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BODYTOPIAN ARCHITECTURE:

An essay written for *Industry Muscle:
Five Scores for Architecture*

Teo Ala-Ruona in dialogue with A.L. Hu

CONTENT

1 Introduction

1.1 Methods of the essay

1.2 Pavilion

1.3 Bodies

2 Modernism & transcorporeality

3 Scores

3.1. Impurity

3.2 Decategorization

3.3. Performance

3.4 Technobody

3.5. Reuse

4 Staging the modernist error



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Author, Original Concept and Artistic Direction of the exhibition: Teo Ala-Ruona
Author and Illustrator (drawings A–F): A.L. Hu
Illustration (back cover): Teo Ala-Ruona, Spider Nykänen, Teo Paaer
Graphic Design: Kiia Beilinson
Proofreading: Jenny Westwell
Review: Katarina Bonnevier and Simona Castricum

Commissioners of the exhibition:
Carina Jaatinen, Architecture & Design Museum Helsinki, Finland
Yngvill Aagaard Sjöösten, The National Museum of Norway
Karin Nilsson, ArkDes, Sweden

Curator of the exhibition: Kaisa Karvinen
Producer of the exhibition: Luba Kuzovnikova

With thanks for reading and feedback:
Jyri Ala-Ruona, Max Hannus, Martta Jylhä, Jaakko Karhunen,
Aleksi Lohtaja, Even Minn, Anna Nurminen, Teo Paaer

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1 Introduction

When I started working on the concept of *Industry Muscle* in May 2024, architect Panu Savolainen asked me, “Did you ever think at any point that you might want to destroy the pavilion?” I laughed and told him yes, the thought had crossed my mind on a metaphorical level.

*Industry Muscle: Five Scores for Architecture*¹ is a multidimensional artwork exhibited at the 19th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, in which the Nordic Pavilion, designed by architect Sverre Fehn and built between 1958 and 1962, is treated as representative of modernist ideals on several levels: its architecture, materials, textures and form. The desire to destroy is directed at the legacy of modernism, which shapes social power structures and influences our perception of the body, eventually impacting architectural design processes. In the context of this essay, I see destruction as a creative and reorganizing practice whereby, rather than inflicting physical damage to the building, I deconstruct the mental framework that upholds the meaning and status of the pavilion in modern architecture.

1 *Industry Muscle* is created with a working group: A.L. Hu (essay dialogue partner); Teo Paaer (sculptural installation and spatial design); Tuukka Haapakorpi (sound design); Venla Helenius (video); Kiia Beilinson (graphic design); Even Minn (dramaturgy and score editing); and Ervin Latimer (costume design). Performers: Caroline Suinner, Romeo Roxman Gatt, and Kid Kokko.

In this essay, I focus on the influence of modernism on architecture, particularly as seen in the Nordic Pavilion; and on the *petromodern*² mindset, shaped by oil, that was already present when Fehn designed the pavilion and continues to prevail in today's world. I look at the ideologies that uphold so-called modernism and their impact, rather than a specific aesthetic or narrowly defined historical period. And I examine the idea of *petromodernity*, which Conway (2020, p. 48) tells us is “relatively new, having been developed by researchers in the field of energy humanities only in the past decade or so”. I show how the petromodern mindset has been bound up with the history of modern architecture, and how petromodernity in architectural practice has affected the way we understand the human being, body and gender.

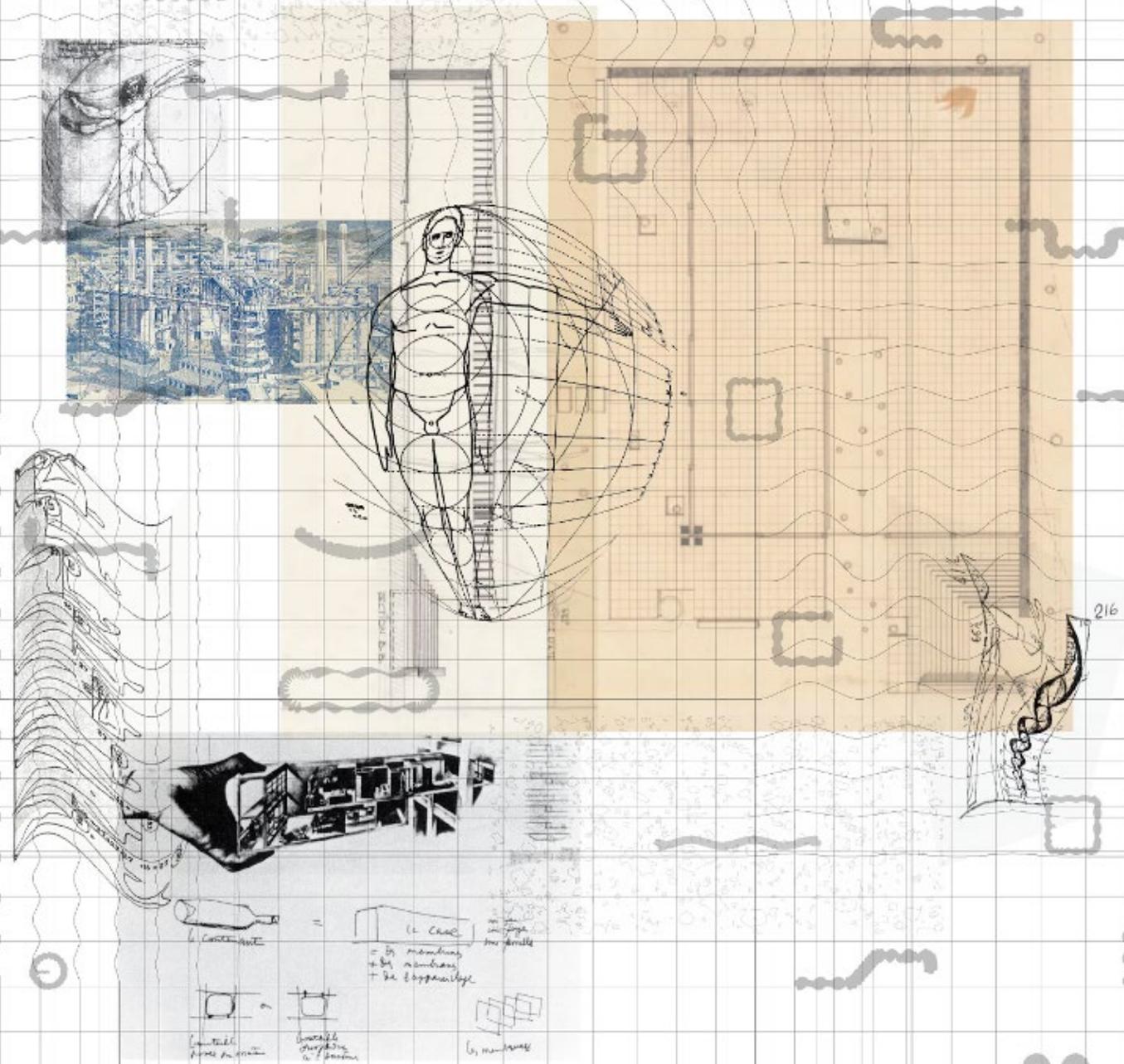


² Petromodernity as a concept emerged in academic and cultural discussions in the early 2010s. The term is used by a range of authors, who use it to signify “modern life based in the cheap energy systems made possible by oil” (Conway, 2020, p. 48)

I write this essay from the perspective of a performance artist and a transmasculine person. I approach architecture as a space for staging the various sociopolitical norms that uphold a specific kind of sociocultural corporeality, whereby transcorporeality³ is subjected to pathologization and differentiation. I use the trans body as a lens to examine architecture. I employ it as a crowbar-like tool to dismantle

3 I aim to use the terms *trans body* and *trans corporeality* as intellectual mediums, while also recognizing their connection to material experiences. Transcorporeality is a term I use to broadly refer to the interplay between the psychological, mental, conceptual, and material dimensions of a trans person's experience of themselves. I am aware of Stacy Alaimo's ecocritical approach to the word (Kuznetski & Alaimo, 2020), I use it with a slight distinction, with specific reference to transgender corporeality. For me, transcorporeality as a concept is broader than the trans body and can be approached as a theoretical tool for reflection. It invites anyone to explore and question their own experiences of embodiment and gender in relation to normative and binary gender conceptions. The trans body, on the other hand, refers to someone who embodies various facets or aspects of transcorporeality. The term "trans body" is more grounded in materiality, referring to the tangible presence of a trans body as it exists in the world, visible and verifiable in its movements and interactions.

When I use the word *trans*, I am referring to all trans people – that is, individuals whose gender does not align with the one assigned to them at birth. I use the term trans body with the understanding that trans bodies exist within different sociopolitical intersections and that these differences shape diverse struggles, with some trans people being more privileged than others. I also recognize that, as a white, able-bodied transmasculine person, my trans body is significantly more protected and less exposed to the threat of violence than, for example, the bodies of trans women, transfeminine people, and Black and disabled trans people. I use the term trans body as a synthesis of my own lived experience and in dialogue with other trans theorists. I acknowledge that I write from my own position, and therefore my perspective is always rooted in and emerging from my subjective experience – and is inevitably partial and incomplete.



DRAWING A. An overview drawing of the written piece in graphic form. The plan and section of the Nordic Pavilion, as well as drawings of other notable Western concrete architectures, loom behind a regular grid, setting the stage for a modernist critique. The grid is disrupted by the distorted “ideal” bodies of da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man, Le Corbusier’s Modulor Man, and a man from Architectural Graphic Standards. Familiar shapes of concrete rebar are made unrecognizable, shifting away from the grid in their own pattern.

and reorganize the remains⁴ of modernist thinking for future architectural practice.

The trans body and its categorization⁵ is a meta-architectural⁶ question that encompasses far more than just gender-neutral public toilets or changing rooms. In this essay, I argue that engaging with this meta-architectural work links the sociocultural normalization of bodies inherent in modernism to ecological questions arising from the mass production of (petro)modernist architecture. Bodily norms are fossil norms, reinforced by architecture through the means of petromodernist production.

My reflections on trans rights within the context of the ecological crisis arise from a sense of urgency. The violence and discrimination that trans people – and especially trans women – face are harsh realities demanding immediate attention – alongside and in relation to the multifaceted ecological catastrophe we are currently navigating.

4 In this essay, I use the term *remains* to refer to surplus, abandoned or discarded things. My relationship with the word is both personal and political. I relate to it from the perspective of trans experience, and the trans body as a remnant of the production of the cisnormative body. The verb *remain* is strongly suggestive of survival and persistence, which I associate with the embodied experience of transness within the hegemonic structures that seek to destroy it. I use the term *remains* also to refer to the lingering influences of petromodernism that persist in our thinking, even after we have come to recognize the effects of petromodernist production on our environment, in climate change, for example. Lastly, I use the term to refer to architectural remains – ruins of buildings and leftover structures – and how we relate to these.

5 I refer to categorization as processes of thinking whereby things, phenomena, actions and people, as well as their inherent qualities, characteristics or traits are divided into intellectual compartments according to various pre-established categories.

6 In this essay, the word meta-architectural refers to research, analysis, and thought that aims to examine the underlying thought patterns, historical, social and power processes influencing architectural thinking and work. I view architecture as inseparable from broader sociopolitical issues, including questions of gender, which are often dismissed in architectural discourse.

This essay is divided into four parts, beginning with an outline of the creation process and objectives. There follows a discussion of the Nordic Pavilion and the body's relationship to architecture, after which I go on to explore five themes – Impurity, Decategorization, Performance, Technobody, and Reuse – framed as scores⁷ for future architecture. Finally, I connect these themes through the concept of bodytopia, where the body is considered as a place influenced and affected by architecture.

1.1 Essay methods

Written in parallel with the development of all the other elements of Industry Muscle (performance, video, installation and soundscape), this essay is both an integral part of the project and a text that can be read independently. It is the product of a collaboration between architect A.L. Hu and myself. In biweekly meetings over an eight-month period to February 2025, we would discuss the themes of the essay, read theory and write together. A.L.'s influence is reflected in the text through their input into my approach, contributions of illustrations and architectural insights.

