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Homosexuality and the city:

emotional geographies of clubbing in Paris and Turin

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Abstract

The urban nighttime entertainment, that is the recreational scene including bars, pubs, clubs and other mainly nocturnal meeting venues, is a crucial space for cities today under many perspectives, including the negotiation of alterity, the performance of gendered social relations, and the manifestation and experience of sexual diversity. The proposed paper investigates the emotional spaces of commercial homosexual recreation using as empirical basis two different settings: Paris lesbian nights, and gay clubs in Turin (Italy). Methodologically, the investigation is carried on mainly through direct observation and auto-ethnographic fieldwork, together with discussions with club users and organizers. Drawing on the literature from emotional geography, the aim of the paper is to propose an alternative take on the geography of homosexual clubbing, particularly by subverting notions of distance and proximity, and inside and outside, and by developing the metaphor of the gay club/lesbian night as an *island*, which allows specific reflections on the micro-emotional politics of nightclubbing.

1. Introduction

This paper deals with urban homosexual[1] nighttime entertainment, that is the scene of clubs, bars and public-private venues where adults and young adults perform recreational activities as meeting, drinking, chatting, dancing and 'clubbing'; a space that Chatterton and Hollands (2002) called *playscape*. Such space is pretty relevant in the performing and experiencing of sexuality: urban space, in general, has been often intended as a locus of social sexual liberation because of the idea of anonymity and cosmopolite life, and because of the escape from claustrophobic kinship and community relations typical of non-urban and family-watched spaces (Weston, 1995; Valentine and Skelton, 2003). This perception of freedom is emphasized within the case of nocturnal homosexual playscape; on the one side, because of the possibility of spending time among people sharing similar sexual orientations in a *space of privacy* (Matejskova, 2007) that is a hybrid public-private space where people feel free to perform sexual identities without

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[1] We use the word homosexuality in a wide sense including different GLBTQ sexual identities. In both Turin and Paris most of the venues are simply labelled as 'homosexual', in opposition to 'heterosexual'.

heterosexual surveillance. On the other side, the nocturnal recreational time-space is generally imagined as characterized by a larger degree of freedom with respect to daytime, and by a partial exception from common social rules and constraints (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Hubbard, 2005; Hutton, 2006).

Clubbing is, of course, a socially constructed and performed activity (Malbon, 1999; Pini, 2001), a series of fragmented, temporal experiences (Bennett, 1999), with a particularly relevant role of gendered performances and emotions (Valentine, Skelton and Chambers, 1997). An abundant literature, within urban studies, has dealt with the different perceptions of fun, amusement, annoyance and fear in the eyes of different audiences with different genders and sexual orientations (Hutton, 2006; Boyd, 2010). For example, given the abundance of heteronormative settings in the performance of night-clubbing, the 'straight' scene for night amusement may be perceived as pretty un-funny, or even violent, in the eyes of sexually marginalized subjects as homosexuals, transsexuals and queers (see Moran et al., 2003; Casey, 2004; Matejskova, 2007). On the contrary, the experience of clubbing in spaces perceived as 'protected', 'safe' and 'loose' may be quite relaxing and pleasurable (Moran et al., 2001), and it is not rare the use of homosexual recreational spaces by heterosexual woman willing not to be approached by men (Hutton, 2006; Boyd, 2010).

This paper will look at nocturnal nighttime through the lens of emotions and space by reflecting on our own auto-ethnographic experience; it will illustrate how the spatialities of emotions transcend traditional conceptualization of space, and particularly ideas of distance and boundary, of 'here' and 'there', and will interpret the emotional space of the homosexual club by the metaphor of the *island*. It derives the idea of the affective space of the club as a *other*-space, ontologically connected to geographical space, but phenomenologically performed on the basis of different logics, spatialities (for example at distance) and temporalities (before and beyond the material clubbing performance).

