Securing Liminal Space
– an intimate approach

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Abstract

This thesis derives from the comprehension that liminality has the potential for new social relations to form towards new social conditions. With an intimate approach and a deeper understanding of oneself, we can reach a more sensible understanding of others, which can bridge preconceived borders consisting of seemingly different realities that make the city a whole. The aspiration is to shift focus from the obvious preconceived reality towards a self-reflective and intimate occupation of space and being amongst each other. What architectural strategies and spaces can cater for this liminal stage to take form?

To explore the concepts of liminality and intimacy this thesis investigates existing independent social operations and physical sites that through their occupation lead to new social relations and physical connections in the city. The methods are based on an inquiry of literature pertaining to this topic, practical curating of intimate space, as well as interviews and engagements with previous mentioned operations and sites.

In the proposal phase three sites, or rather sets of conditions, are test cases to examine how liminal spaces can be reassured through an intimate approach within the context of Umeå, Sweden. The three sites are temporal to different extents and operate on different scales and time spans. This temporality gives the sites an uncertain character, which through the research has been found to be a potential for occupying space and use it in unexpected ways. Similar to the temporal character of the sites, the architectural strategies for giving value to these places should avoid a dogmatic and preconceived thinking of how people should use the place. If the potential lies in the undefined, then the proposal should embrace this uncertainty and thereby become facilitators of imagination and reappropriation to take form.

“Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different perspective.”

H. Arendt
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Vocabulary

Definitions of how certain words are used in this paper:

Liminality – 1: transient and ephemeral. 2: Can be both on social and physical, e.g. based on social conditions that lead to physical environments, or based on physical spaces with ephemeral and transient characteristics. 3: An ambiguous space/state in-between the previous and the new, a space/state that can lead to resolution.

Transgression – to exceed a limit. This limit can be social (personal and societal) and physical.

Intimacy – 1: a state that is self-reflective and nuanced. 2: One’s close and personal relation to a space and other living beings in that space. 3: The feeling that I can tell another person my thoughts and my behaviours without fear of judgement.¹

Independence – 1: resistance to push everyone into one neutral homogenous mainstream body or opposed struggle. 2: An interstitial distance from within and upon the state’s territory.

Meshwork – 1: potential sites where constructed inclusions can be embodied. 2: Understanding site beyond its physical boundaries, as a set of correlating factors that affect the site and its linkage with other places, where the linkage, social aspects and power structures are as much part of the site as its physical dimension.

Edgeland – loosely programmed, seemingly forgotten, public space.

Rationale

Liminality has the potential for new social relations and values to form towards new social conditions. The anthropologist Victor Turner investigates liminality as a stage that can lead to resolution and is therefore a positive quality.² This thesis investigates what new architectural programs and spaces can cater for this liminal stage to be performed and further maintained.

The following conditions illustrate how liminality can be a useful concept in our present times and a reminder of the world being a continuous process, ambiguous and unrestrained. In globalization where power is being dispersed, a present reaction is the quest for one strong leader pointing with the whole hand, providing simple answers with black and white solutions. Due to dispersed power relations, the resistance will also be dispersed, there is no homogenous identity leading to one revolution but rather a multiplicity of social actors claiming a reassessment of values on an interstitial distance from the state. Furthermore, with the massive flow of information that we are exposed to daily we easily end up in reproducing our own reality and “truth” about the world without asking further questions.

This thesis aims at shifting focus from the obvious preconceived answers towards a self-reflective and intimate reappropriation of space and being amongst each other. The protests and demonstrations are equally important manifestations of resistance but this thesis focuses on the creation of intimate, independent space. Through an intimate approach we can allow for self-reflection, grey zones and nuances to be expressed rather than reproducing preconceptions. Such spaces can establish a reassessment of values – enabling imagination and reconsideration of how things could or should be rather than accepting situations as they are.

¹This definition of intimacy is given by Owen in the podcast S town, chapter 6, 16 minutes into the episode.

Outline

This thesis explores a series of social and physical spaces that can be read as liminal, and proposes intimate architecture as a strategy for reassuring these spaces. The methods are synthesised from previous writings of authors investigating similar concepts, curating of intimate space as well as engagements and interviews with actors, existing organisations and citizens. This thesis is divided into the following chapters:

In Background an inquiry of literature helps define the spatial concept of liminality and transgression. These concepts are further analysed in relation to a series of ‘Embodied Acts’ that I have curated and invited others to participate in. The Acts are curated through an intimate approach and reassessment of spatial and social values to enable self-reflection and possibly transgression. The Acts are simultaneously analysed in relation to contemporary societal norms and values.

Belonging shifts the focus from my curating of space towards others’ reappropriation of space; this to follow the understanding of difference as a multitude rather than one homogenous subject. The chapter draws attention to other strategies of resistance and without dismissing these actions focuses on independent and intimate spaces based on engagements with existing liminal sites and operations. Further this chapter analyses space through the concept of edgelands – understood as loosely programmed spaces – that can become manifestations of resistance through their occupations. Finally this chapter explains a different understanding of site based on a social and spatial meshwork that outlines one of the bases for the design phase.

In Sites and strategies the three sites, or rather set of conditions, are presented:
1. The Block: an existing block that is about to be refurbished which opens up a time gap of five years between the demolishment of the existing buildings and the construction of the new. This time gap becomes a site for investigating temporary spaces and programs and furthermore speculates how these can be maintained in the long run.
2. Transit Spaces: public space closely linked to transit points in the city are critical sites of investigation because they allow people living in different districts to cross the city and access independent operations. These sites can become warm entrances in-between the retail and public realm and cater for the unexpected to take form.
3. Mühlebacken: a forestland that is highly valued by its surrounding neighbourhods and public institutions but under the risk of financial exploitation. Through a fragmented ‘occupation’ of the site with nature observation towers, which in turn are occupied by citizens, these spaces can become public guardians of the site and allow for an intimate relation to nature and other living beings.

The descriptions of the sites are followed by an analysis that discusses temporary architecture as a strategy when working with sites of uncertain and temporal characteristics.

In Proposal the strategies are further tested and illustrated in relation to the three sites that are considered as liminal for different reasons, based on social and physical characteristics of space. These sites are to be regarded as tests of how intimate architecture can reassure and give value to liminal space, which can allow for independence, an altered use of space and sense of belonging to the city and each other.