A.L.'s commitment to the material, communal, bodily – and marginalizing – effects of architecture has been crucial to the creation of this essay. Their architectural practice carries a speculative tone, spanning research, writing, teaching, speaking and designing. A.L.'s perspective also includes a nuanced understanding of structures in the architectural

⁷ A score is a central tool in the field of performance art. Scores are guidelines for experimentation, the performer's own interpretation, improvisation and exploration. Sometimes a score contains step-by-step actions, rules or prompts for the performers, and sometimes it can be very open-ended or poetic.

field, and of attitudes towards the value and impact of trans-specific knowledge in architectural design

In performance art, I use the body and imagination as raw materials. The body serves as both the starting point and thematic focus of my work, a site for artistic and theoretical intellectualization. My body is a testing ground for analysis: in my art I expose my gender and materiality to the scrutiny of the audience. In performance art, the body is placed on the stage to be observed. In any performance, the stage is always in relation to the body, the arrangement of the audience, the direction of their gaze, and the political context in which the performance is staged. The stage is a political tool. In this essay, I take performance art's emphasis on developing the imagination of the body and gaze, and integrate it into architecture to expose how "deviant" bodies are categorized. In effect, I apply performance art methodology to the field of architecture.

In addition to theorizing, collaboration and a performative arts lens, I also employ speculative fictioning.⁸ According to architects Anadis González and Fernando Martirena:

Architects do not build buildings; they design them, and just a small number of them are built. Architects mostly work in the infinite, immaterial field of fiction. If the reality of architecture is made of physical matter in

8 "Fictioning" in art is "an open-ended, experimental practice that involves performing, diagramming or assembling to create or anticipate new modes of existence." (Burroughs & O'Sullivan, 2019). By speculative fiction, I refer to both verbal and conceptual creative and exploratory combinations of things, aiming to reorganize our perceptions and actions. I think of speculative fiction largely in the same way as theorist Donna Haraway. Haraway emphasizes the significance of language, words in relation to understanding the global challenges we are facing. Thinking about possible futures requires unconventional language, words, and theories. Haraway calls this speculative fiction (2016). However, I see speculative fiction extending beyond words to actions, material reality, and bodies. Words influence how we think, and our thinking is embodied, generating action within us.



space, then its fiction is made of abstract ideas in time (González & Martirena, 2022).

This essay is a poetic-theoretical and artistic gesture. It is not intended to offer simple models but rather to open up potential and provide speculative tools for thinking about architecture and its political possibilities.

The fight for the bodily rights of trans people is ongoing. The very existence of trans people is subject to speculation, dismissed or erased as if it were a fiction or a joke. The reality of trans people is continually being questioned: Do trans people truly exist? Is it just a passing trend? And should trans people even be taken seriously on any matter? This kind of speculation motivates my research methods. Speculative fictioning is an activity with which trans people inevitably have a relationship. I see speculation as a material means of changing the world because I have been able to change myself by speculating my real, somatic⁹ relationship to the gender fiction imposed upon me. Fiction is material. Thinking is fiction. Thinking is material. Somatic fiction, then, is the materialization of speculative thinking in the body. Destroying binary thought patterns in the current socio-political reality we live in is an ongoing task that should be practised in every area of life. This practice of destruction of thinking in the field of architecture will also mean various kinds of changes – material, immaterial, design-related and structural.

9 *Somatic* here refers to the material body, from the French *somatique* and the Ancient Greek *sōmatikós*, meaning “bodily”. So, very simply, *somatic* means “dealing with or sensing the body”.

Transcorporeality here serves as a means of navigation. Reader, I invite you to consider what could happen if we take seriously architect Tim Gough's (2017, p. 52) assertion that the "transing of gender will lead to a transing of architecture, of its very mode of being".

1.2 Pavilion

In July 2024, when I walked into the Nordic Pavilion for the first time, I examined more closely that inner desire to "destroy" the pavilion. The building is renowned as a harmonious, temple-like, elegant, shadowless space, where light filters beautifully through the roof and spreads throughout the space like the Nordic midnight sun. As I stepped into the space, I held these highly value-laden descriptions in my mind and tried to sense what the space communicated through its form and materials. The Nordic Pavilion is a thematic foundation for my thinking as well as a physical and material place. I look at it as a historical building that has attained the status of a modernist monument. It evokes sensations. It is also a social and political space, shaped by our perceptions and interpretations of it.

For me, the pavilion whispers of desire to eliminate chaos in outwardly "beautiful" ways. The pavilion is constructed from concrete, a central material in our petromodernist environment. The production of concrete – upon which the construction industry heavily relies – is based on extractivism, one of the greatest environmental burdens of our time.

In the warmth and light of a Venetian summer, inside the concrete body of the Nordic Pavilion, I reflected on what I desire to destroy: the way modernist architecture upholds ideals of essentialist, untouched, hygienic corporeality; enforces rigid identity categories; and perpetuates the petromodernist lust for the pure and the new, which can only be sated by greater, faster production and consumption. Through the device of the Nordic Pavilion, I question how bodies are shaped by architecture, echoing my own experience of living in a trans body in a society where modernist ideals still prevail. We cannot simply dismiss modernist environments. They have shaped us and our bodies, influencing who we are. Now we need to discover different ways of engaging with them.



1.3 Bodies

Philosopher Paul B. Preciado (2012, p. 130) proposes that architecture exists within us, and that “the body no longer inhabits disciplinary places, but is now inhabited by them”. This idea highlights the way that architecture actively shapes our bodily autonomy, influencing constructs such as gender. Because architecture is so close to us – existing within us – the deep intertwining of architecture and thought is almost imperceptible, making it difficult for us to imagine remaking it. In the same way, in a cisnormative order, our relationship to the body is seen as fixed, immutable. I argue, however, that the body is always mutable and not confined to a single identity.

Taking Preciado’s claim further, if architecture has entered our bodies, it has not only shaped subjectivity but also infiltrated us – creating a bodytopia.¹⁰ Bodytopia highlights the human body as a place that is shaped by the surrounding places – and, in this context, more specifically by architectural places. I think of bodytopia as a word that transcends the concepts of utopia and dystopia: it is neither inherently positive or negative, but my use of the word in this essay contains undeniably transformative power and potential. Just as I see bodies as inherently mutable and adaptable, in the concept of bodytopia, I consider both the built environment and the bodies within it to be changeable. Within the bodytopian surroundings, any thinking toward a different kind of architecture must also be linked to the body – and particularly to the diversity of bodies.

In the Nordic Pavilion, the concept of bodytopia draws a correlation between the tree roots and the human nervous system. The concrete structure and marble floor rest above the tree roots, causing the tiles

¹⁰ The term *topia* comes from the Greek word *topos*, meaning place. So by *bodytopia* I mean “bodily place”.



to shift into undulating forms as they continually adapt to the pressure from below. The pavilion was built directly over the trees, some of which began dying soon after construction, revealing the loss of biodiversity in a straightforward way. Light floods the space through large windows and an airy ceiling, leaving no shadows and erasing all contrast.

Sverre Fehn once said that, though he never thought of himself as modern, “You might say I came of age in the shadow of modernism.” (Builled, 2009) That shadow, diluted by the Nordic Pavilion's roof design, still looms large in our thinking – in our bodies, too, and within the pavilion itself. I think of this shadow of petromodernism as something profoundly influential in our bodytopian reality, shaping the way we desire, see and experience ourselves, and relate to our environment.

2 Modernism & transcorporeality

Transcorporeality as we understand it today emerged alongside modernist thought, even though gender variance has always existed. Trans identities are defined in relation to cisgender norms such as nuclear family, gendered expertise, behavioural expectations and normalized life course thinking. The concept of “trans” began to be used in the 1950s and 60s (Stryker, 2017, p. 36). The Western modernist gender binary¹¹ system reduces transness to a category – and a disorder (Suess, 2014, p. 73-76). Through this framework, transness was merely a 20th-century idea for a 21st-century trend, erasing the reality that trans people have been profoundly embedded in Indigenous, religious and ethnic contexts throughout history. As cultural theorist C. Riley Snorton (2017) points out, Western representations of trans identity are shaped by racialized narratives where figures like Christine Jorgensen are the “good transsexual” while colonized gender-nonconforming bodies are erased (p. 141). Our understanding of the term is therefore based on the colonialist gender binary norm that these bodies transcend.

According to architecture historian Beatriz Colomina and architect Mark Wigley (2016), the modern designer has been like a doctor who nurtures and rebuilds the body and psyche. I think that architects, throughout modernism and still today, are comparable to doctors in trans clinics, defining human genders and emphasizing their observation. Modern architecture obsessively maintains certain categoriza-

¹¹ The “gender binary” is used to describe the “system that classifies sex and gender into a pair of opposites, often imposed by culture, religion, or other societal pressures” (Kendall, 2023).

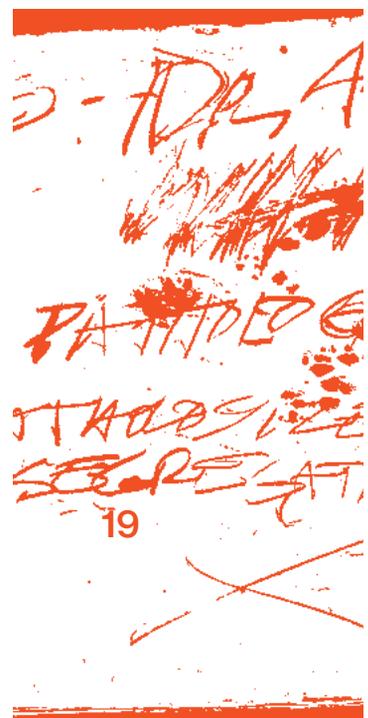
tions: clean/dirty, healthy/sick, normal/abnormal (Colomina & Wigley, 2016, pp. 107–121.) All these categories also reinforce gender categories. Examples of categorizing architectural spaces include dressing rooms, hospitals and prisons, to name but a few.

The central figure of modernist architecture, Le Corbusier, was obsessed with his own body and this obsession caused him to be fascinated with the connections between health and architecture (Colomina & Wigley, 2016, p. 176). He also created the Modulor, an anthropomorphic scale of proportions, based on an idealized male human body supposed to represent the “universal man”. The word “obsession” falls short of describing the intense amount of self-reflection that trans individuals must engage in under the heteronormative, gender binary system whose reference point is the “universal” male body. Normativity in design and aesthetic preferences translates into an ethos of neutrality, whereby groups such as people with disabilities and cultural minorities are marginalized. In the words of lawyer and trans activist Dean Spade:

Critical trans politics requires an analysis of how the administration of gender norms impacts trans people’s lives and how administrative systems in general are sites of production and implementation of racism, xenophobia, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, and ableism under the guise of neutrality (Spade, 2011, p. 73).

The concept of neutrality in modernist architecture – also exemplified by the Nordic Pavilion – manifests through its emphasis on purity, achieved through luminosity, transparency and lightness, as well as through the separation of genders and a deliberate ideological detachment from fossil production, which paradoxically is precisely what enables this façade of neutrality. What is characteristic to modernism in general, in the production of both objects and bodies, is to obscure material origins, making things appear independent of natural resources, even though they are heavily reliant on them.

Let us suppose that modern architecture started out as a doctor whose mission was to maintain normative physical well-being. That doctor went on to become a psychoanalyst, upholding the categories of mental illness and health. Today, architecture is entangled with ecological collapse and the fragmentation of the modern conception of humanity, amid vast amounts of waste and the grime of modernist thought, in an obscenity of surplus inconsistent with the mould of the Modulor Man.



3 Scores

In the context of performance art, a score is a set of guidelines or instructions that serve as embodied, choreographic and conceptual tools for exploring different ways of performing. A score encourages its performer to engage with exploratory and experimental embodied and psychological states, often from an intellectual-speculative perspective, adopting a questioning stance. Scores are used in the process of creating a performance to gather material for the stage. Sometimes, a performance is also based on a score, loosely followed by the performers during the show, but with space for improvisation and experimentation.

We live in a context of petromodernism, in times when almost anything could happen. But if the political direction we take is defined by climate denier, white supremacy-supporting, gender diversity-rejecting tech oligarchs – from the individual to the planetary level – then we are surely close to “destroy[ing] everything we have, everything we know, everything we are” (Berman, 1982).

Against this context, I pose the question, how can the architect work to reverse the march of petromodernism amid our material and political remains? Guided by this question, I propose five scores for future architectural practice: Impurity, Decategorization, Performance, Technobody, and Reuse. The scores are proposals for rethinking the material, conceptual, practical and aesthetic aspects of future architectural practice. They build upon and connect with each other, each continuing from where the previous one left off.

