

Affirming Bodies

by
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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

The gym varies in shape, size, and materiality, yet they all share the characteristic of dedicating their space to their own varying notions of fitness. In addition to training our bodies to be better, faster, and stronger, the physical site of the gym is also location to complex social interactions, for looking and being looked at, and the production of hegemonic beauty standards. While we make our bodies in the gym, we do not make them with our own free will. The way we perceive our bodies in the gym has been constructed by neoliberal and patriarchal values, which exploit the gendered and physical differences of individuals to market the concept of an “ideal” body only achievable through acquiring consumer goods and services.

Beneath the posters of hyper-muscular flexing bodybuilders, fast-paced music playing on loud speakers, and awkward stares from strangers, the gym validates our bodily values and relationship between the body and mind through its architectural existence. While there are texts and research written by philosophers, feminists and sports theorists which explore different approaches and their impact on modern fitness, none have proposed adequate solutions or addressed how the spatial design of fitness spaces are complicit in this process. New fitness styles claim to challenge norms, but in reality they only propose “alternatives” to the hegemonic ideal as an attempt to rebrand existing fitness trends.

The first portion of this thesis is to document and investigate the physical, social, and political nature of the ever-shifting nature of contemporary fitness culture and its subsequent impact on its users and buildings. The second portion of this thesis involved compiling a set of spatial guidelines for a gym space inspired by a variety of philosophers and designers who are committed to challenging the body’s limitations, while referring to both conceptual and built projects as precedents. Finally, the third portion of this thesis is to design a prototype for a gym space which challenges the existing paradigm. Rather than being a space in which physical exercise instills a hegemonic ideal into our bodies, the proposal for a fitness center located in Toronto provides a body-positive and constructive space for both training and play.

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Introduction

Stepping into the Gym

The first time I stepped into a gym I was overwhelmed with the smell of rubber and metal, loud music playing, equipment clanging and gym banter. I had no idea how to start a workout or how to ask anyone for help. I felt like I was constantly being watched discretely through the gaps of various machines or through the reflective mirrors which lined the interior. Looking into the mirror, I cannot help but evaluate the muscle and fat on my own body and compare it to other bodies in the gym. As I walk past the watchful eye of the receptionist and enter the changeroom, I change into workout gear, or a costume, and walk out onto the “stage”. The gym is a theater. Its open plan becomes a performance space for its users who compete for individualism and power. I was slowly indoctrinated into going to the gym, subconsciously picking up social cues, such as motioning towards other gym users to ask if they were still using a certain piece of equipment. Over time, I became accustomed to the rituals and processes of the gym, however the discomfort and social anxiety I first experienced upon entering this space still remained. The gym becomes a fascinating site where our beauty standards of the body become the most visible, as we compare and flex our bodies in front of mirrors under the observations of others. The gym is a paradoxical space for both discipline and play, for watching as well as being watched, for both the ascension to self-enlightenment as well as fueling one’s own pursuit for beauty.

The Gym: Site for Discipline and Play

The commercial gym is a product of the popularization of the fitness industry in the late 1960s.¹ Prior to this, physical fitness was a luxury few individuals could afford. There are many reasons for working out, be it for survival, health, attractiveness, or happiness. Through the “genesis of the individual”, the power of a person can be graduated mentally and physically through physical training.² Fitness can be enjoyable in an age where physical labour is no longer a requirement as society further shifts towards an information/knowledge economy. The habit of training one’s body is seemingly no longer an obscure practice guarded by fitness elitists, it has evolved to the mainstream and can be accomplished through countless options. The spaces in which the process of physical transformation takes place vary, from the affordable Goodlife commercial gym to the upscale Equinox center to the living room as an improvised workout space with minimal equipment.

The gym varies in physical shape and form, its parameters are defined by cultural factors. The word gymnasium originated from the Greek word “gymnos”, meaning naked as Greek athletes would train nude in outdoor spaces to engage in simulated warfare and bonding, today known as sports. The greek gymnasium was reduced to its bare essential elements, with no roof or partitions. Here the purpose of the gymnasium was to enclose a space, but to mark an order, “just as the naked body revealed its order: the body and architecture mirrored each other in space.”³



Training Montage, Rocky



Muscle Beach

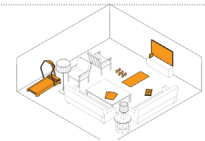


Goodlife Gym



Inspire South Beach

everyday



Home Gym



Anna Hiss Gym



The Hub Climbing Gym



Tai Chi square



Outdoors

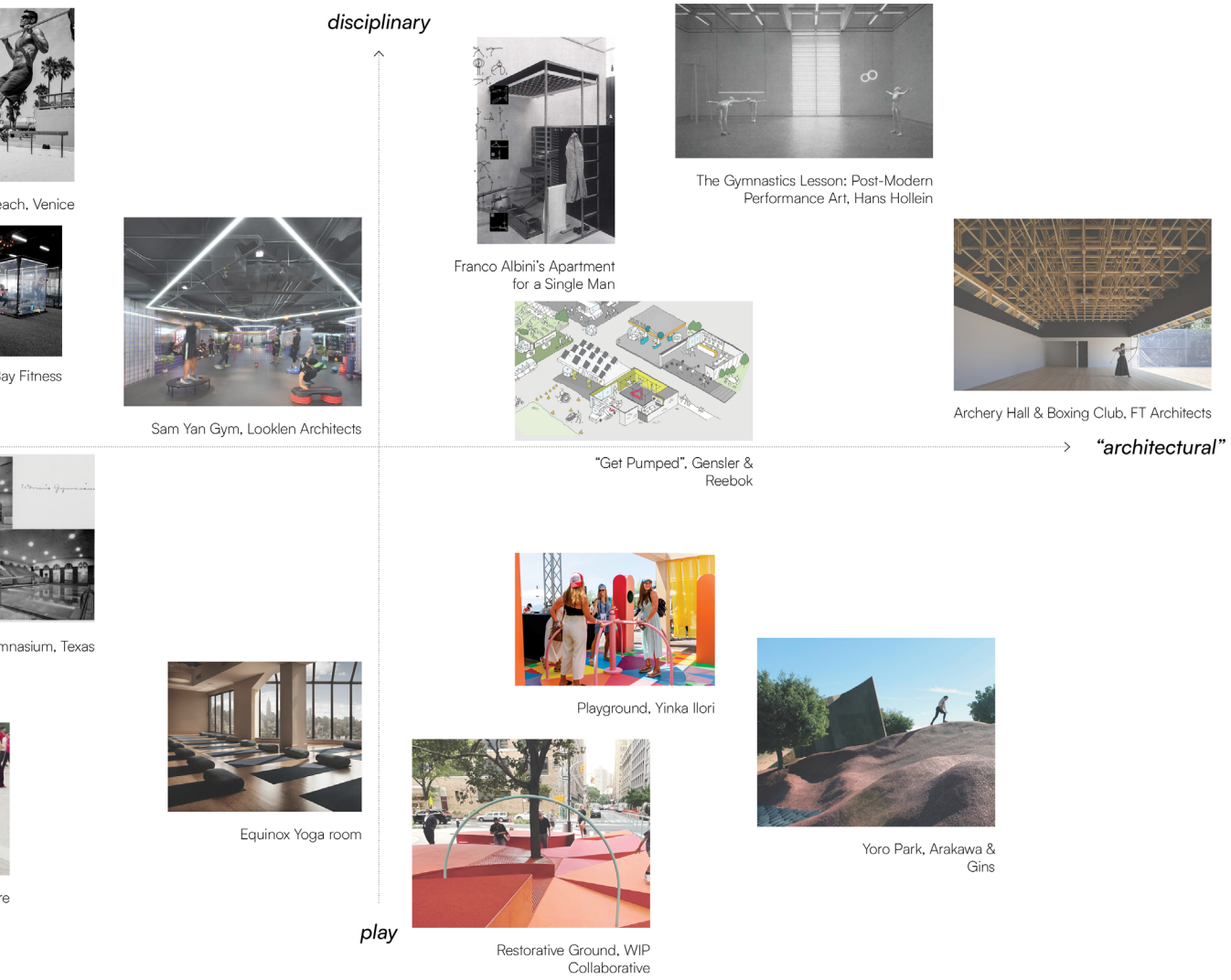
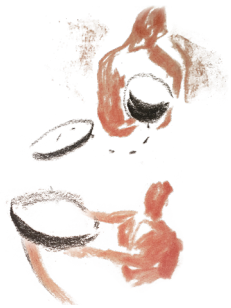


Fig. 1.1 Gym Space Typology Diagram

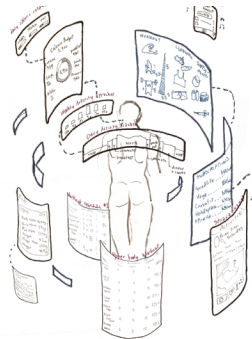
The human body is the material basis for our existence, bodily interactions produce the foundations of social practice. The body as a political object is contradictory, “you ‘make’ your own body, but you do not make it of your own individual will.”⁴ It is important to highlight that while this thesis looks at the design of gym architecture, it also researches the various aspects of body culture and its impact on the way we live, play, and work.

In *Fitness Culture Gyms and the Commercialisation of Discipline and Fun*, sociology professor Roberta Sassatelli defines the gym with three requirements. First, the space must be predicated on the notion of fitness. This is defined by *Eurofit for Adults* as “the capacity to face the physical demands of everyday life adequately and without undue fatigue”.⁵ The definition of fitness can be elaborated to refer to the training within a gym and the physical condition that the training produces.⁶ Second, gyms are built on the provision of structured variety, they provide a variety of activities for both excitement and relaxation, in order to cater diverse experiences to potential clients.⁷

1. the notion of fitness, meaning the “ability to perform physical work satisfactorily”.



2. the provision of structured variety excitement vs relaxation



3. the ability to reframe discipline as fun

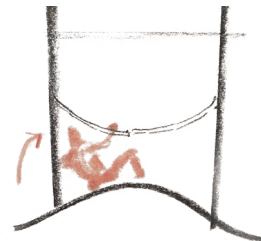


Fig. 1.2 Sassatelli's 3 requirements for a gym

Finally, the program of the gym reframes discipline as fun, the often painful pursuit of physical capital, emphasizing on emotions of pleasure and enjoyment.⁸ In addition to these criteria, the fundamentals of the gym experience is typically centered on the body, the work done on it and the “technologies” applied to it.⁹ It is noted that while all fitness spaces encapsulate these requirements to a certain extent, architecture designed without an intention to house fitness activities as well. Thus, the concept of the gym also extends to informal spaces where people come together to play, such as park squares where seniors participate in tai chi.

Sport theorist Henning Eichberg stated how interest in physical culture in modernity not only produced precise exercises of the body, but also necessitated the establishment of a separate environment for them.¹⁰ The growth of the middle class invented new institutions to order its new space, one of them being the gymnasium, a building typology which represented the importance of the regimented and defined body.¹¹

A REVOLUTION OF BODY CULTURE?

	<i>Traditional games</i>	<i>Modern sport</i>	<i>'Postmodernity'</i>
1. Time	Festivity Rhythmic repetition	Leisure/work time Futurist maximisation	Sport of the unemployed Experience of stress
2. Space	Integration Local identity	Specialisation Standardisation Isolation	Jogging space 'Community sport' Crisis of 'container architecture'
3. Energy	Laughter Music Ritual 'spirituality'	Disappearance of laughter Disappearance of music	New carnivalism Re-musicalisation New religious body cultures
4. Interpersonal relations	Patriarchy/ matriarchy? Togetherness of ages Locality/ internationality	Dynamic of speed Male dominance Classes of gender age, weight National identification/ results	'Sport across the limits' Family sport Social sport Multiplicity of cultural identities
5. Objectives	'The strong man' 'Glory'	Production of results Quantification of records Achievement	Crisis of educational quantification Media circus
6. Values and ideas	Christian/pagan? Traditionalism	Faster, higher, stronger c-g-s rationalisation Olympic ideology	Criticism of sport New Age ideology of sport 'Health' sport
7. Institutions	Local self-determination Age-groups?	Hierarchical system Bureaucratic control	Non-organised sport Commercial sport Alternative body culture

Fig. 1.3 Premodern, modern and postmodern forms of games, sports and body cultures

The gym removed itself from the rest of society, prescribed motion is confined to monitored spaces confined by an enclosure to optimize control over the environmental conditions of physical training. However, this resulted in a monotonized approach to movement which separates the mind from the body, isolating physical exercise from the rest of our life. Knowledge to a healthy body thus becomes gatekept and inaccessible. Systemic barriers within the fitness industry exist in the form of normative ideals which alienate those who do not meet certain beauty standards, social determinants which limit access to training amenities due to location or economic restrictions, and build up of physical and mental toll.

In spite of this growing popularity, the gym seemed also to constitute for many outsiders, and surprisingly at times also for many of its members, an institution where a negative and rather oppressive form of discipline is applied and implemented.¹²

The gym offers much potential for physical and mental health for all members of society. Unfortunately, its lack of approachability for many individuals due to its multiple types of barriers restricts its ability to cater to the community. The territories of both body and space in the gym shaped by gender, race, and income are not homogenous, its boundaries are loose and elastic rather than rigid thus allowing individuals to negotiate with the social constructs, allowing them to disrupt hegemonic and binary ideals. This complexifies the physical and cultural territory of the gym, as it is constantly in flux, shifting to address changing notions of hegemony and new technologies. Despite these issues, the gym does hold a special place in my heart: it is where I found confidence and empowerment, discovering the pursuit of physical strength as a method to forward personal growth. The gym became the first step to becoming comfortable in my own body, as well as better understanding what it was capable of. Thus, I am motivated to explore how this typology can be beneficial to all, rather than isolating those who find gym spaces intimidating and unapproachable due to physical barriers or stereotypes, thus improving the workout experience for those already going to the gym as well as introducing sustainable training to newcomers who previously found gym interiors discouraging.

Rather than being a space to promote hypermasculinity/femininity, narcissism, and unrealistic pursuits of comic book depictions of muscularity, the redesign of the gym as a physical and social space has the potential to dismantle patriarchal and neoliberal values forced into our physical bodies.

The first chapter of this thesis will explore the history of the “fit” body within the western context, as well as its impact of fitness culture onto the mainstream. It establishes the various physical, social, and political factors which have motivated rising beliefs related to health and beauty, which ultimately lead to the formation of today’s contemporary fitness culture which promises the potential of self-fulfillment at the cost of consumer goods and services. The body becomes a tool under capitalist production over which a person has little control.

The second chapter contemplates on different ways to negotiate the fitness-based relationship between the architecture and the body by analyzing architectural precedents, writings, and drawing representation. Buildings designed for exercise training and community living, regardless of the architect’s intention to accommodate for fitness values, are essential to further exploring what roles architecture can play in validating movement, as well as disciplining the body through a variety of technologies.

Finally, the thesis will propose a community gym center based on the research and explorations cultivated in the prior chapters. Titled (Re) creation, a play on the word recreation as well as to indicate the redefining of our body’s limitations, the gym is located in Toronto, also known as Tkaronto which is situated on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples.

Foundations of Fitness

Is this Working out?

In Plato's *The Republic*, gymnasiums were established as institutes for learning, as he believed that physical exercises would not replace the intellectual, rather gymnastics and dialectic were both effective forms of training for the soul, producing individuals with "beautiful souls in strong athletic bodies, and to dedicate them to a civic ideal of unity rather than strife".¹³ Plato emphasizes that music is for training the soul, and gymnastics for the body- when combined correctly they produce musicians of the highest quality, without either music or gymnastics, "there may be nothing left of our special subjects."¹⁴

Gymnastic as well as music should begin in early years; the training in it should be careful and should continue through life. Now my belief is,--and this is a matter upon which I should like to have your opinion in confirmation of my own, but my own belief is,-- not that the good body by any bodily excellence improves the soul, but, on the contrary, that the good soul, by her own excellence, improves the body as far as this may be possible. What do you say?¹⁵

The ethos of gymnastics was to integrate individuals into well-ordered groups rather than promote competition among individuals, employing military training to promote nationalist ideals, social order, control of sexuality to produce good citizenry.¹⁶ Much of the rise of the bodybuilder's popularity in America can be attributed to the American circus of the late 1800s, which was not only a platform for the performative bodybuilder with their extraordinary muscular body, but also the performance of exotic otherness to define the white Euro-American body.¹⁷ The circus was simultaneously a platform to advance the “freeing” of bodies while also placing non-white bodies in positions of servitude and exotic display.¹⁸ The presence of the American circus, the Playground Association of America saw disciplined bodybuilding as a method to “create fit American citizens out of immigrant children through structured and well-supervised play”.¹⁹

However, after World War 2, the symbolic and institutional ties between gymnasium and politics withered in the West, allowing for an introduction

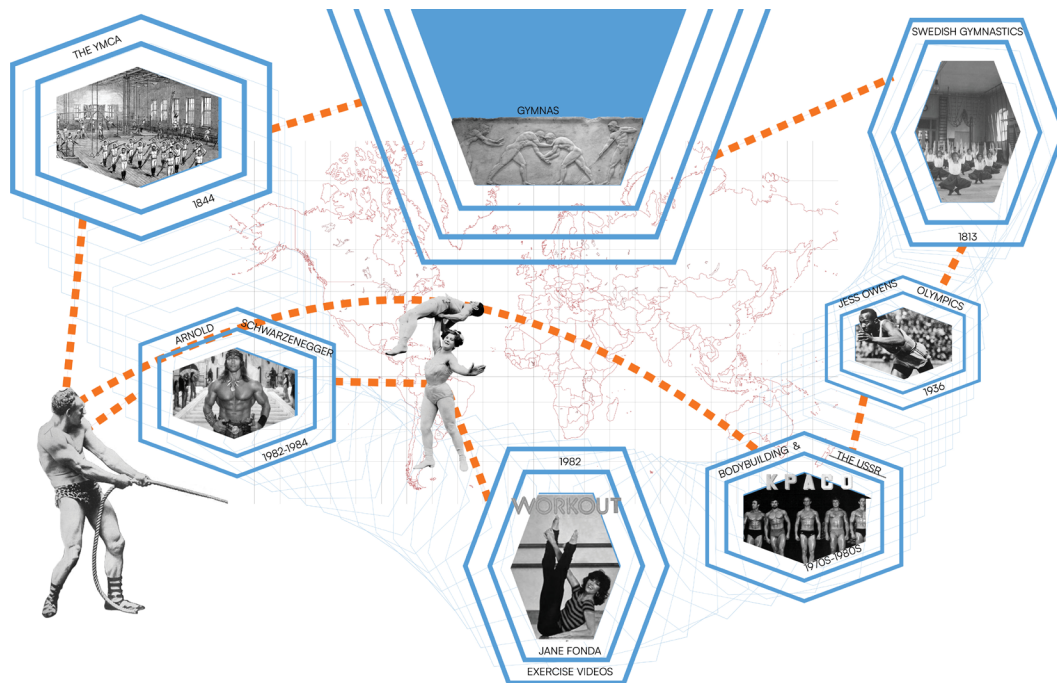


Fig. 2.1 Fitness as an “imagined nation”- creating a community transcending geographical borders

of individualized, health-seeking and fun forms of exercise. Symbolic figures such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jane Fonda act as the image encourages a rise of a new middle class in which high levels of physical capital and self-presentation are demanded.²⁰ Despite its evolution to a mainstream audience, the contemporary fitness ideology is a contradicting culture rooted in both puritanical ideas of military discipline and the individualistic pursuit of self-presentation and narcissism. The current fitness industry sells the narrative that “virile looks are synonymous with youth and health” using celebrity icons and athletes who encourage individualism by claiming that unrealistic physique ideals can be achieved through hard work which in reality is largely made possible through their economic and physical advantage.²¹ The notion that “anyone can succeed as long as they work hard enough” encouraged by neoliberal mindsets is problematic as it neglects deeper societal inequalities.

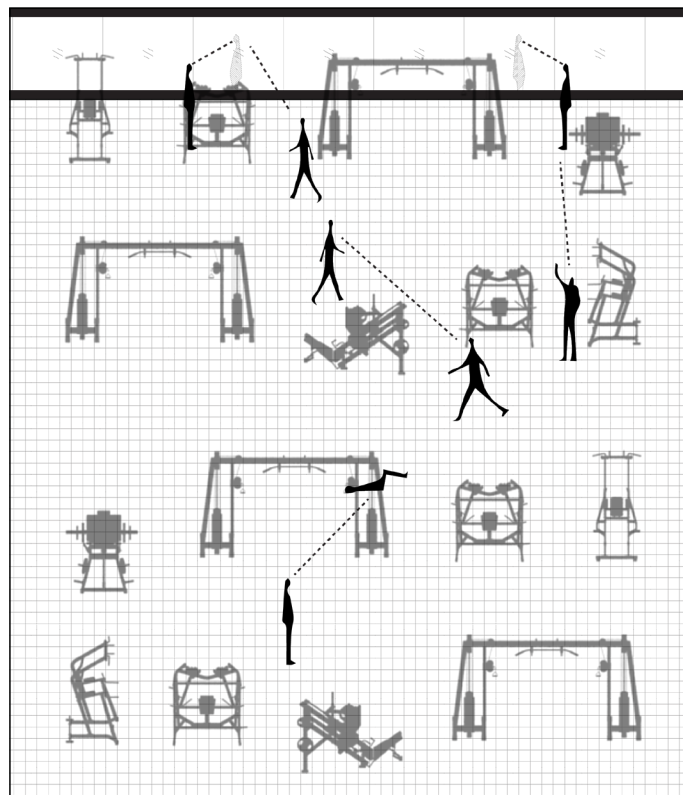


Fig. 2.2 Diagram of the panoptic gym space

To the novice lifter, most of the technologies in the gym seem strange and foreign, and it is difficult to maneuver between the non-ADA approved spacing between various equipment machines during crowded hours. The sensation of being visually and sonically overwhelmed in the gym is intentional, and the durable metal and rubber components that shape the weight room is paralleled by the large HVAC components hanging from the ceiling, all reminiscent of the modernist factory: “Based on Le Corbusier’s conceptions, with his passionate adherence to straight lines and Newtonian view of the body as a machine, a gymnasium logically had to be a machine for training the body in”.²² The modernist approach of perceiving the human body as a machine and separating its regimen by muscle group neglects the stress and work which the body undergoes outside of the gym, it does not account for the hours sitting at a desk, commuting to work, nor the domestic labour required to maintain a household.

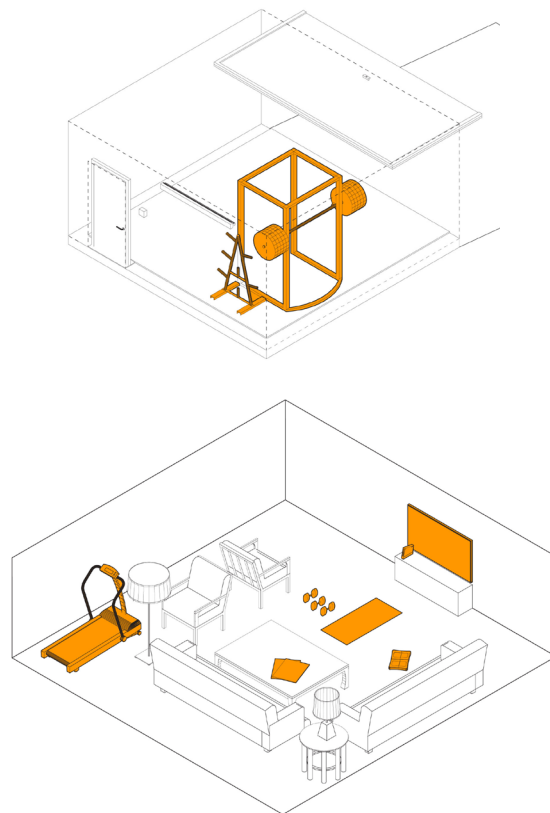


Fig. 2.3 The home gym taking over existing living spaces

Today, the strains of the fitness industry relying on capitalist pursuit is clear, many individuals find the gym intimidating and expensive, while others see little use in purchasing a membership when there are cheaper alternatives available, such as home workout YouTube tutorials and community center sport amenities. The objective of the conventional gym is to sell memberships, rather than fitness, its spatial requirements are designed to accommodate less users than they sell memberships to. "They don't care if you ever come to the gym; in fact, they're counting on your not coming. If everyone who had memberships went to their gyms, nobody would be able to work out." According to the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association 50% of members who joined gyms in January would stop attending within 6 months.²³ Relying on the popular saying "new year, new me" pushes people to impulsively purchase gym memberships in January, resulting in roughly 6.1 million Americans spending altogether \$397 million on unused memberships annually.²⁴ While the fitness industry has grown in capital, it has not necessarily meant that more people are becoming active or healthier in a sustainable fashion.

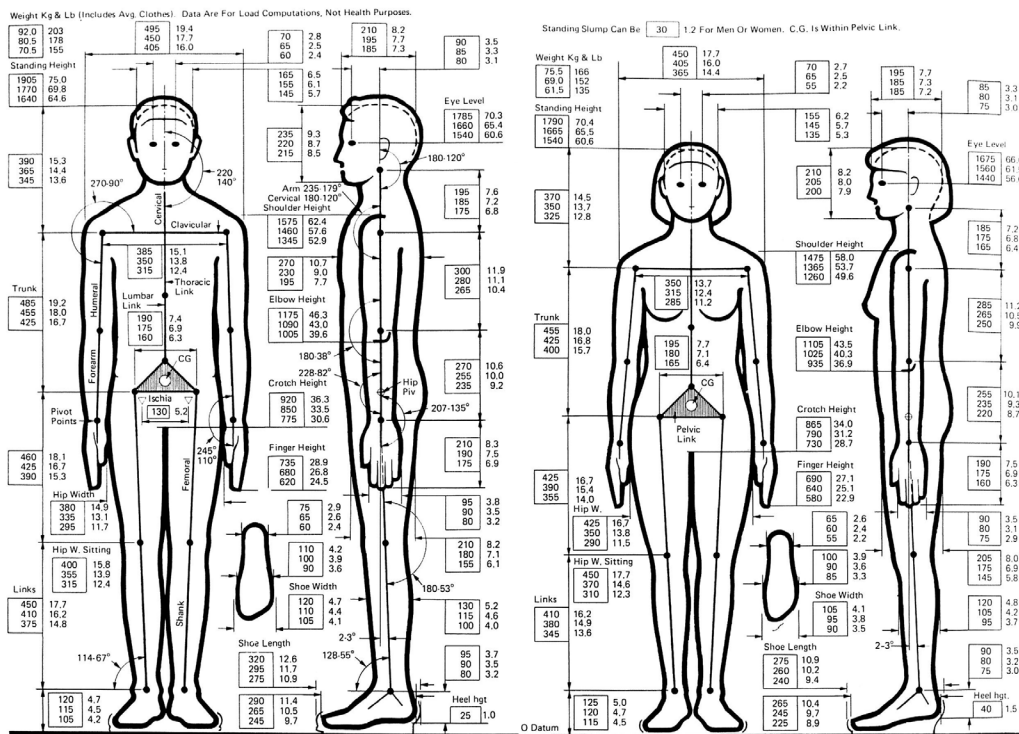


Fig. 2.4 "Joe and Josephine" Dreyfuss, Henry. 1981. *Joe and Josephine, anthropometric figures with statistical data in "Architectural Graphic Standards"*.

Sport was originally developed to simulate war and conquest, as a result its prescribed structures unsurprisingly become active sites to promote dominance and power. While physical strength no longer plays a significant role in aggression and power, its ties to the patriarchy still remain. Systemic barriers based on race, gender, sexuality, and income discourage marginalized people from accessing adequate fitness spaces. It is significantly more difficult to pursue fitness objectives while balancing multiple jobs, and one's financial limitation is further burdened by the consumerist approach of fitness marketing memberships, clothing apparel, supplements, and personal trainers. While global fitness industries task themselves with the problem of increasing membership retention, the shortcomings and limitations of the gym as an architectural typology is clear. The ethos of the gym must be revised, its interiors analyzed and redesigned to serve a diverse society of individuals of different race, gender and economic backgrounds.

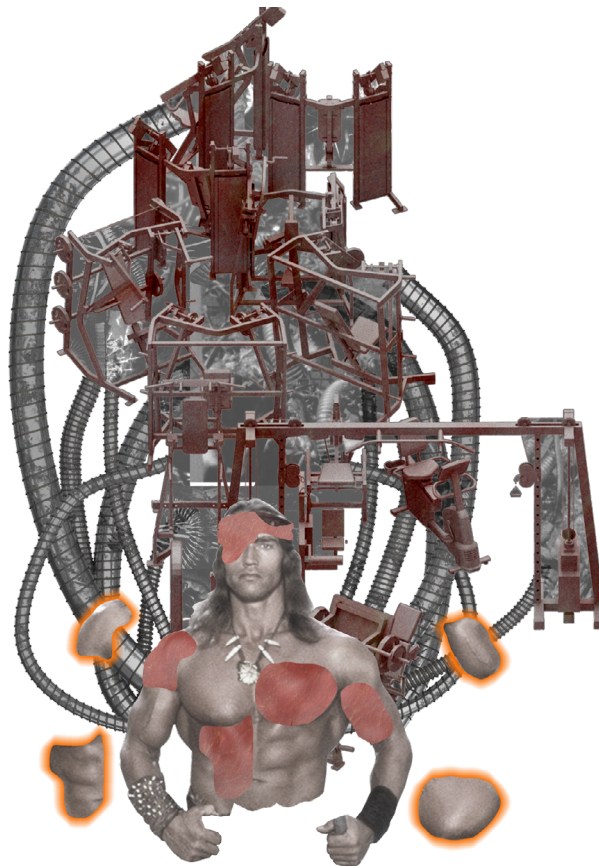


Fig. 2.5 Machines as tools for isolating muscles from one another

Neoliberal Bodies

Much of the popularization of bodybuilding and the widespread growth of today's gym centers within the western sphere can be attributed to three bodily site structures: the national context of "social and cultural thought related to children, strong bodies, citizenship, and play during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era", the circus body as a "corporate laboring body and as a constellation of extraordinary performative bodies", and "the global setting of accelerated bodily mobility during the nineteenth century and early twentieth."²⁵ Seemingly conflicting ideals would work in parallel, such as the Playground Association of America's desire to create "American citizens out of immigrant children through well-supervised play" with the circus being simultaneously both a refuge for marginalized bodies and a performance stage for muscular power and display.²⁶ Today, the industry has evolved to the point where new forms of fitness are created directly as a product of neoliberalism such as Soul Cycle and CrossFit, creating communities around the pursuit of individual fulfillment. Yet its history in the 20th century is brought forward by a collective motivation to discipline "undesirable" bodies into contributing members of western society, then later intersecting with growing popularity of individualism and consumer culture.

The accelerated interest in ‘the body’ in academic research is, however, far from innocent. And the new body awareness is more than cumulative, it does not produce just ‘more’ knowledge. The boom of body research reflects a virtual body craze. The body has become a ‘resource’ in the world of capitalistic production and a new kind of problem under the conditions of industrial use and alienation.

In consequence, the focus of the dominant body discourse is largely colonized by questions of health and illness, curing and hygiene, which mirrors changes in the world of capitalist production and alienation.

A further body discourse is about sexuality. This field opens up for the awareness of societal contradictions — contesting the industrial patriarchy.²⁷

The nature of the contemporary fitness industry within the collective and the private boundaries can be understood through the study of post-industrial ideologies of labor as well as the rationalization of sport. In *the Body in Culture, Technology & Society*, Shilling summarizes the three primary concepts for “reasons for long hours of work”: the nature of competition between individuals within a company, a market of individualized labor power and the idea of “loving your work” which are all factors which shape the contemporary gym identity.²⁸ The commodified body is built off of the belief that a “perfect body” will subsequently lead to success in other fields of life, however this ideal is proven to be an illusion when the body breaks down from unsustainable practices prescribed by private companies. In order to address the failing neoliberal body, the technologies which are constructed to attain it must be reconfigured to suit a body more suitable to our daily requirements. The public gym is a factory for producing neoliberal bodies in the sense that it deceives its user, one must pay an entry fee to access knowledge and technologies such as the leg press machine or the treadmill in order to build their body. Thus, the current paradigms of fitness and gyms must be reassessed in order to pursue a body using methods uncorrupted by capital exploitation.



Fig. 2.6 "A machine for metropolitan bachelors"

In *Delirious New York*, Koolhaas' Downtown Athletic Club is described as "a machine to generate and intensify desirable forms of human intercourse."²⁹ Its 38 floors are each equipped with facilities all connected by the theme of athletics. The Downtown Athletic Club is unapologetically masculine, using phrases such as "male to the core" to describe its design. The language choice used to describe the interiors of the Downtown Athletic Club associates the restoration of the body and conquest with heteronormative values of reproduction and opposite-sex relationships. In this text, the athlete is romanticized, deemed the "puritanical hedonists to a man", the downtown club is for metropolitan bachelors whose ultimate peak-condition has lilted them beyond the reach of fertile brides." Koolhaas' image of the athlete is deeply ingrained in patriarchal values, in the downtown athletic club sport and exercise is used to turn single men into desirable objects, after their workouts on the lower floors, the men finish their day on a rectangular dance floor "to confront the opposite sex - women". Both the athletic club and the male body in this chapter are strong and fit, hegemony and virility in our society is intrinsically linked.

Within this heteronormative space, the straight white male is prioritized, “othering” those who do not fit in the norm. Here, the ideology of the metropolitan bachelor is materialized not only in the production of the male body described in Koolhaas’ text, but in the design of the Downtown Athletics Club, a gym space unapologetically dedicated to male virility.

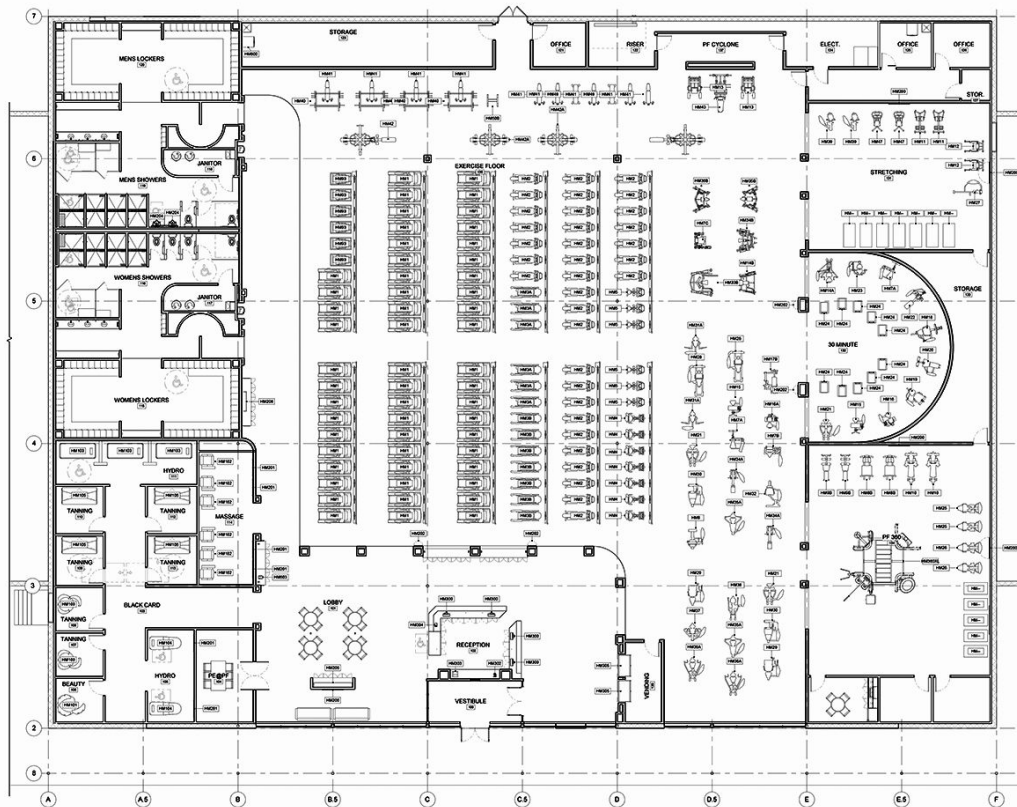


Fig. 2.8 Floor Plan of a typical Planet Fitness gym facility

The gym is a place of power. People enter to train and perfect their bodies in order to achieve self-fulfillment and “human capital” in the neoliberal world of privatized health and fitness. To counteract a sedentary lifestyle in the modern age, working out can empower and provide health benefits. Public gyms laid out in a Corbusian factory style layout reflect the rationalization of the body and physical action, diminishing the playfulness and dynamic nature of sport. In an age of online work and increasingly sedentary lifestyles, the ritual of commuting to a separate site to perform hours of monotonous exercises is both counterproductive and inadvisable, the concept of gym spaces must be renegotiated. In order to acknowledge the unique and varying bodies in society, architecture must participate in the reciprocal act of shaping its users as not simply a passive receptacle, but an active and dynamic bioscave which reflects the shaping of the human body.

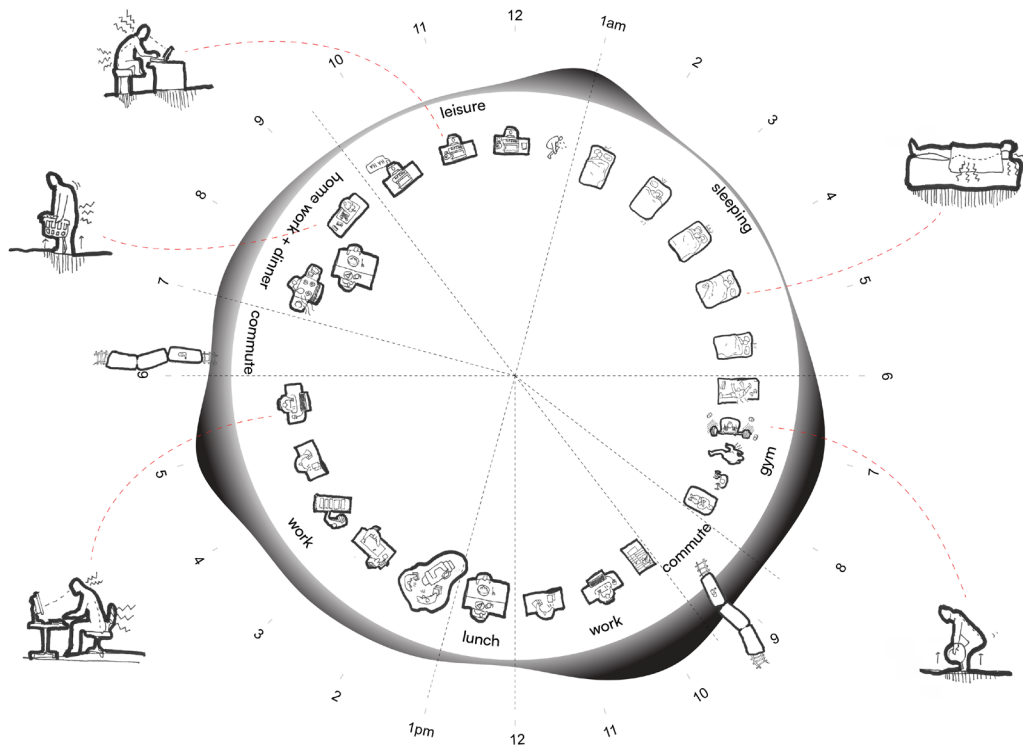


Fig. 2.9 Diagram of a gym-goer's daily schedule

Rather than encouraging us to question these issues, the conventional gym forces us into a mindless rhythm. Our time exercising is strictly scheduled and regimented into chest, legs, abs and other muscle groups. The creation of the contemporary gym and its standardization of movement is reflected through Terret's reading of the modern swimming pool: "Its rectangle shape, standardized depth, and clean water eliminated the physical risk and lack of hygiene found in open water areas such as lakes and oceans. Swimming was no longer the hardy pastime of fishermen and divers; the modern pool allowed swimming to become as mundane as following the black line on the bottom from end to end repeatedly".³⁰ In Koolhaas' *The Story of the Pool*, a floating pool is described as "an enclave of purity in contaminated surroundings" allows almost naked swimmers to socialize, sunbathe and exercise in a contained and sanitized body of water separated from its polluted environment by a long rectangle of metal sheets bolted onto a steel frame.³¹ In the story, the architects/lifeguards are able to coordinate their swimming to direct the swimming pool, propelling it from Moscow to New York. Koolhaas' story of the mobile swimming pool is a metaphor of the act of swimming or exercise in itself: the repetition of exercise labor within an enclosed space, though seemingly artificial and constructed, becomes a vehicle for empowerment and change.

With the globalization of sport through the popularization of the Olympics and fitness magazines, sport shifted to prioritize victory above all, pushing its participants to optimize power and quantify every movement possible. In response, its architecture and spaces reflected said ideologies. "So rectilinear, so unadventurous, so boring: there were no historical allusions: there was no decoration; there was no ... shear, no tension, no wit - only straight lines, right angles and the drab color of rust."³² While Koolhaas uses this portion of the text to critique Postmodernist western thought, the description does reflect accurately on the state of swimming, or fitness during this point in time: movement within the rectilinear swimming pool was rigid, monotonous, and separated from the sensation of swimming in the vast, natural ocean as a compromise for a safe, quantified, and structured container.

