

Do Bodies Matter?

Stone, water, light, skin and material performativity in *Therme Vals*



collage, *Gertrude in Vals*

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abstract

The following text is a study of non-normative gender positions and sexualities in the architecture of the senses proposing and encouraging a new way of thinking about the built environment in terms of gender. My assumption is that a change in the way that we think about gender in the theory, practice and education of architecture also will affect the way we think about gender in relation to bodies. By showing that what we usually take for granted as a symbol for male masculinity in the expression of architectural space due to essentialist ideas about gender, can just as well be interpreted as a form of female masculinity, or an expression of butchness, my aim is to disrupt, dislocate and resignify patriarchal and heterosexist norms. I also touch briefly upon the construction of gender and racialization of sexuality within female masculinity in terms other than sex, such as class, race and ethnicity.

In an architectural analysis of Peter Zumthor's bathhouse in Vals, Switzerland, I apply a newly constructed methodology, what I call *non-essential phenomenology*, joining aspects of both phenomenological ideas and post-structural thought based on texts by Juhani Pallasmaa and Judith Butler. Within this methodology, I devise several new concepts such as *transmateria*, *material performativity*, and *sexual material performativity* which are necessary for analyzing both the performative aspects of matter and the materialization of gender in bodies. By showing that more than one interpretation exists in the way we create and inhabit space, I present the possibility of shifting and resignifying earlier assumptions about sex/gender, dismantling essentialist thinking and disrupting heteronormative trends, while retaining the materiality of matter and body to create spaces which benefit all bodies, genders and sexualities.

key words: body/matter, sex/gender, heteronormativity, drag/gender position, subject/object, theater/everyday, drag king/butch, appearance/presence, surface/depth, clothing/skin, vision/touch, materialization, subversiveness, *non-essential phenomenology*, *transmateria*, *material performativity*, *sexual material performativity*, Juhani Pallasmaa, Judith Butler, Judith Halberstam

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prologue

What do Doris Day's *Calamity Jane*, Greta Garbo's *Queen Christina* and Tilda Swinton's *Orlando* have in common with Selma Lagerlöf's renovated home 'Mårbacka' near Sunne, Sweden? They are all in drag.¹ In a recent discussion with a feminist architect/researcher colleague of mine, regarding her soon to be published dissertation about architecture as enactment, I questioned the implications her theories have on the material aspects of space and their relevance for all types of architecture.² As a reaction to her conviction over the importance of actors and events in the manifestation of architecture, I wondered what role matter played and how the idea of drag and performance affected the materiality of spaces and bodies. Later on in our discussion, to exemplify her architectural position, my colleague suggested that a bathhouse without bathers was no longer a bathhouse. It is here I begin my exploration...

During the spring of 2004, ten studio teachers including myself, accompanied a group of one hundred ten first-year architecture students from KTH School of Architecture in Stockholm, Sweden, on a weeklong study trip to Switzerland. Our first stop was Peter Zumthor's *Therme Vals* bathhouse and included a day of bathing at the spa. Beyond the experience of these spaces which has informed my analysis of this project, I feel that one event in particular concretely shows how the materiality of a space and its connection to the body plays an important role in relation to the actors and events that occur within architecture. This event took place in what can be described as eucalyptus scented steam rooms, a block of sweat chambers and Turkish showers located within the bathing level to one side of the pool area. The signage at the entrance to these chambers, telling the visitors to leave their bathing suits outside on the metal hooks provided, are subtly engraved in German into metal plates fixed in the stone wall. Nothing else besides these metal hooks signals that one is entering a place for a naked steam bath. Therefore, either in the frenzied state of these young architecture students' first meeting with a recognized work of architecture causing them to miss the subtle signage, or in their lack of fluency in the German language, the students filled these steam rooms with bathing suits still on. The group of male teachers, however, led by one who spoke German, had visited the baths previously, and had informed his colleagues that bathing suits were to be left at the door, marched on in. The rest of the story is obvious, but besides breaking the ice and providing a good laugh for both faculty and students later on in the busses to our next destination, the formation of matter and (literally in this case) its relation to skin has a direct effect on the experience of the space and the events that take place in that space. If there had been, for instance, a more imposing multi-lingual signage or a clearer distinction of the dressing area, then it may have precluded this event from ever occurring. Fortunately for us, in Zumthor's bath at Vals, a sense of humor matters.

part I theoretical foundations

introduction

The following text is divided into two main parts: theoretical foundations and architectural study. The first part of this text describes the intentions, questions and earlier research as well as places this study within a methodological and theoretical framework. The second part consists of the study itself where I examine these themes in a concrete architectural example. To allow for a more uninterrupted reading of this paper, all explanations for specific use of terminology and/or key concepts are located in the endnotes and marked in bold. I will also mention that the intended reader is first and foremost architects and architectural educators. I think that gender theory can perhaps do without architectural theory for now; however, architecture and architectural education are in dire need of gender theory.

First, based on the post-structuralist theory of Judith Butler, I problematize the essentialist view of gender in architect Juhani Pallasmaa's phenomenological text, "Hapticity and Time: Notes on Fragile Architecture" and propose a possible revision towards a newly constructed methodology which I call a *non-essential phenomenology*.³ Reciprocally and through Pallasmaa's ideas on body and matter in relation to time, I examine an increased role of the materiality of the body in Butler's theory of performativity and her concept of 'materialization,' found primarily in her texts *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*.⁴ As a result of this discussion and within this new methodology, I devise several new concepts such as *transmateria*, *material performativity*, and *sexual material performativity* which are necessary for analyzing both the performative aspects of matter in architecture and the materialization of gender and sexuality in bodies. In order to make the connection between matter and body, I then explore differences in the saturation of female masculinity through analogies of drag king and butch to surface and matter, pointing to the possibility of subversiveness.

In an architectural analysis of Peter Zumthor's bathhouse in Vals, Switzerland, I apply this newly constructed methodology joining aspects of both phenomenological ideas and post-structural thought. This *non-essential phenomenology* is applied with the help of the accompanying analytic terms mentioned above in order to locate ambiguities, contradictions and transitive qualities of matter in the representation of female masculinity or an expression of butchness. The analysis investigates three main matters in the baths through material, organizational and/or spatial qualities all in relation to skin or body: stone through weight, density and surface, water through acoustics, temperature and color, and light through texture, fragmentation and reflection.⁵ Finally, in the conclusion, I briefly summarize the main points of this paper and present some final thoughts on my findings.

The intention of this study is to propose and encourage a new way of thinking about the built environment in terms of gender, an often essentialized or even forgotten aspect, in the theory, practice and education of Western architecture.⁶ My aim is to resist structural, organizational and aesthetic norms which lead to oppressive social and cultural values through a demystification of essentialized assumptions about gender in architecture which are constantly repeated and reinforced, without losing materiality in the process.⁷ By opening up for new interpretations, much in the same way Butler argues for “...a radical proliferation of gender, to *displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself,” I will attempt to show that what we usually take for granted as a symbol for male masculinity in the expression of architectural space (order, geometry, orthogonality, monumentality and permanence) due to essentialist ideas about gender, can just as well be interpreted as female masculinity.⁸ This re-interpretation will thereby question asymmetrical relations of power underlying assumptions associated with the separation of the sexes into binary opposites and the ‘natural’ connection of masculinity to male bodies.⁹ In addition, I also touch briefly upon the importance of the material aspect of color to the construction of sex/gender and racialization of sexuality within female masculinity in terms other than sex, such as class, race and ethnicity.

The choice to study female masculinity, specifically drag king/butch, stems from several separate but related factors.¹⁰ First, the initial inspiration for this investigation originates in the reaction to an idea about architecture as drag and an interest in the further development of this idea in a non-theatrical architecture, what Pallasmaa calls ‘an architecture of the senses,’ and its possible connection to an everyday gender position.¹¹ My contention is that if an understanding of architecture as façade, surface and scene coupled with Butler’s theory of performativity gives rise to cross-dressing buildings, what one might call an architecture of transvestism, then the application of this same theory to an architecture of matter, depth and presence must go deeper than the clothing, down to the very skin and a direct connection to the body.¹² This architecture is naked; it is not about appearance and the performance of gender in drag, but rather the manifestation of an everyday gender position somewhere along the scale of masculinity and femininity with the potential of bordering on transgender.¹³

With this as a starting-point, one could study any number of theatrical/everyday gender expressions in a range of femininities and masculinities such as drag queen/sissy, drag queen/femme, drag queen/feminine heterosexual woman or drag king/stud, drag king/butch, drag king/masculine heterosexual man. However, the building in question exhibits attributes associated with masculinity, therefore ruling out the gender positions on the feminine side. In selecting drag king/butch, exclusively (usually) female positions, I hope to disturb the traditional dichotomy within architectural thought, where structure is seen as masculine and

primary, making surface (or ornament) feminine and secondary.¹⁴ This essentialized binary thinking is disrupted if we can speak of the structure or very substance of architecture in terms of a female body.¹⁵ I do not see drag king/butch as binary opposites, but rather as two gender expressions with varying degrees of ‘saturation’ of female masculinity.¹⁶

And finally, a study of queer female masculinity makes it possible to escape the normative limits of what Butler calls the *heterosexual matrix* in its performative binary categories of two opposing sexes, where the butch’s connotations to same-sex sexuality questions the heteronormative relationship of desire to sex/gender.¹⁷ As gender theorist Judith Halberstam shows, “when and where female masculinity conjoins with possibly queer identities, it is far less likely to meet with approval.”¹⁸ She makes the point that heterosexual female masculinity is often more accepted than female masculinity coupled with lesbian desire, and that many variations of gender inhibits creating “another binary in which masculinity always signifies power.”¹⁹ Throughout this paper, Gertrude Stein appears as a representation of the butch gender position. This association is entirely mine. I do not claim that Stein identified herself as such, but rather use her as an inspiration and a well-known figure who fits the contemporary description of a butch in order to better illustrate my ideas.

Architect Leslie Kanes Weisman writes: “Space, like language, is socially constructed; and like the syntax of language, the spatial arrangements of our buildings and communities reflect and reinforce the nature of gender, race, and class relations in society. The uses of both language and space contribute to the power of some groups over others and the maintenance of human inequality.”²⁰ In other words, norms and ideologies are materialized in architectural space, and this in turn affects those very same norms and ideologies. Consequently, I feel that a greater openness and awareness of gender in the thought and formation of spaces will not only help dissolve oppressive norms to produce a more inclusive built environment, but it may also contribute to a shift in social and cultural values for those who inhabit these spaces. If we can change the way that we think about gender in relation to the matter of architecture, this will also affect the way we think about gender in relation to bodies.

Although I find Pallasmaa’s ideas on architecture thoughtful and inspiring, it is the foundation that his writing is based upon, like a majority of architectural theory, that I wish to problematize in order to ‘resignify’ essentialist interpretations that may otherwise maintain and reproduce sexist and heteronormative ideas within architecture. Likewise, I find Butler’s theories on gender intelligent and provocative, but wish to examine the potential in an increased role of the materiality of body and matter in the performativity of gender for the purposes of an architectural analysis and its effect on the materialization of gender. I am in debt to them both. This study is one specific example, there are many more to be uncovered.



outdoor pool fig. a



Peter Zumthor, architect fig. b

selection of source material

The theoretical texts I concentrate my analysis on are Pallasmaa's "Hapticity and Time: Notes on Fragile Architecture" and Butler's *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*. I choose these texts for their focus on the discussion of body and matter as well as their connection to gender.²¹ For the architectural analysis, I have selected *Therme Vals*, Peter Zumthor's bathhouse in Vals, Switzerland (fig. a). The publication *Peter Zumthor Works: Buildings and Projects 1979-1997* provides the primary empirical material, including sketches, plans, sections, elevations and photographs of the bathhouse.²² As a secondary source and to refresh my memory from my visit there in the spring 2004, I have turned to the documentary film about *Therme Vals* by Richard Copans, *Les thermes de pierre*.²³ The website of *Therme Vals* is yet another source.²⁴ I have chosen this particular bathhouse, not only for its materiality, but also because Zumthor speaks in a phenomenological manner about his own work and Pallasmaa often refers to Zumthor's work as a good example of an architecture of the senses.²⁵

I will not analyze the entire complex, but limit the analysis to a few specific areas of the bathhouse which affect the visitor directly. Due to limitations in the empirical material, I will also primarily look at organization, materiality and spatiality rather than details in construction; details are difficult to study without proper documentation or repeated site visits. Although the influence of the maker on a work is undeniable, I believe that a work can and should stand on its own, once it is complete. Therefore, the focus of the analysis is on the physical building and not on the architect or his intentions. I do, however, support some of my observations with ideas from Zumthor's own writings or statements from the documentary film where he appears in several scenes speaking about his work with a pencil in one hand and a cigar in the other (fig. b). A double set of props for the performance of male masculinity?

earlier research

Arguably one of his best-known architectural projects, *Therme Vals*, by the world-renowned architect Peter Zumthor, is an icon in contemporary architecture. Besides the 300+ page monograph book published on his works through 1997, Zumthor's production has been featured in architectural magazines internationally including a special number of *El Croquis* (1998) "Worlds One... Towards the end of the 20th Century," as well as with an entire "Extra

edition” of the Japanese magazine *a+u* (Feb 1998) devoted solely to his work.²⁶ With over 240,000 hits in a *Google* internet search on ‘Peter Zumthor’ and 44,500 hits on ‘Therme Vals’, it is surprising that by adding the word ‘gender’ to the search field, results drop to 140 hits, most of which are about a poet named Paul Zumthor and the others unrelated.²⁷ In other words, Zumthor’s work has been extremely well covered in the architectural press, but until now, and in support of my claim that architecture is in need of gender theory, largely overlooked in its relation to gender. I hope to change this trend by examining Zumthor’s bathhouse in terms of gender.²⁸

In 1991, Michael Benedikt wrote *Deconstructing The Kimbell*, an essay which examines Louis Kahn’s Kimbell Museum, another formal, material building and predecessor to Zumthor’s work, using Jacques Derrida’s post-structuralist ideas on deconstruction.²⁹ His intent is to show that 1)Derrida’s ideas are significant and useful for architecture 2)they are often the renaming of previous ideas already used in modern architectural design and teaching 3)these ideas can also be applied to works other than postmodern architecture, giving rise to new interpretations. Benedikt’s analysis serves as an example of the deconstruction of a modern work that can be classified as an architecture of the senses which does not fit within the ‘Deconstructivist label’ in its conception or construction.³⁰ As someone also interested in the phenomena of architecture, he shares both my respect for the complexity of post-structuralist thought and skepticism in accepting it in its entirety. In this way, Benedikt and I begin with a similar approach to a similar situation, however, despite the fact that even Butler finds Derrida’s analytic tools useful in questioning the division of the sexes into binary opposites, Benedikt’s analysis remains genderless.³¹ Therefore, his intent is emblematic of academic and theoretical discourse with an assumption of universal neutrality, whereas my intent has a more direct aim of shifting the way we think about gender in architectural thought and practice to change the lived situation of the everyday.

