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# Spatially organizing future genders: An artistic intervention in the creation of a hir-toilet

human relations

1–26

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**Annika Skoglund** 

Industrial Engineering and Management, Uppsala University, Sweden  
The University of Exeter Business School, UK

**Robin Holt**

Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark  
The University of Nottingham Business School, UK

## Abstract

Toilets, a neglected facility in the study of human relations at work and beyond, have become increasingly important in discussions about future experiences of gender diversity. To further investigate the spatial production of gender and its potential expressions, we transformed a unisex single-occupancy toilet at Uppsala University into an all-gender or 'hir-toilet'.<sup>1</sup> With the aim to disrupt and expose the dominant spatial organization of the two binary genders, we inaugurated the hir-toilet with the help of a performance artist. We describe and analyse internal and external responses thereto, using Lefebvre's work on dialectics and space. Focusing on how space is variously lived, conceived and perceived, our analysis questions the very rationale of gender categorizations. The results contribute to a renewed critique of binary thinking in the organization of workplaces by extending our understanding of how space and human relations mutually constitute each other.

## Keywords

architecture, gender, hir, Lefebvre, space, toilet

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## Corresponding author:

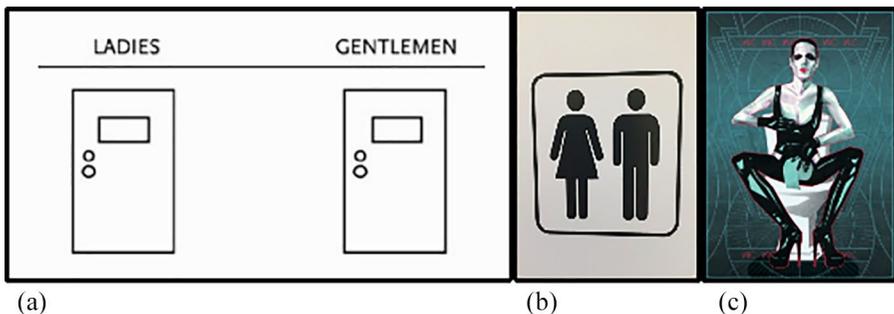
Annika Skoglund, Industrial Engineering and Management, Uppsala University, Lägerhyddsvägen 1, Uppsala, 752 37, Sweden.

Email: annika.skoglund@angstrom.uu.se

## Introduction

The toilet has historically been taken for granted as a space oriented toward the physiological, natural rhythms of male and female bodies (Lefebvre, 2013: 27). Yet, as Lacan (1966/2006) critically suggested, more is at stake. Labelling toilets ‘ladies’ and ‘gentlemen’ reveals a pervasive and profound structural ordering: public life is managed according to laws of urinary segregation (see Figure 1). Gender segregated toilets, worldwide, naturalize ‘normal sexedness’ (Cavanagh 2010; West and Zimmerman, 1987: 137), reflecting a biologization favouring of heterosexual identities (Butler, 2007). This spatial organizing of urinary segregation and, in effect, two polarized genders, is being increasingly questioned, notably through renewed awareness of those identifying as neither (Browne, 2004; Connell, 2011; Erickson-Schroth and Jacobs, 2017). We might, then, imagine alternative toilet signs, which can both reveal the patterns of our everyday repetitive organization of the body through ‘space’, in its ‘public and fictional rhythms’, and allow us to imagine them differently (Lefebvre, 2013: 27). Toilets, it seems, could be lived, sensed and signed anew, bringing questions and future experiences of gender diversity to the fore (Gershenson and Penner, 2009; Slater et al., 2018). More broadly, it brings into question the way humans relate through socially and historically ordered categories and how space is integral to this organization. Those happily, or thoughtlessly, categorized within their biological sex instituted at birth are invited to question the way they have been rhythmically producing such binary spaces. Hence, this study is both interested in how a majority of people expect their bathroom experiences to conform to their gender identity, and how such expectations can be disrupted to be better understood.

To expose the current state of, and open up for new thinking about, spatial productions of gender, we initiated a transformation of a unisex single-occupancy toilet at Uppsala University (est. 1477). The transformation was inaugurated by artistic intervention, or performance, the aim being to ‘provoke new constellations of what is visible and sayable’ (Beyes and Steyaert, 2011a: 100) in the everyday enactment and duration of the two dominant genders, or what Ranade (2007: 1524) calls ‘hegemonic gender-space’. What was originally signed to unite woman/man became a sign open to all potential genders,



**Figure 1.** Loosening of the binary genders.

(a) Lacan's urinary segregation; (b) Uppsala University unisex signs; (c) new hir-toilet sign.

or even no gender, a so-called ‘hir-toilet’ (see Figure 1), mainly for employees within the Department of Engineering Sciences. ‘Hir’ (‘hen’ in Swedish, a new word officially taken up since 2015<sup>2</sup>) is not only a pronoun undoing gender, but is also isolating the possibility for an all-encompassing category that can host the heterogeneity of lived experience, open for anything and anyone, be it those who take gender identity more or less for granted as ‘cisgender’ (i.e. people who gender identify with the biological sex ascribed and determined for them at birth), those who feel excluded by signs of the two dominant biological sexes or genders, or those who prefer to be genderless. ‘Hir’ is a notion that gathers this fluidity, and expands the unisex to the unsexed to configure a heterogeneous whole of future genders.

Our article presents how the transformation and artistic intervention were planned, implemented and responded to, with theoretical focus on renewed critiques of binary thinking in the organization of human relations (Brewis et al., 1997; Dougherty and Goldstein Hode, 2016; Jeanes et al., 2011; Mumby and Stohl, 1991; Rumens, 2012; Rumens et al., 2019; Thanem, 2011). We contribute to these, prompted by Lefebvre’s (2013) empirical interest in disruptions of the everyday and theorizing on dialectics and space. Lefebvre emphasized that disruption often emerges from frustration with boredom and dullness – felt experiences identified as sources for playful action. Retaining a deep interest in the everyday, Lefebvre thus insisted on events as crucial for spurring the ability to rethink and trump old theories (Shields, 1998). At the same time, criticized for an unclear position on feminism and lack of gender awareness (Shields, 1998), Lefebvre’s spatial theory has occasionally stereotyped human relations (Hirst and Schwabenland, 2018). Yet, Lefebvre’s focus on the senses and embodiment offers possibilities to ‘transcend phallogocentrism and heterosexist accounts of alterity’ (Blum and Nast, 1996: 560) with a triadic thinking that fits what feminist theorists have called for: ‘a playful displacement of gender and sex to allow for an imagining of a multiple subject between a and b’ (Phillips et al., 2014: 314). Instead of disregarding dialectics and phallogocentrism, we wish to address the under-theorization of gender and otherwise insightful thought on the body (Conlon, 2004).

As Lefebvre notices, talk of toilets is uncomfortable, and as such their force goes unacknowledged, not least the male–female pairing. As if to enforce and echo this, the toilet is considered architecturally an inconsequential space, tucked away and ‘functional’ (Kornberger and Clegg, 2004). In most workplaces, toilets go undecorated, without personal touches, managed hygienically and visited quickly – close to what Lefebvre (1987: 8) calls a ‘modern object’ with an explicitly managed role and place. Importantly, though, even with this ‘managerial colonization of everyday life’ (Hancock and Tyler, 2004: 619), the ordering is not total; there is, inevitably, room for play (Lefebvre, 1987; Tyler and Cohen, 2010) – inevitable because to institute and manage binary constructions in everyday life, toilets must produce such relations *in use* (Shortt, 2015), which also means disturbing these relations if planned uses are subverted.