The paper will be drawn on reflections from two case studies: the lesbian night-time events in the big city of Paris, and the homosexual clubs in the smaller city of Turin, Italy, where there is not a specific gay-area. The two cases have not to be strictly considered elements of a comparison, but mainly as elements in an assemblage of empirical observations, reflections, juxtapositions and discussions between the two authors of the paper. Nevertheless, as it will be discussed, the two cases share a relevant geographical element: both deal with ephemeral and temporary spaces, as

lesbian nights in Paris and GLBTQ nights in Turin (homosexual events in Turin are generally open to every genre) are performed in temporary spaces, that is in clubs that, for the rest of the week, are intended for other customers and for different sexual identities (heterosexual). This peculiar feature of the leisure spaces allowed us to carry on reflections on the spatialities of affect with a particular sensitivity towards transcending the physical space of the urban leisure.

The next section will introduce thematic reflections on the role and politics of emotions in geography, with particular reference to the homosexual nocturnal-recreational space. Section 3 will briefly introduce the two case-studies, emphasizing differences and peculiarities. Section 4 will elaborate research outcomes concerning the affective performing of gay recreational spaces, particularly by discussing the different physical and emotional spatialities of the 'inside' and 'outside' of the club, and by working on the metaphor of the island. Finally, the concluding remarks will set final comments concerning the relation between the spatialities of emotions and the politics of the ephemeral space of the homosexual club.

2. Emotions and the social construction of homosexual night-time space

Space beyond representation: a ontology of relation

As testified by a growing and relevant international literature developed during the last decade, emotion is a key ingredient in current reflections in human geography. There is, of course, a long tradition in the analysis of the geography of emotions, whose roots include geographical-psychoanalytic literature, as well as reflections on the emotions enacted in the construction of places (see Callard, 2003; Bondi, 2005). The current segment of the debate, often named *emotional turn* (Bondi et al., 2007) gained momentum with a forerunning editorial paper by Anderson and Smith (2001), stressing the importance of emotions as pain, bereavement, elation, anger and love in shaping, constructing and living the human world; in this sense emotions may (also) be intended as ways of knowing, being and doing, opening the field to the research of geographies of feeling going beyond the visual, the textual and the linguistic domains. Space is in fact fundamental in the emotional sphere: very often the source of emotions come from

somewhere outside the body, from the setting, the contexts, and from the place where relations occurs. Space is saturated with moving and ever-changing emotions, and looking through the lens of emotions allows diverse conceptualizations of space. Particularly, the playscape of clubbing may be thought as an *event*: as a discontinuous, contingent production, intimate to the bodies but not corporeal to them, including the multiplicity of the virtual and the actual things happening and affecting the bodies in the space of contact (Lim, 2007; 2010). In fact, events do not refer just to the *actual* performances of the bodies, but also to the *virtual*, that is to the multiple emotions and dispositions to what potentially can be done (Deleuze, 2001; Lim, 2007). The emotional space is therefore an important element in understanding the nature of events and how events possess different potentials for action and relation, for forging connections and ways of living.

Reflections on emotions and space have been largely developed in the influential works of Nigel Thrift (2004, 2008), and specifically in his reflections on the geographies 'beyond representation', that is the insistence on what cannot be brought into representations, as the affective, the emotional and the pre-cognitive. Emotions are in fact formal evidence of what, in one's relations with others, speech cannot congeal, and therefore is cancelled by methods like questionnaires analyzing how people *talk* about their emotions (Thrift, 2008; Katz, 2000). At the same time, a number of geographers have carried on phenomenological analysis of emotions in a variety of contexts, including ambivalence, anger, anxiety, awe, caring, depression, desire, disgust, familiarity, fear, guilt, happiness, violence, etc., often posing attention to noticeable expressions of emotions such as blushes, laughs, crying (Thien, 2005; Smith et al., 2009).

Despite the growing number of contributions, it has to be noticed that, within the debate, there is not a univocal vocabulary of concepts, nor a single methodological approach. On the contrary, the geography of emotions is a stimulating and ongoing attempt to explore different ways to investigate and to conceptualize the relations between feelings, affects, spaces and subjective positionalities. This is much a political exercise: as discussed by Ahmed (2004, 2008), drawing on Spinoza, emotions shape 'the very surfaces of bodies', that is contingency, how we are touched by what is near, taking shape through repetition of actions over time and through orientations towards and away from others. In this sense, emotions shape what bodies can do, a relation that heavily deals with *power*.