Architect and educator, Frank Weiner, describes the philosophy of phenomenology as “a science of beginnings,” a looking inward, a sense that we can not take for granted the existence of a thing or person, but must meet each phenomenon anew and build up our understanding from the ground up, questioning even that which is considered ‘natural.’³² This is often referred to as ‘bracketing’ and implies an attempt to reject preconceived notions and/or knowledge in order to retain a naïveté which requires one to reconstruct what is often assumed. Weiner points out the similarities to the way an architect must approach each new project with a specific situation and constraints. Although the humility of this position and the rejection of preconceived notions about what is assumed to be ‘natural’ seem to almost promise an answer to ‘gender trouble,’ post-structural thought finds this position problematic

in that, as Butler explains, the subject can never occupy a position outside of discourse, language and the oppressive forces of compulsory heterosexuality and therefore can never 'bracket' what one already knows.³³ I am torn between the two views; hence my desire to unite aspects of both into a new methodology.³⁴

French philosopher and phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard, often referred to in Pallasmaa's writings and perhaps best known among architects for his book *The Poetics of Space*, has written several books focusing on daydreams, reverie, and the poetic experience of elemental matter.³⁵ Bachelard writes on the matter of water in *Water and Dreams* based on what can only be described as an understanding of gender which is essential to the point of making any feminist reader exhausted.³⁶ Although they rely heavily on sexual connotations in the polar division of matter, where the elements earth/water are related to female femininity and fire/air to male masculinity, Bachelard's otherwise poetic arguments provide a platform for examining aspects of gender in the matter of Zumthor's water.

Juhani Pallasmaa describes the architecture of the senses as works that are "...more interested in the encounter of the object and the body of the user than in mere visual aesthetics."³⁷ He claims that the rationalization of space based on vision, through the geometric construction of perspective, causes the repression of the experience of space through the other senses, specifically that of touch.³⁸ Pallasmaa suggests the design and valuing of built spaces through a heightened awareness of the haptic senses to "...free the eye from its historical patriarchal domination."³⁹ In this hierarchical relationship vision/touch, I see an analogy to surface/matter, where vision is concerned with appearances and can be satisfied by looking at a surface from a distance while the tactile senses involve a more physical encounter with the presence of matter, demanding another level of closeness and intimacy. "The eye surveys, controls and investigates, whereas touch approaches and caresses."⁴⁰ This norm of visual hierarchy is also questioned in Butler's argument that sex/gender is not simply a matter of *what we see* (i.e. genitals), but rather dependent on a complex relation of regulatory social and cultural forces materialized and interpreted within the body.⁴¹ Later in the text, the relationship surface/matter will be further extrapolated to encompass the differences in gender expression between the theatricality of the drag king (surface/appearance) and the position of the butch (matter/presence) through the notion of saturation of female masculinity, supporting my claim that drag king is to an architecture of surface as butch is to an architecture of matter.

In his book on modern light in architecture, Henry Plummer refers to both Bachelard and Pallasmaa in his phenomenological study of the matter of light through what he calls 'modern concepts of light.'⁴² Although not as explicit, Plummer's descriptions of matter show a clear influence of the essentialist ideas about gender from his predecessors. It is this legacy of

maintaining and repeating essentialist views on gender within phenomenological architectural thought that I wish to disrupt by proposing a move towards a *non-essential phenomenology*.

Leslie Kanés Weisman, feminist architect and educator, writes with a strong political agenda regarding the power of space and women's rights. The titles alone, "Women's Environmental Rights: A Manifesto" and *Discrimination by Design; A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment* speak of her engagement as a feminist addressing the asymmetrical balance of power between the sexes in both the practice and use of architecture.⁴³ Although her texts are largely centered on gendered power systems, tending towards heteronormativity, Weisman's discussion of essentialist ideas of sex/gender in architecture serves as a base for my critique of phenomenological architectural thought.

In the introduction to the anthology *The Sex of Architecture*, Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway and Leslie Kanés Weisman explain that this collection of essays developed out of a conference of women theorists, historians, educators and practitioners in 1995 and explore the marginalized position of women in architecture.⁴⁴ They describe the intent of the various articles as a re-examination of "some long-suspect 'truths': that man builds and woman inhabits; that man is outside and woman is inside; that man is public and woman is private; that nature, in both its kindest and its cruelest aspects, is female and culture, the ultimate triumph over nature, is male."⁴⁵ While this collection can be seen as either 'strategically essentialist' or heteronormative both in its criteria for the selection of authors as 'women' only and its definition of the term *sex* as almost exclusively referring to the traditional separation of the sexes into male/female, many of these same 'truths' will also be discussed in this paper.⁴⁶ One article in particular, feminist architect and educator Jennifer Bloomer's "The Matter of Matter: A Longing for Gravity," argues for the importance of matter in architecture and discusses the concept of materialization as an escape which supports my claim for the need of *material performativity* as a possible addition to Butler's theory of performativity for the purpose of architectural analysis.⁴⁷

Among many essays dealing with the essentialist view of gender and the marginalization of women in architecture in the North American anthology, *Gender Space Architecture* edited by Rendell, Penner and Borden, another feminist architect/educator, Diane Agrest, writes about 'sex' and the body in architecture.⁴⁸ She points to the influence of the Renaissance and Western Christianity on architectural ideology, maintaining that the body of man as the basis for both proportion systems and design ideologies has led to the suppression and replacement of the female body in architecture. In this critique, Agrest talks about what she describes as "architectural transsexuality", where the male architect is symbolically given the female ability of conception and reproduction in the 'creation' of a built work.⁴⁹ Although Agrest speaks of the ambiguity of *gender* and *sex* and raises the idea of a non-normative sexuality, her discussion

tends to fall into a division of the sexes into the binary opposites man/woman, making the notion of a transitive gender or sexuality always a matter of either/or rather than both/and, excluding for example the possibility of queer female masculinity.

The recent European anthology, *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial productions of gender in modern architecture*, edited by Heynen and Baydar is divided into three parts.⁵⁰ The first, “Gendered subjects,” discusses essentialized ideas of gender in architecture which connect women with domesticity. The second, “Sexual articulations,” focuses on sexual metaphors in architecture and questions an underlying male dominance and heterosexual norm. Included in this section is an article by Swedish feminist architect, Katarina Bonnevier, “A queer analysis of Eileen Gray’s E.1027,” an earlier version of the investigations leading up to her current PhD dissertation discussed below.⁵¹ Also of interest, is Despina Stratigakos’ text “The uncanny architect: fears of lesbian builders and deviant homes in modern Germany” about the representation of women architects as lesbians due to the threat women posed to architectural practice in modern Germany, as she makes a reference to transgendered architecture when speaking of architecture in drag.⁵² The final section discusses “...the complicated exchange between the materiality of architecture and lived practices,” and questions the architect’s role and ability to affect the experiences of gendered subjects and challenge hierarchical relations of power through the formation and articulation of space.⁵³ While the aim of this section is closely related to my own, the authors’ studies tend to focus on spatiality or symbolism in ornament, rather than my focus on the experience of matter.

A clear inspiration and point of reference for my study comes from a reaction to the soon to be published dissertation *Enactments of Architecture* (working title) by Katarina Bonnevier.⁵⁴ With the intention to eliminate sexist and heteronormative structures in the theory and practice of architecture, Bonnevier makes a connection between architecture and Judith Butler’s theory of performativity by stating that architecture occurs through performance and is dependent on the actors and events, not merely the physical manifestation of the built environment. In other words, architecture does not exist until it is inhabited by bodies, and it ceases to exist when the bodies are no longer there. Common to a postmodern view of architecture and fitting with Butler’s post-structuralist theory, Bonnevier places emphasis on the fluidity of context, history and events, presenting an idea of architecture as scene and theatricality which tends to dismiss the material or tectonic aspects of space as inconsequential or less important. Further, through an analysis based in queer theory, Bonnevier draws parallels to the notion of ‘drag’ or cross-dressing and Gottfried Semper’s ideas of cladding where the essence of architecture lies in the facades and surfaces, coining the term ‘cross-cladding’ to uncover the queer or non-heteronormative aspects of the built environment.⁵⁵

While we both share a similar intent as well as a focus on female non-normative genders and sexualities, there are several points where our investigations diverge, most likely due to our different understandings of architecture. Although I agree that the interaction with the body is essential for the experience of architectural space, I think that the materiality that makes up a space, whether real or imagined, is critical for architecture to exist. Bonnevier's study of existing architecture made or appropriated by queer women (Eileen Gray, Natalie Barney and Selma Lagerlöf), which fit the ideas of performativity and drag in both their conception and construction, made me curious about other examples of architecture that don't necessarily fit.⁵⁶ My position within a phenomenological understanding of architecture and personal preference for an 'architecture of the senses' presents new questions which do not correspond with Bonnevier's architecture of scene and surface.⁵⁷ What do spaces that have little to do with cladding do, if they do not drag? More specifically, how does Butler's theory of performativity and ideas about gender affect an architecture of matter and presence conceived in and designed by architecture's patriarchal norm; that of white, western man? Does matter matter? Inspired by Bonnevier's term 'cross-cladding', the need for a new concept which can be applied to an idea of matter and everyday gender positions rather than surface and drag, gives rise to what I propose as *transmateria* –matter which is in a constant state of transformation, incorporating and expressing multiple connotations of gender simultaneously. Further, how can an architecture of the senses, informed by Butler's post-structural theory, affect the bodies that inhabit these spaces? Do bodies matter? Whereas Bonnevier's study of theatricality and costume fits Butler's theory of performativity, I feel the connection between body and matter in the everyday requires a slight addition to account for materiality, a *material performativity*.

method

This is a study of Zumthor's architectural project, *Therme Vals*, through image analysis. It is also a philosophical/theoretical inquiry into the relationship of body and matter to gender and architecture through an analysis of texts by Juhani Pallasmaa and Judith Butler. Using *non-essential phenomenology*, I devise two related concepts that I call *material performativity* and *transmateria*. In addition, the first concept is modified later in the analysis to *sexual material performativity*, in order to incorporate the dimension of sexuality which is insufficient in the original terminology. Even in the final section of the analysis, this revised concept is modified once again to *sexual material (non)performativity* to fit the specific sexual practices of a gendered position which are 'non performative' or more accurately described as giving without receiving in return. In the analysis, I apply this combined methodology with its accompanying concepts to observations and images from published documentation of the building, a documentary film on the project, the *Therme Vals* website and a site visit to the thermal baths themselves.



Swiss Re HQ, Foster and Partners fig. c



Shaker interior fig. d

theory and methodology

non-essential phenomenology

Essentialized assumptions about gender in architecture (matter) both in theory and practice can be summarized by the following examples of binary opposites analogous to male/female, where male is understood as hierarchically superior: phallos/cave, vertical/horizontal, orthogonal/round, geometric/organic, builds/inhabits, culture/nature, public/private, exterior/interior, structure/decoration, whole/fragment, permanent/temporary.⁵⁸ Weisman explains that sexual symbolism in architectural forms tends to lie closely to psychoanalytic definitions of what is masculine and feminine, as do connotations to sexual references.⁵⁹ For instance, the patriarchal symbolism in the American skyscraper as “...the big, the erect, and the forceful [...] consists of a ‘base,’ ‘shaft,’ and ‘tip,’” in contrast to references of the house, in connection to women and women’s bodies, such as ‘cozy nest,’ ‘sheltering womb,’ ‘vessel for the soul,’ or the ‘maternal hearth.’⁶⁰ (see fig. c, fig. d) Weisman asserts, “[i]n associating the workplace with male power, impersonalization, and rationality, and the home with female passivity, nurturance, and emotionalism, distinctly different behaviors in public and private settings, and in women and men, have been fostered.”⁶¹ In other words, the rooms we inhabit and the way we perceive them have a direct effect on the way we think about gender and vice versa. These stereotypical assumptions about gender lie not only in the symbolism of finished architectural spaces, but also in the very matter which makes up these spaces, and can be found in the foundations of a phenomenological understanding of architecture. It is these types of assumptions I wish to demystify or displace in an analysis of the thermal baths by studying female masculinity and its relation to matter.

The subject (body) also has the dimension of sexuality which is almost always heterosexual in architectural thought, from the standard division of bathrooms into two opposing sexes to housing planned for the nuclear family, among other examples, reinforcing an essentialized view of gender and maintaining heteronormativity. Halberstam explains the problems which arise for individuals with an ambiguous gender when forced to adhere to the heterosexual

norm of the built environment in sex-segregated bathrooms.⁶² She lists them as follows: “First, it announces that your gender seems at odds with your sex [...] second, it suggests that single-gender bathrooms are only for those who fit clearly into one category (male) or the other (female).”⁶³ Similarly, Weisman mentions the problem of heteronormativity in what she calls the “family mystique” which she explains as an idealized patriarchal family consisting of man, woman and child, where the husband is the head of the household.⁶⁴ She explains that throughout history, women who defied this heterosexual norm and were either head of their households or had chosen to live alone or with another woman were often stigmatized and/or risked personal danger. Weisman credits the continued enforcement of this “family mystique” (despite statistics showing the opposite) coupled with the production of housing to fit it, as establishing the belief in the (heterosexual) family norm and the way we aspire to live. This normative assumption of heterosexuality, stemming from the understanding of gender as binary opposites, will later be examined in the analysis of *Therme Vals* by studying matter and its relation to non-normative sexualities of female masculinity.