This subversion has a long history: toilets have figured as important spaces for liberation and alternative expressions of sexuality, as well as gender (Isaiah Green et al., 2010). Based on Lefebvre, Dick (2014) traces how male same-sex relationships in Western Canada between 1870 and 1945 created alternative spaces for sexual practices. Men

actively made public toilets meeting places for homosexuals: ‘the closet’ became a ‘mental space’ for living out desires of same-sex relations (Dick, 2014: 18). The public toilet facilitated lives overflowing and resisting neat alignments between the otherwise embedded heteronormativity of space, and instrumental attempts to order sexual expression. In other words, experimenting with toilets can open up for a ‘queering’ of gender, heterosexuality, femininity and masculinity, so destabilizing and making them more suggestive than definitive (Rumens et al., 2019).

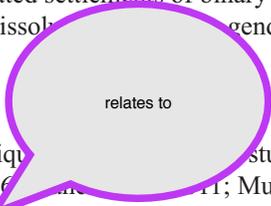
Space is like this: it is not ‘there’ and then managed; it is being produced continuously, open to be produced differently as humans relate to themselves and others differently (Beyes and Steyaert, 2011b; Lefebvre, 2009). Acknowledging how space and human relations mutually constitute each other is critical if we wish to question how binaries are enacted, but also spatially disrupted, as norms of gender relations and their managed enactment find both secure (settled binary use) and uncertain expression (potential genders) in everyday life.

We start by a brief introduction to studies of binary gender constructions in workplaces with focus on the critique of dialectics, followed by how we complement other studies that also have found Lefebvre fruitful for spatial analyses of the workplace and/or genders. We then present the research design and a section on how to analyse with Lefebvre, exemplified in the following spatial analysis of the multiple reactions the disruption excited. We end by discussing how our methodological merger of an artistic intervention and Lefebvre’s spatial theory reveals the intimacy between space and gender binaries, and conclude that it exposes both the habituated settlements of binary gender constructions and points to the possibilities for their dissolution of genders.

## Binary relations at work

Binary thinking has attracted and survived continuous critique in gender studies (Brewis et al., 1997; Dougherty and Goldstein Hode, 2016; Heston, 2011; Mumby and Stohl, 1991). The oft-repeated problem discussed is the hierarchical power relations tied to binary separations, dualisms and dichotomies (Bondi, 1992). As Rumens (2012) argues, prevailing discourses in work settings connect sex, gender and everyday activity through heteronormative structuring of male–female, and as Hirst and Schwabenland (2018: 161) usefully point out, ‘it is not the content of those distinctions but their very existence that constitutes doing gender’. Against these binary pairings, others are often considered deviant forms (Thanem, 2011), according to a biopolitical racism that segments and subsumes the population (Stryker, 2014).

Many studies of gender in organizations rely on a logic of masculinity vs femininity (Lewis, 2014) at the same time as they complain about binary separations. So, instead of attempting to reveal and advocate a reorganizing of stable gender identities, common in efforts to establish equilibriums between them (Hanson and Pratt, 1995), what of disrupting gender binaries altogether? Linstead and Pullen (2006) show how playful performance can decouple gender and identity, emphasizing how commonalities might override difference (Glick Schiller, 2012). A performative disturbance of opposing binaries can thus nudge us towards ‘postgenderism’ (Dvorsky and Hughes, 2008), or ungendered/transgendered situations, resisting categorized difference (Linstead and Pullen, 2006). In



relates to

part, this nudging has been conceptualized by critical work on, and problematizations of, Judith Butler's gender matrix and its creation of binaries (Meijer Costera and Prins, 1998). It has also been added to significantly by Butler, notably in her work on fictional politics (Butler, 1993, 2007), giving rise to a burgeoning literature on workplace LGBTQI+ policies (Cook and Glass, 2016), sexual minorities (Van Laer, 2018) and queer bodies (Muhr et al., 2016). Narrowed down to gender and/or sexual practices, this broader debate has resulted in a growing visibility of a third category called 'transgenders' (including transvestites, transsexuals, drag kings, drag queens, intersexuals, third genderists, genderqueers, genderfucks, agenderists as well as female-to-male (FTM) and male-to-female (MTF) transitioning (Thanem, 2011)), where gender identity is separated from sexual practices and preferences, provoking distinctions between LGB and TQ+ (Erickson-Schroth and Jacobs, 2017), or even spurs non-identification with a particular gender or sex within the transgender category (Thanem, 2011), exemplifying how a more fluidly generative body is productive of and produced by postgendered space.

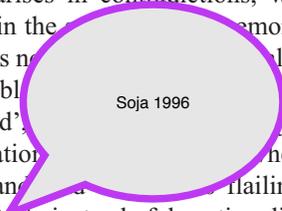
There is indeed a wider scholarship beyond the spatial turn that currently makes the presence of gender fluidity notable, from a western or non-western canon of ethics to the academic call for political imaginaries of posthuman others (Braidotti, 2006). To be clear, we are, in light of this general trend of loosening up the biological distinction of the human species, addressing future genders and ways of living more broadly, and not advancing emancipatory questions concerning how a rich variety of minorities can better flourish at work, even if this is an important civil rights issue that our intervention also politically provokes. Rather, we wish to go even further and acknowledge how 'postgenderism' indicates blurred alignments of sex (ascribed at birth), sex category (social designation of characteristics) and gender (expected self-management in line with chosen sex category) (Muhr et al., 2016), to question if we can assume and assign a correlation between body and gender, or first name and gender, at all? There is a hint of this thinking in Žižek's (2016) reminiscence of how, on entering a door marked 'gentlemen', he paused and began asking existential questions about maleness. Similarly, but in the context of research practice rather than binary subjects of research, Ashcraft and Muhr (2018) advocate 'promiscuous coding' to dissolve the gendered analytical frameworks and metaphors commonly found in leadership studies (also see Collinson, 2005), and to explore the analytic potential of playing with scenes of 'fantasy and misrecognition', which are important in gender constructions (Harding, 2016: 78).

This renewed critique of binary thinking in human relations studies carries echoes of early poststructuralist opposition to dialectics in social theory, an intellectual turn introduced to organizational and work relations scholars in the 1980s (Cooper and Burrell, 1988) and then broadly debated (Knights, 1997; Mumby and Stohl, 1991). Dialectical thinking, then argued, produces binaries supporting a structure of taken-for granted hierarchies (Collinson, 2005). Using binaries ('A' in relation to 'not A') was considered problematically linked to patriarchal ways of thinking (Massey, 1994: 256), phallogocentrism (Irigaray, 1993), and neglect of more complex interrelations and asymmetries (Collinson, 2005) – in effect, the possibility for alternatives.

Tellingly, then, the scholarly critique of gender binaries at work has been delivered hand-in-hand with an intellectual criticism of dialectics and its correlation of perpetuating conventional gender categories. Nevertheless, dialectics comes in various forms

(Mumby, 2005), and does not necessarily neglect divergent perspectives on multiple social relations and contradictory organizational features, as we show by turning to the spatial dialectics of Henri Lefebvre.

Dialectics is productive as an analytical approach because it exposes forces of distinction and separation, prompting consideration of how these are normalized, revealing how inherent structural contradictions yield further distinctions, also containing contradiction, and so on, one binary opposition feeding others. In comparison to other spatial theorists, Lefebvre stays close to dialectic thinking to enrich and disrupt it by introducing into the thesis/antithesis relationship an ever-present, always disruptive force, the 'third' – so triads, not binaries. In dialectical analysis, Lefebvre credits Hegel with a grounding insight: wherever pairings are placed the relationship lives in company with a third, the 'other', that which arises in contradictions, without end, as pairs/entities/scales vie amongst themselves in the search for harmony or consensus. Unlike Hegel, though, Lefebvre (2009: 19) is not satisfied with a finalized resolution, arguing instead that any binary relation is unable to reach a final, fully transformative difference in which it is lived out. The 'third' is not a subject category but what is always present behind any representation of a subject when these categories are placed (spatially) amid everyday life and practice, flailing against exception and contradiction (Lefebvre, 2009: 205). So instead of deserting dialectics as the feminist approaches have suggested, there is an opportunity to complement critiques of binary thinking, as well as twofold-thinking dialectics, by turning to Lefebvre's triadic, spatial thinking.



