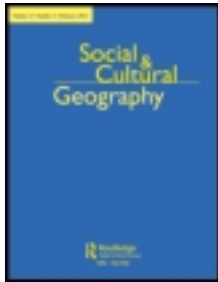


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# Dirty dancing: the (non)fluid embodied geographies of a queer nightclub in Tel Aviv

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*This paper examines the (non)fluid embodied geographies of a queer nightclub in Tel Aviv, Israel. The nightclub is considered to be a space of sexual liberation and hosted the Friendly Freedom Friday party. Yet, the space of the nightclub is also divided by gender and sexuality. We draw on individual in-depth interviews and participant observations to examine the tensions that arise from, and between, gay men, transwomen and club spaces. A number of paradoxes are present in the club. We argue that the fluidity of subjectivity—espoused by queer theorists—evaporates when confronted with the materiality of actual sweating bodies. We are interested in the visceral geographies of how and where sweat, and other body fluids, becomes matter out of place or ‘dirty.’ Three points structure our discussion. First, we outline the theoretical debates about body fluids and fluid subjectivities. Second, we examine gay men’s and transwomen’s bodily preparations that occur prior to attending the nightclub. The spatial, gendered and sexed dimensions of participants’ subjectivities are embedded in desires to attend the club. Finally, we argue that the spaces gay, partially clothed and sweating male bodies occupy are distinct from, and in opposition to, transwomen’s clothed and non-sweating bodies.*

**Key words:** fluid geographies, gay men, transwomen, bodies, sweat, subjectivities.

## At the club

A couple of years ago, I (Chen) had a visitor from Berlin and he asked me to take him to the Friendly Freedom Friday (FFF) party which, at the time, was being held in one of the Tel Aviv, Israel’s gay nightclubs. We arrived early (2 a.m.) and some of the nightclub rooms were still closed. At the entrance to a small dance room—and waiting for the door to open—was a group of transgender women, or Coccinelles.<sup>1</sup> My friend from Berlin asked me why these women were standing only in this area,

and I answered without even thinking ‘I really don’t know. They are not in their place.’ I immediately realized that I said something very weird. What does it mean ‘they are not in their place,’ and where is their usual place? My friend was confused, so I said ‘well, I think they are usually standing around the bar in the other hall.’ That was the minute I realized that for me, probably like for the most of the gay men in this club, these Coccinelles usually went unnoticed. That was the moment I decided to conduct research in order to understand how and in what ways nightclub

spaces construct gendered and sexualized bodies, and vice versa.

While this project involved participant observations—that is multiple visits to the Tel Aviv nightclub—it also involved a lot of thinking through and talking about nightclubs, bodies and spaces with research participants. Our focus is on the construction of gendered and sexualized subjectivities, particularly gay men and Coccinelles, and the ways in which dance, drugs and sex are spatially significant to the sweaty materiality of bodies in this nightclub (Waitt 2013). At FFF parties, it soon became clear that some of our participants had very fixed ideas about bodies (their own and others). Coccinelles and gay men occupy different spaces within the nightclub. Coccinelles wish to maintain their femininity; hence, they actively distance themselves from dancing, sweating and drugged gay men. As this article illustrates, at the FFF dance parties it is common for gay men to dance topless. The shirts that they wear to the club are quickly discarded when dancing and sweating in the tightly packed nightclub. The Coccinelles, however, carefully prepare their bodies for the nightclub, wear their best clothing and try not to sweat (or come into contact with sweat) in order to maintain their feminine appearance.

In this club, sweat becomes defined as matter both in and out of place, masculine and evokes disgust for some. Hence, the hybridity of subjectivities (Knopp 2004; Nash 2010a, 2010b) solidifies when Coccinelles and gay men are under the same nightclub roof. In other words, the fluidity of subjectivity—espoused by queer theorists—evaporates when confronted with the materiality of actual sweating bodies. We are interested in how and where sweat becomes matter out of place, ‘dirty’ and/or sexy.

In a themed issue titled ‘Towards trans geographies’ Browne, Nash, and Hines (2010: 573) argue that the topic of gendered geographies: ‘have focused on normatively gendered men and women, neglecting the ways in which gender binaries can be contested and troubled.’ We agree and in this article on ‘dirty dancing,’ we argue that there is plenty of scope to engage with, and extend, the theoretical debates surrounding queer bodies, binaries and places. In particular, we draw attention to the anxieties that arise when bodily fluids such as sweat—the idea of sweat, feeling and smelling sweat—create spatial divisions between Coccinelles and gay men. We are inspired by the work of Waitt (2013) who urges geographers to pay attention to visceral experiences of sweat in order to understand spatial gendered subjectivities. The concept of the visceral refers to embodied and felt sensations, moods and subjectivities formed via sensory engagement with the material world (Hayes-Conroy 2010).

Before we discuss ‘dirty’ dancing bodies, we begin by pointing briefly to some of the theoretical contributions that seek to understand embodiment, sexual and gendered subjectivities. Theoretical debates about body fluids and fluid sexual subjectivities are introduced. Drawing on concepts of dirt (Douglas 1980), sexual difference (Grosz 1994; Kristeva 1982) and visceral geographies (Hayes-Conroy 2010; Waitt 2013), we highlight the ways in which a focus on bodily fluids has the potential to help us understand further the complexities of sexual and gendered subjectivities and spaces. Empirically, we first focus on the bodies of both Coccinelles and gay men as they prepare to go to the nightclub. Second, we examine the ways in which sexed and gendered spaces of the nightclub are divided by (non)sweating bodies. The spaces that gay, partially clothed and sweating gay

male bodies occupy are distinct from Coccinelles' clothed and non-sweating bodies. Coccinelles, in particular, do not wish their own bodies to sweat, and they avoid being touched by other sweating bodies. By paying attention to the visceral geographies of sweat and sweatiness, we wish to prompt new thinking about the spatiality of queer subjectivities.