Objectives

The main goal for this thesis is to analyse and shed light on intimate independent operations sometimes based on dissonance and resistance, as one set of formation that can lead to resolution. Through specific examples of social operations and physical sites the text aims at investigating the transferrable nature of such spaces that makes them valuable on a larger scale. The aim for this thesis is to analyse what social operations and physical spaces can enable the liminal to take form. The methods are based on investigations and meetings with existing sites and operations in relation to an enquiry of literature, as well as practical curating of intimate independent spaces.
Background

Embodied Acts
Liminality/Transgression

To answer these questions liminality is here analysed through existing theories and literature. This is investigated in symbiosis with practical experience where I curate intimate independent spaces.

Liminality can be defined as an intermediate state, phase or condition, or to be in a transitional stage. The potential of liminality lies within its abilities and inherent characteristics of challenging and questioning given norms that are perceived as neutral. If liminality is understood as the spatial condition where this can occur, transgression is considered as the embodied act of testing and further altering preconceived patterns. In Architecture and Culture Sara and Littlefield write about transgression and describe its spatial condition to be of liminal characteristics:

“The bodily act of stepping across implies a location that is at once neither here nor there; it is in both places simultaneously and therefore inhabits a distinct quality of ‘betweenness’… Transgression is therefore about liminality and ambiguity – about occupying a place that is perhaps uncertain and other.”

Through a series of what I have named Embodied Acts, I invite women to participate in conversations concerning intimate topics. These Acts can be understood as a sharing and gathering of intimate knowledge. The aim is to create situations where one can collectively unpack intimate and sometimes conflicting concerns that society at large take for granted, and then through this unpacking of intimate concerns explore to what extent one internalises societal norms. The aim for these Embodied Acts is not to prove a point or to show right or wrong, it is about raising awareness that one can to different extents internalize norms. This sometimes conflicting awareness is explored through experience and self-reflections sprung from within, rather than told or proclaimed as good or bad or right or wrong. Liminality is here used as a concept for the spatial setting that can enable this self-reflective awareness.

The word liminality implies spatial conditions, though its character is ephemeral and transitional, always relating to its context and alternative states. Liminality is not to be seen as a dividing condition that defines the alternative states, but as a space in itself providing a common ground that includes simultaneous awareness of conflicting polarities, allowing for “a dialectic interaction between the positions rather than a duality of opposites.” Liminality in this definition is not to be understood as situated on the edge between polarities but can exist on its own conditions within the one or the other realm.

4 A. van Eyck, The Child, the City and the Artist, SUN, 1962, p. 63.
5 Smith.
The aim for the Acts is to establish situations of trust, openness, humility and respect for difference – for other’s knowledge, perspectives and experiences. This to allow for the intimate, personal and sometimes conflicting to be expressed and further tested. This state I define as an act of transgression set in a spatial liminality. The point of the Acts is not to create consensus or come to one correct answer, but to allow for different perspectives and dialogues of conflicting polarities to coexist.

The method for the Acts is based on a feminist methodology that Men for Equality has been part of formulating. Other operations that work with a similar methodology are Ellen och Allan and the work by Suzanne Lacy, which are explained in more detail in chapter “Belonging”, under the section “Spaces of independence”. Some aspects of this method that I have taken into consideration are the amount of people that participate, how and where the gathering take place, and the establishment of social and spatial norms during the Act. Though these Acts take place locally in Umeå the transferrable aspect is what gives this method a powerful impact. Similar to Ellen och Allan, Men for Equality and Lacy’s work, these conversations have the possibility to be transferred and reproduced in different localities and contexts. Here the potential of the temporal, intimate and independent space lies in its transferrable ability and reproduction, which goes beyond physical condition of one specific site and context. The Embodied Acts evolved into a series of acts situated in different locations – both at other participant’s homes and in the public realm.

In these Embodied Acts I have invited women whom I know of to different extents, but who might not know each other that well. The aim has been to invite women with various socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, though according to the method mentioned above there is no advantage in how well we know each other or not, or whatever background one might have. The importance is that one wants to participate and share one’s perspective and experience, and to create a setting of the space that can cater for this to be shared. The number of people participating is rather an important aspect. Everyone should receive enough time to express one’s experiences and simultaneously the more people the more perspectives one will get to take part of. We have been around six people for each Act.

Before the others that have been invited and decided to participate in the Act arrive I prepare the food that we will share. This makes for something to gather around – an intimate activity simultaneously creating distance and reason. I arranged the space and furniture in an intimate setting – through the framing of the room and its spatial dimensions trying to construct inclusion. I chose a round table with the right dimension in relation to the amount of chairs needed, all in quite a close setting. I compile a series of group norms based on the feminist methodology, present these norms to the group and further we collectively revise and approve them. As a final part of the unpacking of an intimate concern we take a round to reflect upon the Act, to collectively evaluate one’s individual experience.

Following are some quotes from participants:

“The moment the norms were established and agreed upon something happened in the room, the spatial atmosphere changed drastically.”

“I felt I could raise the uncomfortable and contradictory and not thoughts that weren't really formulated.”

“I am like this and I think like this. We don’t need to agree, and that’s okay. Our differences are allowed to coexist. That's something I try to bring with me to other situations.”

The rhythm of the room creates a new set of norms and values that goes against societal norms and can thus be seen as an act of resistance. This new set of norms that allows for nuances sometimes based on dissonance to be expressed can further be understood as a questioning of present societal norms.

Examples of such societal norms are the quest for the simple solutions and black and white answers. In the presence of globalization where power is being dispersed and fragmented one reaction to this is the quest for one ‘authoritarian man pointing with the whole hand, constructing clear enemies, fast answers and obvious solutions. Examples of such strong figureheads are Erdogan, Putin, Trump, and Orban – persons who embody the idea of the ‘strong’ leader.

Through the massive flow of information that we are exposed to daily we easily end up in searching information that reproduce our already established reality and “truth”, which avoids self-reflection or problematization. Many feel we live in a world that every day becomes more and more obsessed with the clearly distinguishable, the explicit borders and categories, the disciplinary and the controllable. There is an aim for the world to be clear and obvious, for all borders to be rigid and unchangeable. There is an old quote saying, “The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.”