Beyond the strong connection to phenomenology, a philosophy which speaks of a universal subject but in actuality can be deduced as assuming the subject to be male, Pallasmaa’s argument for an architecture of the senses or ‘fragile architecture’ in “Hapticity and Time: Notes on Fragile Architecture” is built upon some problematic assumptions about gender.⁶⁵ First, the division between vision and the other senses can be interpreted as analogous to the traditional dichotomy of mind (man)/body (woman), where vision is associated to *masculine* reason and touch to *feminine* sensuality. Throughout the text, Pallasmaa associates the visual trend in architecture and culture to patriarchal qualities of power, control, dominance and objectification and stresses that resistance and emancipation lies in a movement towards sensuality, materiality, nearness and intimacy, characteristics most often associated with femininity. “The imagery of Mother Earth suggests that after the utopian journey towards autonomy, immateriality, weightlessness, and abstraction, art and architecture are returning towards archaic female images of interiority, intimacy, and belonging.”⁶⁶ Further, in reference to this desired move towards a more sensory architecture, Pallasmaa writes explicitly “[t]his transition signals a departure from the predominantly visual and masculine air of Modern architecture towards a tactile and feminine sensibility. The feeling of *external control* and visual effect is replaced by a heightened sense of *interiority and tactile intimacy*. [...] This architecture seeks to *accommodate* rather than *impress*, to evoke *domesticity and comfort* rather than *admiration and awe*.”⁶⁷ (my italics) In his use of terminology, Pallasmaa is mindful of the negative connotations of ‘weak’ choosing instead ‘fragile’ and careful to use the term ‘femininity’ instead of ‘woman,’ however, he posits the feminine against the masculine leading to an understood ‘natural’ imagery of complementary pairs: rational/sensual, dominant/fragile,

formal/material.⁶⁸ He even laments the loss of “the virtues of architectural neutrality, restraint, and modesty” in a reference to “[b]uildings [that] attempt to *conquer* the foreground instead of creating a *supportive* background for human activities and perceptions.”⁶⁹ (my italics) Here, one can perhaps interpret ties to symbols of the traditional Western/Christian/Freudian notion of (white, middle-class) female sexuality with its moral implications of passivity, self-restraint and frigidity.⁷⁰

Although Pallasmaa’s intentions call for a move away from a dominating ideal and towards a more open architecture of ‘inclusion’ and ‘tolerance’ which combines both strength and sensuality, underlying his argumentation is an essential understanding of gender as two opposite categories, masculine/feminine, which can be construed as male/female.⁷¹ To clarify, the problem is not the call for ‘fragile’ architecture, but rather the assumed connection of qualities such as *interiority*, *intimacy*, *accommodation* and *domesticity* with the feminine (or female) and *exteriority*, *control*, *admiration* and *awe* with the masculine (or male) in a relationship of *support* and *conquer*. This presupposes an essentialized relationship between sex/gender and neglects to acknowledge the existence of nuances in gender which legitimize masculine traits for a female or feminine traits for a male, making gender positions such as butch impossible. As Butler shows, the division of sex into a binary system male/female creates a necessary complementary relationship which makes heterosexuality seem ‘natural’ while same-sex desire is seen as a deviation.⁷² This sex/gender/desire chain creates a system of heterosexual norms, in what Butler calls the *heterosexual matrix*, which oppresses and excludes all who fall outside of it. If we continue to think in these terms, it is inevitable that these norms will be built into the environment. What happens then if we disconnect these categories, as Butler suggests, and instead work within a range of possible masculinities and femininities present within architectural space? For example, rather than thinking about a sensually rich building of formal restraint, such as Zumthor’s bathhouse, as a ‘masculine’ architecture in transition towards the ‘feminine,’ perhaps we can see it instead as representative of a butch gender expression. This revision retains the same desired effect of dislocating and multiplying the ‘severe censoring and suppression’ of the preconceived, strong unified image that Pallasmaa speaks of while also breaking the heteronormative and essentialist views of gender.⁷³ In this way, the materiality of the architecture of the senses is able to pose questions not only to idealized images of architecture, but also to idealized notions of gender through a *non-essential phenomenology*.



interior of *Thème Vals* fig. e



interior of *The Rural Studio* fig. f

transmateria and material performativity

The self or one's subjectivity is constituted in relation to people and the interaction with things, body and matter. Looking at *body* and *matter* implies examining the relationship between subject and object, the inhabitant of a place and the place itself. This 'intertwining' of body and matter lies at the core of the architecture of the senses.⁷⁴ According to Pallasmaa, "...there is no body separate from its domicile in space, and there is no space unrelated to the unconscious image of the perceiving self."⁷⁵ The question is *what* body? Butler claims that as a subject within discourse, our bodies are always already sexed/gendered and assigned an 'appropriate' sexuality according to the heterosexual matrix.⁷⁶ In her theory of performativity, a development of Beauvoir's famous statement "One is not born a woman, but becomes one," Butler explains that gender is about *doing* not *being*.⁷⁷ It is not derived from a single act or performance, but rather the embodiment of gender depends on a repetitive process where norms are reiterated constantly to produce the appearance of something genuine.⁷⁸ Butler shows that if gender is constantly enacted there are no 'natural' genders, making 'deviations' an impossibility. This questions the norm of binary opposites that presuppose heterosexuality, opening up for a multitude of possible genders and sexualities. In terms of the body in space, this means that there is more than *one* body (man's) and more than *one* experience. Pallasmaa's notion of the embodied experience of space would then vary in relation to gendered bodies. I agree with Pallasmaa, in that architecture's main task is to materialize our existence and create a sense of belonging in the world.⁷⁹ Accordingly, thinking outside of the binary gender system is necessary to create places which provide a sense of belonging for *all* bodies (and sexualities). However, here I am interested in the importance of the materiality of the body itself in relation to performativity and its effect on gender. Do bodies matter?

The question of the materiality of the body in Butler's theories is not a new one. She even addresses this critique in the preface of *Bodies That Matter*, and begins the introduction with "Is there a way to link the question of the materiality of the body to the performativity of gender?"⁸⁰ As part of her theory of performativity, Butler shows that both *sex* and *gender* are

equally constructed, making them one and the same.⁸¹ Butler disproves earlier feminist thought that "...understand[s] 'gender' as a cultural construct which is imposed upon the surface of matter, understood either as 'the body' or its given sex."⁸² In an understandable reluctance to 'fix' the subject within the boundaries of a body that inhibit the notion of *becoming* through performativity where even the body is constructed, Butler distances her theory from the corporeal or 'the flesh' by reformulating materiality as 'materialization,' linking the body's construction directly to the power of discourse and the norms which regulate it. Although this step away from the body helps in presenting *sex* not merely as a matter of material differences, it also shifts the focus from the physical aspects of the body, and I would argue, limits its role in the process of materialization and the construction of gender. If "[a]ll the senses, including vision, can be regarded as extensions of the sense of touch – as specialisations of the skin," then the relation between the body and architecture is through the skin, and the skin is inextricably related to matter.⁸³ How then does the skin's relation to matter affect materialization and the construction of gender? Is matter also performative?

Similar to her theory of performativity, Butler suggests that matter should also be thought of "...not as site or surface, but as a *process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter,*" it becomes not *is*.⁸⁴ Here, Butler attempts to give *matter*, a concept regarded since the time of Plato as feminine and passive awaiting the determining power of the masculine form, an active agency.⁸⁵ Although Pallasmaa speaks of 'the presence of matter' which implies a state of *being*, he also places it in relation to time in recognition of phenomena such as erosion, weathering and decay, indicating a process which is the result of the inseparability of matter and the world.⁸⁶ Materials have an agency as they are imbued with a history, memory and symbolism of their own stemming from their origins, production processes, crafting, and patina. For example, "[s]tone speaks of its ancient geological origins, its durability and inherent symbolism of permanence."⁸⁷ A similar view allowed architect Louis Kahn to ask the brick what it wanted to be, and it said an arch.⁸⁸ Butler would argue instead, that it is through the power and meaning of discourse that allows us to interpret the brick as such, rather than any inherent qualities possessed by the brick itself. Whereas Butler sees a process which creates the illusion of matter, Pallasmaa sees matter interlocked with process, where it's inherent qualities inform the rate and result of materialization. For instance, the erosion of marble undergoes a slower change than the decay of wood due to the qualities of the materials. In other words, materialization is dependent on materiality, it is matter in transition, what I call *transmaterialia*. Matter becomes performative as *transmaterialia*. In the analysis of the thermal baths, for instance, I study the *transmaterial* qualities of stone, water and light through a *non-essential phenomenology* of architecture. How does thinking in terms of *transmaterialia* affect the body and its relation to gender?

In an essay about the importance of matter and the drawbacks of virtual technology in architecture, Jennifer Bloomer writes of the desire for the freedom of immateriality, and the tendency to want to escape the body, pretending it doesn't matter.⁸⁹ She sees the concept of materialization as a way to avoid materializing the unattainable, thereby perpetuating the lust for that which one can never have. If we look back to Butler, Bloomer might suggest that her call for materialization is in actuality the "...triumph of Aristotelian form over matter, of the rational over the corporeal," where the process is given precedence over substance.⁹⁰ The underlying question is, must we escape the matter of the body to escape the confinements of gender? Thinking about bodies in terms of *transmateria* does not deny that bodies are more than the physical matter contained by the skin, nor that they are in a state of *becoming*. As Pallasmaa reminds us, "[t]he body is not a mere physical entity; it is enriched by both memory and dream, past and future."⁹¹ However, it may allow the materiality of the body (condition, age, health, skin color, function, etc.) a greater importance and influence in the process of performativity and a decisive role in the construction of sex/gender, what I call a *material performativity*. Just as Butler cites the overlapping effects of different relations of power such as race, class and sexuality on the construction of the body, and explains that they do not coexist, converging equally along a horizontal axis nor can they be ranked hierarchically in a vertical scale, the transitional materiality of the body contains variable qualities that help determine which power relations affect that specific body, when and to what degree.⁹²

As the images above show, (fig. e)- one of the few photographs presented on the website of *Therme Vals* including a human figure, a skinny white model, Nadine Strittmatter, posing in a string bikini as if for a sports car ad in a macho magazine, and (fig. f)- Lucy Harris in her new home by The Rural Studio, one of the only published photos I have ever seen with a 'black' female pictured in a contemporary architectural space, the materiality of the body has an effect on the way these bodies are understood in relation to structural, aesthetic and societal norms.⁹³ Although both are published photos of a female body in a contemporary architectural space, the shape and skin color of the bodies are immediately compared to the norm, making Lucy Harris seem like an outsider, even though hers is the body of a 'real' client who lives in the actual space and the other is a model, not an everyday visitor of the bath, used to create a desired illusion. Here, skin color and physique are material factors in the subjectification and construction of gender for these two individuals, as is the materiality of anonymous heavy, grey stone (masculine-public) in comparison to the warm wooden interior of the home environment (feminine-private). My intent is not a return to an essentialized understanding of gender, but rather, for the purposes of a *non-essential phenomenological* analysis of architecture, to test the potential of performativity where the materiality of body and matter inform the process of materialization, a *material performativity*.



drag kings fig. g



Gertrude Stein fig. h

drag, butch and subversiveness

Butler sees the performative nature of gender exemplified in the act of drag; however, she makes it clear that she does not equate gender with clothing, as if it were something one could simply put on and take off at will.⁹⁴ She describes the potential in ‘drag,’ or the performance of alternative expressions of gender, as a critique of the normalizing assumptions made as a result of gender being fixed to a specific sex, which is in turn fixed to a specific body.⁹⁵ These norms, according to Butler, ultimately lead to a heterosexist society where sex determines not only a person’s gender, but also the object of one’s desire. Butler states that the subversiveness in drag lies not only in ‘resignification’ of these norms within gender and sexuality to produce new meanings and discourses, but more importantly in revealing the gender idealizations of heterosexual norms and the impossibility of ever attaining them.⁹⁶ In other words, “...*drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself-as well as its contingency,*” showing the original to also be a copy.⁹⁷ How then does the notion of drag and performativity of female masculinity relate to body and matter in architectural space?

As mentioned earlier, I do not see the drag king and butch as binary opposites, but rather as gender expressions with varying degrees of saturation of female masculinity. Nor do I see the architecture of scene and surface as the counterpart to the architecture of the senses; it is more a matter of surface and depth, hence the analogy to clothing and skin. However, these two related pairs can be compared to each other in the investigation of *material performativity*. Halberstam describes the drag king, “...a female (usually) who dresses up in recognizably male costume and performs theatrically in that costume [...] different from the drag butch, a masculine woman who wears male attire as part of her quotidian gender expression.”⁹⁸ The drag king, generally a more parodic form of the male impersonator, is part of a theatrical genre that performs male masculinity while the (drag) butch, although still a performance (as is all gender according to Butler), is an everyday gender expression of a masculine woman. Butch lies closer to the idea of *transmateria* than ‘cross-cladding’ in its *material performativity*,

transgender rather than drag, and has more to do with subjectivity than appearance, possessing the added element of sexuality. Halberstam writes, "...whereas the male impersonator and the drag king are not necessarily lesbian roles, the drag butch most definitely is."⁹⁹ According to Butler, the butch identity is a lesbian with a masculine identification, and it is the tension in this juxtaposition of a masculinity with a female body which has the desire for another female body that 'resignifies' the very notion of masculinity, keeping it from ever becoming a copy of heterosexual male masculinity or desire.¹⁰⁰ It is this type of 'transgression' or 'resignification,' to borrow Butler's terms, that I wish to achieve in redefining the assumed male masculinity of architecture by looking at its matter in transition, *transmateria*, through *material performativity* in a *non-essential phenomenological* manner.

Butler's proposal for political action entails smaller 'subversive' acts of everyday resistance to open up and dissolve the rigidity within the existing structure of the *heterosexual matrix*.¹⁰¹ This structure, resulting from the norms of heterosexuality, also affects our understanding and forming of the built environment. Although I am aware that Zumthor's bathhouse is likely rooted in the traditional teachings of a patriarchal canon which is founded on essentialist ideas and based on the body of a man, in other words built upon masculinist and heterosexist norms, I choose to interpret this space from another angle, and in doing so, to dislocate and resignify these norms. As Butler explains, drag is not about opposing or dismantling heterosexuality, but rather exposing what is usually taken for granted within heterosexual performativity.¹⁰² Likewise, I do not wish to abolish the current systems of geometry, proportion, and order, but rather to bring to light those aspects which are still unquestioned and may have an impact on redefining the very basic principles of architecture which in turn redefine our understanding of gender. Just as the drag kings (fig. g) and Gertrude Stein (fig. h) present two of many possible nuances of female masculinity, studying *transmateria* in *Therme Vals* provides alternative readings of a built work that may contribute to new understandings and meanings for both the body and matter, problematizing otherwise unchallenged ideals. In her own theory of performativity, Stein wrote, "The thing one gradually comes to find out is that one has no identity that is when one is in the act of doing anything. Identity is recognition, you know who you are because you and others remember anything about yourself but essentially you are not that when you are doing anything."¹⁰³ Little did Stein know, that according to Butler, she was not only subversive in her grammatical transgressions, but also in *doing* her gender.



stone

plate 1



water

plate 2



light

plate 3



valley of Vals & situation plan **fig. i**

part II architectural study

After a brief description of the baths: situation, exterior and interior, the following analysis is divided into three main categories; stone, water and light, all in relation to skin or body. By exploring the concept *transmateria* and its inseparable relation to the body through the senses, I study the *material performativity* of the thermal baths and its connection to female masculinity.

background

The thermal baths are located along the narrow valley of Vals in the Swiss Canton of Graubünden (fig. i), nestled in of one of the mountain slopes at the source of a natural spring. The surrounding village is made up of mostly vernacular architecture, dark timber farm houses with stone roofs, and is best known for its mineral water factory which bottles and distributes the very same water which flows out of the mountainside at a temperature of 30°C/86°F to fill the baths. Replacing an earlier spa from the 1960's, the actual site of the building is situated next to an existing hotel complex which was bought by the citizens of Vals. A local committee made up of members of the town commissioned the project and acted as the client group, working together with Peter Zumthor, the world renowned architect from the nearby town of Haldenstein, outside of Chur.¹⁰⁴



main facade fig. j



window-inside facade fig. k

exterior

The baths appear as a large stone object growing out of the slope of the mountain with its grass covered earth wrapping around the sharp geometric volume to form its roof and meet its exterior stone walls. Zumthor describes his intent of making a building which seemed to belong to the topography, like a quarry carved out of the mountain where the remaining blocks divide the space.¹⁰⁵ Reinforcing this idea, the bathhouse is made up of solitary units or volumes, each with its own overhanging roof, which fit together like a puzzle, yet none of the roof structures touch each other, leaving an 8cm gap between them to allow in streams of light making the roofs appear to float in thin air. In another connection to the mountain, the entire baths are built in the local stone gneiss which also covers the roofs of the farmhouses. The main façade facing the valley has large symmetrical square openings making dark contrasting shadows in the soft grey mass of the heavy stone (fig. j). The geometrical composition of the exterior is strong, as even the grassy roof is divided into a geometrical pattern with glass joints, as a reminder that this place is designed, not natural. The bathhouse is entered through an internal passageway from the connecting hotel: no grand entry. It is to feel as if one is beneath the surface of the earth, coming from the depths of the mountain and into the cave-like room.