Soja 1996

## Spatial relations at work

Commonly, Lefebvre is introduced to affirm a spatial turn with emphasis on socio-materiality and embodiment, one sensitive to the spatial productions and disturbances of prevailing power structures in human relations, for example theorizations of self-management (Rose, 1978), liminal space (Shortt, 2015), trading activity (Borch et al., 2015), office space (Kornberger and Clegg, 2004; Tyler and Cohen, 2010) and gender (Ranade, 2007). In studying hospitals, for example, Ford and Harding (2004) acknowledge a dialectic dynamism between space and social relations, each folded into the other as collectives, bodies, personalities, targets, waiting rooms and theatres. Zhang and Spicer (2014) show similar interplays in studying bureaucratic expressions of power in a building's architecture and patterns of occupation. Dale and Burrell (2007) study the intimacy between certain office functions and professions and access to restricted areas, in efforts to architecturally encode certain values such as openness or security, and in layouts that elicit certain movements (aisles in a supermarket) and behaviours (café areas to encourage conversation). Here they pick up on the ordering of material space by symbolic order of prestige, with seniority associated with central and elevated space, and minor and overlooked activities assigned to liminal spaces. Also, Shortt (2015) remarks how liminal places (stairwells, toilets, cupboards) are ignored in spatial studies, which tend to concentrate on the main spaces of business.

Of those studies with explicit interest in gender and space, Franck's (1985) noted incongruences emerging when ideas (conceptions) about gender clash with outdated materiality and practices in the built environment (perceptions): the material feel did not

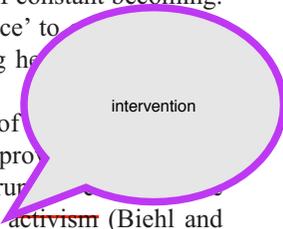
reflect the language. Tyler and Cohen's (2010) study of offices continues such inquiry into possible alignments between workspaces and conceptions of gender by identifying (binary) gendered aesthetics in which women were regarded as less professional in preferring personal spaces decorated with family-oriented mementos. In a study of The Founders Building (a Victorian college for upper- and middle-class women created under the philanthropic drive of Thomas Holloway), Liu and Grey (2018) explain further how space and organizational identity unfold by using Lefebvre's merger of spatial production and social practice set within patterns of historical use. Illustrating how spatial arrangements steer separations of men and women, they expose how a largely smooth, performative interplay of ideals (conceptions) and managed university space (perceptions) unfolds, enacted with minimal transgression. Here, spatial production is harmonious, not antagonistic. Yet the authors remain aware that, for Lefebvre (2003), spatial production can always become contested, loosening the alignment of ideas and categories, roles and practices as well as material arrangements: it breaks rhythms of alignment and conformity as much as it announces and enforces them.

This transgressive sense of spatial productivity is taken up by Hirst and Schwabenland (2018) in a longitudinal ethnographic study of office space interaction. They emphasize how generative bodies are integral to sensemaking, and how personhood develops in a dialectic relation between space and body. Suggesting an office may be seen as neutral, but in reality hosts "idealized" workers, including how the worker "does" gender' (Hirst and Schwabenland, 2018: 161), they find 'normal' heterosexual-looking bodies being generated anew in this modern, supposedly more gender-fluid, office. Toilets are mentioned, somewhat equivocally. According to one research participant, the new transparent office meant a formerly shameful physical activity 'could now be done with pride'. It also destigmatized women's body fluids, installing tampon vending machines, yet then kept to stereotype by restricting condom vending machines to male toilets. The toilets still segregated the sexes/genders, yet the authors suggest a loosening distinction: 'gendered norms are not coherent but a sort of historically assembled hodgepodge' (Hirst and Schwabenland, 2018: 173). This resonates with Ranade's (2007) argument that space is different for us all, with 'gender space' viewed as a fluid process of constant becoming. Ranade (2007: 1519) goes beyond the adjective in 'gendered space' to verb, 'en-gendered space', which fosters possibility for loosening the space and better pinpoints how gender is continuously produced.

Such emphasis on spatial fluidity can foster an understanding of this spirit, our study furthers such reflection through the intentional project of gender expression. By using artistic intervention to expose and disrupt, we are methodologically inspired by a growing interest in academic activism (Biehl and Reynolds, 2018; Contu, 2020, in press) and Beyes and Steyaert (2011b), who seek more performative studies and conceptualizations of spatially configured relations.

## Method

Our study thus pairs two methodologies. First comes an active transformation and artistic intervention in the office of the first author, specifically transforming a toilet mainly available to the employees at Uppsala University, with occasional visits by



intervention

students. The first author posed the idea with the chief administrator in August 2015, who checked if there were any building regulations to consider, for example if the toilet was designed for disabled people, or if the proposed refurbishment would not conform with the fire regulations. This was not the case, and to add, there were only single-occupancy toilets in the building, and the chosen toilet did not stand out in comparison to the other toilets of the same size. The transformation occurred over the autumn with the help of two department technicians, prior to inauguration in February 2016. The original single-occupancy unisex toilet was functional: white tiles, grey floor, sink, half-body mirror, bins for paper and sanitary towels, and regulation compliant toilet paper, paper towels and liquid soap. The transformation included: colourful towel, full body mirror, shaving and make-up mirror, a bench and glass shelves, so-called queer magazines shelved on a small wicker table (and a donated book 'How gentlemen dress' that subsequently disappeared), incense oil, plastic flowers, deodorant, hair styling gel, nail polish and 'vanity' boxes etc. collected from conference hotel bathrooms. Bodily needs were also addressed by adding razors, toothbrushes, toothpaste and hand cream. Female body fluids were in addition acknowledged in the provision of sanitary towels, pantyliners and tampons. In general, the items were introduced to be put in perspective of gender neutrality, hopefully cast in a different light and rethought, with the purpose to confront the toilet users with their own reflections about the possibilities to undo gender.

Significant to the transformation was a new hir-toilet sign, glued over the original woman/man symbol (Figure 1), commissioned from artist Mirelle Eriksson, drawing inspiration from a photograph of performance artist, Tobias Bernstrup, who was to inaugurate the toilet by a performance at campus. Performative intervention is a methodological approach taking cues from early action research and field experiments (Lewin, 1946). Kurt Lewin (1946) considered action research, a method adept at revealing how so-called 'minority problems' are creations of the majority, further suggesting that it is not until we experience a social change closely that it is possible to fully grasp the implications of dominant norms. In this case, the performance was designed to affirm a 'minoritarian politics' by actively pursuing aesthetic experiences allowing participants (performer/researchers/audience) to question the typically hidden and unexpressed dominant, majority conditions (Beyes and Steyaert, 2011a: 111). This intent was admitted in the inauguration invitation, emphasizing the posthuman qualities of Bernstrup's works, 'Sing My Body Electric' and 'Almost Human'.

Indeed, Bernstrup functions as a 'positive deviant', a person who already possesses knowledge of how to loosen dominant genders, and who is willing to share this with us (Martínez, 2017). From a more critical perspective, we were thus mobilizing 'an ideal transgressive category' (Muhr et al., 2016: 53) when Bernstrup on 24 February entered the Ångström Lab, a building housing around 1000 employees, and was helped by a colleague with the complicated outfit and makeup, and making hir way through the main student area, a café and an open staircase. Another colleague brought DJ gear and played music by Bernstrup, whilst about 60 colleagues, a few students, the local illustrator, and several journalists were served state-approved, alcohol-free drinks and snacks. After a speech by the first author, Bernstrup cut the red tape (photo found here: <https://www.ergo.nu/nyheter/20160224-mediattätt-på-toalett>).