All five scores arise from the experience of transcorporeality in relation to the built environment. Through these scores, I ask, how should we reconsider the petromodern remains? What should we destroy, and what should we repair?

Although these scores have been written specifically for architecture practitioners, I believe they can guide anyone towards the practice of trans-theoretical ecological thought. I suggest reading the scores, allowing them to shape your thinking, then engaging in your architectural or other practice, transformed by their incitement.

3.1 Impurity

SCORE:

Implement: Impurity of ideals. Impurity of form

Impurify the design process

Integrate: The impurity of the bodies that inhabit the space

In short: Impurity is a score that deconstructs ideals, manifesting both aesthetically and in the shared, messy thinking of the design process. It challenges purity-seeking design, which upholds notions of bodily purity (e.g., gender-essentialist views of humanity) and the illusion of waste-free petromodernist production (where waste is merely hidden).

I look around the pavilion. The space is light. The material pillars of modernist architecture – steel, glass, and concrete – that transformed spaces into sanatoriums of cleanliness, hygiene and health are all present in the pavilion.

We desire the pure, the well-defined and the clear. The trans body has never enjoyed the priv-

The concrete aggregate of all the visible concrete finishes includes Italian white marble so that the surfaces glow when light hits them. The light flooding in from the transparent membrane roof is tempered by evenly-spaced 6 cm x 1 m concrete beams to create a uniform, shadowless, bright interior space (Hobhouse, 2021).

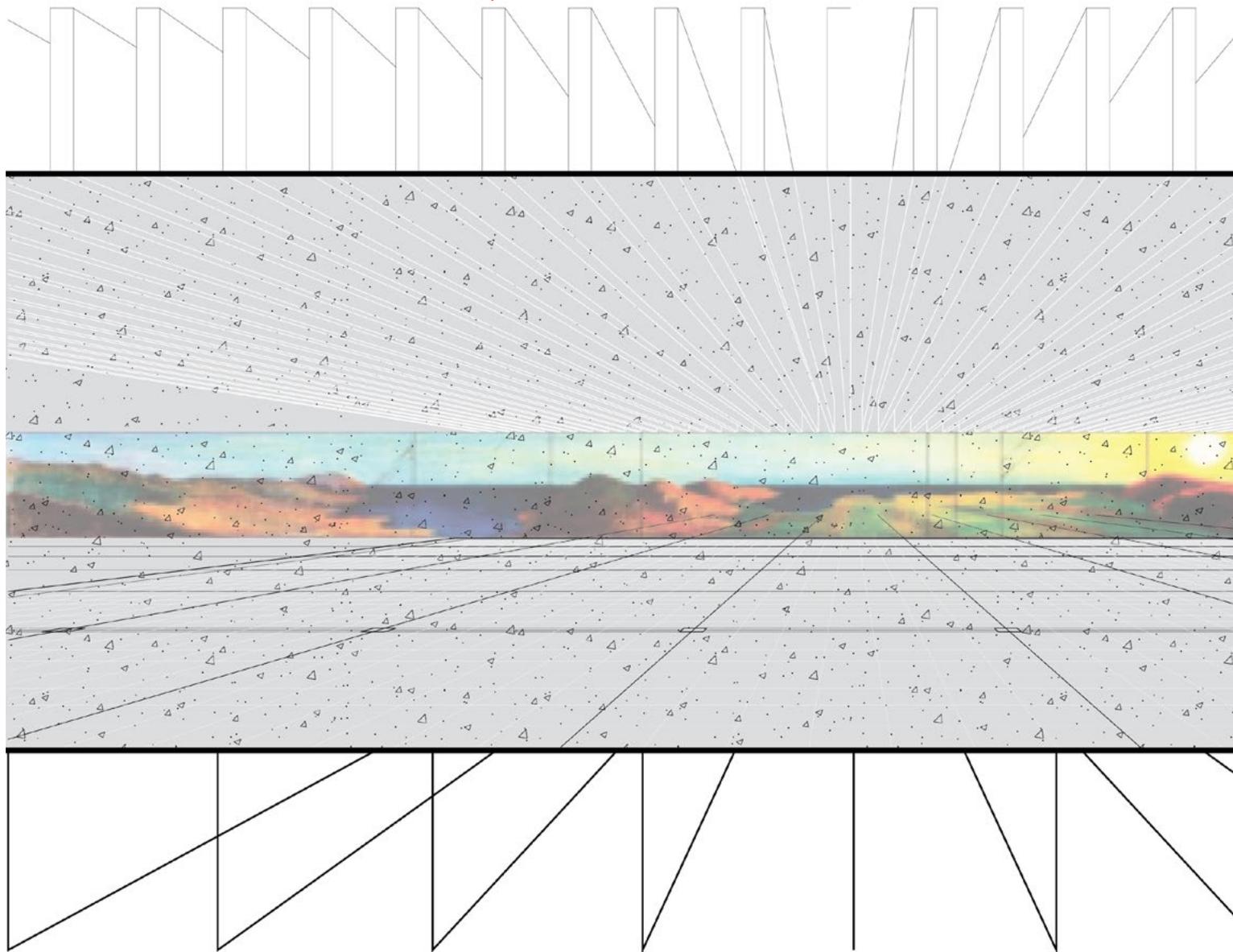
ilege of being categorized as pure. I have spent a lifetime feeling out of place while attempting to fit in, to adapt to sleek, clean spaces with monochromatic surfaces. Clean lines, minimalist aesthetics combined with a sense of smoothness and the velvety feel of surfaces. The skill of masking of affect. No cracks, no disturbances – the space maintains its illusion of control and order, erasing the unruliness of life. The body is expected to conform, to suppress its own irregularities and excesses, becoming an extension of the polished aesthetic. Colomina and Wigley describe this as the anaesthetic ambition of “good design” (2016, pp. 89–101). A good, “pure” design aims to create an experience in which everything is in its place, while huge amounts of production surplus are concealed.

Philosopher María Lugones defines the modern subject as a “lover of purity”, arguing that purity and the desire for uniformity come from the same origin, that “The urge to control the multiplicity of people and things attains satisfaction through exercises in split separation” (Lugones, 1994, p. 464). According to anthropologist Mary Douglas, dirt and impurity are “out of place” and seen as disorderly or transgressive in the socio-cultural order (Douglas, 1966, pp. 36–37). This in turn is reflected in architectural spaces. In aesthetics where purity is about smooth sensations and lightness – as in the Nordic Pavilion – this order favours precise identity categories defined by clarity and immutability, based on the idea

of essential, “pure” gender. Purity implies one “right” way of being and coding identity, whereas the impurity of embodiment embraces plural ways of being, moving from a single code to a heterogeneity of codes.

We struggle to confront mess and dirt directly. We either avert our gaze or aggressively fixate on whatever is ugly, wrong and strange about bodies deemed “other”. I remember the first time I saw trans people, thinking they were scary, almost gruesome. My understand-

DRAWING B. A reinterpretation of “No-Stop City” by Archizoom (1970), an ideal metropolis that extends infinitely through the addition of homogeneous elements adapted to a variety of uses. Though the Nordic Pavilion’s uniform structure and smooth, clean aesthetic strives towards the utopia of “No-Stop City,” its messy, impure materiality, here represented by the concrete texture overlay, must be grappled with.



ing of humanity had been conditioned by my surroundings. And my sense of self was conditioned by the built environment around me and its pursuit of formal, material and conceptual purity. It would take me years of deliberate effort to dismantle the frameworks that shaped my thinking and rebuild my understanding of what it means to be human. In deconstructing my own beliefs, I uncovered something within myself that had always been there, but that I had never dared to face: I was far less “pure” than I had imagined – at least within the framework of gender essentialism upheld by the medical-clinical order, which extends into our sociocultural structures, architecture included.

The shift in my thinking was largely shaped by the influence of others whose perspectives blended with my own. Learning to love impurity requires collective thinking, which in turn leads to an impure aesthetic. Collaboration creates polyphonic, “contaminated”¹² aesthetics and forms of design, where the “ownership” is shared. When transgender architect Julia Oderda was asked how her gender transition has affected



¹² By *contamination* I mean multiple things: the entanglement of one person’s thinking with the thinking of others; the entanglement of the human body with petrochemical pollutants, such as microplastics, but also more broadly with the pollution of our environment, that is, the way harmful substances (e.g., chemicals, waste and other pollutants) make their way into the air, water or soil. I acknowledge that some bodies are more severely (i.e., lethally) contaminated than others, and that those in privileged positions – particularly people in Western countries enjoying the abundant possibilities of petrocapi-talism – are significantly less lethally affected. It is, however, important to remember that they – myself included – are not separate from this state of contamination, even though in their daily lives they might imagine themselves unaffected by pollution. Questions of contamination are tied to issues of race, gender, social and economic class, and able-ness.

her design work, she replied: “I’m not sure I can really describe any particular changes – just the fact that having a diverse set of voices on any project, or in any office, or in any profession makes for a better product in general” (Kawecki, 2023). Though diversity has become a widespread buzzword, I would say that its true value is often overlooked or not fully recognized. Historically, the pursuit of a pure end result has focused on uniformity, aiming for a singular “master” vision. This approach values purity and avoids anti-contamination in both thought and process. In contrast, the aesthetics of impurity reject simplification or uniformity as guiding ideals and embrace complexity throughout the creative process.

In addition to the fundamental impurity of being human (as there is no essential, pure body that embodies ontological gender) and the petrochemical contamination that affects all bodies to varying degrees, I also view impurity as potential for change in aesthetics. In particular, I think impurity is inevitably the aesthetics of the future. We live in a thoroughly contaminated world, where the traces of modernism are the pollutants. The ideal of purity has created an imagined neutral aesthetic – a fiction of purity – both in buildings, such as the Nordic Pavilion, and in conceptions of gender, where cisgender individuals are seen as pure, aligned with the gender assigned them at birth. However, in both cases – the Nordic Pavilion and cisgender identity – there is an immense amount of consumed hidden excess, and industrial waste¹³ that exceeds this petromodern fiction of purity. This hiding of dirt has created, not

13 In *Atlas of Petromodernity*, scholars Alexander Klose and Benjamin Steininger note that “petromodernity can be understood as a historically unique era of wastefulness” (Klose & Steininger, 2024, p. 15). Oil culture has consumed the planet’s resources at an extraordinarily rapid pace compared to the whole of previous global history. Wastefulness – marked by careless and excessive resource use – has resulted in unnecessary environmental destruction, biodiversity loss and overconsumption, while also generating an overwhelming amount of surplus, pollution, and waste.



only an environmental crisis, but also a long-anticipated crisis of human identity, both of which are now unravelling simultaneously: ecological systems are collapsing and the cisgender man is in crisis about his masculinity (having realized that he, too, is merely a fiction maintained through *gender performativity*¹⁴), while marginalized people are rising up and sharing their historical processes of subjugation.

Trans people are certainly not free from the mechanisms that maintain the gender binary in the cycle of consumption. The two-gender system demands assimilation and sustained conformity to its norms. Despite this, the fact that trans people exist demonstrates the fundamental plurality (impurity) of gender. And I dare to insist that, were our collective view of gender to expand into a broader, more inclusive and chaotic framework, gender performativity might feel less exhausting and lethal (policing and punishment aside). Broader gender performativity is more impure, more connected to the world's grim, eco-catastrophic situation. With this collective shift in consciousness, will we be able to learn to appreciate the value of the strange, the ugly and the ambiguous? Trans people could flourish without the burden of having to conform. We cannot go on maintaining the gender binary as we have been doing, we can no longer consume as we have been doing, and we cannot continue to build new things as we have been doing.

14 *Gender performativity* is a term that encompasses all the various material, behavioural and technological means through which a person creates an impression of themselves as a gendered being. This includes, for instance, clothing, makeup, hormones, ways of speaking, moving and gesturing. Gender performativity is partly conscious and partly unconscious, but it is always in relation to sociocultural understandings of gender and the kinds of genders that are recognized within a culture.

The time has come for us to learn to tolerate what some might deem uncomfortable, incongruous dirt, emerging from beneath the imagined cleanliness of smooth surfaces and sanitized environments, bodies and experiences.