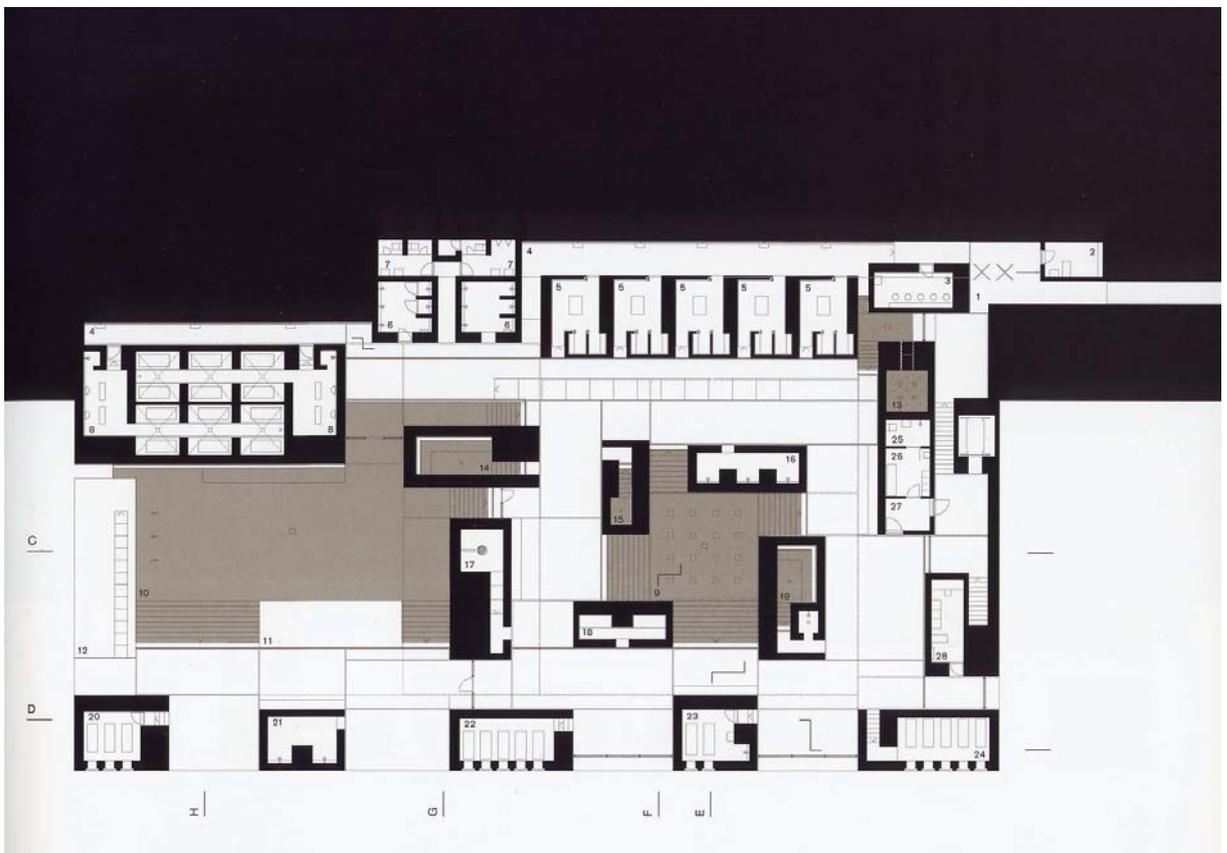
interior

Beyond the underground passageway, the corridor and linear block of changing rooms serve as a threshold to the baths. These small intimate spaces open up to the vast interior of the main space which is divided and framed by freestanding rectangular blocks of stone. Each of these blocks houses a different function, whether a pool, a shower (fig. m, #16), a steam chamber (fig. m, #8), a lounge area (fig. m, #22,24) or the fountain (fig. m, #17) where one can drink the mineral water directly out of the local spring, tasting the iron of the earth. There are 6 pools with different themes and temperatures; the main indoor bath 32°C/90°F (fig. m, #9), the fire bath 42°C/107.6°F (fig. m, #14), the cold bath 14°C/57.2°F (fig. m, #15), the flower bath 30°C/86°F (fig. m, #19), the spring grotto 36°C/96.8°F (fig. m, #13), and the outdoor bath 36°C/96.8°F (fig. m, #10). Stone is conceived as a homogenous material throughout,

mixing with water and light. Two discreet posts of brass topped with a clock the diameter of a wristwatch, stand punctured into the floor in the main space, a request of the client and compromise by the architect who wanted to keep the meditative space free from the constraints of time.¹⁰⁶ Signage is also kept to a minimum, often in engraved metal plates. Large openings in the main façade frame the outside landscape (fig. k), offering a view back out to the opposite side of the valley and mountaintops.



section E fig. l



plan, bathing level fig. m



door to one of stone blocks fig. n

stone

weight and the material performativity of butchness

The sheer weight of stone of *Therme Vals* produces an immediate awareness of gravity. The sharp contrasting voids cut into the solid mass of the stone walls, whether openings on the façade or niches in the interior, reveal the heaviness and permanence of the material. Zumthor describes the impression of the building from the exterior as a ‘large porous stone’ and the interior space as a ‘geometric cave system.’¹⁰⁷ He says of its relation to the landscape; “[t]he outside world *penetrates* through large openings and merges into the carved-out system of *caverns*.”¹⁰⁸ (my italics) Here the architect’s choice of imagery for the building has connotations to what are assumed to be feminine attributes. These terms imply an essential understanding of the female body and sexuality as something that is *porous* and passive, containing *caverns* to be *penetrated* by the masculine-associated outside. At the same time, Zumthor states “[t]he building has been conceived as a technically ordered, architectonic structure which avoids naturalistic form.”¹⁰⁹ In this statement, he describes the building as *geometric, technically ordered* and not *naturalistic*, qualities more readily associated to rationality, culture and the expression of male masculinity. Following, with the help of the concept *transmateria*, I will show why these two notions need not be understood as a contradiction. While the matter of the building is described in terms of a female body, the presence of this same space is associated to an expression of male masculinity. However, based on a *non-essential phenomenology*, I would argue that the combination of these contrasting associations can also be interpreted as an example of female masculinity.

The total height of the walls in the baths is 5m, overpowering the dimension of the body, but the thin stacked layers of stone which make up the walls relate to the human hand and the measure of the body (fig. n). They are pieces which can be grasped and reveal the wall’s structure in the methodical stacking of the building process. 60,000 carved stones equaling 60km of stone, went into the building; the quantity alone gives the sensation of heaviness

when thinking of the physical labor involved in quarrying, transporting and assembling the stones. The special stacking of the stone slabs in the walls of the baths look randomly placed (see plate 1), but are actually varying combinations of units equaling 15cm in height.¹¹⁰ This emphasizes the weight of the stone by exposing the structural principle where one slab rests on top of the other in an additive pressure downward towards the earth. This feeling of heaviness, however, is contrasted by the assemblage of the whole units or blocks, each with its own overhanging roof. The fact that they do not touch each other, gives the impression of lightness, as the heavy concrete roof slabs which top the stone walls seem to be floating on air, resisting gravity. Here, the associations to the existential dichotomies that Heidegger describes in relation to building and dwelling as sky/earth, divinities/mortals are inescapably bound to the gender dichotomy man/woman in its relation to the elements air/earth.¹¹¹ This building is both bound to the earth (feminine) and reaching towards the sky (masculine), questioning this male/female dichotomy and its very principles of separation. Stone, its matter, exhibits *material performativity*. The weight of the matter informs the way it reacts in relation to itself through its assemblage within the wall. Likewise, weight affects stone's relation to the world through the pull of gravity and the way it meets the support of the earth. Its relation to the body, in its size, shape and presence gives stone measure and scale. However, its weight is also used to contradict its own 'nature,' showing that this matter is not constant, but has the ability to transform the inherent 'feminine' qualities of stone to express what can be understood as female masculinity. This *transmateria* likens a butch gender position in its *material performativity*, thereby dislocating the assumptions of both what it is to be female as well as man's propriety over masculinity.

density of transmateria in female masculinity

"Gravity is measured by the bottom of the foot; we trace the density and texture of the ground through our soles."¹¹² Density is another material quality which affects the experience of matter in the building. *Therme Vals* is a dense stone mass, not a skeletal structure with an attached façade. The feel of a solid wall or floor engenders cave like imagery, recalling castles, grottos and monuments from the past. Sound echoes in the space, as the vibrations bounce between solid substance rather than continuing into the walls or floor like a hollow drum. As Pallasmaa writes, "...sound measures space and makes its scale comprehensible."¹¹³ Scale is what makes us feel the size of our own body in relation to a space, making us feel small or vulnerable in spaces of monumental size. When speaking of the 'homogenous composite construction' of the walls of the baths, a specially developed technique called Vals composite masonry, Zumthor states; "[t]here is no cladding of stone, concrete, or ceramic. Everything is monolithically conceived, constituted, and constructed."¹¹⁴ Zumthor's monolithic reference speaks of the scale of the space and the body's relation to the 5m walls mentioned earlier, as well as the feeling

that the space is carved from one solid piece of stone. The main room which contains all of the free-standing blocks of stone is vast, open and continuous. It takes up space and commands a presence in its stable massiveness. Similarly, one of the most usual characteristics of performing male masculinity taught in drag king workshops is the control or 'owning' of floor space through a firm stance and commanding presence.¹¹⁵ These are qualities attributed to masculine behavior, but not exclusively connected to male bodies. Is it possible then to continue thinking that monumentality is necessarily a form of dominant male masculinity? Rather, I suggest that monumentality is also a form of butchness. Of course, the asymmetrical power relations in our society play an important role. However, if we can no longer assume that masculinity belongs to male bodies, it follows that not only male bodies can exhibit the power and presence of the monumental. This brings the potential of transition to the material stone, showing that it can not be fixed in a singular gender expression and that the density of this *transmateria* lies within the realm of female masculinity.

Further, Zumthor's emphasis on homogeneity in his description of the wall construction can be seen in terms of the earlier discussion of the dichotomy between structure and surface in architectural discourse.¹¹⁶ Within this structure/surface dichotomy, the idea of cladding and façade is seen as 'clothing,' something trivial or false and connected to the feminine. In contrast, a wall which is built as a massive construction, where the façade is not only a 'decorative' covering but an integral part of the entire load bearing wall, is seen as part of the primary structure, necessary and functional. This homogenous construction is 'real,' not hiding anything else underneath, and is most often made up of natural materials such as stone or brick. Like the stone of the bathhouse, the materials are usually left in their natural state, without applying decorative coatings of paint or other surfaces. While the strength and functionality of this material density may be understood as masculine coded, the use of natural materials can be construed as gender ambiguous. The 'non-decorative' aspect in the rejection of other exterior coatings (likened to make-up and femininity) give homogenous natural materials a masculine materiality; however, their origins also have associations to 'Mother Earth' and the connotation of the element earth to the feminine/female.¹¹⁷ In this respect, the density of natural materials, such as stone, allows them a transitory position, free from the need of protective coatings (masculine), yet bound to its earthly origins (feminine), a transgender materiality or *transmateria*. Through both the weight and density of stone as *transmateria*, the male/female dichotomy is dissolved, proving Zumthor's earlier statements as non-contradictory.

surface and the transgender materiality of stone and skin

The thermal baths are about touching stone, ‘warm stone and naked skin.’¹¹⁸ According to Pallasmaa, “[t]he skin reads the texture, weight, density and temperature of matter. The surface of an old object, polished to perfection by the tool of the craftsman and the assiduous hands of its users, seduces the stroking of the hand. [...] The tactile sense connects us with time and tradition: through impressions of touch we shake the hands of countless generations.”¹¹⁹ In other words, the surface of stone is not only hard, impenetrable and protective, it is porous, erosive and subject to the forces of change through touch and time.¹²⁰ The stone in *Therme Vals* is affected in the process of bathing through the contact with water and the skin of its bathers. For instance, traces on the stone floor left by wet feet are like wrinkles which appear on a beautiful face, showing traces of laughter or dismay, lived experience embedded in the skin (see fig. o, fig. p). The phenomenon of discoloration on the stone evidences the porous quality of its surface and its ability to radiate warmth, as the color is restored over time from absorption and evaporation. In many ways, the surface of stone is related to the skin of the body. Both are the outermost boundary and contact with the world. Like skin, the surface of stone has the ability to absorb moisture, be scarred, and retain the marks from the erosion of time. Aging is a process which makes itself most visible in the surface, both in stone and in skin, although its effects may go much deeper in terms of gender and sexuality. How then does stone’s relation to skin as *transmateria* affect gender and sexuality?



stone floor fig. o



Gertrude Stein fig. p

Age can perhaps be seen as a materialization of time. Zumthor describes the initial concept of the thermal baths as forming a relationship with the mountain landscape and the stone’s geological origins, saying that “...the new building should communicate the feeling of being older than its existing neighbor, of always having been in the landscape.”¹²¹ In this statement, Zumthor seems to accredit age with a sense of power and respect, something which he envisions can be achieved through the use of this stone and its material embodiment of a sort of ancestry. Yet, *Therme Vals* has stood on this mountainside for a mere ten years since its

completion; its surface hardly tested by the weathering effects of nature and time, the years of experience which the surrounding farmhouses can attest to. One could say that it emulates the authority of the older stone-capped village through the promise of its material substance, but time is a determining factor for its process of maturation.

In regards to female masculinity, the aspect of age makes itself evident in the formation of sexuality. Traditionally, female sexuality is associated with the reproductive aspect of the body, reinforcing the heterosexual norm by connecting sexuality to reproduction.¹²² Within this construct, only the fertile years between puberty and menopause are seen as sexually significant for female bodies. This results in a desexualizing of both older and lesbian women for their 'non-fertile' sexuality, where the process of age functions as an expiration date on female sexuality and female same-sex desire is portrayed as abnormal due to the impossibility of reproduction. Architecturally speaking, the thermal baths are 'young,' not quite yet having reached what would be considered the age of puberty. Halberstam explains that female masculinity is often accepted in girls or 'tomboys' up to adolescence and the onset of puberty; however, once the aspect of sexuality arises, the girl is forced into femininity, 'managing' her body in what Halberstam calls 'gender conformity,' in order to fill the role which heterosexuality demands of her.¹²³ Age is also a determining factor in the early years for both gender expression as well as for sexual desire. The freedom and authority of male masculinity afforded in the years of female youth are often repressed and denied in accordance to hegemonic norms of gender and sexuality. If we continue to study the possibility of the bathhouse as representative of a butch gender position, one wonders if the bathhouse will be allowed to maintain its tomboyish ambiguity, once the surface of the stone begins to record marks left by everyday use along with the elements of weather and time, telling of its coming of age? Or will outside pressures and demands of both past and present transform its austere complexity into a one-dimensional conformity, denying its ability to question vernacular uniformity and essentializing its *material performativity*?



outdoor pool fig. 9

water

acoustic sexual material performativity of stone and water

The matter of water is an integral part of the thermal baths in Vals. Although its shape is determined by the stone basins which contain it, Zumthor builds with water just as much as he does with stone. Zumthor refers to the ‘archaic heritage of baths in Budapest, Istanbul, and Bursa’ and speaks of the ‘primary experiences of bathing.’¹²⁴ His view of bathing as ‘relaxation,’ ‘cleansing’ and ‘ritual’ reveal the type of water he wishes to create as well as the clear influence of the idea of baptism, with its origins in the Christian religion. Zumthor’s water is not dark or stagnant; it is clear, fresh spring water which revitalizes and renews; it even quenches the thirst.

