

# *The need of separatist spaces*

*a queer feminist exploration of saunas and lesbian spaces*

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## **Sammanfattning**

Uppsatsen och projektet utforskar separatistiska rum, med fokus för platser för lesbiska. Målet är att möjliggöra för en diskussion om behovet och utformningen av separatistiska rum. Fokuset är på exkludering som metod för att långsiktigt kunna uppnå ett jämlikt samhälle. Den teoretiska grunden är i queer fenomenologi som konstaterat att kön har att göra med tillgång till platser, och att genom en repetition av handlingar skapas en könssegregation som upplevs som den sker utan ansträngning. Den tar även upp hur queera, och andra minoriteter, orienterar sina kroppar på vissa sätt för att undvika påhopp och övergrepp. För att orientera sina kroppar på ett visst sätt behovet rummet om-bebos. Slutsatsen från det är att minoriteter behöver separatistiska rum för att kunna pausa från att ständigt ha fokus på omgivningarna. Detta stärkts genom en katalogisering av några separatistiska sammanhang baserat utifrån kön, sexualitet och ras. I Sverige idag används separatism som ett verktyg för att motverka strukturell diskriminering. Trots det så möter separatism motstånd från majoritetssamhället. Utifrån dessa slutsatser har design projektet gjorts delvis i skala 1:1 av att organisera separatistiska arrangemang, så som att arrangera bastuklubbar där personer bjuds in till en bastu för samtal. En annan del har gjorts i en mindre skala. Under designprocessen har en feministisk metod med fokus på arkitektur som en process snarare än som ett objekt samt att använda normkreativ design.

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores separatist spaces, with focus on lesbian spaces, with the aim of enabling discussion about the need and configuration of that type of spaces. The focus is on exclusion as a method for achieving an equal society in the long term. Grounded in the queer phenomenology that concludes that gender has to do with access to space, and by the repetition of actions, gender segregation takes place in a way that seems effortless. It also deals with that queer, and other minorities, bodies need to orient themselves in a certain way to avoid assault. To orient themselves in a certain way, the space will need to be re-inhabited. The conclusion from that is that there is a need of separatist spaces for minority groups in order at times to get a break from the need to stay aware of the surroundings. This need is strengthened by cataloguing existing separatist spaces based on gender, sexuality and race. In Sweden today separatism is used as a practice to fight structural discrimination. However, separatist spaces face a resistance from the majority society. Following these conclusions the design project is carried out partly in 1:1 actions of separatist spaces, such as hosting sauna clubs where a group of people are invited to sauna together and talk. Part of the project is carried out in smaller scale. Feminist methodology has been used with a focus on architecture as a process rather than an object and using norm-creative design as a tool.

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# 1. Introduction

## Starting point

To whom do the public space belong? Feminist and post-colonial writers have discussed how the public space is built by and for white heterosexual men<sup>1</sup>. Is that still the case? Today the term 'public woman' no longer refer to a prostitute and jews are not forced to live in ghettos. However, access and a sense of ownership of public space is still affected by gender, sexuality, and race, just in a more subtle way. Does everyone feel comfortable in the public space? If not, how do we, as those who the public space isn't built for, claim it?

1. Kanés Weisman, Women's Environmental rights: a manifesto, 1,4

In my aim to understand how gender and sexuality shape architecture and how architecture shape gender and sexuality, my starting point is to look at spaces of nudity. In spaces inhabited by naked bodies, what is barely visible in other spaces become exposed and this knowledge can then be applied in other settings as well. One example of this is how the presence of the naked body give some access to the space while others are excluded.

## Background

I use the sauna and changing room as a filter to analyze access to space and to discuss who is included and who is being excluded. If our society in general have the aim that everyone should be included all the time, we miss the fact that we don't live in a equal society where everyone are included on the same terms. Instead, those facing racism, sexism, homophobia and ableism, meet discrimination when being in public spaces. Initiatives such as Statement festival, a music festival open only to women and transgender persons aimed to temporary host a safe public space where women and transgender persons do not need to fear sexual harassment or rape. There are various similar separatist spaces excluding the majority group that discriminates them. However, this is often seen as controversial by the majority group. I find it to be an important discussion to have regarding the needs of spaces of exclusion. Also to show the difference between the oppression group which exclude the marginalized, such as

apartheid, and separatism as a political strategy as for the network Black coffee.

bell hooks writes about to choose to stay in the margin and use it as a space of resistance. This is based on an anecdote of how the black people lived on one side of the rail road and the white people lived on the other side where the public institutions and infrastructure was located <sup>2</sup>. By this lies a strategy in staying marginalized, and exclude the majority, in order to put focus on the lack of equality and to organize the resistance.

2. hooks, Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness.

In this thesis I will explore separatist spaces, with a focus on lesbian spaces, with the aim to discuss the need of that type of spaces. The focus is on exclusion as a method for achieving an equal society in the long term. This begins with a theoretical foundation and then carried out partly in 1:1 actions of separatist spaces, such as hosting sauna clubs where a group of people are invited to bath sauna together and talk. Part of the project is carried out in smaller scale. In this process I have been using a feminist methodology of focus on architecture as a process rather than an object and using norm creative-design as a tool.