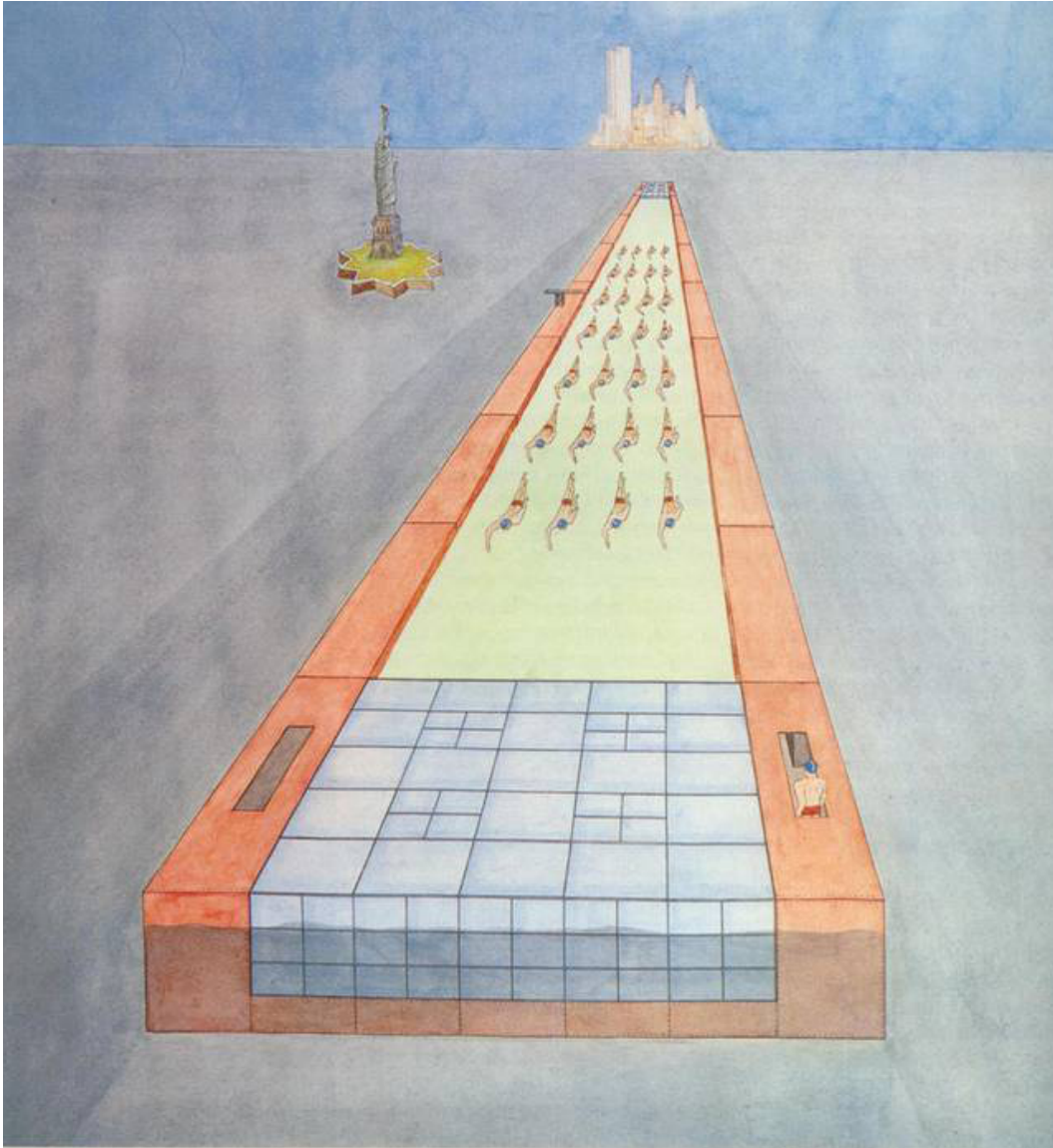
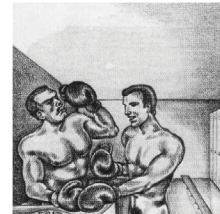


Fig. 2.10 Floating Swimming Pool

To deal with stress and burnout from work, people are encouraged to work out, essentially spending any available free time to work even more.³³ Physical movement for the sedentary desk worker thus becomes a tool to increase their work productivity, the workers' health is only cared for as it benefits the employer. While going to the gym does not directly produce economic capital, evidence has shown that fit and healthy employees are more productive, and employees perceived as healthier and attractive are more likely to be promoted than their less physically attractive colleagues.³⁴ The societal pressures to produce a "working body" is complex, with each individual having different motivations to exercise, which can vary from disciplined, repetitive physical work to relaxed play. Thus, the physical and cultural site in which our bodies are shaped exceed that of the walls of the fitness center, they encompass the media which we consume, our daily schedule balancing work and play, the traditional values which are still ingrained within ourselves. While physical beauty and aesthetics popularized by media icons are being questioned by members of the fitness community, the issues of training the body under capitalism still remain.

disconnection between space and its bodies



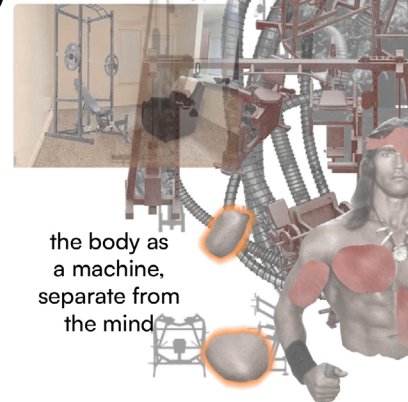
panopticon-unsolicited male gaze



individualism & competition

a traditionally hyper masculine space

guys really live in apartments like this and don't see any issue



the body as a machine, separate from the mind

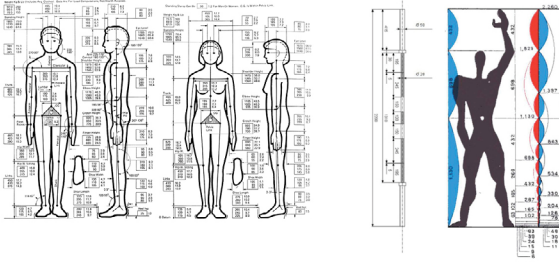
generic and open plan filled with foreign machines

the perfect floorplan doesn't exist



Fig

standardization of the human body

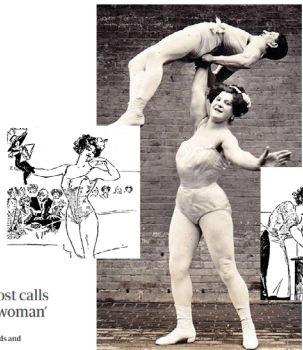
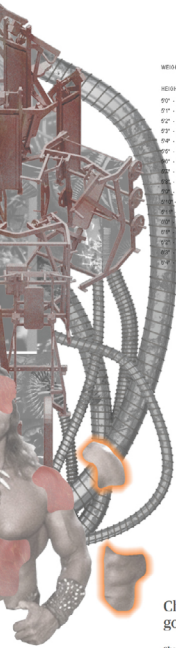


gender constructs & the reinforcement of binary heteronormative ideals

BMI Chart

WEIGHT (lb)	100	105	110	115	120	125	130	135	140	145	150	155	160	165	170	175	180	185	190	195	200	205	210	215
HEIGHT (ft)	46.5	47.7	50.0	52.2	54.5	56.8	59.1	61.4	63.8	66.1	68.5	70.9	73.2	75.6	77.9	80.3	82.6	85.0	87.3	89.7	92.0	94.4	96.7	99.1
HEIGHT (in)	558	570	594	627	654	682	710	738	766	794	822	850	878	906	934	962	990	1018	1046	1074	1102	1130	1158	1186
BMI	18.5	18.7	19.0	19.3	19.5	19.7	20.0	20.3	20.5	20.7	21.0	21.3	21.6	21.9	22.2	22.5	22.8	23.1	23.4	23.7	24.0	24.3	24.6	24.9

exercise as a means for capital production



Chinese upstart as state TV host calls gold-medal winner a 'manly woman'



"a successful body equals a successful life"

As we train for health and for work, we subject our body to be exploited, and access to health is only accessible through private leisure facilities and enclosed outdoor spaces.³⁵ Health centers and gyms become accessible to all body types, as long as the participant could afford a membership.

The performative aspect of fitness culture is critiqued as well, members of the gym participate on the “stage” to perform a spectacle, which Guy Debord describes as “not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images.”³⁶ This statement rings true particularly in the case of fitness culture, where more visible muscles to the naked eye, such as chests and abdominals instinctively become prioritized over other aspects of the physical body. As a result, newcomers to fitness training are often tempted to prioritize building bodies to produce visible effects, over maintenance work such as stretching, which can lead to muscular imbalance in the body, limited mobility, and possible serious injury. It is common for young men to overcompensate early on in their strength training with bench press and overtraining their chest, leading to a neglect in adjacent muscles essential for certain movements, which can lead to health issues and injury in the future. The dependency on images blurs the separation between health and aesthetic beauty, placing emphasis on beautiful bodies and muscles over less visible but essential components. The future of fitness must acknowledge its unhealthy obsession with appearance and performance, in order to create a safe space for sustainable growth and care.

The cult of the contemporary fitness industry is driven by a desire to create an identity from a superior physical body, enabled by labour concepts emerging from the post-Fordism era and exploited by neoliberal ventures. The desire to become better, to achieve transcendence through repetition and self-discipline is capitalized by private corporations promoting often unsustainable or inefficient “get skinny quick!” products and supplements. “In neoliberal societies, economic capital is not only produced through production, but is also accumulated through consumption.”³⁷ This applies particularly to the justifying the aspirational spending of gym memberships and consumer goods in hopes of building a “better” body. Slogans such as “train like an athlete, look like an athlete” operate under a guise of positivity. Promises implying that a successful body produces a successful life creates a false optimism within its users, neglecting one’s age, genetics, education, gender, socio-economic status, physical and mental health capacity. Athletic role models sponsoring supplements and workout products advertise that their “perfect” bodies are achievable through sheer willpower, determination

and the purchase of their product, omitting the reality that their physique is an outcome of access to elite fitness trainers, personal gyms and sometimes, the use of performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs). The mainstream rise of contemporary fitness culture is made possible by the popularity of fitness icons, who symbolize the spectacular representation of living human beings. As Debord states, the celebrity “embodies the inaccessible results of social labor by dramatizing the by-products of that labor”.³⁸ The fitness market exploits people’s desire to achieve the same level of fitness as these celebrities who appear to be truly free and have power over their lives. To the general population, achieving the “perfect” body in a capitalist society not only equals acquiring physical and social capital, but a false promise of freedom from societal confines.

While fitness goals can be accomplished through personal drive, external factors impact our capacity to change our bodies, the mental effort required to allocate 1-2 hours to train in addition to a 9-5 work schedule becomes further strained if one accounts for additional jobs, domestic labor and child care. As a form of leisure, working out is a privilege which requires facilities, nutrition and knowledge not available to all. Rather than addressing systemic issues, the blame of fitness-related shortcomings are placed on the individual, instilling guilt and trauma resulting in less people going back to the gym. Fitness spaces are often shaped to market the promise of an ideal body for aesthetic, social and health gratification. Under neoliberalism, fitness culture has thrived as a result of the ideology that a “fit body indexes self- fulfillment”.³⁹ The dominant values of fitness principles such as self-improvement and impression management under neoliberalism must be re-evaluated, as their function in one’s journey with physical exercise is not always constructive or beneficial to the user. Contemporary gym centers have no educational mission, it is simply a product that people purchase, which includes the promise for better health and bodies which have the potential to contribute to one’s physical, cultural and social capital.⁴⁰

Marginalized Bodies

Discrimination in leisure has traditionally aimed at undermining a “social group’s right to socio-cultural existence. Denying a group the access to a recreation space meant the denying of a means to gather socially and to develop culturally. Barriers existed in tangible forms, such as making facilities available only to certain neighborhoods, as well as invisible barriers, such as the “accidental” prioritizing of a preferred homogenous clientele and marginalizing people of colour through the continued normalization of white privilege in sport spaces. Racial minorities were restricted by racial and economic bias, as their neighborhoods were more likely to receive inadequate facilities and limited financial resources. The intention and unfair distribution of social determinants of health thus neglects less wealthy neighborhoods, which are typically occupied by marginalized families, contributing to higher chances of malnourishment, obesity and lack of overall health. The prioritizing of resource access to white people subsequently leads to them dominating the activity, such as in the case of swimming.⁴¹ As



Fig. 2.12 Bruno Beger measures the facial characteristics of a Tibetan man

racial and gender segregation faded away in the twentieth century, emerging racial identities became associated with particular spaces which made it unpopular with excluded groups. The public space's influence on racialized and gendered identities is seen through structuring and reproduction of constructed norms. The violence on marginalized bodies also exists in the form of the rationalization of the body based on white standards, such as the Body Mass Index (BMI) which neglected the fact that black people tend to have greater bone mineral density and muscle mass than white people, resulting in a racial bias in the classification system.⁴²



Fig. 2.13 Diagram of the various socio-political factors contributing to neoliberal feminism

Leisure is a key arena for risk-taking behaviour, and it is deeply gendered, both in terms of the spaces and places that young women occupy and their behaviour within such spaces. Such behaviours are also overlaid by differences of age, class, sexuality, 'race', ethnicity and culture.⁴³

While the commercial fitness center, or “gym” has the potential to empower users through working out, it is still considered intimidating by new users due to its physical and knowledge borders. The gym becomes a theater stage for gender performativity, gender identities are both reinforced and refigured in the space. Hierarchies are created between training exercises and their respective spaces, which is reflected through the gym’s architectural design and interior aesthetics. Gender constructs thus become reinforced through “masculine” and “feminine” exercises, and the hierarchies between the technologies present in the gym. “These gender performatives are

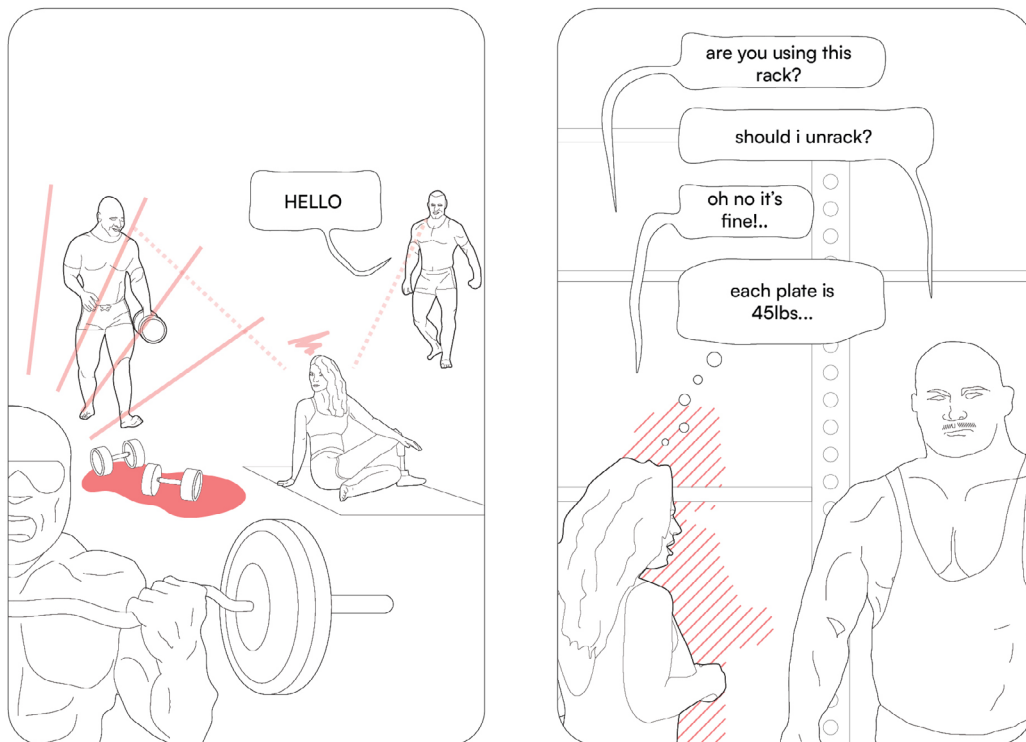


Fig. 2.14 Social tensions of a female gymgoer

bits of language historically charged with the power to invest a body with masculinity or femininity.”⁴⁴ The architecture of modern sports training under modernism expressed by both Le Corbusier and Henning Eichberg produced a rigid, enclosed spatial typology reinforcing stereotypes and attitudes about virility, male power and female subjugation.⁴⁵ The functional image of sport as a planned, controlled and regulated activity embodying Le Corbusier’s belief that man was a “geometric animal, a closed system, a surrogate machine in an industrial age.”⁴⁶ The gym was designed in the image of the ideal male body, it disenfranchised women from training as equals to men. Not only were gyms designed to suit men’s activities, any budget restrictions resulted in cutbacks for the planned women’s facilities, such as in the case for the War Memorial Gym in the University of British Columbia campus.⁴⁷

The evolution of fitness as a tool for empowerment is critiqued in Patricia Vertinsky’s *Physical Culture, Power and the Body*. The author discusses the image of women, specifically young girls being “produced” by using sport to encourage a sense of responsibility and confidence within a corporate world.⁴⁸ While this movement has the ability to empower women, this model produces individuals who blame themselves for “inevitable failures” rather than the social structure they inhabit. Through media advertisements by corporate companies such as Nike and Adidas, the idea of a successful body becomes closely associated with product consumerism, as well as a good life. Feminist bell hooks noted that while gender-based changes were made as a result of neoliberal feminism, patriarchal notions of masculinity remained intact. This philosophy is relevant in the case of fitness spaces, which have been designed to shape the traditional notion of the gender binary, even though women and minorities are still allowed in gym spaces, they are still primarily occupied by men.

The current typology for exercise spaces is outdated and reflects the gendered, competitive and exploitative nature of the fitness industry. Similar to the “one-size-fits-all” products and services sold in the consumerist nature of this industry, the generic commercial gyms boast an open floor plan featuring standardized machines and equipment which are modeled after the hegemonic male’s dimensions and neglecting those with non-normative bodies. “Like transit environments, then, gyms are often a classic example of a male-biased public space masquerading as equal access”.⁴⁹ As women enter the weight room, they are faced with an overtly masculine space, and

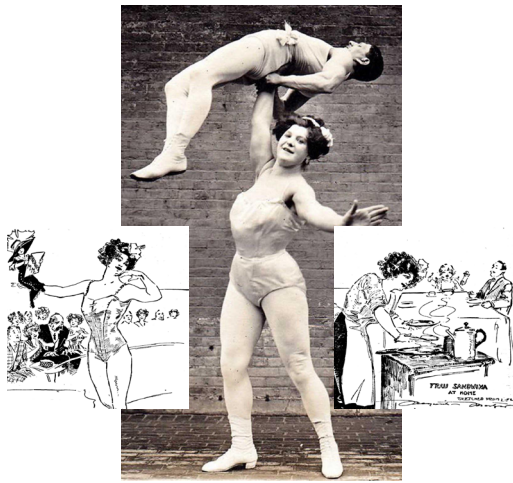


Fig. 2.15 Kate Braumbach, a renowned female bodybuilder in the 1900s



Fig. 2.16 Gong Lijiao winning the gold medal in the 2020 Olympics for shotput

entry into this physical realm and the acquisition of cultural capital often requires the guidance of a male, usually a friend or trainer to show them how to lift weights. While all genders have equal access to the gym, it has been traditionally dominated by the hyperbolic masculine male, thus discouraging the “others” from using weights and often staying within the borders of the aerobics and cardio spaces.

In the book *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*, Caroline Perez states that “When planners fail to account for gender, public spaces become male spaces by default”, which is apparent through the way men and women behave differently in the gym. “Many perceive the gym as gender neutral for the simple reason that both men and women have access to the same space”.⁵⁰ “Straus observes between the way boys and girls throw is that girls do not bring their whole bodies into the motion as much as the boys do. The girls tend to remain relatively immobile except for their arms, and even the arms are not extended as far as they could be.”⁵¹ Within a space deceptively considered as “free” and “open to all”, the user is often subservient to the gaze, which accordingly to Laura Mulvey “in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure looking has been split between active/male and passive/female.”⁵² While all who enter the gym are likely to undergo being perceived by a collective and sometimes illusionary gaze, the woman is often the image (oftentimes sexualized), perceived by the man, the bearer of the look. The constructed ideal of the female figure by the male fantasy contributes to today’s physique standards within contemporary society, where men are encouraged to gain as much muscle as possible, whereas women are told to not get “too big” to avoid appearing grotesque. The gender inequality present in society is constructed within the space where we shape our bodies, thus preserving the patriarchal order on the human body.

The movement of mainstream fitness and rising popularity of commercial gyms in the 1960s coincides with the rise of neoliberal feminism, opening the previously pre-dominantly male-occupied gym spaces and creating the potential to empower women. However, access to the gym is just as economically and racially biased, seeing as “fitness studios and gyms tend to be located in more upscale neighborhoods in both cities and suburbs—areas with higher incomes and higher levels of college grads, and where whites make up a larger share of the population”.⁵³ Balsamo argues that despite appearing as a form of resistance, feminist bodybuilding “transgress gender boundaries, they are not reconstructed” and reveal “how culture processes transgressive bodies in such a way as to keep each body in its place”.⁵⁴ This potential is seen in the work of Heather Cassils, who uses their physical body as a sculptural mass to rupture societal norms, “It is with sweat, blood and sinew that I construct a visual critique and discourse around physical and gender ideologies and histories.”⁵⁵ Cassils performance art, such as *Cuts: a Traditional Sculpture* pushes the notion of gender performativity to the extreme, literal sense, bodies become sites for “radical de- and reconstruction of gender to the limits.”⁵⁶ The body, according to Cassils, must be in a state

of constant transformation to prevent it from becoming a commodity, which seems contradictory to mainstream bodybuilding, as it owes much of its growing popularity to the commodification of the body.

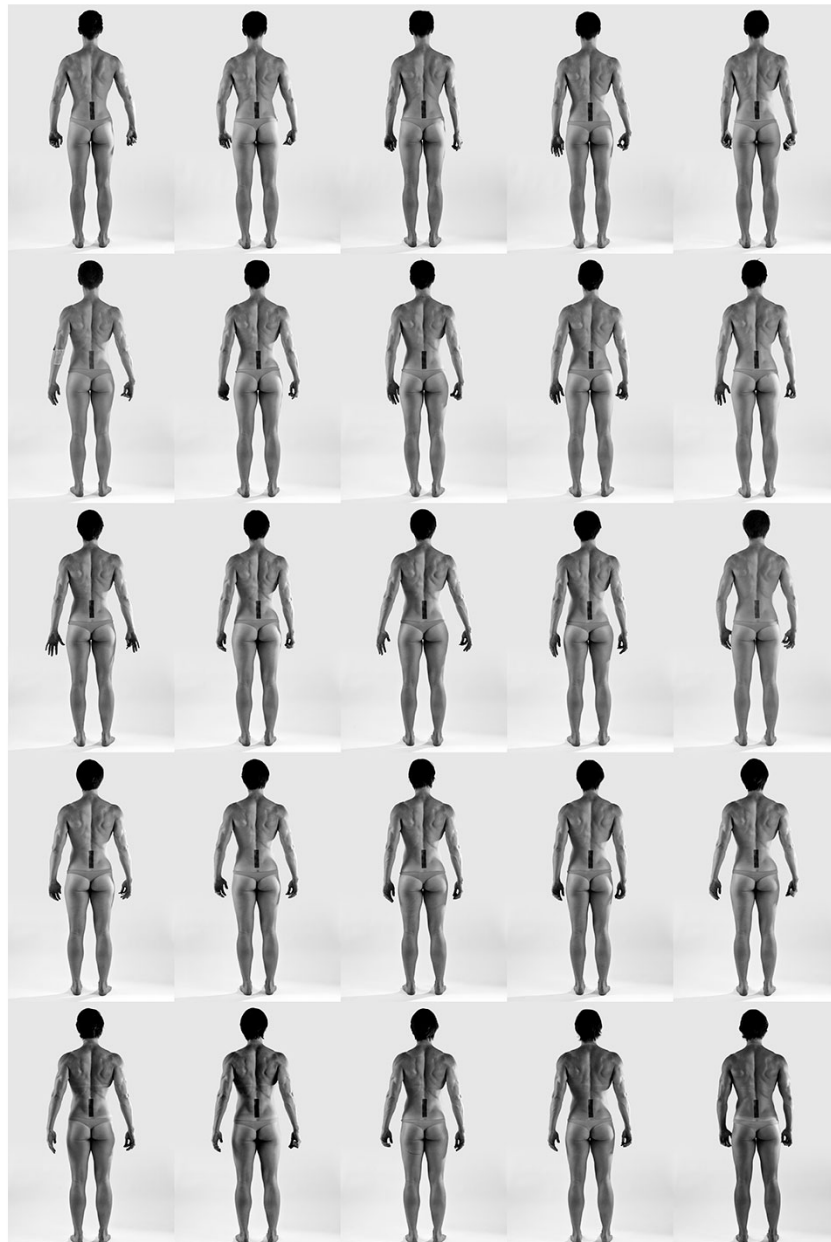


Fig. 2.17 CUTS: A Traditional Sculpture

“Weight-lifting might be recommended as a practice of feminist resistance, not for the visibly “revolting” body it may create, but as a pleasurable non-normalizing practice that cultivates experiences of the body as capacity instead of as an object.”⁵⁷ As people enter the weight room, they are faced with an overtly masculine space, and entry into this physical realm and the acquisition of cultural capital often requires the guidance of a friend or trainer to show them how to lift weights. The gym as a male space understood masculinity not as biological or psychological, and realized its values through spatial segregation and architecture. “This performative theory of space is in a sense a result of the incubator model according to which architecture is a biopolitical, surrogate womb where the process of becoming male or female is fully achieved.”⁵⁸ While all genders have equal access to the gym, it has been traditionally dominated by the hyperbolic masculine, thus discouraging “others” from using weights and often staying within the edges of the gym. By falsely portraying the fitness space as neutral, it conceals its roots of patriarchal power and dominance.

The commercial gym is rooted in the image of the white, sculpted male such as Zeus, Hercules and Arnold Schwarzenegger. It prioritizes this over the non-conforming non-normative body and preserves this through the creation of physical and cultural borders in three primary forms: the architectural design of the physical gym space, gender norms established through the performative act of fitness and the hierarchies between various technologies present in the gym. The gym is constantly evolving and shifting, its cultural boundaries being elastic rather than rigid. Hegemony can be “contested, and gender relations are always situated in an arena of tension and conflicts.”⁵⁹ Anyone is capable of lifting weights, or performing any type of exercise they want to, however fitness culture is undeniably built on inequality.

Future Bodies

During the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, it became apparent that working out at the gym center would never be the same. Memberships to everyday fitness gyms were canceled en masse and people switched to online classes and home workouts as alternatives. Outdoor activities were also popular options as it allowed individuals to socialize while respecting the 2-meter social distancing rule as well as breath in the outside air. However, the pandemic also shifted the general population to consider health more holistically, as well as mental wellness particularly in response to isolative remote work. Virtual fitness options surge in popularity, from free Youtube workouts to 72% of fitness club owners offering on-demand and livestream workouts.⁶⁰ Home stationary bikes with access to online subscriptions simulate the presence of a personal trainer with none of the intimidation and discomfort one experiences when entering a physical gym. Yoga, Pilates, and countless other options can be done in the comfort of one's own home, hidden from the collective gaze. With 15% of gyms permanently closed due to the pandemic, the future of fitness training remains uncertain.⁶¹ Even prior to shutting down gyms, the formula of the conventional gym membership's success was questionable, as more than 50% of its users would quit their membership within 6 months of purchasing it in January.⁶² Nonetheless, the in-person gym still has potential as a community hub, as well as offering other services where virtual and at home fitness alternatives cannot. Gym businesses can respond to the shift towards digital and hybrid workout schedules by reallocating their floor space to respond to what users look for during in-person workouts and also offering flexible membership options to allow individuals to optimize client retention. Regardless of the future of fitness, the shift of its industry can serve as an opportunity to reflect and redesign not only how we train, but how we perceive our bodies as well.

A new paradigm shift for the gym must address the political, gendered and economic dynamics between different bodies, while also providing an enjoyable and inclusive space for daily life and exercise. Much of the social and cultural constructs which shape the broad notion of “fitness culture” remains abstract and complex, the architectural design of its sites has the potential to control how we govern our bodies and the disciplinary gaze existent within the spaces. “Eichberg argued that the adoption of new technologies in sport — more exact timing tools, universal standards, and artificial spaces—stemmed from changes in societal behavior that necessitated not only winners, but also the quantification of victory”.⁶³ While Eichberg’s philosophy is responsible for presenting sport and fitness spaces as largely hegemonic and prioritizing the white male body, it is important to acknowledge that when governed properly, discipline and control can be efficient factors toward nurturing one’s relationship with their body. In *Sensing the Stadium*, Gaffney contrasts Eichberg’s philosophy with the idea that the ideal stadium “be characterized by placelessness’ — a plane surface without spectators, communicated televisually to an audience which constitutes an absent presence”.⁶⁴

fully automated
 standardized movements
 discipline
 interior

fully manual
 free movements
 play
 exterior



Fig. 2.18 Comparing the athletic space as a controlled space vs. a free space

Both the building and the body can be interpreted as completely artificial or constructed, yet at the same time purely organic. “Their carnal plasticity destabilizes the distinction between the imitated and the imitator, between the truth and the representation of the truth, between the reference and the referent, between nature and artifice, between sexual organs and sexual practices.”⁶⁵ In the age of the spectacle, the line between being healthy and appearing healthy are blurred beyond comprehension, as the two notions become interdependent on each other. The revised gym must address this, and while it would be challenging to separate the two, it must empower the user with the ability to choose how they pursue health or the act of appearing healthy, as the fitness-related values of every individual differ based on their history, culture and genetic physique. The new gym typology must find balance between Eichberg’s disciplined gymnasiums and Gaffney’s “placeless” stadiums in an approach which opens its borders to those who find training spaces daunting. As digital and hybrid fitness spaces become the norm, it is difficult to justify the presence of an outdated program typology which relies on surveillance and insecurity to motivate its users. It is imperative to rethink the design of gyms and physical health education, regardless of whether the future of gyms is digital or in person. As the pandemic shifts the general population’s concern of physical fitness to holistic health and mental wellness, the purpose of the gym must be rethought. (Re)creation, a response to the outdated contemporary gym formula, has the ability to empower those attempting to reclaim control over their own bodies, as well as possibly address the trauma contained within their muscles, fat, and bones. The gym contains “technologies” which though originally intended to produce “docile bodies” also have the potential to empower bodies as sites of agency and resistance, which will be further explored in the research and design process of (Re)creation.

Body Buildings

The architecture of building our bodies remain largely unexplored, as everyday gym centers and yoga studios are neglected from any form of spatial analysis, a shame particularly due to the unique phenomenology experienced throughout a workout in the gym. From the walk from the receptionist, to the vulnerable undressing in front of strangers in the changeroom, to the navigating between sweat, metal and rubber to perform a strict set of exercises designed to create tension in the muscles and to burn fat. This thesis draws its influence heavily from the recorded ethnographic studies of different gyms and fitness spaces. Research across philosophers, sport theorists and architectural designers explore the relationship between space and the political nature of bodies. Regrettably, the majority of gym clubs incentivized by financial profit do not exploit the architectural potential of this unexamined building type. Rather than pushing the limits of the mind-body connection, most gym centers adhere to a generic design formula. As we become more aware of how our physical environment shapes us, the fitness gym can be redesigned to challenge problematic cultural notions about health, beauty, gender, and sexuality.

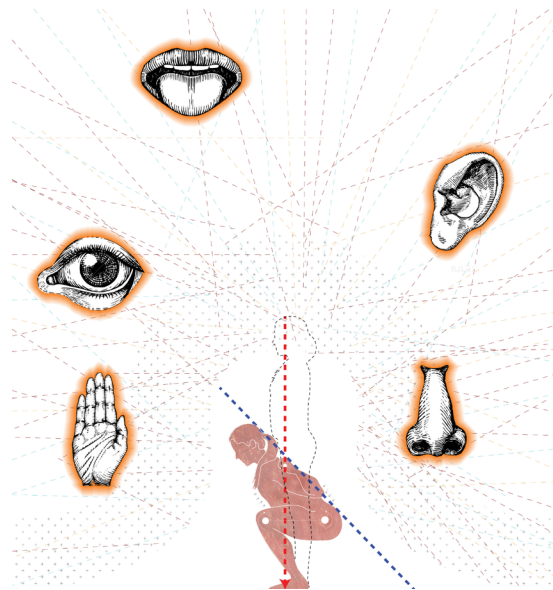


Fig. 3.1 Weightlifting as an embodied & sensorial experience

The existing gym typology neglects the knowledge barrier and enforces the standardized ideal man and woman, thus resulting in uncomfortable workout spaces which contribute to unnecessary emotional stress and discomfort. The objective of the intended design aims to merge the solutions of addressing social/cultural issues with the practical limitations of the gym into a single design proposal. My research of this thesis primarily involves exploring texts, analyzing case studies and exploring the relationships between space and body through design. Writings of the body from a variety of disciplines ranging from architecture, queer theory, sport theory, feminist theory and training manuals all provide valuable critiques on physical and perceived space and how they impact our bodies during exercise. Existing buildings, regardless of their direct relation to the realm of fitness, serve as precedent for proposing a manifesto for a new exercise space typology.

To address the architectural and cultural shortcomings of the gym typology, one must look past the research of written text and architectural drawings and draw stories and histories from anecdotal interactions. The *phenomenogym* - an alternative home gym proposal, and *Training Manual #1*, a field guide both experiments with representing various aspects of the lived experiences of either myself or the observations of others who also go to the gym. This research phase was motivated by the reality that conventional architectural analyses and ethnographical studies of cultures often resulted in a technocratic gaze which isolated the observer from the user. Thus, *phenomenogym* and *Training Manual #1* not only explore different ways of what contemporary fitness can be, they are both projects which confirm the private and vulnerable emotions experienced by certain individuals throughout the process of shifting, training, and accepting one's own body.

Precedents

Sassatelli describes fitness as an “embodied performance”, she states that embracing gym culture aids our objective of negotiating the social space of the gym and its impact on exercise as an embodied practice.⁶⁶ While there is an abundance of writings available concerning my topic of resisting the hegemonic expectations for our bodies, few of them solidify in the form of built projects. Most “cutting” edge architectural gym designs avoid the inequality of working out, reusing the generic open floor plan gym layout and limiting their interventions to including upscaled equipment and materials to provide a luxurious experience. As Ontario Building Code does not accommodate specifically gym spaces, the typology typically falls under the Group A Assembly Occupancy in Division 2, as “Assembly occupancies not elsewhere classified in Group A”, alongside classrooms and bowling alleys.⁶⁷ The lack of differentiation of gym typologies ranging from community fitness gyms, weightlifting gyms, to yoga studios is concerning as each space type should require different areas per square meter, acoustic insulation, ventilation, and live load depending on the technologies present. The potential of the gym is neglected in architectural academia, there is no drive to question such a crucial space in which bodies are shaped and formed. Despite this, there are architectural precedents which can provide valuable insight for what an alternative gym proposal might be.

Muscle Beach, Venice today is an iconic training facility for both locals and celebrities, as well as a tourist destination and cultural site for physical culturists. The program is simple, with rows of gym equipment framed by a mesh bar, making it visible to all those who come to spectate, or simply to passerbys. While Muscle Beach in essence is voyeuristic due to its dual function as a fitness space and a performance space, it came into existence around 1934 when local gymnasts came together and brought their own equipment to train, which led to the building of a low wooden platform.⁶⁸ Muscle Beach is unique as it is described by sociologist Ray Oldenburg as a “third space”, an informal setting where communities come together, thus “bringing subcultures together in a liquid network, producing a new subculture that transcended physical disciplines”.⁶⁹ This space was able to, at the time, take influence from different fitness cultures to produce a bodybuilding subculture which would influence the production of a hegemonic ideal. Simultaneously, Muscle Beach also served as an example of a collective space being formed without capital interest and was evidence that training facilities did not require extravagant equipment or amenities.



Fig. 3.3 An uncrowded view of the original Muscle Beach

Designed for the women students on campus, the Anna Hiss Gymnasium included basketball courts with modified dimensions more suitable for casual play instead of using professional standards. Its swimming pools were intentionally undersized as well, making it approachable to swimmers of all skill levels. This project challenged the way athletic expectations are often imposed onto gymnasium goes through amenities designed for a high level of performance, making it difficult to approach for new users. In addition, the Anna Hiss Gymnasium avoided the use of mirrors and bleachers in its design, reinforcing its interiors as a surveillance-limited space. The space did not prioritize gifted athletes, rather it prohibited trophy displays to discourage competition. Through subtle design choices, the Anna Hiss Gymnasium was capable of creating a safe space for physical exercise from the male gaze during its time, it valued sporting enjoyment and social solidarity which would improve the long-term physical health of its users. However, the design of women-only facilities was also critiqued as a tool of sexism and discrimination, allocating only the second-best resources.



Fig. 3.4 Group of women fencing in the Anna Hiss Gymnasium

The proposed paradigm shift for fitness spaces reveals the provocation of what the building's structure and materiality can contribute to question the ideology of mainstream fitness. The Casa "il Girasole", designed by Italian architect Luigi Moretti resides in Rome, Italy. Moretti critiques the uniformity of the free plan with the implementation of columns changing in size and shape as one progresses throughout the building. The conventions of the building, often designed in the human image, is disrupted and destabilizes our assumptions of both the building structure and human body. Eisenman describes Girasole's lobby as a "riot of materials" without a clear dominant hierarchy, as well placing heavy stones on thin stones to invert conventions of rustication and defy structural logic.⁷⁰ The tactility of the building becomes complexified, tempting the user to touch and interact with its architectural surroundings. A space with no clear dominant hierarchical language becomes a space for multiple truths. Rather than designing with the clear image of a man, Girasole is an abstracted combination of volumes which acknowledges which does not represent a singular entity. Finally, the sculpted remnant of a human leg is incorporated into a window jamb, which while can be considered whimsical or unsystematic, is a playful metaphor of the true potential of the gym: an architectural space where building and body blur, creating a new way to move.



Fig. 3.5 Casa il "Girasole" Elevation



Fig. 3.6 Casa il "Girasole" lobby's "riot of materials"



Fig. 3.7 Casa il "Girasole" window jamb leg detail

Case Study: Richie's Gym

I was fortunate enough to have a membership to Richie's Gym, one of the iconic bodybuilding gyms located in Bushwick, New York. For three months, I attended the gym regularly for 3-5 times a week for 2 hour gym sessions. My lived experience in Richie's gym, reflected conclusions made in several ethnographical studies of the fitness gym, while conducting my own observations of the gym as a social space. Located on the first floor of a former factory building on Stanwix St, the infamous Richie's Gym boasted of its strong clientele, offering 150lb dumbbells as well as other equipment that conventional gyms would not offer. Yet it is also open to everyone, offering \$35 per month memberships with no commitment requirements, making it accessible to those with less disposable income. Despite the aggressive gentrification in the Bushwick area, Richie's Gym maintained its prices to remain affordable to its local community, while also welcoming newcomers. Richie's Gym undeniably embodies critiques that Newhall describes in her study, its cramped floor plan populated by rusted barbell plates and bodybuilding machines establish its celebration of traditional notions of masculinity and strength. Yet stereotypes of gender roles and physical power were being questioned, feats of strength were celebrated regardless of gender, race, or sexuality, through sheer willpower and determination. I recognize that due to my status as a heterosexual male and physical stature, my navigation throughout a masculine-encoded space is biased and does not reflect the experiences of women, LGBTQ+ or non-binary individuals in this space. Nonetheless, my time training at Richie's Gym was still invaluable as it provided phenomenological research of a culturally significant fitness space.