The different pools of flowing water in *Therme Vals* are of contrasting shapes and sizes, colors and temperatures, housed within rooms of varying degrees of stillness and intimacy. The acoustics of the water are defined through the proportions (shape and size) of its container as well as the depth and character of movement within the water itself, in an interdependent relationship between water and stone, two ‘feminine’ matters according to Bachelard. Bachelard writes that “...every combination of material elements is a marriage [...] the naïve or poetic imagination nearly always attributes *feminine* characteristics to water.”¹²⁵ Further, he states “... for two substances to be opposite is for them to be of the opposite sex. If two matters with feminine tendencies, like water and earth, mingle, well then! one of them becomes slightly masculine in order to dominate its partner.”¹²⁶ Although Bachelard opens up for the possibility of matter in transition, *transmateria*, he heterosexualizes the ‘same-sex’ relationship of water and earth by requiring one of them to ‘become masculine,’ resulting in the norm of a complementary pair of female femininity and male masculinity. Here, I assume that Bachelard is not likely referring to a butch/femme relationship between matter.¹²⁷ In his description of what he calls violent water, he says “[t]he water becomes spiteful; it changes sex. Turning malevolent, it becomes male.”¹²⁸ Rather, it appears that Bachelard equates masculinity with male and femininity with female, always making the pair in matter heterosexual.

However, Moraga and Hollibaugh discuss a similar relationship of power between two female bodies with differing gender expressions in their critique of feminism's heterosexist view of female sexuality.¹²⁹ "I think the reason butch/femme stuff got hidden within lesbian-feminism is because people are profoundly afraid of questions of power in bed. [...] the question of power affects who and how you eroticize you[r] [sic] sexual need. And it is absolutely at the bottom of all sexual inquiry."¹³⁰ So, the domination of one's sexual partner does not necessarily have to imply a male masculinity. Therefore, Zumthor's symbiosis of matter between water and stone can just as easily be viewed as a butch/femme relationship. Whether the intense echo from the slightest movement of water within one of the small intimate stone spaces or the slow sound of a lingering splash from the indoor pool of the main open space, water and stone interplay with one another in a *sexual material performativity* of matter.

temperature and water's sexual material performativity of butch/femme

Through the body's contact with water a strong connection between skin and matter is formed. "Our skin traces temperature spaces with unerring precision; the cool and invigorating shadow under a tree, or the caressing sphere of warmth in a spot of sun, turn into experience of space and place."¹³¹ Through the combination of warm temperatures and moisture, an erotic or sexually charged sensation can occur. In a comparison with alcohol, a liquid which sustains fire instead of extinguishing it, Bachelard writes "[w]hen alcohol flames on a holiday evening, it seems that the *matter* is *mad*; it seems that the feminine water has lost all modesty and that in frenzied joy she is giving herself to her master, fire!"¹³² In this case, hot water is attributed to a dominant male masculinity or a seductive and promiscuous female psychosis. Bachelard speaks of thermal water as 'the immediate composition of water and fire.'¹³³ While the natural spring water of Vals is already quite warm at 30°C/86°F, four of the six pools are heated to a temperature above 30°C/86°F.¹³⁴ Only the cold bath and the bath filled with flower petals are the natural spring's temperature or colder. In a more explicit manner, Bachelard speaks of matter as "...the marriage of opposites... Water extinguishes fire; a woman extinguishes ardor. In the realm of matters, no two can be found which are more opposed than water and fire. Water and fire give what is perhaps the only really substantial contradiction. If logically one calls for the other, sexually one desires the other. How is it possible to dream of greater Procreators than water and fire!"¹³⁵ If one were to follow Bachelard's logic of sexual potency found in material opposites, the heterosexual force of procreation would be at its peak at Vals in the combination of the fire bath (fig. r) and cold bath (fig. s). However, what happens if we measure sexual potency not in terms of the heterosexual measure- procreation, but in terms of pleasure and intimacy?

Hollibaugh and Moraga describe the sexual intensity and intimacy possible within a butch/femme relationship. “That’s what I begin to feel from my lover’s hands. I begin to fantasize myself becoming more and more female in order to comprehend and meet what I feel happening in her body. I don’t want her not to be female to me. Her need is female, but it’s butch because I am asking her to expose her desire through the movement of her hands on my body and I’ll respond [...] This can feel profoundly powerful [...] *It was only with women I couldn’t avoid opening up my need to have something more than an orgasm.* With a woman, I can’t refuse to know that the possibility is just there that she’ll reach me some place very deeply each time we make love.”¹³⁶ In these terms, same-sex sexuality is also a possible analogy to the material pleasure the body receives from the fire and cold water in Zumthor’s thermal baths. In other words, the attraction and ‘fertility’ of opposites does not require a male/female dichotomy, and the transitory nature of matter allows us to view the hot/cold relationship as butch/femme.¹³⁷ Its *transmateria* makes *sexual material performativity* possible.



fire bath fig. r



ice bath fig. s

color saturation of transmateria in the sexual material performativity of butch

The intimate connection between the fire (fig. m, #14) and cold (fig. m, #15) bath is not only established through the contrasting differences in water temperature; it is also emphasized by physical qualities of the interior spaces which house and affect the water, such as asymmetry, unequal proportions and variations in color. In plan, the fire bath and cold bath are located opposite one another, functioning together as a complementary pair, but the physical containers are not equal in volume nor symmetrically placed. They are situated in an L-configuration where the openings are shifted in an offset relationship to one another, disrupting any symmetrical understanding of the spaces as equal opposites. From the bather’s point of view, the opening to the fire bath is on the short side of the volume and the body’s movement into the space is a steady direct line from one end to the other. In contrast, the opening to the cold bath on a long side of the volume forces the body to enter from the side and turn a corner, slowing down the movement before the plunge into the cold water.

However, the exit of these rooms is usually the reverse, due to water's effect on the body. One is often a bit light-headed from the heat of the fire bath resulting in a more careful procession outward, while the intense shock of the cold bath triggers a quick escape. These contrasting patterns and speeds of movement coincide with the proportions of the rooms and their variations in color. While the room of the fire bath is low and wide, radiating a dark warm red glow, the cold bath is compact and high, frosted in a bright whitish-blue tint. Associations between color and matter, where red symbolizes the speed and heat of molten lava and whitish-blue connotes the stillness of frozen snow, reinforce the materialization of these waters as opposites. What does the saturation of color in the red and blue water of these spaces have in common with the saturation of female masculinity in a butch gender position? How does the saturation of color in *transmateria* affect its *sexual material performativity*?

In a sexist/racist explanation of the associations that come from 'the primitive sensual reality of matter' Bachelard describes waves of water in terms of color and virginity.¹³⁸ "The waves receive their whiteness and their limpidity from an internal matter. This matter is *dissolved maiden*. Water has taken on the property of dissolved feminine substance. If you want an immaculate water, have virgins dissolved in it. If you want the seas of Melanesia, have negresses dissolved in it."¹³⁹ And if you want the waters surrounding the Greek island Lesbos? What then? Bachelard would likely say dissolve a few lesbians in it. Despite his reference to female bodies as a substance that can be 'dissolved' in water like a curry off the kitchen spice rack, Bachelard implies that the color and transparency of water can have connotations to gender, sexuality and skin color. As mentioned earlier, *transmateria* is related to the body through skin, where gender and sexuality are a matter of saturation. Zumthor adds color to the materiality of water in the fire/cold baths through pigmentation within the concrete inner walls and the use of a terazzo floor.¹⁴⁰ Both materials are homogeneously colored throughout the thickness, rather than a thin layer of applied color to the surface of the materials. The reflection of this color radiates from the depth of matter, joining surface with thickness, giving the sensation that color belongs to matter; it cannot be removed or easily changed, similar to the saturation of female masculinity in a butch gender position or the saturation of female femininity of a femme gender position. Although the water itself could be saturated with pigment instead of reflected from the surface of stone, by making the color of water dependent on the interaction with the stone, the same-sex sexuality of 'feminine' matter is retained, supporting the idea of a butch/femme relationship.

The effect of color on the *sexual material performativity* of matter can be compared to the racialization of sexuality in bodies based on the grounds of skin color. Similar to what American black feminist bell hooks describes as the "...prevailing racist sexist stereotypes that

portrayed black women as morally impure,” Bachelard connects virginity and whiteness to calm, clear water and an inferred impure sexuality to water which is assumed to be dark, mysterious and uncontrollable like the seas of a far off exotic land.¹⁴¹ The specific reference to Melanesia, a former colony of the author’s country of origin– France, raises the question of the relationship of the colonizer to the colonized and Bachelard’s own position when referring to the waters of the Melanesian sea. In his description of the *sexual material performativity* of water in terms of its color, the stereotypes comparable to those hooks speaks of, where the view of female sexuality is based on skin color and derived out of sexism and racism. In relation to *Therme Vals*, is it possible that the saturation of color in *transmateria* achieved in the baths has an effect on the *sexual material performativity* of the otherwise clear ‘virginal’ spring water?

In terms of the discussion above, the difference between dark red water and light whitish-blue water can be falsely construed as the passion of the aggressive sexuality of working-class female bodies with ‘non-white’ skin versus the frigidity of the passive sexuality of middle class female bodies with ‘white’ skin. However, even within the scope of female masculinity, the racialization of gender and sexuality is present. In a critique of white, middle class, academic feminism, Hollibaugh and Moraga write “We believe our racial and class backgrounds have a huge effect in determining how we perceive ourselves sexually.”¹⁴² For instance, my own use of Gertrude Stein in this text as an example of the butch gender position has most likely produced imagery throughout the analysis of a white, western, female body from a culturally and economically privileged class. This in turn associates the female masculinity of a butch to a hegemonic form of male masculinity.¹⁴³ However, the notion of butch changes with a non-white or non-western female body from what Brah describes as ‘working-class,’ ‘peasant’ or ‘migrant’ social conditions.¹⁴⁴ This shift is similar to what Halberstam reveals when she writes “...the category of butch realness is often occupied by nonwhite drag kings, attesting specifically to the way that masculinity becomes visible as masculinity once it leaves the sphere of normative white maleness.”¹⁴⁵ In other words, the form of female masculinity performed by a drag king, or embodied by a butch, can also be affected by normative notions of male masculinity in terms of skin color, ethnicity and class. Accordingly, since normative notions of male masculinity also include norms of sexuality, the saturation of color affects the *sexual material performativity* of *transmateria*, and is a determining factor in its representation of a butch gender position.



roof detail fig. t

light

Light differs from the tangible matters examined earlier, stone and water, in that scientific terms describe it as a visible immaterial phenomenon produced by electromagnetic waves.¹⁴⁶ In order to speak of light as matter in a *non-essential phenomenological* way within the context of an architecture of the senses, it is necessary to first establish what I mean by light. In his poetic words about silence and light in architecture where light is ‘the measureable’ and silence ‘the unmeasurable,’ Louis Kahn defines his understanding of the relationship of light to matter and body as follows: “I said that all material in nature, the mountains and the streams and the air and we, are made of Light which has been spent, and this crumpled mass called material casts a shadow, and the shadow belongs to Light. So Light is really the source of all being.”¹⁴⁷ In other words, light materializes as matter and body. With a similar understanding of light as something measureable or material, Plummer, who refers to both Pallasmaa and Bachelard in his text, describes light as something you feel rather than see or think.¹⁴⁸ He describes the shift in the character of light within modern architecture from serving a secondary role of making form visible to acquiring a “...substantial presence of its own, as a *real* ingredient in architecture.”¹⁴⁹ Light in the thermal baths has an interdependent relationship where it is dependent on the interaction with the matter of water and stone to become visible. Plummer, borrowing a phrase from Mircea Eliade, describes the quality that light brings to other matter as “saturation of being.”¹⁵⁰ It is in this sense that I wish to explore the *material performativity* of light and its potential of exhibiting qualities of *transmateria*, as matter which, together with stone and water, makes up the space of the thermal baths.

texture of light in the sexual material performativity of butch desire

The texture of light in the spaces of the thermal baths is directly connected to the organization of matter and its situation in the landscape. The entrance and changing rooms, nestled within the slope and mass of the mountainside, make artificial light a necessity (see fig. l). This is also the place where one is most naked, most vulnerable, as well as most protected and enclosed.

There are 5 changing rooms (fig. m, #5), an odd number not divisible by 2, leaving an ambiguity to the usual binary division of sex-segregated use. Each changing room is a single open space lined with lockers, to achieve an economy of space and functionality, however, this arrangement can also be seen as establishing a heterosexual norm where an idea that all bodies of ‘the same sex’ are considered to be ‘the same’ and to desire ‘the opposite,’ therefore making it acceptable to be naked in the same space. This is countered, however, by two curtained changing booths within each changing room to allow for individuals who prefer to dress in privacy. The reddish color and high polished finish on materials of dark wood and leather in these small intimate spaces (fig. u), combined with naked skin, affect the materiality of the artificial light, giving it what I would describe as the taste of dark chocolate with a hint of red chili. It’s texture is velvet, artificial, yet warm and comforting with a sensuousness that is sexually charged... not at all like what Plummer describes as ‘the static artificial light of engineers.’¹⁵¹ As mentioned earlier in the discussion on essentialized notions of female femininity and male masculinity in architectural discourse, sensuousness and intimacy are assumed to be feminine or female characteristics. In this situation, however, these characteristics are ‘artificially’ generated, supporting Butler’s notion of gender as a copy of a copy.¹⁵² Since all forms of femininity are ‘iterations’ of an ideal, then the light or *transmateria* in the changing rooms can just as well be associated to femme femininities and their accompanying sexualities.¹⁵³ If the main space of the baths has an interdependent relationship to the changing rooms, then what is the relationship between the light or *transmateria* of these two spaces?



changing room fig. u



main space and stair fig. v

Passing through the dressing rooms and into the open continuous space of the baths which flows outward, away from the mountain and towards the valley, entails a move from artificial to natural light, to daylight and shadow (fig. v). While artificial light is constant and controllable, daylight changes according to influences from the weather, the shift of the sun, the seasons, time of day or even the color of the sky, its materialization is dependent on time

and place. As Plummer notes, “[o]ften the simpler in palette and more severe a building form [is], the more nature’s moods [become] amplified.”¹⁵⁴ The room of the baths is austere, amplifying the texture of light as it rests on the surfaces of water and stone. The materiality of this natural light has an ambiguous quality which is even more dependent on the bodies that inhabit the space. As daylight is always in constant change, its rate of materialization much faster than that of stone or water, its texture is ‘formed intersubjectively’ through observations of individual bathers at specific moments in time.¹⁵⁵ This transitive or ambiguous quality establishes light’s materiality as *transmateria* making its *material performativity* evident.

Although the materiality of daylight in the baths can not be fixed, the influence from the matter of stone and water is relatively constant. Despite Bachelard’s claim that matter can never combine in more than a pair, “there is no marriage à trois,” I propose that the interrelationship of stone, water and light form a combination where the *sexual material performativity* of the matters already discussed provides an influence on light’s *transmateria* which push it towards a female masculinity.¹⁵⁶ The sturdiness of stone and the seductiveness of water, with all of their built in contradictions, provide a base for the texture of light to materialize. With these influences in mind, I would describe the materiality of this light as a combination of polished stone and fine mist... smooth, solid, fresh, radiant, like the taste of honeydew melon combined with salty parma ham.¹⁵⁷ The texture of this light is satin.