## 2. Queer phenomenological analysis of bodies in spaces of nudity

As a tool to analyse how bodies inhabit and relate to spaces of nudity I use Sara Ahmeds theories of queer phenomenology to understand the processes taking place.

Thesis question

What role do gender and sexuality play in the experience of places of nudity?

Which expectations are there on the bodies inhabiting these spaces?

These questions were my starting point going in to the project. I will in the following chapter go through examples of situations or conversations from the interviews which I conducted during the two sauna clubs I hosted, as well as an individual interview and my personal experience. Along these I will explain the

theories by Ahmed and apply them to these cases.

To introduce phenomenology; it is focused on understanding objects as phenomena. All objects have an orientation which affect how they relate to the world. Another important notion is that we experience the world with our body, and also how our body is oriented <sup>3</sup>.

3. Sanberg,  
Filosofiska rummet –  
Om fenomenologi

Brady Burroughs is of the opinion that architects have misunderstood phenomenology. She writes that the architectural theorists who have been interested in phenomenology have focused on Husserl's 'return to things' and Merleau-Ponty's 'the primacy of perception' and seen phenomenology as a polarity of rational objectivity, functionality and technology, and have let it represent the mystic, poetic and Being <sup>4</sup>. Burroughs here point out that it has been used with ideas based in the patriarchy, colonialism and racism where The Other is constructed and the work, production and history of objects is missing and in doing so, it continues to create a universal object – which is the white educated man. For phenomenology to become useful Burroughs states that it needs to be evaluated from a post-structural perspective to be feminist and race-critical. Therefore Burroughs turn to Ahmed's understanding of phenomenology <sup>5</sup>.

4. Burroughs, Architectural Flirtations: a love storey, 90

5. Burroughs, Architectural Flirtations: a love storey, 91-92

Ahmed defines a queer phenomenology. It deals, as Merleau-Ponty talks of, with how we perceive objects. Ahmed claims that how we inhabit spaces has to do with the way that the orientation of objects depend on what the objects allow me to do, and the possibility to use the object depend on if I can reach it, which in turn depends on how I am oriented <sup>6</sup>.

6. Ahmed. Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others 52

### **a. Me as a lesbian in the changing room - inhabitation**

I will begin with a personal anecdote. My girlfriend and I often go to the gym together, and being in the changing room it is one of the few places where I feel uncomfortable to come out. Since I, as not conforming to the norm of heteronormativity, constantly 'come out' to the people in my surroundings. In that space, naked and surrounded with strangers I do not wish to talk or act in

a way that acknowledge that we are a couple. This is because I feel as I could make other people uncomfortable by that. So, what is it with this space that create this feeling? Regardless if it would actually cause any reaction or not. The architecture of the space, the norms and rules related to gender and sexuality confined within the space defines our behavior.

Ahmed writes about how bodies extend into the spaces they inhabit. As well do spaces extend bodies, and if we say that, then we could say that spaces also extend the shape of the bodies that “tend” to inhabit them <sup>7</sup>. She also talks about how the heterosexual bodies extend into spaces, as those spaces have taken form by taking on their form <sup>8</sup>. This would mean that my body extends into the space it inhabits and I’m not only in the space but part of the space. However, this also means that the space extends the bodies that tend to inhabit them, which is not a queer body as mine, but a heterosexual body. Because, Ahmed explains, a space becomes straight by a repetition of actions that shape the surface of that space <sup>9</sup>. Depending on our orientation, how we orient ourselves, we direct out attention to different things.

7. Ahmed. Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others 86

8. Ahmed. Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others 92

9. Ahmed. Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others 92

Husserl writes about phenomenology in his study at home explaining how his attention is on the paper, and the rest of the house exists only in the background. Adrienne Rich also writes about phenomenology in her study and talks of how her attention is directed toward her children, even when she is writing and they are doing other things. Ahmed state that our direction discloses to what we are oriented in life <sup>10</sup>. In this example of two scholars writing about phenomenology, but they direct their attention differently, and my interpretation is that this is because of the gender of the authors.

10. Ahmed. Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others, 29-33

Ahmed writes about how she as heterosexual and part of a heterosexual couple did not think about how they acted in public space, held hands and kissed without thinking. But after coming out as a lesbian did she need to re-inhabit the space. She was more cautious and what was previously the background was now bodies and things gathered in a specific way <sup>11</sup>. This process is close to my

11. Ahmed. Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others, 101

experience of being in the changing room of the gym. The need of caution is based on the higher risk of assault as a queer person when being in a public space. When going to the gym alone or with friends the changing room remain an heterosexual space due to how it taken the form by the heterosexual. But when being there with my girlfriend and I orient myself in relation to the object of my desire, her presence defines me in relation to that. Causing me to re-inhabit the space and my attention is directed to what previously was the background.

### **b. Sauna together with classmates – orientation**



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12. Schmidt, Kim.

The first of my sauna clubs was located in the common sauna of my housing block and I invited people from my class to join me. When being in the sauna together we were oriented. I oriented myself in relation to the objects – my towel, the bench, the stove and the door. I was also oriented in relation to the other bodies that I co-inhabited the space with. Ahmed writes about how our bodies are shaped by this co-habitation when we orient ourselves in relation to other bodies. She also states that to be oriented is a tactile experience <sup>13</sup>. When I touch the bench the bench touches me. The bench and the towel will leave a mark on my skin after I've sat there for one and a half hour, even though that

13. Ahmed. *Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others*, 54



mark will disappear afterwards.