In addition to the detailed preparations, the actual expenses for the toilet transformation and inauguration amounted to €750 (Bernstrup had to be convinced to accept €300), funded by research funds granted to the first author categorized as an underrepresented gender (judged by ascribed sex at birth) in the engineering sciences.

The second methodological approach involved tracing reactions to the intervention (cf. Biehl and Reynolds, 2018). The extensive personal communication and media attention that followed the inauguration became very self-experiential, similar to first-person action research (Heen, 2005). The experience was shared between the co-authors in daily conversations and emails, discussing increasing volumes of messages, comment, trolling and images. These were mapped with the help of a computer expert who deployed ‘crawling techniques’ to capture how news and comment about the inauguration and toilet spread. The privacy settings on Facebook made some comment threads possible to collect in an Excel file, where we have chosen not to archive any personal data attached to the comments, in line with the GDPR (The General Data Protection Regulation). Similarly, there is a Twitter scraping tool, but it is cumbersome to gather tweets older than 7 days as the API (Application Programming Interface, the coders’ way to scrape Twitter data) only covers a week. Within these limitations, Table 1 summarizes the empirical material collected and reaction spread.

### *Analysing with Lefebvre*

Studies that exemplify analytical tools sufficient for the study of space and embodiment are meagre (Jeanne et al., 2018; **IAQ: 1** Yanow, 2010): many scholars whose studies are theoretically underwritten by Lefebvre seem hesitant to operationalize a dialectic method. Yet spatially animated approaches do exist, for example ‘atmospheric analysis’, which considers both the ‘hard and soft, immediate and (potentially) diffuse: location (what sort of area is it?), architecture, décor, history and site-generated official and popular discourses’ (Isaiah Green et al., 2010: 11). In our spatial analysis we employ similar focus, but embrace a dialectic method that reveals the existence of a ‘third’ in the fluidity in between pairings (such as hard and soft). Dualisms are directly broken in Lefebvre’s triadic conceptualization of space – conceived (ideas and idealized plans), perceived (rules, habits and routines) and lived (attempts, experiences and feeling). These three mutually configuring aspects of spatial production give a form of categorical direction, or ‘frame’, for analysing spatial production (Liu and Grey, 2018: 643).

Starting from reactions in the office corridor, and geographically working outwards (from Division of Industrial Engineering and Management to Department of Engineering Sciences, then to University central administration, then campus and student organizations, Uppsala town, Sweden and internationally), we trace how continuous dialectical tensions and interplay between perceived (habitual, managed activity) and conceived (managerial intent, norms) space are manifest in lived space (spatial experience). With this dialectical method, we approached the empirical material by making notes, first separately and then together. Whilst the first author had a more direct self-experiential access to many of the reactions to the toilet intervention and functioned as an ‘insider’, the second author worked as a critical discussion partner (Ahonen and Tienari, 2009:

**Table 1.** Collection of empirical material.

Type	Description	Content
Emails	Personal emails sent to the first author (80)	Questions about the initiative, positive and negative feedback, hate mails.
Swedish newspapers and magazines	<i>Uppsala Nya Tidning</i> (4) <i>Fria Tider</i> (1) <i>Metro</i> (1) <i>Aftonbladet</i> (1) <i>Världen Idag</i> (1) <i>Ergo</i> (2) <i>Universen</i> (1)	Reportage, interviews and debates with replies. Including a vote for the <i>UNT</i> readers – for or against the hir-toilet, 93% voting against. Most articles include online commenting by readers.
Swedish radio	SR P4 Uppland (1) Student radio show 'the closet' (1)	Interviews with the first author and Tobias Bernstrup.
Swedish television	SVT News (2)	Reportage from the inauguration and interview with the first author.
Swedish Internet Forums	Högskoleläckan Facebook group (166 comments) Flashback Forum (12 comments) Toklandet.com (56 comments) Pettersons's blog (8 responses) Nordisk.nu (3 comments) Pressen.se (1 article)	Academic discussion about the university and role of the academic in relation to the hir-toilet. Anonymous complaints about the ridiculousness of the toilet transformation. Attacking the hir-toilet and Swedish feminism in general. Against the hir-toilet and against the current Swedish immigration politics. Critical about hir-toilets and body fluids.
International Internet forums	Facebook (More than 200 comments) Twitter (More than 239 posts) Instagram (1 post known) Reddit.com Agenda Europe Blog	Reporting the inauguration Comments about the toilet, Swedish socialism and aggressive speculations about the first author. General discussions and sharing of pictures of hir-toilet signs.
International media	WMC TV (1000 shares)	Article about the hir-toilet

663), the aim being to reveal how the prevailing production of gender binaries (woman and man) was variously disturbed.

By this analytical focus, first on how binary pairings configure an idealized *conception* of human relations, one placed distinctly against another, and second, how these representations organize these relations in *practice*, and third, how *lived* experience engenders, enacts and yet overflows this coming together of ideas and practice, we found how binaries were present and undone. Whilst conceptions are considered easiest to 'get at', as they are communicated (Wapshott and Mallett, 2012), it is mainly within perceived and lived experience that spatial productivity is sensed (Lefebvre, 2013: 43). It is

thus something researchers become aware of in attentive, immersive study (Lefebvre, 1991: 391):

The more carefully one examines space, considering not only with the eyes, not only with the intellect, but with all senses, with the total body, the more clearly one becomes aware of the conflicts at work within it, conflicts, which foster the explosion of abstract space and the production of space that is other.

## **Findings: Revealing gender binaries – within Uppsala University and beyond**

In the immediate work environment, the inauguration and transformation drew positive and negative comment, and silence. Leading up to the inauguration, comment was sporadic. Issuing the invitation elicited most comment, especially the claim suggesting existing toilets had been equipped with only male needs in mind (i.e. toilet paper). A vivid discussion spread among colleagues at the Ångström Lab, and what was an internal invitation found its way to the newspaper, *UNT (Uppsala Nya Tidning*, 163,000 daily circulation). From here, a local intervention, seemingly quite a timid and perhaps even compliant attempt at transformation in a society institutionally proud of its levels of equality and tolerance, drew unexpected levels of fascination. Though formally a category ‘hir’ existed, the term still seemed generally absent from daily practices at the university, perhaps owing to its position in Uppsala with old, formal (patriarchal), gender patterns that went largely unnoticed. Disturbing the settled conceived space of the ‘normal’ toilet by intervening in the way it was routinely to be used, i.e. disturbing conceived/perceived spatial alignments with a new sign, interior decoration and amenities, people seemed motivated to either protect prevailing spatial and hence gender orders, or embrace possibly new conceived/perceived alignments (affirmed through a ‘hir’ sign that perhaps offered more varied and even playful amenities, but which disturbed thoughtless entry, as in Žižek’s reflections on maleness).

To start mapping comment, we begin with reactions from those most physically proximate to the toilet: academic colleagues/users. Some reactions were sent to the common ‘info ångström’ mail address, and personally to the first author (see Table 2). One professor complained about the cost of an unnecessary transformation (Mail 1). Another professor suggested the first author should not mix politics and workplaces and pursue a campaign for its own sake (Mail 4). The mails align toilet conventions with those of academic research by re-enacting perceptions of the original toilet as satisfactory, and spatial conceptions equating toilets to efficient, humourless spaces for meeting male bodily functions. The felt disturbance is met with appeals to reasonable, rational research practice, coupled to ridicule of the new sign, new ideas and, personally, the first author. They seek recovery of established ‘correct’ experiences, i.e. habits conforming to, and confirming, dominant ideas and routines, supportive of a factual biologization of the two genders, without alternative – for example, by starting an email with ‘But Annika’, followed by a question about the old toilet’s already ‘bisexual’ character, in that the old sign portrayed an attempted perceived equilibrium of the two dominant genders, woman and man (Mail 4). Compared to the term ‘pansexual’,<sup>3</sup> ‘bisexual’ thus relies on gender binaries.