Fig. 3.9 Richie's Gym dumbbell rack



Fig. 3.10 Richie's Gym Interior



Fig. 3.11 Richie's Prices



Fig. 3.12 Richie's Gym Mural

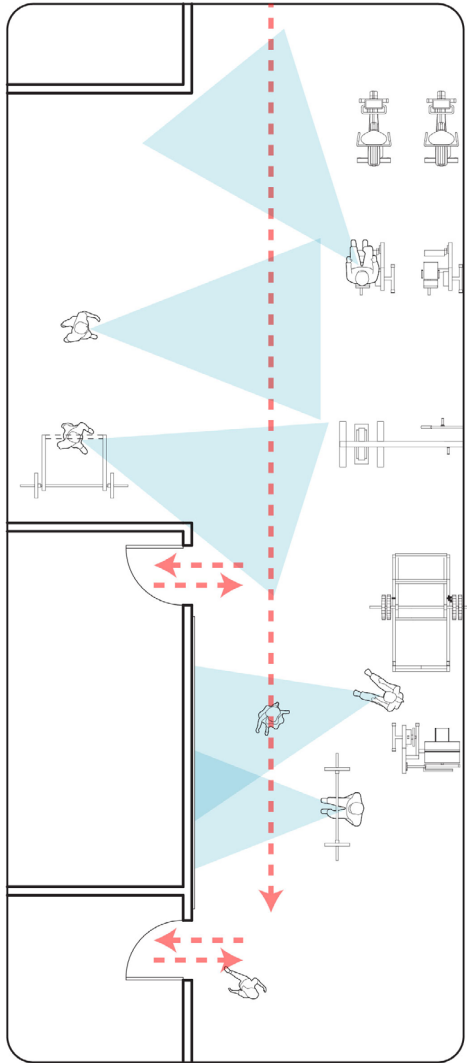
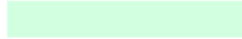


Fig. 3.13 Washroom entrance experience floor plan diagram



Fig. 3.14 Para

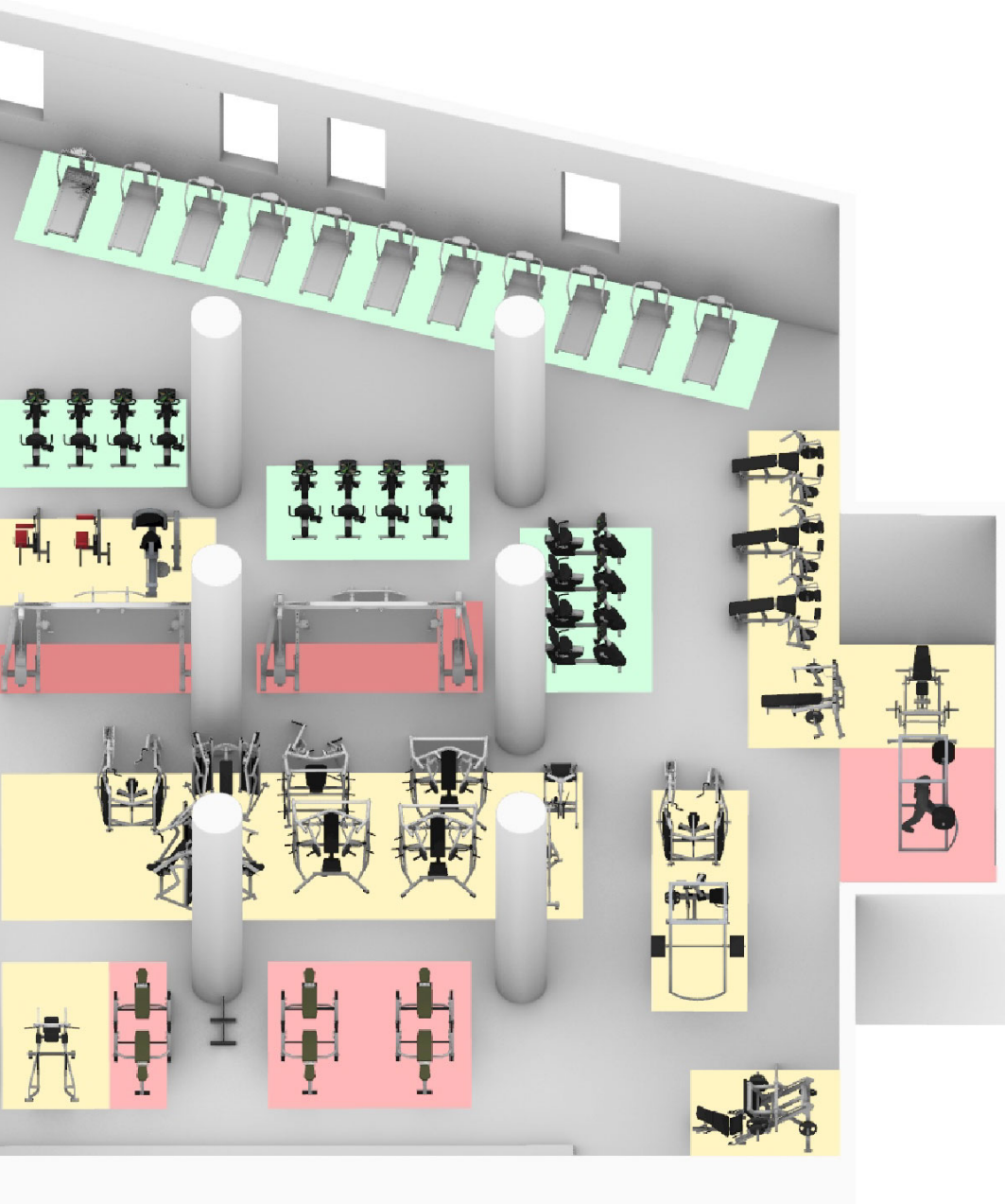
cardio machines



isolation machines



barbell and free weights



Isometric axonometric diagram of Richie's Gym and its equipment

CARDIO & AEROBICS

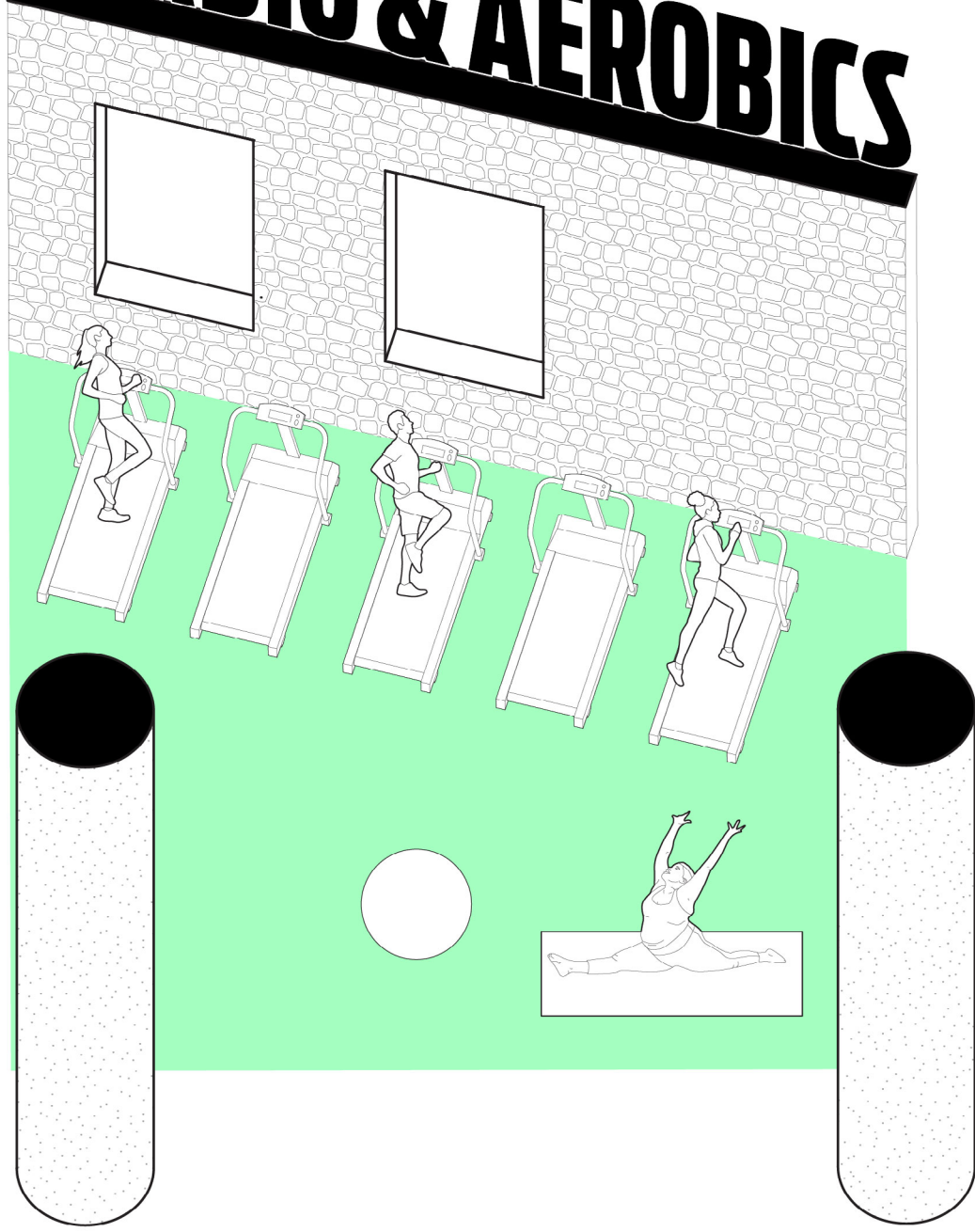


Fig. 3.15 Spatial analysis: Cardio and Aerobics



Fig. 3.16 The aerobics space was designed to capitalize off the growing market of middle-class working women

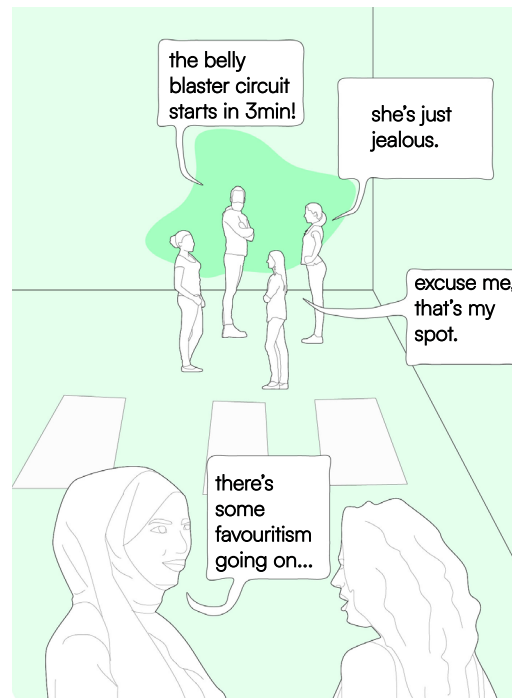


Fig. 3.17 Competition and social capital in the yoga room

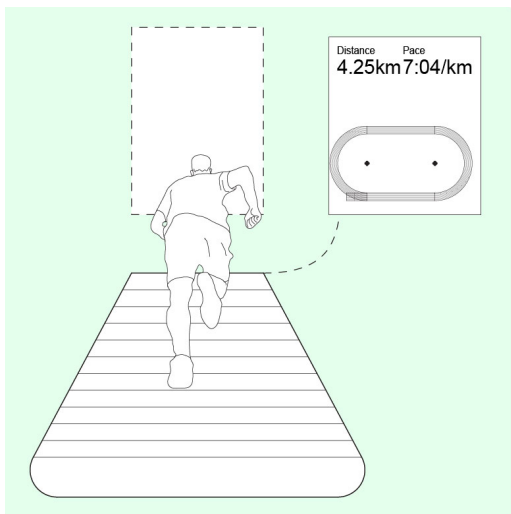


Fig. 3.18 The Treadmill: an artificial simulation of natural running

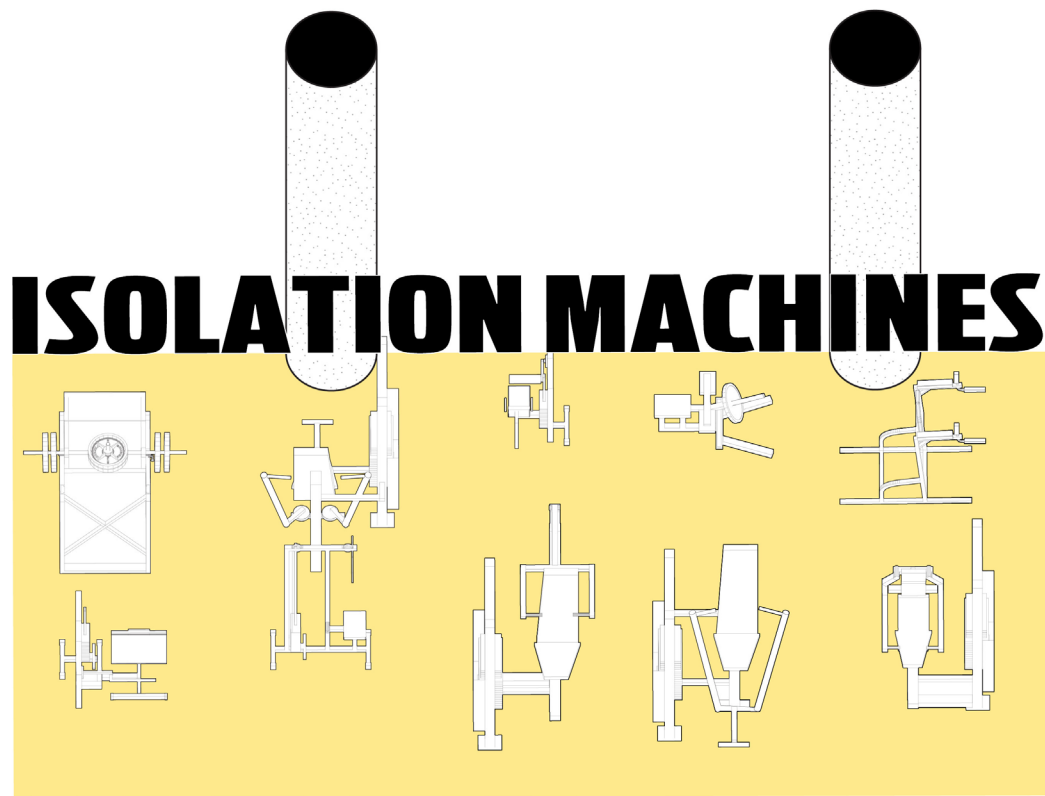


Fig. 3.19 Spatial analysis: Isolation Machines

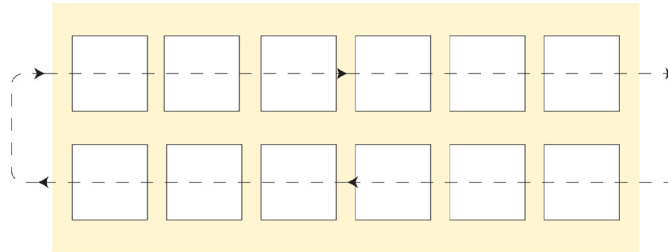


Fig. 3.20 Spatial analysis: Isolation Machines

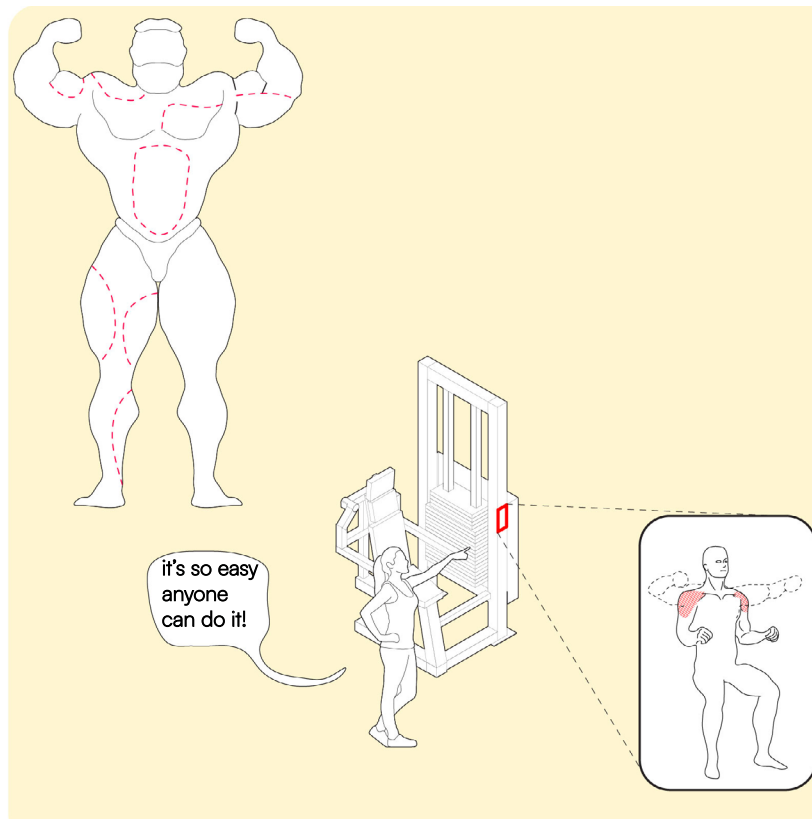


Fig. 3.21 Machines strengthen muscles instead of movements

BARBELL RACKS

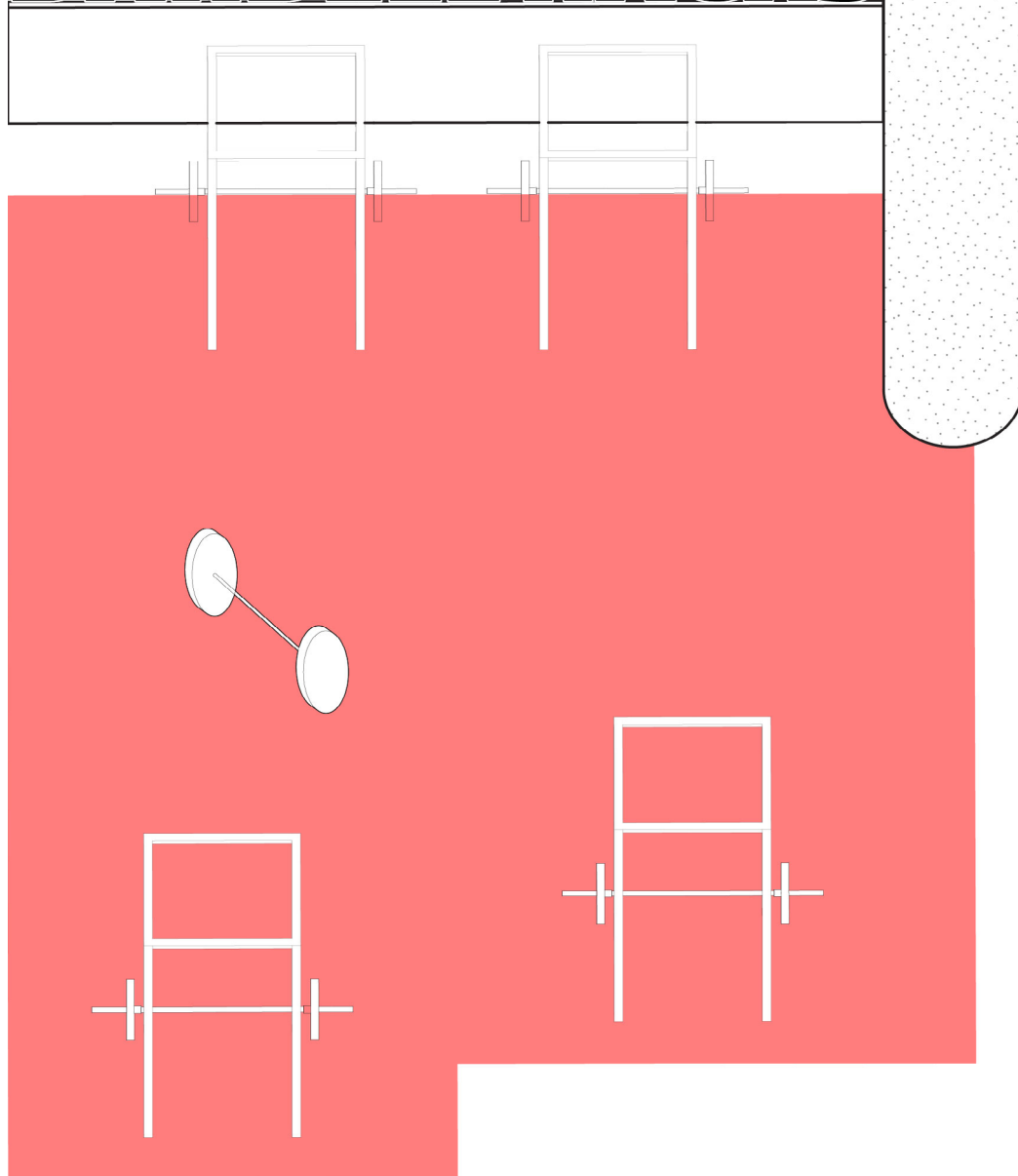


Fig. 3.22 Spatial analysis: Cardio and Aerobics

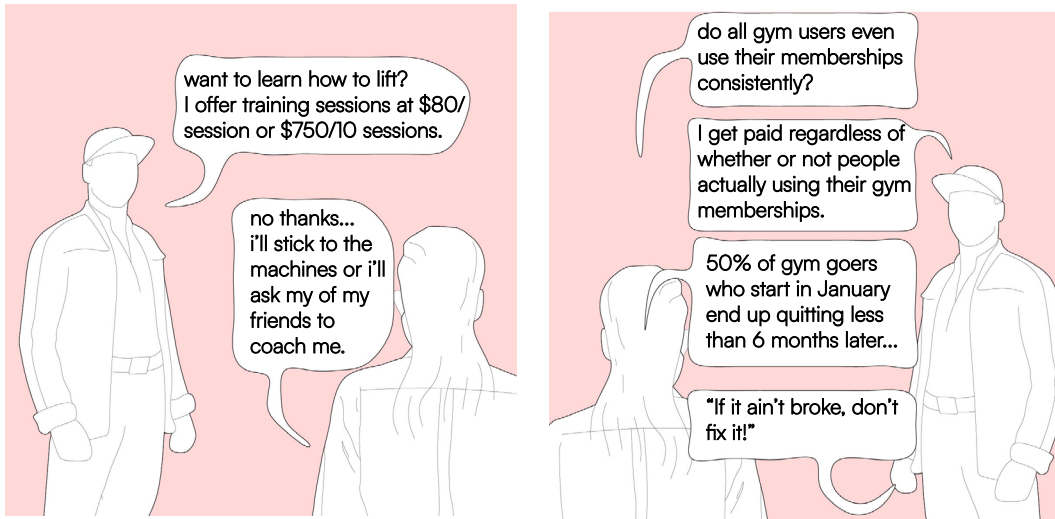


Fig. 3.23 The inaffordability of acquiring physical in the fitness gym

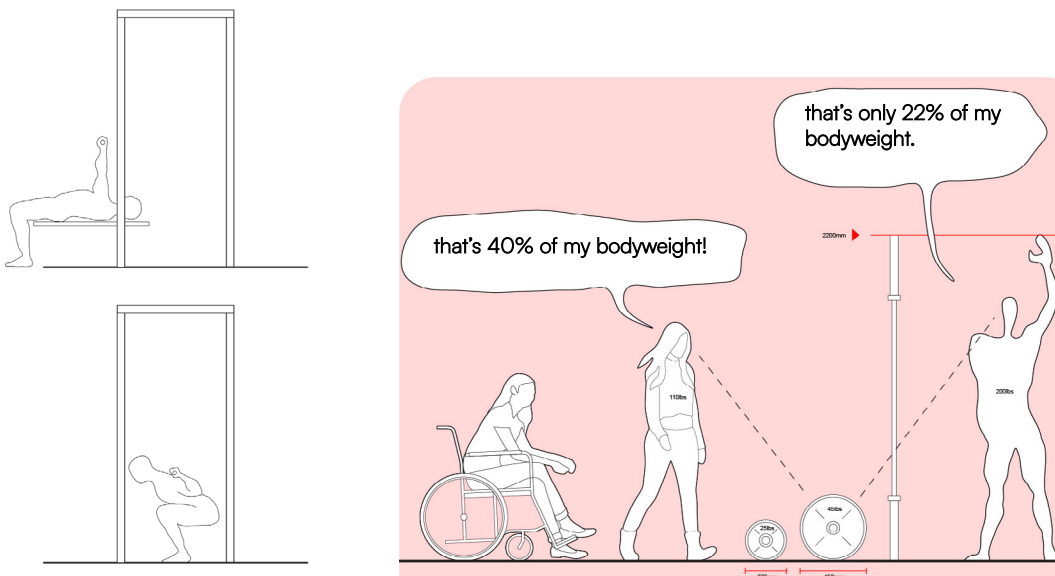


Fig. 3.24 Gym equipment is not equal for all



Fig. 3.25 Barbell compound movements simulating daily movements



unappealing ceilings with hvac clutter



messy floors and clutter of equipment



awkward equipment placement

Fig. 3.26 Design issues within the gym

“We Have Decided Not to Die”

The Maison à Bordeaux was applauded for its claim to bring the entire house to its wheelchair-bound client. While it empowers the client by allowing him to move from floor to floor primarily through an elevator platform, the house must rely on the constant maintenance and care by its housekeeper. The architecture responds to the man’s disability, while completely ignoring its inefficiencies which make it difficult for the domestic worker. In the film *Koolhaas Houselife*, the filmmaker follows the housekeeper as “she lugs a mop, bucket, and vacuum up a spiral staircase, then resourcefully deploys these long linear tools in a space of tight curves.”⁷¹ The shortcoming of this approach to design accessible architecture prioritizes one individual’s needs at the cost of someone else’s, selectively addressing the burdens of certain forms of labour. In doing so, the labour of domestic work and caregiving are not only ignored by the architecture, but by cultural attitudes of rest and recuperation as well. The Maison à Bordeaux does little to address inclusivity, if anything it reinforces the hierarchies within the household archetype by selectively acknowledging the man’s limitations.

The building's platform elevator is a technology comparable to a gym's single-use isolation machine, allowing a controlled movement to occur along a rigid axis, nothing more. It is designed to accommodate a specific proportion and ignores those it is not intended for, forcing the user to become dependent on it rather than empowering them to move freely within a space. In addition, the film demonstrates how household labour is often performed with "tools that can be neither manufactured nor understood by the workers who use them."⁷² In the ever-increasing dependency on machines in the information age, control and autonomy is taken away from the body. The Maison à Bordeaux's approach to "accessible architecture" is hardly successful, it only recognizes the everyday movement of the client, accessibility thus becomes exclusive. To address the sum of all the stress and pain experienced by the body, all forms of labour must be recognized, and building must be more than an inorganic technology serving the user, it must act in reciprocity, acting as an organism.

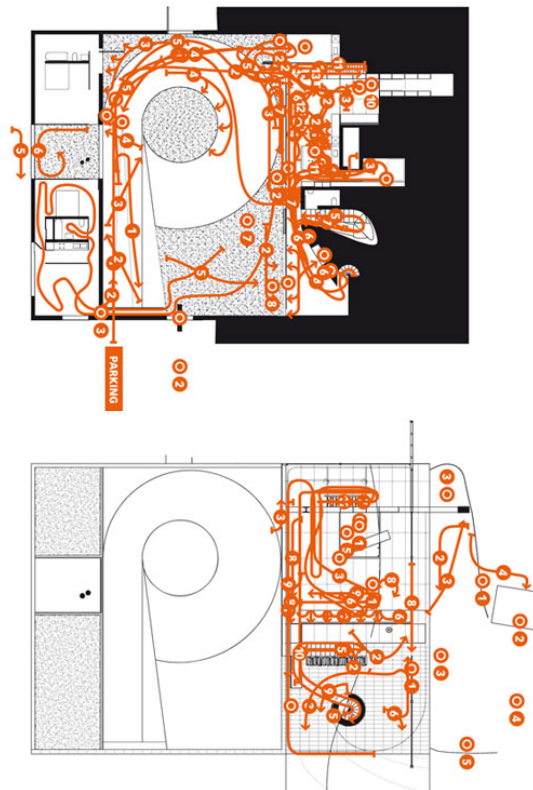


Fig. 3.27 Circulation Diagram of the Housekeeper in the Maison à Bordeaux

While people go to the gym to improve their physical abilities and beauty, the pursuit of physical training among the general population can also be attributed to desire for health and longevity. The philosophy of Shusaku Arakawa and Madeleine Gins, a pair of artists who explored the Spinozist principle of not knowing what the body can do, is portrayed in their extensive portfolio of poetry, art, and buildings. The two propose the idea of a “landing site”, a place for developing a craft of open attentive awareness, a space for abolishing predetermined assumptions of the body. The interaction between body and surround is constantly reciprocating and in flux, “similarly to how she flexes her muscles, a person flexes her surroundings—both are with her and of her always”.⁷³ Similar to Plato’s philosophy regarding the body, intellectual training was not superior to the physical, instead an individual would undergo both to not transcend the body, rather to rethink the self as an “architectural body”.⁷⁴ The couple use their art and architecture to “reawaken” the body, exploring possibilities of human perception and kinaesthesia in order to produce an “immortal body”. In the artists’ Bioscleave house, the building is characterized by an undulating organic floor which separates the residents’ bedroom from the kitchen and dining communal space.



Fig. 3.28 Bioscleave House interior

The floor becomes a medium to stretch, lie on, and crawl to move from one side of the house to the other. The phenomenological qualities of physical space are reawakened, in order to unmute our sensory awareness, and their “reversible destiny” demands the body to no longer be complacent about a set of givens in an environment, one is not given, but formed by perceptions.

Within the ideology of the Reversible destiny foundation, a gym space has the potential to enhance the perception of the user through stimulating bodily movement through procedural knowing, the boundaries between built form and bodies blur and exist as a co-structure.⁷⁵ The rationalization of contemporary sport is responsible for the subjugation of play, it restricts its “spontaneity and play quality”.⁷⁶ The origin of sport was to train the mind and body to survive in a physically demanding world. As society becomes dependent on standardization, Spinoza’s questioning of “what can a body do” is ignored, creating fitness routines which are rigid and tedious.

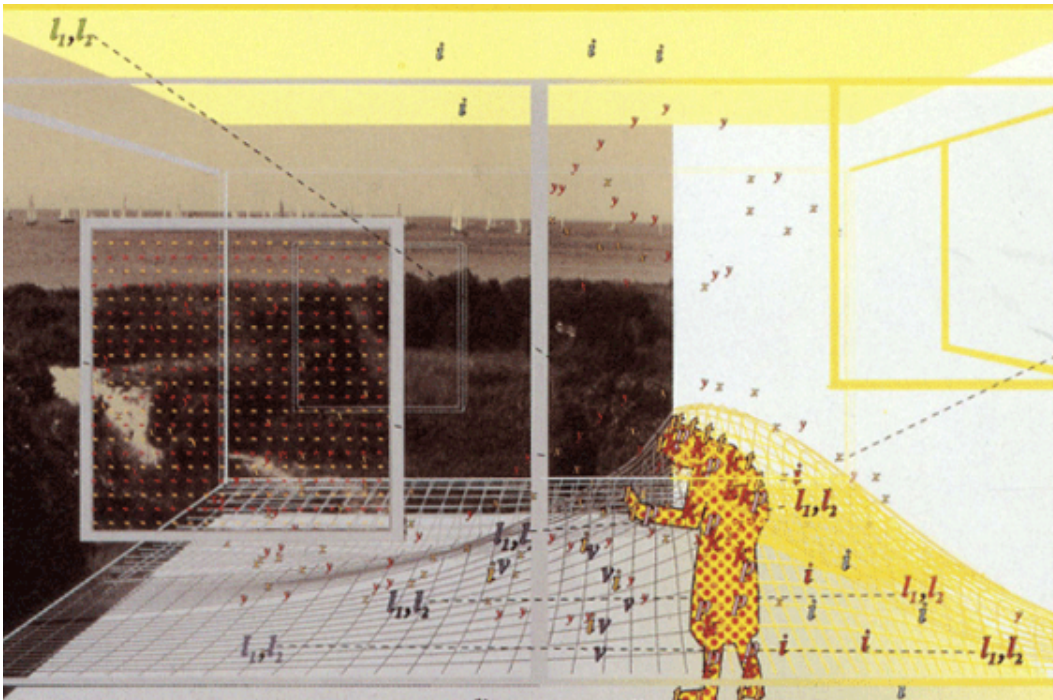


Fig. 3.29 Critical Holder Chart 2, 1991

In an increasingly sedentary lifestyle, the need to “feel alive” is insufficiently met with going to the gym two to four times per week, performing exercises confined in tight parameters. In order to win the war against mortality, the ethos of the gym must permeate into our other daily spaces, thus becoming “a location for developing a craft of open attentive awareness”, thus unlocking new possibilities for what the mind-body is capable of.⁷⁷

How can we rekindle our relationship with the body? Throughout my research, I have repeatedly come back to Arakawa & Gins’ philosophical pursuit of Reversible Destiny - the defying of death by activating and stimulating the body and mind. Though seemingly unrelated, there is an intriguing parallel between reversible destiny and fitness ideology. The Bioscleave House is dedicated to prolonging the body’s health while balancing discipline and play. As fitness became more popular, it evolved into an object of consumption in which the user has little control, working out is now fueled out of insecurity and inadequacy, enforcing notions of unattainable beauty. By redefining fitness principles around “reversible destiny”, we become one step closer to disputing the hegemony within our lived spaces.

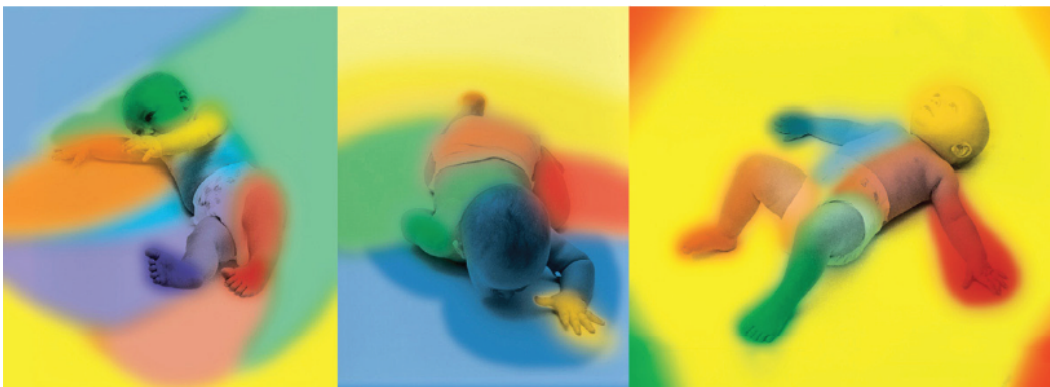


Fig. 3.30 Illustration of landing site formation, 1997

Embodied Enclaves

Along with the rapid growth of cities, mass construction and an increasingly dependent on technology, the human body becomes commodified and pacified. Under consumerist culture, the path towards achieving the “perfect” body is “practically organized, embodied practices are left out of the picture”.⁷⁸ My research process greatly involved exploring intimacy and vulnerability during exercise, as well as challenging the conventional method in which exercise is drawn and represented. Even seemingly simple movements such as running and jumping are in reality not simple, the body is filled with complex tensions ignored by the naked eye. In the following diagram, I draw the movement of a shamaness’ performance from the film *Himiko (1974)*, her actions are reflected and memorized in the sand around her. Her movements are recorded and reciprocated by her immediate surroundings, the sand captures her dance as she breathes with her entire being. When placing the identical movements in a completely different environment of a contemporary gym space, the movements of the body is completely disregarded, forcing her body to tense and lock up, as she

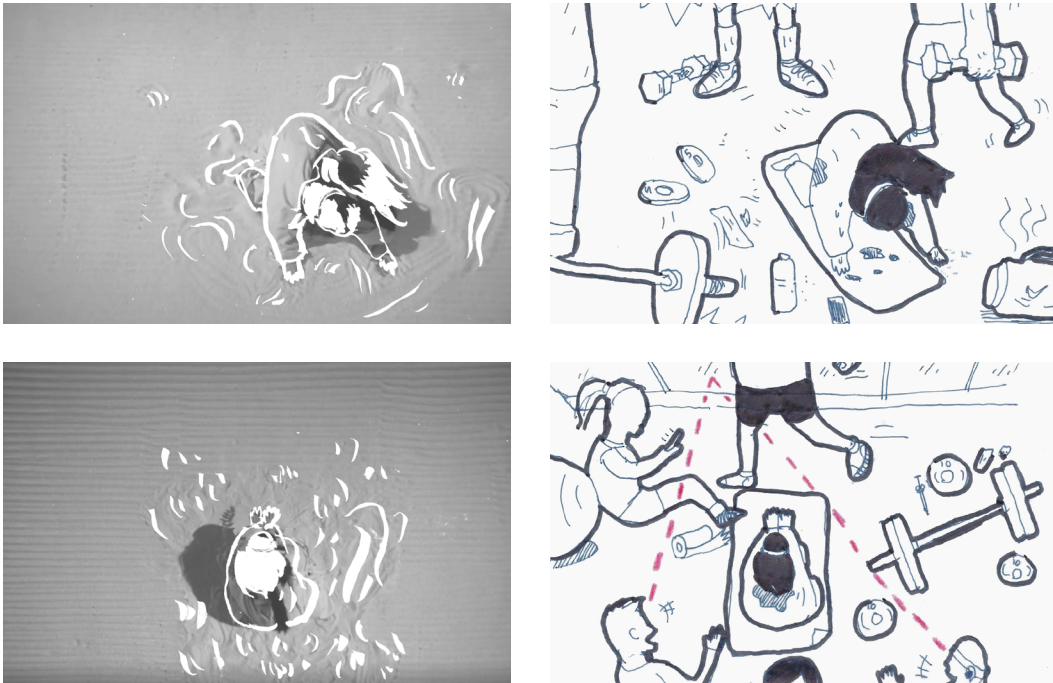


Fig. 3.31 Recording of the body: (Himiko, 1974) vs the gym

struggles to perform vulnerable and intimate movements while fighting for floor space with other gym users, as they neglect her personal space and comfort levels. This drawing experiment is significant, as it challenges the tensions between the objective and subjective dimensions of bodily existence within different spaces.

Judith Butler notes that bodies are a passive medium signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as “external” to that body.⁷⁹ Our body is a site for physical, social, and cultural constructs. Feelings of nakedness and sensitivity are not considered in the contemporary gym, ignoring the history of violence and trauma experienced by its user. They do not treat the learner as an embodied subject, in part due to the western mindset of privileging the mind-intellect over the body-spirit. In Heather Cassils’ *Becoming an Image*, the artist physically assaults and beats down a huge block of modeling clay. The result is not only a bashed up body of clay which symbolizes the unrepresentability of trauma in the body, but also the artist themselves, who is exhausted, tired, and hurting.

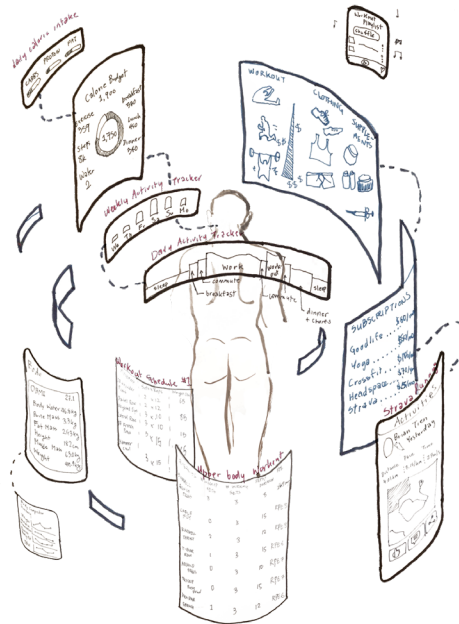


Fig. 3.32 Agents of self-discipline for fitness diagram

Here, the “workout” is simultaneously violent and vulnerable, it is not only the performance, but also the medium to create art. identity.

The queer subject here—whether re/presented in Cassils’ body during the live performance or the resulting damaged clay—is not the conforming, “good gay” (Casey 2007) of queer liberalism, but the abject, marginalized, and unintelligible body, in a state of confusion and becoming.⁸⁰

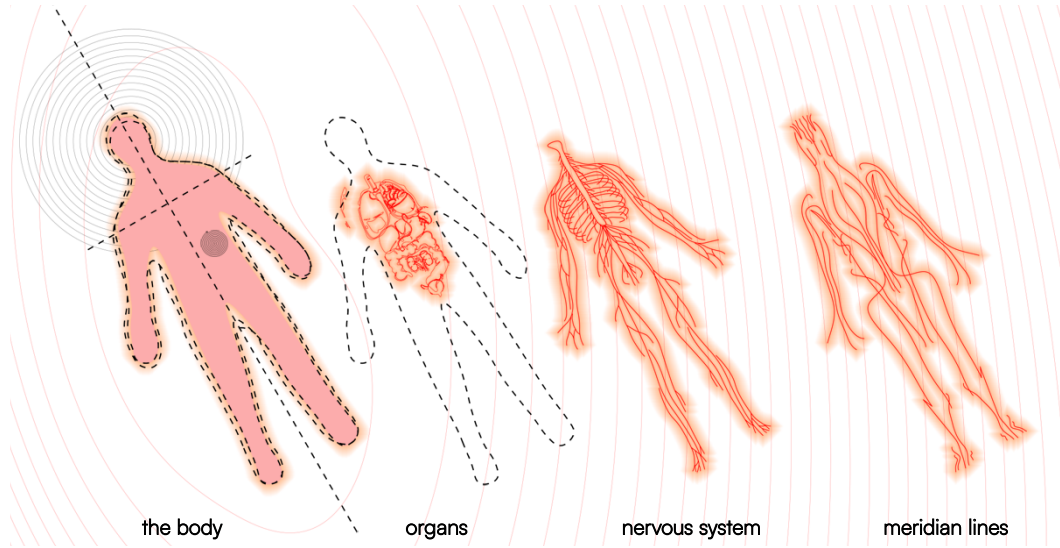
If body work has the power to empower and acknowledge the marginalized and unrepresented body, the redesigned gym must serve as an enclave dedicated to reclaiming autonomy over one’s body.

Within western culture, the popularization of physical exercise was significantly contributed by Foucault’s understanding of disciplinary power, which was implemented to produce “docile bodies” suited for everyday institutions.⁸¹ Naturally, motivating oneself to achieve a stronger body through “guilt, self-consciousness, goal orientation, and unnatural applications of willpower” is a prominent tool present in contemporary fitness culture, while also being a deterrent to many people who consider gym culture intimidating.