After we were done in the sauna the other woman and I who participated went first to shower, the men followed when we were done. A spontaneous gender segregation. It was not intentional but it happened that way anyway. More than one of us are not completely heterosexual which means that this gender segregation is not a logical consequence of creating a non-sexual space. Ahmed writes about how the repetition of work is not neutral, and by repeating an action it orients the body in some ways rather than others. Therefore, if we work hard, it seem as the actions are effortless and without thought. By this bodies are shaped by history, and the repetition of acts they've previously preformed <sup>14</sup>.

14. Ahmed. *Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others*, 56-57

Merleau-Ponty use the term disoriented as the unsure moment, where one needs to re-orient to be oriented. Ahmed looks at it as queer moments. When we orientate ourselves we align our bodies with the room, and then we begin to 'feel at home' as Ahmed say according to Burroughs. Therefore orientation creates a sense of belonging <sup>15</sup>. Ahmed describes it with Kants example of the difference of being blindfolded in a familiar room opposed to an unknown one. Finding the table in a familiar room and tracing it's surface makes you oriented since you then know where the doors are and how you can find your way. If you are in an unknown space the table tells you nothing. We often don't notice when we are oriented, it is first when we are disoriented we notice it <sup>16</sup>.

15. Burroughs, *Architectural Flirtations: a love storey*, 84

16. Ahmed. *Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others*, 6

### c. Lesbian sauna club – lines of desire



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17. Schmidt, Kim.

Ahmed writes that “If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as ‘who’ or ‘what’ we inhabit spaces with.”<sup>18</sup> By this claiming this is how we inhabit spaces, as well as who or what we inhabit spaces with, creates that sexual orientation. Referring to Butler who shows that naming oneself a lesbian is to make oneself a lesbian “in some more thorough and totalizing way, at least for the time being”<sup>19</sup>. By stating that it is a lesbian sauna club and that those participating at least at the present time stated themselves as lesbian the sexual orientation becomes lesbian. Similar to the art project *Myter och verkligheter – en lesbisk odysse* for which the feminist art-architecture practice MYCKET refitted a caravan for it to be both a museum and a space for the lesbian and queer community on the road in Norrland<sup>20</sup>.

18. Ahmed. *Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others*, 1

19. Ahmed. *Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others*, 93

20. Mycket, *Myths & realities – a lesbian odyssey*.

Phenomenology speaks about lines in relation to orientation, and how one orientates according to the lines. If being straight one follows a straight line which leads to ‘the other sex’<sup>21</sup>. But the queer life doesn’t follow a straight line. The milestones in life are defined from the heterosexual couple, marriage, kids and so on which can be reached by following the line. To be queer one needs to

21. Ahmed. *Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others*, 70

reorient one's body not only to follow the vertical and horizontal lines of straight culture, but also to find other lines to be able to reach other objects of desire <sup>22</sup>.

22. Ahmed. *Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others*, 100

During the sauna club we spoke about saunas and dating and one person said "A while back I dated a girl who hadn't dated women before. We went to yoga together and in the shower on the way to the sauna she eyed me up. Like really checking me out. I just felt like 'stop it now, this is not the place, save this for later'. Because it's not a sexual place." <sup>23</sup>

23. Informant 1, group interview

As Ahmed states, to follow the straight line is expected and when reorienting one's body away from those to follow other lines, diagonal lines of desire, this doesn't always go unnoticed. The disorientation becomes visible, and the person telling the story did react and was as well reoriented in this unfamiliar situation. Here the relation between action and space becomes crucial as Ahmed points out, since spatial relations between objects as well as bodies are created by actions. How she previously acted in the space defines how she expects to act in the space. When someone acted in a differently in this space, which is marked by heterosexuality as the norm and therefore has become non sexual, it disturbed her. The action by her date, who followed other lines of desire, and marked it as a sexual space. It disoriented her. Therefore it can be understood as what Merleau-Ponty talk of as queer moments <sup>24</sup>.

24. Burroughs, *Architectural Flirtations: a love storey*, 84

#### **d. Transgender body without a changing room – the privilege to reach out**

Husserl speaks of what he call living body, which queer phenomenology understand as our lived experience of inhabiting a body. This means our consciousness and how we relate to the world is not something which happens in our heads <sup>25</sup>. I understand that as stating that one cannot separate body and mind. Therefore, how we relate to objects and by how we relate to the world is affected by our body. This means that bodies can not extend into the world in the same way, and in that gender, sexuality, race and ableness intersect.

25. Ahmed. *Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others*, 2

A friend of mine is going through a gender transition. A process of testoster-

one and surgery reshapes his body. He told me that when he works out at the gym Iksu Sport in Umeå, he uses the disability toilet in the entrance area to change clothes. At that gym there is also lockers in the entrance area, where he puts his stuff. It's mostly fine, except that he can't shower after working out, and therefore he always has to go straight home <sup>26</sup>. This is another example of how spaces extend into the space of the bodies that tend to inhabit them, in a very obvious way. Since the gym is mostly inhabited by cisgendered bodies the changing rooms are shaped by that.