### Dirty theories, body fluids and trans subjectivities

Geographers have mapped out some of the relationships between place, space, bodies, bodily orifices and bodily fluids (Johnston 2006, 2009; Longhurst 2001, 2005; Waitt 2013). Much of this scholarship draws on the work of anthropologist Douglas (1980) and feminists Kristeva (1982) and Grosz (1994). To summarize briefly, Douglas argues that there is a connection between dirt and embodiment. Bodies have become symbolic of social order and bounded 'rational' systems; hence, bodily fluids such as blood, urine, milk, feces, semen, tears and sweat represent potential threats to social collectivity as they transgress acceptable social order. In other words, anxieties about pollution and purity are actually ontological anxieties about order and disorder, borders and crossings, being and not being. Bodies are deemed dangerous when orifices open and leak onto spaces and places, as well as other bodies. Therefore nothing becomes 'dirty' unless dirt exists as matter out of place and hence the power of dirt to threaten social orders.

Horror and disgust is expressed in relation to some fluids, while others may cause little anxiety. Kristeva (1982) builds on Douglas's ground-breaking text *Purity and Danger* (1980) to develop notions of abjection. The

abject prompts fear and fascination because it threatens the distinction of binaries such as Self and Other, male and female, heterosexuality and homosexuality. Douglas does not pursue the relationship between abjection and sexual difference, rather it has been Kristeva (1982) and other French corporeal feminists (Irigaray 1984) who argue that sexual difference is at the core of power relations and distinction between clean and dirty. The clinging viscosities of some body fluids are usually associated with femininity, while solidity and firmness are associated with masculinity.

Extending the discussions on bodily fluids and feminist geography, Waitt (2013) pays attention to the visceral sensations of sweat as experienced by a small group of young women in Wollongong, Australia. His participants ascribed to—and were inscribed by—essentialist notions of gender. The women spent a great deal of time trying to rid themselves of sweat and dirt so that they would be considered 'acceptable' and attractive bodies. Participants also acknowledge, however, that their sweat and sweatiness facilitated an "intimacy" within everyday life, connecting people together, particularly in places called home' (Waitt 2013: 14). Another geographer, Brown (2008), focuses on the geographies of cruising and public homosex and the body fluids and touch, and other scholars focus on touching bodies in spaces dedicated to gay sex, such as bathhouses and saunas (Nash and Bain 2007).

Over the past two decades, social scientists, geographers included, have argued that trying to separate us/them, Self/Other, private/public, black/white and structure/agency oversimplifies complex issues relating to embodied subjectivities (Cloke and Johnston 2005). Rather, these binary oppositions are mutually constituted (Grosz 1994). Feminist and queer

geographers (such as Bondi 1992; Johnston 2005; Johnston and Longhurst 2010; Rose 1993) argue for the need to deconstruct binary formations such as man/woman, male/female, masculine/feminine, mind/body, rational/irrational, sex/gender, heterosexual/homosexual and culture/nature.

Geographers interested in trans theories and queer geographies also argue for the need to destabilize binaries (see Hines 2007, 2010; Hines and Sanger 2010; Hines and Taylor 2011; Hines, Taylor, and Casey 2010; Nash 2010a, 2010b). Much of this scholarship argues that gender is fluid and at times unknowable. Browne and Lim (2010: 616) describe trans studies as ‘a growing field of enquiry that seeks to redress both the absence of trans lives in queer theory (despite the conceptual deployment of trans subjectivities across this field).’ Hines (2010: 609) uses the term ‘trans’ to include a diversity of gender identifications. As one of us has acknowledged elsewhere it is not always possible to ‘easily and unproblematically step out of binaries such as man/woman’ (Johnston 2005: 120) but the notion of trans can function productively to unsettle these terms prompting a questioning of their supposed ‘naturalness.’ This fluidity greatly affects how people experience different spaces at different times (see Doan 2007, 2010). Doan (2010: 64) notes that the ‘tyranny of gender dichotomy is an artefact of the patriarchal structuring of gendered space and it is time to lay it aside, not just for trans people, but for all of us.’

It is within the urban clubbing spaces that we are interested and note the work of Hubbard (2012: 208) who argues, gay villages are often considered ‘queer’ spaces yet maybe unwelcoming for trans people, as shown in Browne and Lim’s (2010) research in Brighton, ‘the gay capital of the UK.’ Clubbing spaces, in particular, have tended to be

considered utopian and inclusive spaces where young people may express their identities (Chatterton and Hollands 2003; Jayne, Valentine, and Holloway 2010; Malbon 1999) and provide opportunities for drinking, dancing, touching, (partly) undressing, using drugs or having sex in dark toilets (Jackson 2004).

While many queer spaces such as clubs and bars serve as important sites for constructing sexual identities, they also exclude the ‘queer unwanted.’ For example, old people may be excluded because of the number of commercial spaces in a youth obsessed scene (Casey 2007; Hughes and Deutsch 2010). It is not only old people who may feel unwelcome in a queer club. Other ‘unattractive’ people such as drab dykes (Browne 2007) or people of Asian ethnicities (Caluya 2008) experience marginalization in these spaces.

This scholarship is vitally important yet we cannot find any research on the interactions between transgender women and gay men. Before discussing these issues, we first explain the research context and methodology on which this article is based.