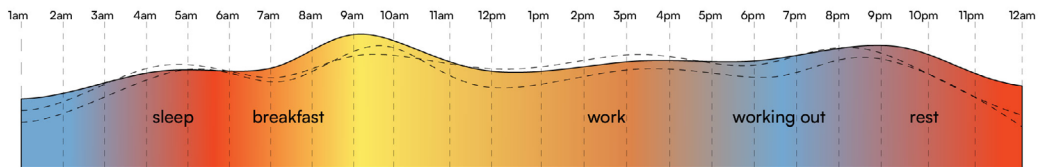
To produce a fitness culture that promotes sustainable routines which do not rely on sheer determination, the study and research of *yangsheng* is relevant. Described loosely as a list in the following order: “cultivation of the spirit”, “good nutrition” and exercise, *yangsheng* provides a refreshing alternative to an objective-centered approach to physical exercise.⁸² *Yangsheng* includes activities with no evident relationship to fitness, such as chess, cards, and quiet-sitting meditation. Incorporating *yangsheng* into a design language for a revised gym space becomes imperative, as it has the ability to bridge the physical and social separation of scheduled exercise routines and everyday pastimes. Rather than spending thirty minutes changing and preparing for an intense workout, the gym can also be a space for relaxed play and movement. “*Yangsheng allows people to “escape without leaving” a sometimes uncertain social and political order that is both experienced and remembered as fragile*”⁸³ providing users an experience not yet offered in existing fitness space typologies. The effect of *yangsheng* can be seen in China’s senior population adopting a more active lifestyle as they age.

their agility and mobility are improved through daily activities often done in social groups in parks which offer various calisthenic exercise equipment and gathering spaces for group activities.⁸⁴ Maria Smith echoes the philosophy of *yangsheng* in her critique of the contemporary work regime, in which free time simply becomes time to recover from work, or prepare for more work.⁸⁵ Rather than living to work, Smith proposes the “play ethic”, which would promote reciprocity by rewarding rest: “instead of being efficient, play. Instead of working out how best to get more for free, play. Instead of harming, play.”⁸⁶

Contemporary fitness spaces have been designed to reflect the western approach of privileging the mind-intellect over the body-spirit. The overwhelming senses of loud music, bodies, and unfamiliar machines force the newcomer to neglect their complex emotions of nervousness and insecurities. This somatophobia (fear of the material body) is increasingly present as one is forced to disconnect from their surroundings, using focus and mental concentration as a tool to isolate oneself from the rest of the gym. By thinking of the body as a machine, it subordinates itself to the mind “while retaining a structure of binary opposites, as well as assuming a one-way relation between the body and the mind, rather than being congruent counterparts.”⁸⁷ In order to thrive in the weight room, detachment and disconnect become necessary. As tools for constructing capitalist bodies, the modern gym lacks the technology to account for different ways of constructing the body, it neglects “the diverse ways of perceiving and describing bodily experience”⁸⁸. To encapsulate a diverse society of people, the gym as a revised typology must be built to house multidimensional approaches of exercise that incorporate songs, meditation and other forms of embodied spiritual practice; they must address how experiences are stored within the body.⁸⁹ The gym must break free from its capitalist bonds, and have a role in one’s reclamation of the body and deconstructing normalized patterns of behavior that have become “natural”.



the 9-5 work schedule



alternative: fluid boundaries between labour

Fig. 3.33 restructuring the boundaries of both our bodies and schedules

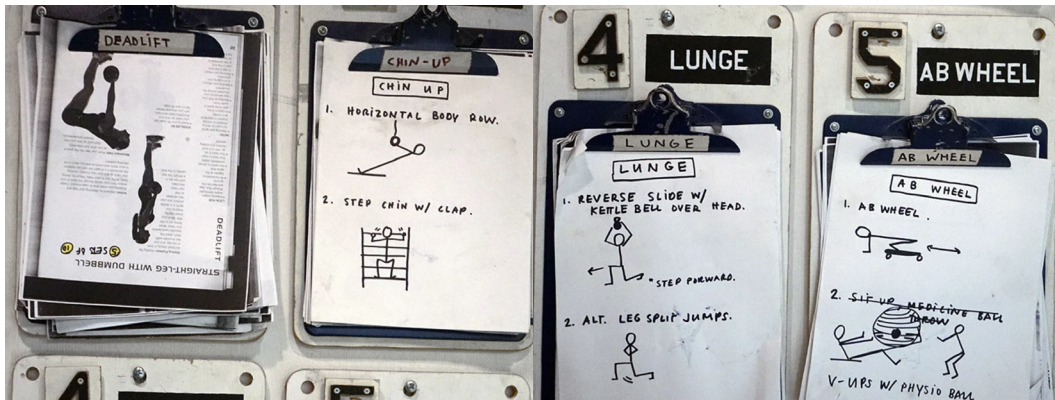


Fig. 3.34 Tom Sach's Nike's Space Camp diagrams illustrate the physical steps of five essential exercises

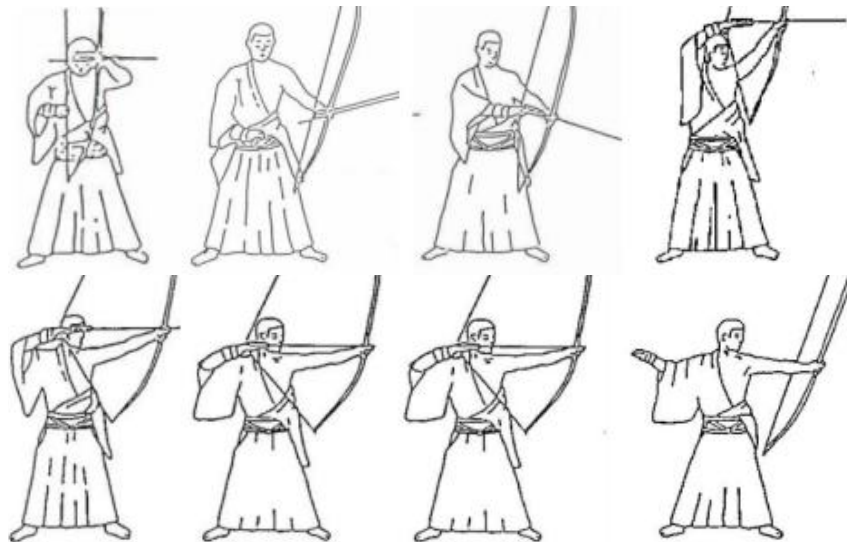
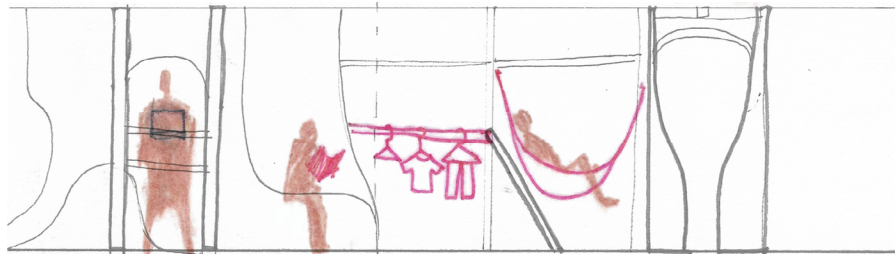


Fig. 3.35 Archery Diagram from "Zen in the Art of Archery"

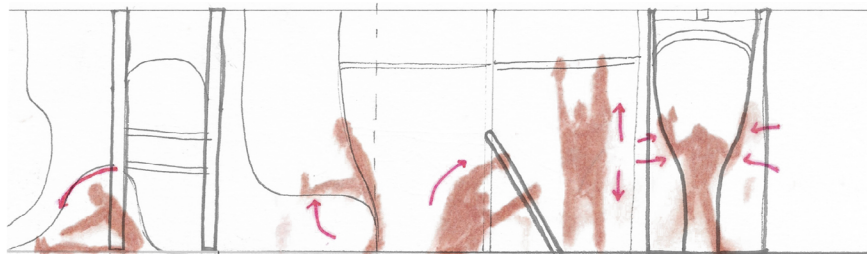
Drawing Movement

Phenomenology

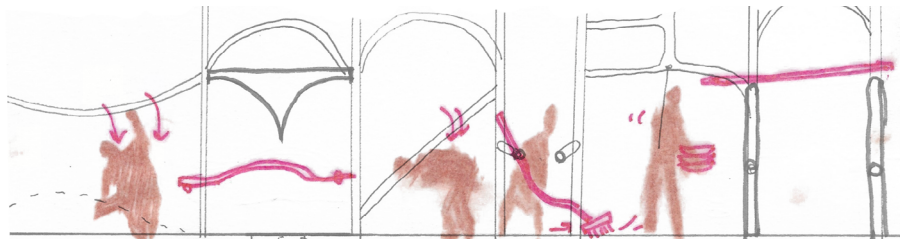
One of the challenges of designing a “new” gym or architectural space for fitness is addressing how it will challenge existing gender norms and standards of beauty. Hegemonic standards are constantly changing, and the way we shape our bodies through food and nutrition shift in order to accommodate that as well. Exercise trends such as hot yoga and Crossfit claim to challenge gender expectations, however leave the structure of the patriarchy intact, and continue to employ the “enlightenment at a price” driven mindset to tie one’s association with their physical bodies’ successes to consumer products (i.e. apparel, equipment, supplements). During the earlier phases of my thesis exploration, I proposed the *Phenomenology*, a home gym installation which blurs the boundaries between different forms of labor and created a platform for all bodies to crawl, stretch and move around. The structure of the *Phenomenology* draws from Brendan Fernandes’ *Master and Form*, a sculptural installation in the form of a cage featuring ropes, bars, and railings. Ballet dancers move around the sculpture, its various appendages act as supports for certain movements, while restricting motion in some cases. Fernandes’ piece depicts the role of the apparatus in reinforcing certain ways of moving, which in the case of ballet or even gym culture reflects a normative and colonial thinking. The *Phenomenology* highlights three primary barbell compound lifts often considered as the foundation for strength training: the deadlift, the squat, and the bench press. The phenomenological qualities of each exercise is warped to elicit certain feelings of discomfort and destabilization to reconsider our relationship with conventional fitness training. The *Phenomenology* serves as a predecessor to the final chapter of my thesis, experimenting with material and equipment properties of the gym at a smaller scale.



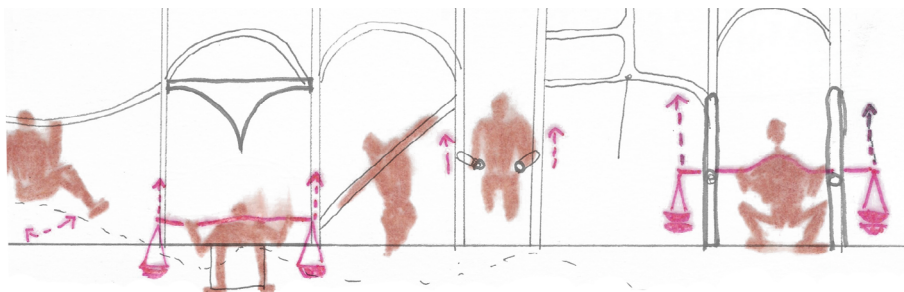
daily life



stretching



moving



training

Fig. 3.36 Instruction manual for using the Phenomenologym

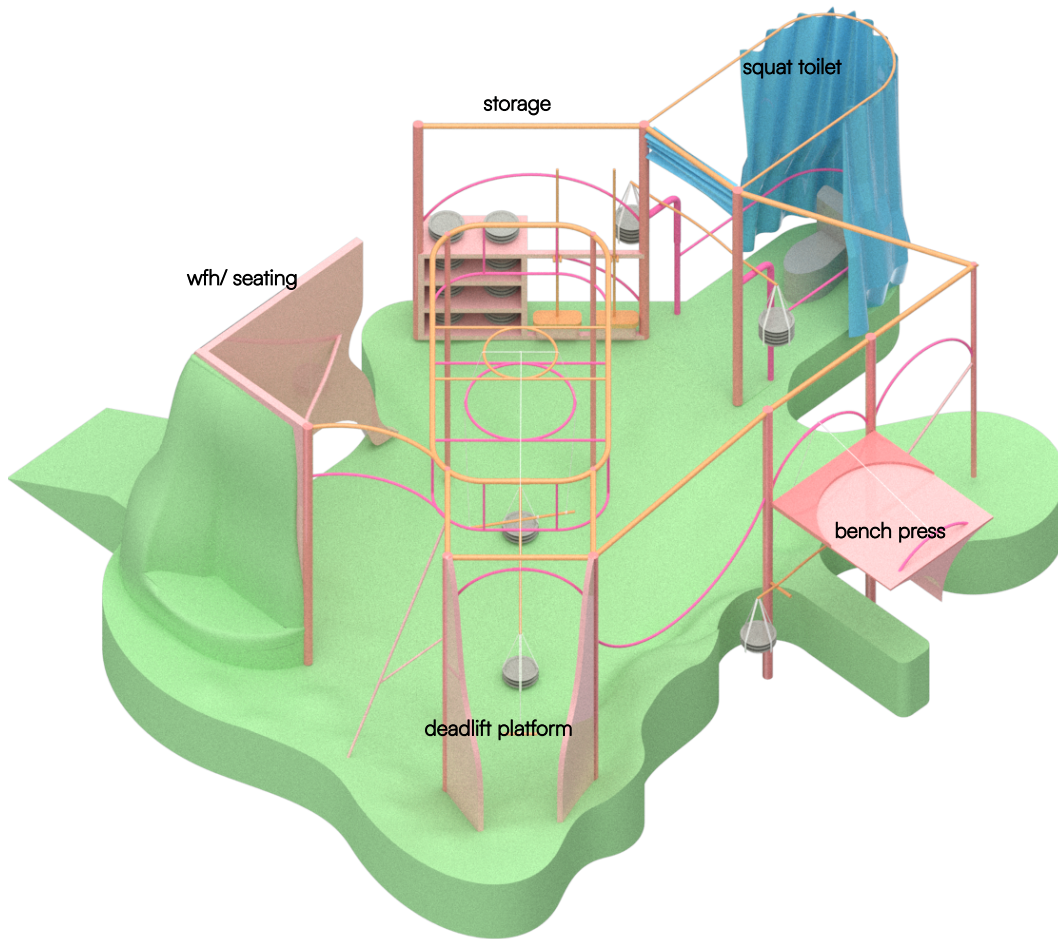
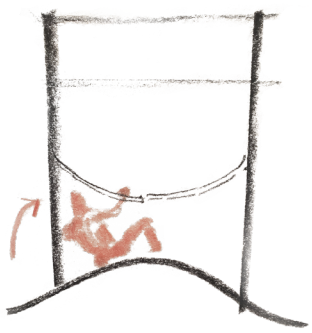


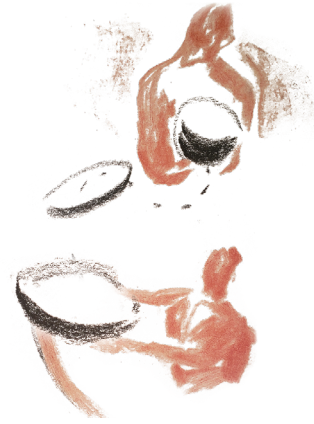
Fig. 3.37 Axonometric of the Phenomenogym



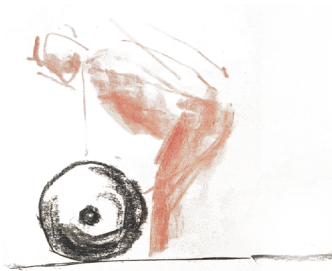
shrinking down to enter



illusion of height



smaller objects become larger,
larger objects become smaller



the typical barbell forces the user to conform to its standard during a lift. The proposed design allows the length of the weight to be modified accordingly to the user's height



the act of sweeping the floor as
exercise



the way we interact with our surroundings affects the body's physical
activation during an action



Fig. 3.38 Exploration of movement within the Phenomenologym diagrams



Fig. 3.39 Exploration of movement w



within the Phenomenologym diagrams

Training Manual #1

As I experiment with different forms of representation, I noticed that the choice on how to represent bodies becomes significant, since they imply a hegemonic notion of physical beauty. A quick Google search for exercise revealed “perfect” models who were often white, muscular, and sculpted executing complex movements with ease. The imagined ideal of a body becomes performed throughout movement, Oskar Schlemmer’s drawing depicts a figure-environment relationship determined by spatial notations and proportion.⁹⁰ Lux Feininger’s multiple exposure photos of a dancer resembles an interpretation of the Vitruvian man. Regardless of the original intention, the artists’ values of what deems a beautiful body is constantly present in their work, and contribute to the creation of a hegemonic ideal of the human form. Not only was it important to depict bodies of all types engaging in movement to empower those isolated by mainstream fitness culture, I also became aware that diagrams of teaching physical exercises were limited. The diagrams on isolation machines would often highlight the muscles working in separation from the rest of the body, normalizing the notion that gym training must be rigid and precise. In addition, conventional drawings for exercise often neglected to acknowledge the user as an embodied subject. As a result, newcomers are often encouraged to trust their entrance into the fitness world to a personal trainer or coach. I thus developed *Training Manual #1*, a set of drawings which explored how to teach physical exercise as not a quantitative movement secluded from the mind and spirit, but rather a holistic experience.

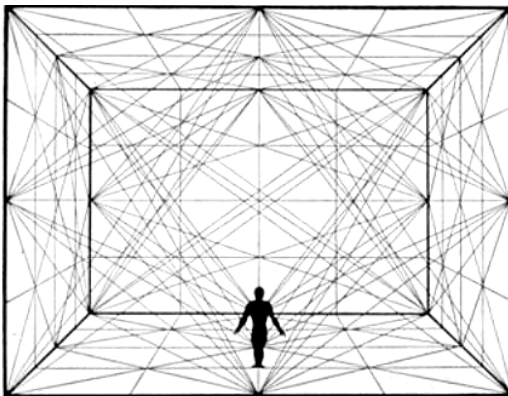


Fig. 3.40 Figure in Space with Plane Geometry and Spatial Delineations, 1927

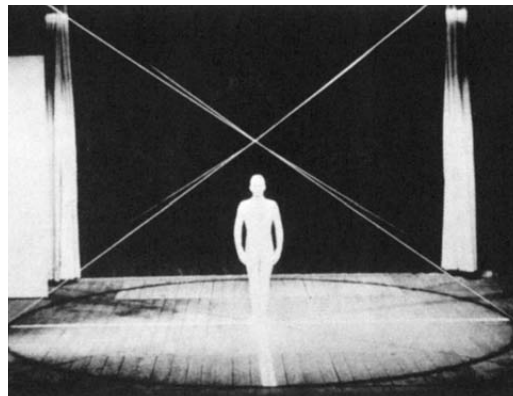


Fig. 3.41 Dance in Space (Delineation of Space with Figure)

The critique of representation concerning fitness spaces also involves the floor plan convention to depict spatial organization in gyms. Donna Haraway proposes that architectural drawing becomes a “modest witness” rather than a blueprint for reality, thus acknowledging the truth of multiple realities rather than assuming an objective analysis of territory.⁹¹ This statement is relevant for the gym floor plan, where “political issues are covered up by geometric representations and silenced during the design process”.⁹² Similarly, Luce Irigaray critiques the Cartesian claim that “truth and scientific laws are neutral and universal”. By reviewing statements from gym participants of different ages, sexualities and genders, it becomes clear that the gym holds different symbolism and values for different people. Sarah Wiggleworth’s drawing of a cleanly laid out dinner table gradually succumbing to a mess reveals how the everyday details which are omitted in the typical architectural representation. These philosophies of multiple truths are relevant for the discussion of the gym, which may serve as a place for empowerment to some, yet represent tension and insecurity for others.

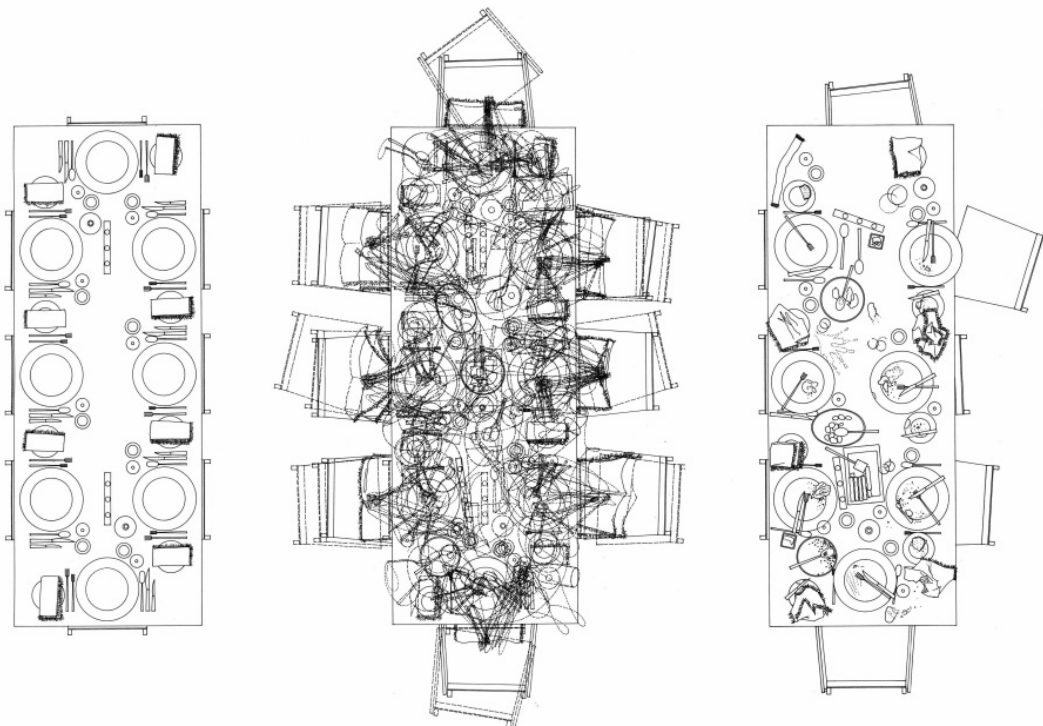
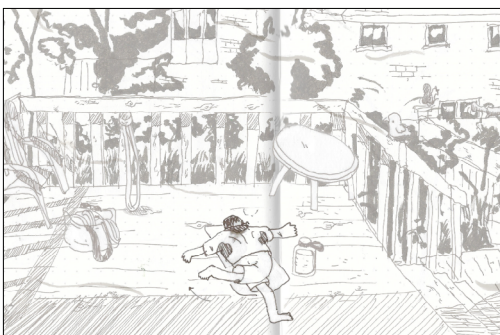
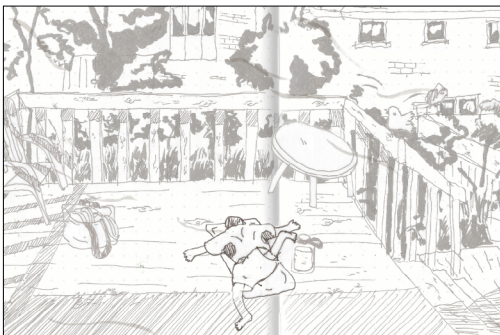
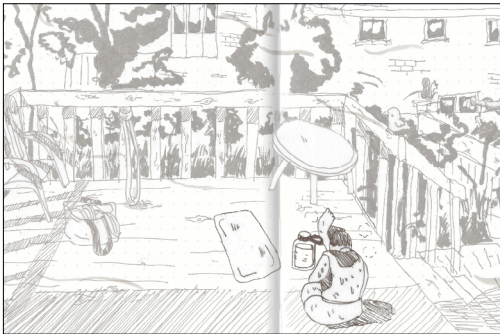
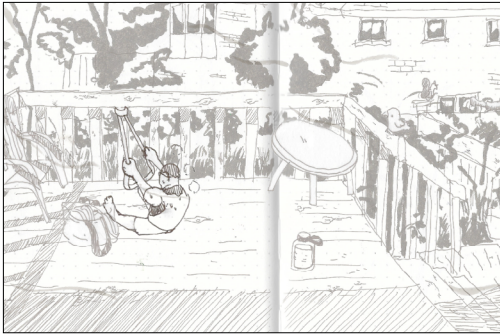


Fig. 3.42 Increasing disorder in a dining table



My yoga studio had like baskets for your stuff and then mini lockers for wallets and phones

And it was in a tall bldg so they were able to have surrounding windows without being worried about people looking in

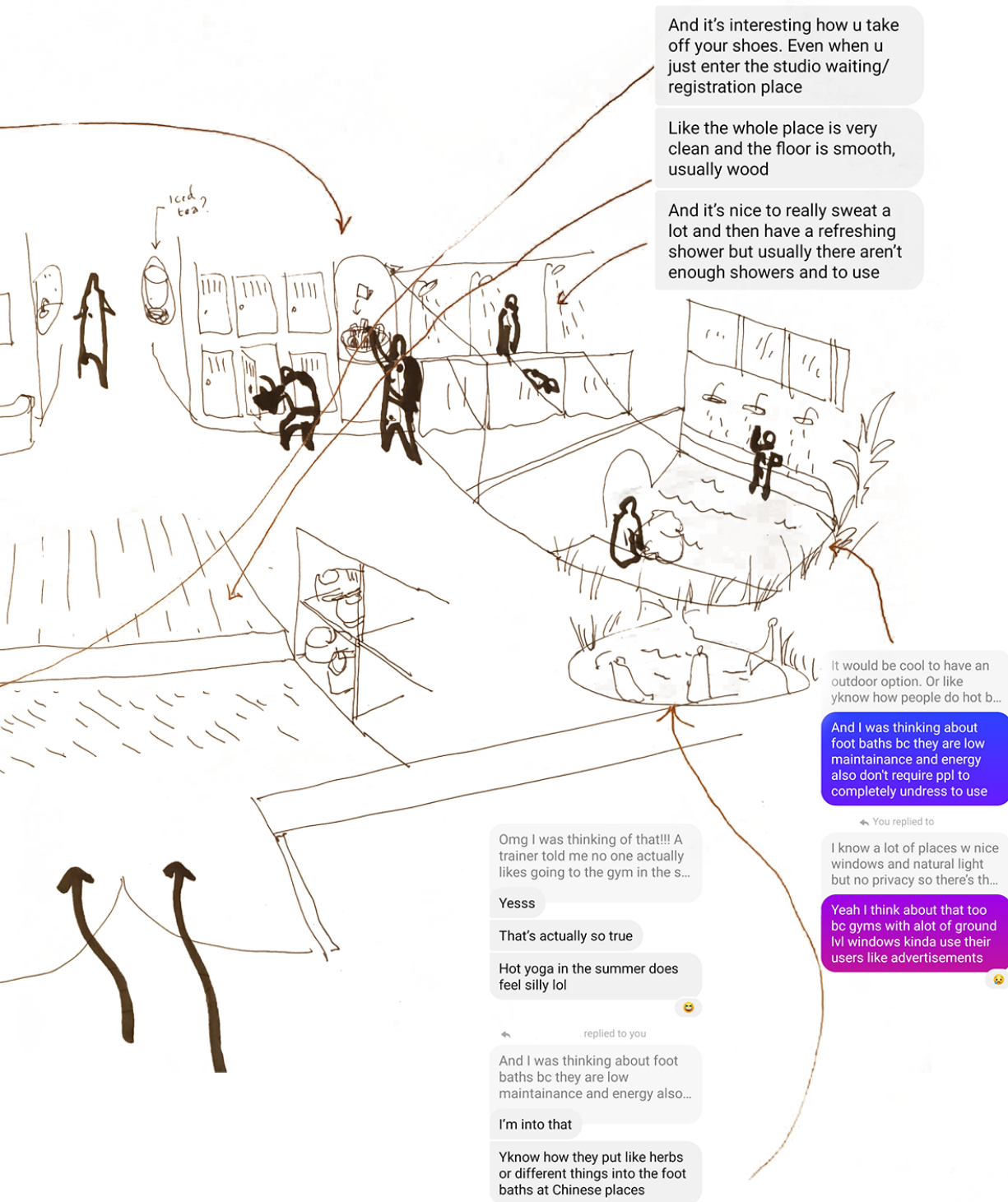
They also have different types of classes like reg temp, hot yoga, Pilates, barre etc

The yoga practise room has mirrors to help w form but I guess most gyms do

Honestly the classes are very good the main issue is there isn't enough space bc they get so full



Fig. 3.43 An anecdotal recording of a home workout



And it's interesting how u take off your shoes. Even when u just enter the studio waiting/ registration place

Like the whole place is very clean and the floor is smooth, usually wood

And it's nice to really sweat a lot and then have a refreshing shower but usually there aren't enough showers and to use

It would be cool to have an outdoor option. Or like yknow how people do hot b...

And I was thinking about foot baths bc they are low maintainance and energy also don't require ppl to completely undress to use

You replied to

I know a lot of places w nice windows and natural light but no privacy so there's th...

Yeah I think about that too bc gyms with alot of ground lvl windows kinda use their users like advertisements

Omg I was thinking of that!!! A trainer told me no one actually likes going to the gym in the s...

Yesss

That's actually so true

Hot yoga in the summer does feel silly lol

replied to you

And I was thinking about foot baths bc they are low maintainance and energy also...

I'm into that

Yknow how they put like herbs or different things into the foot baths at Chinese places

Fig. 3.44 Drawing from conversation - Yoga Studio



Fig. 3.45 How do you perform a Bridge?

body
not assumed,
ground
drawn.

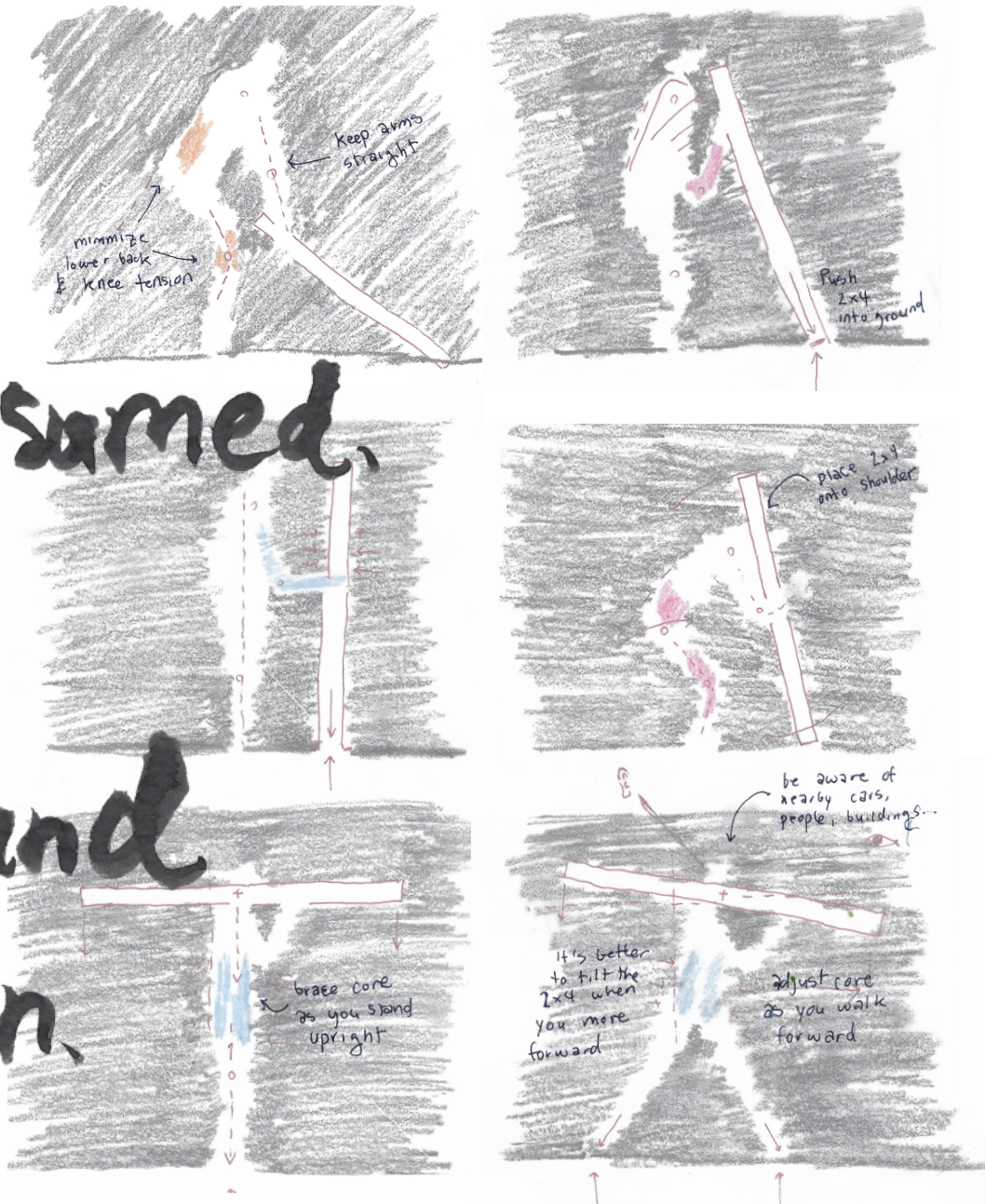


Fig. 3.46 How to carry a 2 x 4

The challenge of addressing the issues within this typology becomes clear, the gym's violence, aggression, and intensity experienced by different groups of people is not represented in the use of conventional methods, typical plans and sections are incapable of depicting daily conflicts and tensions of working out in a gym.

Traditional representations imply stable objects and fixed subjects, thus new ways of drawing are needed to process the "simultaneous presentation and interplay of information in diverse scales, on shifting coordinates and even of differing linguistic scales".⁹³ In Richie's Gym, the floor plan does not reveal how the women's change room requires its user to walk through the entire gym under a collective gaze, nor does it reflect how the floor plan becomes crowded and inaccessible as it fails to account for the moving of equipment and surplus of gym goers during peak hours. The drawings I have produced as a response to this attempt to narrate the reciprocal history between the body and its surroundings during both static and disrupted states. Through the various pages of *Training Manual #1*, new drawing methods are used to express the embodied experience, addressing the invisible forces of the gym.

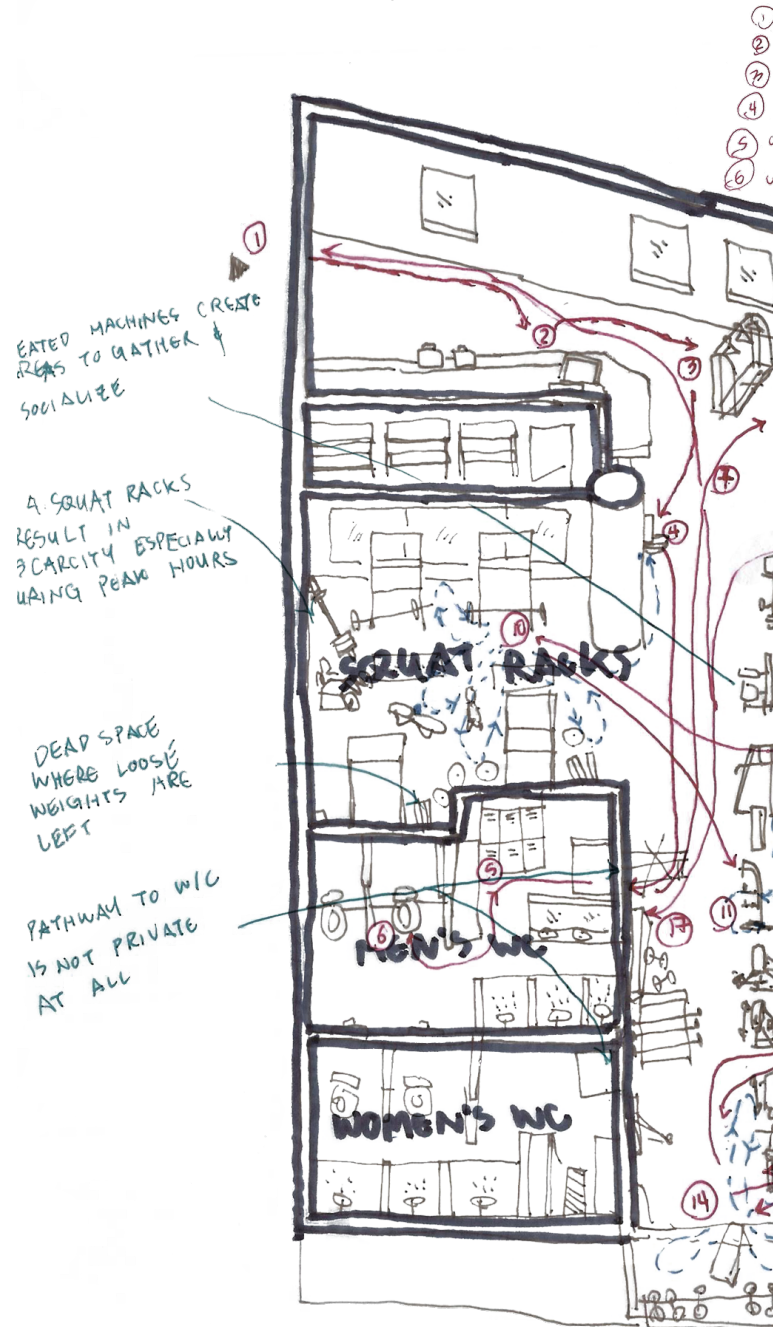


Fig. 3.47 M

entrance
reception
coat rack
water fountain
change
bathroom

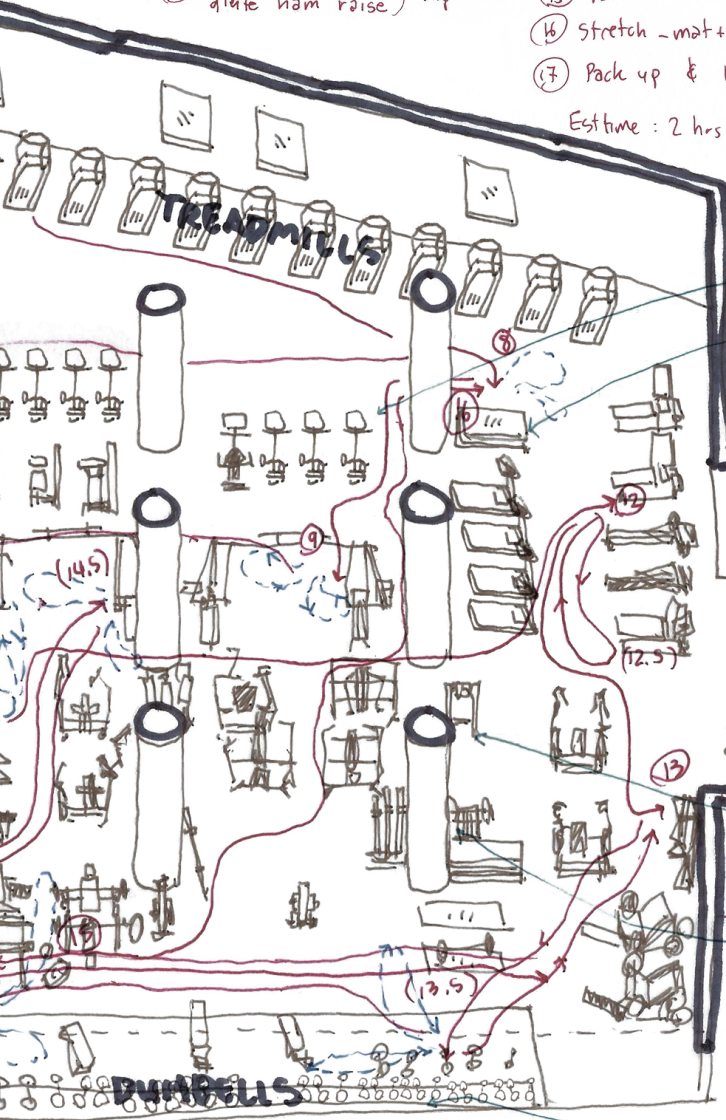
- 8 cardio-running
- 9 stretching - mat
- 9 warmup - cables
- 10 deadlift
- 10 dips
- 12 leg extension
glate ham raise) superset

- 13 cable pullover
dbell lateral raise) superset

- 14 Rope face pull
EZ bar skull crusher) superset

- 15 Farmer's walk
- 16 stretch - mat + foam roll
- 17 Pack up & leave

Est time : 2 hrs



POSITIONING RESULTS IN
USERS LOOKING AT THE
TREADMILLERS' BEHINDS
IMPROVISED STRETCH
AREA INTERFERES WITH
CIRCULATION

DISPERSED BARBELL
RACKS MEANS WEIGHTS
ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE
DISPERSED ACROSS THE GYM

MOVING BETWEEN
MACHINES DURING PEAK HOURS
& USE IS NON-ADA COMPLIANT

GAP BETWEEN MACHINES
& COLUMNS CREATE MORE
HEAD SPACE

FLOOR TO CEILING
WALL MIRRORS ALLOW
FOR OPTIMAL PANOPTIC
SURVEILLANCE

Mapping out a typical workout at Richie's Gym

During my production of *Training Manual #1*, different drawing mediums were experimented to explore how they would reflect various elements of the body and environment differently. A brush pen would vary in heaviness, recording the history of both the hand stroke of the artist as well as the intensity of the illustrated action. Charcoal and pastel are rough and sketchy, and alluded to a vagueness of the bodies' boundaries, it thus becomes unclear what the "ideal" user looks like. The swiftness of the brush stroke was inspired by Paul Rep's picture-poems, a series of brush drawn "telegrams", which capture his thoughts as a sudden flash of insight.