3.2 Decategorization

SCORE:

**Feel the hard-working muscles of your eyelids soften;
blur your gaze**

Watch as the standards collapse

In short: Decategorization seeks to dismantle the categorising thought patterns of the “proper human” based on standardization. It highlights how our habit of visually categorizing people is reinforced by categorizing architecture and calls for the decategorization of humanity to create more inclusive spatial design.

I stand next to the concrete wall inside the pavilion. The spaciousness of the building allows the body inside it to be outlined clearly and distinctly against its light surfaces. A distance away from me stands a person who is looking at me. They come closer, and their gaze becomes sharper, focusing on my face. They avert their gaze then quickly look back, away then back again. Behind these glances lies an almost mathematically detailed scanning, an attempt to analyse me. The closer they get, the more trained their gaze becomes: they know what to look

for. Their gaze has been trained throughout their lives, aided by the methods of segregation inherent in our built environment. I sense my body under the person's gaze, within the pavilion's landscape. I think about the contours of my body, how they might be read up close, how they might be read from afar. From what angle might my body be seen as a woman, and from what angle as a man?

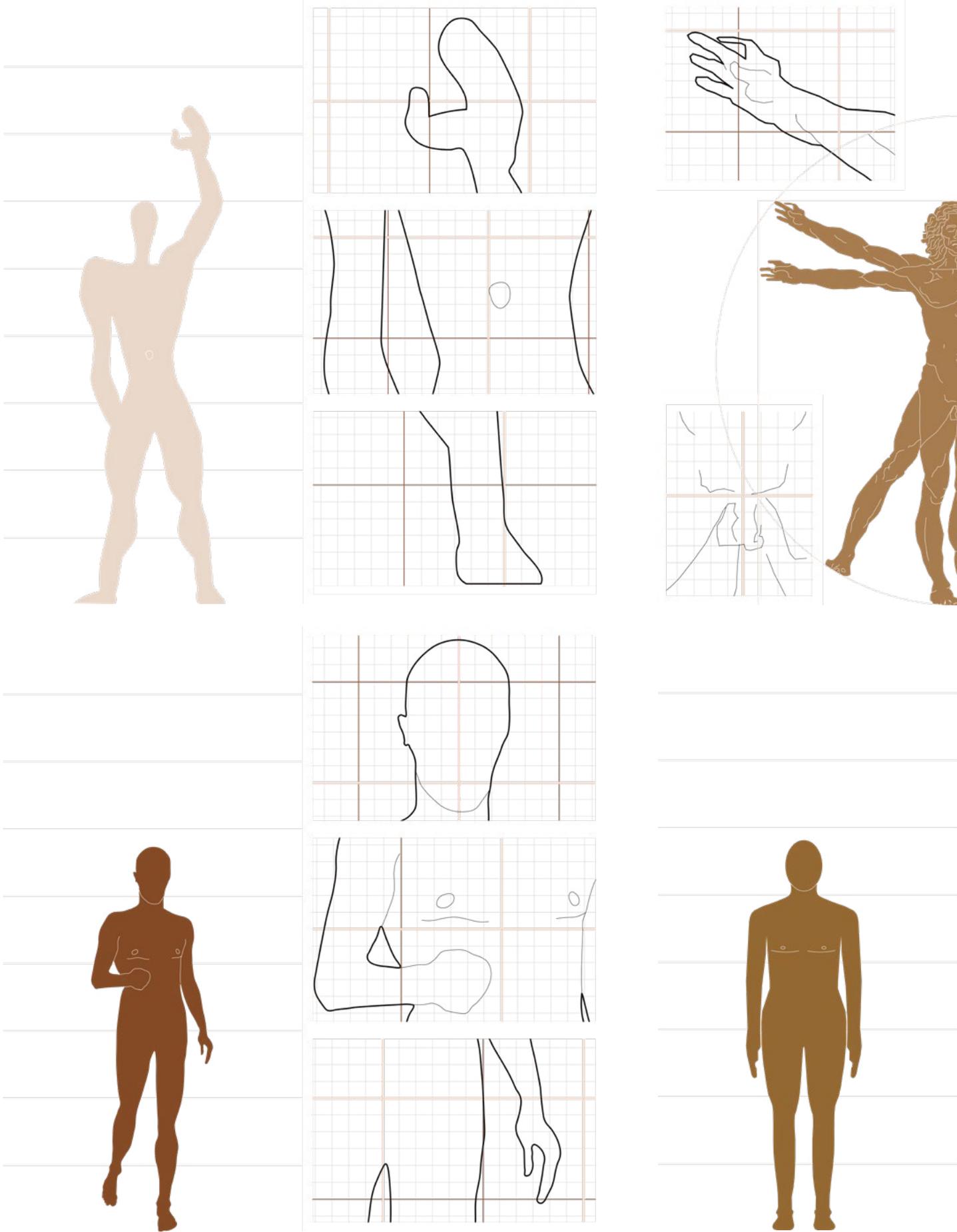
Knowing, identifying, measuring and quantifying the body and gender have come to define so many ways of being and living that it is almost impossible to imagine deconstructing them. The gaze, which seeks clarity – in this case an identifiable and categorical gender – is informed by received knowledge drawn from colonial, white supremacist and patriarchal narratives, all of which are deeply intertwined with and sustained by *petrocapitalism*¹⁵ today. This categorical gaze enforces a psychosomatic industrialization whereby the body is bound to the mass-produced environment. Through the categorical gaze, we become the modern flesh.

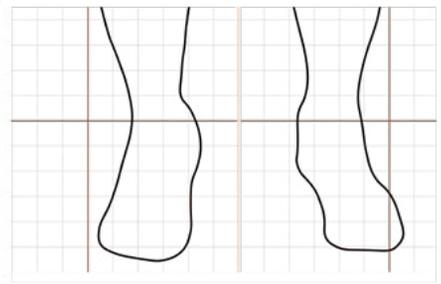
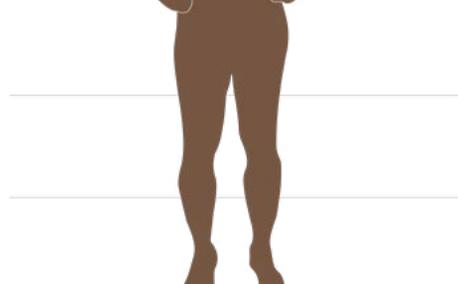
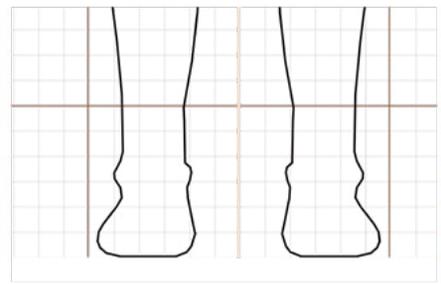
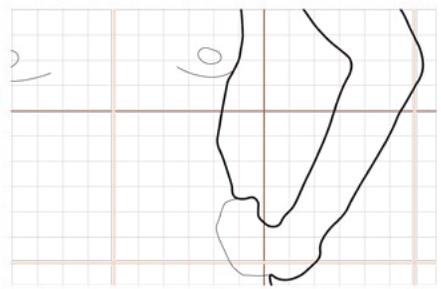
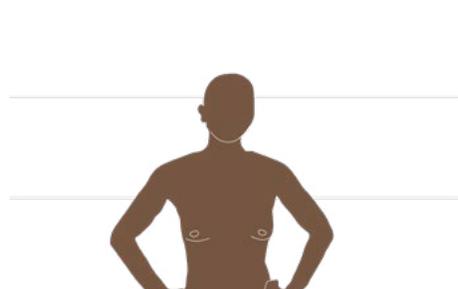
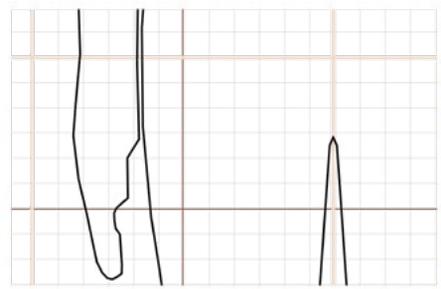
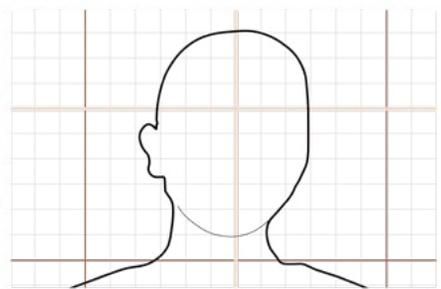
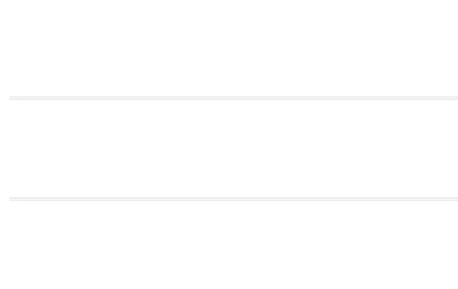
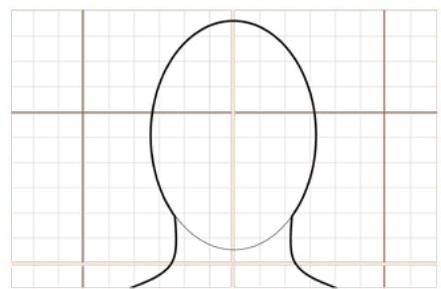
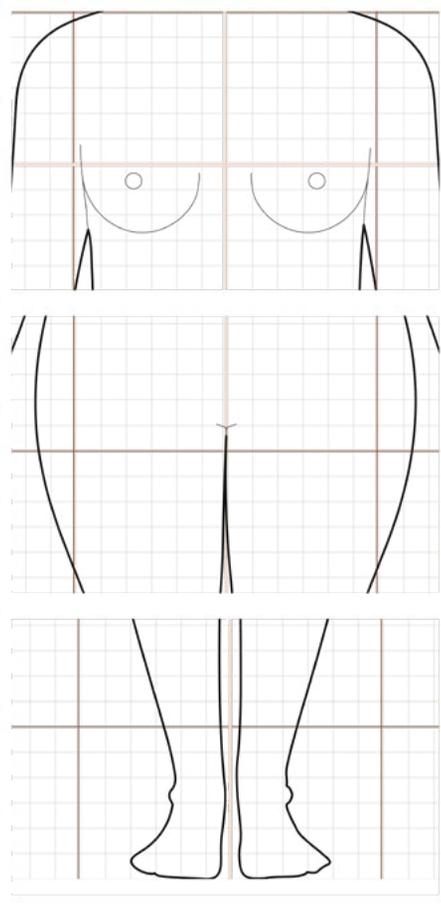
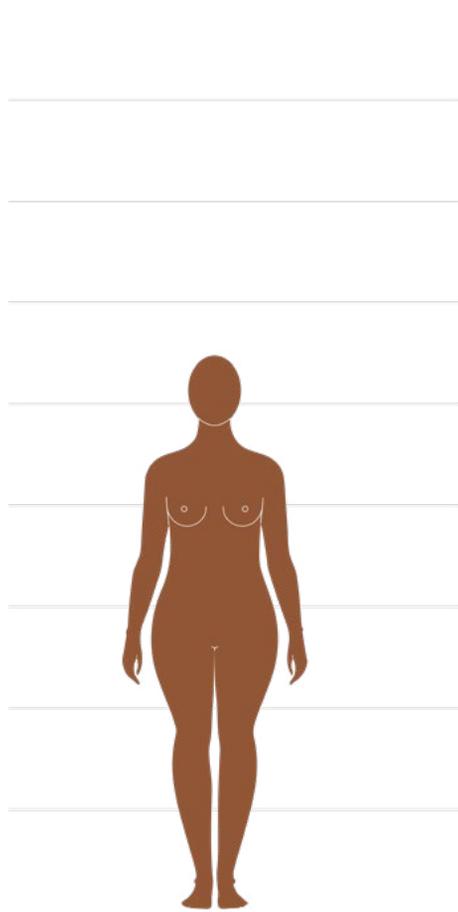
How might the decategorization¹⁶ of the thought patterns that influence our gaze impact architectural practice? In *Vistas of Modernity*, educator and decolonial thinker Rolando Vázquez examines how modernism relies on separation, using the modernist gaze to establish a divide between the self and the other (Vázquez, 2020, pp. 23–32). The space created in between is first and foremost mental: normative thought frameworks separate the self from the other, the pure from the impure, and the clear from the ambiguous. This same mechanism

15 The term *petrocapitalism* emerged in geopolitical discussions in the early 2000s and refers to the relationship between capitalist production and the extraction, distribution and consumption of petroleum.