### **Researching FFF party: Tel Aviv gay scene and methodology**

The development of LGBT nightlife not only has important consequences for the creation of subjectivities and pride, but also has a major impact on heterosexual cultures of ‘going out’ (Chatterton and Hollands 2003). Such an evolution happened in Tel Aviv in the mid-1990s when the gay scene started to grow at the same time as the heterosexual club culture (Shor 2008). It was in 1994 that ‘Playroom Parties’ (they later became known as FFF) started in Tel Aviv’s city center ‘straight’ club ‘Allenby 57.’ It was clear to the club owners

that they had to dedicate the main clubbing night—Friday night—to a gay party (Shor 2008). This was a time of great changes for the Israeli LGBT community—legally, publically and in the media (Gross and Ziv 2003)—which saw the rise of gay clubbing.

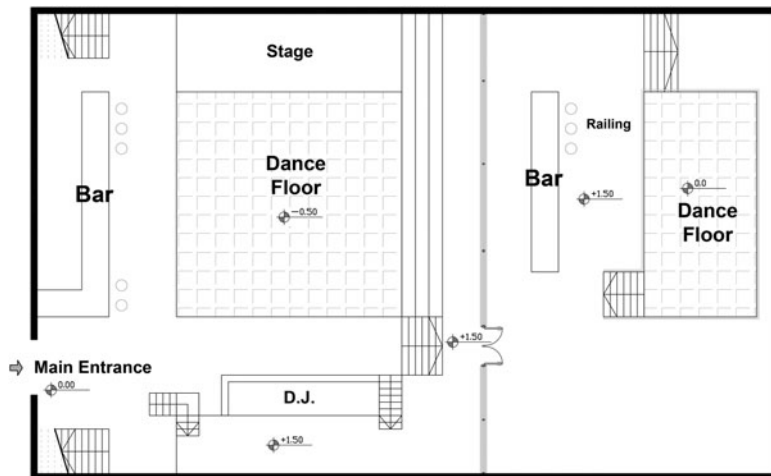
Changes in Israel's sexual politics serve as the background for the rise of the gay scene. Until the late 1980s, Israel was a conservative place for LGBTs and in many ways excluded them from the public sphere. The turning point was the 1988 amendment of the penal code that prohibited homosexual intercourse. This penal code was adopted from the British mandatory law and although rarely used, its amendment in March 1988 started the Israeli gay legal revolution (Harel 1999). At this point, LGBT subjectivities started to be recognized not only legally but also in the media, in public and even in the Israeli army (Kama 2011). Maybe the best example of this was the story of Dana International, a trans woman who represented Israel at the Eurovision song context in 1998 and won. She became a cultural icon in Israel (Ziv 2000) and leader of local and global human and gay rights (Gross 2013a). In this context, Tel Aviv became the gay capital of Israel, and unlike the formal capital, Jerusalem, started to support—financially and socially—the LGBT community (e.g., by producing the biggest gay pride parade and financing the LGBT center) (Alfasi and Fenster 2005; Kama 2011). These changes led to the rise of the gay nightlife scene in Tel Aviv and growing numbers of gay tourists. These 'rights' are controversial, particularly within the context of Israeli–Palestinian relationships. We are mindful of the growing global gay movement who names these 'rights' as 'pinkwashing': a strategy to conceal the violations of Palestinians' human rights behind a progressive image personified by Israeli gay life (Gross 2013b; Schulman 2011).

In 2008, Chen embarked on a research project titled 'The Night Club: the Sexualized Body, Identity and Space.' The aim of the project was to examine gay nightclub spaces, and specifically the gendered and sexualized embodied spaces of gay men and Coccinelles. The location 'Haoman 17' in Tel Aviv was chosen as this was a local mega club which has been hosting the FFF parties for more than a decade. Moreover, this venue is deemed to be the most attractive and popular venue for (mainly) gay males—both locals and tourists.

Chen was familiar with the club and particularly their Friday night FFF parties. He conducted field research with participant observations. Chen arrived every second Friday night to the club soon after the doors opened, and instead of spending the whole night with friends in the main bar or dancing floor, he moved from one hall to the other, writing some notes about where people spent their time in the club, what they were doing and their gendered and sexualized clubbing differences. Because it was almost impossible to write 'regular' notes during the party, the notes were written later when Chen returned home. In some cases, he also wrote some brief notes on his cell-phone in order to remember important things or took short videos on the cell-phone. Both recordings helped later when writing fuller field notes.

Chen used his body as an instrument of research (Longhurst, Ho, and Johnston 2008) by attending and being part of the nightclub, e.g., dancing, drinking and talking with people in the club, but remained alert to his main role as a researcher. This was challenging when friends asked to have more drinks or dance in a different hall. Chen, like Bain and Nash (2006), experienced angst about what clothes to wear each time he went to the club or whether to drink, but decided to wear his





**Figure 1** Sketch of the club and the sub-divisions of spaces within it (created by Arc. Roni Bar).

regular clothes and drink the minimum he could in order not to be drunk. Paterson (2008: 565) adds this about clubbing research: ‘you have to be there, do those activities, for it to become meaningful to outsiders ... [there are] interconnections of flesh, sympathy, feeling; alternative modes of embodiment; imaginatively transgressive acts of gender blending and sexuality.’ From time to time Chen stayed longer in the smaller hall in order to watch interactions. As a researcher, he experienced fieldwork via touching, feeling and being part of the thinking about geographical practice in the production of the knowledge (Tolia-Kelly 2010). Participant observation notes were used to understand the ways in which people, gay men and Coccinelles maintain gendered and sexed spatial divisions in the nightclub.<sup>2</sup> The next research stage was to take these observational insights and talk about them with interviewees.

As previously noted ‘Haoman 17’ is one of the biggest clubs in the city hosting the biggest gay party (as well as major events such as the

annual gay pride dance party). It is divided into two main dancing halls, each one of them includes a bar, a DJ work-station, toilets and a space for dancing (see Figure 1).