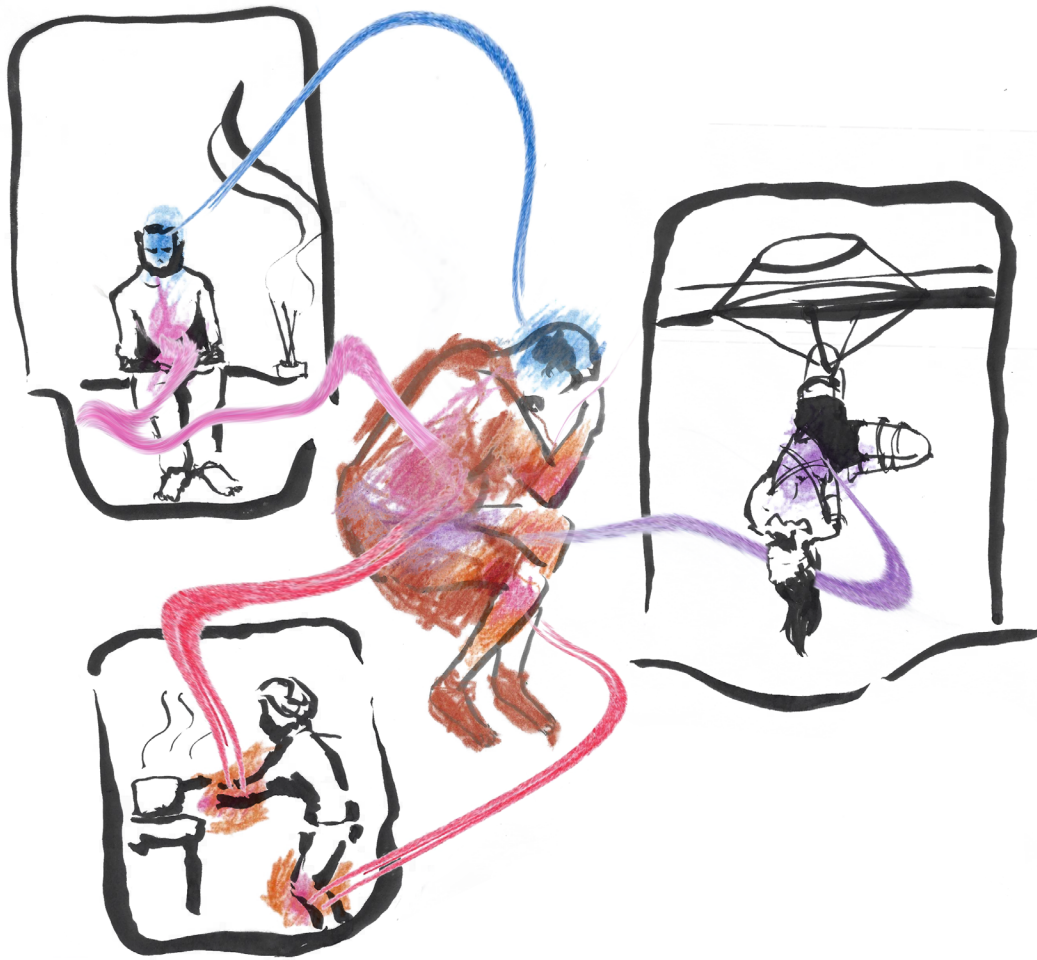


Fig. 3.48 *The body is site to different forms of energy*

Black brush lines on white space, such as calligraphy, are treasured by the Chinese and Japanese, who feel they receive something of the writer through them. They do not call them art. It is something from the heart.⁹⁴

Employing these drawing methods and overlaying over digitally drawn vectors then creates a contrast between the temporary and the permanent in a way to represent time and movement in a fixed space. Rather than attempting to appear as neutral, the hand drawn reflects the emotions of the artist, as well as depicting the dynamic range of movement. The resulting drawings become a symbol of what the body can accomplish, no longer being instructed on how to move and appear, rather the user is encouraged to draw its own conclusions and explore their own relationship between their mind, body, and spirit.

Designing (Re)Creation

The approach to a responsive gym design involves a combination of both practical and conceptual strategies. While researching gym precedents, most “design-innovative” spaces simply attempt to rebrand the “dirty”, “sweaty” concept of exercise into something marketable and luxurious without straying far from the existing gym typology. Rather than addressing the socio-political issues within the gym, physical exercise was instead rebranded as an experience for a rich clientele. In the previous chapter, the anthropological and ethnographic studies reviewed how architectural design can influence the cultural construction of a space, such as in the case of the Anna Hiss Gymnasium where undersized sport courts were more approachable for casual play. Buildings with no intended program to cater to fitness training such as the Bioscleave House designed by Arakawa & Gins, as well as Casa “il Girasole” designed by Luigi Moretti provide inspiration for a design guideline for an alternative gym proposal which prioritizes inclusivity and care. Theories that explore the intersection between gender, class, sexuality and economics explored by individuals from a diverse variety of academic backgrounds, such as Arakawa & Gins, Joel Sanders, Patricia Vertinsky and Judith Butler will be bridged with the analysis of architectural precedents, formulating an interdisciplinary approach towards redesigning fitness cultural spaces.

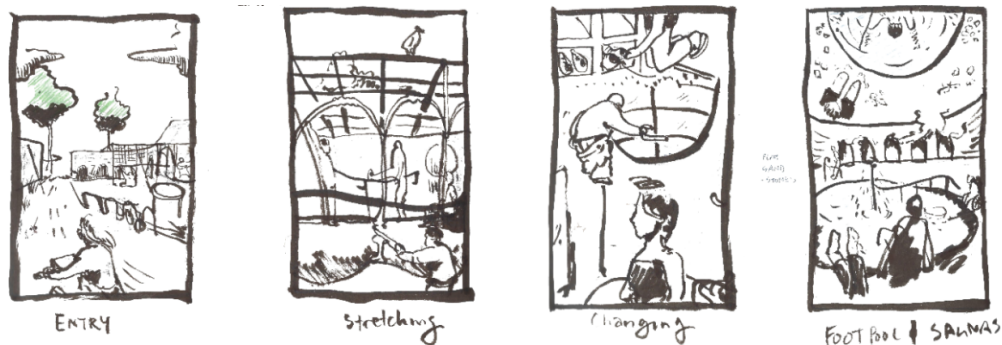


Fig. 4.1 Early Concept Sketches

We engage with the work of the “new” cultural geographers who suggest that “space” is in a constant state of transition as a result of “continuous, dialectical struggles of power and resistance among and between the diversity of landscape providers, users and mediators”⁹⁵

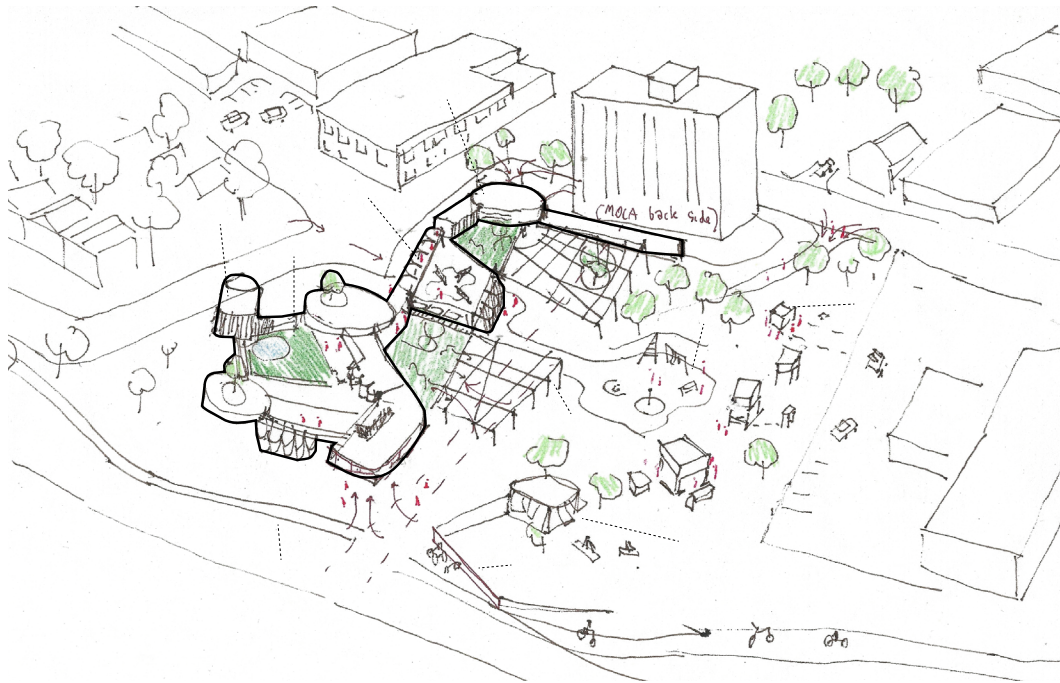


Fig. 4.2 Early Massing Sketch

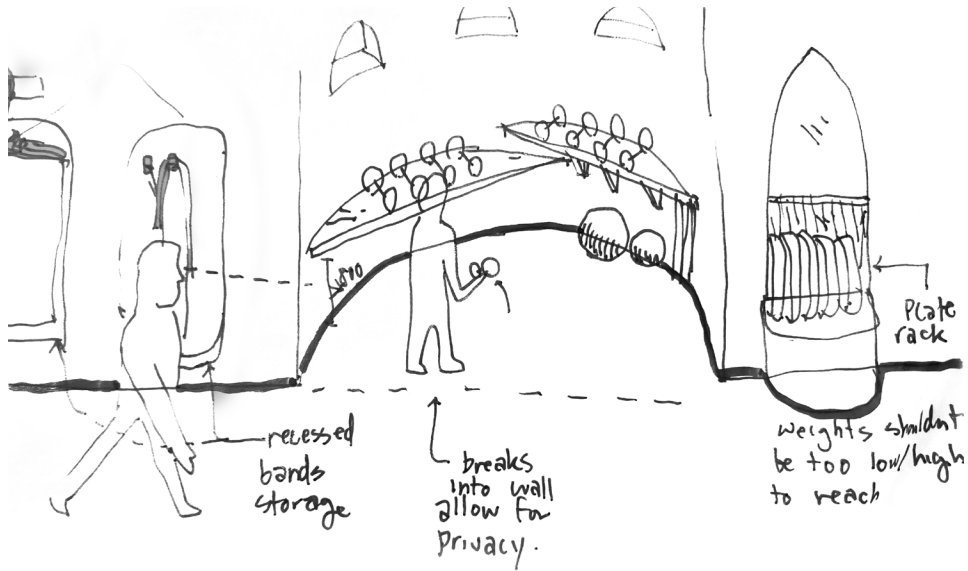
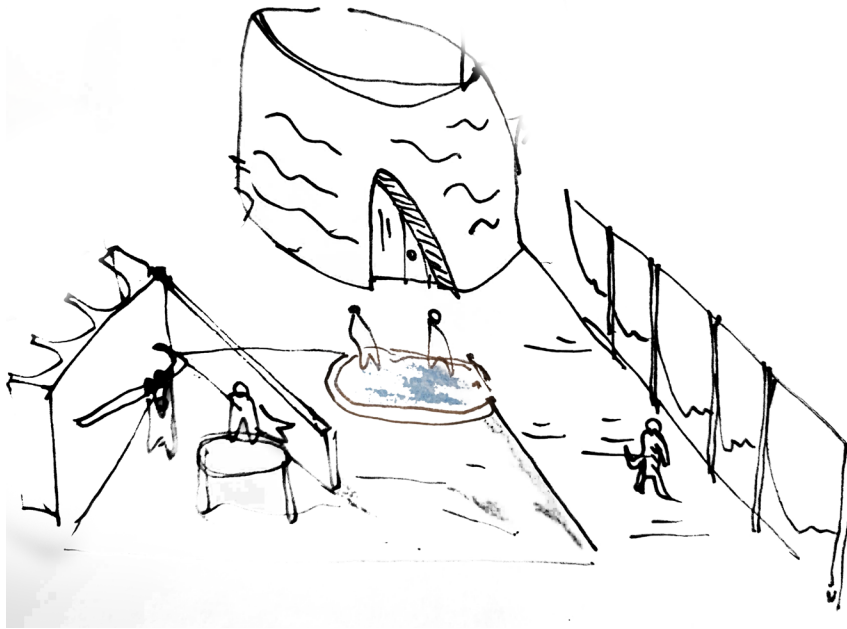


Fig. 4.3 Early Interior Sketches

The lived experiences of both my own and others who have encountered discomfort and tension while working out in the gym further (Re)creation's intention to create safe spaces for fitness. While the impact of architectural intervention is limited and cannot fully control how individuals perceive their bodies under the influence of social media, hegemonic ideals, and the collective gaze, designers do have the ability to propose architecture that challenges how we train and move. The goal of (Re)creation is not to produce successful bodies, rather it is to aid individuals in renegotiating their relationships with their bodies within a welcoming space. In (Re)creation, all bodies are beautiful, both disciplined training and unscheduled play are celebrated and performed in safe spaces.

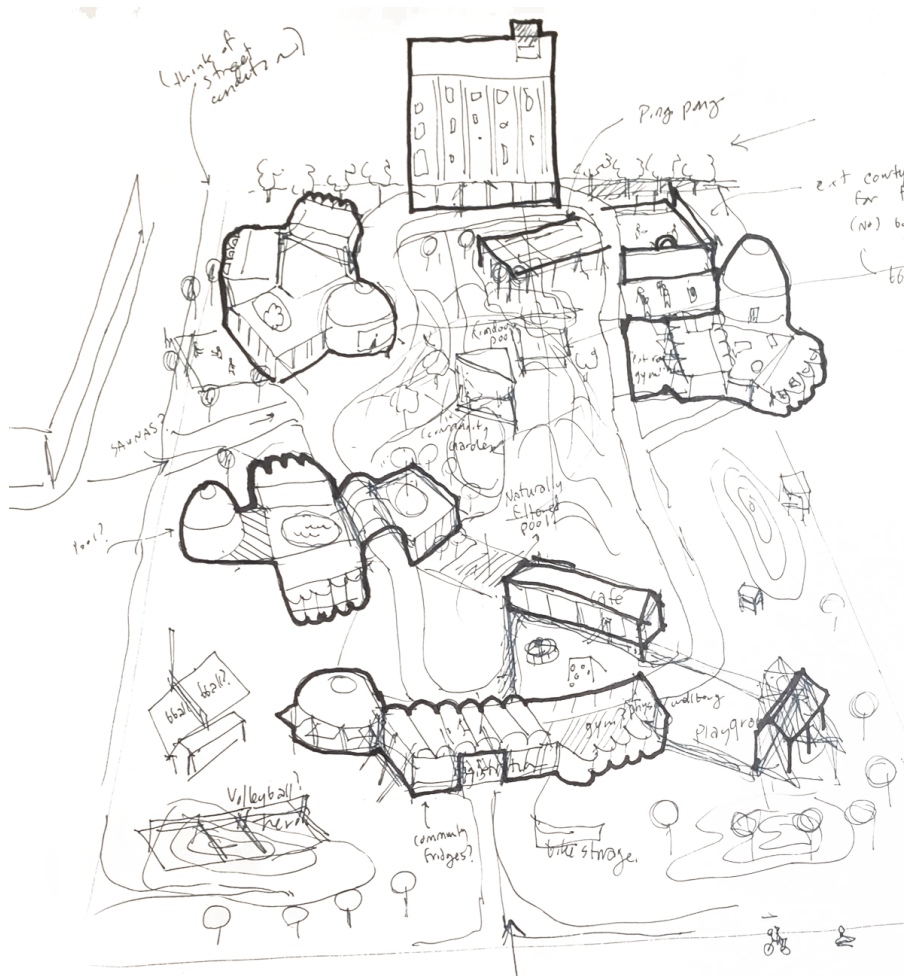


Fig. 4.4 Early Massing Sketch

Site Selection

The formerly vacant lot west of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Toronto was chosen as a potential site. As Toronto continues to expand, this location becomes an ideal intersection in west Toronto for activity goes of all ages to come and exercise. Its site location is at a close proximity to residential areas, as well as various local businesses. It is also a 10 minute walk from the Bloor Go station and the Dundas West station for the Line 2 subway as well as being accessible via the west railpath. Unlike suburban gyms, (Re)creation



Fig. 4.5 North



Fig. 4.6 South

encourages its visitors to commute by public transit or biking, rather than relying predominantly on automobile transport. Due to its location within the city, (Re)creation's program must provide more than gym amenities to appeal to individuals with different levels of fitness knowledge. Thus, (Re)creation is planned as a community center to its users, while still offering gym amenities as a central element of its design. Physical and cultural boundaries which have typically separated different types of fitness activities become blurred, making daunting exercises such as weightlifting approachable to newcomers.

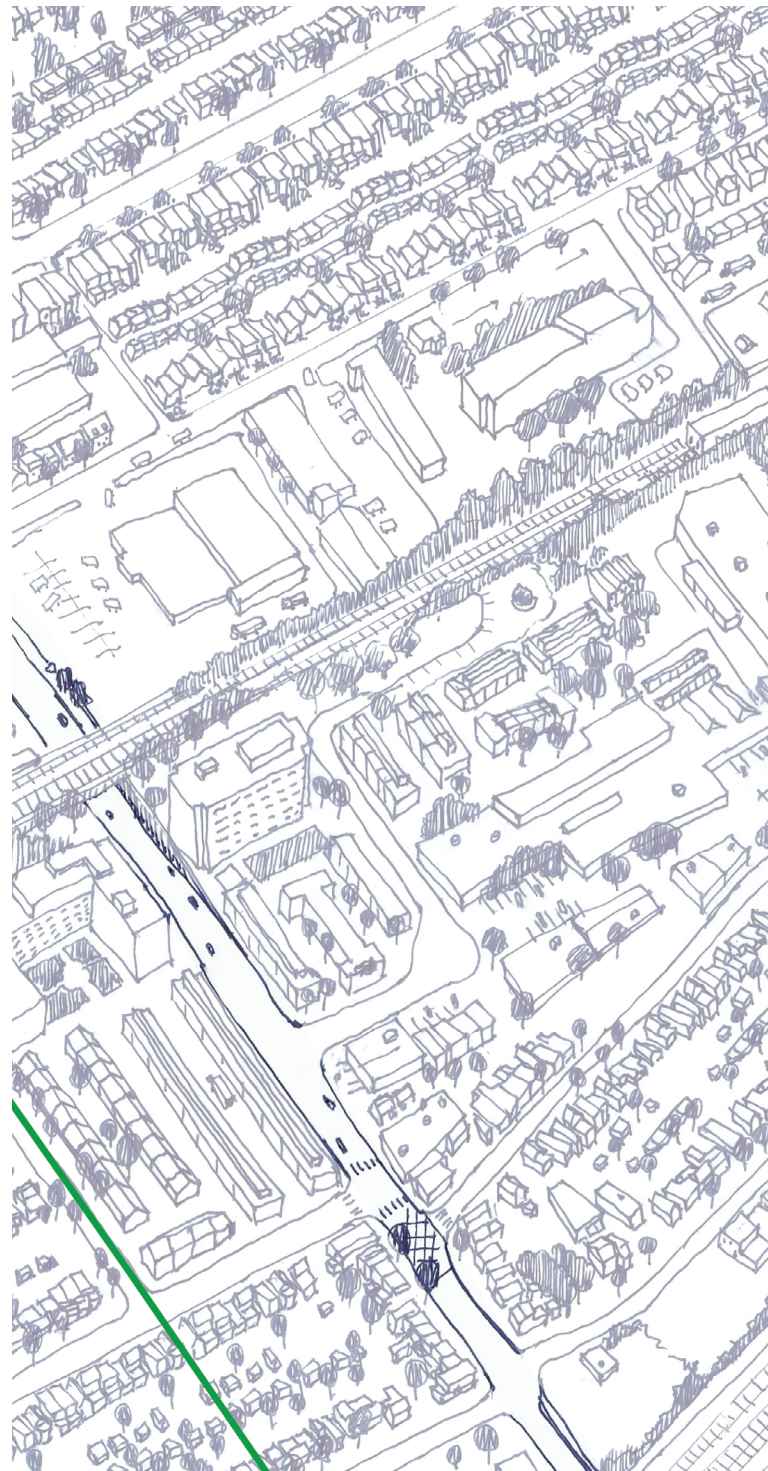


facing site views



facing site views

While Toronto residents can travel to the (Re)creation Community Center before or after their work or school day, people of all ages are welcome to work out and play during the day. In addition, the nearby proximity to the Museum of Contemporary Art of Toronto emphasizes the correlation between the body, mind, and art, encouraging one to experiment with one's boundaries. The Toronto (Re)creation Community Center dismantles the somatophobia instilled within our society, the connection between the existing MOCA and (Re)creation represents the return to Plato's own belief of the gymnasium as a place to train the soul, rather than simply the body.⁹⁶



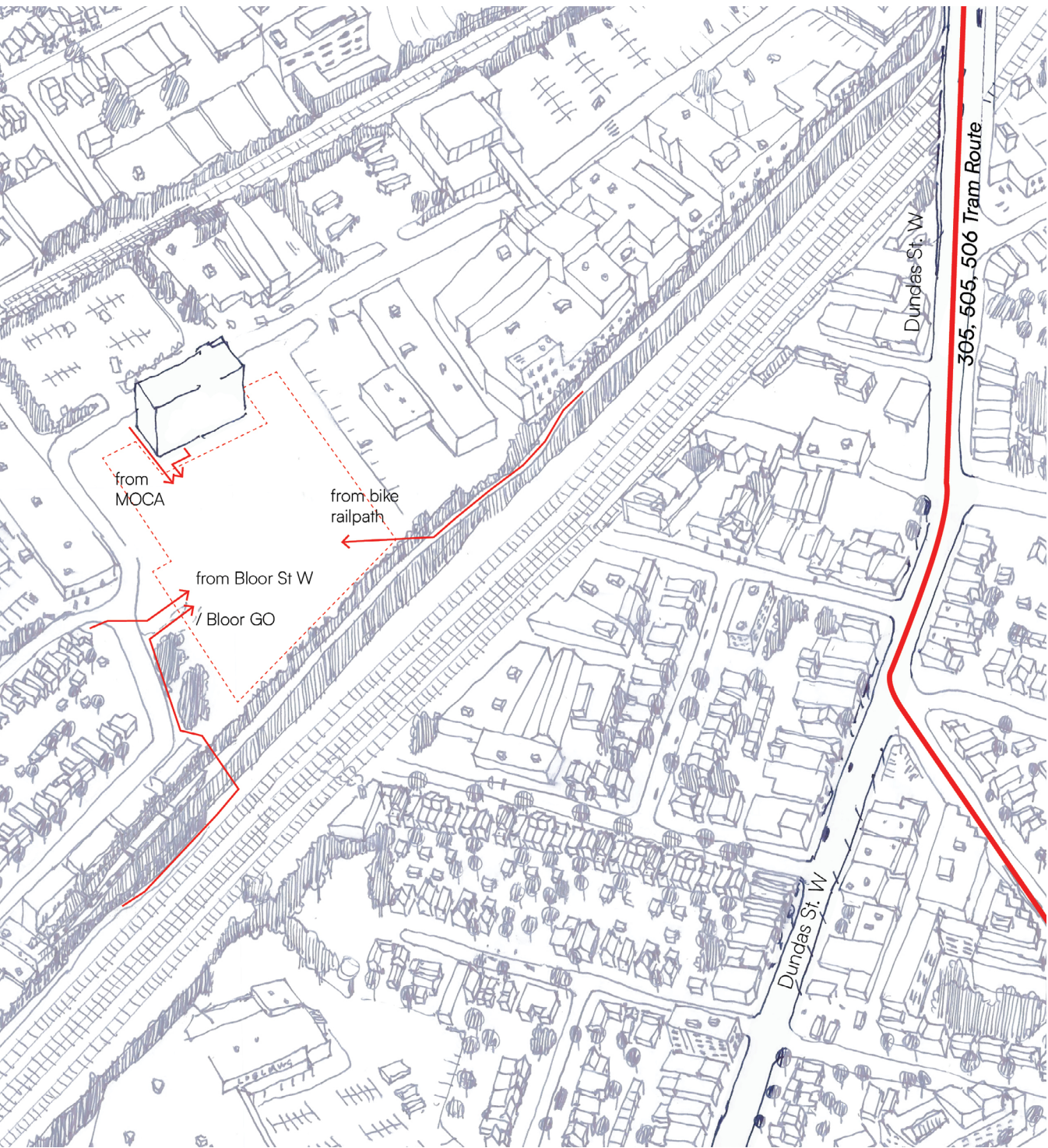


Fig. 4.7 Site Axonometric

Toronto (Re)creation Community Center

Design Approach

From my research on the social space of gyms, it was imperative to propose a space which dismantled current stereotypes of contemporary gyms. Architect Joel Sanders describes his experience with the gym being characterized by the “banging of metal plates, grunts and groans, help create a hypnotic atmosphere of mechanical and repetitive physical, social, and psychological noise”.⁹⁷ To avoid designing a space which embodied these traits, (Re)creation incorporated design elements which welcomed new users into a safe space for physical and mental growth. (Re)creation reframes the notion of exercise as not a ritual solely for developing the human body as an instrument for labor and work, but a process which blends into our everyday schedules. Thus, (Re)creation becomes a space where play, meditation, and training come together, it plays with our assumptions of what physical exercise should be. The material choice of rammed earth contrasted with colorful railings and gym equipment distributed throughout the building, encouraging users to touch and interact with them intuitively. The choice to blend hand drawn elements into conventional architectural drawings is my approach of emphasizing the playfulness of the building. The history of the body and its movements are recorded in the strokes of a brushstroke, which also allude to the temporality of a moving body passing through the space of a building.

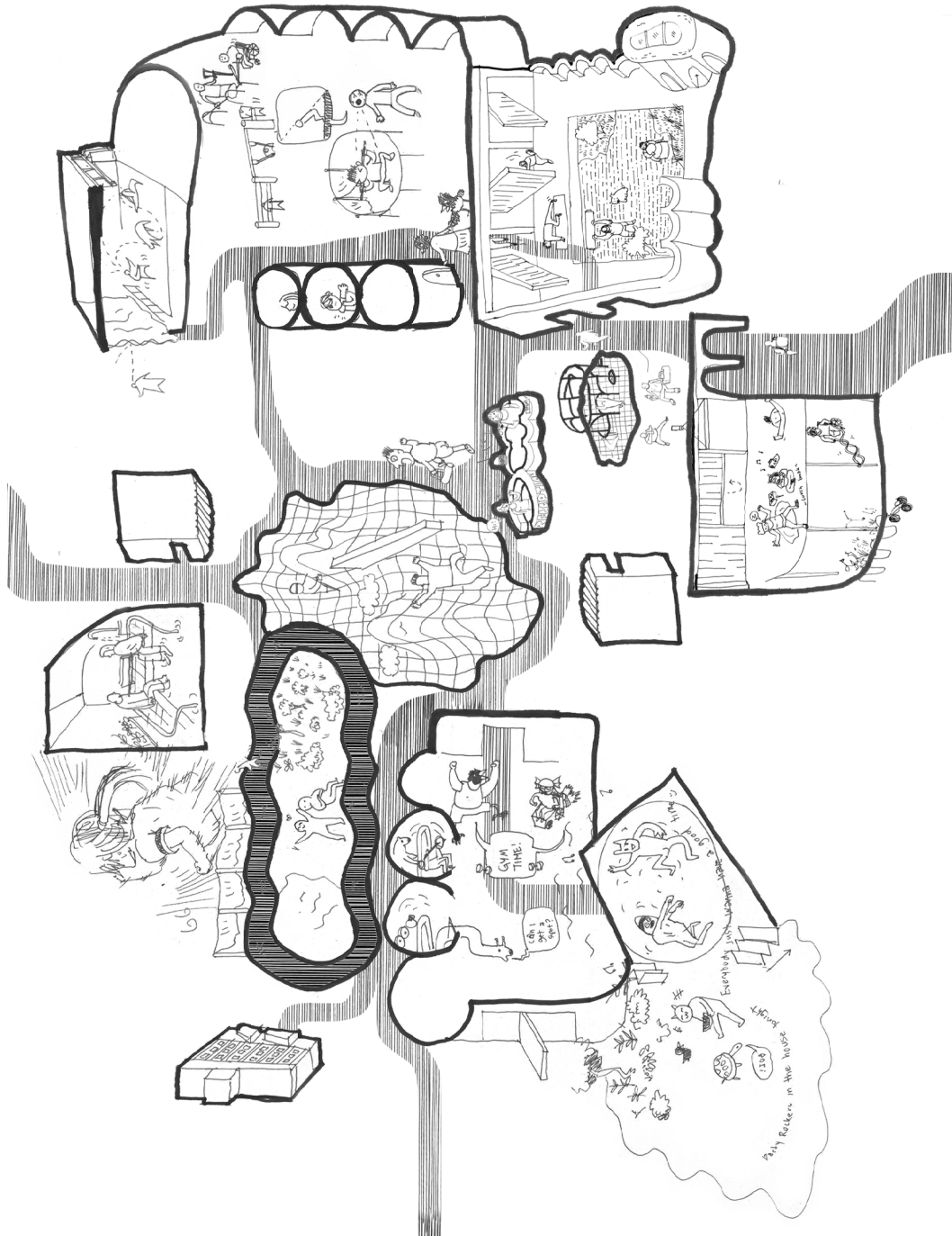
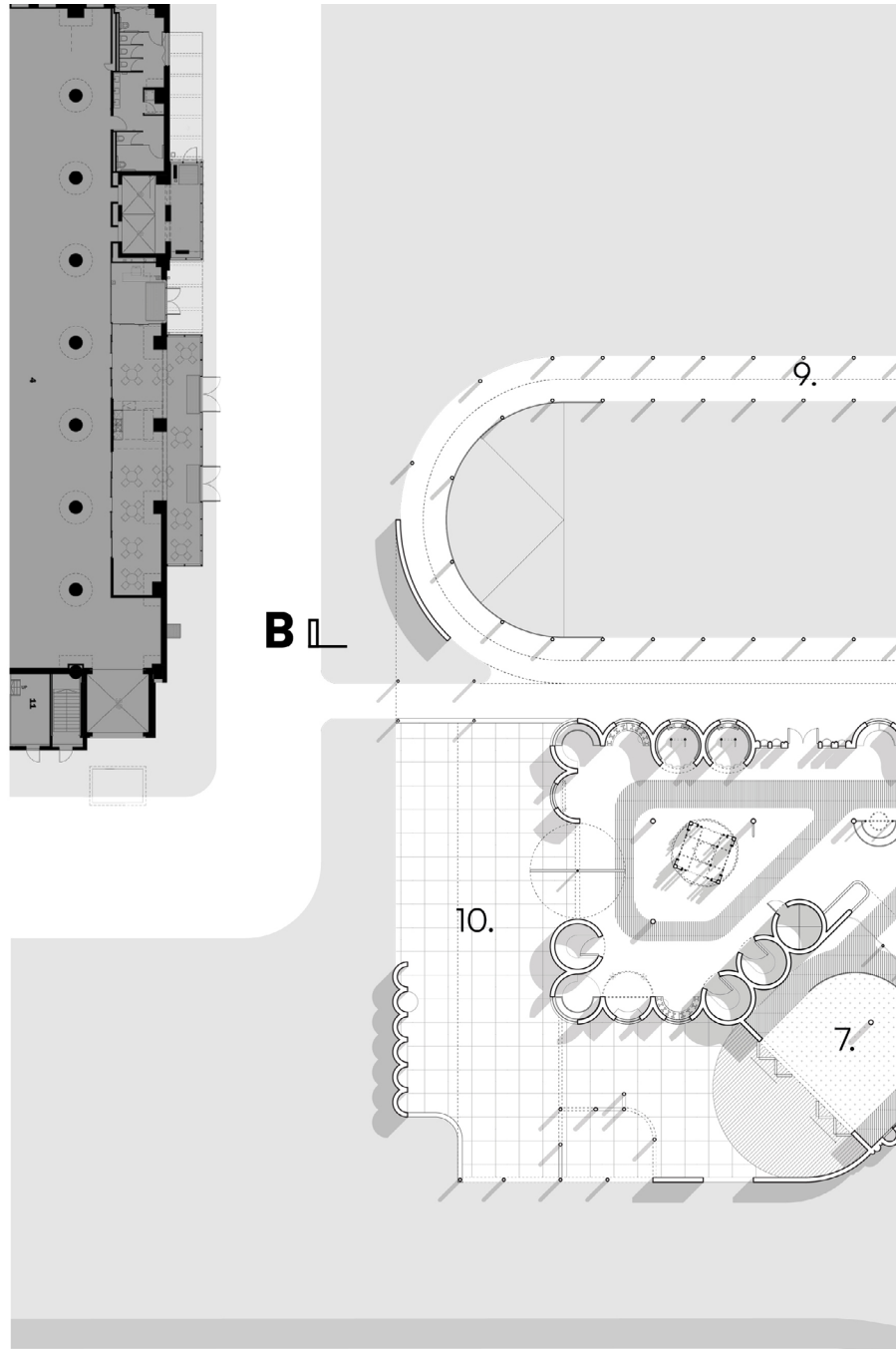
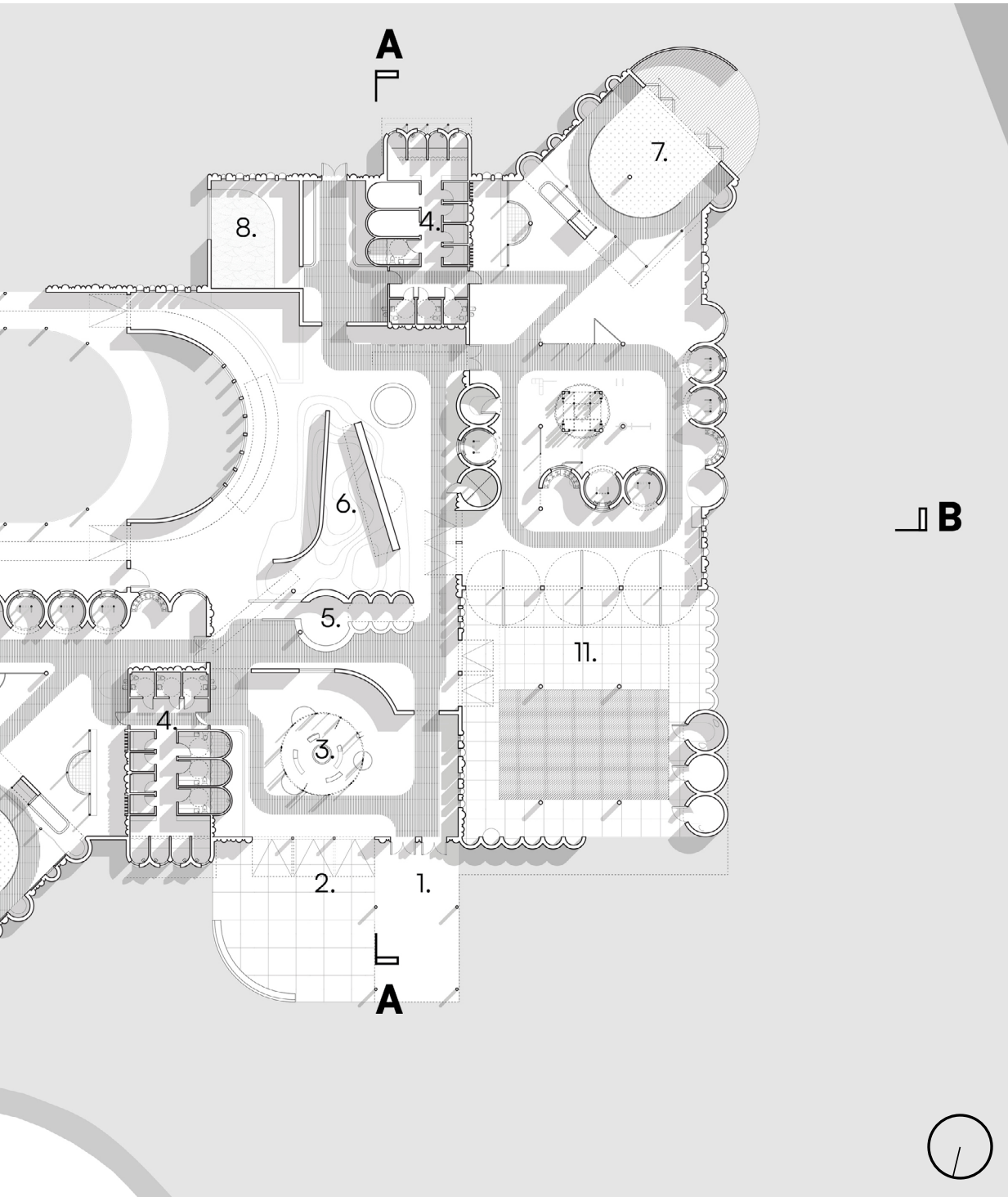


Fig. 4.8 Concept Diagram



- 1. Main Entrance
- 2. Outdoor Square
- 3. Vestibule Stretching
- 4. Gender Neutral Washroom, Shower & Changeroom
- 5. Reception
- 6. Play Mountain
- 7. Collective Room
- 8. Foot Baths
- 9. Running Track
- 10. Outdoor Gym Area
- 11. Courtyard

Fig. 4.9



Floor Plan

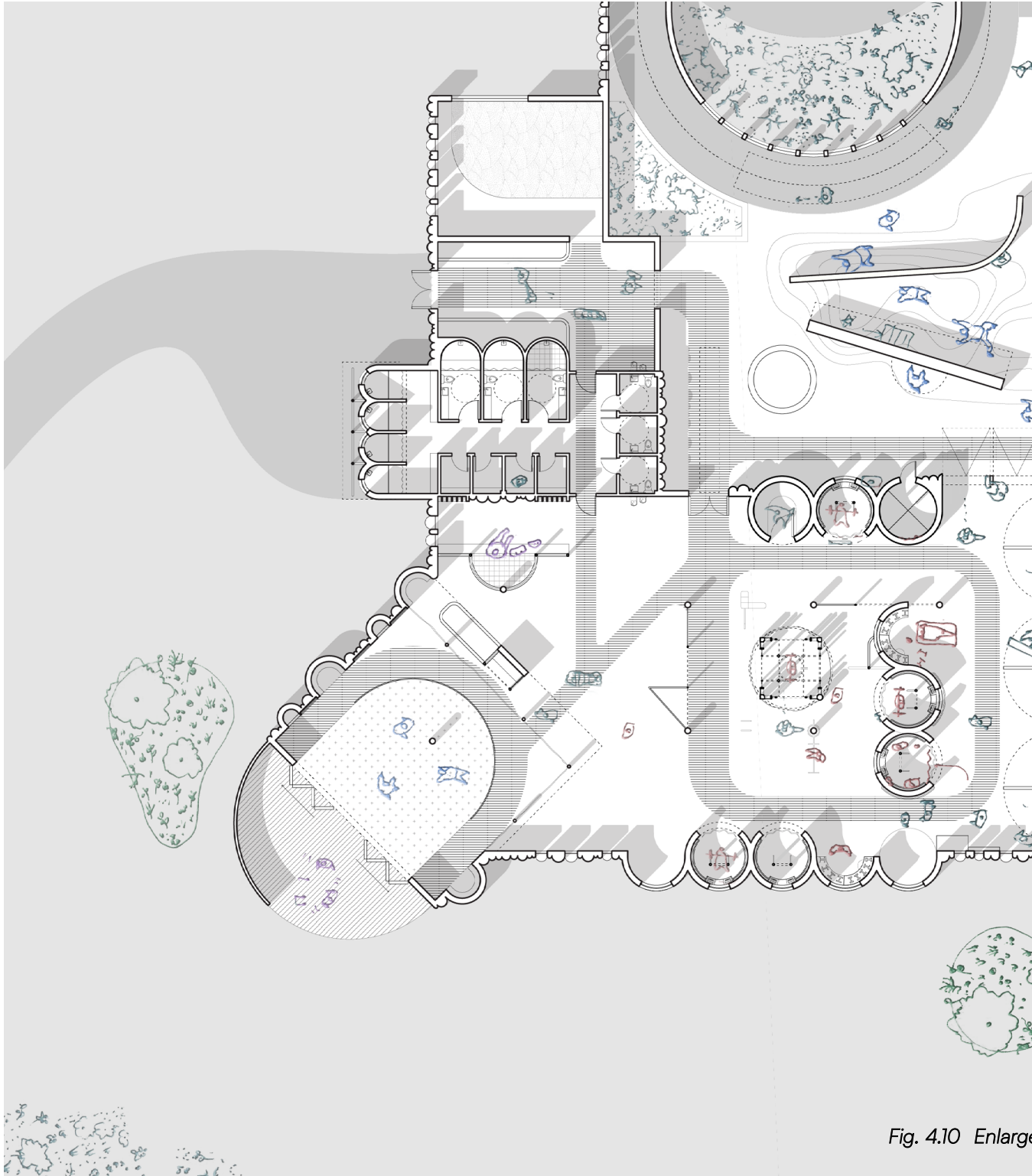
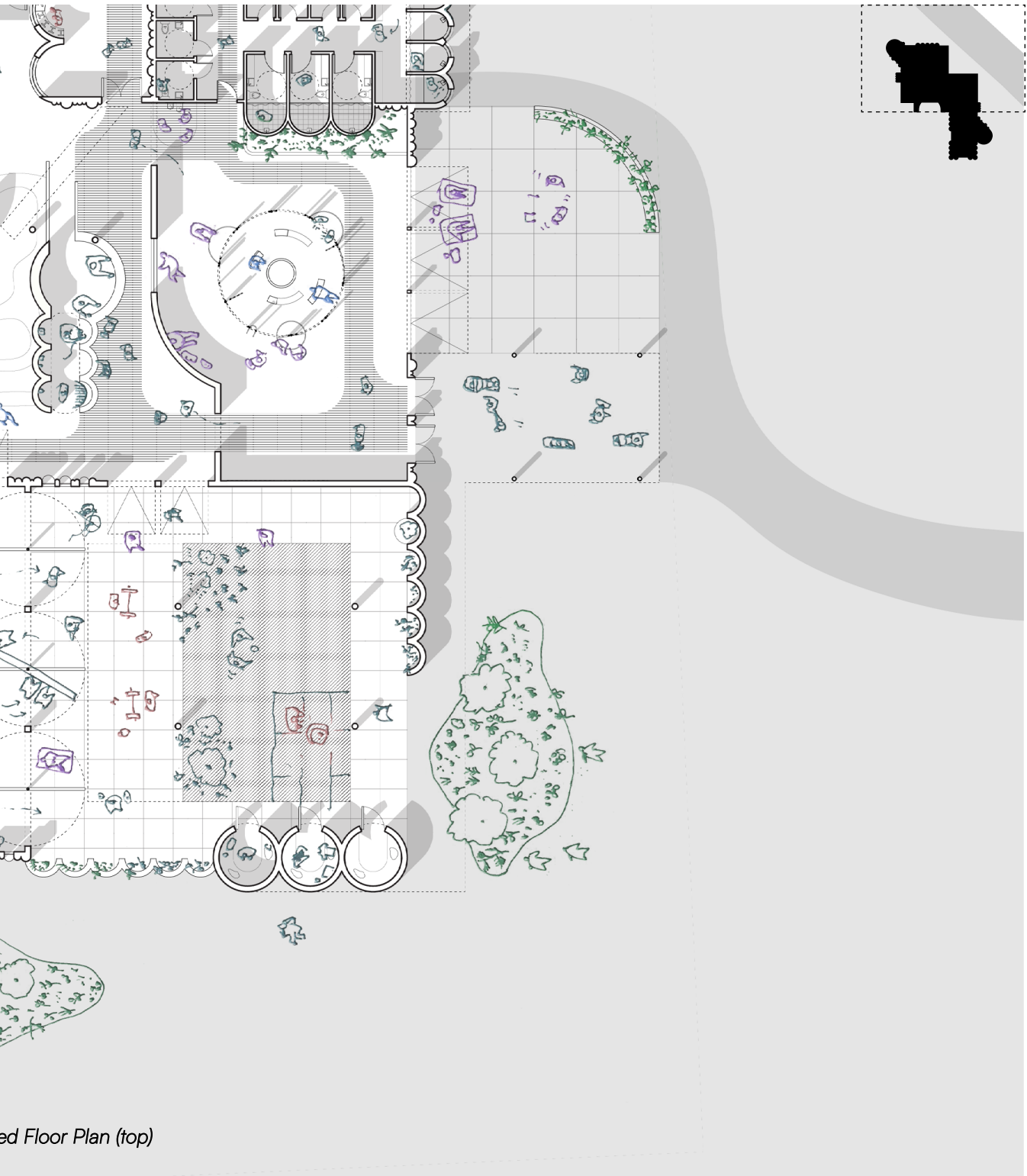