16 By *decategorization* I mean dismantling categories. I approach decategorization from the perspective of the joyous, multifaceted nature of human existence and the ongoing process of transformation. Decategorization is a thought practice whereby no single category is deemed more valuable than another.

DRAWING C. These taxonomic drawings call attention to the absurdity of "ideal" bodies. Full figures are juxtaposed with zoom-ins on specific parts, as if to categorize them through a specific gaze. Are bodies so easily and naturally dissected into analysable pieces, and sorted by binary frameworks: pure/impure, clear/ambiguous, male/female, self/other? Or is the regulation of genders and bodies an operation of power that serves to produce and normalize coherent modern subjects?





of practising separation through the gaze, though from a slightly different perspective, is examined by Colomina in *X-Ray Architecture* (2019), which addresses the co-evolution of modernist architecture with X-rays and the history of Western medicine, particularly the fight against tuberculosis. The X-ray gaze is also a categorizing gaze, seeking out flaws in relation to standards in order to segregate. The Nordic Pavilion is a perfect example of how the gaze itself has been turned into an X-ray through buildings: large horizontal windows allow you to see through the body of the building to the human within and through the human body itself.

Le Corbusier had this to say about the Modulor:

My dream is to introduce a norm, a 'grid of proportions', which will one day be spread throughout the country on construction sites, drawn on the wall or made of iron strip, which will serve as a measure for the endless *series of different combinations and proportions throughout the project*" (Wall Corporation, 2023).

Philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2013) discusses how Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, a Renaissance reinterpretation of the classical ideal of man as the measure of the right kind of human, embodies the (masculine) humanist ideal that continues to shape modernity (pp. 13–15). From Vitruvian Man to Modulor Man, and to this day, the white man is the standard against which thinking, embodiment and identity are measured.

Modernity is the violent flattening of difference and diversity, shunning uniqueness for standardization, and repressing specificity for economy. Gender is one of those tools whereby modernity produces and normalizes coherent subjects. The binary matrix of "masculine" and "feminine" uses gender norms to define boundaries. To conflate gender with male/female – to insist that the binary of man and woman is the exclusive way to understand gender – is a "regulatory operation of power that naturalizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption" (Butler, 1990, p. 43).

Trans people experience two different categorizations. Either they are uncategorized, where their existence is overlooked or ignored, slipping through systems that rely on categorization. Or they are mis-

categorized, affecting their experiences in public spaces, services, institutions and systems such as healthcare, prisons and schools:

The miscategorisation and stereotyping of trans and gender diverse lives facilitate the imposition of conflict and surveillance upon all gender non-conforming lives in the public realm. These have direct consequences for how architecture misclassifies trans and gender diverse people through its series of architectural typologies (Castricum, 2022, p. 136).

In architecture, categorization manifests in, for example, the design of spaces segregated along the lines of the gender binary system. Gender segregated spaces cause danger, stress and anxiety for transgender individuals. Entering rooms that enforce gender segregation is a deeply somatic and psychological process that experientially permeates the chromosomes, the hormonal system, the internal organs and the genitals – based on their (mis)categorization and sexual definition. Segregated spaces are spaces for practising the categorizing gaze. When looking at a trans person, the gaze struggles because it has been trained to see only what it knows. The gaze penetrates the trans body in a cutting way. Categorization splits the body into categorical fragments. In the viewer's experience, the trans body complicates the gazing and the binary paradigms behind it.

Although the Nordic Pavilion itself is not inherently a gendered space, it sits within the tradition of modern, hygienic infrastructure that reinforces the power dynamic of an essentialist view of gender. Gender segregation symbols are not the only reason spaces become gendered. Gendering exists in the

bodytopia of our socio-cultural DNA, manifesting both physically and through the material effects of the historicity of thought (that is, in the design and planning processes behind them).

The gendering power of spaces permeates through various semiotic and symbolic means. In his essay “The Crumple and the Scrape” (*Places Journal*, 2020), queer theorist Lucas Crawford examines concrete from the perspective of gender category maintenance, for example. In the Nordic Pavilion, exposed mould seams align with *béton brut* – raw, uncoated concrete. While Le Corbusier praised concrete’s honesty, calling it a material that “does not cheat”, Crawford (2020) interprets this as a longing for “naked cis masculinity via architectural nudity”, paralleling the gender essentialists’ desire for bare, clearly defined bodies. According to this view, concrete epitomizes masculinity as the standard of clarity.

Architecture is within us; the spaces of segregation are within us; spaces for women and men are inside us. I want to experience architecture that resists the solidified categories of gender, reimagines its very foundations, and challenges the concept of categorization from

In the same essay, Crawford also writes that textural metaphors for bodies and spaces are gendered, racialized and class-based. Texture is “the condition of possibility through which our bodies meet our environments.” Boys are “rough” and “tough,” while girls are “flaky” or “bubbly”. Gendered metaphors for textures are used to describe buildings and spaces, subconsciously but coercively linking architecture to gender. Consider that we may feel “at home” through the experience of fuzzy, soft textures; that an interior design can be “soft and feminine yet strong”; or one critic’s claim that Zaha Hadid’s Heydar Aliyev Centre is “as pure and sexy as Marilyn’s blown skirt”. Cultural understandings of textures affect ideas and experiences of gender. Architectural design is an active agent in the construction and administration of gender.

the very inception of the design process. In Gough's words, "this is not just a question of the blurring of boundaries between categories; rather, it involves the deconstruction of the hegemony of categorical thought itself" (Gough, 2017, p. 52).

3.3 Performance

SCORE:

**When you practice a performance long enough
it's easy to forget that edits can be made**

In short: Performance extends the work of Decategorization, focusing on the political potential of architecture in spatial design. This score focuses on deconstructing ways of thinking and urges architects to recognize that the maintenance of normative gender roles is a performance – one in which architects take part and can actively shape through their design work.

The pavilion is a stage built for looking, presenting and performing. The audience moves inside the pavilion. They contemplate the space and the artworks placed there. They observe each other. Both the artworks and the audience present in the pavilion perform, by which I mean the act of being on display, and the social maintenance of this display: the identity shaped through, against and alongside sociopolitical narratives. In what ways is the pavilion related to the mechanisms of normative gender representation? How could architectural practice

utilize an understanding of staging to re-stage towards more diverse expressions of gender? From within the pavilion, I broaden my analysis of the public's performance to encompass the modernist architecture that the pavilion symbolizes.

In Colomina's words, architecture is "a viewing mechanism that produces the subject" (1992, p. 83). In the context of the present essay, I think of subject production as a socially shaped process. Being with others in different spaces and being visible is a process that is moulded through the gaze; the subject, as the object of the gaze, appears to the viewer, constructing their subjectivity by performing, over and over again. Architecture, in this situation, provides a stage for looking and performing.

The built environment of our everyday life creates stages for performing identity in various ways, through exclusion, spacing, and separating the public and private. Homes, public toilets and saunas, airport security checkpoints, gas stations, gyms, offices.

Architecture assembles the stages, backstages and auditoriums of everyday life to sustain a petromodernist performance, in which the main actors are cisgender, able-bodied, white, thin, fit, neurotypical end-times survivors. Everybody performs. Everybody is shaped by their own sets, the normative script, and their props: the gender-maintaining products and technologies, the behavioural patterns and the environments built to suit the operating of their bodies. What they wear, how they use their voice, how they cut their hair, how they move, how they shape their body (e.g., through sports, tattoos, implants or diets), whether they use hormones and in relation to which gender narrative (e.g., birth control pills, steroids, hormone replacement therapies, hormones used for deficiencies, menopausal hormone treatments), and the words they use to refer to themselves – all are tools for building

the somatic fiction¹⁷ of gender. Different kinds of performers may also appear, but only on stages designed explicitly for artistic (i.e., norm transgressive) expression, in spaces where the main characters can contemplate the exciting boundaries of embodiment, and not actually taking part, but sitting in the audience.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (1990) writes about the performativity, rather than the essence or fact of gender. There is no “objective ideal” to which gender aspires, they argue, because gender is contingent upon culture and history. As conditioned “corporeal styles”, acts of gender are intentional and performative. Discrete genders humanize modern subjects; nonconformity often leads to punishment through dehumanization. Compulsory adherence to the cultural fiction of gender is therefore a requirement for survival.



17 When referring to somatic fiction in performance art making, I mean exercises that blend fictional (i.e., impossible in reality) elements with somatic practices. When I talk about the somatic fictions according to which we live within society, I specifically refer to biological narratives that make particular claims about human gender and innate being based on chromosomes, genitalia and hormones.

“The modern subject must be dressed, costumed, masked to appear able to exercise this reduction of heterogeneity to homogeneity, of multiplicity to unity” (Lugones, 1994, p. 466). The modern subject is spatialized in the role of easily categorizable gender. The subject has not chosen the role themselves. Gender designations – the strongest somatic fictions of modern society – assigned in the hospital delivery room initiate the role. Hospitals are architectural spaces where the training of gender roles begins, and the categorical gaze supports this process. The body begins to be constructed inside a somatofictional mould: a pregiven structure. The hygiene, pathologization and diagnosis emitted by these architectural spaces are central to the maintenance and reinforcement of this mould.

Architecture has a special place in the staging of binary representations. The position of transgender and other gender nonconforming people in this staging tends to fall into the realm of spectacle or freak show. In the delivery room, an intersex baby causes alarm. In a public

shower, a trans person is blatantly stared at, their body parts stirring confusion. Because not only do we still struggle to imagine womanhood and manhood beyond essentialist frameworks, we are often incapable of seeing the person beyond the gender binary altogether.

Transgender people carry revolutionary potential in their everyday performance, whether they want to or not. Trans people spark curiosity, fear, anger. They are stared at because they reflect something back, a truth. Like an effective piece of performance, a horizon of potential opens up while gazing at trans people: perhaps no one's identity is quite as unequivocal as we once thought?

I know what it feels like to stage a piece of performance art that angers the audience. I also know what it feels like to anger an everyday audience without any elaborate theatrical machinery, simply by the way I look, on the street, in the store, in the restaurant, in the Nordic Pavilion. Transness threatens the smooth, anaesthetized dramaturgy of the cisnormative performance. Transness must be controlled, restrained and regulated; preferably left backstage or, even better, in a cage, like in a circus freak show, brought onto the stage only when those in power decide it is safe to do so.