In a discussion on female masculinity and butch desire, Butler explains that “...for the most part (but not exclusively) butches are deeply, if not fatally, attracted to the feminine and, in this sense, love the feminine. [...] butch desire ought properly to be described as another permutation of feminine desire. [...] But if there is masculinity at work in butch desire, [...] then why shy away from the fact that there may be ways that masculinity emerges in women, and that feminine and masculine do not belong to differently sexed bodies?”¹⁵⁸ The butch desire for femininity that Butler speaks of can be understood either in terms of a butch/femme relationship where the female masculinity of a butch desires the female femininity of a femme, or as a ‘permutation of feminine desire’ where the femaleness of a butch in its formation of female masculinity coupled with same-sex desire is valued. Through the interrelationship between the daylight and artificial light of the two spaces, the *sexual material performativity* of the *transmateria* in the main space (satin/butch) forms a butch/femme relationship with the *transmateria* of the changing rooms (velvet/femme), satisfying the butch desire for femininity, and the femme desire for butch.

fragmentation in the sexual material performativity of light and stone

Streams of light from the ceiling divide the large continuous space of the baths revealing its composition of solitary units comprised of massive stone blocks with overhanging concrete slab roofs, what Zumthor describes as ‘tables’ (see plate 3). Reproducing imagery from the geological origins of the stone and ecclesiastical associations to the light of God in Western Christianity, he uses the assemblage of the building to allow in light from above as a ‘network of fissures’ in the ceiling, reinforcing the sense of a cave-like room.¹⁵⁹ Zumthor mentions how these streams of daylight which filter in through the narrow gaps, wash one side of each block by toplight (fig. t). This shows the interdependence of light and stone, as light imbues stone with a ‘saturation of being’ while at the same time making its own presence as matter visible.¹⁶⁰ Further, Zumthor describes the connection between light and stone where “...the meandering internal space is structured by big ‘tables’ of stone, assembled in a geometric pattern.”¹⁶¹ In its materialization, light, as matter regulated by stone, institutes a formal order on the openness of the interior space. The *material performativity* of light and stone are dependent on the materiality of each other.

Butler explains her reservations about the concept of ‘materiality’ in that it establishes norms which are taken for granted and eventually used as the grounds for exclusion. “‘Materiality’ designates a certain effect of power or, rather, *is* power in its formative or constituting effects.”¹⁶² According to Butler, materialization is always about power, “...for to be material means to materialize, where the principle of that materialization is precisely what ‘matters’ about that body, its very intelligibility.”¹⁶³ Butler speaks of ‘intelligibility’ as an exclusive norm which has the power to determine which bodies are acceptable and which are not. Those bodies which are deemed unintelligible or ‘fail to materialize,’ fall outside the norm of what is acceptable in terms of gender, race, class, etc. and do not ‘qualify as bodies that matter.’¹⁶⁴ In terms of sex/gender, this affects transgender bodies which do not fit the norm of a masculine gender with a male body or a feminine gender with a female body, or even the materiality of a male/female body itself, deemed to belong to one ‘sex’ or the other. Butler warns that a return to matter implies a return to “...a sedimented history of sexual hierarchy and sexual erasures...” on the grounds of sexual difference.¹⁶⁵ If this is so, how can the idea of *transmateria* show the potential of materialization through light’s *material performativity*? How can the materiality of light inform our understanding of the materialization of the body in a non-essential, non-heteronormative manner?

Rather than seeing the *material performativity* of light in a normative way, as a lighting effect enhancing the surface of stone or as the geometrical ordering of the main space, I suggest instead that these streams of light materialize within the surface of stone, fragmenting the

continuous space of the interior. As matter, light is not in a subservient position to stone, with the sole purpose of illuminating its surface. It is matter itself which bounds and divides space in a joint effort with the stone blocks. This union can be seen as *sexual material performativity* between the two *transmaterias*. Likewise, the fragmentation of space disrupts the continuity of the interior space, dividing the whole into ‘unintelligible’ pieces. Through materialization, light makes the norm of a complete unity unintelligible, opening up for other understandings of the space. In its interaction with stone, the *sexual material performativity* of light reinforces the contrast between interiority and exteriority, as rays of light from the outside brightness slice through the shadowy stone interior. The rational ordering of a dark interior space is assumed to be a ‘masculine’ act upon an implied passive ‘female’ body, an idea reinforced by the connection of the brightness of light to the exterior (male) and the darkness of the stone space to the interior (female). However, since we have already established that the *transmateria* of this light in the main space exhibits butch desire through its texture, what was assumed as a ‘masculine’ act, is more specifically a female masculine act of butchness. Thinking in terms of fragmentation allows light as *transmateria* to combine in a joined *sexual material performativity* with stone in a butch/femme relationship. This visible sexual desire between these two matters, where light and dark meld in activity and stillness, refutes the idea of a necessary division of sex into a binary system male/female with its heterosexual complementary pairs.

reflection of light as the sexual material (non)performativity of stone butch

Just as there are many gender positions along the scale of masculinity and femininity, there are also many different kinds of butches. Halberstam explains that “[p]redictably, the degrees of butchness are measured in terms of hardness and softness or in terms of permeability...”¹⁶⁶ She describes the most impenetrable, the stone butch, as “...a dyke body placed somewhere on the boundary between female masculinity and transgender subjectivity.”¹⁶⁷ What characterizes the stone butch from other subjects with a butch gender expression, according to Halberstam, is a specific relationship to lesbian sexual practice, where historically the stone butch is known to give pleasure to her partner without allowing her partner to make love to her as a woman in return. In a twist on Butler’s theory of performativity, Halberstam calls this ‘untouchability’ an example of ‘nonperformance’ stating that it “...reveals the ways in which performativity itself is as much a record of what a body will not do as what it might do.”¹⁶⁸ It is a mixture of pleasure and restraint, eroticism and sexuality. In the baths, this mixture is expressed through the *sexual material performativity* of light in relationship to water. Is it perhaps more appropriate to speak of a stone butch gender position in Zumthor’s great stone building when exploring the relationship between the *transmateria* of light and water?

In a discussion on the interaction of light with glass, a solid material with translucent qualities similar to that of water, Plummer writes of “[a] love for diaphanous substances which light can *penetrate*, causing them to glow and sparkle from within.”¹⁶⁹ (my italics) He explains the reflective and refractive qualities of the substance in its ability to “...delay, fracture and disturb transmitted light.”¹⁷⁰ With implicit sexual connotations, Plummer describes the phenomenon of illuminated glass as the “...sign of passing light as it briefly inhabits solid material, transfusing the glass with *ecstasies* of brightness and beauty.”¹⁷¹ (my italics) Much in the same way I speak of the materialization of light within the surface of the stone walls, Plummer suggests that by joining with the solid translucent material glass, that light itself becomes corporeal. Again, equating the similar material qualities of water with glass for the specific situation in the bathhouse, we have a ‘feminine’ material, water, being *penetrated* to the point of *ecstasy*. Light is given an active ‘masculine’ role in its interaction with another substance, however there is an ambiguity in the fact that light only attains its presence or full being through the joining with another matter. In the traditional patriarchal hierarchy of the separation of the sexes, it is ‘woman’ who is dependent on ‘man’ for her subjectivity, while “...the stone butch in many ways is femme dependent...”¹⁷² It follows then that if light is dependent on water for its subjectivity, but water is penetrated by light, then within the realm of female same-sex sexual relationships and in accordance with Plummer’s description, it is possible to deduce that light and water form a butch/femme union where light assumes a stone butch position.

Although it appears that light sacrifices its *transmaterial* qualities for the sole benefit of water (or stone) in its *sexual material performativity*, light also becomes materialized in the union (see plate 2). In defense of the stone butch’s sexual practices, Halberstam reminds us that “...for the stone butch, pleasure lies in, and indeed springs from, her ability to satisfy her partner *without reciprocation in kind*.”¹⁷³ However, this particular form of lesbian masculinity has its price. Because of her sexuality, the stone butch has been ridiculed and excluded, deemed intimately crippled and selfish, even within the lesbian and feminist communities. “If stone butch is claimed as a transgressive sexual subjectivity, then, it is [...] because there is a degree of hardship and contradiction embedded in this sexuality.”¹⁷⁴ The aspect of melancholy that Halberstam mentions, residing in the embodiment of a stone butch gender position, can be compared to the solemn, contemplative stillness of the baths which arise in the flicker of light upon the pools of water and their reflection within the matte stone surface of the walls. The *sexual material (non)performativity* of light in water produces a meditative atmosphere or melancholic longing for the bodies which inhabit the space, calling for reflection and a looking inward, ‘a presence of absence.’¹⁷⁵

conclusion

After presenting some examples of the essentialist ideas about gender that architectural phenomenological thought is founded upon and suggesting a revision in the way one thinks about the architecture of the senses through a *non-essential phenomenology*, I examine Butler's theory of performativity and her ideas on the concept 'materialization,' where a move towards a non-essential understanding of gender tends to distance itself from the materiality of the body. Here, I propose an increased role of the materiality of the body with the help of Pallasmaa's ideas on body and matter in relation to time. Matter, like the body, is seen as something constantly in transition, or *transmateria*, where matter's inherent qualities directly affect the rate and processes which determine its materialization, a *material performativity*. This in turn, may have an effect on the role of materiality of the body in the materialization of gender. In order to connect the *material performativity* of *transmateria* in architecture to gender and sexuality in bodies, I explore the differences in the saturation of female masculinity in drag king and butch gender expressions in an analogy to surface and matter. This difference lies somewhere on a variable scale between appearance and subjectivity within the expression of female masculinity. By looking specifically at queer female gender positions, the thought is to destabilize the essential thinking of the binary opposites male/female, thereby transgressing the heterosexual norm built into the environment.

In the architectural analysis of Peter Zumthor's thermal baths in Vals, Switzerland, I study three primary materials of this built work, stone, water and light, with the help of a newly constructed methodology. Material qualities of stone (weight, density, surface), water (acoustics, temperature, color) and light (texture, fragmentation, reflection), are examined through a *non-essential phenomenology* in terms of the *material performativity* or *sexual material performativity* of *transmateria*. I attempt to locate ambiguities, contradictions and transitive qualities of matter to show the potential of materiality and that more than one understanding of both bodies and matter exist.

The weight and density of stone in the walls of *Therme Vals*, through the *material performativity* of its *transmateria*, disrupts the essentialized gender coding of its material origins as well as its principles of construction and questions the presumed connection of monumentality to male bodies, dissolving the male/female dichotomy. In a close connection to skin, stone's surface shows the power of age in the process of materialization and the construction of gender and sexuality. The surface of this *transmateria* presents a gender ambiguity which challenges an essential conformity to norms of architectural expression and female sexuality.

Water in the pools of the thermal baths exhibits *sexual material performativity* through a butch/femme relationship both in its acoustic relation to the stone basins and through its

temperature within the fire and cold baths. In a twist on the elemental associations of these matters to femininity, sexual domination and potency- measured in pleasure and intimacy, place this *transmateria* in a butch/femme relationship questioning the ideals of heterosexual sexuality. The saturation of color in the fire and cold baths also affects water's *sexual material performativity* in a similar way that skin color racializes sexuality in bodies. In terms of female masculinity, associations to color may determine which normative notion of male masculinity a butch stands in comparison to, in terms of skin color, ethnicity and class, showing that color is an important material aspect in the performativity of gender.

Sexual material performativity of the textures of *transmateria* in the interdependent relationship between artificial and natural light, found in the contrasting intimacy of the changing rooms and the vastness of the main space, evidence the butch desire for femininity. Fragmentation in the main space allows light as *transmateria* to combine in a joined *sexual material performativity* with stone in a butch/femme relationship. This same-sex sexual relationship refutes the idea of a necessary division of sex into a male/female binary system with its heterosexual complementary pairs. Revealing the diversity within the female masculinity of butches, the *sexual material performativity* between the *transmateria* of light and water form a stone butch/femme relationship. Light receives its pleasure in its *sexual material (non)performativity* through the pleasuring of water in the pools of the bathhouse, making variations in queer female masculine gender positions visible and keeping butch from becoming an essentialized category. The feeling of melancholy in the main space from the interaction of these *transmaterias* speaks of the bathhouse's longing for bodies that matter.

Is an analysis of architecture through the concept of *transmateria* and variations of *material performativity* a subversive act in itself, in the way that Butler speaks of working within the dominant gender system to create new meanings of gender by refuting normalizing assumptions about femininity and masculinity?¹⁷⁶ Or does this demystification of gender merely establish new normalizing dichotomies which essentialize ideas about transgender positions? If so, is it then necessary or even possible to completely eliminate sexual symbolism in architecture and move towards a more androgynous understanding of the built environment? Or does this utopian desire, an impossibility according to Butler, lie too closely to the already underlying problematic assumption in architecture today that the built environment is 'neutral'?¹⁷⁷ Perhaps most pertinent to this study, how can the exploration of female masculinity in the matter of architecture help to change the way we think about, practice and teach architecture?

Through the analysis of Zumthor's bathhouse in terms of female non-normative gender positions and sexualities, I have shown the possibility to shift and resignify earlier assumptions

about sex/gender, dismantle essentialist thinking and disrupt heteronormative structures, while still retaining the materiality of matter and body. Although I see the similarities and dangers between phenomenological essentialist analogies of masculine/feminine relationships and my own of butch/femme relationships to matter, I feel that the emphasis on non-normative female genders and sexualities challenges hegemonic hierarchical relations of power and gives the study a subversive meaning and force, in keeping with Butler's ideas of political resistance.

Traditionally, architectural discourse focuses on arguing for one 'true' or 'real' way of viewing and making architecture, a canon, ranging from philosophical, structural and aesthetic issues to practical, functional and economic ones. Although I have a personal affinity towards the architecture of the senses, I would suggest that rather than arguing for one understanding of architecture, perhaps we should begin arguing against *only* one, recognizing our own positions and power in promoting that which is taken to be representative to allow for the inclusion of marginalized positions that enrich and vitalize dominant discourse. This is not to say that 'anything goes' and fall into relativism, nor am I suggesting that individual architects should 'diversify' rather than following inclinations towards one way of thinking and making; however, 'dragging' now and then is probably a healthy idea.

By providing some new interpretations beyond the established essentialized ones in practice and theory, I challenge built-in values and norms which are taken for granted as being representative or 'neutral' rather than socially and culturally selective and exclusive. I would argue that it is these norms that lead to a stifling architectural education which stuffs all of its students into one single mold, popping out identical architects that produce identical buildings with identical values, creating and maintaining potentially oppressive norms through mere repetition. As Butler reminds us, although repetition gives the appearance of being genuine, it only hides the fact that even the original is a copy.¹⁷⁸ In this study, I propose *one* way to look at *one* type of architecture. This is only one of many possible readings.

Do bodies matter? Pallasmaa states, "[w]e transfer all the cities and towns that we have visited, all the places that we have recognised, into the incarnate memory of our body. Our domicile becomes integrated with our self-identity; it becomes part of our own body and being."¹⁷⁹ Sitting submersed up to the shoulders in the warm outdoor pool at *Therme Vals*, looking up at the surrounding landscape of intense snow-capped mountains from the interior courtyard, catching snowflakes on the tongue or nose at the end of a journey through the baths, the joining of matter and body is sensually heightened to a degree that is almost graspable, material. In the experience of architecture, matter and body are inseparable. It is therefore crucial for architects to begin to think about the *material performativity* of matter in terms which benefit all bodies, genders and sexualities.