Fig. 4.10 Enlarge



ed Floor Plan (top)

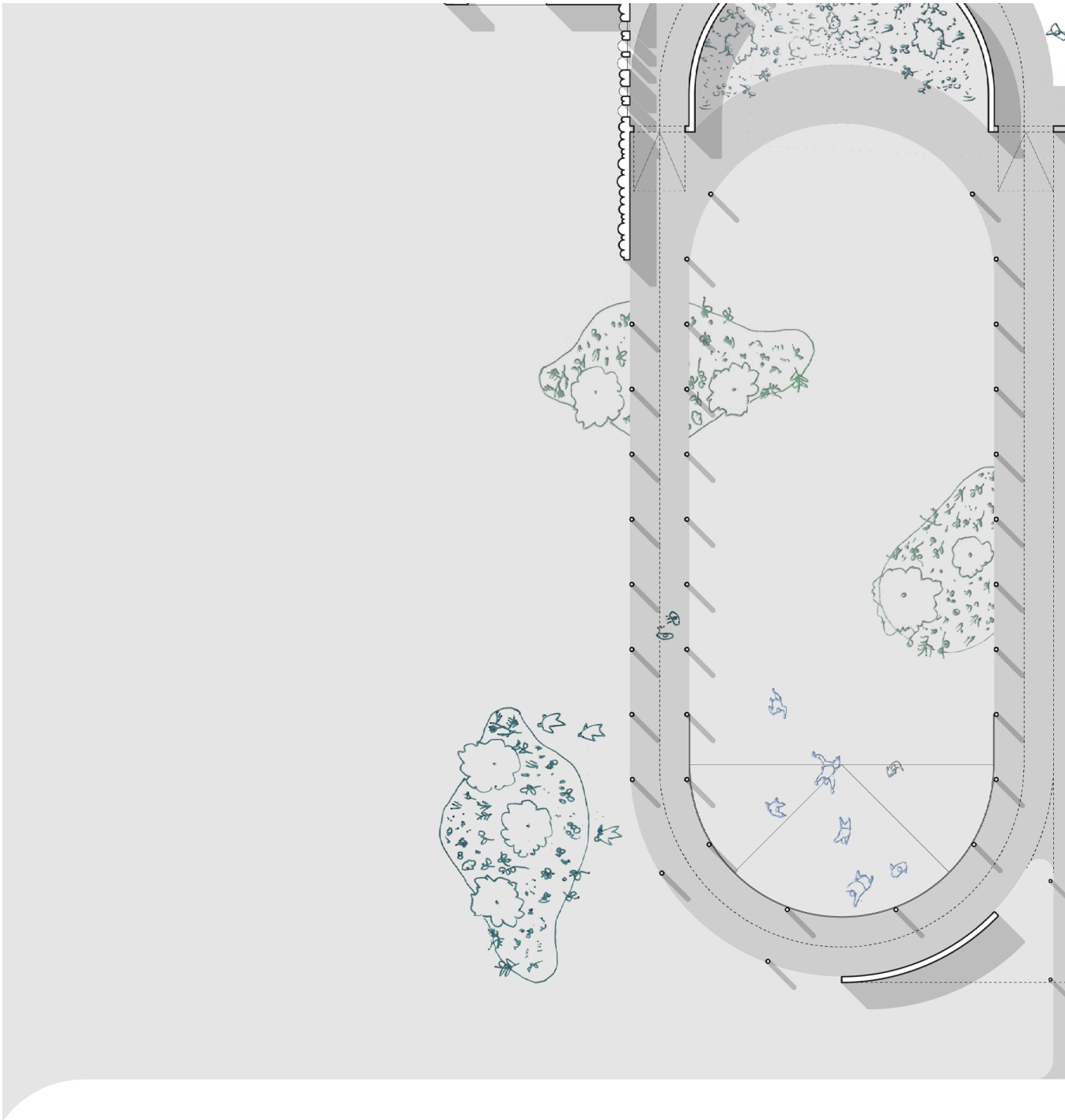
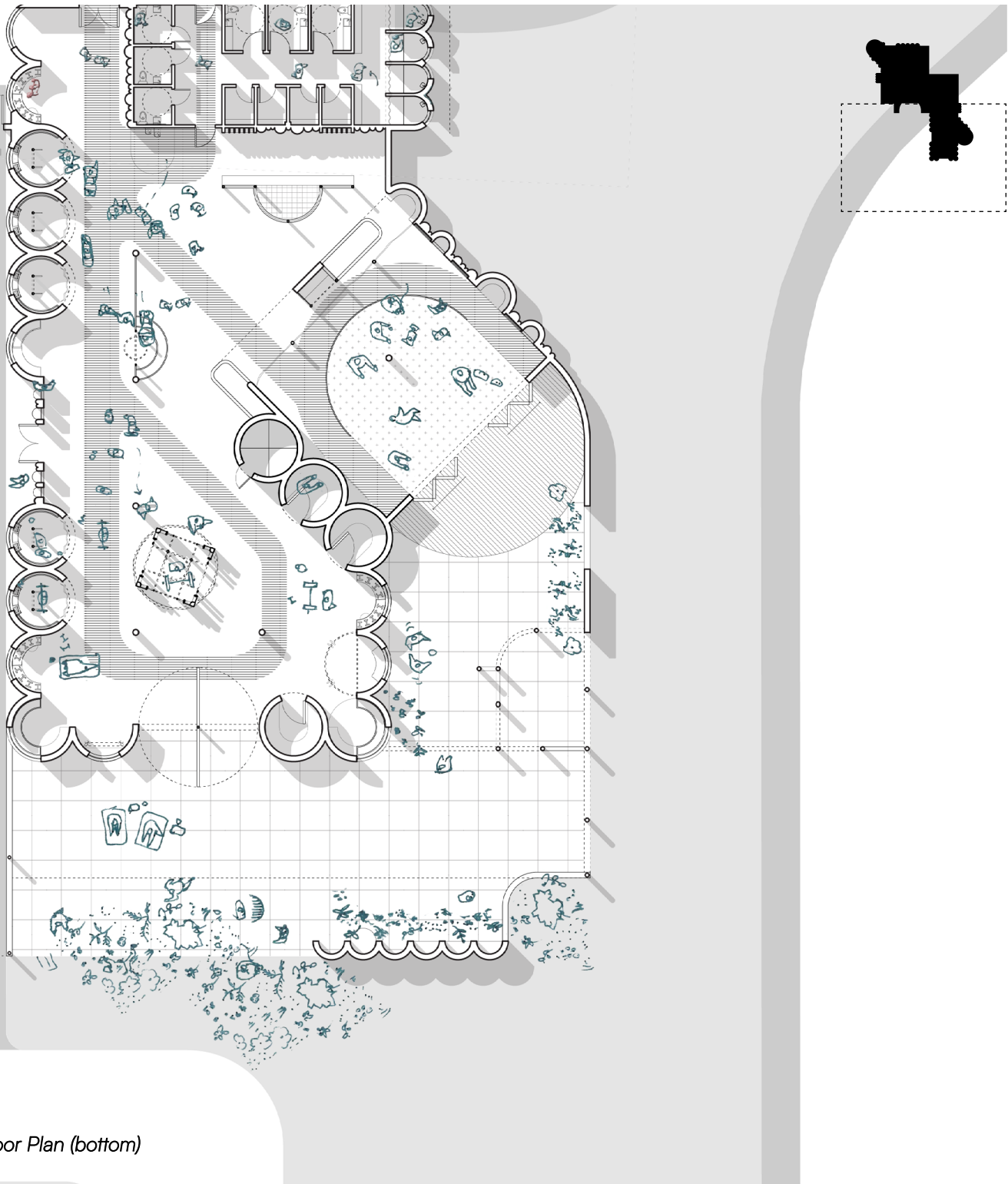


Fig. 4.11 Enlarged



Floor Plan (bottom)

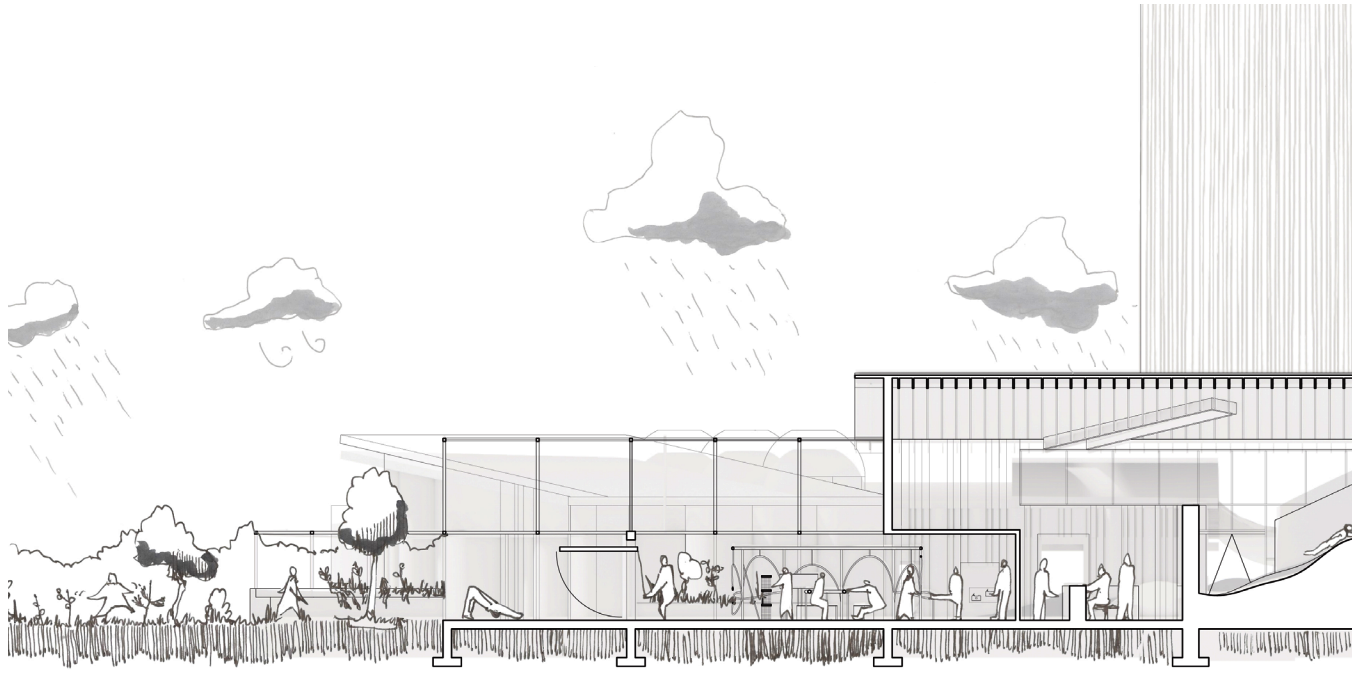


Fig. 4.12

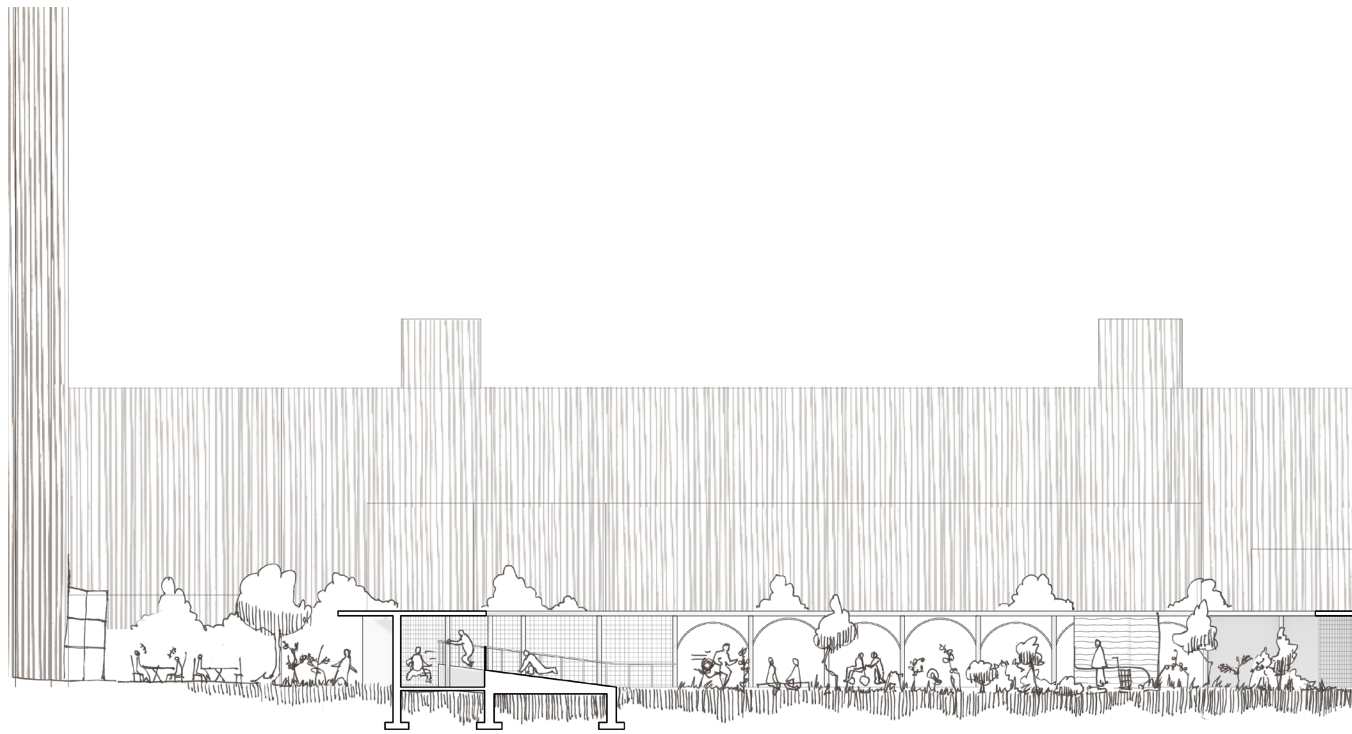
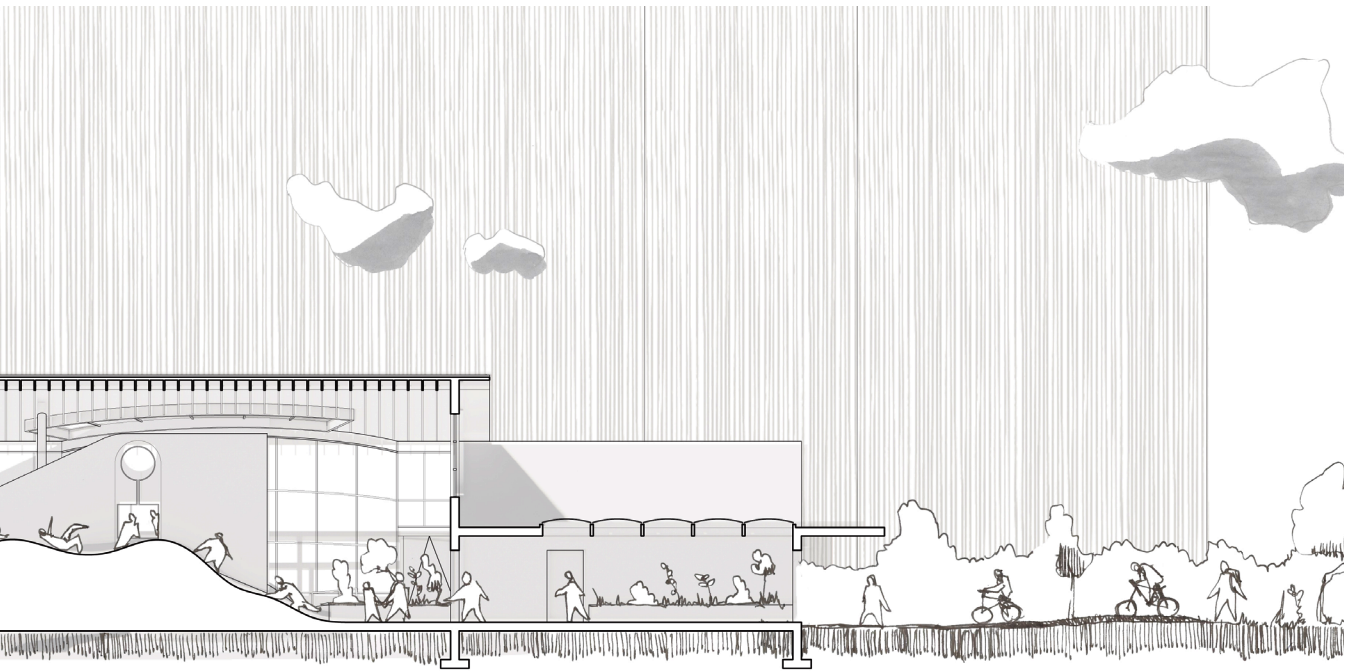
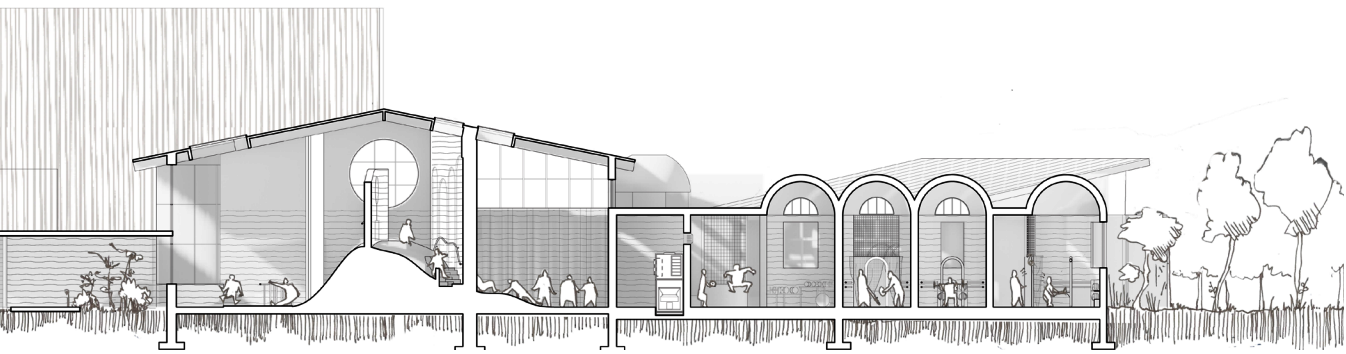
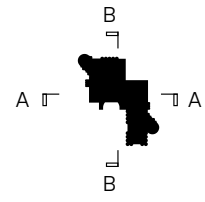


Fig. 4.13



Section AA



Section BB

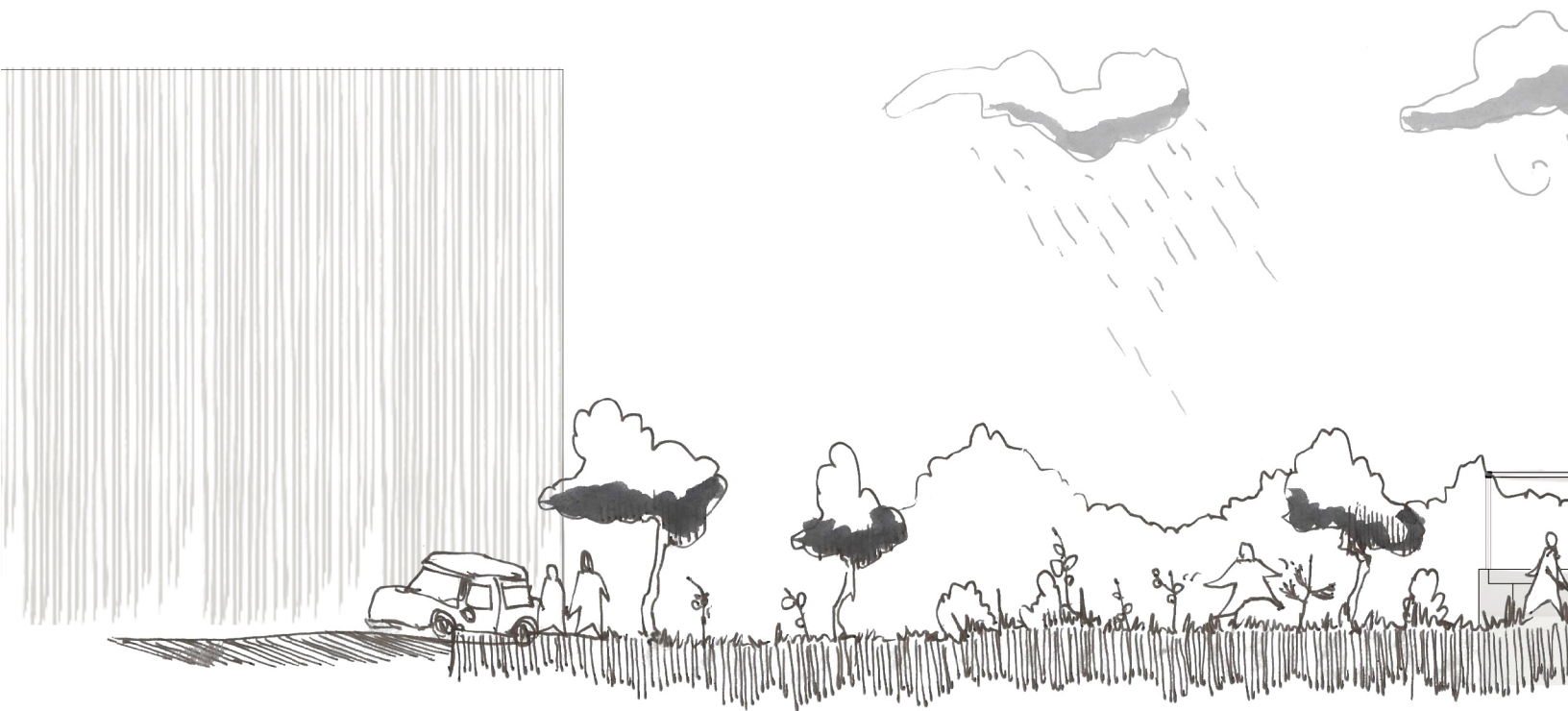
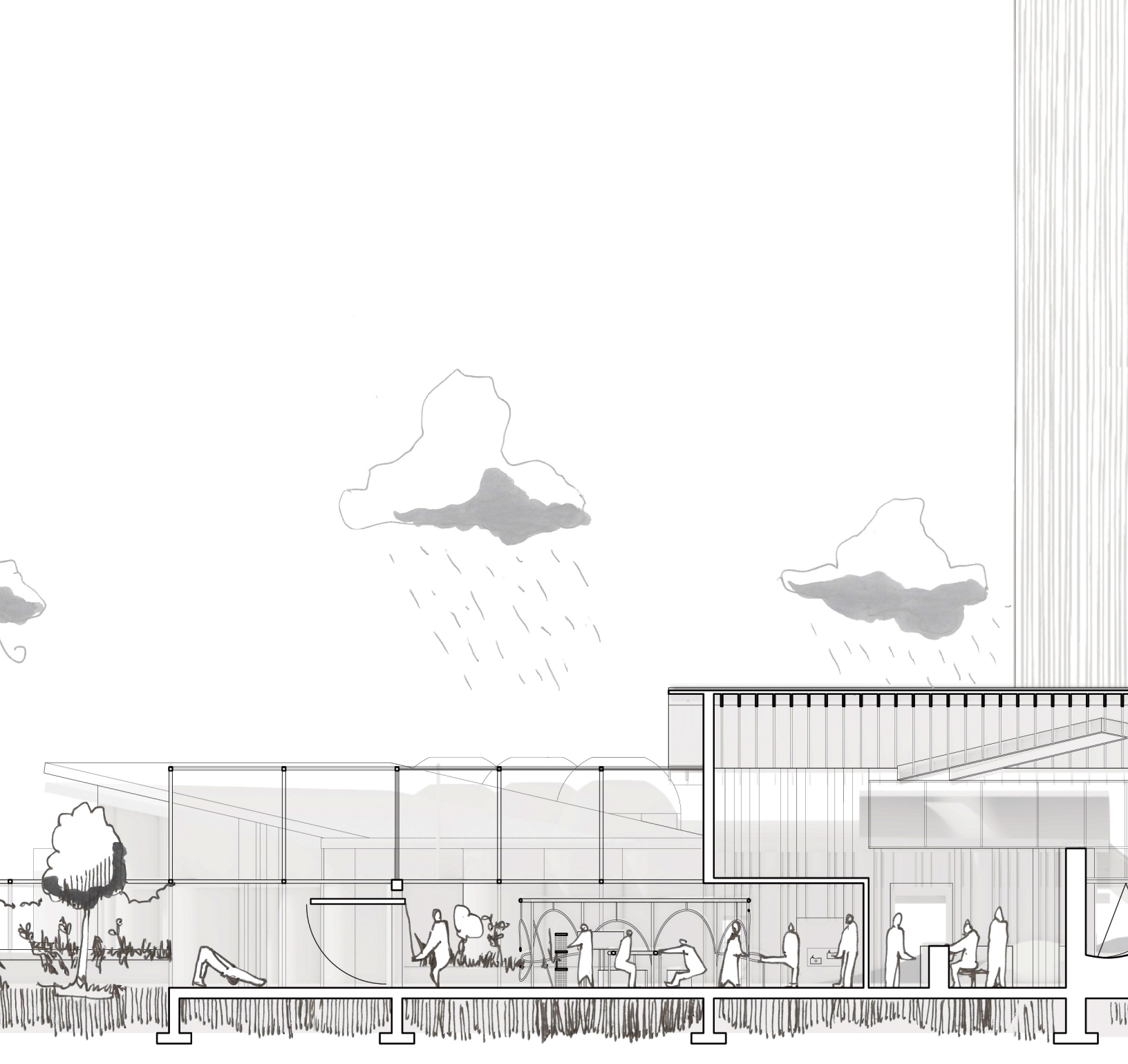


Fig. 4.14 Enlarge



Section AA (left)

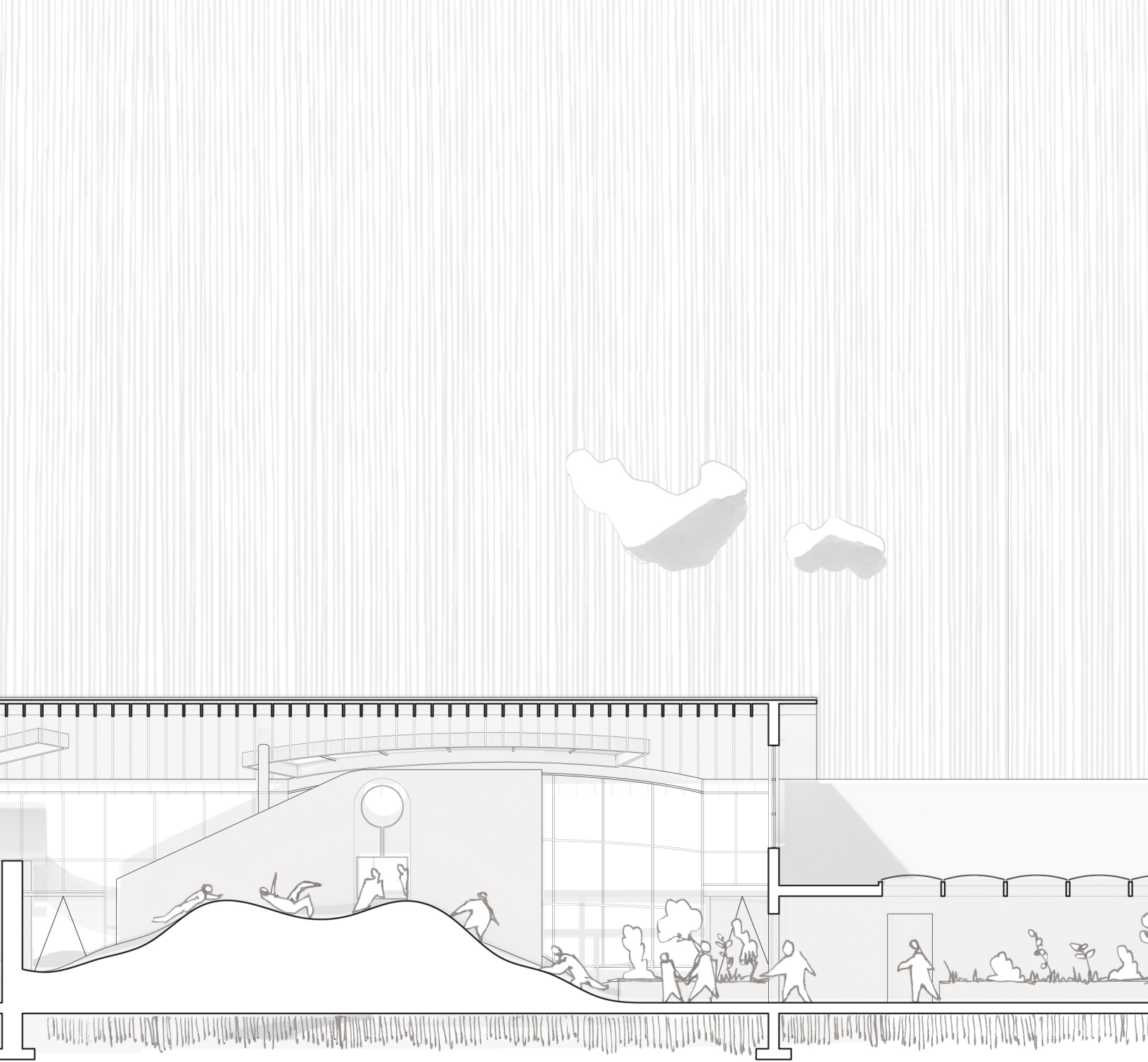
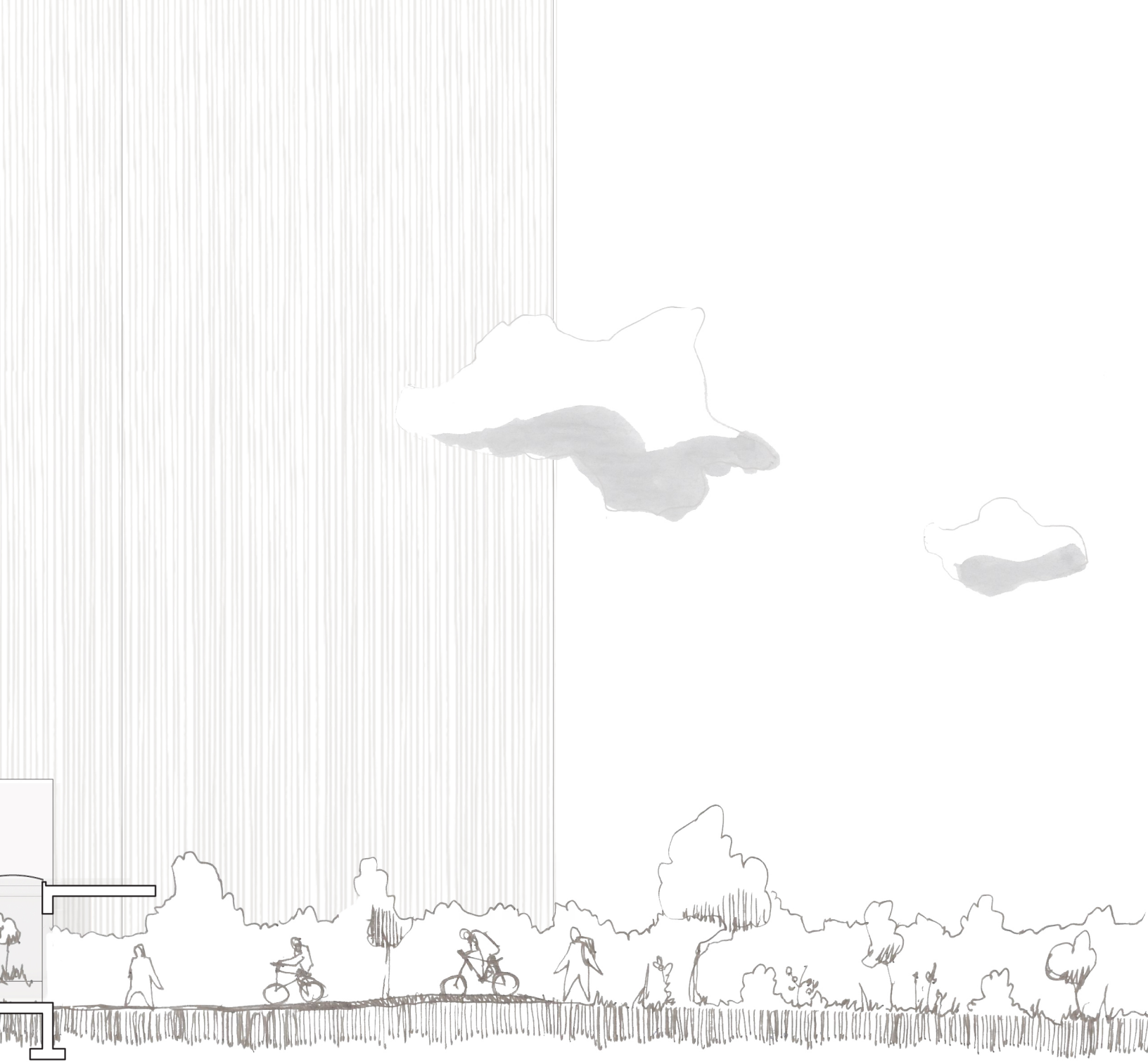


Fig. 4.15 Enlarged



Section AA (right)

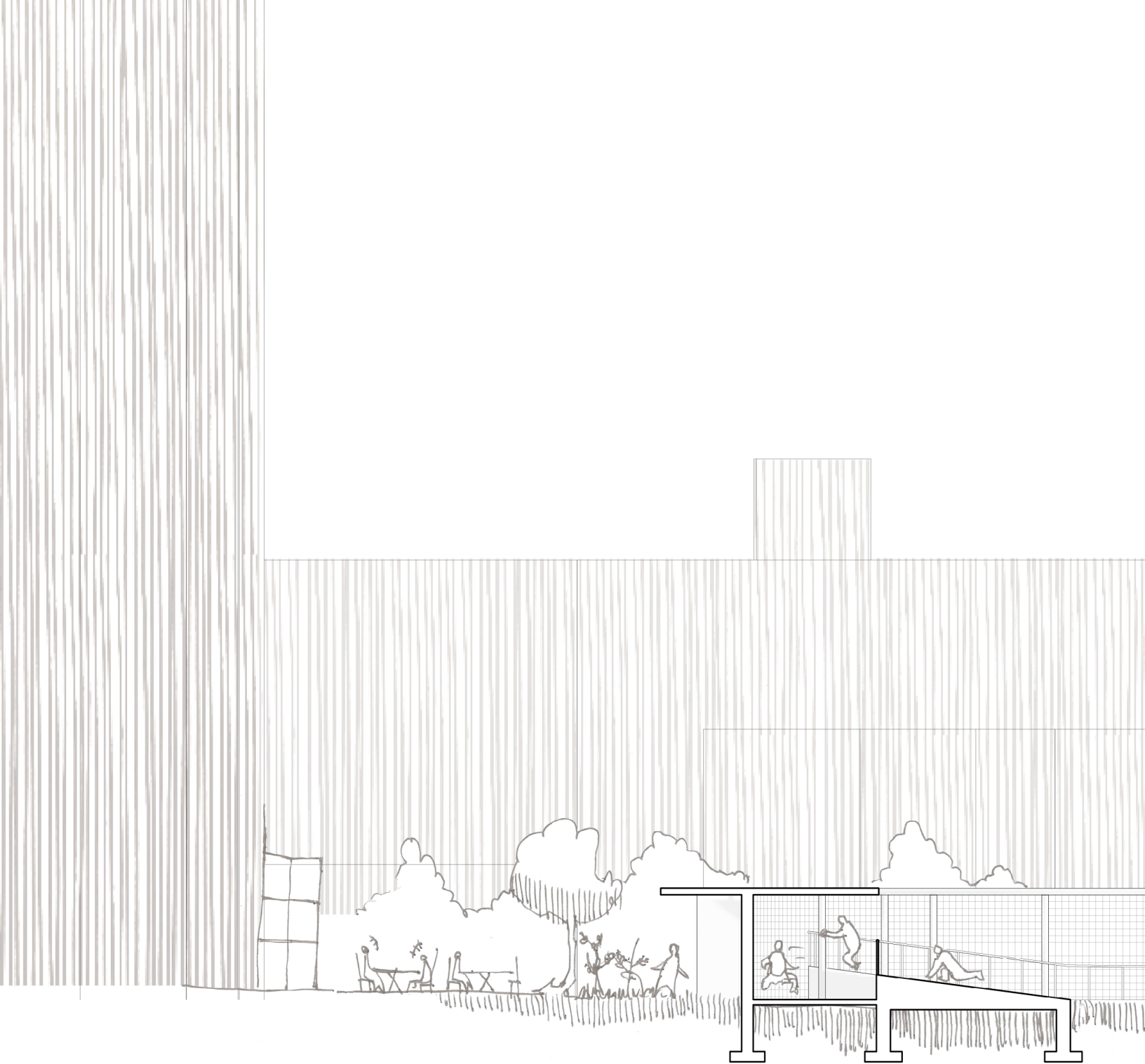
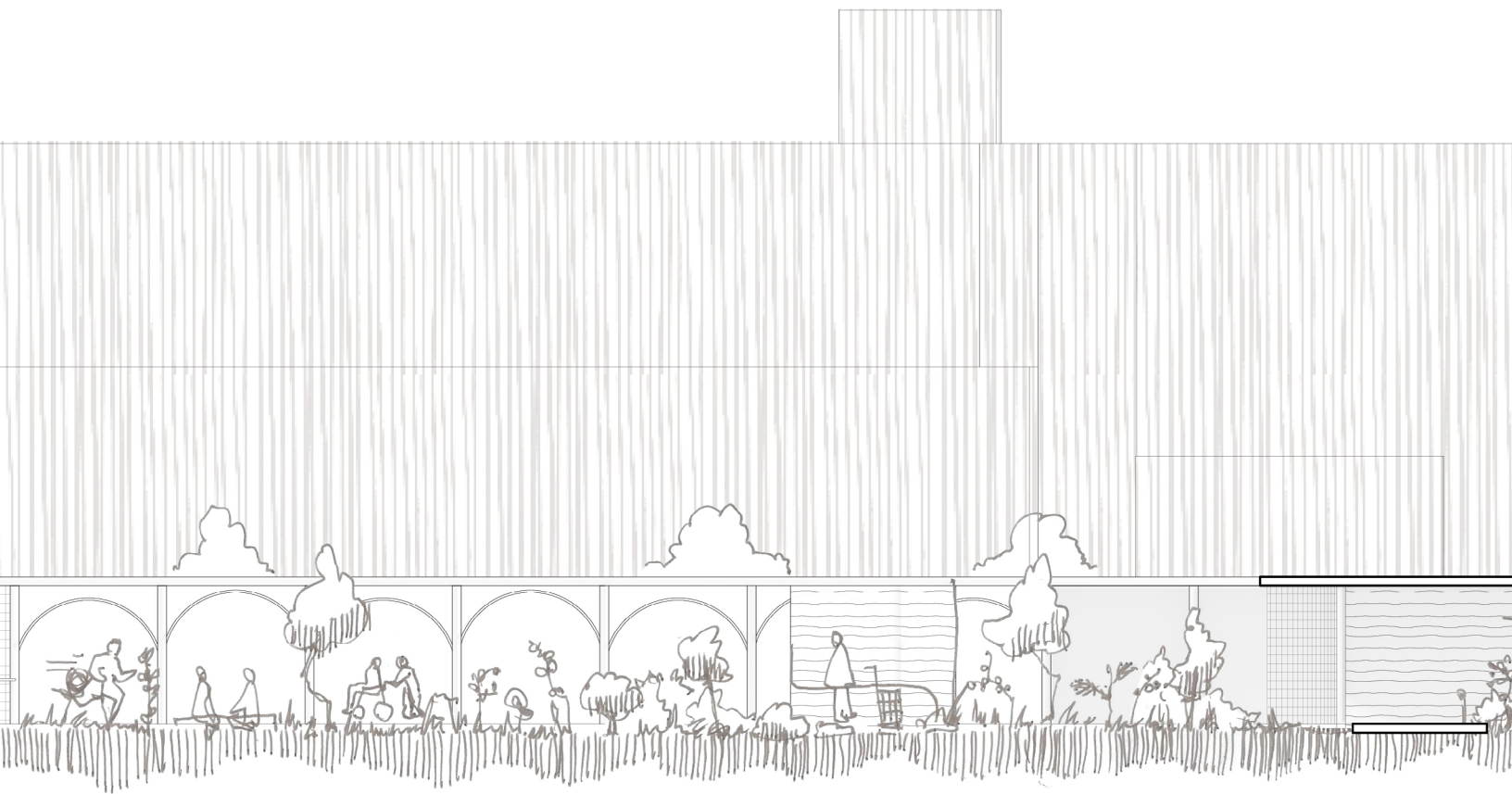