What arose from the intensive observations was a clear spatial division between gay men and Coccinelles within the club. While gay men concentrated in the main hall—crowded together around the dancing floor or the bar—the Coccinelles accumulated next to the bar on the small, secondary hall.

Following these, insights in-depth interviews were conducted with clubbers—three gay men (ranging in age from 25 to 40) and three Coccinelles (all in their 20s). Another interview was conducted with the club’s public relations manager who has been working there for nearly a decade and could share some information regarding the people who use to come to the parties (hence seven interviews were conducted—three trans women and four gay men). While it was easy to find gay men who were willing to be interviewed about their experience in the club (mainly because as a gay man, Chen has

an informal and personal connection to some of the male clubbers, but also because of their number and dominance in the parties), it was not easy to contact the Coccinelles who attend these parties. Many of these women earn their living in the sex industry; they are part of a very small and close-knit group and their experience with interviews are not necessarily positive because people usually ask them about their sexual practices. Chen's attempts to contact them during the parties, or via shared friends, failed and for long time they refused to take part in the research. Finally, with the help of the FFF PR person, one Coccinelle—who is a respected leader within the trans community—was willing to meet and talk. The meeting took place in a cafe and after an hour she invited Chen to move the interview in her flat. Because she trusted Chen, she agreed to help and convince two of her close friends to take part in the research too. It is important to mention that although it took a long time to find interviewees from this small trans community, no pressure was applied and women who refused to take part in the research were not asked again. Only women who agreed to do so were interviewed.

Although this project draws on a small number of participants (seven interviewees in total) each interview was long, insightful and a great deal of clubbing experience was shared. All the interviews were semi-structured and included the same questions about the experience and spaces that are in use in the club and before the going out. The interviews were transcribed in full, translated from Hebrew to English, and both Chen and Lynda analyzed these together with the earlier information from the observations. Two main themes emerged: 'preparing the body to (not) sweat' and 'the gendered spatiality of sex and sweat inside the club.'

### Preparing the body to (not) sweat

One of the main insights from the interviews was that for both gay men and Coccinelles, the experience of going out to the club is very fluid in time and space. In other words, the club experience starts hours before the actual time in the club itself and in different spaces and places such as home, the hairdressing salon, a friend's places or the car. These spaces are crucial when preparing to attend the club. Julia, a Coccinelle, began by describing what she does to get her body ready for FFF:

From the moment I decide to go out, I know exactly how I want to be and be seen. From the beginning of the week I know which contact lenses to put on, what to wear, how my hair will look, which jewellery, for example, I will wear. I have a casual look and a less casual look, it depends on whether I'll want to dance or not. If I'll go dancing I wear a comfortable shoe, with a heel, but a low one. Not a tennis shoe anyway .... With me everything is feminine! .... The makeup takes me at least an hour. I'm always made up when I go out, it's a must. It takes a long time because it's really heavy makeup. (Julia, Coccinelle, 28 years old)

Suzan, another Coccinelle, also pays attention to make-up, hair and clothing. She says:

I spend a lot of time on the hair and makeup and the rest ... add hair extensions, arrange ... in terms of the makeup, I obviously put on makeup, you can't go to a club without it ... it's not every day that you go out clubbing! It's a club! You can't not put on makeup! (Suzan, Coccinelle, 28 years old)

Suzan, Julia and the Lori all talk about the importance of using one's body at the night-club to 'put on a show' and to maintain their name and image. Their actions also reinforce others who claim that clothing,



make-up and other bodily decorating not only help transwomen pass as women, but also shape the ways they embody womanhood. In other words, their subjectivities are shaped through bodily decoration (Schrock, Reid, and Boyd 2005). Lori states that:

the Coccinelles usually glamorize, wear a dress ... dress up, glamorize to maintain a name and image. Each one goes out there and puts on a show .... Men usually come in sneakers but for us—the Coccinelles—it usually borders on the uncomfortable. We wear things that might not be so comfortable .... One suffers for the image. For a man it's different, he doesn't need to invest as much .... Sometimes I go to the hair salon at noon, sometimes just to attach extensions and blow-dry or fix a ponytail .... A club is like an outing that's a thing especially for us when I know that the entire world is there ... I care, I want people to look and say 'she looks good' and not, god-forbid, she looks horrible. (Lori, Coccinelle, 26 years old)

Lori also pays attention to her hair and make-up in addition to what she will wear to the club:

Besides the dressing, you know, talk about the hair and makeup .... Some wear certain wigs, which is nice too, and I put on makeup, I always put on makeup! .... I'm always made up. Sometimes I tell my friends 'it doesn't matter what you wear, if you're wearing makeup you can be the best looking one in the club .... Our face is our business card' .... To look good it takes makeup, hair, and an outfit. (Lori, Coccinelle, 26 years old)

Lori and the other Coccinelles are very focused on their bodily preparations and the way they wish to look at the club. It was clear from observations in the club that bodily preparation and maintenance is very important for the Coccinelles. Similarly, Waitt (2013: 8)

reports that his participants reflected on the pressure to 'always look clean and presentable' whereas sexist discourses allow men to be more casual with their bodily appearance.