It has to be noticed that bodies are not to be intended merely as human bodies, but as assemblages of any kind, as discourses, ideas, social collectivities, human bodies in conjunction with tools, technologies, other objects and other humans (Lim, 2007). Emotions circulate between

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bodies, but are not 'inside' them, are not corporeal, and are not 'possessed' or 'passed': emotions are relational, and involve (re)actions or relations of 'towardness' or 'awayness' in relation to such objects; emotions shape the surfaces of bodies in relation to objects (Ahmed, 2004). In this sense, emotions, by creating the 'surfaces' of the contact between bodies, also contribute in drawing the boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside, the 'I' and the 'we' in contact with others. There is, in fact, an important tradition of geographical reflections between particular emotions and the construction of identities (including spatial identities, for example in terms of love, attachment, fear; see Bondi, 2005; Duff, 2010), with a relevant political dimension, as grasped by various feminist geographers (Thrift, 2004; Thien, 2005; Mountz and Hyndman, 2006). On the one side, emotions frame and circumscribe sexed and gendered experiences of place and space (a classic example refers to the feminist works on fear: Valentine, 1989), often by incoherent, unstable, opaque and subjective human performances. Put it differently, emotions are relational, fluid and non-representational; they move and circulate through bodies, relations and objects, and this complex ontology, based on pre-cognitive phenomena, obviously takes form in space.

On the other side, in line with an ecological-psychoanalytical perspective, assuming the emotional perspective is coherent with the development of more *porous* conceptions of the self: since feeling is not only or entirely personal and individual, emotions emerge *between* bodies of various kinds, human and trans-human (Conradson, 2007; Thrift, 2008). The self is therefore understood as a relational concept, imbricated within particular ecologies of place: the self emerges in part through relations with other people and events, whether these are present here and now or located in the 'there and then' (Conradson, 2007).

Performing intimacy in homosexual playscapes

In the perspective of this paper, it is possible to look at nighttime leisure spaces (also) as places of contact, belonging and meaning, as 'thick' places (in terms of emotional engagement: Casey, 2001; Duff, 2010) involving issues of intimacy and distance. In fact, emotions constitute a zone of indeterminacy, an intensity, that transforms space/event in the very instance of creating place (McCormack, 2007; Duff, 2010), not through individual bodies and practices, but rather in the dynamic and relational interaction and contact of places and bodies: in this case, through the

collective performance of clubbing. Gay and lesbians clubbing not rarely implies an emotional performance producing an *intimate* space, that is an emotional (dis)position virtually preceding other social ties (friendship, communitarian spirit, etc) that works beyond geographical proximity (see Erni and Fung, 2010; Evers, 2010; Meunier, 2010). In line with the emotional framework, the emotional-intimate space is in fact intended as a coproduction with the public that may take form at a number of geographical scales, meaning that the relation between distance and emotion is far from linear (Valentine, 2006; Mountz and Hyndman, 2006; Barnett, 2005). And, also, intimacy is not a state of fact, but a process: a mutual construction involving the ways bodies and objects meet and touch and the formations they generate. Pratt and Rosner (2006) use the metaphor of the tactile in describing intimacy: it is a contact beyond the visual, making nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity. The intimate space is a border zone: both a site for the expression and experiencing of emotions, and a space widening and redefining what a body is allowed to do. This is particularly important for the queer experiences, because of the violent, heteronormative institutions dominating daily spaces. In fact, intimate space – both at the scale of the body and the household, and that of the club or the gay-friendly district – may represent a thick space in terms of freedom of behavior, particularly with reference to emotions and affects. Using the language of Agamben (2003), it is a 'state of exception' from the rest of the emotional urban space, or – to use a different metaphor – an *island* in the heteronormative landscape. The metaphor of the island (in the philosophical tradition of term, since Thomas Moore) is important in emphasizing the idea of the club as a separated utopian or dystophian space (Edmond and Smith, 2003). The island is in fact often presented as a sort of geographical trope where the physical detachment from the mainland apparently allows for an entirely different set of emotions, perspectives, possibilities, identities, temportalities and spatialities (Minca, 2009): the sea surrounding them keeps them separated from the everyday, allowing a radical imagined separation between the extraordinary and the banal, the unpredictable and the obvious. In this sense, dreaming of islands implies dreaming of pulling away and separating, the seek for a new identity, new encounters (or new isolations) and new starts (Deleuze, 2002). Of course, the performing of the myth of the club/island never occurs just because of the physical separation of the club space from the outside, but through discourses, practices, rituals, institutions, social norms and other elements of a wide 'system of relations' or, to use Michel Foucault's language, of a 'biopolitical dispositive' (Oswin and Olund, 2010; see also Hubbard et al., 2008).