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prologue

¹ -Halberstam 1998, p 209-215 presents these three characters as examples of female drag in film.

-The reference to Selma Lagerlöf's home and connection to drag comes from the discussion in Katarina Bonnevier's 2006a unpublished dissertation.

² -Bonnevier 2006b

-A note on the use of the term *feminist*: As Gemzöe 2002 explains in her book *Feminism*, there is not one type of feminism, but many feminisms. When referring to 'feminist' or 'feminism' in this paper, I am referring to the more general definition that Gemzöe presents: "A feminist is a person who believes 1) that women are subordinated in relation to men and 2) this relationship should be changed." (my translation) p 13

introduction

³ Pallasmaa 2005b; Butler 1990, 1993

⁴ Butler 1990, 1993; Pallasmaa 2005a, 2005b, 2005c

⁵ -A note on the use of the term *matter*: For a western historical/philosophical (androcentric) overview of the many meanings and understandings of matter see *The Great Ideas: A Syntopicon of Great Books of the Western World* 1952, p 63-70. The beginning of this overview raises the question whether the philosophical concept Matter is the same as the everyday things we encounter in the world. It suggests that the philosophical concept Matter is not "the things I see with my eyes and touch with my hands," but rather properties or qualities which we perceive, and "have their being *in being perceived*." (p 63) This was often maintained by theologians in defense of the existence of immaterial spirits which did not have a corporeal body. Although she does not completely deny materiality, this argument perhaps lies closer to Butler's notion, where matter is a process which produces an effect or illusion of that which we call matter. (Butler 1993, p 9) Phenomenologists also stress the experience of matter through perception, however, they ascribe a primordial existence to matter which changes in relation to time, affirming both the material and immaterial. In other words, there must *be* something exhibiting these qualities we perceive. (Bachelard 1994, p 1-18) To completely define where my notion of matter lies in relation to these positions would take another paper. Within this text matter is understood as "the solid, massy, concrete stuff of which tangible, visible, movable, and moving things are made." (*The Great Ideas*, p 63)

-A note on the use of the term *body*: My use of the term is closest to Merleau-Ponty's 1962 phenomenological concept of the lived body where body is not simply 'the flesh' but a unified physical, emotional and intellectual being. In this text, I do stress the materiality of the body, primarily through the skin and the sense of touch. However, I wish to distance myself from all universal and/or androcentric understandings of the body by speaking of the body as sexed or gendered.

Also, I most often use the phrase 'the body' instead of 'a body' or the plural 'bodies.' Albeit, this is not my intention, this use can be construed as implying that there is a pre-given body which exists as a site for the powers of social and cultural construction to act upon. Rather, for the purpose of linguistic ease and to achieve a consistency within the style of writing, I use 'the body' and ask that the reader understand this term as referring to the body which is constituted through forces of cultural construction, yet retains the properties of materiality. This is possible due to my understanding of the phenomenological concept of the lived body which is a simultaneous union of material and immaterial phenomena. (see discussion above on matter) This is, further, where my understanding of the body diverges from Butler's extreme constructivist view. She rethinks materiality as an 'effect of power' and denies the possibility of the existence of the body outside the forces of discourse and power. (Butler, 1993) In other words, I do not claim that bodies exist outside or before discourse, but that the two occur simultaneously. Likewise, I do not believe that bodies are constituted through an inscription *on* the surface of a pre-existing body, but that through embodiment cultural forces and materiality meld. As in the discussion of matter above, this view is not philosophically resolved, but merely gives an insight into to my current understanding and use of the term. For a discussion on this dilemma, see Butler 1999.

⁶ -A note on the use of the terms *gender/sex*: According to Gayle Rubin 1975, "Gender is a socially imposed division of the sexes. It is a product of the social relations of sexuality." p 179 Throughout this text; however, I use the terms *gender* and *sex* synonymously, sometimes as a pair, in the way that Butler 1990 describes both as being socially and culturally constructed. Butler bases a great deal of her gender theory on the findings of Gayle Rubin. In contrast to Butler's theory which separates body from sex making sex and gender equal, Rubin's theory calls for a re-organization of the kinship system while leaving the connection of sex to the body intact and gender as a separate category of social/cultural construction. I choose to use both *gender/sex* rather than just one, to reinforce the idea that they are synonymous and to avoid the risk of being misinterpreted as speaking either of only the physical anatomical body or only the socially constructed attributes of masculinity or femininity. Linguistically, the term *gender* is perhaps most widely accepted, as *sex* can be confused with the act of intercourse,

and therefore I use *gender* in more general discussions about ideas rather than about actual bodies. In the event that I use *sex*, however, I am either following the use of terminology of a specific reference or emphasizing the anatomical meaning of the term.

-Throughout this text, when referring to 'architecture,' I am speaking of the history and traditions of Western architecture.

⁷ The term **demystification** refers to Minnich 2005. Minnich defines *mystified concepts* as "ideas, notions, categories that are so deeply familiar that they are rarely questioned." p 108 Further, she explains that *mystified concepts* develop out of what she calls *faulty generalizations*- universalizations or assumptions made through an abstraction of cultural values taken to be obvious or 'natural' and *circular reasoning*- a conclusion which is already built in the assumption. The result, *partial knowledge*- where reasoning is limited by these *mystified concepts* leading to faulty and biased knowledge.

⁸ - Butler 1990, p189

-This type of conceptualization of gender coding in architecture will be discussed later in this paper, but Ahrentzen 1996 gives one example when quoting Charles Jencks, author of *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1978, Academy Editions: London): "Buildings or building details that are large, solid, massive, linear, or vertical are labeled as masculine; delicate and curved forms constitute the feminine." p 92

⁹ A note on the use of the term **masculinity**: When speaking of the concept of masculinity I am primarily referring to a form of masculinity for men in Western society which feminist architect Ahrentzen 1996 calls the 'Marlboro man myth.' She explains that qualities such as individualism, competitiveness, control, mastery, rationality and emotional distance "specify a normative masculinity, a version (albeit white, middle-class, and heterosexual) that is often the standard against which other masculinities are compared and other social groups suppressed." p 73 This is the type of masculinity I refer to as the norm which female masculinity stands in comparison to and challenges.

¹⁰ Halberstam 1998, p 232 "A **drag king** is a female (usually) who dresses up in recognizably male costume and performs theatrically in that costume.... Both the male impersonator and the drag king are different from the drag **butch**, a masculine woman who wears male attire as part of her quotidian gender expression." (my italics and bold)

¹¹ -A note on the use of the term **architecture of the senses**: Despite that Pallasmaa tends to use this term synonymously with 'phenomenological architecture,' I prefer to use this term *instead of* 'phenomenological architecture' to emphasize that my interest is in the experience of matter through the senses rather than an adherence to the philosophy of phenomenology. While I find many aspects of phenomenology useful and significant in the study of things, I wish to distance myself from phenomenology's problematic constitution of the subject. The subject is most often described as a 'universal being' or 'human body' which for all intents and purposes can be understood as 'Man.' For an example of this argument, see Judith Butler's 1989 text "Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description: A Feminist Critique of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception." I also sometimes use 'architecture of matter and presence' or Pallasmaa's 'sensory architecture' for variation and/or emphasis in the language of the text.

-A note on the use of the term **everyday**: This term is used as a synonym for and refers to the term 'quotidian' with its associations to the routine, even monotony, of the everyday. Whereas 'everyday' can be understood simply as referring to the 'commonplace' or 'ordinary,' I prefer to use 'everyday' as it has a more colloquial tone.

¹² -Butler's **theory of performativity** can be described in simple terms as the idea that gender is something one *becomes* not *is*. For further explanation see Butler 1990, p 33.

-Halberstam 1998, p 207 defines **transvestism** as "crossdressing" or "the theater of gender disguise."

-For further explanation on the relation of drag to architecture, see the description of Bonnevier 2006a in the 'earlier research' section of this paper.

¹³ Halberstam 1998, p 161 defines **transgender** as "a gender identity that is at least partially defined by transitivity but that may well stop short of transsexual surgery." Further she explains that *transgender* becomes a general term for all positions that transgress gender norms.

¹⁴ Bonnevier 2004, p 13 makes this point in her argument for the importance of surface in architecture. "Since the early days of architectural theory there has been an ongoing discussion concerning the dichotomy of structure and ornament-... structure has been marked as masculine and ornament has feminine connotations. With this dichotomy follows that ornament has been, and still at large is, considered superfluous and structure essential." For further discussion Bonnevier also refers to a text by Jennifer Bloomer, *The (S)cripts of Joyce and Piranesi* (1993, Yale University Press: New Haven and London)

¹⁵ This approach can be seen as an alternative to Bonnevier's 2004 attempt to revalue surface in order to transgress or reverse the hierarchy of structure over surface. In a similar manner, I hope to disrupt the dominant position of structure with its connotations to (heterosexual male) masculinity by proposing one of many alternatives.

¹⁶ A note on the use of the term **saturation**: Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary 1987 defines the term as a state of maximum impregnation; complete infiltration, permeation. p 1044; Steinbock 1999 connects the term 'saturation' with Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological ideas on intentionality. In this context, saturation becomes 'generative presence,' and the lived body is described as a saturation of presence. Steinbock also explains that this saturated or generative presence concerns who we are and who we become, what he calls a "transformative movement of existence." p 194-195 Steinbock's argument raises an important aspect connected to what I describe as the saturation of female masculinity in the drag king or butch, as it denotes a sliding scale where saturation exists in varying degrees, is dependent on a definition of the defining limits and has the ability to change in relation to time and the subject's materialization or *becoming*. As Steinbock mentions, it can not be controlled, dominated or exhausted.

¹⁷ -Throughout this paper I use the term *queer* in the sense of Tiina Rosenberg's 2002 *Queerfeministisk Agenda* definition # 5: queer as a term denoting various non-heterosexual phenomena which can not be clearly labeled/ understood as lesbian, gay, bisexual or a trans-position(s), but rather are thought to contain one or many of the aspects within these categories and refer to one or many of them at the same time, often in a "confusing" or dissonant manner (my translation) p 12. Queer theory, according to Rosenberg, can be defined simply as the critical study of heteronormativity. p 15

-Butler 1990, p 42-43 The term *heterosexual matrix* refers to a system of norms which assume that two predetermined sexes are fixed to two predetermined bodies, and that these two opposite sexes form a 'natural' complementary pair making heterosexuality compulsory. This system creates a sex/gender/desire chain which makes all same-sex sexual relationships seem 'deviant' and excludes all non-conformative genders.

-*Heteronormative* or *heteronormativity* is defined by Rosenberg 2002 as "the assumption that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality is the natural way to live." (my translation) p 100 This point of view establishes heterosexuality as the norm or ideal, thereby deeming all persons or acts which fall outside this norm as deviant or wrong.

¹⁸ Halberstam 1998, p 28

¹⁹ Halberstam 1998, p 29

²⁰ Weisman 1992, p 2

selection of source material

²¹ Pallasmaa 2005b; Butler 1990, 1993

-Professor Pallasmaa mentions in a letter to myself dated October 5, 2006 that although gender was not in the focus of his essays, this was the one text which went furthest in "acknowledging other ways of encountering space and time than the "patriarchal" western (quasi) scientific approach."

²² Zumthor 1999b, It is important to note that the published documentation of an architectural space is only one of many representations of the building through drawing and never fully grasps that which is built. It is an interpretation which also implies limitations. The images and drawings I will analyze are not the construction documents, but rather a sort of abstracted presentation and will likely affect my interpretation of the work in that the images are graphically simplified, placing emphasis on certain parts and qualities of the expression of the building.

²³ *Les thermes de pierre*, 1995-2003 Since the published documentation of a space is never sufficient to fully understand the experience of a *place*, and the basis of this study itself is about materiality and the body in space, I feel it is imperative for my interpretation of the work that I have actually been to the place.

²⁴ see *Therme Vals* homepage http://www.therme-vals.ch/bad/index_en.html#

²⁵ -Zumthor 1999a, p 57-58 "A good architectural design is sensuous. A good architectural design is intelligent.... Architecture is always concrete matter.... All design work starts from the premise of this physical, objective sensuousness of architecture, of its materials. To experience architecture in a concrete way means to touch, see, hear, and smell it."

-For references to Zumthor's work see Pallasmaa 2005a, p 69; Pallasmaa 2005c, p 40.

earlier research

²⁶ Zumthor 1999b; *Worlds One... Towards the end of the 20th Century* 1998; Peter Zumthor 1998

²⁷ websearch on Google, 20061227, 'Peter Zumthor'; 'Therme Vals'; 'Peter Zumthor and gender'

²⁸ It is important to note that there is a large amount of writing on issues of feminism/gender in architecture; however, as Ahrentzen 2003 puts it "quantity of publication does not translate into clout or transformation within the discipline of architecture." p 179 I hold fast with my belief that architecture needs more influence from gender theory, but I wish to make clear that my study is a continuation of work which comes before me.

²⁹ Benedikt 1991, p 9-51 According to Benedikt the four main principles of Derrida's concept of deconstruction which are important in relation to architecture are: the shift in meaning through the idea of *différance*, the reversal in hierarchy, an exchange of marginality and centrality and the production of meaning through the process of iterability.

³⁰ Benedikt 1991, p 4 argues that Derrida himself deconstructed canonical, classical works, not texts of a more deconstructivist nature.

³¹ -By 'genderless' I mean that the study does not intentionally focus on issues of gender; however, like many texts with a 'neutral' position, it may occasionally fall into the habit of androcentrism in its tendency to focus on predominantly male architects and theorists and a traditional understanding of gender.

-See Laskar 2005, p 18 where she cites Butler's use of Derrida's deconstructivism with an explanation of his main concepts *différance* and *defférance* in note 39. Laskar also cites Butler 1990, pp 24.

³² Weiner 2006, (unpublished text) Weiner's ideas on phenomenology are largely based on Edmund Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. (1977, trans. Dorion Cairns, Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague) Thank you to Frank Weiner for sharing his unpublished paper on the relationship of phenomenology to architecture through perspective and axonometric drawing.

³³ -A reference to the title and theme of Butler's 1990 book *Gender Trouble*.

-Butler 1990, p 171-173

³⁴ While I see the potential and drawbacks in both, I lack the philosophical foundation to argue for or against either.

³⁵ Bachelard 1969

³⁶ Bachelard 1994

³⁷ -Pallasmaa 2005a, p 71 Further, he explains that the buildings of sensory architecture are “conceived to be appreciated in their actual physical and spatial encounter, ‘in the flesh’ of the lived world, not as constructions of idealised vision.” This phenomenological experience of architecture can be described by the term *embodiment*, the perception of the world through one’s entire being, including the intellect and the senses. In an earlier text (Pallasmaa 2005, p 3) I define *embodiment* as “our perceptual experience of the world of things in space and time through our consciousness and senses which dwells within what Merleau-Ponty calls the *lived body*. Likewise, the *lived body* can be seen as the sum of a physical, emotional and intellectual being contained but not constrained in a defined entity.”