So, we ask, how do Coccinelle and gay men interact in the nightclub? Suzan provides a response that acknowledges marginalization (and tensions) yet also sameness:

We the Coccinelles, for us the body is something! And the appearance! And still, just because we're a minority, within a minority, within a minority, within the gays and lesbians, and the rest, doesn't mean that we're all the same. People don't know about us because they're afraid of it ... quite fearful of it. The point is that you want to enjoy yourself, drink a little, let loose, and that's what the outing is all about. I'm not looking for a fuck in the bathrooms at the club, you understand? I never go to the club to meet—it doesn't happen. (Suzan, Coccinelle, 23 years old, emphasis in the original)

While for Suzan, the club is a place to show off her body and have some fun, it is not a place to meet and have sex. For Lori, the club is a place to meet friends and show others the process of bodily changes:

When I started the process of becoming a women I used to come to the club to meet more people .... Each one wants to show the beginning. When a man goes from gay to Coccinelle he goes from an anonymous to conspicuous and it is interesting for the particular crowd. Who is this new girl who is at the club? Who was she before? What did she do? How is she dressed, made-up, what is she doing? (Lori, Coccinelle, 26 years old)

Lori presents the situation for new and young transwomen. For them, their body presentation is a major reason for going out to the club. This insight follows other scholars' arguments about the social, emotional and

psychological importance for transwomen to meet each other and re-present their bodies in the same space (Schrock, Reid, and Boyd 2005).

For gay men, the club experience also starts earlier than the actual time of entering the club. Like the Coccinelles, they prepare their bodies hours before they go out. But unlike the Coccinelles, the comfort and ease to take off shirts is most important, particularly for Ben:

What I usually wear are shorts and t-shirt that I'll take off pretty quickly at the beginning of the party . . . . It's like you're selling your merchandise, what you brought tonight and your merchandise is obviously your body. If it was possible to show more I would probably show, but my boyfriend won't allow me . . . [laughs]. My friends wear the same thing and if it's not hot then jeans and an undershirt. The top is always something that comes off. (Ben, gay man, 37 years old)

Shay shares a common experience and reinforces the importance of 'a good look':

The undershirt usually comes off very quickly so you need something relatively light that doesn't take up room, and when I take it off I'm only wearing jeans so I shove it somewhere, you know. During the summer the choice can be shorts. The decision is based on if I'm hot or not, very simple . . . I need something practical that has pockets and is comfortable and not too warm, and it's less of a fashion statement but still needs to fit well and look good! (Shay, gay man, 25 years old, emphasis in the original)

Shay went onto explain another embodied dimension—taking drugs and drinking alcohol at the club. Drugs enhance particular bodily performances within the club itself, and they are also an important part of the preparations to the party:

Well, it's quite an operation, each of these parties . . . . It starts with getting organized (with drugs etc) here ahead of time at home with everything that you need to get for the party. First we meet up at one of our friend's places, [and] drink ourselves to death. Why do we drink like this at the house before the party? I think it's part of the story and it heats things up before we get to the club and it's also fun to be together with friends before going out. (Shay, gay man, 25 years old)

Shay continued to describe the way he dresses for the parties. His description is totally different from that of the Coccinelles and it has to do with the enactment of different gendered and sexualized subjectivities during the party itself. But Shay also refers to another important factor in the decision of what to wear. He is concerned with the dirty and flooded bathrooms, the fact that the club is very packed and his shoes might be damaged:

I dress up rather simple, usually an undershirt and jeans, regular shoes—preferably black because of all the filth there. I have my regular party shoes that I don't wear anywhere else but there because you have to go to the bathroom there and these are shoes just for the club . . . . If it's a long party like an after party or if I know it's going to be filthy or especially warm and I'll have to use the toilets, which are always flooded and it's disgusting disgusting disgusting. (Shay, gay, 25 years old)

The tension created by the dirty spaces of the club, particularly the bathroom, evokes disgust as body fluids are deemed to be highly unstable and may contaminate bodies, clothes and shoes. The bathroom is a volatile place where bodily boundaries are broken and resealed (Longhurst 2001). Hence, Shay feels anxious about his own body in the space of the club's bathroom. Grosz (1994) reminds us that some bodily fluids are more threatening than

others. Bodily fluids have ‘different indices of control, disgust and revulsion. There is a kind of hierarchy of propriety governing these fluids themselves’ (Grosz 1994: 195). It is in the space of the bathroom that binary discourses of inside/outside of bodies are destabilized.

Gilad, the party’s public relations manager, reflects on the differences between gay man and Coccinelles:

When people decide what to wear to a club it’s usually something simple that can be taken off, especially the shirt, that for the gay guys usually comes off quickly . . . . People come to dance and let-loose and forget about themselves so fashionable and elegant outfits don’t serve the purpose for which they come to the club . . . . Lesbian or straight women usually wear flats and not heels, that is, a casual look, but the Coccinelles come to a ‘fancy restaurant,’ and that’s how they see it. They wear the nicest outfit there is and it’s usually very revealing—both to be seen and to show the new surgeries—boob job, lips, etc, and their hair-extensions are very obvious, stilettos and anything that can be seen and presented as the ‘natural woman.’ They want to present the real and natural woman, sometimes they’re taller and wider than a regular woman so the outfit is there to refine it. The party staff tend to nickname the Coccinelles ‘traveliot,’ that is they’re on a journey from male to female . . . . As someone that’s been working here for years, I really see the process and transition for a man, usually a feminine man to a woman.

These embodied differences for gay men and Coccinelles at the nightclub is a prominent research theme and one not discussed elsewhere. Doan (2010: 638) shares her experience of meeting other transgendered people which ‘suggests that there is a wide diversity in our understanding of what gender is and how it should be displayed.’ While both gay

men and Coccinelles want to show off their bodies, to have fun and meet friends, the Coccinelles also use the space of the club to show their transition from man to woman. Thus, Coccinelles put a great deal of effort into revealing their feminine bodies at the nightclub.