Under these conditions liminality can be a reminder of the world being a continuous process, ambiguous and uncontrolled. In this sense intimate knowledge plays an important role, since it can open up for vulnerability, self-reflection and ambiguity.

Spaces that create a feeling of uncertainty are spaces that force us to think, reflect and question. This uncertainty can appear as frightening, the ungraspable is often experienced as unformitable, which leads to the quest of filling it with something one already knows. To allow for this uncertainty and let it exist without filling it with preconceived answers is difficult and frustrating. But it can ultimately lead to a new way of being amongst others, which in turn allows for a reassessment of values, enabling imagination and reconsideration of how things could or should be rather than accepting situations as they are.

In the Embodied Acts the establishment of new spatial and social norms go beyond the absolutely sure and unilateral. Here lies the ability to recreate reality for a moment, the ability to go beyond the habitual and constrained, to situations and thoughts that are unexpected and notable. These moments are not to be seen as escapism or utopianism. In this meeting between living beings and critical thinking, with an openness towards difference and the unknown, leads the way to reflection and consequently to negotiation and resistance. Intimate knowledge I would argue is extremely powerful but not sanctioned or recognized as valuable by any formal body.

Entangled dualities

In Architecture and Culture the notion of transgression is closely analyzed through personal experiences. Though, what we understand to be the “private sphere” cannot be analyzed as islands. It has to be analyzed in relation to the “private sphere” of others as well as laws and values that apply and influence them.

Hannah Arendt describes the public realm as a place where everything can be seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves, thus she links closely to appearance and reality. Arendt illustrates that even the most private and intimate concerns lead a doubtful existence until they are transformed into a shape that fits a public appearance. Here Arendt finds critical significance in the role of the public realm. She further writes:

“Each time we talk about things that can be experienced only in privacy or intimacy, we bring them out into a sphere where they will assume a kind of reality… The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves…”

According to this writing what we experience only exists if it is experienced by others. Though, simultaneously Arendt describes that not all concerns might “fit” the public realm and makes it clear that these concerns are thereby not of less importance:

“Yet there are a great many things which cannot withstand the implacable, bright light of the constant presence of others on the public scene; there only what is considered to be relevant, worthy of being seen or heard, can be tolerated, so that the irrelevant becomes automatically a private matter.”

Here lies a contradiction that what might be concerns of minorities or groups that are not considered a part of the norm, can easily be rejected as irrelevant and thus belonging to the private. One can argue for the importance of bringing private concerns into the public and to create spaces of liminality situated in the public realm. Then within this realm one can create spaces that allow for differences and disrupt the idea of originality and fixity, or as Arendt writes: “Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different perspective.”

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12 Sara, Littlefield, p.296.
Shifting of focus

In this last quote from Arendt lays a shifting of focus from looking and talking into seeing and hearing, which appear less confrontational and more negotiating and reasoning. When the focus is shifted from looking to seeing, the understanding of looking at someone includes a distance; that there is an I and a distance between the object or person that I'm looking at. Whereas seeing someone or something can appear as less distant and more empathic, exemplified with the saying ‘I see you’. Similarly talking implies a focus on the I who is talking compared to hearing which shifts the focus from the I towards others in the room.

It is my understanding that in public debate there is a pressure to either make for coherence or opposition. Especially in political debate this usually creates parallel oppositional chambers which reproduce the same without any interaction. The shifting of focus from proclaiming imperatives (!) pointing with the whole hand towards one’s own way of listening (?) can allow for a better understanding of differences and further to reasoning and negotiation. Because if we learn to listen we cannot decide what to listen to, then new questions could arise. This comprehension is closely linked to the altered set of norms that are formulated in the Embodied Acts. During the concluding round of the Act some participants reflect on this shifting from talking to listening and others on the resistance of consensus:

“It’s a tricky exercise to listen and not interrupt.”

“The change of rhythm creates a change of gentleness towards the others in the room.”

“When we actively listen to each other, first then can we understand someone else’s perspective.”

“It is interesting to really dissect one topic. That you don’t need to debate, come to a conclusion or one correct answer.”

To conclude this chapter I would like to emphasize that there is not one difference or one otherness. There is no dual opposition with one hegemonic group and one that is different. Difference has to be understood as intersectional, as Mary McLeod emphasises: “Difference is experienced differently, at different times, in different cultures, by different people. The point is not to just recognize difference, but all kinds of difference.” This interlinks with Arendt’s saying that everyone sees and hears from a different perspective. In agreement with this I argue for the importance of recognizing differences on all societal levels – concerning interpersonal relations and political negotiations.

Belonging

Understanding others spatial liminality
With the background of the Embodied Acts where I have been a participant and curator, this phase seeks to achieve a better understanding for other’s spatial liminality and potential transgression. It explores how people alter spaces sometimes programmed for one purpose and use them differently. Further this phase tries to understand to what extent the spatial occupation is chosen and forced and how they construct inclusion. An analysis of spaces that through its occupation become uncertain and other, this to create an intimate sense of belonging to each other and the occupied space.

How do I engage with these situations? And more importantly, how can I try to read them through the understanding of others? My whole life I’ve always been interested in taking shortcuts and had a talent for getting lost. I’ve decided to see this as a gift; it allows me to discover new places as well as continuously rediscovering my own context. Though, the older I get the more difficult I find it to get lost. Similar to the reading of Arendt, I alter my presence from looking and talking into seeing and hearing and welcome encounters with strangers I meet along the way. I bring with me the altered set of norms formulated in the Embodied Acts – allowing for greyzones and nuances to be expressed without questioning, and invite others to guide me through their intimate reappropriation of space.

Contemporary imperatives

To advocate intimate independent spaces in the global presence of enforced boarders can seem somehow contradicting. Here independence is defined in relation to liminality and transgression as an ephemeral, tangible and transitional stage, which is not about borders or rigidity. The Embodied Acts that evolved into a series of acts situated in different locations are of a dispersed and transitional nature and not about stagnation. These spaces enable for question marks and grey zones to be expressed, rather than imperatives and black and white answers. Though, with the recent demonstrations of ‘The Women’s March’ globally and the ‘BB-occupation’ in Sollefteå in January this year, it would be foolish not to engage with more ‘imperativish’ manifestations of resistance.