**Table 2.** Mails sent to the Author or to the collective university mailing list.

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This must be a joke? But the first of April is not yet? Will us men get free razors too? If this is true, the money should have been used for something sensible. / Sent from my iPad [Mail 1, sent by a professor at Ångström Lab to info\_angstrom@polacksbacken.uu.se]

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Thank you for your interesting answer. Even if the idea can seem strange to many at Ångström, it is with consideration to the employees that the toilet has been decorated. / Kind regards [Mail 2, name of the first author] [Sent by first author via info\_angstrom@polacksbacken.uu.se]

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That was a very controlled response – what an arse to complain about this! Whoever it was, they clearly feel the need to criticise to make themselves feel good. Perhaps they're most in need of the new facilities? [Mail 3, sent by a PhD candidate at Ångström Lab to first author]

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But Annika, is it not so that our toilets are 'bisexual' or even neutral? I thought so until now – or have I misinterpreted the signs? Don't you think that we should not pursue campaigns at our workplace just for the sake of the campaigns? [Mail 4, sent by professor at Ångström Lab to info\_angstrom@polacksbacken.uu.se]

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Hi everyone who like me have paid attention to the artistic decoration of a fairly boring toilet. If the art piece makes us discuss and ask questions, it also fills its function. There are surely worse examples of waste of money at the university. However, I do think you agree that this is not the right forum [the common mail] to discuss this issue. [Mail 5, sent by Associate Professor at Ångström Lab to info\_angstrom@polacksbacken.uu.se]

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Not my intention to discuss, but considering how much discussion this has generated the money must have been considerably well spent. Tips: You could advice [sic] some of the elderly "cranky" old men that sanatory [sic] napkins are gender neutral and that older men can suffer from incontinence. Cannot imagine that the expenses for extra sanatory [sic] napkins/tampons could be huge enough to steer up any debate. Does not know myself how it is to menstruate, but can imagine that it is not that fun if it arrives unexpectedly. I had probably appreciated it [the napkins/tampons], if I had been a woman. / [Mail 6, sent by PhD Candidate at Ångström Lab to first author]

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Hi, the most pleasant toilet in the house, as a room. Fun that the room is given attention. Often used by people who are not seated in this corridor, often occupied. The toilet is a room where we can find peace for a while, and the ambition/level regarding the toilet is testament for how well you take care of the rest. Stenbeck [Swedish founder of the investment firm Kinnevik] always evaluated companies by specific criteria, of which the toilet standard and the service mindedness of the receptionist had significance. Toilet fittings/design & its significance/pleasantness is perhaps the topic for a book to be released soon. Sad, however, that some persons have problems with their emotions regarding norms/inclusion & gender. [Mail 7, sent by a lecturer at the Ångström Lab to the first author]

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Hi! I went by to have a look today. It was very sweet. I will naturally turn up to the inauguration! In fact, I think it would be suitable for many co-workers if so-called 'washlets' were implemented in all corridors (that is popular in for example South Korea and Japan). I am also surprised that standard hygiene product, like sanitary napkins, aren't provided in for example the adhesive plaster storages in the departments (not seldom, this is something that is provided at universities abroad). [Mail 8, sent by PhD Candidate to first author]

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Being sent on common university regulated mailing lists (1700 recipients), these mails are then interpreted by others who speculate about ‘who’ these critical colleagues are (Mail 3), and how they, in effect, create a backwards organization which might, actually, need new spatial orders of the form offered by the hir-toilet (Mails 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8). The hir-toilet conception, and the changes of habit required, entices some to walk from other parts of the university to use it for themselves. One colleague (Mail 8) describes hir experience diverging both from how the toilet was originally conceived and from the intended administration of bodies sought in the previously perceived space. Additional suggestions on improvements of the work environment are given, invoking international comparisons. The previously unthought is expressed in a space which awaits reconfigured practices, whose disturbance brings possible materializations of new relations at work to the fore – ones where toilets can be less ‘boring’ (Mail 5) and good for ‘finding peace’ (Mail 7), raising a positive generosity towards each other at work, for example supporting provision of extra amenities (Mail 6). This mail also shows the spatial disruption bringing forth thoughts about bodily differences in relation to genders, at the same time as it loosens up such possibilities for body/gender correlation, in an effort of at least imagining oneself as a menstruating body. There is an emerging sense of fluid intimacy between body and spatial productions questioning the separation of two binary genders: formal conceptions and everyday practice are giving way a little within the everyday agitation of an artistic intervention.

News about the hir-toilet reached the University central human resources (HR) unit before the inauguration due to public complaint: ‘To the vice-chancellor, Uppsala University. Is this really true? If so, can the vice-chancellor stop this spectacle? With kind regards . . .’. As equality specialists, the HR unit contacted the first author. Initial expressions of interest and curiosity were followed by hesitation resulting from the public criticism, coupled to insistent requests for a meeting prior to the inauguration. The HR unit believed the unisex toilets worked well: why change? They suggested the intervention could be discussed in a sanctioned space, like a seminar room, with gender experts. There was concern that diversity management procedures were being flouted, so a meeting would at least be an attempt to manage and hence legitimize a centrally unsanctioned, grass-roots initiative and in effect re-assert conceived ideas on how equality and diversity was facilitated by existing procedures.

The HR unit continued to question the funding and decision processes, despite being directed to previous communication between the first author and vice chancellor, via the prefect and the vice chancellor’s advisor. Understandably, the HR unit’s administrative role is strengthened through formalization, i.e. by appointing a ‘case handler’ for the formal query/complaint (Mail 25 February), now given a specific reference number (UFV 2016/309). This grounding in spatial perception (i.e. routines and rules about equality efforts aligned to conceptions of diversity) escalated exchanges, legitimating more detailed questions, pointing for example to §23 in an internal steering document concerning equality funds and quoting information from the inauguration invitation, and specifically the ‘updating of the university’s affirmation of alternative identity expressions’. Throughout, the HR unit questioned the first author’s perceived right to initiate the transformation, by forwarding and adding to the questions sent to the vice chancellor (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Questions sent from the Human Resources unit to the prefect, 2 March 2016, shared with the first author.

1. In what way do the ordinary toilets at the university offend hir-persons?
2. Have responsible persons possibly thought about the possibility that hir-persons could feel offended by being pointed out as unhappy with the ordinary toilets and instead are pointed out to be in need of whole body mirrors, magazines (what type of magazines?) etc. and amenities at the toilet of workplaces with design signs with excentric [sic] make up and latex clothes?
3. Is it in line with the policy of the university to permit that (tax) equality funds are invested in extra furnishing of toilets and spectacular 'inaugurations'?
4. Who is responsible for that this type of 'inaugurations' are pursued and are cabled out to mass media?
5. Has the decision been taken at the central University administration or has the decision been made at the local department without informing the central administration in advance? Is there any protocol?
6. Will anyone head off this 'inauguration'?

After the inauguration, the HR unit continues in attempts to close down the hir-toilet and reverse the dramatization of the intervention. They report receiving 'some phone calls from people at Ångström who consider it all as offending women', in addition referring to *Ergo* [student magazine] that 'has had a critical article about the way of thinking behind the initiative: [https://ergo.nu/debatt/20160226-“hen-toan”-reproducerar-binärt-könstänkande](https://ergo.nu/debatt/20160226-\), and assumption about the non-binary'.

Mirroring the institutional debate, and intensifying its terms, is criticism of the hir-toilet posed by local media and Uppsala's citizens (95% vote 'against' in *UNT*'s poll). The phalanx of comment from Uppsala's citizenry prompted the HR unit to write to the prefect:

. . . the inauguration has awakened enormous reactions in mass media (the issue is discussed incessantly both in *UNT*, Facebook). This could be considered good from a research perspective or for the cultivation of public debate, but it can also weigh down the work environment at your institution or campus area. If that is the case or if you deem there is a risk to the work environment, we at the human resource unit can support you with a possible risk assessment or planning of possible response. (Mail 25 February).