### **The gendered spatiality of sex and sweat inside the club**

We now consider more closely the spatial experiences within the club. As noted by Chen at the beginning of this article, the club has clear divisions that reflect spatialized subjectivities. One of the Coccinelles—Julia—explains why she and her friends prefer a separate room:

We, the Coccinelles, love Motti’s room [the smaller room in the club where DJ Motti Sa’adya plays]. Up until they open the room, I stand at the entrance to Motti’s room in the inner part of the club, by the stairs with all my Coccinelle friends, everyone just stood there. First of all, the music Motti plays really catches us. His music is totally different from the trance beats in the big room and also, Motti is more connected to us, the Coccinelles. (Julia, Coccinelle, 28 years old)

She gives a spatial description of the small inner room:

In the room I have my usual spot. It’s next to the bar, in front of the DJ stand, just across, by the handrail. I stand on the handrail or on the bar itself. My close friends also stand there, my male friends that I told you about, my partner, also my roommate and a few other girlfriends and Coccinelles friends—we all go out together. That’s how it always is with the Coccinelles, they have their own spot. They also concentrate together in one spot by the bar. It’s like

the Coccinelles who always stand by the entrance to Motti's room before the room opens, by the door, they like being there and waiting for the room to open so they can get to their favorite place in the club. They could spread out, the club is big, they don't, don't just wait there. (Julia, Coccinelle, 28 years old)

Lori also explains why the Coccinelles prefer the small room, but unlike Julia, she adds the desire to stay away of the bodies affected by the drugs. Hence, the Coccinelles create a club within the club by this separation, something like a room of their own:

The truth is that I'm not at the big dance floor, I'm always in Motti's floor. It is more intimate and most of the Coccinelles are there and it's more enjoyable to be with each other, drink, gossip with each other, etc. ... Motti's room has become the Coccinelle's club, for us, as Coccinelles, the fact that we're there in a group makes it a social gathering, in the same way that for the gay guys it's the Friday night hookup. For us it's the social gathering, a place to go out, clear the head from work and daily life ... I don't like all the stoned people in the main room. I'm not into the idea that people are high or sweaty, topless, aggressive or showoffs. (Lori, Coccinelle, 26 years old)

Coccinelles actively avoid going to areas of the club where there are sweaty bodies that may disrupt their feminine identities. The back bar of the club is where they can be safe and keep themselves from what might threaten their dress, make-up and hair design.

From a gay male perspective, Dean explains 'their' part of the club, and the fact that it is rare for these two groups to meet within the club. Moreover, he shows the complicated spatial arrangement between the gay male clubbers within the main dancing hall and even on the dancing floor itself:

We're always on the main floor but even there we have our area and there are parts of the floor that territorially speaking aren't ours because there are different groups, and each group of men have their area on the floor. I might go and say hello to someone from a different group but won't dance there and in the end always return to my group and our area ... We'll rarely find ourselves in Motti's room, and sometimes I won't go in there the whole night. (Dean, gay man, 40 years old)

Shay goes further to say that small hall, where the Coccinelles are, disgusts him. While the Coccinelles also concentrate in the small room partly because of feelings of disgust—the smell, sight and touch of sweat—Shay feels disgust not only of the bathroom, as he explained earlier, but also by feminine subjectivities of Coccinelles who prefer Motti's room:

I personally don't go near Motti's room. I can't go near there. The people and music disgust me. I don't like the ochtchas [slang term for an ultra-feminine man] there, the crowd, and what goes on in that place. It's a really uncomfortable space and I don't go near there. (Shay, gay man, 25 years old)

Later, when I asked Gilad (FFF's public relations manager who has a nuanced understanding of gendered and sexualized subjectivities and groups of clubbers) about this spatial and social arrangement, he confirmed the spatial divisions. Rather than focusing on this tension between clubbers, he remarked that the club had a space for everyone:

The Coccinelles are always at the bar in the small room - Motti's room. It's 'to see and be seen.' They keep their place because to dance means to get crazy and not be a maniac, which means letting loose ... They dance but by the bar in Motti's room with a drink in their hand like ladies who don't get wild.

The club's big space, and the different music in each of the room, turns the club into a party for the community because it works for everyone, not just for men who are looking for a fuck or drugs, but for everyone. Also the Coccinelles seek to have more of a social gathering. Each one has a corner that fits. The staff call Motti's room 'The Diva room.' Motti, the DJ, is feminine himself and connects to the Coccinelles and the music is relatively relaxed and it's less crowded. (Gilad, gay man, 29 years old)

We pause to consider more deeply these feelings of both comfort and disgust as they are important when considering what to wear to the club, as well as the creation of spatial divisions, subjectivities and tensions within the club. As already mentioned, some geographers have paid attention to the performativity and practices of nightclub culture and dancing (Bain and Nash 2006; Chatterton and Hollands 2003; Malbon 1999; Nash and Bain 2007; Thornton 1996). Our findings add to this scholarship by focusing on the way in which embodied feelings shape gendered and sexed subjectivities, experiences and spatial layout of the club. In another example, Julia talks at length about feelings of comfort and disgust within the club and the way these feelings embody the space of the club:

All around me are my Coccinelle girlfriends so they will accept me as I am. But I want to say something about the bathrooms. The bathrooms at the club are horrifying! It's absolutely disgusting when I need to use them or when I want to go there. All the people who fuck there ... it's really awful ... when I go to the bathrooms, the toilet seats are broken, unhygienic, with condoms on the ground and the air-conditioning doesn't work well so everyone is sweating and the smell is bad. In the bathroom area I feel very uncomfortable. I'm wear heels and can easily slip .... It's disgusting... There are tons of sweaty guys and I don't want them touching me ....