The outcome of the US election that evolved into the Women’s March protest on the 21st of January 2017 took place in over 600 cities in more than 60 different countries worldwide. The protest advocates human rights, legislations and policies regarding environmental issues, origin, immigrants and immigration, people who identify as LGBTQAI and with different disabilities, indigenous rights, and healthcare. Though it started as a local (in Washington) or rather national protest it rapidly evolved into the emergence of new political subjects exerting universal claims manifested all around the globe.

Image 1. Worldmap where Women’s March occurred.
On January 30 the same year the maternity, orthopaedics and emergency surgery clinic at the hospital in Sollefteå was shut down due to economic cutbacks, despite the inhabitants' campaign for it to remain open. Support manifestations were held in neighbouring cities, resisting healthcare cutbacks in the hinterland of Sweden. Though, after losing the fight of keeping these clinics at the hospital running inhabitants in Sollefteå gathered outside the hospital to protest at the day of the shutdown. This utterly led to an occupation of the hospital’s foyer to express the critical need for the maternity clinic to remain open. The consequence of shutting it down means that the new distance to the nearest maternity hospital is more than 100 kilometres away.

Thus these two resent “imperativish” manifestations of resistance that claim a reassessment of values concerning societal policies and legislations, are examples of how local or national struggles evolve into national or global claims. Regardless of whether resistance is expressed with the fist in the air at mass demonstrations or through intimate settings these are equally important claims for reassessment of values regarding current local or national situations that advocates universal concerns. As Critchley writes in the book Infinity Demands: “the art of politics consists in weaving such cells of resistance together into a common front, a shared political subjectivity.”

This does not mean that all struggles stand aligned shoulder to shoulder in one homogenous front, but rather that we can act on different levels and within different localities simultaneously. The contemporary protests are crucial manifestations of resistance but this thesis focuses on the creation of independent spaces in intimate settings that through self-reflection and negotiation can resist and alter preconceived societal values. The above actions can serve as an example of what Critchley illustrates in Infinity Demanding. Critchley claims that the accelerating dislocatory power of capitalism emerge a multitude of social actors in a society that is made up by an increasingly complex fabric of identifications, and that the political task of subject formation has to be invented or aggregated from the various struggles of the present that manifests this multitude of identities. The complex fabric of identifications that Critchley describes in relation to globalisation creating a more and more dislocated ground upon which capitalism operates, means that the resistance cannot rely on a supposedly homogenous framework of social and political relations. Critchley continues his argument saying that at times when the state seeks to saturate and control more and more areas of social life, political resistance is praxis in a situation that articulates an interstitial distance from the state. This distance evokes a comprehension of independence as an important concept for reading others spatial liminality. To advocate independent intimate spaces is to resist creating a homogenous subject that pushes everyone into mainstream.

17 https://www.vardfokus.se/webbnyheter/2017/januari/ockupationen-av-bb-i-solleftea-fortsatter/ (revisited 02.27.17)
19 Critchley.
In some cases the claiming and programming of independent space is shaped to allow for an altered inclusion to take place and a self-reflective reassessment of values. The Swedish association Save The Children arranges norm critical conversation groups for 14-year old teenagers that meet once a week to speak about rights. The conversation group has its base in the UN's convention about children's rights – The Children's Convention – with a focus on all children's equal value and right to influence in a work of change. At the website they write:

"The operation should constitute a forum where children can participate in a work of change concerning power and sexuality. It wants to make boys and girls aware of their rights and resist sex discrimination."

In collaboration with the Red Cross Youth Association, Save the Children arranges spaces of independence that address unaccompanied and new arrival girls. Their main activity has been to arrange swimming lessons. Frida who is one of the voluntary organizers says:

"With this project we want to create a gathering place and comforting space for young girls. The public welfare that this activity creates goes beyond the girls learning to swim. We see unaccompanied and newly arrival girls that develop their language skills and their social interaction."

The above operations both have their base in a feminist methodology. Similarly, the internationally famous visual artist Suzanne Lacy has a background in feminist arts and movements. Much of her work focuses on social activism based on a participatory practice and performance with communities all over the world. Her project 'Between the door and the street' took place in a Brooklyn neighbourhood in 2013 but was part of a much larger project where Lacy collaborated with activist organisations. During one day almost 400 women and a few men held conversations on 60 porches open for the public to listen. The topics concerned activist engagements and issues regarding gender, race, ethnicity and class.

To summarise, the unpacking of intimate concerns evolved into a series of Embodied Acts where different people in the group invited us to new places, the constellation of the group changed over time, and collectively we decided on new concerns to dissect. Similarly, the above-mentioned operations and art practices speak of the potential of their spaces to be scattered, understood as a meshwork rather than one defined location. Whereas they take place in relatively small settings and local contexts they have the transferable ability to be reproduce in other localities. These situations all go under the common theme of constructing intimate independent spaces, which can allow for an altered inclusion and reassessment of values.

Local examples of independent non-profit organisations in Umeå such as The Back Pocket, Öppen Gemenskap and Kärnhuset create spaces for people that for different reasons fall between the cracks of the mainstream system. They serve food, distribute clothes and provide warm spaces with activities where people can meet with others in an open and independent setting. Erika, a volunteer at The Back Pocket says: “Sometimes we even host funerals and weddings in this space, even though it’s way too small for the amount of people we cater for.” The Back Pocket is open for all but according to Larsen, the initiator of this organisation, they fall short on including women. “This is due to guilt and shame, but it is crucial to have access to a space like this. The situation for women is not only based on addiction but also a question of money. The income is insufficient because their pension is generally lower.”

Similar to Save the Children’s operations and Lacy’s work these organisations all work on an interstitial distance from the state, a distance from within and upon the state’s territory. One reason for this is that it allows for a more independent structure and faster decision-making in a close response to the needs of the organisation’s users. Due to this interstitial distance these operations become more independent, which resist being pushed into one neutral mainstream. But with this distance follows scarcity – many of the organisations are operating on the edge and sometimes beyond the limits of their capacity.

The liminal condition of these operations is of social characteristics based on a marginal societal habitation. As mentioned in the introduction Turner defines liminality as a transient condition that can enable resolution, this compared to being an “outsider” which does not per se lead to resolution. Here lays a focus on the potential of the liminal stage rather than a negative connotation of the word marginalization. Another important distinction is the foregrounding of political subjects constructing these independent spaces rather than putting emphasis on these operations as victims. This without neglecting the conflicting stage of life that one might have to put up with.