The disturbance to the syncopated balance of spatial conceptions (gender is biological, offices are efficient and safe even to the point of 'trumping' academic freedom, toilets are functional) and perceptions (accepting assigned genders, enforcing procedures, using toilets in orderly, habituated ways) is acknowledged as a managerial problem solution (risk assessment).

Apprised of the commotion, the chief personnel administrator wonders, why. Recalling no one complained when another university toilet had been luxurious, rated and guarded when the Swedish queen visited, leaving the toilet (thereafter Drottningtoaletten) unused. After a discussion with the first author, the prefect, also bemused that people were taking such offence, replies to the HR unit: 'At Ångström there are some common rooms with aquaria and aquaria fish. Surely some animal right

Prefect

activist can feel offended. We have co-workers who due to tradition or religion do not shake hands, and that can be experienced as offensive by some. We can have people in the house who dress flamboyantly, that can also be experienced as offensive'. Furthermore, it was clarified that the values of administrative line management seemed to be clashing with the core university activity, i.e. a freedom to think and pursue unfettered and disciplined research, and that one did not naturally trump the other.

Twitter feeds also catalyse the drama, but differently, testifying to how the specific hir-toilet, and the word 'hir' in general, disrupt conceived/perceived ways of living according to the gender binaries, female and male. The normalized bodily characteristics proving the truth of biological sexes, and gender categories that strengthen heterosexuality, are called on by statements like: 'There is only him & her. No need for a hir-toilet. Change name from men and women to cock room and cunt room. Just to touch to check before you choose [which room to go to]' (Tweet, 2016a). Power relations between the sexes are also questioned, by asking whether it is 'a patriarchal demonstration of power if you stand up and wee on a hir-toilet?' (Tweet, 2016b). If visiting the new hir-toilet, this tweeter would have seen a sign informing users that 'on a hir-toilet you sit down'. The sign was made part of the intervention arising from a general request from colleagues in the department, who saw the chance to update the unisex toilet into a cleaner, user-friendly toilet, thus re-aligning spatial perceptions with conceived norms of cleanliness (not everything is experiment and disturbance, it seems).

Other Tweets concentrate on Bernstrup's performance, and 'don't care about values' but asks: 'isn't this clothing a bit unpractical in teaching situations?' Hir-toilet or not' (Tweet, 2016c). On Facebook, someone wonders what 'the contraption the guy is wearing means . . .?' (Facebook, 2016a), and another person similarly suggests the 'outfit is ridiculous' and '[h]e could put someone's eye out!' (Facebook, 2016b). Further comment puzzles at the toilet contents: 'how can it be gender neutral and have all that makeup? IT is not an actors dressing room. IT is a bathroom' (Facebook, 2016c). As with Tweet 2016a, associations are being made between the legitimate assignment of specific activities to sex categories.

Instead of attacking the toilet, there are attempts at restoring the orthodox conceived/perceived alignments by espousing norms of cost-efficiency: 'someone has to RESIGN due to this, supermegasily nonsense . . . it is totally sick that tax payers' money is spent on equipping toilets for employees with nail polish and razors. Toooooo sick' (Tweet, 2017a). This opinion is questioned by others, suggesting taxpayers' money has been used to improve the collective work environment rather than satisfy any individualistic needs (Tweet, 2017b). A mathematician, who records videos for a blog about 'genderlunacy', disagrees, saying news of the toilet transformation made hir 'hit the roof' (Blog, 2016). The inauguration and transformation, hir suggests, 'says everything' about the 'perverted lunacy' of the 'gender mafia' at Ångström, attacking the first author as both 'gender-obsessed' and there 'to grab the resources [text placed next to a photo of a woman picking money from a tree]'. University life is being upset by what hir finds 'Unbelievable. Completely idiotic', since expanding '[t]he thought that professors and lecturers and soon to be engineers are to enter this toilet and "play with their identity"?' is childish. Hir thus suggests that the first author 'should be in nursery herself, not be a lecturer' given media attention. The mathematician also attends to the clash of conceived space of

**Table 4.** Example of Facebook comments.

Sin sick!!!	You can't fix stupid.
DISGUSTING	Sad !!
Stupidity at it's finest	VOMIT :/
WTF? smdh	So now SICK is the new NORMAL?
Disgusting!	freaks
SICKY, SICHO, NASTY, AWWWWW	What a bunch of fools.
Sodom and Gomorrah . . .	now that's progressive
Freaks!!	Misguided souls
massive rapes in 3, 2 . . . 1	don't bump into it
so sickening	Creepy weirdos!!
2 Hillary voters?	Horrible
What the hell is 'he' posing for???	Stupid
How sick is this world becoming	Freaks!
Goofballs	Disgusting
They forgot condoms	Perverts
We'll see about that . . .	Halloween is a half a year away.
How nice.	It's a FREAK show!
Sick asscountry	get over it
Never money why	Brilliant
Perverts!	Wow I'm lost for words
The freaks shall inherit the earth	sick
Sick!!!	WTF
LOL hen-toilet	Sweden. Enough said.
freaks	You see? Socialism is great!

scientific academia (ideas of fact, truth, fixed laws, and rigour) and the newly conceived space (imaginative curiosity in social problems and fluid human relations), expressing annoyance with a society where 'nothing can be taken for granted'. Hir concludes that space physicians at Ångström should shine a big convex lens onto the hir-toilet and prove the existence of the sun by turning it into 'a pile of ash'; the new spatial organizing of (post)gender is thus to be ended by the spatial organizing of scientists harnessing universal forces far bigger and stronger.

Yet further expressions of shock and opposition emerge from religious directions wondering whether God has lost grip. With suggestions that 'we should return to the Biblical model of normality' where '[t]here are no transgenders. In Hebrew, "male" means marked and "female" means punctured (Gen 1:27). In Greek, "male" means heavy lifter and "female" means breast feeder (Matt 19:4). A woman's experience is distinctly different from a man's. The "manner of women" refers to the recurring monthly ovulation, preceded by a few days of fertile mucus (Gen 18:11). The "custom of women" refers to the monthly hormonal depression, followed by a few days of menstrual bleeding (Gen 31:35)' (Facebook, 2016d). Someone else bypasses the Bible, appealing directly to God: 'God help us all. + "In the beginning, He created them male and female; in His image He made them"' (Facebook, 2016e). (See further comment in Table 4.)

This international, mainly US-based, Facebook discussion, testifies to felt disruption of a once easy alignment of gender and toilet division. The disruption is experienced as a threat, part of the ‘f`ed up mess the world is becoming’ (Facebook, 2016f), where ‘[t]he world is going insane’ (Facebook, 2016g). Others question social priorities, worrying that Sweden’s ‘women are being raped’ and that the ‘country is being overrun by Muslims’ whilst Swedes pathetically ‘worry about gender-neutral bathrooms’ (received 76 likes on Facebook, 2016h). Though downplaying the hir-toilet disruption, these worries are shared in a statement that further entrenches a sense of racial insecurity and isolationism: ‘[t]his will pass until the muzzies shut it down. Europe is in for a serious shock’ (Facebook, 2016i). The hir-toilet exemplifies a society at risk. For one commentator, it encouraged ‘the sociopathic whims of mentally ill people . . . at the expense of society at large . . .’ (Facebook, 2016j), with others adding, ‘[t]here was a time when freaks were not tolerated’ but that ‘[n]ow freaks are honored and [s]ociety is doomed’ (Facebook, 2016k), and ‘[I]obotomys for transgenders would be much cheaper’ (Facebook, 2016l), exemplifying how fantasies of violence underpin attempts to re-establish coherence between conceived/perceived alignments.