Fig. 4.16 Enlarge



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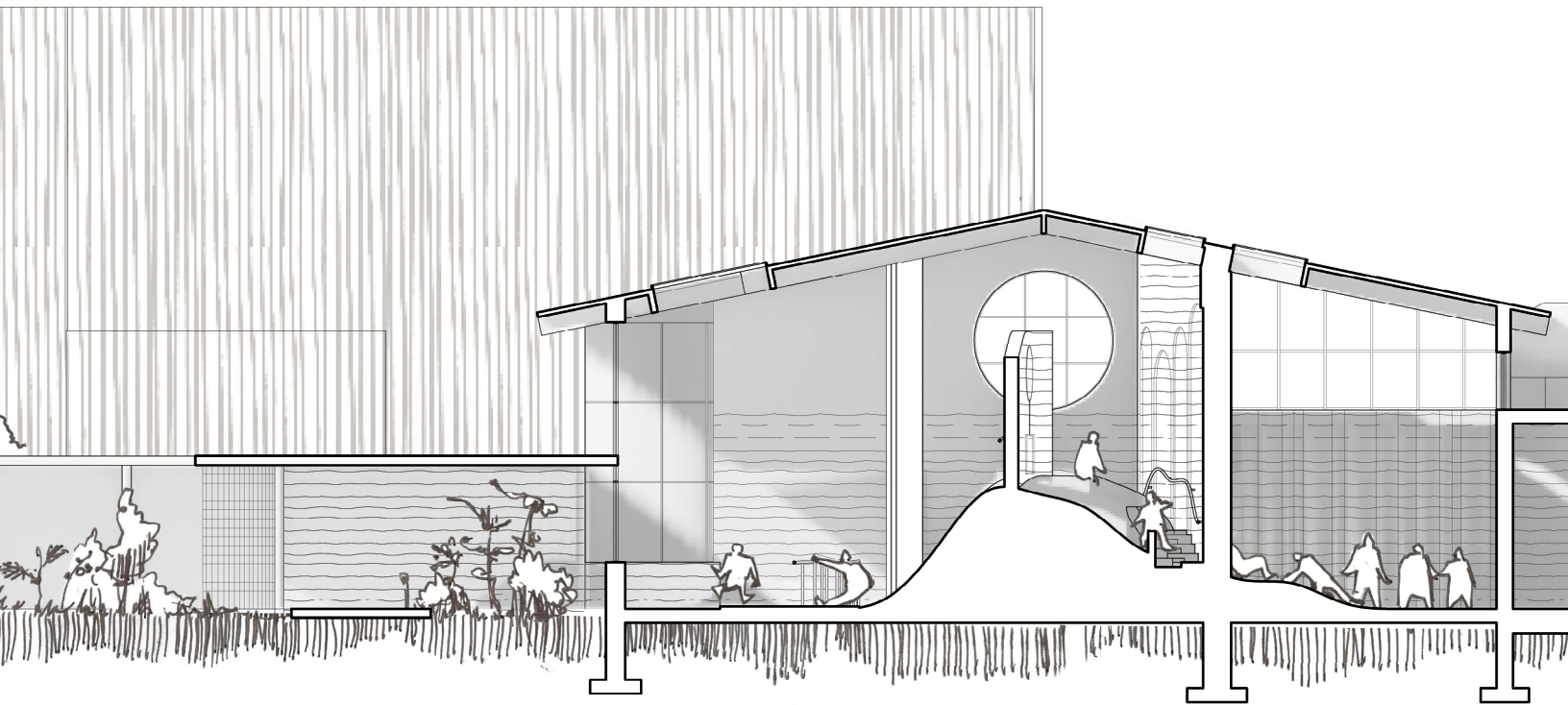
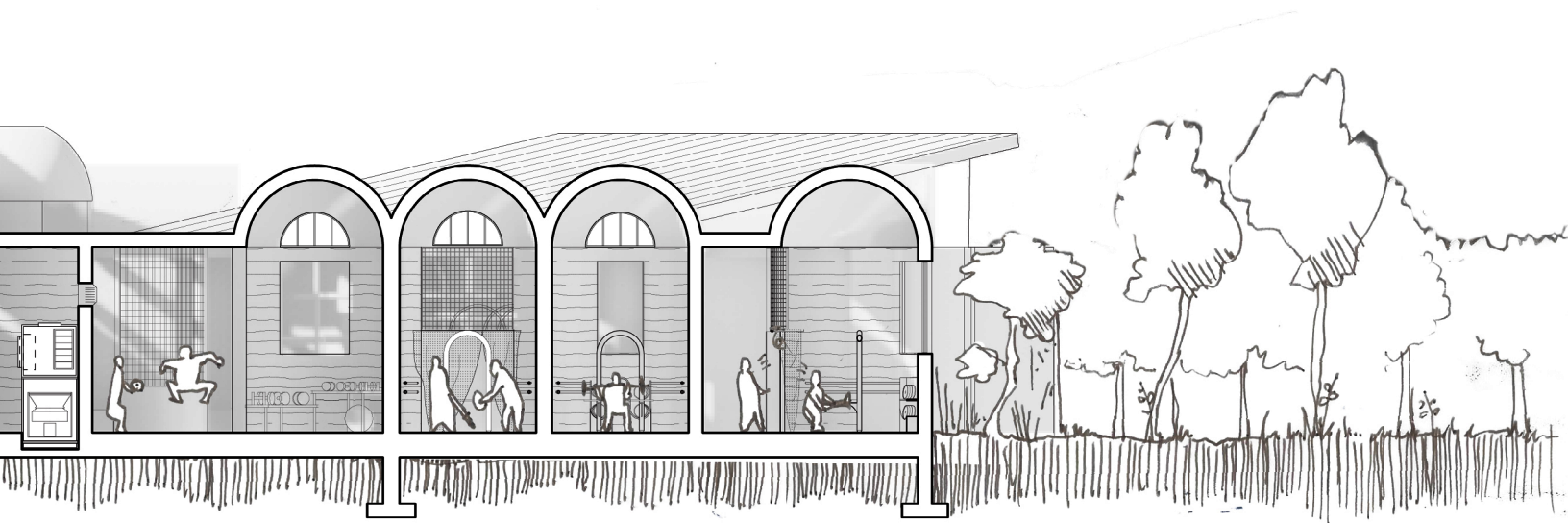
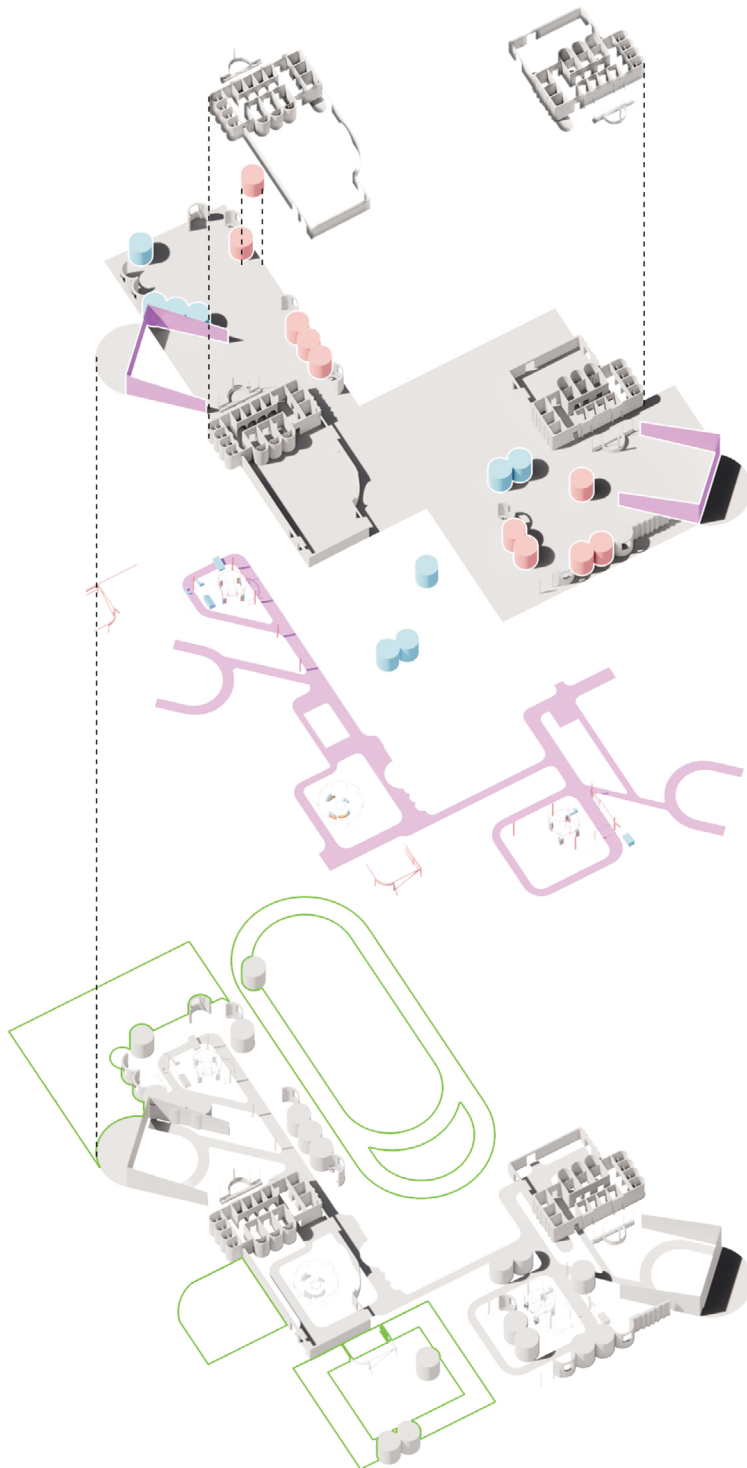


Fig. 4.17 Enlarge



Section BB (right)



gender neutral washrooms and vestibules for stretching are close to the multiple entrances. These allow users to discretely use the changeroom before entering a gym space

collective rooms and pods are scattered & mixed to avoid isolating certain exercise groups to newcomers.

wayfinding + colourful gym equipment to encourage users to play with their surroundings

close access to semi-open and open spaces for unprogrammed workouts (accessible in the winter if you are brave enough)

Fig. 4.18 Exploded Program Axonometric

The Entrance

One of the defining aspects of the site was that it allowed entry from multiple directions, allowing the program of the proposed building to be experienced in different succession. Rather than having one main entrance, the building has multiple entrances to avoid congregating and physical gatekeeping at a singular entrance. Not all who enter the gym are comfortable with being perceived while entering a space when they are self-conscious of their physique or fitness goals, according to *safe space housing lgbtq youth experiencing homelessness*, providing discreet entry also improves the space's ability to "look and feel as 'home-like' as possible".⁹⁸ Gyms should apply this strategy into their entry ritual, as for many the experience of exercising in a social space can be very daunting and uncomfortable. (Re)creation acknowledges that not all who enter are comfortable with their own bodies, and thus do not wish to be perceived by strangers. This issue is also reflected in Perez's *Data for Invisible Women*, in which a study on public spaces discovered that single entrance areas would often be congregated by boys, discouraging girls from entering.⁹⁹ To discourage the production of male-dominant social spaces, (Re)creation is given multiple entrances accessed by a membership key fob to provide discreet entry options for varying levels of privacy.

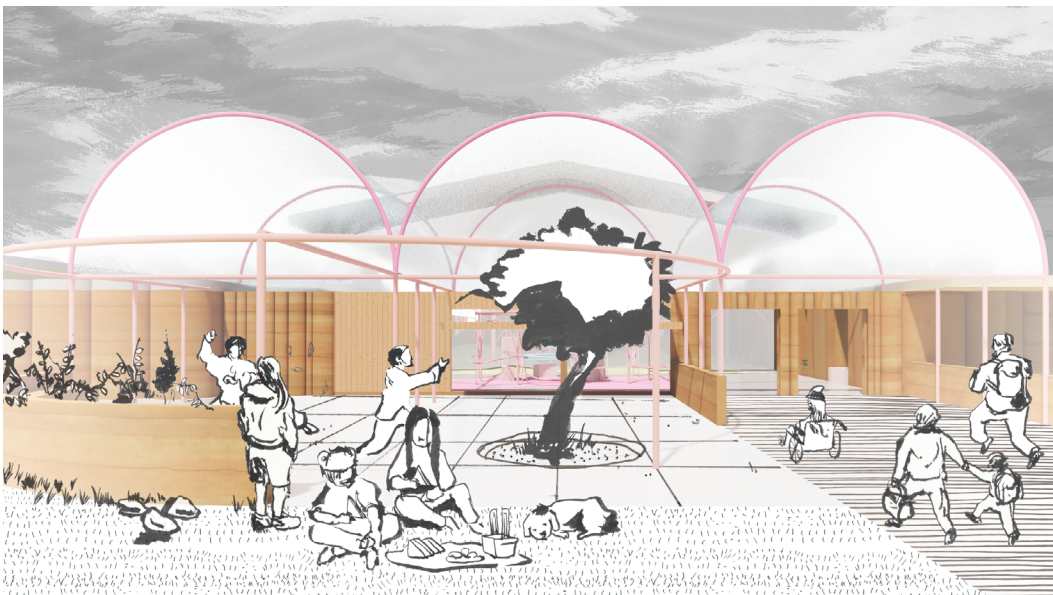


Fig. 4.19 Main Entrance

The Vestibule

The purpose of the vestibule within conventional building design is experimented with in this project. Serving as a threshold space between the exterior and interior, its role for reducing heat loss into the building is furthered as it also serves as a space for users to literally “warm up” their bodies. The main vestibule in (Re)creation features stretching bars which allows individuals to come in, stretch, and pull their muscles which have been relatively sedentary during the day. Stretching and warming up is an essential part of a workout process, yet gyms offer limited space dedicated to these activities, particularly when real estate is limited. Thus, the architecture implies that stretching activities are secondary to defined exercise regimens such as yoga or weight lifting routine, which is typically prescribed in an area characterized by partitions or equipment. The vestibule in (Re)creation allows one to gradually ready the mind and body for more strenuous and intense work and de-stressing the tension in the muscles, while engaging in social activity with other incoming users.

The Changeroom

The design approach of (Re)creation’s changerooms was greatly influenced by architect Joel Sanders’ *Stalled!* project, a research and design project dedicated to proposing transgender friendly public washrooms for everyone regardless of race, gender, age, religion or disability. The design of *Stalled!* addresses the social anxiety experienced by previously marginalized members of society and is characterized by its multi-user solution which avoids separating users by binaries.¹⁰⁰ The gender-neutral change rooms of (Re)creation are divided into two modules located at a near vicinity to each of the building’s entrances, allowing users to discreetly access the change room amenities efficiently without being perceived by other gym users. In critical *geography of physical activity*, Dr. Stephanie Coen points out the discomfort of having to walk through a public space in order to access a private one, “you have to walk right by all these machines to get to the women’s change rooms and there’s like mirrors”¹⁰¹. Alexander Kira notes that while public washrooms are “public” in a strict sense, the user’s notions of “mineness” or “territories of the self” are constantly at risk of being violated, as these boundaries are a “set of loosely implied or felt affinities based largely on perceived social differences.”¹⁰²

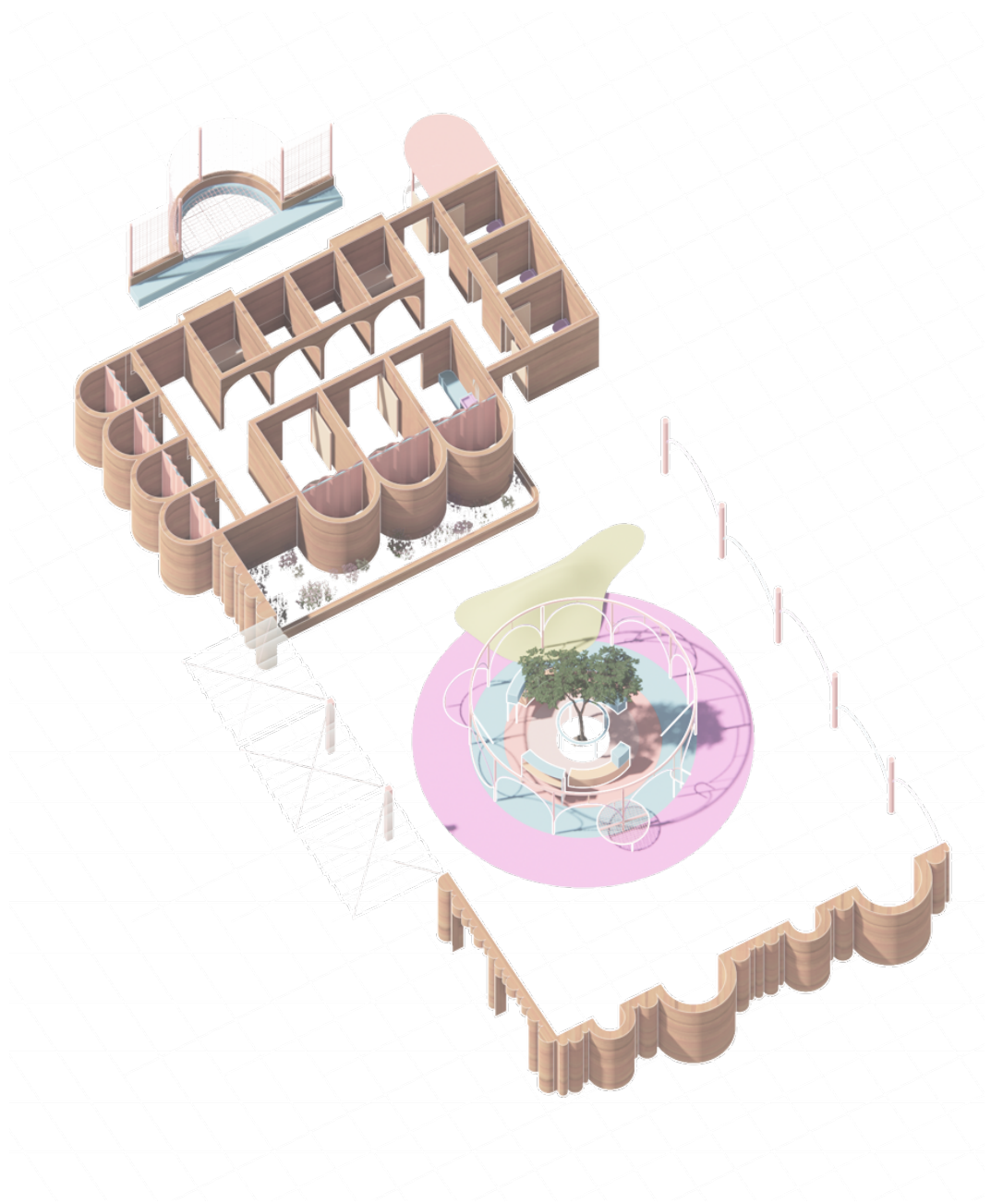


Fig. 4.20 Vestibule and Changeroom Axonometric

The conventional typology of a gym washroom consisting of a shared space for washing, changing results in a space which lacks the consideration for those with higher levels of discomfort. The intimate act of undressing and grooming is neglected as you are perceived by strangers who enter and leave as they please.

The locker room (in conjunction with a gym) is where bodies are made to fit. Yet in the locker room there may be constant rem(a)inders of how unfit bodies may be. Unfit, not in terms of their muscularity, although this too is probably a source of constant anxiety, but in terms of what shape the body is in, for instance, when it is covered and dripping with the bodily residues of sporting activity.¹⁰³

To dismantle this neglect of the body's vulnerability, change room amenities are individualized and completely partitioned to maximize privacy and control, prioritizing one's comfort levels. Each module includes three ADA-accessible toilet stalls, four changing stalls, four shower stalls, and three stalls with all previously mentioned amenities. These stalls are designed to accommodate individuals of varying bodies and comfort levels; it normalizes the notion that all rituals associated with cleansing and excreting within the change room are completely private, regardless of one's comfort level. The conventional approach to same-sex change rooms must be abolished within the proposal for an inclusive gym space, as well as addressing the privacy levels of the diverse range of gym users who use this programmed space for a variety of different washing, showering, changing, excreting and grooming activities.

Materiality

The gym spaces within (Re)creation are contrasted between the bright gym equipment and the bare rammed earth walls. Its heavy rammed earth walls protect its interior from the natural elements, acting as a thermal bank to store heat within the colder months. Its durability allows it to withstand heavy impact, which must be considered for gym use. This rework of the gym actively questions the excessive use of rubber, metal and mirrors which have defined the building language of 21st century fitness gyms. By avoiding materials often associated with the cold, logical nature of factories, (Re)creation as a gym facility has rejected the Modernist idea that a building is a factory for the body as a machine, rather it focuses on nurturing one's ability to grow both physically and mentally.

On your balance point on the floor in front of you, the pressure on your feet, the feel of your back angle, the bar in your hands and against your back, and your general sense of the balance of the movement, your sensory input is much richer than that provided visually by the mirror image.¹⁰⁴

In a space lined with mirrors, the user is pressured to over-rely on their sight, rather than training their body awareness. By omitting mirrors from the gym, users are encouraged to rely on their kinesthetic sense as well as ask for cues or feedback from nearby individuals. In *Queer Space*, Aaron Betsky describes mirrored space as something that both affirms and destabilizes its users.¹⁰⁵ Mirrors are limited within (Re)creation, to prevent the creation of competitive spaces, as well as discouraging panoptic traits which will influence gym users to survey others as well as themselves. In addition, the efficiency of mirrors for physical training is questionable as well, "a mirror is a bad tool because it provides information about only one plane of the three: the frontal, the one that gives you the least information about your position and your balance".¹⁰⁶ While mirrors as a correctional tool can be to a limited extent, its constant presence in a gym becomes problematic, demanding persistent self-surveillance from the user. To compensate for the lack of mirrors, (Re)creation employs tactile and approachable materials to emphasize that the gym is a space which heightens one's awareness of the built environment. The warm rammed earth encourages users to lean and push on its walls, the colorful

railing and bars denote playfulness, and the various floor vinyl and wood floor finishes allow one to run and crawl across the community center barefoot.

But the gym, a space dedicated to the cultivation of the body, is a rare building type that has the potential to counteract this prevailing tendency. In these mirrored-lined interiors sweating bodies, wired to headphones and video monitors, assume a variety of poses that bring them into direct contact with all the surfaces of architecture—walls, floor and even ceiling.¹⁰⁷

The gym is a program which directs the user to focus on building surfaces which one typically ignores, the ceiling - during exercises such as the bench press and the sit-up, and the floor - during exercises such as the prone leg curl or the ab crunch. During these types of exercises, the user engages in the tactility of the architecture, which we rarely have the chance to experience in conventional architecture. Thus, the shape of (Re)creation's roof and floors change throughout the building to reflect its different programs: the vestibule with curved polycarbonate, the wood glulam roof of the play mountain, and the curved steel clad roof of the individual training pods. The skylight roof in the communal space lights up the space, in contrast to the pods, which become a much more intimate experience.

In contrast to the roof, the floor changes in form and material as well, primarily in the form of the "play mountain". Here, people of all ages and physical ability converge to explore the intersection between their physical bodies and the oscillating floor which blurs the boundary between horizontal and vertical architectural elements. The play mountain is minimal, creating a space of temporary isolation as the user finds themselves between two huge walls. The play of scale becomes a factor, further stimulating one's senses and awareness. Dlegez's exploration of altering body-environment scaling within fictional works such *Gulliver's Travels* and *Alice in Wonderland* can be applied to the envisioning of an alternative gym environment:

Altering the scales of human reality is undoubtedly one of the most straightforward and simple ways to disrupt ordinary experience, and thereby reveals our implicit reliance and expectations about the structure of space, places, people and things, as well as our place therein. Making the “normal” world unpredictable, or less predictable, is a central modus operandi of fantastic and horror fiction, as well as experimental research¹⁰⁸

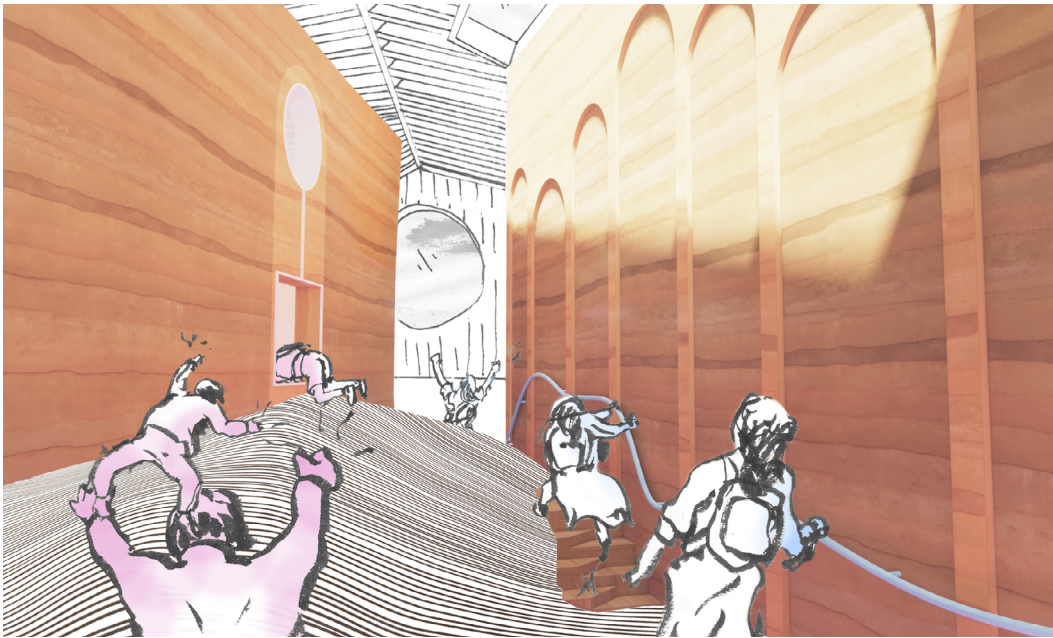


Fig. 4.21 Play Mountain

In constant dialogue with each other, the roof, floor, and walls of (Re)creation reflect the philosophy of Frederick Kiesler, “architecture here becomes an infinite, uterine cave, nurturing a kind translucent body so that the brain can thrive and feel”¹⁰⁹ as well as that of Arakawa & Gins objective of using design to denaturalize the standard body. The architectural changes on both the roof and ground plane evolve and shift as the user wanders throughout (Re)creation, stimulating both one’s visual and kinesthetic interaction with their physical surroundings. The experience of traveling through the building becomes a quest or journey, the floor gradually deviating and transforming into a mountain, challenging all to climb, play and stretch on it.

Even the act of prescribing architectural elements of non-conventional standards have the ability to disrupt one’s preconceived notions of spatial awareness, its distances, heights, volume and sizes can be varied, forcing the user to take more careful explorations of their bodily and perceptual alterations.¹¹⁰ The walls of (Re)creation feature curved repeating vertical elements which change in scale as one walks past them, emphasizing that within this space. A building’s standard is typically proportioned to an idea of a fixed standard of the human body, by incorporating (Re)creation’s floors, roofs, and walls of shifting sizes it forwards a notion that a building for the body should not adhere to a fixed set of binary standards, rather it should transform to accommodate bodies of all shapes and sizes.

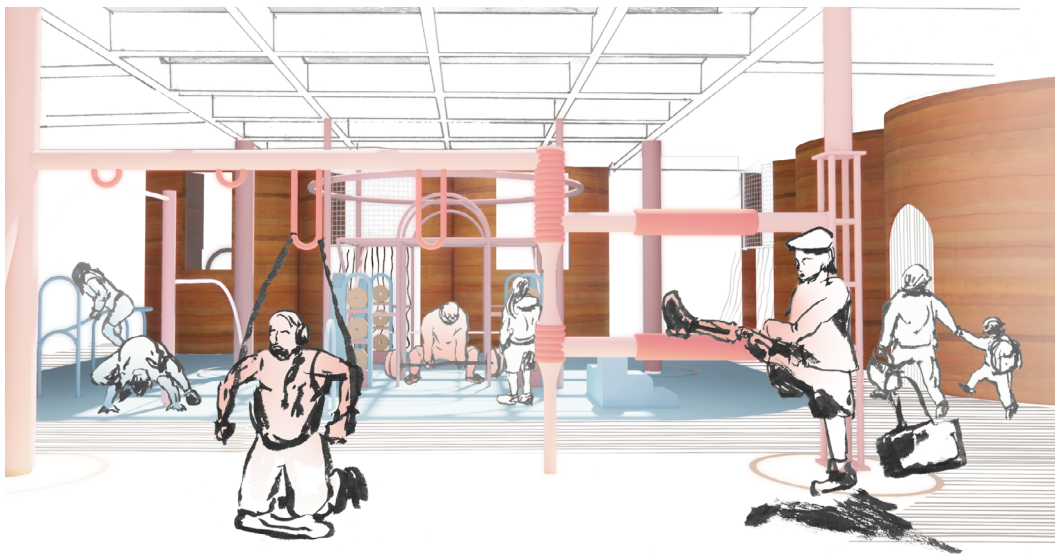


Fig. 4.22 Communal Gym Space

Blurring Boundaries

The design of (Re)creation is also a critique of the materialist obsession associated with fitness culture. Typically, in order to gain access to both equipment and knowledge for physical capital, one must pay for entrance into a particular group or space. The result of this is a consumerist approach of selling health which prioritizes the sales of memberships, with little regard to how many users actually use a gym on a regular basis. Thus, gyms are designed to accommodate less members than they accept, in 2019 it was reported that on average only 18% of gym club members regularly used their membership.¹¹¹ In contrast, there are free methods to work out in the public realm, such as outdoor gyms and running tracks, however are limited in accessibility due to location, safety, and climate. One should not guarantee their success within the gym based on consumption of fitness-related goods and services, the ethos of (Re)creation is driven by the notion that everyone should have access to the knowledge available to empower their body.

Rather than making exercise accessible only by paying, the community center offers open spaces that are open to all, creating semi-covered outdoor gyms that can even be used in the colder months. The outdoor areas of (Re)creation encourages new users to experiment and test out their physical abilities without committing to a membership plan. The building opens up in different directions, engaging the site while producing multiple spaces for working out outside. Operable doors are used to blur our notion of prescribed exercise, as we exercise our body in order to open up the walls of (Re)creation. Users are encouraged to perform portions of their daily workouts during sunny days, while those inside the building can enjoy natural cross ventilation. Within the building, curtains are employed where possible to create privacy between different fitness rooms in an approach which avoids the rigid partitioning of the space- limiting the creation of hierarchies between different exercise types as well as encouraging curious individuals to explore and try new areas of the gym. This is used for the collective yoga rooms, as well as the entrance for the training pods throughout (Re)creation, to minimize the production of threshold spaces which might deter newcomers from trying new activities. Rather than segregating individuals, parts of the body, and technologies of the gym with strict physical boundaries, the curtain symbolizes plasticity and fluidity, allowing users to come and go as they please.

From a thermal approach the gym is an interesting subject as the ideal temperature of a space varies depending on the user's preferences and their level of intensity. In this typology, the use of thermal discomfort can be employed to further engage the user in their physical activity, such as hot yoga to stimulate more sweat. Rather than being a thermally static space, (Re)creation is designed to balance hot and cold spaces to contribute to the experience of transitioning from one exercise space to the other. Workout pods built of rammed earth are more capable of retaining heat for a smaller square footage in comparison to group training areas, which accounts for the metabolic heat production of multiple people exercising within the same room; different heating strategies are employed to produce varying bodily experiences with heat and cold. In the warmer months, the cool earth pods become a desired spot to rest or train, in contrast to the community training spaces. Unlike conventional architecture which aims to maintain thermal comfort, (Re)creation uses thermal discomfort to destabilize the human body, similar to how its shifting bars accommodate individuals of different proportions, yet also force users to shift and adjust their own body in the act of everyday movements. In addition, raised access floor construction is used to ensure that the majority of HVAC and mechanical equipment is hidden under the flooring, rather than being exposed on the ceiling. This not only creates an aesthetically appealing ceiling condition devoid of mechanical clutter, they allow for layout flexibility as well improved temperature controls.

The ritualistic process of opening and closing the doors engages the user in moving in reciprocity with the building, it transforms in correspondence to changing weather conditions, similar to how a human body takes longer to warm up in the cold. Even in the winter months, the semi-covered pavilions protect the user from direct snowfall and harsh winds, allowing group workouts to be executed outside. By blurring the lines between structured exercise and unscheduled play, (Re)creation offers an endless combination of activities, reminding oneself that normal activities with no sense of duty are just as important to our health than rigid exercises. In addition, this design approach grants the user control over the conditions of their training environment, allowing them to adjust the openness of the building to their preferences. (Re)creation dismantles the idea that separate spaces are necessary for isolating sport and exercise from our daily lives. Its spatial conditions in which semi-rigid exercises can be performed next to those relaxing and enjoying the space prove that physical exercise can be performed anywhere regardless of time and location, while providing the essential tools for building the muscles of the body.

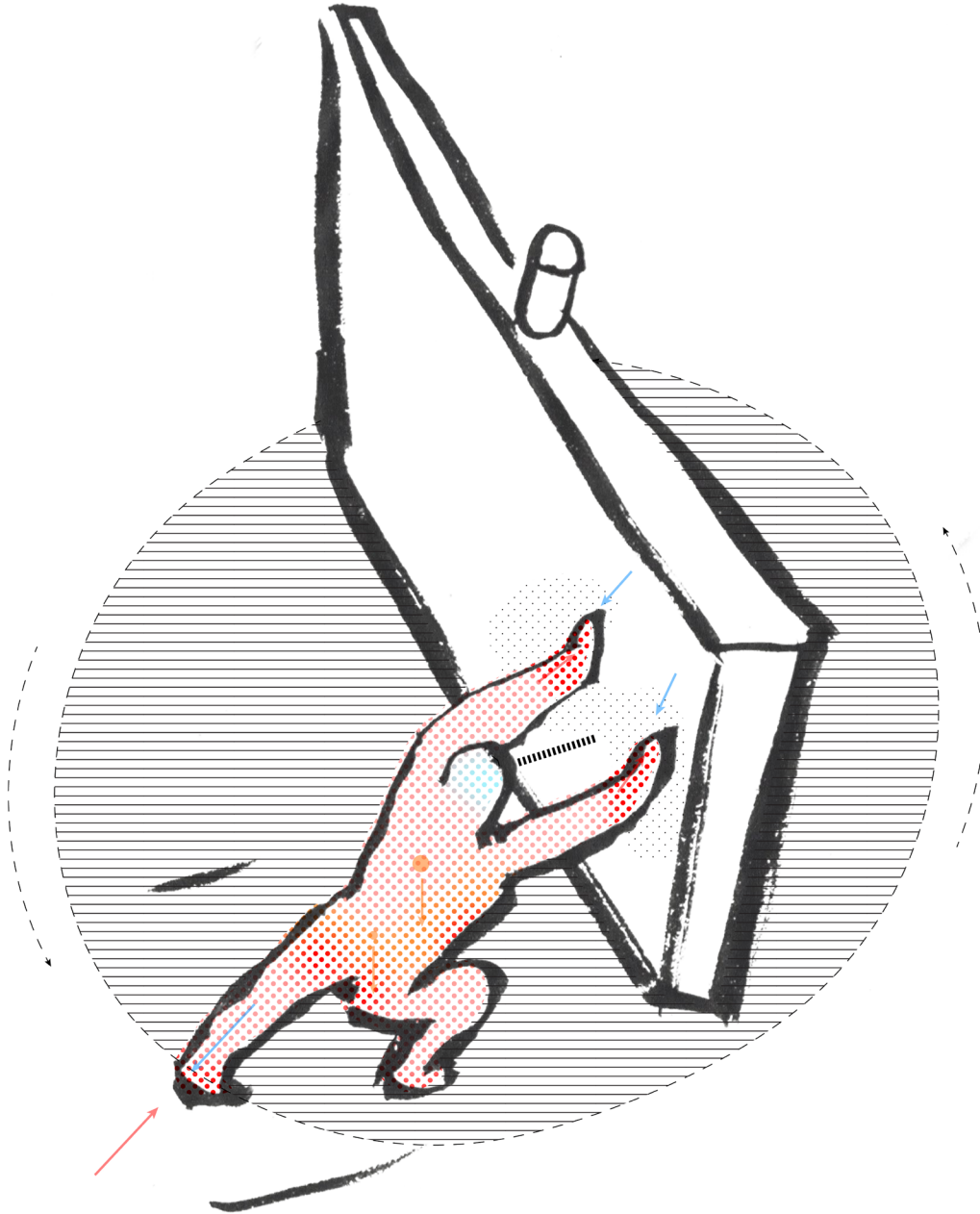


Fig. 4.23 Operable Door Movement Diagram

Fitness Program

The floor plan is composed of two separate interior gym spaces, a play mountain in the center, a running track, a foot bath and three different outdoor gym spaces of different sizes. The objective of program distribution was to ensure that there were multiple options of the same exercise space scattered through the floor plan to avoid the congregation and gathering at a central space. Perez noted in her book that in the 1990s, “single large open spaces were the problem, because these forced girls to compete with the boys for space”, which applies particularly in fitness gyms, further enforcing certain masculine and feminine norms.¹¹² While all genders have equal access to the gym, it has been traditionally dominated by the hyperbolic masculine male, thus discouraging “others” from using weights and often staying within the borders of the aerobics and cardio spaces. Rather than being a singular performance voyeuristic space, (Re)creation challenges the existing design approach of a gym by creating smaller spaces of varying intensities to cater to an array of people visiting the fitness center. The decentralization of the floor plan limits competition between users, as well as lessening the presence of the collective gaze on gym users. (Re)creation is characterized by individual rammed earth pods lining the facade of the building, which range from programs such as weight lifting and meditation. The communal spaces framed by the pods are partitioned to limit unsolicited staring, contrasting the isolating meditation and workout pods. Without the presence of mirrors, the unsolicited gaze becomes limited, and consent must be approved for any productive example of being perceived in the gym, such as checking someone’s form or “spotting” a fitness exercise. Upon entering the pods, the user leaves behind the public gym area, allowing them to move as they please without nonconsensual supervision of their fellow gym peers.