The formation of these spaces, the commitment from the initiators and people running the operations and the trust created with its users are critically important. With a base in ethics and politics these operations simultaneously propose spaces for resolution as well as a critique based on dissonance towards current political values. Critchley puts emphasis on the ethical aspect of politics stating: “If ethics without politics is empty, then politics without ethics is blind.” The creation of independent spaces on an interstitial distance from the state emphasizing the formation of political subjectivities can in Critchley’s words become “powerful examples of politics as the conflictual questioning of consensus and the opening of a space of dissensus…. It is this space of dissensus that best expresses the event of politics, an event that the state order always wishes to shut down.”

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21 Critchley.  
22 Critchley.
Edgelands – based on physical characteristics of liminality

Certain physical spaces – in this case referred to as edgelands defined as loosely programmed spaces – are examples of how liminal spaces can become manifestations of resistance through their occupation and altered use of space. Such spaces can be considered liminal because they cater for new social relations and connections in the city. Furthermore, the occupations of these spaces are temporal and uncertain, and whereas the city expands and develops these edgelands risk being exploited, refurbished or “cleaned up”.

Soup kitchen Stockholm is a non-profit organization that started in 2012 to help exposed persons and elucidate the growing problems concerning homelessness in Sweden. This evolved into similar initiatives in other Swedish cities. Once a month they met and distributed clothes and food to homeless people in Stockholm. Though, two years later in May 2014 they were no longer allowed to use the site for this purpose. The site – Börrns Trädgård - can be described as leafy, loosely and mixed programmed park that includes a playground, skate park, grass and stone layered ground, greenery and benches. It is situated next to the metro and a central square. The rejected permission was decided by Stockholm municipality that portrayed the activity in media as following:

“There is a risk that it will become a freak show”23

“With homelessness often comes mixed abuse and mental illness. It is not desirable from the city’s view to create a gathering place for people with certain problems on common ground, and particularly not at the city’s central squares.”24

“…the risk is that the place will be transformed into a zoo.”25

Dungen on the other hand – a community initiated park located in Umeå – got a positive response from the municipality owning the land and housing company owning the surrounding buildings. There are no clearly visible design elements in this park, it can appear as unplanned, forgotten and left over. Dungen evolved as a community project in 2014 and was initiated by inhabitants living in the area. It is self-managed by the community and includes everyone that wants to participate or just happens to pass by. According to one of the participants the project received positive response:

“The municipality and housing company believed it could raise the attractiveness of the area.”

23 http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article18913795.ab (revisited 27.04.2017)
25 http://www.metro.se/artikel/de-f%C3%A5r-inte-l%C3%A4ngre-dela-ut-mat-vid-medborgarplatsen-xr (revisited 27.04.2017)
However, sometimes the temporal and uncertain aspect of a site and occupation is less obvious and direct but rather links with the tyranny of small steps. Ålidhemsskogen is a forestland dividing three neighbourhoods in Umeå and is presently under the threat of financial exploitation. Because of its unconditional presence of the forest allowed to grow vividly and its close link to neighbouring residential areas and public institutions, it allows inhabitants to interact with the site and occupy it intuitively. The patterns of many small paths and remains of tree houses show this intuitive use in the middle of winter. One inhabitant that I meet with says:

“I remember playing there as a kid, then I was living in one area. Now I have a kid on my own and live at another edge of this forestland. Because I’ve been living next to this site for almost my entire life I feel personally connected to this particular forestland. But I’m worried that it will be demolished now that the city is being densified.”

Furthermore, when moving from the residential districts into the centre of Umeå there has been a massive refurbishment the last five years. Three of the existing parks along the river have been refurbished (Rådhusparken, Ärstedernas park and Broparken) along with the main esplanade and the present reconstruction of the main square Rådhustorget. In addition to this new hotels (Comfort Hotel and U&U), malls (Utopia) and the culture house Väven – all relatively large projects – have been built in the city’s most central locations. 'Trädgård i Norr' was a leafy park in the centre of Umeå where people could be no matter ones societal status or age. Though, this place was demolished in 2011 with the argument of opening up the centre towards the river. When asking further questions of the reason for its transformation one official at the municipality answers:

“Unfortunately in the summers it was used by society’s ill-fated.”

One of the few parks in the centre of Umeå that has not been refurbished is Vänortsparken. In addition to this being a park with large grass areas and surrounded by bushes, benches, a small river and bridge, Vänortsparken has also been a site occupied by various people that by mainstream society are considered as non-productive.

26 http://www.umea.se/4.2323/b3e532b8/e2a80035/742.html (revisited 01.01.2017)
In summary, a common theme for these spaces is the human right to claim space and fear of or quest to avoid alienation, or with Lefebvre's words “the right to the city.” These examples occur in spaces that can be read as loosely programmed edgelands, which can further be regarded as a potential for claiming space and the construction of altered inclusions. Though, depending on what the altered use of the space is, whom it includes and how these occupations are portrayed through media, these spaces are to different extents threatened and temporal. The sites can all be read as liminal because of this temporary and partly uncertain existence, and their potential of constructing new social inclusions in the city. This includes the notion of time that stretches from the duration of a day when the hospitality act of Soppkök offers food and cloths to homeless people, or over seasons and generations through altered use of loosely programmed park areas and forestlands.

The sites referred to as Edgelands are of physical liminal characteristics due to their temporal and sometimes threatened existence. One can argue that this temporality is the inherent nature of these spaces. That it is the loosely planned and seemingly forgotten characteristics of these sites that enable reappropriation of space. And then over time, when the city develops these spaces are shut down and reclaimed at other sites. At the same time claiming of space is regarded a human right based on a quest to avoid alienation. In that sense these spaces are political manifestations of democracy based on dissonance.

**Meshwork of social and physical sites**

Some of the spaces and operations described in this chapter have defined geographic locations whereas others are to be understood more as a meshwork of potential sites where constructed inclusions can be embodied. When reading across these spaces here lays a different understanding of site that goes beyond the geographical context of one central location or one specific group. It is neither a network of geographically located communities but rather a physical and social transitional meshwork of people crossing the city to reach these constructed inclusions where spatial liminality is manifested. Furthermore, along the path to access these spaces and operations, there are certain situations where people reappropriate space for one's own purpose; these situations often occur close to transit points in the city.
To transit  
– informal reappropriation of space

For people to access the above-mentioned operations and spaces the transitional phase between the home and district and the arrival to these spaces becomes an important path in this meshwork. Along this path intimate reappropriation of space can be performed on an individual and even more temporal basis. Such situations can appear when by exclusion the use of space is altered for one’s own purpose and need, which simultaneously expresses a request for certain spaces and constructed inclusions within the city.