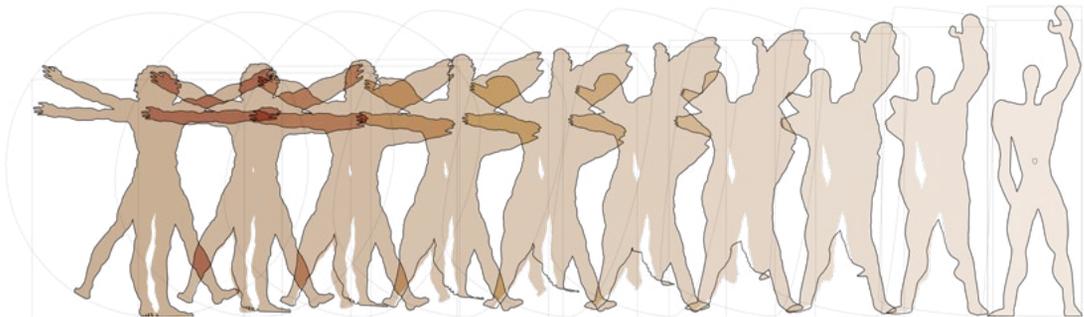
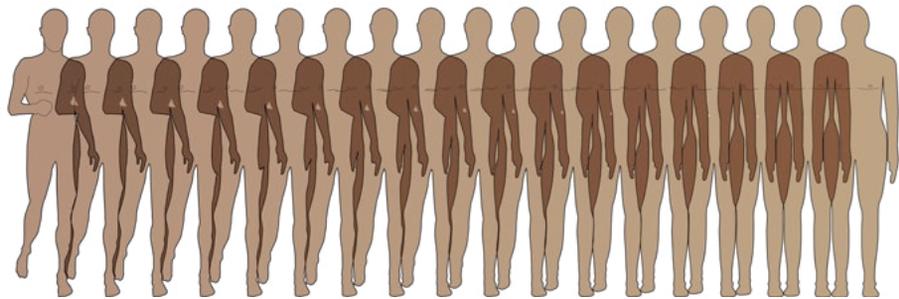
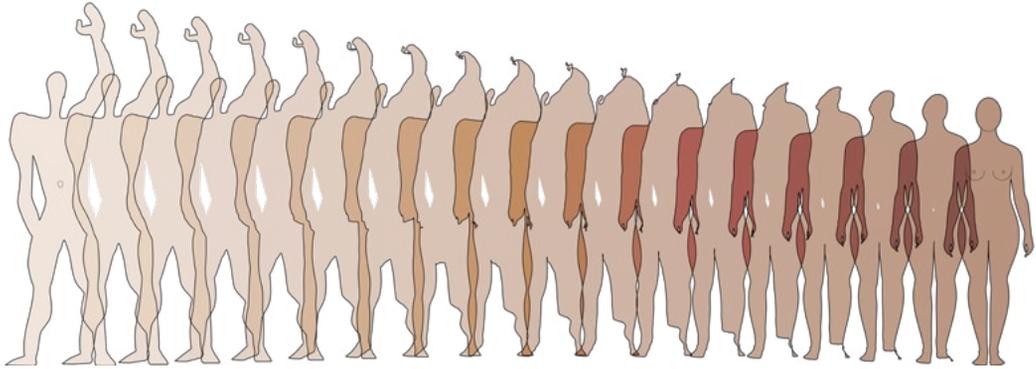
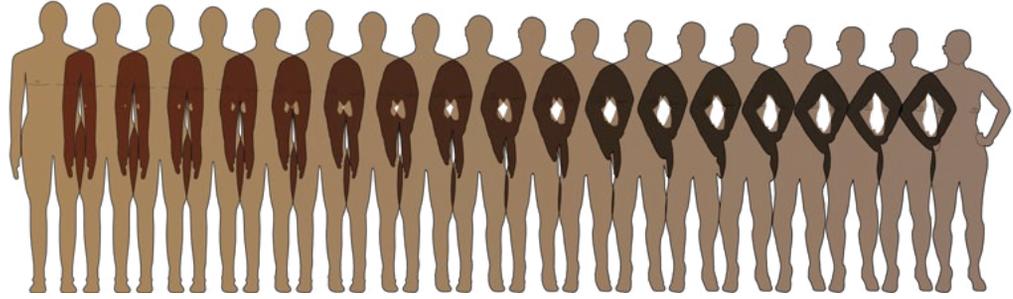
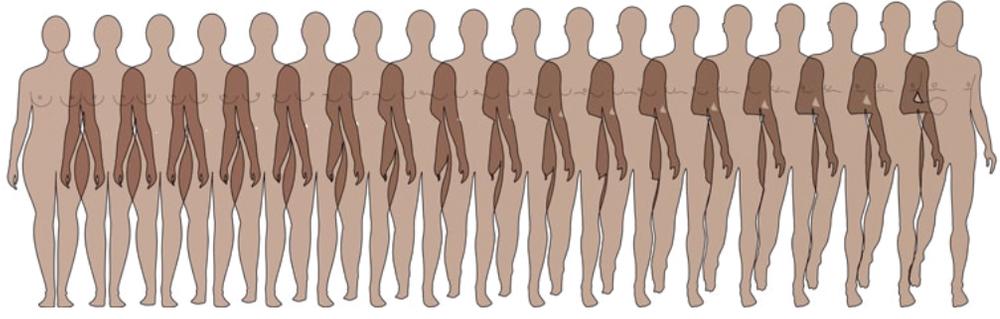
The order of the cisnormative stage is disturbed when gender non-conforming subjects appear, often triggering an intense impulse toward aggression (Castricum, 2022, pp. 66, 100). Danger lies both in the desire for violence and sexualization the observer wishes to unleash on the body of the trans person they see, and in the possibility that, through the act of looking, they just might find a part of their own body/self that threatens the cis-hetero matrix directing the way they themselves perform.

We need to find ways to rethink spaces that have divided people into roles based on an essentialist understanding of gender. What if architects were to become aware of their power to stage, akin to the

way playwright Bertolt Brecht sought to produce a critical spectator in theatre? What if architects were to take this Brechtian idea seriously when designing? And designed spaces where we critically view the norms of our political reality as a performance, so that we can transform them. Could architects guide the inhabitants of cities, spaces and buildings to become aware of the performativity of modernism, encouraging them to inhabit spaces differently and shift away from their predetermined roles? Might such an approach enable the creation of “somatic fictions” attuned to the diversity and chaos of the real world, without striving to render one performance categorically better than another?

This could be thought of as a kind of emancipatory architecture that employs researcher Stephen Duncombe's idea of the ethical spectacle as a tool that presents reality in all its diversity and seeks to engage people in its creation: “a system of discourse that must be (re) created, imagined, operationalised, and dramatized to appeal to the public’s imagination” (Duncombe, 2007, p. 20). Performing arts have always been about political rearranging of reality and altering how we perceive it. And behind the everyday stages of architectural life lies a backstage, where gender performativity-related thoughts reside and guide the logic behind the construction of these stages. Changes to a performance can also be made backstage, right up to the moment of the performance.

DRAWING D. A visualization of bodily performance through repetition, morphing to create overlapping spectrums that break the mould of the modernist binary system. In contrast to DRAWING C, the bodies are placed in relationship to each other and the unseen in-between possibilities are made visible.



still not seen as technological. The body, in its flesh and materiality, is still perceived as “detached” from technology: pure and neutral, the natural human. Microplastics, pharmaceuticals and hormones are often not recognized as part of bodily technology; instead, efforts are made to disguise and normalise them as part of everyday life. They may even be used to pursue bodily purity, through dietary supplements, vitamins, skincare products and hormone supplements that purport to be “natural”.

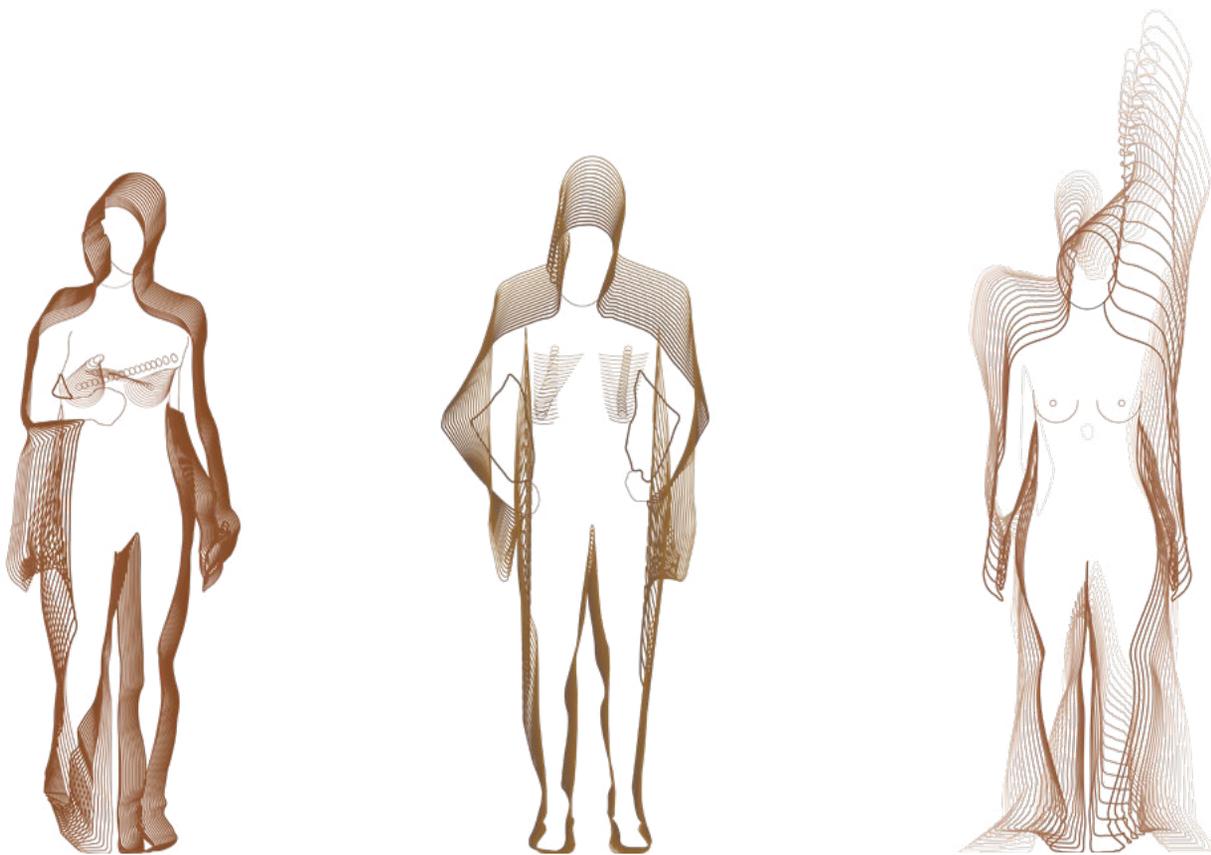
A “pure body” is a product of industrialization and fossil fuels, an illusion of intactness maintained by petrocapitalism. According to philosophers Antti Salminen and Tere Vadén (2024, p. 17), this belief in purity is delusional and hubristic in that it perceives itself as sovereign, free from waste, and denies the body’s dependence on oil. In contrast, I propose the concept of the *technobody* – an evolving self-construction that explores its own historical, political and social layers defined by modernism. The technobody is self-determined and utilizes technology to enhance liveability in the name of emancipatory justice. What if we were to think of architectural spaces as technobodies, enmeshed with petro-production? And what if we were to view all of this from a human rights perspective? What if the effort for bodily autonomy were to guide architectural design?

The maintenance of the fiction of the pure body requires that any technological mediations and design must not be visible in the body. Therefore, bod-

ies that visibly modify themselves, such as trans bodies, are seen as anomalies. Transness derails from the defaults of the production industry that do not serve the norm-deviating life and body.

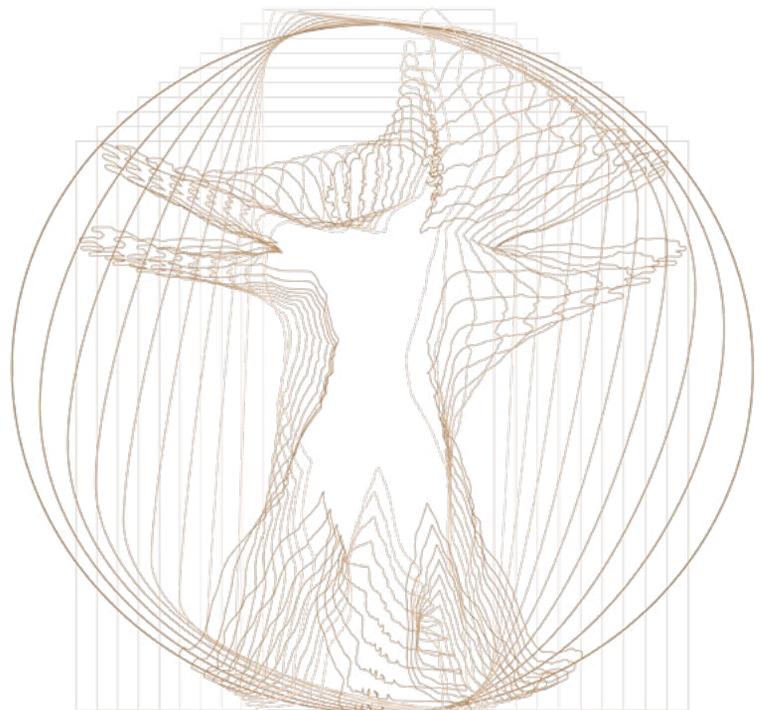
The human body is technomaterial: our bodies' materiality changes, is impacted by, and coexists with technology – throughout history and throughout our lives. In the trans body, technomateriality meets trans-materiality (trans(gender) materiality): a material embodiment that transcends societal impositions, whether empirical, rhetorical or aesthetic. Transmateriality can manifest as socio-discursive or bodily-transformational – or both – but it is always inherently material. Socio-discursive refers to the conceptual transition from a person's birth-assigned gen-

DRAWING E. Each spectra is collapsed to form ethereal representations of technomaterial bodies, where the boundaries between self and other are not so clear. The overlay of many different bodies to form one highlights the way our material experiences are continually impacted, made impure and blurred by petrocapitalism, technology and normative ideology.



der, while bodily transformation encompasses both social aspects and hormonal and surgical changes. In all these forms, being trans is a fundamentally material experience: any transition, whether discursive or physical, impacts the materiality of the trans body. How, then, might technological mediums, devices, medical advancements – and indeed architecture – support transmaterialism?