It grosses me out .... If someone who is dripping sweat gets close to you because someone else pushed him, what can you do, recoil and think that it's gross. Which is why I'm always surround by friends, to get away from all the sweaters and such, I don't want all that on me. The place is quality, everything is at a high-level, the music and all, but the sweaters there are gross. (Julia, Coccinelle, 28 years old)

It is clear from Julia's description what makes her feel uncomfortable in the club due to the aroma, sight and feel of sweat on bodies, as well as body fluids in bathrooms, on toilet seats and flooded floors. A young woman in Waitt's (2013: 8) study reported the same experience and feelings:

I actively avoid going to places like 151 [nightclub] because it is just filthy and filled with sweaty people. That is a major reason, people come out of 151 covered in sweat. Although I like to dance, I will spend a lot of time making myself ready to go out, I don't like to get drenched in my own or other people's sweat .... Sweaty dancing is not fun there. If you are out in town wearing a pretty dress and heels, you don't really want to be getting gross.

Clubbers' reactions to sweat in Wollongong and Tel Aviv are in line with Longhurst's (2001: 32) argument that bodily fluids are part of a gendered discourse employed to maintain a masculine/feminine binary. Sexist discourses work to allow men 'to smell sweaty and unpleasant without losing any of their masculine identity, women who don't smell sweet are traitors to the ideal of femininity and objects of disgust' (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 2003: 164). Later on in the interview, Lori agreed with Suzan and said:

I'm not into guys who are high or sweaty, without shirts, aggressive ... people who come to the club

with the intent of showing off and to be ‘I’m the prettiest’ or ‘I’m hot’. (Lori, Coccinelle, 26 years old)

Lori is adamant that she does not want to be surrounded by men who are high, sweaty or aggressive. For these reasons, she stays in Motti’s room where most of her (non-sweaty) Coccinelle friends are. Waitt (2013: 5) notes that a ‘visceral approach is attentive to a more sensually attuned body, which takes account of, and learns how to negotiate space through, a range of sensory registers.’ In the nightclub, we became attuned to the bodily negotiation of sexed and gendered norms and club codes.

For gay men who like to dance in the nightclub, taking shirts off is part of the embodied and sensuous experience, as Ben notes:

It’s obvious that I take my shirt off for the reaction . . . . So people will look at me . . . I’m obviously hot in the club, I also dance and I’m surrounded by tons of people, it’s always hot there . . . there’s contact with other people whether we want it or not . . . depends on what my situation is . . . . If I’m high because of the drugs it turns me on and doesn’t bother me and I enjoy the contact, and if I’m not high it annoys me and I’m not always comfortable with strangers touching me, sweating on me, and clinging to me, and usually the gay guys scratch me because they shave their body. (Ben, gay man, 37 years old)

When Ben is high, he enjoys touching and being touched by other sweating bodies, yet, without drugs he—like the Coccinelles—feels annoyed and uncomfortable being in close proximity to other sweating bodies. When bodies touch and become intimate, boundaries are dissolved (Dixon and Straughan 2010). For those who take drugs, their embodied experience changes the way they feel about

touching other bodies, brushing against sweating skins of others and mingling body fluids. Dean explains his feelings:

When the pill kicks in you look for a random person to kiss, or my partner, but he doesn’t have priority over anyone else . . . . It’s more of a need for physical contact . . . . The pill turns you not just into a sweater but also sensitive to the contact and senses are different when you’re high, even your hearing, by the way . . . . When the pill starts taking over the music erupts from within you. The whole space warps and turns into something else, you feel as if you’re floating and there’s a type of disorientation, you start hovering in the club, touching everyone and having stoner conversations, which means you love everyone and you also tell it to anyone. All of a sudden everyone is caressing one another, physically and symbolically . . . . Also I start wandering around the club and looking for someone to have sex with. The dance floor itself becomes really crowded after a while. People sweat on you, touch you from every which-way. If you happen to be sober you can smell all the smells but when you’re high you don’t smell at all. You see guys topless, sweating, holding a bottle of water, and their eyes are on and wide-open. It’s really a culture of its own, it really characterizes gays and it’s full of warmth, love, and intimacy that a stranger wouldn’t understand. (Dean, gay man, 40 years old)

In the early hours of the morning, when people get high at the club, the doors into the Motti’s room open, providing a separate space away from the heaving bodies on the dance floor. The Coccinelles move to Motti’s room where they can maintain their embodied femininity away from masculine sweating bodies. As the FFF party goes on, gendered subjectivities change in relation to gendered and sexed spaces (Doan 2010). There is a fluidity to gender and sexed subjectivities, as well as the gendering and sexing of body fluids.



## Conclusion

Sweaty bodies are, in some spaces of the Tel Aviv nightclub, considered dirty, disgusting and abject. Yet, in other spaces of the nightclub, sweaty bodies are part of a sensuous and sexual experience. ‘Dirty’ dancing is both desired *and* feared. In this article, we have extended the visceral geographical discussions about gendered bodily sensations and spaces associated with sweat. As Waitt (2013) argues, sweat connects and disconnects bodies in particular spatial contexts.

The mega nightclub ‘Haoman 17’ in Tel Aviv is the location of our research. A small group of clubbers—gay men and Coccinelles—have strong views and experiences that leave little doubt that the spatial segregation of the nightclub is influenced by bodies that sweat, do not sweat and/or take drugs. This distinction is gendered and sexualized. For gay men, being able to dance, take clothes off and take drugs are important ways in which to experience the sensual and sexual spaces of the nightclub. For Coccinelles, being dressed, wearing make-up, talking, laughing and (gently) dancing is their preferred nightclub experience.

Empirical findings illustrate that both gay men and Coccinelles experience the visceral geographies of the club through their bodies. They start preparing for the nightclub a long time before they go to the club. This preparation cannot be understood easily as a gendered binary. Both gay men and Coccinelles are particular and careful about what they will wear, how they may be seen and take time to get their bodies ready for the club. The Coccinelles, however, may also wish to show their changing embodiment as they transition from male to female. The maintenance of their new femininity is a high priority and preparations for the nightclub

party start early in the week. Because of the desire to conform to a type of Coccinelle transgendered ‘norm’ that is ‘in place’ in the nightclub, bodily preparations are vitally important.