The experience of freakish disturbance is repeated in more or less stark ways, combining disgust and threat. Where some will ‘just pee in the parking lot. Where it’s safe’ (Facebook, 2016m), and others suggest people visiting Sweden should ‘just piss on their buildings and avoid their goofy restrooms’ (Facebook, 2016n). Even violently proposing that ‘The fags will not be going in any bathroom when my daughter is in it, i [sic] will swipe the freaks face off his head’ (Facebook, 2016o), or ‘[t]he day that walks in my mens room is the day I start my arrest record with a felony’ (Facebook, 2016p). The disruption is absorbed by sexualizing Bernstrup, suspecting an uncontrolled desire in hir, and fantasizing about violent disruptions to re-animate the old order.

Even a year after the inauguration, two angry mails were sent to the first author, the first asking if ‘this is a joke, or have you become totally fucking crazy? What the hell are you doing? You might also be some sort of hybrid! It’s a bit difficult to see in the photo if you are a transvestite or . . . hell pull yourself together! Sent from my iPhone’ (Mail, 2017a). The first author replied politely, with cc to the head of division, by thanking for the feedback and active engagement with the toilet initiative (Mail, 2017b). This mail was in turn replied to by a third person, answering the question in the first mail (Mail, 2017c): ‘Since your queries had to do with her as a person and she directs you to Industrial Engineering and Management, one can get the impression that she has been produced in “artificial” ways. Perhaps as a seed planted into some technical alternative to the “surrogate mother”. Who knows in these Swedish hir-enthusiastic times . . .?’. Here, angry, rhetorical attempts to restore God-given or biological binary gender categories position the first author as non-human. The exchange is picked up by local media keen to revisit and reinvigorate the hir-toilet debate ‘one year on’ (phone call from *UNT*, 26 January 2017). In reporting the inauguration, *UNT* had seemingly played on blurred aesthetic boundaries between male and female by contrasting the apparently androgynous characteristics of Bernstrup’s intentional expression of confusion, and the first author’s comparatively nondramatic looks. One year on, the journalists, spurred by the mails about hybridity, now concentrated on questions of androgyny, loosely inquiring whether the first author was occupying a vanguard role as a representative model of the non-binary in

Sweden. Rather than discuss our inability to decide on gender according to specific bodily attributes and sexual preferences, they seemed curious about the true identity of the first author, seeking answers to ascribe a new gender category and pin down hir belonging.

## Discussion

Before the inauguration and transformation at Uppsala University, like many workplaces, ideas of equality and diversity were thought well understood, and managed habitually, often based on the assessment and balancing of two gender categories across the workforce according to polarized binary qualities of masculine and feminine (Brewis et al., 1997; Dougherty and Goldstein Hode, 2016; Jeanes et al., 2011; Mumby and Stohl, 1991; Rumens, 2012; Thanem, 2011). Despite a growing debate about ‘cisgender’ in relation to an increased visibility of intersex categories, all-gender discussion and gender-neutral pronouns in social media and the official Swedish dictionary, the toilet intervention revealed a persistent incongruity between these existing, some might say already enlightened, institutional practices supporting gender equality and diversity (symbolized in the original unisex sign and the HR unit expertise) and renewed ideas about all-gender inclusion (cf. Franck, 1985). Similar to Franck’s study, the intervention also exposed different opinions about the role of rooms like a university or office toilet – serving pure bodily functions, or efforts of self-expression? It was noticeable how ‘expectations attached to the concepts of gender and family change more quickly than the physical form of our surroundings, making it difficult to enact these expectations without considerable hardship’ (Franck, 1985: 143). And as gender is not only socially but spatially constructed and thus alterable (Franck, 1985), our active invoking of a ‘minoritarian politics’ via the intervention evoked such difficulties.

Bernstrup’s appearance as an aesthetically charged, all-gender ‘hir’, and symbolized in the new sign, provoked the disturbances of the ‘third’. The intervention accentuated and disturbed a contradictory dialectical situation where affirmations of gender equality and transgenderism fed its opposite pole, heteronormative statements (Conlon, 2004). It revealed typically hidden and unexpressed dominant, majority, heteronormative conditions (Beyes and Steyaert, 2011a; Butler, 1993). Gender categories were organizing people according to predetermined categories for body and currently assumed corresponding correct traits and practices (Stryker, 2014), with binary toilet signs silently manifesting an underlying structuring by two dominant genders, their symbolic presence guiding the circulation of power by which desire, bodily performance and subjective understandings are canalized into a regular and predictable flow. That is, whilst it is often a body – emphasized sexually – that constitutes ‘proof’ of belonging to gender categories (whether at birth or having gone through a transition (Muhr et al., 2016), a spatial analysis can reveal the contextual dependency of these ascriptions (Johnston and Longhurst, 2010).

The intervention was furthermore interpreted as an anxiety-inducing, re-eroticization of an otherwise ‘successfully’ desexualized workplace (e.g. see Burrell, 1984); the body matters. In the immediate working space, reactions were mixed (Mails 1–8), constituted by debating whether the first author was engaged in legitimate work practice, what Bernstrup’s role meant, and how the questions raised by the hir-toilet were woven into wider issues of academic practice. Not just the human resources unit, but also many

bloggers, attempted to restore what offices, universities and researchers, historically, should do. Office life, and academia, should not be ludic as this upends the seriousness of fact-finding, business administration and proper laboratory experimentation which constitute disciplinarily organized departments. The human resources unit, and comment in wider social media, clearly seek binary distinctions between play/work, frivolity/formality and bodily activity/mental thinking. Critical voices thus ridiculed both the toilet as such and the artistic intervention and performance.

Positive voices, on the other hand, revealed possibilities for improving everyday work experience, similarly to employees in Hirst and Schwabenland (2018) emphasizing the toilets as an important but neglected element of the work environment, or what Shortt (2015) elaborates on as a potential liminal space. In line with Shortt's suggestion, the hir-toilet offers a possibility for dwelling, with magazines and amenities that may stimulate such activity. It becomes a resting area where ideas can be tested and emotions come out (Shortt, 2015), obviously far away from the formal organizing going on in the building. As Shortt argues, the toilet can become an especially potent locus for liminality – the last room in the work environment that could be taken over totally by managerial interests. Whereas the toilet is obviously part of conceived and perceived space, its being lived out subversively is harder to manage away.

Away from academic users, reactions were less equivocal. The felt disturbance of HR responses is testament to the instituted attempt to manage everyday life at work (Hancock and Tyler, 2004), as well as making the workplace life apolitical, clear and predictable. The job of management is to spatially align ideas and norms with routines in ways that forestall lived eruptions: excess and deviance pose managerial problems. In line with Tyler and Cohen (2010), we thus find only limited toilet/office adornment being suggested, and only accompanied by its correct use, as scripted by assigned gender roles, and more generally by conceptions of efficiency, professional practice, and health and safety. This brings forth the way space is produced continually and dynamically, which further reveals the manner in which gender is produced through spatial norms/ideas and practices associated with good, and therefore ascendant, administration (Zhang and Spicer, 2014), and with purportedly natural male/female differences (Tyler and Cohen, 2010). Our study complements and complicates these findings, showing management itself operating to varied and sometimes divided alignments of conceived/perceived space, for example in the way the current equality management of HR clashed with the discourse of academic freedom emphasized by the prefect. This is also how fluidity becomes clearer, in that the perceived, conceived and lived constantly interrelate in new ways (Liu and Grey, 2018). Gender does not exist in space, but is variously experienced in relation to how old and new ideas about the toilet, and the habitual everyday use of it, creates differences and tensions that may lead to other ways of living in relation to both toilets, genders and the workplace. Making spatial fluidity visible also makes gender fluidity more apparent.