³⁸ -Pallasmaa 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Pallasmaa believes that the hegemony of vision, originating in Greek times and aided by the technology and speed of today, has led to superficial architecture as well as alienation, exclusion and less intimacy in our relation to the world and others. He blames the development and continued influence of the perspective and perspectival thought during the Renaissance where the eye of the subject, rather than the body, is made the center of perception, standing in relation to a fixed object from one single point of view (man’s). Other architects/theorists such as Agrest 2000 (1993) and Eisenman 1996 (1992) support Pallasmaa’s theory about the influence of the Renaissance and the discovery of perspective on architectural ideology with its importance on proportion, harmony and Cartesian space. Eisenman also argues for a more embodied experience in what he calls ‘folded space.’ Pallasmaa often refers to the philosophical work of Merleau-Ponty 1962 (1945) as a critique of perspectival vision. See specifically Merleau-Ponty’s description of the problem of perspective in regards to the perception of a house in *Phenomenology of Perception*, p 77. (This example was brought to my attention by Frank Weiner’s 2006 text.)

³⁹ Pallasmaa 2005c, p 41

⁴⁰ Pallasmaa 2005a, p 46

⁴¹ Butler 1993, p 1-2

⁴² Plummer 2003, p 10 These concepts include: *openness, crystallinity, health, silence, atmosphere, place and mobility.*

⁴³ Weisman 2000a, 1992

⁴⁴ *The Sex of Architecture* 1996, eds. Agrest, Conway and Weisman

⁴⁵ *The Sex of Architecture* 1996, eds. Agrest, Conway and Weisman, p 11

⁴⁶ **Strategic essentialism** can be defined simply as the forming of a collective group temporarily, on the grounds of essentialist identity categories for political purposes. For further explanation of the term see Diana Fuss 1996 (*Essentially Speaking*, 1989) or Spivak 1996 (*In Other Worlds*, 1988); Even Butler 1993 promotes temporary collective actions based on categories of identity for the purpose of political resistance in chapter 8, “Critically Queer.”

⁴⁷ Bloomer 1996

⁴⁸ -Agrest 2000, In the preface to *Gender Space Architecture* 2000, Rendell, Penner and Borden state that in relation to sex and sexuality, the majority of texts deal with “feminine or female aspects of gender and consider sexuality from a heterosexual perspective.” p xii

-For an interesting article about the problems within feminist architectural theory (including the anthology *Gender Space Architecture*), see Ahrentzen 2003.

⁴⁹ Agrest 2000, p 364

⁵⁰ *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial productions of gender in modern architecture* 2005, eds. Heynen and Baydar

⁵¹ Bonnevier 2005, p 162-180

⁵² Stratigakos 2005, p 145-161

⁵³ *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial productions of gender in modern architecture* 2005, eds. Heynen and Baydar, p 213

⁵⁴ Bonnevier 2006a

⁵⁵ Gottfried Semper, a 19th century architect, proposed the idea of architecture as mask and decoration where the traditional hierarchy of structure over cladding is reversed, making cladding primary. He thereby placed importance on the visible surface or “clothing” (*Bekleidung*) of the building rather than the structure which bears it. (As explained in Bonnevier’s 2006a text) For the original source see (Semper, Gottfried 1989, *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, transl. Harry Francis Mallgrave, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge).

⁵⁶ For other writing on queer space in architecture, see Betsky 1997 and *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Spaces, Sites of Resistance* 1997, eds. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette & Yolanda Retter.

⁵⁷ The phenomenological understanding of architecture I refer to is based on the ideas of philosophers such as Martin Heidegger (1993), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968, 2004) and Gaston Bachelard (1994) and has its origins in existential philosophy. Its relation to architectural thought is explained through the writings of architect Juhani Pallasmaa (2005a, 2005b, 2005c). Briefly, the focus lies on the experience of architectural space and the presence of matter through the body and its senses, always in relation to time. For further explanation see the description of architecture and phenomenology in the ‘earlier research’ section of this paper.

non-essential phenomenology

⁵⁸ In this text I prefer to use the terms *male/female* rather than man/woman, as the first have a closer connection to sex/gender while the latter are more burdened with assumptions, associations and connotations to an ideal of masculinity/femininity and are dependent on the reader’s own understandings of these terms. Man/woman does

however appear in quoted passages. While Butler 1993 rejects the notion that sex/gender is merely a given fact dependent on the materiality of the body (specifically the genitals), she also acknowledges that *sex* is forcibly produced in bodies as they become intelligible through discourse. Although the intention of this paper aims at dissolving the thought of gender as binary opposites in accordance with Butler, the distinction male/female is necessary for a discussion within existing hierarchies as well as for the purposes of *strategic essentialism* in order to discuss the disparate conditions between persons usually designated as female to those designated as male.

⁵⁹ Weisman 1992, p 15-20

⁶⁰ Weisman 1992, p 16-17

⁶¹ Weisman 1992, p 20

⁶² Halberstam 1998, p 20-29

⁶³ Halberstam 1998, p 24

⁶⁴ Weisman 1992, p 127 Weisman also mentions the problems of class and race this concept presents, however these issues will not be addressed in any length in this paper, as the concentration is on gender and sexuality.

⁶⁵ Pallasmaa 2005b; For a feminist critique of phenomenology see Butler 1989.

⁶⁶ Pallasmaa 2005b, p 325

⁶⁷ Pallasmaa 2005b, p 326

⁶⁸ Pallasmaa 2005b, p 328-332

⁶⁹ Pallasmaa 2005b, p 333

⁷⁰ Mernissi 2000, p 29 For another historical explanation of the development of (female) sexuality, see Pia Laskar 2005, *Ett bidrag till heterosexualitetens historia. Kön, sexualitet och njutningsnormer i sexhandböcker 1800-1920*.

⁷¹ Pallasmaa 2005b, p 326

⁷² Butler 1990, chapter 1, p 3-44

⁷³ Pallasmaa 2005b, p 332

transmaterial and material performativity

⁷⁴ Merleau-Ponty 1968, chapter 4, *intertwining* on p 138; As quoted in Pallasmaa 2005a “The notion derives from Merleau-Ponty’s dialectical principle of the intertwining of the world and the self. He also speaks of the ‘ontology of the flesh’ as the ultimate conclusion of his initial phenomenology of perception. This ontology implies that meaning is both within and without, subjective and objective, spiritual and material.” p 75, note 28

⁷⁵ Pallasmaa 2005a, p 40

⁷⁶ Butler 1990, p 22-31

⁷⁷ -de Beauvoir 2002, p 325 “Man föds inte till kvinna, men blir det.” (my translation) Butler refers to this statement in *Gender Trouble* 1990, p 12.

- Butler 1990, p 33

⁷⁸ Butler 1993, p 231

⁷⁹ Pallasmaa 2005a, p 41

⁸⁰ Butler 1993, p 1

⁸¹ Butler 1990, p 10-11

⁸² Butler 1993, p 2

⁸³ Pallasmaa 2005a, p 42; Here Pallasmaa explains the role of the skin in relation to all of the senses.

⁸⁴ Butler 1993, p 9

⁸⁵ See Butler 1993, p 39-41 and Plato *Timaeus*

⁸⁶ Pallasmaa 2005b, p 323

⁸⁷ Pallasmaa 2005b, p 324

⁸⁸ Lobell 1979, p 40 Much of Louis Kahn’s production was greatly influenced by one of his female colleagues working in his office, architect Ann Tyng.

⁸⁹ Bloomer 1996

⁹⁰ Bloomer 1996, p 164

⁹¹ Pallasmaa 2005a, p 45

⁹² Butler 1990, p 19; In support of the consideration of varying factors affecting bodies, Ahrentzen 2003 reminds us “[t]he body in architectural thought and discourse is not simply non-female, as many feminists have pointed out.” p 187

⁹³ -The Rural Studio is an architectural outreach program of Auburn University’s School of Architecture in rural Hale County, Alabama. Founded in 1992 by architect and teacher Samuel Mockbee, it teaches students through designing and building houses and community buildings for impoverished and racially segregated residents. After Mockbee’s death in 2002, the program is carried on by Andrew Freear, recent recipient of the Erskine Prize 2006.

-Brah 1999, p 432-434 Rather than using the more accepted term ‘African American,’ I have chosen to use **black** as it focuses on the materiality of the skin through color and carries with it a political dimension which Brah explains under the section in her text, “What’s in a name? What’s in a color?”

drag, butch and subversiveness

⁹⁴ Butler 1993, p 231

⁹⁵ Butler 1993, p 233-242

⁹⁶ Butler 1993, p 237

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- ⁹⁷ Butler 1990, p 175
⁹⁸ Halberstam 1998, p 232
⁹⁹ Halberstam 1998, p 232
¹⁰⁰ Butler 1990, p 156
¹⁰¹ Butler 1993, chapter 8: *Critically Queer*, see also Butler 1990, p 175-180
¹⁰² Butler 1993, p 237
¹⁰³ Stein 1971, p 148-149

background, exterior, interior of *Therme Vals*

- ¹⁰⁴ *Les themes de pierre* 1995-2003, Information in this section from the documentary film.
¹⁰⁵ Zumthor 1999b, p 156
¹⁰⁶ *Les themes de pierre* 1995-2003

stone

- ¹⁰⁷ Zumthor 1999b, p 156
¹⁰⁸ Zumthor 1999b, p 156
¹⁰⁹ Zumthor 1999b, p 157
¹¹⁰ *Les themes de pierre* 1995-2003, Factual information in this section from documentary film.
¹¹¹ Heidegger 1993, speaks of the division of divinities and mortals, earth and sky, in relation to building and dwelling. Weisman 1992, p 12 connects the elemental understandings of different cultures to these gender dichotomies.
¹¹² Pallasmaa 2005a, p 58
¹¹³ Pallasmaa 2005a, p 51
¹¹⁴ Zumthor 1999b, p 157
¹¹⁵ A fact noted in the film *Venus Boyz* (2001) by Gabriel Bauer, on the drag king scene in New York and London.
¹¹⁶ Bonnevier 2004, p 13
¹¹⁷ Bachelard 1994 or Weisman 1992, p 12
¹¹⁸ Zumthor 1999b, p 156
¹¹⁹ Pallasmaa 2005a, p 56
¹²⁰ Pallasmaa gives the example of a pebble on the seashore which has undergone the polishing processes of water and sand, making the process of time and its formation visible in its sensuousness to the hand. Pallasmaa 2005a, p 58
¹²¹ Zumthor 1999b, p 156
¹²² Laskar 2005, describes the history of heterosexuality connected to procreation in terms of sexual practices explained in sex handbooks from 1800-1920.
¹²³ Halberstam 1998, p 268 See also the section on 'tomboyism,' p 5-9.

water

- ¹²⁴ Zumthor 1999b, p 156
¹²⁵ Bachelard 1994, p 14 Here, the 'naïve or poetic imagination' can be understood as the phenomenological manner of looking at matter as discussed in the 'earlier research' section of this paper.
¹²⁶ Bachelard 1994, p 95
¹²⁷ Rosenberg 2002 describes *femme* as "the French word for woman or wife and the term used for a lesbian woman dressed in women's clothing." (my translation) p 76
¹²⁸ Bachelard 1994, p 15
¹²⁹ Moraga & Hollibaugh 1983
¹³⁰ Moraga & Hollibaugh 1983, p 397
¹³¹ Pallasmaa 2005a, p 58
¹³² Bachelard 1994, p 96
¹³³ Bachelard, 1994, p 97
¹³⁴ During the summertime, the main or outdoor pool is also left at 30°C/86°F.
¹³⁵ Bachelard 1994, p 98
¹³⁶ Moraga & Hollibaugh 1983, p 399-401
¹³⁷ The attraction between two butch identified females is also mentioned in Moraga & Hollibaugh's 1983 text, showing that not even the opposites of femininity/masculinity are required for pleasure and intimacy. See p 401.
¹³⁸ Bachelard 1994, p 126
¹³⁹ Bachelard 1994, p 129
¹⁴⁰ Terazzo is a polished marble and concrete aggregate material usually used as a floor surface.
¹⁴¹ hooks, bell 1999, p 379; Bachelard 1994, p 129
¹⁴² Moraga & Hollibaugh 1983, p 404
¹⁴³ Connell 2005, see discussion on hegemonic masculinity p 76-86
¹⁴⁴ Brah 1999, p 434-435
¹⁴⁵ Halberstam 1998, p 247-248

light

- ¹⁴⁶ Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary 1987, definition of light: 1c, p 690
- ¹⁴⁷ Lobell 1979, p 20-22
- ¹⁴⁸ Plummer 2003, p 26
- ¹⁴⁹ Plummer 2003, p 22
- ¹⁵⁰ Plummer 2003, p 26 (See also Mircea Eliade 1959, *The Sacred and the Profane*, transl. Willard R. Trask, Harcourt, Brace & World: New York, p 12.)
- ¹⁵¹ Plummer 2003, p 30
- ¹⁵² Butler 1990, p 175
- ¹⁵³ Butler 1993, p 70 "In this sense, materiality is constituted in and through iterability."
- ¹⁵⁴ Plummer 2003, p 30
- ¹⁵⁵ Plummer 2003, p 30 uses this phrase to describe the modern conception of light in architecture.
- ¹⁵⁶ Bachelard 1994, p 95
- ¹⁵⁷ My apologies to vegetarian readers for my shortcomings in providing a 'veggie equivalent.' This is not meant as an exclusionary tactic.
- ¹⁵⁸ Butler 2004, p 197
- ¹⁵⁹ Zumthor 1999b, p 157
- ¹⁶⁰ Plummer 2003, p 26
- ¹⁶¹ Zumthor 1999b, p 157
- ¹⁶² Butler 1993, p 34-35
- ¹⁶³ Butler 1993, p 32
- ¹⁶⁴ Butler 1993, p 16
- ¹⁶⁵ Butler 1993, p 49
- ¹⁶⁶ Halberstam 1998, p 122-123
- ¹⁶⁷ Halberstam 1998, p 124
- ¹⁶⁸ Halberstam 1998, p 126
- ¹⁶⁹ Plummer 2003, p 40
- ¹⁷⁰ Plummer 2003, p 40
- ¹⁷¹ Plummer 2003, p 40
- ¹⁷² -For a description of this patriarchal hierarchy of man/woman and various feminist arguments against the subjectification of woman through men, see de Beauvoir 2002, *Radical Lesbians* 1970, Monique Wittig 1980, Adrienne Rich 1986.
- stone butch reference: Halberstam 1998, p 128
- ¹⁷³ Halberstam 1998, p 127
- ¹⁷⁴ Halberstam 1998, p 135
- ¹⁷⁵ Plummer 2003, p 64

conclusion

- ¹⁷⁶ Butler 1993, p 230-242 Butler encourages political resistance through small subversive acts such as the performance of non-normative variations of gender in order to expand, resignify and reveal the construction of heterosexual ideals of gender and sex.
- ¹⁷⁷ -For an explanation of Butler's view of the subject's relation to discourse see Butler 1990, p 171-173.
- "Even though built space shapes the experiences of people's daily lives and the cultural assumptions in which they are immersed, it is easy to accept the physical landscape unthinkingly as a neutral background. But the spatial arrangements of buildings and communities are neither value-free nor neutral..." Weisman 2000b, p 86
- ¹⁷⁸ Butler 1990, p 175
- ¹⁷⁹ Pallasmaa 2005a, p 72