26. Informant 4, individual interview

We can also understand his situation by another theory by Ahmed, about Willful subjects. There is an Institutional will, the general opinion of how something should be, which is what is the best for those who share the institutional will. Since the institutional will is the will by those in power, this is achieved by an alignments of wills. Alignments of wills happen by will work, to conform one's will until it no longer require any effort <sup>27</sup>. In this case the institutional will defines that there are two binary genders, men and women, and it wishes to separate men and women into separate dressing rooms.

27. Burroughs, *Architectural Flirtations: a love storey*, 92-101

My friend whose body don't use any of these changing rooms doesn't align with the institutional will. Other examples pointed out by those who don't align with the institutional will, is the immigrant who refuse to integrate, the woman who doesn't reproduce and have children, the queer body who doesn't have reproductive sex and maintain the institution of heterosexuality, the wanderer who refuses to settle down and become part of the social body. Ahmed points out as seen in all these examples, the will economy is gendered, sexualized, classed, and racialized <sup>28</sup>. When not conforming, one becomes a Willful subject. Similar to the feminist killjoy, the willful subject makes the situation uncomfortable either by being vocal and pointing out the need of changing rooms for other genders or simply existing, and "ruining the atmosphere" <sup>29 30</sup>.

28. Burroughs, *Architectural Flirtations: a love storey*, 99

29. Burroughs, *Architectural Flirtations: a love storey*, 94-95

30. Ahmed, *Willful Subject*, 4

Ahmed writes about a story by Frantz Fanon, where a black man sits in a room where a pack of cigarettes is placed on the table. He would like to have a

smoke and is contemplating what he will need to do – lean forward and reach out his arm to grab it, but he can feel the white man’s gaze and therefore chooses not to. Ahmed says that he interrupts himself because the world is white and the body which feels at home is the body which can inhabit the whiteness <sup>31</sup>.

31. Ahmed. *Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others*, 109-112

Therefore this has to do with how the body can extend into the space. Ahmed says “phenomenology helps us to show how race is an effect of racialization, and to investigate how the invention of race as if it were “in” bodies shapes what bodies “can do”.” <sup>32</sup>. This is also interesting in looking at saunas as spaces of nudity, considering that the public sauna in my experiences often is a space occupied by white bodies. And Ahmed also talks about how easily the white body extend into the world <sup>33</sup>. In these theories Ahmed speaks of how race is “in” bodies due to racialization. I’ll try to apply the same hierarchy to gender in the case of my friend. Race and gender are of course also different and intersecting, but also similar in how Fanon stops himself of reaching out due to his body, the transgender body stops itself in reaching out to the gendered changing rooms. Similar to the consequences of racism are the consequences of not conforming to a cis-gender norm and heterosexual norm on a scale from critical gaze and comments, to violence attacks. Therefore it is a privilege to extend into the space. A privilege which certain bodies have due to race and gender, while others do not. <sup>34</sup>.

32. Ahmed. *Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others*, 112

33. Ahmed. *Queer phenomenology - orientations, objects, others*, 138

34. For the methodology of interviews and research see my report from the autumn semester

## **Conclusion of phenomenological analysis**

Is there a conclusion to be found in this, in regard to my questions? First question, what role do gender and sexuality play in the experience of places of nudity?

Gender, as being visible on the surface of the body, define who can access spaces of nudity. The gender divided sauna, by time or space, where either men or women can access it, plays a role in informal decision making. Another effect of gender for my transgender friend who doesn’t fit into the binary gender norm, is that one cannot access spaces of nudity at all. For my friend, who is going through transition, this may change when the body has changed enough to

pass. But for those who are non-binary or intergender this is constant, as well as other transgender men and transgender women whose bodies are not passing. So, gender have to do with access to space.

Sexuality have to do with how the spaces of nudity can be experiences. In my experience of going to the gym with my girlfriend I needed to inhabit the space in a different way as a queer body than a heterosexual. The heterosexual body doesn't have to think of how it orient itself. As a queer body what was otherwise in the background become bodies and things gathered in a specific way. This requires the queer body to orient itself in a certain way and pay attention to the surrounding as a strategy to avoid assault.

The second question deals with which expectations are there on the bodies inhabiting these spaces?

This can be answered that they are expected to follow the institutional will. As in the example of the lesbian women whose date eyed her up in the shower. It made her uncomfortable since she had aligned her will to the general will of the changing room as a non sexual space. The action by her date disoriented her. The same way the expectation to conform happened to the bodies at the other sauna club, with the spontaneous gender segregation where the repetition of acts made it happen effortless.

The expectations on the bodies inhabiting the space are also different depending on how privileged the body are. I have mainly looked at gender and sexuality, and a little at race, but also ableness, age and other factors intersect. A white body can inhabit spaces of whiteness more easily than a black body. The bodies are expected to be heterosexual to feel at home in the spaces, and when they are not they need to re-inhabit the space and the queer moments of reorientation take place.

## Are separatist spaces needed?

Separatist spaces for the minority or oppressed groups are safe havens and a political strategy. The conclusion that it is a safe haven is based in the analysis from queer phenomenology that the queer body needs to orient itself in a certain way and pay attention to the surrounding as a strategy to avoid assault. To be, temporary, in a space where the person doesn't need to pay attention to the surrounding is a break from otherwise being constantly aware.