My approach to technology aligns with xenofeminist (Hester, 2018) and crip technoscientific (Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019) perspectives. I view technology as a socially, politically, historically and ecologically multi-layered force that demands critical scrutiny but also holds the potential to create more liveable futures, particularly from trans, crip and



reproductive rights perspectives. I reject the idea of technology as merely a patriarchal tool and challenge ecofeminist and ecofascist notions that seek purity in nature. As an anti-naturalist, I see nature as mutable and open to reinterpretation rather than an idealized state. Technology should expand gender diversity, enabling gender hacking, experimentation and subversion. I consciously distance myself from capitalist techno-innovation, instead advocating for technosciences to be “linked to a collective theoretical and political thinking in which women, queers, and the gender non-conforming play an unparalleled role” (Laboria Cuboniks, 2018).

For Le Corbusier, the architect was akin to a surgeon, deciding what to cut, fix or alter according to the predefined model body of the Modulor Man. Imagine a future where architects went beyond static structures to become system-hacking, mutating, differently-abling, potentially revolutionary engineers of bodies, deeply immersed in collective theorizing and political discourse, sketching maps, and designing spaces for self-determining techno-bodies?

“Technological mediums” alludes to infinite possibilities and juxtapositions not bound by disciplinary definitions of “technology”. What if destruction, reuse and reconstruction were to form a technological medium? What about repair and renovation? Maintenance? How might technological mediums extend over time to encompass beyond just the moment of transition? Can socio-discursive and bodily transformation be seen as continuous processes that do not end at the moment of taking hormones, or having surgery, or healing from surgery?

Perhaps the role of technology in this unfolding of social construction, shift in discourse, and potential bodily transformation is to recognize that architecture, as a technology, produces and reproduces gender performativity. How might architecture be redeployed – physically and discursively – as a “technological medium” to create space for all technobodies? Like bodily transformation, architecture is never “complete”, as people who inhabit architecture make it their own through their everyday actions, and buildings are renovated, restored and reused. We must let go of the “finality” of architecture and embrace and work with the ongoing, continuous processes of architecture.

We need spaces to socially, discursively and safely explore gender variety and transgress the normative body. We need spaces where bodily fluids can flow regardless of the shape of the genitals, and where hormone distribution and surgical procedures are based on need rather than medical diagnosis. We need spaces where the internal experience of bodies is given room to strengthen, and where clinical pathologizations fade away, leaving opportunities to engage with one's own desiring body and its editing. These spaces for technobodies are technobodies themselves, mutually intertwined and in an critical analytical relationship with petro-modernism. Architecture failed to create pure bodies. Technobody, which has activated and actualized its own transcorporeality – the potential of a body beyond norms – has now squatted the space of the Modulator Man.

3.5 Reuse

SCORE:

Destroy the faults of design

Redesign the remains

Disrupt the dominance of the norm

In short: Reuse directly engages with material practices in architecture. It examines the conceptual and material remains left behind by the oil industry and – using the trans body as a case study for reusing corporeality – proposes an ecological practice that aims to recognize the role of oil in modernist production. This approach seeks to reset the default settings of constant new production and instead utilize existing materials in a world shaped by remains.

The Nordic Pavilion stands in its final years in its current form. It is deteriorating. It is fragile and smells of mould. My body inside it feels a certain sense of empathy and inspiration. The pavilion's main building material, concrete, is supposed to stand the test of time. But the Nordic Pavilion, once a testament to timelessness, is worn out; what remains is not eternity but an immense residue, a material legacy with which we must now coexist. We all, pavilion visitors and artists alike, are part of a shared socio-political performance amid so much material residue, grounded in our petromodernist relationship with oil.



Fossil fuels, new production, concrete and significant amounts of waste are fundamental elements of petromodernism. Of these, at least two – existing concrete structures and waste – are a part of our present and future reality, whatever our intentions. Could we perhaps transform our desire for the new and for the means of production by reflecting on the essence of the already built concrete infrastructure, waste and the human body that resides within our landscapes shaped by oil?

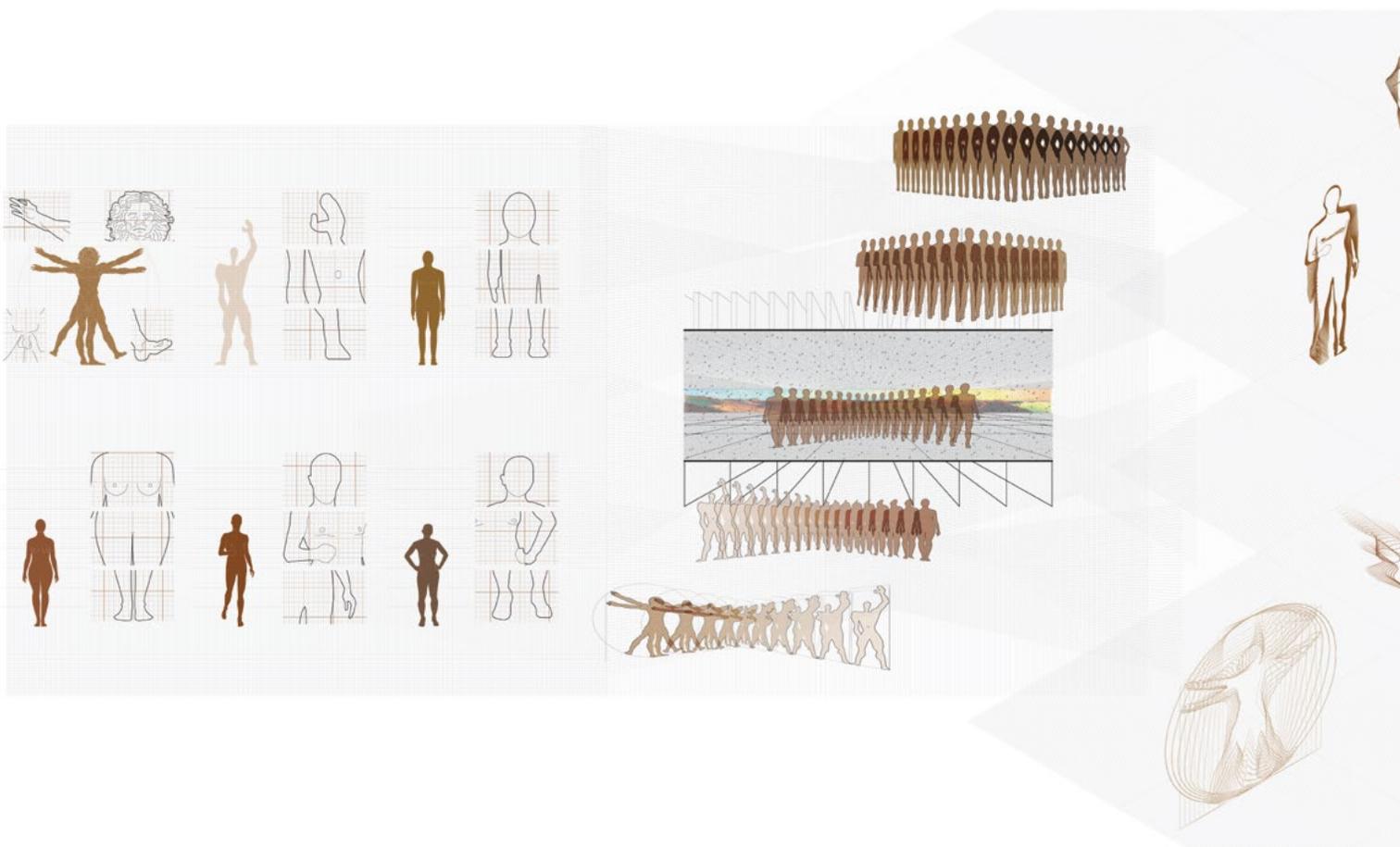
In this (literally) burning world, we must reframe reuse, repurpose and indeed repair.¹⁸ These activities are exercises in ecological thinking that connect our bodies to oil and permeate our ways of desiring.

To link this to transcorporeality, the trans body reuses/recycles/reshapes/repurposes its own material. I use transness here as a practice in ecological thinking. Trans bodies can be understood as a metaphor for ecological collapse through self-recycling: transcorporeality involves the reuse of its own material, semiotics and identity.

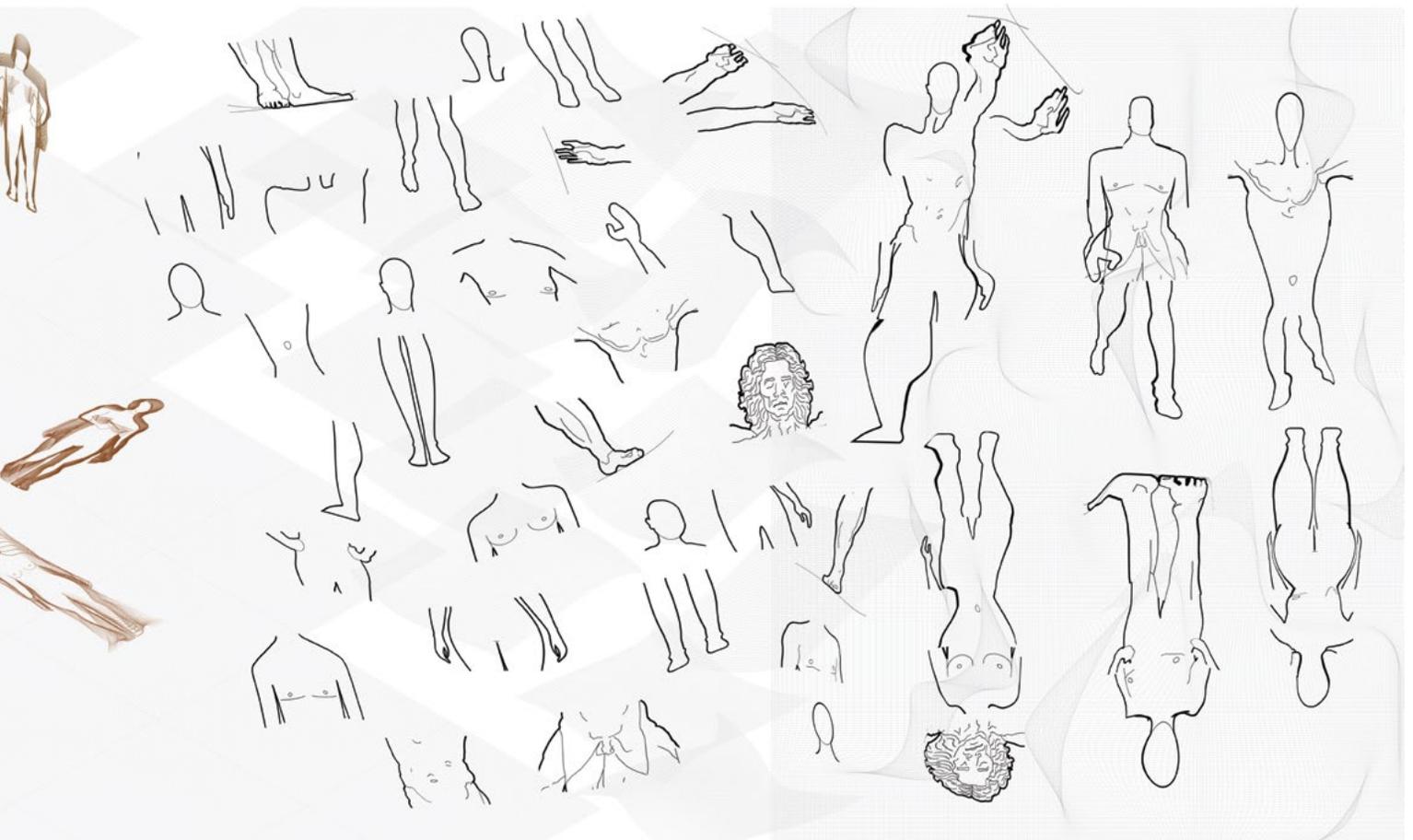
¹⁸ I consider the word *repair* from an abolitionist perspective, referring to an abolitionist architectural practice that aims to dismantle in the name of reform and reshaping (Castricum, 2022, pp. 5–6). I suggest that we approach repair by acknowledging the harm we have caused, and committing to restoration. Within this framework, I align myself with the practices rooted in climate justice, transfeminism, and Indigenous rights.