Spaces that are closely linked to transit points in the city show situations where citizens alter space programmed for one purpose and use it differently due to an individual need, when for example waiting for the bus. Though, these situations are not only based on a need or request but also links with Lefebvre’s saying of ‘the right to the city’ – the right to claim space in public realm. The bus lines and bus stops are critical sites of investigation because of their crucial importance for people to travel across the city from different neighbourhoods to access these constructed independent operations.
The centre of Umeå showing certain independent operations and reappropriations of spaces closely linked to transit points.
Sites and strategies

Embrace uncertainty
Defined meshwork of sites

To situate the project locally – enabling a closer collaboration with the users and curators of these liminal sites – I decide to further focus on some of the situations that are currently manifested in Umeå. These include the block where the Back Pocket is located, the forestland Ålidhemsskogen and the network of bus stops and bus lines that interweave these situations and other local independent operations.

Half the block where The Back Pocket is situated is about to be refurbished and turned into a car park and later on housings and corners. The other half of the block contains historical buildings that host different social organisations. Because these buildings are labelled to be of cultural historical interest they are thus to a certain extent protected. The refurbishment of the other half of the block opens up a time gap of approximately five years between the demolition of the existing buildings and the construction of the new. The time gap that appears in this block becomes a site for testing temporary spaces and programs that can cater for new social relations and connections within the city. This part investigates how architecture can give value to already existing manifestations of liminality through a rethinking of the block where The Back Pocket and other social organisations are located. Furthermore this part investigates how the program and spaces designed for the time gap can possibly be incorporated in the car park that will be built later on.

The municipality has future plans for how the city will be densified. At the moment there is one plan on building housings on the southern part of The Forestland. This part investigates how to protect The Forestland that is highly valued by its surrounding neighbourhoods and public institutions. Through a fragmented ‘occupation’ of the site with nature observation towers that in turn are occupied by citizens these can become public guardians of the site. Furthermore these spaces can allow for an intuitive use of space and intimate relation with nature and other living beings.

The bus lines and bus stops become critical sites of investigation because of their crucial importance for people to travel across the city to access these constructed inclusions, e.g. Ellen and Allan/Tjejgruppen and The Back Pocket/Öppen Gemenskap/Kärnhuset/The Forestland. This part investigates how architecture can be used to encourage liminal spaces in city planning through intimate occupation of spaces that are closely linked to transit points in the city. These spaces can become warm entrances in-between the retail public realm and cater for the unexpected to take form through an intimate reappropriation of space.

These sites all operate on different scales and different time spans. The Forestland over generations, The Block over five years and Transit Spaces on an even more temporal basis. They all go under the same investigation of how to reassure, encourage and give value to liminal spaces through intimate architecture – testing what spaces and programs can allow for an intimate occupation of space, based on the background of the Embodied Acts.
To be exploited

Schools and preschools
Valuable solitary building
Notable building
Core value of national interest

To demolished and refurbished into a car park, housing and commerce.
Uncertain sites
– temporality as a strategy

The time aspect of the above-mentioned sites speaks of a certain temporal character of their present use and existence. The temporal aspect of the sites can as mentioned be described as uncertain and threatened, and their loosely programmed characteristics can give an impression of the sites being forgotten or ‘empty’. But within this uncertain and seemingly ‘empty’ condition also lies a potential.

Uncertain characteristic of urban places is analysed by de Sola Morales through the French term terrain vague in his book with the same title. The French word vague derives from the Latin word vagus, meaning “indeterminate, imprecise, blurred, uncertain.” Similar to the notion of edgelands described in the previous chapter, these descriptions of place that could be interpreted as of negative characteristics are precisely what give such place its potential for imagination and the unexpected to be performed. To avoid stagnating or give a false illusion of the sites being fixed, the ephemeral characteristics should also be reflected in the propositional phase, whereas their potential and simultaneous threat lies in the undefined.

De Sola Morales writes: “These strange places exist outside the city’s effective circuits and productive structures… Uncorporated margins, interior islands void of activity, oversights… In short, they are foreign to the urban system, mentally exterior in the physical interior of the city, its negative image, as much a critique as a possible alternative.”

In the same way as the sites are ephemeral so should the strategy for giving value to them avoid a dogmatic and deterministic thinking of how people should use the place. If the potential lies in the undefined, then the proposal should embrace this uncertainty to cater for intuition and imagination to take form. Thus, temporary structures and initiatives is one strategy when working with sites in the urban fabric that in themselves possess a temporal existence. The last decade temporary architecture has gained recognition and even crossed its way into the most acknowledged national prizes for architecture and contemporary art. In 2015 the German practice Raumlabor was nominated for the most prestigious Swedish architecture prize Kasper Salin for their sauna in the harbour of Gothenburg. The same year British practice Assemble became the first design and architecture collective to win the prestigious Turner Prize.

The architect Malin Zimm writes about the potential of temporary architecture in a report for Stockholm municipality. Zimm writes from the perspective of equity and social sustainability of a city and shows that temporary structures can be a strategy for cultural expressions to be performed. Temporary initiatives can be a tool for the city to enhance solidarity, meet the needs of different groups in society and lead the way to a democratic and equitable access to the city. Temporary structures can cater for citizens to meet in new places and in different forms, which in turn can contribute to an inspiring and curious city.

What’s the role of the architect in the formation of temporary structures? One can argue that it is the meeting that is of most value and that the structures should be pure facilitators for public encounters to take form. At the same time, Zimm writes that with the contribution of architects and artists such projects can achieve the originality that should be required of temporary structures, and that the competence behind the designing or shaping of these spaces is part of the hosting and a way of showing how valuable public meetings are. Design should never be seen as the solution or the final goal. The architect and artist working with social activism in the public realm should inhabit the role of a facilitator for other lives and expressions to take form, or as Kim Ingold phrases it in Altering Practices “… a role that moves from author to facilitator.”