Separatism has a history within the feminist, lesbian and civil rights movement since the 1970's. Separatism was practiced as spaces by and for marginalized communities that saw intentional exclusion, permanent or temporary, of their oppressors as key for liberation <sup>35</sup>.

35. Gemzöe, Lena. Feminism.

In a paper by Sandrine Ndayambaje about young adults participation of anti-racist forums for afroswedes she concludes a number of positive outcomes. Among those are that the participants feel validated in their experiences of racism and realized that different groups have different understanding of racism. To be with others who face the same type of discrimination they find it possible to identify a structural oppression and feel less alone. Therefore group belonging is an important contributing factor to having the energy and strategies to face racism in their every day lives <sup>36</sup>. In this sense the separatist space is a space for discussions.

36. Ndayambaje, Sandrine. "Det är aldrig vi som får vara i fokus" En kvalitativ studie om unga vuxnas deltagande i anti-rasistiska forum för afrosvenskar. 23.

This is also supported by my personal experiences. When I have been involved in women's groups within political organizations the discussions there made me notice patterns and structure within the organization. By doing that I felt less as it is only me who happens to be the secretary at every meeting/making sure that the meeting room get booked/reminding people of the next meeting/makes coffee/sends that email since almost all women in the different local branches had the same experience. Which then have been helpful in trying to change those structures, because the first step is to acknowledging those as structures not as individual cases where it just happens to be me.

My experience of Lesbisk Makt, hosting breakfasts for lesbians only is somewhat different <sup>37</sup>. That is instead a moment for a few hours every month to be in a space where I am the norm. Where I don't have to think twice and make a subconscious safety calculation before kissing my girlfriend. As Ndayambaje discusses, it provides a space for discussions and to share experience of discrimination without having to give the whole background story because most people there can relate.

37. Lesbisk makt. Om Lesbisk Makt.

In Sweden today, separatist event for women is the more common form of separatism. Such as the Statement festival, a music festival in 2018 where only women and transgender people were allowed <sup>38</sup>. Separate hours for women at the public bath house or women's shelters are other separatist spaces based on gender <sup>39 40</sup>. Spaces based on sexuality are for example Lesbisk frukost (Lesbian breakfast) hosing breakfast and other events for lesbians. There are also in Sweden a few groups based on race, such as Black Coffee that is a network and facebook group for afrosweddes and Välkommen till motståndet (Welcome to the Resistance) for people who experience racism, who organize demonstrations and study circles <sup>41 42</sup>.

38. Om statement. Statementfestival.

39. Roger Wallenius. Kvinnobad en succé på andra badhus.

40. ROKS. Riksorganisationen för kvinnojourer och tjejjourer i Sverige. Kvinnoseparatism – var, när, hur och varför?

41. Facebook group Black Coffee. About this group.

42. Facebook page Välkommen till Motståndet. Om.

	Group	Activity	Potential Site	Visibility
gender	Statement festival		Broparken	
	Women hours at public bath house		Ersboda, badhus	
	Bastaklubben, Ögonblicksteatern		Mobile	
	Women's shelter		Berghem	
	Lesbisk Odyssey		Mobile	
sexuality	Lesbisk Makt		Nydalsjön	
	Black Coffee HBTQ		Hamn-magasinet	
race	Black Coffee		Ålidhem	

43. Schmidt, Kim.



## 4. Criticism of separatist spaces

In society over all is there a overall critique toward separatist spaces. Even though separatism women spaces have been present in the feminist movement, there is an internal critique where separatism is seen as extreme, as written about by Jackie Andersson in the article *Separatism, Feminism, and the Betrayal of Reform* <sup>44</sup>. The critique also comes from those outside the movement. Lisa Magnusson wrote a column claiming that Black Coffee, the separatist afroswedish group, are doing the same thing as nazis do. Heavily critiquing that the group acknowledges that race exists and people could have different experiences based on their race, claiming that it gives legitimacy to nazis also speaking of race <sup>45</sup>. The gender based separatism also meets resistance. In an article in SVT the local government commissioner in Västerås comments on that there have been certain hours at the public bath house assigned for women only. She states that it is discriminating to exclude men and that everyone should be welcome to the public bath house when it is open. She expresses that this is a symptom of honour culture that is new to Sweden, and that it have stagnate views on women <sup>46</sup>. Statement festival, a music festival which started as an reaction to sexual harassment and rape at other festivals have also been criticized and Diskrimineringsombudsmannen, the state agency dealing with discrimination, has deemed that it was discriminating in their marketing to say that cis-gender men are not welcome <sup>47</sup>. The basis of the criticism vary, from men who feel excluded and to those who find it to be the wrong method to achieve feminist progress. Emma Jaenson wrote in her article *Mansfri festival är ett svek mot kvinnor som utsätts för sexövergrepp* (The man free festival is a betrayal toward women who face sexual harassment) that the initiators of the festival instead of creating a festival where men are not welcome should have focused on preventing sexual harassment and rape of women instead. She also compare their choice of hosting a festival without men, due to men being responsible for the large a majority of those offenses, with having a festival where jews or muslims are not allowed, stating that it must be clear to everyone how wrong that is <sup>48</sup>.