Concrete is a central part of the petromodernity discourse. It is a fundamental building material in our built environment, enabling rapid and large-scale new construction, which today still largely relies on producing new materials. The industrial age began with the widespread use of coal. This was followed in the early 20th century by the rise of oil and natural gas, also known as petroleum, introducing unprecedented energy sources, applications and impacts (Klose & Steininger, 2024, p. 19). Despite being a major source of industrial pollution, concrete remains a symbol of progress and modernity in architecture (Al Asadulloh, 2023).

DRAWING F. In a procession from left to right – from status quo to future – DRAWINGS A through E depict the transformation from limited, “ideal”, dissected bodies to morphed, remixed technobodies. The two-dimensional plan grid evolves into one-point perspectives, then isometric views, before finally breaking free. Destruction, removal and reuse are generative processes that create space for transcorporeality. Could we think of our bodies and architecture as part of larger ecological cycles that connect us back to each other?



According to Le Corbusier, the ground was dirty, corrupting and harmful, a harbourer of disease (Colomina, 2019, p. 20). Humanity needed to be lifted above it, into the air, through architecture. Modernism contains a certain irony in its efforts to detach humans from the disease-ridden earth by means of oil, a filthy, viscous substance extracted from deep under the ground. Oil fuels the production of concrete structures, enabling humans to experience industrialization while distancing themselves from the “dirty” earth. In petromodernism, the human experience is fictionalized away from oil. In Western countries, oil is primarily associated with the comforts of modernity that are easily accessible. The petromodern individual does not recognize oil as part of the earth but as an immaterial enabler, allowing bodies to hover as far from the ground as possible (CIRS, 2021).



One of petromodernism's key spatial means of elevating the human body into the air and experientially isolating it from the ancient temporality of oil is, of course, the car. The car is the main symbol of the age of oil; the age of oil is the age of modernism; and the symbol of modernism is the man, who is also represented by the car. The car is a petromodernist space of segregation. It separates bodies from ecological processes into moving metallic machine interiors and distorts our relationship with oil, elevating human experience above the environment. I think about the Nordic Pavilion in relation to the car. The pavilion is physically close to the ground, yet its aura of purity and neutrality disconnects it from the oil that produced it in the same way that a car lifts us into the air, elevated above the concrete highways, also made possible by oil.



Fictional detachment from oil fuels the desire for the new and the pure, which at their core are ultimately desires for oil. As Salminen and Vadén argue, oil blinds us to and distances us from it (2015, p. 25). Oil's energy density erases its own traces, making it invisible within our desires. To see oil, we must actively think about it.

Through intentional practice, could we learn to see the oil around and within us, and transform our relationship with the endless desire for the new? If we could see the amount of oil embedded in already produced objects and ways of thinking, could the ensuing awareness lead to understanding of the ecological burden directly created by fossil fuel production, and could our relationship with oil also change? Could the desire for new production enabled by further oil extraction give way to valuing what has already been used – the remains of oil in materials, buildings, and the image of the body?

Just as novelty is maintained in the built environment, the modernist fiction of the body as immutable is sustained solely through consumption and is inevitably linked to the illusion of endless natural resources. Concrete is mass produced. Bodily and gender norms are mass produced. The lifespan of reinforced concrete can be surprisingly short – as little as 50 years, depending on the conditions. After that, it is most often discarded as waste, left to rot. I see gender norms in a similar light: adhering to them demands constant maintenance and, if you are unable to sustain them, society leaves you to rot.

Having already lived a life in the role of a woman, I think of my trans body as reused. Womanhood, as a field of experience, turned into waste for me as life progressed. I still carry that waste within me. It exists in my memories, in how others perceive me, in the way I understand myself and the world. I live with the waste. Parts of me have been semiotically dismantled and destroyed, parts of my flesh have been surgically removed and reshaped, and industrially produced

hormones have been added to it to enable me to repurpose my body.

Trans bodies are case studies in reconstruction and repurposing: for some, finding a home; for others, living amid endless change and relocations. Transcorporeality is a recycled embodiment that observes the mind, matter, and sociopolitical power structures within oneself and, through this, questions the petromodernist construction of subjectivities. Considering Guattari (2000)'s three dimensions of ecological thinking – environment, social relations, and human subjectivity – transcorporeality cultivates conscious awareness of these interconnected aspects of ecological responsibility and recognizes the diverse influences of modernism in the shaping of the self. As a conceptual “ecological thinking” framework, it offers a corporeal lens through which all petromodernist subjectivities can be analysed.

The practice of ecological thinking requires reuse in both thought and materials. Reuse embraces impure worlds, involving the use of old and discarded material or space – “dead” material, the dirty and leftover – with a zombie-like quality. By “zombie”, I mean a repurposed aesthetic – including architecture – that, from a capitalist perspective, is neither fully alive nor entirely dead, neither abandoned nor completely destroyed. Reused architecture exists in a liminal state, intertwined with repurposed materials.

This is beautiful: destruction and removal as generative processes that make way for different forms and purposes.

This is also the reality of the trans body. Trans individuals possess a remarkable capacity to live in liminality as they navigate existing gender norms, the use of spaces, and their own gender history, which is partly “dead”, transformed into waste, and partly alive, along with their present and future.

Adaptive reuse in architecture involves the rethinking and reframing of materials in construction. It also requires a reframing of spaces programming: thus an old cinema becomes a salad restaurant; a barn becomes a wedding venue; the stage in a theatre becomes a climbing gym; a shopping centre becomes housing; a school becomes a medical facility; and a factory becomes a tattoo studio.

Could we alter our relationship with the built environment by transforming our relationship with the body? Living with the leftover muck of the past requires a Harawayan “staying with the trouble” mindset, a deeply embodied practice of ecological thinking (Haraway, 2016). Such a practice must embrace the fundamentally changing nature of the world, its continuous processuality, within which the trans body is just another body, its characteristics no longer emerging as differences but as part of each life’s settling into its own unique course.

Perhaps incompleteness and imperfection as aesthetics are the antidote to modernist ideology. By doing away with finality, we usher in flexibility, participation, adaptation and in-betweenness. What would it be like to design architecture that changes over time? Like the trans body – always in flux, transforming in different ways – architecture can be pliable, too. That is my (A.L.) intention for my embodiment as a trans architect.

4 Staging the petromodernist error

I identify with trashed cars, dirty concrete garages, oil-stained puddles, the city's dark corners, the residues of modern life. Sometimes, I mourn my own miserable inability to fit into the widely accepted conception of corporeality upheld by the social imaginary.

Petromodernism has generated a fatal error at the intersection between the fiction of clearly categorizable humans and the fiction of infinite resources and endless economic growth. Modernist architecture has been a central stage for the playing out of this error: born out of the fictions that gave rise to the error, then building upon and eventually reinforcing them.

A conception of humanity based on purity and clear categorizations is directly linked to the ecological crisis. At the intersection – where the material impacts of modernist production (architecture, for instance) meet – the ecological crisis and the crisis of humanity have seemingly diverged, even though they both result from the same cause. This error, in which things are seen as separate from each other, is the bodytopia in which we live.

Inevitably, petromodernist flesh and muscles – mind and body – are trained alongside the self-image produced by the error. Our bodies are the product of petromodernist bodytopia. Our thoughts, our desires and our flesh are permeated by plastics, pollution and petrochemical filth. We are our environments, the hyperextended bodies that populate our cities; we are the cars we drive, the gas stations, the streets, the concrete walls. We perform our mass-produced

ARCHITECTURE AS A STAGE

OVERCONSUMPTION/
ECOLOGICAL COLLAPSE

PATHOLOGICAL - MARGINALIZA-
SEGREGATION

ERROR

FICTION: THE IDEAL
CATEGORIZABLE HUMAN

FICTION: ENDLESS
ENERGY RESOURCES

and standardized identities; we self-design ourselves each day in relation to our environment.

Our industry muscles – our bodies trained for the roles of petromodernist culture – must now be directed towards new pursuits. Only from within can we begin to reorganize the current bodytopia, our human bodies, and the bodies of buildings.

We need to transform the way we define and perceive the body – and the way we speak about it and its gender – so we can begin to design spaces differently. Height, voice pitch, pronouns, body hair, breasts, flat chests, clothing, hormones, muscles, vaginas, penises, wombs, testicles. Dismantling the categorizing structures of thought is architectural work. The body is architectural. Our thinking is architectural. It is constructed historically through routines, repetition and layering.

Returning to Panu Savolainen asking me whether I would have wanted to destroy the pavilion. My urge to destroy it was for the sake of reshaping the way we relate to the so-called treasures of modernism. The pavilion is old; perhaps living its final years before the big restoration project. A monument is perceived as immovable and permanent. Genders assigned at birth serve as monuments to petromodernism, paralleling other modernist legacies, like the Nordic Pavilion. But gender is not static, just as the pavilion itself is not static: it is already in motion, the roots of the trees influencing its form. Looking ahead, the pavilion – and by extension, these con-

Although this is a fundamental concept that architecture students are taught from the start, it can get lost as other, seemingly more important lessons are learned. But site analysis, programming, circulation, materials, colours, textures, light and air, structures, and the coordination of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems – all of these parts of architecture ultimately impact the body in real ways.

More precisely, the way we think about bodies manifests in the way we design and build architecture. Spatial design reflects societal attitudes and norms regarding which bodies are allowed where.

structs – must embrace their transformative mobility through practices of reuse. How this is to be done, for what purpose, on whose terms, and towards what conceptions of humanity remains to be seen.

We live in absurdly frightening times, as the fascist mindset spreads both insidiously and overtly around the world. Its mechanisms of expansion relying heavily on emotional appeal, dramatization and political propaganda, fascism in its current form appears as a form of affect-driven theatre, the effects of which we must bear witness to, while simultaneously persisting in the creation of alternative performances and counter-hegemonic political theatre.

I wanted to look at the Nordic Pavilion without averting my gaze from the historical and still-present political ideologies it represents. I wanted to transform the way we view it and, from there, architecture in general. I wanted to stage the error. I think of a stage as a site of political change; it is full of movement. A stage is not a monument because stages are used as spaces for active political reimagination, transformation and resistance.

Researcher Eetu Viren (2023) writes that theatre and theory both originate from the Greek theoreo, “to see”, and that, in Ancient Greece, theatron referred to the auditorium (the place from which the viewer watches the performance). I want to perceive and theorize the Nordic Pavilion as a kind of theatron, a space for critical spectatorship of the tradition of postmodernism. Viren discusses Brecht's view of political theatre as a platform that not only depicts the world for its audience but also encourages them to actively participate in and transform it, rather than merely observing (Viren, 2023, pp. 63–94). I wish to bring modernist conventions and their effects on our bodies and the environment before us so that we may take part in them.

I want to believe that the future lies in what we already have, in how we look at the past and how we have got to where we are, and how we decide to rearrange the remains for looking forward to the

future. I look at the bodytopia in the Nordic Pavilion. I see the horizon of error opening up on the stage, as environmental collapse shares the space with bodies long rejected, marginalized, oppressed and rendered valueless. Let us gaze upon them together, in their simultaneous presence.

Relax the muscles in your eyelids to blur the categorizing gaze

Reprogramme the settings in your muscles of thought

Connect your muscles to the technological interfaces where the currents of collective norm-hacking flow

Fuel your muscles with the energy of the waste that courses through the system

Engage all of your muscles in the work of creating endless diversity of performances

Teo Ala-Ruona is a transmasculine, white, Helsinki-based artist who works at the intersection of performance art, theatre, and choreography.

A.L. Hu is a queer, nonbinary, transgender Taiwanese-American architect, organizer, and facilitator who lives and works in New York City.



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