Design should never be seen as the solution or the final goal. The architect and artist working with social activism in the public realm should inhabit the role of a facilitator for other lives and expressions to take form, or as Kim Ingold phrases it in Altering Practices “… a role that moves from author to facilitator.”

Though, it is important to remember that everything we are surrounded by is shaped by someone, and to neglect design is a naïve stance that neglects the fact that all objects we are surrounded by are designed by someone. We should rather work critically with design as a strategy that can give value and cater for an intuitive and curious use of space and interaction with objects, temporary structures, the city and each other.

Zimm argues that “the mobility of the architecture evokes a mobility in its users, it becomes a dynamic relationship where people move more and thereby discover new social possibilities and gets to know their district and its residents.” She further declares that temporary structures can answer the need for more meeting places and create more movability in a place – both within the district and shape new links between different places. Such initiatives should create a curious and intuitive ability for the users to reappropriate these spaces and claim them for their personal interpretations and needs.

In the same way as the temporal characteristics of the sites can cater for possible alternatives and altered inclusions to take form, likewise should the temporary structures become facilitators of imagination and reappropriation.

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29 Zimm.
31 Zimm.
One critique to temporary architecture is that it risks replacing more permanent investments and responsibilities. To uncritically propose temporary solutions can danger motivating and in worst case normalizing the absence of public investments and management of non-productive public places. Another critique is that temporal structures never gain resistance or affect change in the long run. Though, if such initiatives are perceived positively by the city, then it is important to have a strategy for how they can be further maintained. But even if they remain temporal the transferable nature of the projects is what can make them more resistant. Temporary proposals should be specific in their applications in relation to their local contexts, and simultaneously transferable in the sense that they can be translated to address other contexts. And even if they don’t gain acknowledgement by those in power, then at least more people can see possible alternatives and raise opinion, which could gain weight in the longer run. But most importantly, as Zimm stresses:

“Place making through temporal initiatives can pave for different uses and thereby open up for more stories and interpretations of the city.”

\[Zimm.\]
Summary
– Background, Belonging, Sites and Strategies

The curating of space through a series of Embodied Acts is one way to gather and share intimate knowledge. When we avoid falling into preconceived societal taken-for-granted values that reproduce the same new questions and comprehensions can take form. To within the Acts establish new social and spatial norms can at first appear as uncomfortable, but can consequently lead to transgression and resolution. The spatial setting – physical and social – for these spaces is intentionally small and intimate, which can make for the more vulnerable to occur. Other operations that work with similar strategies express the importance of an intimate and independent setting, which can lead to new social relations towards new social conditions – both personal and societal.

Moreover, when shifting from the social to the physical (they are always intertwined), certain sites – that above have been referred to as edgelands, or in Morales’ words terrain vagues – are potential sites that through their occupation can lead to new social relations and connections in the city. The loosely programmed and uncertain nature of these sites can make for people to occupy the space intuitively and use it in unexpected ways. These occupations can further propose possible alternatives to how our common ground could or should be used. When working with sites that by nature are uncertain and to a different extent temporal, it is important to embrace these characteristics rather than stagnating the site, this to preserve the potential for the unexpected to take form, which is embedded in the uncertain nature of the site.
Discussion

Intimate knowledge

Intimate knowledge I would argue is incredibly important but not sanctioned or recognized by any formal body as valuable. Through creating spaces that are intentionally small and intimate, not necessarily open to the public and not about the spectacle, more vulnerability can occur. To be able to express one’s thoughts and behaviours to other persons without the fear of being judged is crucially important on an interpersonal basis societal basis, this to avoid reproducing already pre-established and taken-for-granted perceptions. Through the establishment of new social and spatial values that, through feminist methodologies as well as Arendt’s reading shifts the focus from talking-looking into hearing-seeing, such settings can raise new questions consequently leading to new interpersonal and political relations.

Whereas the Embodied Acts and some of the social operations that I have encountered are manifested in the local context of Umeå, they have the ability to be transferred and reproduced in other localities. The Embodied Acts evolved into a series of acts situated in different homes and public spaces. National operations such as Save The Children and the work of Suzanne Lacy can reproduce and translate their operations and performances into different localities. Such operations are of a dispersed and transitional nature and speak of the potential of such spaces to be scattered, understood as a meshwork rather than one defined location.

Though, as important as it is for these spaces to be independent, intentionally small and not necessarily open to all, Arendt also argues for the importance of bringing intimate topics into the public sphere. That is because as she argues, only when intimate topics reach a public appearance they gain a certain reality. Here lies a possible contradiction; that certain topics might not ‘fit’ the public realm and can therefore by society be regarded as less important. When compiling these arguments and experiences from the Acts one can claim the importance of bringing intimate topics into the public realm and create liminal spaces within the urban fabric that can cater for the intimate to be expressed and shared.

Independence in the public realm

Critchley speaks of the importance of independent spaces in the public realm working on an interstitial distance from the state, negotiating specific local struggles that can address universal concerns. According to some of the operations that I met with in the process, this interstitial distance allows for faster and more immediate decision making in close response to their users. Simultaneously this distance opens up a space for questioning and resistance of preconceived societal values. This distance resists the operations to be pushed into one homogenous mainstream body – or with Critchley’s words the so-called societal order that the state wishes to establish. When working with marginalized groups, minorities and people who for different reasons fall between the cracks of the mainstream system, Critchley illustrates the possibility of shaping political subjectivities that focus on the person as being an actor, rather than emphasizing a stigmatized perspective of the subject being a victim. This can seem as provoking, especially when one is already in a difficult and vulnerable situation. Though, it is an equally important reminder, since the force that lies within a subject as being an actor implies that the subject has power which can be directed for one’s own and others’ purpose and good.

The geographical location of the independent operations that I have met is an important aspect to take into consideration. Sometimes the operations gain from being located in the centre because this allows people living in different outskirts of the city to access the operations. In a broader sense, the central location also addresses the issue of ‘the right to the city’. Especially in a ‘smaller’ cities like e.g. Umeå that only has one ‘clear’ centre, the geographical location becomes a democratic question concerning who’s allowed to take place in the centre, who’s interests are served and who’s is being pushed out.