What arose from the intensive observations and interviews was a clear spatial division between gay men and Coccinelles within the club. While the gay men concentrated in the main hall—bodies touching and sweating together on the dance floor—the Coccinelles were accumulated mainly next to the bar on the small, secondary hall. Conforming to (trans)gendered and moral social norms of sweat meant occupying different parts of the nightclub. Feelings of disgust (at the thought of one’s own body sweating, or being touched by a sweating body) mean that some bodies become understood as ‘dirty’ while others may be considered ‘sexual.’

Our research—much like the research conducted by Brown (2008)—responds to Binnie’s (2004: 74) critique on queer theory that ‘has lost a radical cutting edge. It is rare to find much discussion of pervy sex or bodily fluids’ (Binnie 2004: 74). We hope this research encourages others to pay more attention to sweat, gender, sexuality and space. Feelings of disgust, and/or desire for, sweat and sweatiness may allow for a deeper understanding of the spatiality of queer subjectivities.

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Geographies conference, Groningen, July 2013, also helped us to develop some of the ideas in this article. Finally, thanks to the anonymous reviewers and Michael Brown for useful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

## Notes

1. Coccinelle means 'ladybird' in French and it is also a term used to denote transgender women. It was the name of a French transsexual singer that visited Israel in the 1960s. For many years, the term Coccinelle was derogatory toward transwomen. Like the word 'queer' in English, however, the meaning of Coccinelle has been reclaimed and now used as a positive identifier by and for transwomen in Israel.
2. During Chen's observations, he counted 15–20 transwomen, but only some of them come regularly to the club. There are also some people who do not perform as 'complete' women but are in the process of transitioning from male to female. It is also essential to understand divisions within the Tel Aviv trans community. There are some groups of queer transgender activists that bring together FTM and MTF trans people. There is also a genderqueer group which consists of young politically motivated people. Another group is made up of only MTF transwomen and many of whom are involved in the sex industry and their main social meeting venue is the FFF parties (Misgav 2014).

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### Abstract translations

*Dirty dancing: incarnations (non fluides) géographiques d'une boîte de nuit gay à Tel Aviv*

Cet article examine les incarnations (non fluides) d'une boîte de nuit gay à Tel Aviv en Israël. Cette boîte de nuit est considérée comme un lieu de libération sexuelle et a accueilli la Friendly Freedom Friday (FFF) Party, la Fête du Vendredi Amical Libre. Cependant, l'espace de la boîte de nuit est aussi divisé en genre et en sexualité. Nous puisons dans des entretiens individuels approfondis et des observations de participants pour examiner les tensions qui naissent de et entre hommes gays, transgenres et les espaces de clubs. Un certain nombre de paradoxes sont présents dans le club. Nous argumentons que la fluidité de subjectivité – soutenue par les théoriciens gays – s'évapore quand elle se trouve confrontée à la matérialité de corps réels en sueur. Nous nous intéressons aux géographies viscérales du comment et où la sueur et autres fluides corporels, deviennent des matières qui ne sont pas à leur place ou « sales ». Notre discussion se divise en trois points. Tout d'abord, nous exposons les grandes lignes des débats théoriques au sujet des fluides corporels et des subjectivités des fluides. Ensuite, nous examinons les préparations corporelles des hommes gays et des transgenres qui se déroulent avant d'assister au nightclub. Les

subjectivités spatiales, en fonction du sexe et des dimensions sexuelles des participants résident dans leurs désirs d'assister au club. Enfin, nous argumentons que les espaces que les corps masculins gays, partiellement habillés et en sueur occupent sont distincts des corps habillés, qui ne transpirent pas, des transgenres, et en opposition avec eux.

**Mots-clefs:** géographies fluides, hommes gay, transgenres, corps, sueur, subjectivités.

*Baile sucio: las geografías corporales fluidas y no fluidas de una discoteca gay en Tel Aviv*

**Resumen:** Este artículo examina las geografías corporales fluidas y no fluidas de una discoteca gay en Tel Aviv, Israel. La discoteca es considerada como un espacio de liberación sexual y fue sede de la fiesta *Friendly Freedom Friday* (FFF). Sin embargo, el espacio de la discoteca, también está dividido por género y sexualidad. El estudio se basa en entrevistas individuales en profundidad y observaciones de los participantes para examinar las tensiones que surgen de y entre hombres homosexuales, transexuales y espacios en la discoteca. Una serie de paradojas están presentes en la discoteca. Se sostiene que la fluidez de la subjetividad—propugnada por teóricos en homosexualidad—se evapora cuando se enfrentan a la materialidad de cuerpos reales cubiertos en sudor. El trabajo se interesa en las geografías viscerales de cómo y dónde el sudor y otros fluidos corporales, se convierten en algo fuera de lugar, o 'sucio.' Tres puntos estructuran la discusión. En primer lugar, se describen los debates teóricos sobre los fluidos del cuerpo y subjetividades fluidas. En segundo lugar, se examinan las preparaciones corporales de hombres homosexuales y mujeres transexuales que se producen antes de asistir a la discoteca. Las dimensiones espaciales, de género y de sexo de las subjetividades de los participantes se encuentran incorporadas en los deseos de asistir a la discoteca. Por último, se argumenta que los espacios ocupados por cuerpos masculinos gay, semidesnudos y sudorosos son diferentes de, y opuestos a los ocupados por los cuerpos vestidos y sin sudor de las mujeres transexuales.

**Palabras claves:** geografías fluidas, gays, transexuales, cuerpos, el sudor, subjetividades.