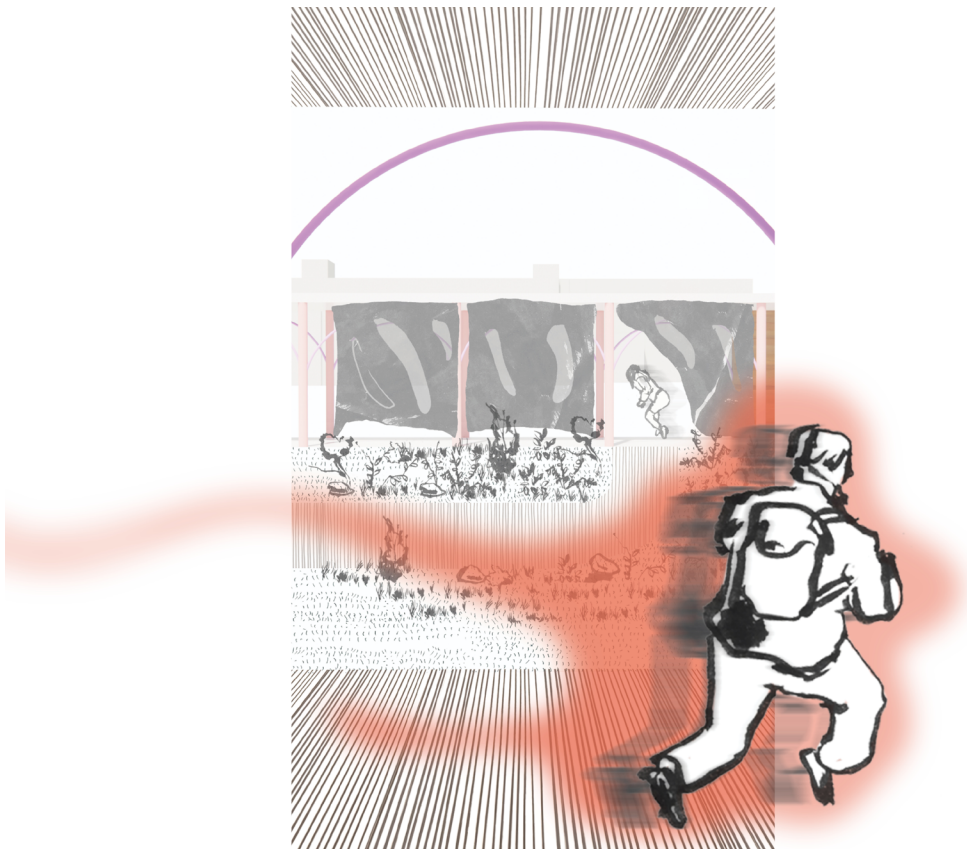


Fig. 4.24 A Light Jog in the Afternoon

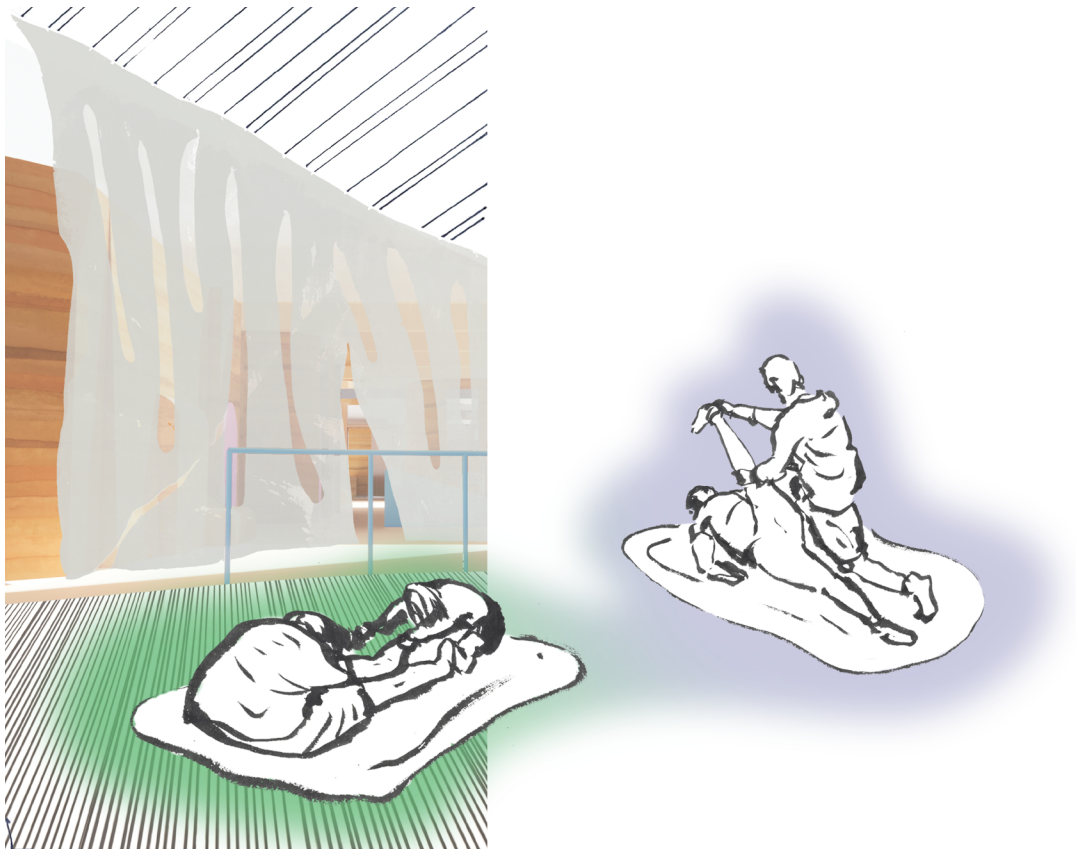
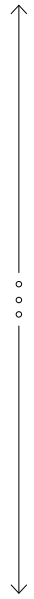


Fig. 4.25 A Soothing Morning Yoga Class



Fig. 4.26 A Quick Dip in the Foot Bath

Collective Exercise



Individualistic Exercise

Controlled Effort

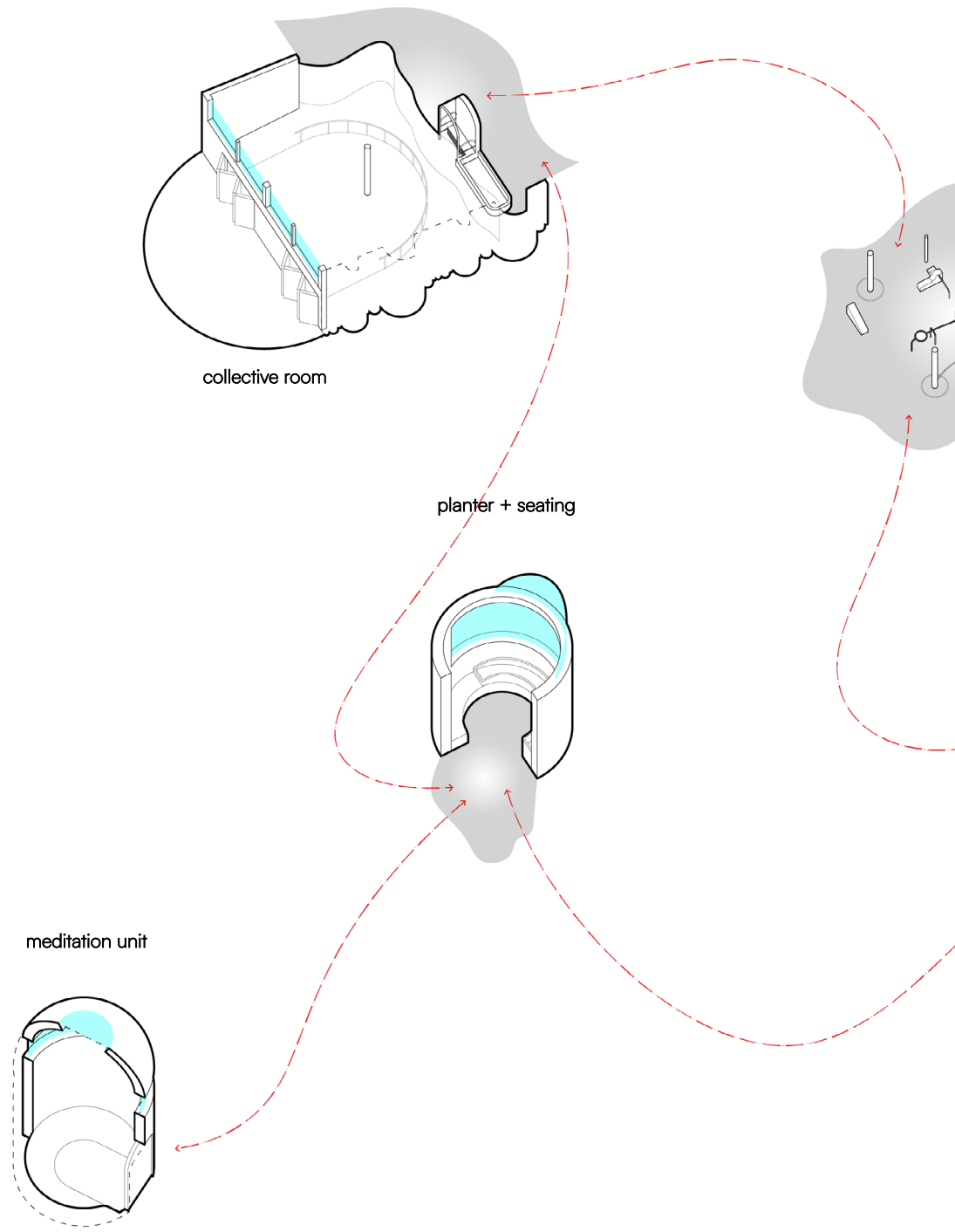
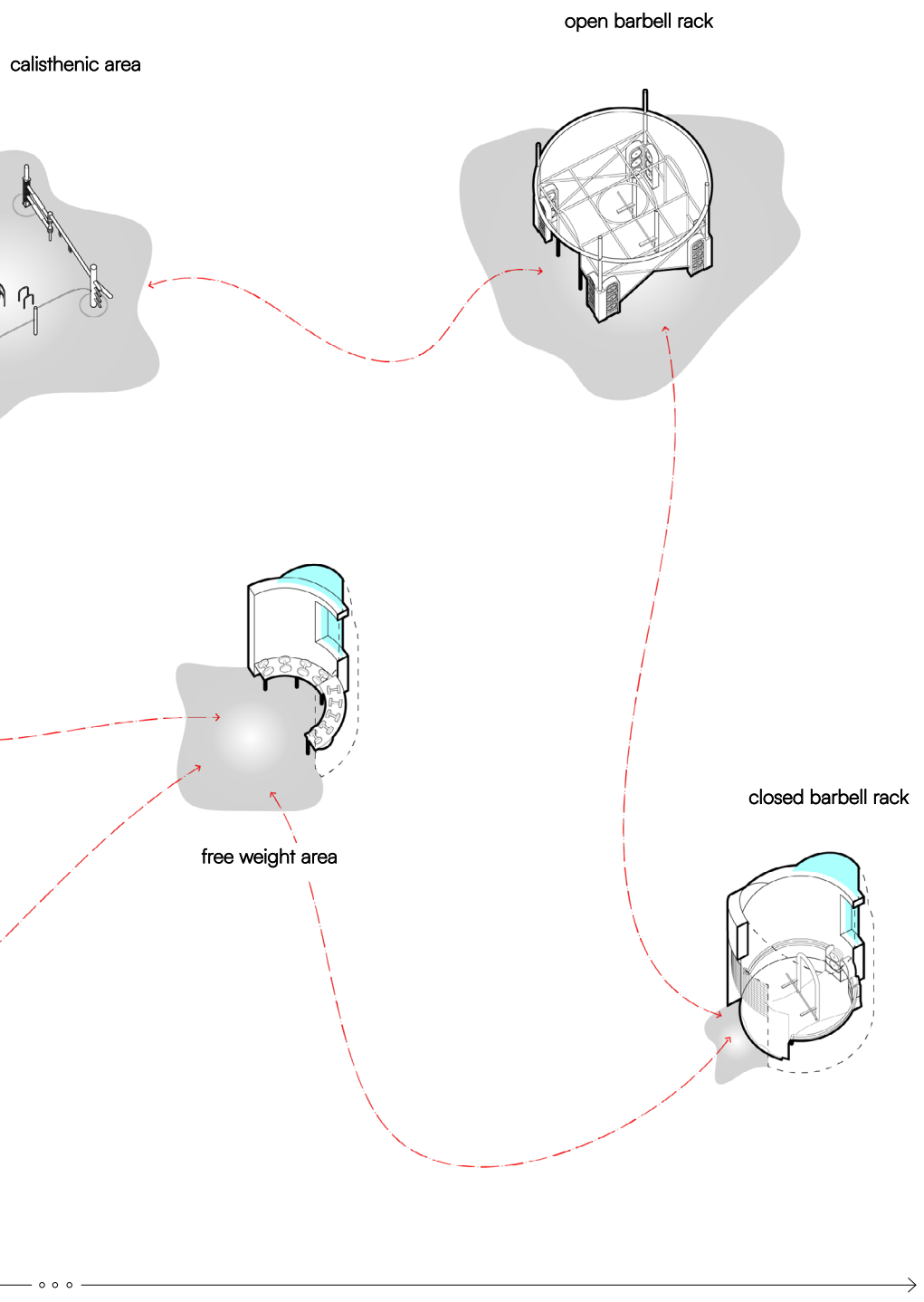


Fig. 4.27 (Re)creation



Program Typologies

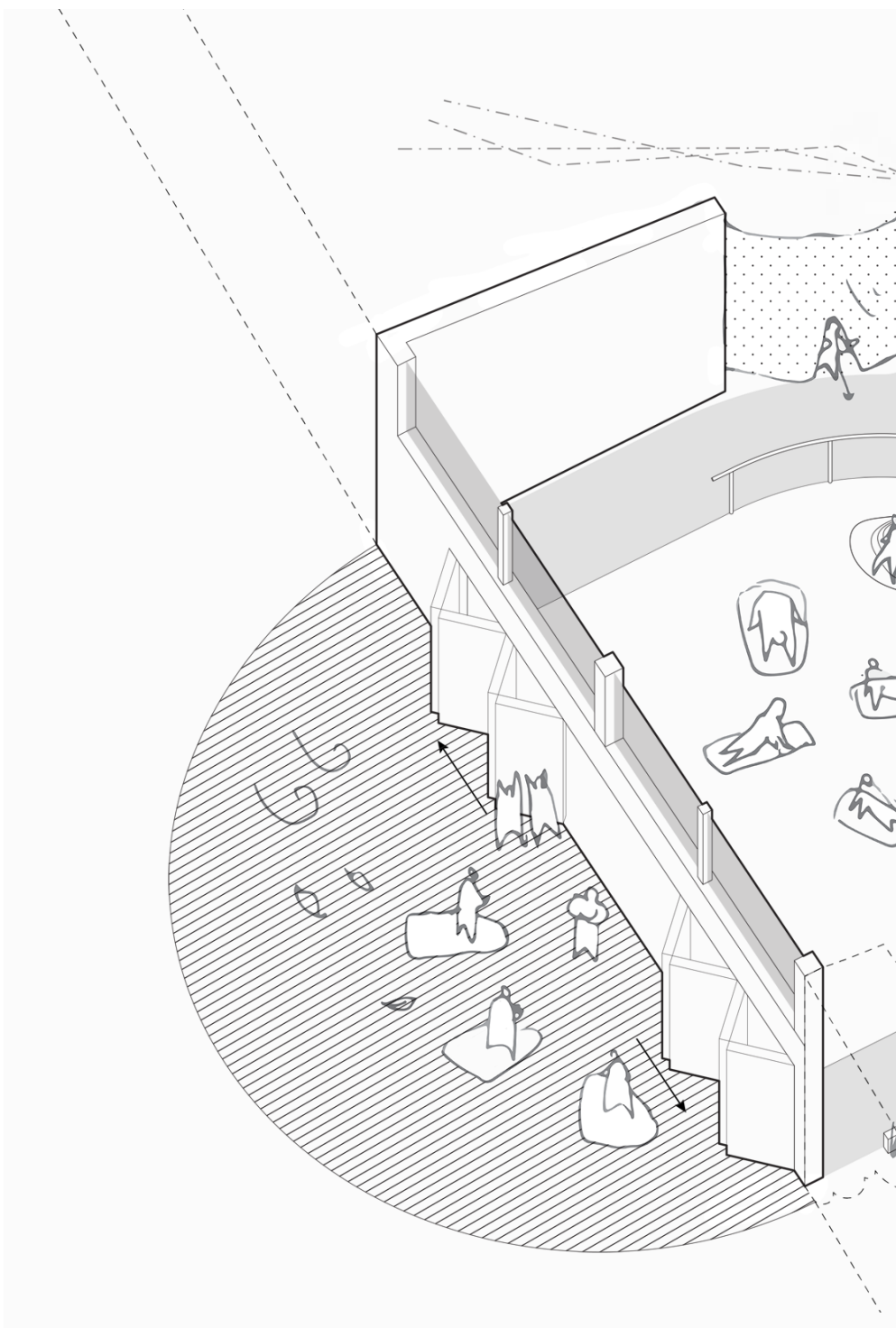
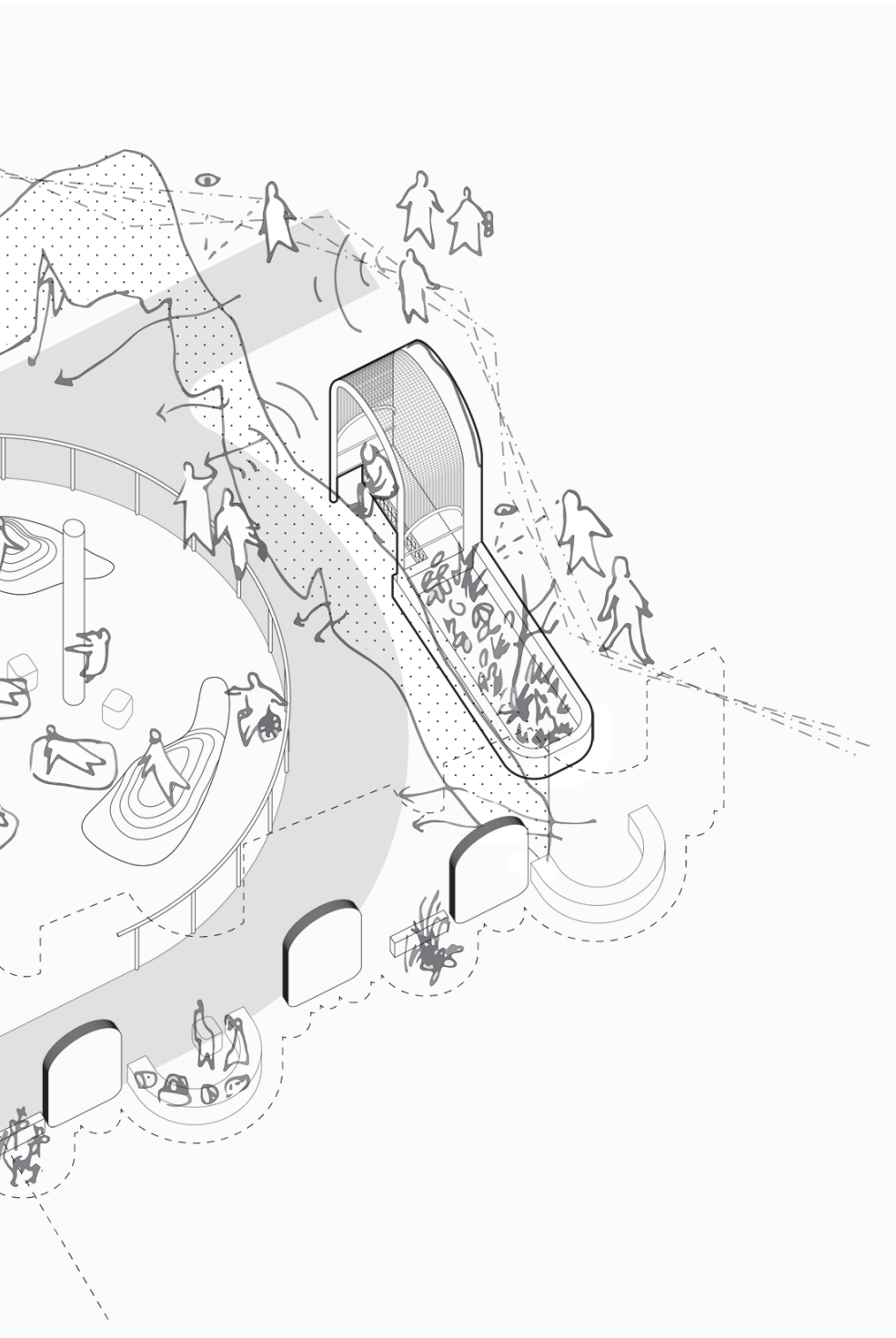


Fig. 4.28 Collective Street



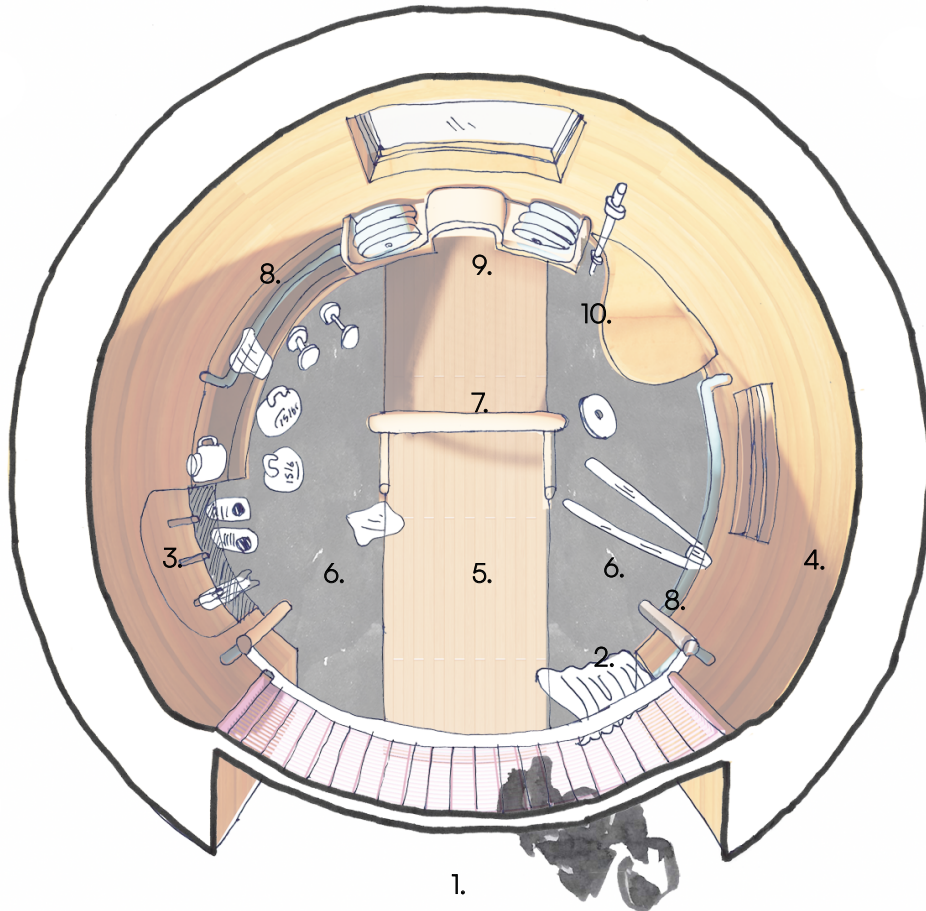
aching Space Axonometric

Pods

In contrast to the meditation pod, the barbell pod's main feature is the barbell rack and accounts for the variety of rituals such as warming up and stretching through its seating area and grab bars which double as stretching tools. Its 3.3m diameter allows for 2-3 people to take turns in it, and uses a privacy curtain to separate itself from the rest of the gym. Its circular floor plan is inspired by Gaston Bachelard who states that roundness allows one to "collect ourselves, permit us to confer an initial constitution on ourselves, and to confirm our being intimately, inside."¹¹³ The roundness of the plan is devoid of its exterior features, leaving little to no evidence of where the user must face, as there is no "correct" way to train when one does not know what the body is capable of. The inclusion of pods which shield a user from the unsolicited gaze is important as it allows the exploration of one's own body to be done without feeling uncomfortable or violated, as well as normalizing physical exercise as an embodied process rather than a social performance. The meditation and the barbell pod appear identical from the exterior, alluding to the idea that both high and low intensity movements are equally respected in (Re)creation, one is not prioritized over the other.

"Here the shell cave is also a "fortress city" for a man alone, a man who loves complete solitude, and who knows how to defend and protect himself with simple images."¹¹⁴

The pod, designed to embody the characteristics of a shell, becomes an intimate chamber for the gym goer, an opportunity to retreat from the rest of the world. Regardless of the type of activity, the polished interior of the pod shields one's sensitive flesh and emphasizes physical exercise as a meditation, rather than a performance. It is unapologetically introverted, acting as a safe space for those who do not feel comfortable working out in open space, a cave of solitude who would prefer to train in private.



1. Entrance
2. Privacy Curtain
3. Hooks
4. Storage
5. Hardwood Flooring
6. Rubber Flooring
7. Barbell Rack
8. Grab Bars
9. Barbell Storage
10. Seating

Fig. 4.29 Pod Diagram

Gym equipment

One unique aspect of this thesis was exploring the various options for fitness apparatus and workout routine types, rather than infilling a vacant space with generic equipment to check off a list. The gym implies a body ideal, through the types of machines available and how they are laid out. Isolation machines were first popularized by Arthur Jones in the 70s, as they did not require special skills and appear relatively non-threatening in comparison to heavy, intense barbell equipment.¹¹⁵ The over-reliance of machines which provide “objective parameters, indicate precise muscles and impose precise positions” force users into a state of constant self-surveillance, adjusting their bodies and actions to an apparatus for an ideal standardized body. The influence of the outdated “Joe & Josephine” model by Henry Dreyfuss must be eradicated from the presence of fitness equipment, as (Re)creation rejects the archetypal able-bodied human bodies of an unrealistic average height and weight. In addition, the shortcoming of teaching new gym users to train muscles in isolation neglects the balance between different parts of the body, such as addressing the imbalance in someone’s body who has developed strong pectoral muscles, but lacks adequate shoulder and back muscle growth.

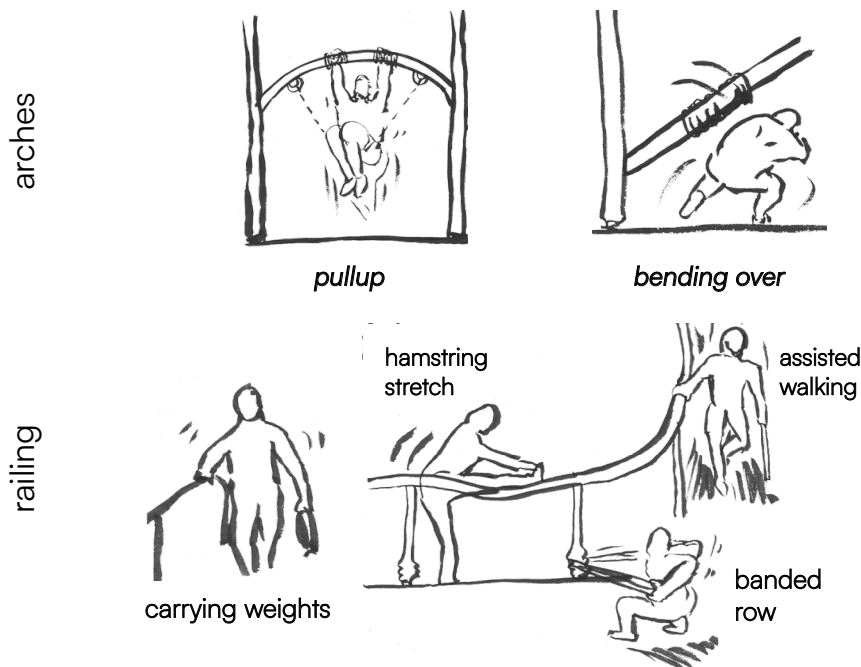


Fig. 4.30 Face Pull Diagram

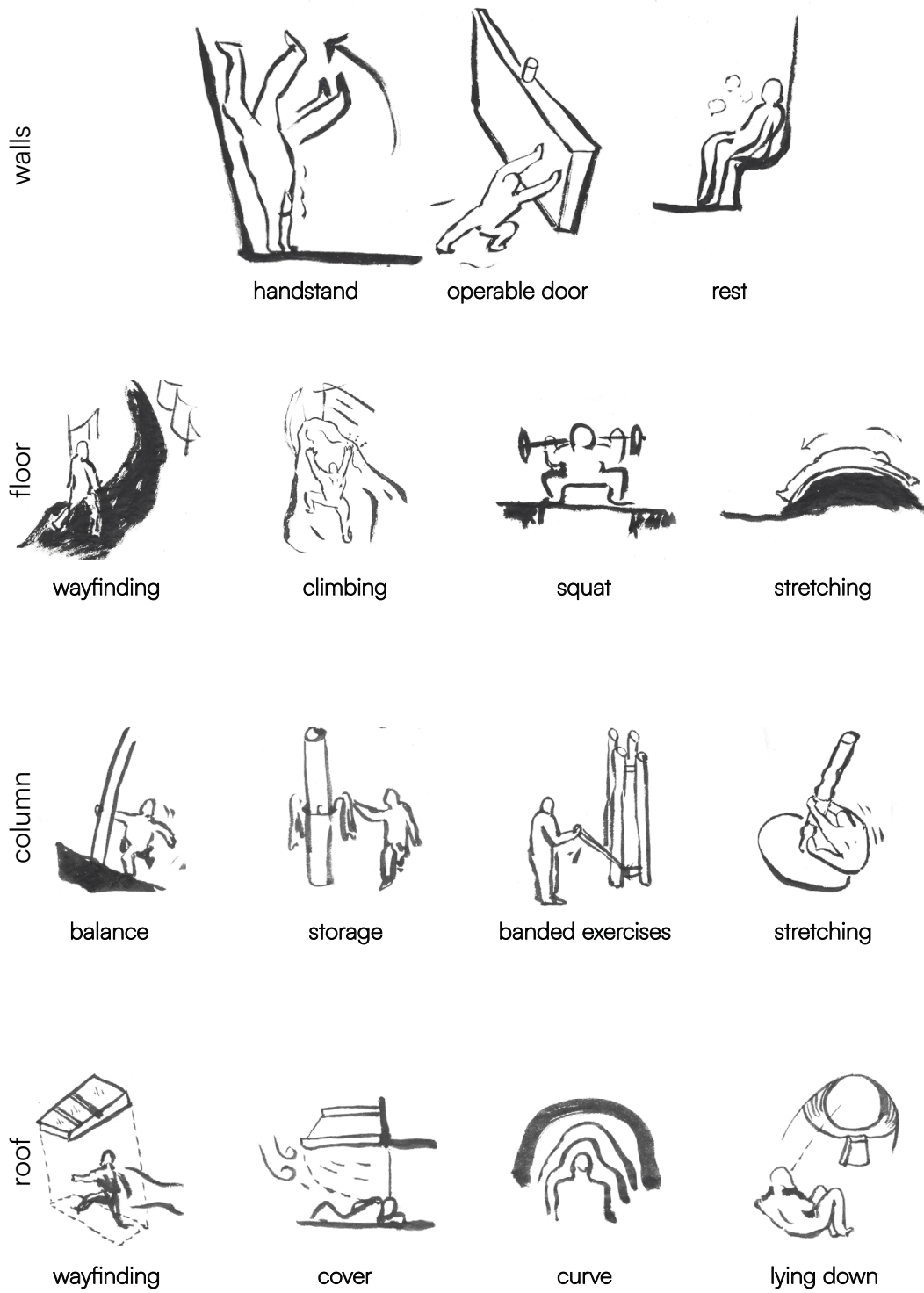


Fig. 4.31 Architecture - Exercise diagram

(Re)creation rejects the use of machines which train “useless” movement patterns, instead focusing on promoting holistic movements which heightens the user’s awareness of their body engagement such as compound weighted movements and calisthenics. This thesis explores how architecture can be designed to double as an extension of the human body during training and play, rather than simply being a box containing a set of generic machines. Without clear instructions, one must learn how to operate the limbs of (Re)creation, they must experiment with its different elements as well as communicate and learn from fellow gym users. The rejection of precise technologies in sport also represents a rejection of the quantification of victory, discouraging competition between gym goers.

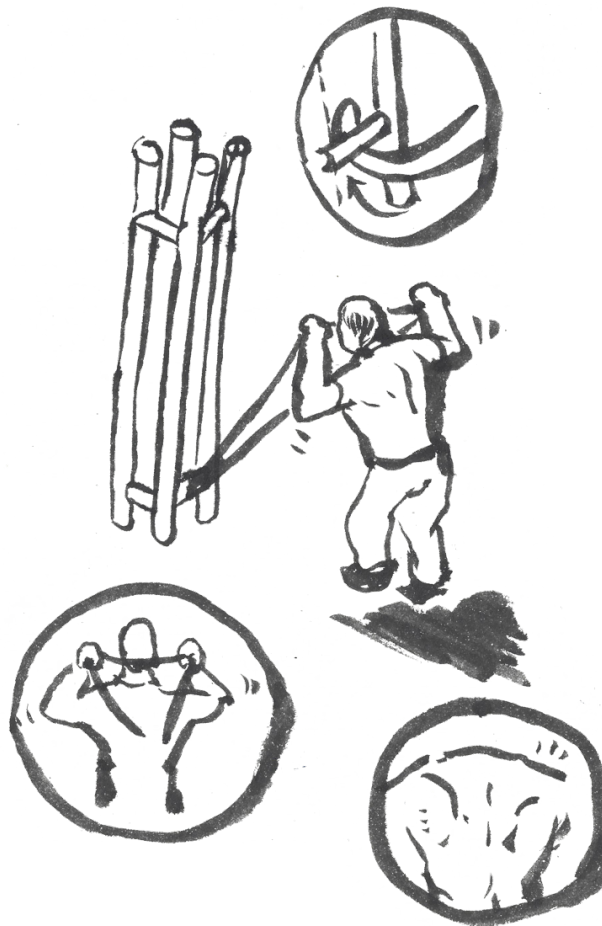
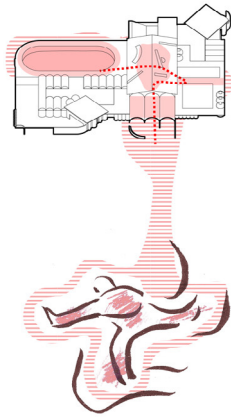


Fig. 4.32 Face Pull Diagram

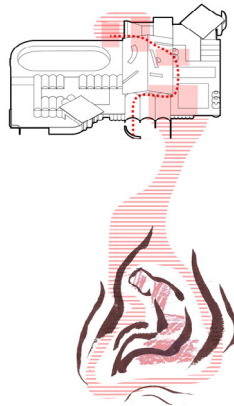
Monday

- static stretching
- mountain play
- light weight workout
- running



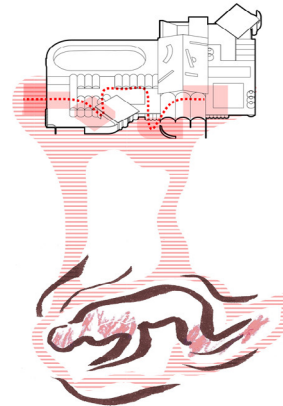
Tuesday

- change
- bathe
- calisthenics
- outdoor HIIT



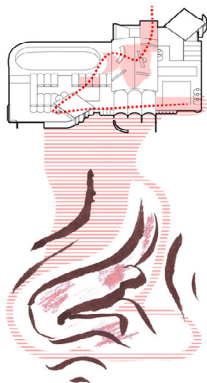
Wednesday

- dynamic stretching
- collective yoga
- outdoor meditation
- relax in courtyard



Friday

- change
- mountain play
- garden maintenance
- private meditation
- courtyard reading



Saturday

- light cardio
- change
- mountain stretch
- afternoon jog
- active cooldown



Sunday

- bathe
- private HIIT
- private meditation
- group dance
- courtyard relaxation

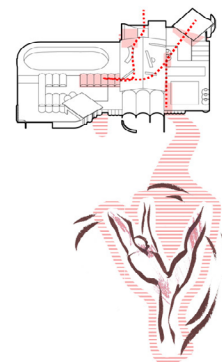


Fig. 4.33 Daily Schedule Gym Diagram



Fig. 4.34 Court



yard Perspective

(Re)creating Embodies

The process of working out becomes a collective effort rather than a competition between individuals, the traditional knowledge barrier of the conventional fitness gym is dismantled as there is no singular “correct” way to operate equipment, the columns, railings and walls surrounding the user blur between architectural components and training apparatus. Training oneself, as well as others thus becomes a shared responsibility, which then nurtures caring community members. These exercises demonstrate that the pathway towards a certain body is not dependent on access to the physical space, rather on one’s knowledge of exercise as well as curiosity to experiment. When one enters the (Re)creation with the intention to train, even the mundane act of walking and stretching become ways to further immerse the user into their architectural surroundings. In a world where one’s environment is increasingly becoming standardized and static, the gym must break its archetype as a factory of generic bodies and accommodate a more diverse clientele. As an instrument against the battle against death of reversible destiny, (Re)creation aims to aid people to reclaim their ability to reject the normalized standards which define our bodies. As a community center, (Re)creation becomes more than a place to train, it becomes a space where one can destabilize our existing notions of the body on an everyday basis, allowing these disruptions of hegemony to hopefully become mundane.

Conclusion

My initial interest in the topic of gym architecture and its influence on society was inspired by my own training experience. As I researched the physical and social geography of contemporary fitness culture through reading texts from a variety of architectural, anthropological and feminist lens the gym revealed itself to be a complex and contradicting space, with its influences exceeding that of its physical walls, reinforcing our existing values of health, beauty, and commodification of the body. As we renegotiate our relationship with physical health and beauty, our spaces must be redesigned to be more than stages for performative movement and individualistic competition. The gym as a typology must reshape itself to accommodate the diverse members of society regardless of age, gender, race, religion and disability. To do so, patriarchal notions existing within traditional forms of exercises and spaces must be dismantled to ensure gym spaces remain open and approachable to all.

The evolution of physical culture in the 20th century in the west rose out of popular yet seemingly paradoxical notions of disciplining bodies to create strong, contributing workers for society and the rise of individualism which fueled the growth of fitness as a consumer product. The gym thus becomes an embodiment of these values, its factory-like array of machines designed to isolate body parts not only from each other, but the mind as well. Interiors lined with mirrored surfaces created a panoptic space, enabling the surveillance of others as well as the self. While the gym is open to all, its open space disregards the users' age, gender, race and socio-economic status, ignoring the fact that not all experience the gym in the same way, resulting in discomfort for many. The result of this typology lies in the reality that the majority of gym membership owners do not end up going to the gym sustainably. While the gym promises the potential of self-empowerment and fulfillment, it is equally an intimidating space, filled with social and physical tension thus promoting competition, aggression and narcissism. Despite the arrival of the information age where physical ability no longer determines one's chances for survival and food, patriarchal motifs of dominance and conquest still remain in our existing infrastructures. Thus, (Re)creation was proposed to address these issues within fitness culture, as well as overcoming the various barriers that many face in the gym.

The current fitness industry relies on marketing unrealistic body standards to the general public, with little consideration for longevity of the body and mind. While contemporary fitness movements claim to bring empowerment and success, it is still done under the drive of neoliberalism. In an age where physical and economic accessibility is more recognized than ever, forms of fitness such as Crossfit, rock-climbing and variations of yoga are touted as approachable and empowering, but do little to address the flaws in our fitness standards/industry and simply provide an “alternative” ideal to the hegemonic physique. It is important to acknowledge that contemporary fitness culture is restrained by loose boundaries, its fluidity is seen in its constant flux and shifting, and with its actors questioning existing norms as well as overcoming them based on the knowledge and experience as coaches, nutritionists, athletes and gym goers. While I cannot contribute the equivalent level of expertise, I believe my approach of addressing the gyms’ architectural role in shaping the body explored much of what fitness related spaces can truly accomplish for the user. Instead being an isolated space, the “gym” has the potential become a space that reaches out and melds into the city fabric, becoming a mixture of everyday life and play, “gyms hold the promise of becoming truly hybrid spaces that can erase traditional distinctions between hardware and software, spatially integrating the human body with architecture, machines, and electronics.”¹¹⁶ No longer will the arduous ritual of commuting to a gym be arduous and stressful, and project unrealistic physique standards onto its user groups.

The outcome of this thesis is to provide a proposal which envisions the gym typology as an embodied and nurturing space, rather than contributing to a fitness culture which exploits feelings of insecurity and competition to motivate people to work out. (Re)creation addressed this challenge by not only acting as a physical site for training and play, but also offering a space for the community, providing non-fitness related activities, thus giving everyone a reason to visit, regardless of intensity, objective or skill. The gym is redesigned to become a reciprocal shell for the human body, engaging it to explore its utmost limits, acknowledging that we “do not know what the body is capable of”. Rather than being a panoptic stage for self-surveillance and isolation of the body and mind, (Re)creation empowers the user, aiding them in overcoming barriers shape by one’s age, genetics, education, gender, socio-economic status, physical and mental health capacity. (Re)creation symbolizes the shift from the quantification of sport and consumerist nature of fitness, while also showing the importance both collective healing and emotions typically subjugated under the capitalist patriarchy, such as intimacy

and vulnerability. Meditation can be active and intense, while performing heavy weightlifting can bring inner peace and calm. By dismantling the “masculine” and “feminine” properties assigned to different types of exercises, hierarchies are broken to produce non-biased approach towards exercise, changing one’s pre-existing assumptions about beauty, health and strength. The outcomes of (Re)creation extend out of the physical location of the site, as it impacts the way people rethink their relationship between their body and the environment on a daily basis. A simple climbing of the stairs causes one to activate their core and oblique muscles, and carrying groceries becomes easier as the entire lower body is strengthened through not only strength regimens in the gym, but rested time as well. (Re)creation does not seek to lock users into memberships, rather it hopes to provide one with the knowledge to ultimately use the entire world as a playground.

(Re)creation is more than a building, it is a response to a fitness approach whose limitations are becoming more apparent as individuals embrace remote work and no longer need to commute to a gym. It is about how we view and represent our own bodies, as well as how we can reclaim control over them. As we begin to relearn how to love our own bodies, it is important that our enclaves are designed to reciprocate our renewed movements and activities.

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