44. Anderson, Jackie. Separatism, Feminism, and the Betrayal of Reform. 438.

45. Magnusson, Lisa. Nynazisterna jublar såklart åt Black Coffee.

46. Lundh Liljegren, Anna Kommunrådet kritiskt – "diskriminerande".

47. Aftonbladet. Mansfri festival fällt för diskriminering.

48. Jaenson, Emma. Mansfri festival är ett svek mot kvinnor som utsätts för sexövergrepp.

As noticed the arguments for why separatism is wrong vary, but are often centered around that one should not divide between different groups, regardless of it is based on gender or race. However, the criticism doesn't in any of these examples acknowledge that there is a difference between excluding the group which discriminate, and when the majority exclude the discriminated group.

## 5. We need to talk about the need of separatism

My thesis is set based on this background of the need of separatist spaces, spaces of exclusion, and how they are seen as controversial and counter productive. The aim of my thesis is to start a discussion about the need of separatist spaces and the configuration of those spaces.

## 6. Methodology

With my aim to work with gender and sexuality I turned to feminist methodology to allow my feminist approach to be part of the whole process. Part of it is also to look at norm creativity as a methodology.

Jane Rendell writes about the practice *muf* in the essay *Critical spatial practices: setting out a feminist approach to some modes and what matter in architecture* that they position the building as a methodology rather than the end result of the method that makes a building <sup>49</sup>. This focus of the building is not to be the final product of my thesis, but as part of the process and the aim is to move beyond to use of it and the actual architecture. When Margarita McGrath talks of her practice in the essay *Fishing for ghosts* she speaks of the practice of architecture to build meaningful and extraordinarily multi-dimensional spatial experiences. Something which she state differs from the more common approach to focus on the design of building as isolated objects. She also claims that architecture as a practice should cross disciplinary boundaries in order to devote itself to a broad public audience <sup>50</sup>.

49. Brown, A Lori, ed.  
Feminist practices.17-56

50. Brown, A Lori, ed.  
Feminist practices.  
213-238

Based in the methodology provided by them, I view architecture as a spatial experience which interact with a public audience. My focus is on the social

processes that architecture may create. Following that, I will design a building which can be used as a tool to understand this interaction.

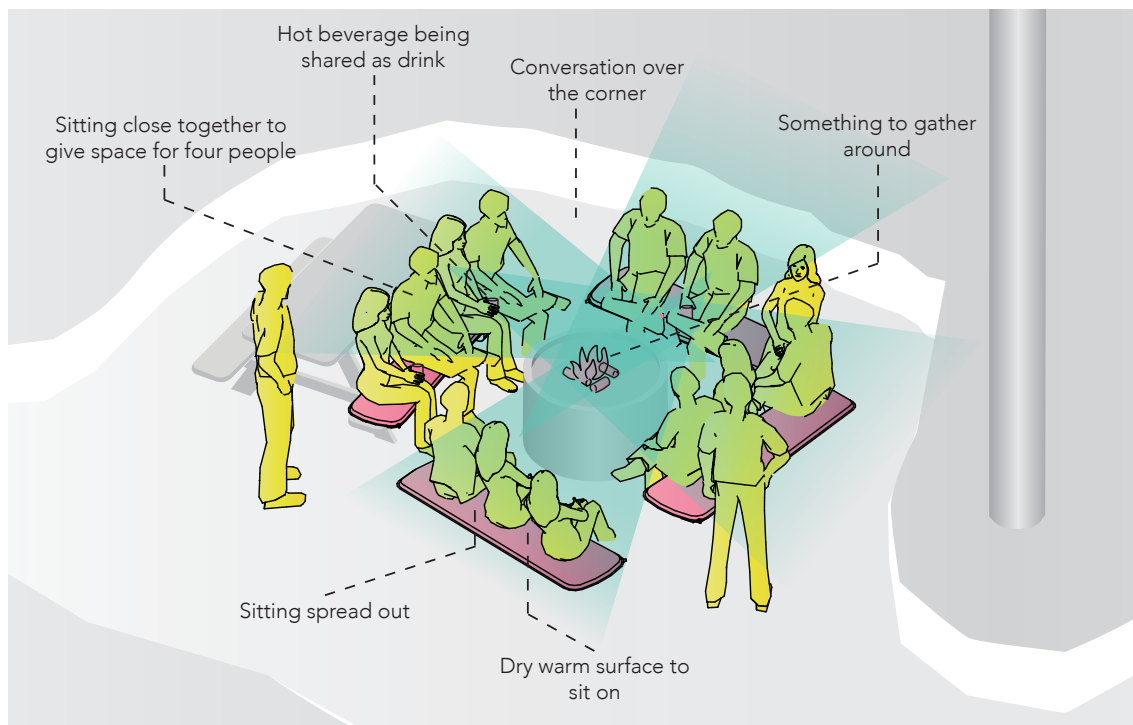
Norm creativity is a tool for this design. The reason behind it is that we, as architects and designers, follow our habits. And we are restricted by norms and values even when we think we are not. Norm creativity is based on the awareness that norms can limit and discriminate and to change that one to a need to investigate peoples situations and needs <sup>51</sup>. Norm creativity has several methods, but central is the need to speak to different groups and to work with the group one aim to include.