To work with independent spaces in a present that seems more and more divided, where people seem to only look for one’s already established “reality” of the world, can appear somehow contradicting. Whereas it is important to address specific people and create intimate independent spaces for certain that allows the vulnerable to be shared, it is simultaneously important to let this take form in the public sphere where it, in Arendt’s words, ‘can be seen and heard by others’. Only then can we bridge the preconceived borders consisting of seemingly different realities that make the city a whole.
Uncertain potential

Though, sometimes the physical place itself allows for people to occupy public space, which in turn can lead to unexpected use of space and new social relations in the city. The uncertain aspect of such loosely programmed and ‘un-defined’ spaces can further be seen as a potential for these occupations to take form. Several initiatives – such as Soppkök Stockholm, Dungen, tree cabins and scenes built in forestlands, and occupation of leafy green areas in cities – show how the loosely programmed character of a site allows people regardless of age or societal status to use the city in ways that by mainstream society is perceived as unproductive. Such occupation of space can be read as a political manifestation of democracy. Though depending on what the altered use of the space is, whom it includes and how these occupations are portrayed through media, these spaces are to different extents threatened and temporal.

Zimm argues that temporary architecture is one tool that can enable unexpected occupation of space in the urban fabric. She argues that temporal structures can create new social and physical connections in the city. The critique towards temporal architecture is here based on scale and complexity. To work with an architectural practice that is small, local and propositional can seem to rarely affect change in the long run or a larger scale. Such practice can be perceived as naive and ineffective, and interpreted as politically useless because it is not scalable to confront larger structural issues. Though the initiatives are socially and physically specific in relation to the local context they operate within, the transferable nature of such initiatives to be translated into other localities is what makes these operations powerful, but it can simultaneously be regarded as a fragile condition to rely upon.

Towards a practice

The role of the architect I argue is to work with an ethical approach and the awareness of one’s insufficiency. Critchley portrays an ethical anarchy based on the comprehension of insufficiency and differences, or multiple singularities:

“We might say that ethical anarchy is the experience of the multiple singularities of the encounters with others that defines the experience of sociality. Each of these singularities overwhelms and undoes us and we can never do enough in response. An attempt to order these singularities into a shoulder-to-shoulder ‘fighting collectivity’, as Carl Schmitt might say, is doomed to fail.”

To establish an intimate and independent practice dealing with local struggles and initiatives even though by mainstream, it can be perceived as naive and irrelevant, I would argue is one important route towards a more ethical practice. To pretend that such practice will change everything is equally wrong, naïve and foolish. With Critchley’s words, such practice “should not seek to set itself up as the new hegemonic principle, but remain the negotiation of a new totality.” To seek for such praxis with the humility that one approach will not solve all implies a self-awareness of insufficiency – that we can never do enough in response. In the wider context, when it comes to social and economic inequalities, hostility and the fear of difference in our common urban fabric and private spheres, to mimic the mainstream power tools will not, in Audre Lorde’s words, change our present conditions in the long run:

“For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. Racism and homophobia are real conditions of all our lives in this place and time. I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives here. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices.”

Here I chose to use the whole quote, whereas the second part is often cut out when have read texts quoting Lorde previously. To reach down and connect with the deep knowledge inside ourselves requires an intimate approach where one gets in contact with one’s fragility, fear, prejudices and insufficiency. Only then, through this deeper understanding of oneself, can we reach a more sensible understanding of others, which in turn can lead the way to resolution.

33 Critchley.
**Conclusion**

Intimate independent operations are critically important because they can cater for an altered inclusion. Though such operations are intentionally small in their physical form and not necessarily open for everyone, they have the ability to be translated into other localities, which gives them value in a wider context. Simultaneously it is equally important that such operations are physically manifested in the public realm where they can be seen and heard by others and thereby reach a certain reality. Through an intimate approach and a deeper understanding of oneself we can reach a more sensible understanding of seemingly different realities that make the city a whole. By working with sites that to different extents are uncertain and temporal, and inhabit the potential to be used in intuitive ways, such spaces can allow for the unexpected to take form consequently leading to new social relations and physical connections in the city.

**Reflection**

Liminality and intimacy has been an important base for the shaping of this thesis. These social and spatial concepts have allowed me to access an incredibly interesting inquiry of literature, which have been useful for the framing of this thesis’ methodologies of engagements with others as well as in the propositional phase. At the same time it is also easy to lose oneself within this suggestive field. I will not reduce the pleasure and knowledge that I have gained in this process, the uncertain and ambiguous nature of these topics intrigues me. Ultimately it is in the meetings with existing operations and through the curating of intimate space in the Embodied Acts that I have been able to test the theoretical investigation and gained practical knowledge. When working with concepts such as liminality and intimacy in a propositional phase, the knowledge gained from previous work that I have been part of realizing, analysis other practitioners’ work as well as meetings with existing operations, set out an important base for the propositions. Though, I feel that it is only through implementation that we can purely find out the possible advantages and insufficiencies of such proposals.

**Coming up**

For the lasting time of this thesis I will focus on the site called ‘The Block’. The spatial investigation and methods used when working with the ‘Forestland’ and ‘Transit Spaces’ have set out a good base for the development of ‘The Block’. In dialogue with actors and existing social operations within that neighbourhood I will propose how the ‘empty’ space that occurs in the time gap can be used. Furthermore I will speculate on how such proposal can be incorporated in the car park that will later on be built. An ethical remark from my side is to make it clear that I will not be part of initiating or realizing such project. I will only propose how the space can be used in dialogue with the operations, and then transmit the proposal for them to use it anyhow they find appropriate.

**Future directions**

One conclusion in this thesis is that a potential to occupy space lays within uncertain and temporal characters of a site. The architectural strategies and spaces for giving value to such places are in general small in its physical manifestation, this can be due to their uncertain existence. On the one hand I see an importance to further investigate and how such initiatives can gain resistance and alter change in a longer run, as well as considering scale and complexity within such proposals. To further work with a practice that proposes intentionally small and intimate structures dealing with local struggles is one way to gain experience and evaluate such initiatives. Simultaneously I see a possibility for further research to investigating how an intimate reappropriation of space can be maintained within larger projects.
List of figures

Image 1:  http://collegecandy.com/2017/01/20/womens-march-protest-location-full-information-list-get-involved-details/

Image 3:  http://www.umea.se/4.232bb3eb132b9e0c2ca800030742.html

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