As regards gender imbalances, our study also reveals a plethora of comment attesting to such conceptions, much related to the practices of perceived space, women sit and men stand, men do not need nail polish and neither is it required to infuse non-binarity (*Ergo*), so why add it to a toilet to induce playfulness? All these questions opened up, rather than closed, the questioning we can do of our own gender belonging in relation to our body (Žižek, 2016). One employee even attested to becoming more attuned to the

notion of ‘hir’ by a loosening up of gender, in that he, as a man, now started to imagine how it would be to menstruate (Mail 6); and by loosening all gender ascriptions, both those of ordinarily conceived/perceived binaries and more broadly, our study questions the grounding institution of gender as such. In raising daily life to critical thought (Lefebvre, 1987), we sense how ‘hir’, rather than being an additional category, can upset ideas of the correct management of and balance between genders, and, by extension, categorization work to clarify ‘differences’, made by anyone. This chimes with Butler’s advocacy of political fictionalizing from a gendered to a postgendered world – a more fluid condition Bernstrup accentuates with exuberant, exaggerated aplomb.

Our methodological approach and theoretical invitation to Lefebvre’s ‘triad’ is not a call for an additional gender, the endless ‘+’ continuing LGBTQI, but our own attempt at spatializing gender differently. The study thus emphasizes the questionability of gender itself, by how Bernstrup’s courage, aesthetic awareness, and performative brio facilitate what Linstead and Pullen (2006) suggest could loosen gender binaries. Bernstrup’s practice is, of course, conceived to be miles away from the majority of academic desks, but can thus inspire to other types of ‘basic research’ and social field experiments that Kurt Lewin (1946) called for. Furthermore, in comparison to early action research on social change (Lewin, 1946), it has become evident that no final conclusive evaluation of the positive or negative effects of a certain action can be made. When action research turns to art, it is rather the artistic expression in itself that is considered to be important (Beyes and Steyaert, 2011a).

## Conclusion

Even if gender binaries have been increasingly disrupted (Harding, 2016; Linstead and Pullen, 2006; Muhr et al., 2016; Rumens et al., 2019; Thanem, 2011; Thanem Wallenberg, 2016), our active intervention in a unisex emergency toilet design revealed how binary thinking about genders precluded a man’s presence at work (Brewis et al., 1997; Dougherty and Gold, 2009; Mumbly and Stohl, 1991; Rumens, 2012). The intervention’s spatial analysis, thus helped us to better understand the duration of the gendered experience in a specific workplace, the engineering department. It is a practice that has been accepted in history of disciplinary fact finding and science production. By advocating the imaginative and playful, we succeeded to provoke a ‘third’ in everyday reconfigurations of spatial production, to apprehend the prevailing alignments of conceived and perceived space, the former grounded on norms, values and expectations about toilets and genders, and the latter on routines and material arrangements that seek to align with, and fulfil, the former. The provocative and explicitly artistic intervention based in minoritarian aesthetic politics brought forth the ‘open-ended’ and immanently fluid character of lived experiences (Beyes and Steyaert, 2011a), and how seemingly static relations formed by binary gender thinking can be disrupted by tensions and interplays between ideals and habits, fundamental to space as generative of ways of living (Lefebvre, 2003, 2009, 2013). Consequently, Bernstrup’s merger of art and life exemplifies the embodiment of a hypersexuality of all genders that blurs any possible distinction of gender in relation to specific bodily attributes. Hence, the spatial organizing of genders and the gendered organizing of space is shown as something endlessly and variedly produced, more active than

entitative (Beyes and Steyaert, 2011b) – a fluidity that does and undoes gender, but still seems inherently adept to the structuring condition of binaries.

To address the critique of Lefebvre's lack of gender awareness (Blum and Nast, 1996; Shields, 1998), we have contributed to others who have used his work in studies of the spatial production of gender (Liu and Grey, 2018; Ranade, 2007; Tyler and Cohen, 2010). Here, and more broadly, we nevertheless question the gender, work and space literature that often limits itself to studying the construction of, and balance between, the two dominant genders (Hanson and Pratt, 1995; Hirst and Schwabenland, 2018; Liu and Grey, 2018; Ranade, 2007). Our study has in comparison responded to recent calls for spatial studies alive to broader performances of gender (Conlon, 2004; Zhang and Spicer, 2014), by attending to the ordinary case of toilets, and how their signs institute segregation and exclusion, or unification and inclusion (Cavanagh, 2010; Gershenson and Penner, 2009; Slater et al., 2018).

As a result of our own 'closeted', complex and processual gender identities (McDonald, 2016: 391) and limited study of a single-occupancy toilet at a Swedish university campus, there are many questions to be raised and answered in future research. How would this artistic intervention and redesignation of a toilet have worked elsewhere pursued by other researchers? What if we had used another sign? What if the focus had not been on the voices of a majority of cis-gender people who create minority problems, but on the voices and diverse performativities represented in transgender and gender non-conforming communities (Connell, 2011)? These minorities face problems that have not been broached in this article, from unwarranted pathologization by professionals, harassment in public, to bullying in workplaces and schools (Erickson-Schroth, 2014). The artistic intervention due to these prevailing problems may have fed further resistance to norm breaking, when the attempt rather was to expose how pervasive and powerful the cis-norms are. Nonetheless, as suggested by others, even if "queer" political experiments fail, they can yield insights into how sexuality and gender can be lived differently' (Rumens et al., 2019: 608). Although the artistic intervention was a celebration of life and its diverse expressions, it was harder than expected to defend it against discipline, control and a suffocation of life, revealing that the engineering sciences offer rich possibilities to think more reflexively about the rigidity of gender binaries and how these can be dissolved (Wang and Young, 2014). Just as nail varnish and other make-up are slowly being read differently, no longer dedicated to acts of feminization only, we may see an increase of commercial products developed for more gender-neutral younger generations. Future research could also look into gender and generational shifts in relation to tensions between governmental politics, religious practices and other supposedly diversity-friendly 'free spaces' than universities. Hence, this study does not neglect the current war on expression and fragility of freedom, even if it has not been able to observe it in detail for the gender and sexual minorities that are most at stake. What we could observe was nevertheless a generally increased local use of the hir-toilet, despite the negative comments. To bridge between our introduction of 'hir', for a diverse whole, and studies of minorities, we therefore find Florence Ashley's elaboration on gender modality highly relevant (Ashley, 2021, forthcoming).

Relatedly, in the spirit of Lefebvre's 'third' as that which is always 'other', we have in our study gone beyond the will to categorize gender-wise, in that a spatial analysis can

question correlations being made between bodies, specific spaces and gender. We make explicit how misguided it can be to assume and assign a correlation between body and gender, and, in effect, first name and gendered pronoun. And by shifting analytical focus to how space is variously lived, conceived and perceived, we show in a very ordinary way how more fluid productions of gender make its ascription contested, and so more broadly questioning its very rationale.

Similarly to how Dick (2014) traces the history of how the public toilet facilitated lived space, and shows how it opened up for more fluid sexual relations and resisted heteronormativity, our study shows how institutionally, lived space that is agitated by academic/artistic intervention can disturb the most entrenched norms, revealing hitherto concealed possibilities for new human relations and future genders.

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### ORCID iD

Annika Skoglund  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2898-9995>

### Notes

- 1 Gender-neutral pronoun (see <https://genderneutralpronoun.wordpress.com/tag/ze-and-zir/>).
- 2 Hen was formerly taken up in 2015 in the official Swedish dictionary SAOL 14, <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=97&artikel=6124599>.
- 3 Sexual attraction that is grounded in desires disconnected from specific preferences for gender identity or sex category.

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**Annika Skoglund** is Associate Professor at Uppsala University, Sweden and Honorary Associate Professor at the University of Exeter, UK. She has ethnographically investigated the interface between politics and organizing in various empirical settings, from alternative entrepreneurship to insider activism. Her work has, for example, been published in the journals *Organization*, *Organization Studies*, *Children’s Geographies* and *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses*.

**Robin Holt** is Professor at the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark and Visiting Professor at Nottingham Business School, UK. He studies the creation of organizational forms and the technological mediation of organization. He was editor of the journal *Organization Studies* from 2013 to 2017. He recently published a book, *Judgment and Strategy*, with Oxford University Press.