From that I decided to explore separatist spaces together with the separatist group of my focus, which have been based on gender and sexuality, to focus on lesbians.

51. Alves, Mariana et al. NOVA - Verktug och metoder för normkreativ innovation. 4.

## 7. Process

### Lesbian out-doorsy day



52. Schmidt, Kim.

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I am active in the organization Lesbisk Makt that hosts lesbian breakfasts and other separatist events for lesbians. In February we hosted an outdoorsy day at Lake Nydala in Umeå. I decided to use this opportunity to look into space configuration and to use fire as a tool. I decided to test what tools I need to create a space. I brought coffee, coffee pot, fire wood and matches. Encouraged people to bring sleeping pads to sit on. On site using the existing infrastructure I lit a fire and studied how people interacted. The fire became the center point of how the bodies were placed and interactions. The site is by a lake in the forest, but is accessed within a few minutes walk or biking from neighborhoods such as Mariehem, Ålidhem and Tomtebo. As people were coming and leaving, people rearranged themselves how they were seated. They were seated closer together with their bodies touching when it was more people, and further apart when fewer people were there. With the group centered around the fire, the gazes were directed towards the middle, however discussions often took places over the corners. I talked about my research, and about how we were sitting and talking there, and the discussion was about the difference from this to a sauna to our regular breakfasts seated at tables.

## Lesbiska Bastuklubben – the lesbian sauna club



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53. Schmidt, Kim

An outcome from the conversation I had about my project at the lesbian outdoorsy day, was some loose talk of creating a sauna club and go to sauna together regularly. This because several people present had wished to attend the lesbian sauna club I hosted in November, but had not been able to.

I initiated a lesbian sauna club as a group meeting in a physical space, but also as an Instagram account to be visible and accessible to a wider audience. The sauna club have been a situation where I can use the tools to form a norm creative design process of interacting with the target group, and discuss and receive input on saunas and separatist spaces while being in a separatist sauna space.

I can study the movement in and out of the sauna. When the discussion is engaging and no one wants to leave the room, but still has the need to cool down, people move downward on the benches or to the floor to stay in the room.

# Ögonblicksteaterns kick off

## Part 1

**Time:** 30 min

**Place:** Lecture room

**Topic of conversation:** Speaking of research of saunas and spaces of nudity from a feminist perspective.

## Part 2

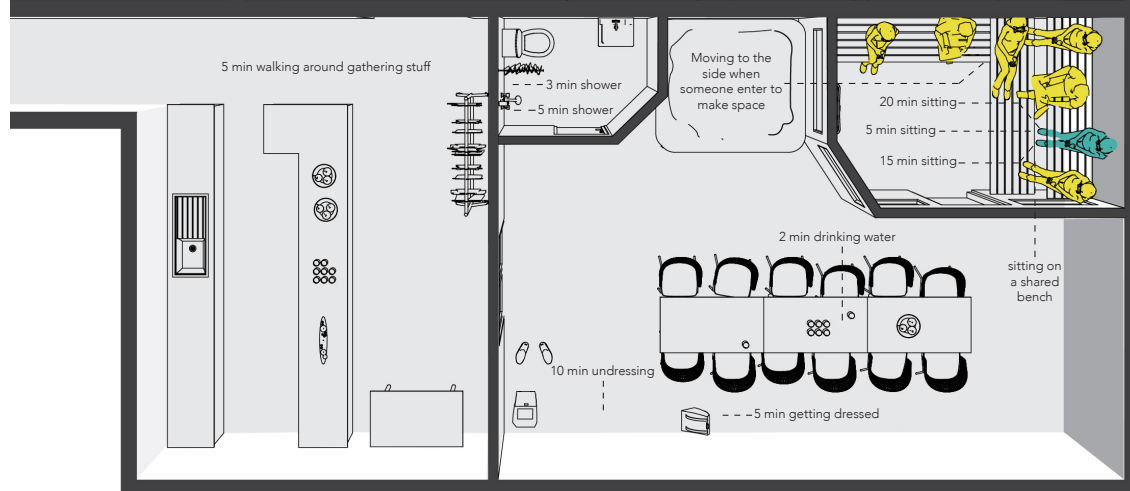
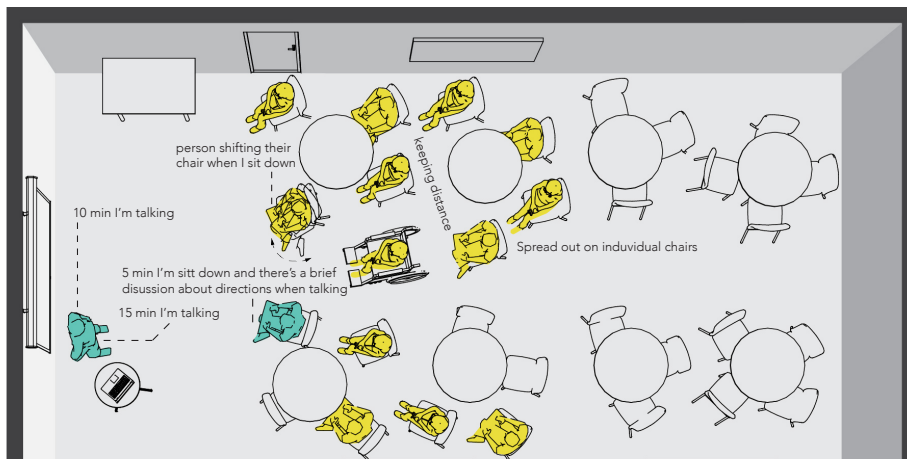
**Time:** 60 min

**Place:** Sauna

**Topic of conversation:** The low temperature in the sauna, future plans for Ögonblicksteaterns projekt bastuklubben, that there's a shelf for sauna accessories at Stora Coop and what people talk about in saunas.

**Total time:** 5 hours

30 min intro by the creative director  
 30 min talk about the sauna  
 15 min fika  
 20 discussion by photographer  
 30 min I speak  
 30 lecture about the Sauna Academy  
 30 min wrap up and people leaving  
 60 min sauna, for women



54. Schmidt, Kim

I began a collaboration with the theatre group Ögonblicksteatern. Ögonblicksteatern is based in Umeå, and they are working on an upcoming project about sisterhood and separatist female friendship set in a sauna.

I was invited to their kick-off to speak of my research. We were located in the basement of an office building in central Umeå. Me and several other were speaking standing in front of the audience. I used the opportunity to speak of the common orientation in a sauna, where everyone is looking in the same direction. To do this I sat down in the audience looking forward and posed the question of if it feels different. This created a larger engagement than when I just stood facing them and talking, a bit of a laughter and also reflections of how it is easier to share personal experiences when one doesn't have to look the other people in the eyes.

The other part of this kick-off was a sauna club which was open only to those

identifying as women. The process of undressing and being in the sauna with women of different ages. Sitting in an L-shape allowed a mix between looking partly at each others and partly forward through the windows of the sauna to the room beyond. Similar as to by the fireplace the benches lacks defined seating and as people came in or went out, people shifted the placements of their bodies, moving closer together to provide place.

### Sauna club collaboration with Ögonblicksteatern



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55. Schmidt, Kim

In collaboration with Ögonblicksteatern and Lesbisk Makt did I host a sauna club for lesbians with a public call for participants. Taking place in the sauna of the Design School at Umeå University it did tie together my work at the Art Campus with Ögonblicksteatern and Lesbisk Makt. The discussion took of after we entered the sauna, sitting in an L-shape. Talking about my project and discuss regarding Ögonblicksteaterns project Bastuklubben and different settings for hosting other sauna clubs. For Ögonblicksteatern this become part of the sauna clubs they are hosting prior to writing the script of they play to explore what topics are discussed in the female sauna.

## 8. Discussion

In these different situations I have plugged into existing networks, such as Lesbisk Makt and Ögonblicksteatern, but also begun to create new connections between these different networks and creating new networks with the lesbian sauna club, by engaging new people in the project.

The 1:1 explorations of how the configuration of a space is altered by how the bodies are placed in the space have been a part of shaping and creating spaces as experiences.

As the fifth part of this project is a design part that will allow me to work in another scale. For this I decided to collaborate further with Ögonblicksteatern. Their project Bastuklubben will host sauna clubs for women and then write and perform a play set in a sauna. The sauna they will use is currently being constructed but I will use the requirements they set up for the sauna they need for their performance as my brief. They want it to be a functioning sauna, it should be able to be transported in 80 km/h and function as scene + scenography.

This require different areas to be taken into consideration. For it to be a functioning sauna, dimensions and materials will need to be considered. The need for it to be mobile and to drive 80 km/h is affected by the weight, driving license regulations and dimensions of the sauna. For it to function as a scene and scenography, I have to deal with view lines and the placement of audience and actors.

## 9. Conclusion

The thesis has dealt with different areas of separatist spaces. From the start with queer phenomenology which concluded that gender has to do with access to space, and by the repetition of actions gender segregation which takes place in a way that seem effortless. It also dealt with that queer, and other minority, bodies need to orient themselves in a certain way to avoid assault. To orient themselves in a certain way the space will need to be re-inhabited. A conclusion is



that that there is a need of separatist spaces for minority groups, in order to at times have a break from the need to stay aware of the surroundings. This need is strengthened by the argument of it as a practice in a feminist movement, and presently as a tool to fight racism in Sweden today. However, as pointed out previously in the text, separatist spaces face a resistance from the majority society who fails to understand the need of it and finds it discriminating, ignoring the difference in power balance between the excluded group having a separatist space versus the majority group that discriminate having separatist spaces. Based on these conclusions I find it necessary to discuss and highlight the importance of separatist spaces, as a tool for achieving an equal society in the long term.

The lesbian sauna club will continue to inhabit existing spaces of nudity, claiming those as separatist spaces, catering to the need of spaces of exclusion for the marginalized group. To focus the work on the collaboration with Ögonblicksteatern, it is not only me myself who create a discussion of separatist spaces, but Ögonblicksteatern who will be traveling with their performance reaching a wide public audience. By this both the minority and majority groups are reached in different ways and engaged in a discussion about separatism.

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