Our analysis of nightclubbing aims at questioning the use of traditional conceptions of space – dealing with ideas of proximity and distance, of being 'here' and 'there' – in the conceptualization of the emotional space of the gay nighttime entertainment.

How to investigate emotions in homosexual clubs?

Methodologically, investigating intimacy and emotions means a challenge to not just talk about spaces, emotions and feelings but to also register how the researchers and the researched perform an attunement of bodies, of subjects and objects (Smith et al., 2009; Probyn, 2010). One of the main challenges of the analysis has been to try and produce an intimate relation with the object of the analysis, in a way that keeps hold of interiority, idiosyncrasy and emotion, through auto-ethnographical work. In the attempt to grasp the inexpressible field of emotions and to privilege closeness in the analysis, it has been privileged an immersive auto-ethnographic approach (Butz and Besio, 2009). Extensive fieldworks have been conducted in the two cities from January to May 2011. Fieldworks, carried on with the help of new and old friends active and affectively immerse in the local gay scene, have been performed with a particular attention towards *our own* development of emotions, and by taking advantage of a privileged position in decoding and interpreting our friend's emotional and affective dispositions in the field (see Rose, 1997; Banks, 2003; Hubbard, 2005; Butz and Besio, 2009). The tactic of entering into the enthusiasm of gay clubbing and experiencing the feeling of each scene allowed, in a blend of participation, occasional, informal chatting and direct observation, to get a rich and variegated source of materials, together with the elaboration of a theoretical vision and a language 'from within', and particularly emphasis on the self-analysis of our emotions (Dewsbury, 2003; Pile, 2010). Data have not been recorded during nightclubbing, in order not to give an impression of 'supervision' to the other users, but have been annotated later on pocketbooks. In the case of Turin, a large amount of visual materials have been collected thanks to an 'official' photographer of gay-evenings. The informal chatting – that, according to the cases, developed with the explicit assertion of the position of being a researcher – aimed at investigated the feelings of the clubbers about their performance of gay nightclubbing, and have been accompanied with subjective notes concerning the perceptions of the researchers (for example impressions of the persons being annoyed, amused, relaxed, surprised, etc., that is an attention to the body as a source of

information, a site of feeling and experience: see Wylie, 2005; Pile, 2010). The research notes have been also encoded used labels and qualitative patterns.

Participation and direct observations have been accompanied by other sources of information. First, before and during the fieldwork, an extensive bibliographic research focused on newspaper articles, media representations, brochures, thematic web-sites and clubbing magazines from the two cities, providing important information concerning the contexts. Secondly, in-deep interviews have been carried on with scholars and relevant actors in the gay recreational scene, and particularly organizers and club managers (2 in Paris, 4 in Turin) in order to get their feelings and impressions regarding the object of the analysis and the research hypothesis. The interviews have been recorded, transcribed and classified.

Finally, the two researchers shared their research materials and the thematic storylines emerging from the classifications of the research materials, both through emails and face to face discussions. In fact, the development of the paper has been also an issue based on the contact between the sensibilities of the two researchers, that physically and emotionally met in front of the computer.

3. Homosexual playscapes in Paris and Turin

The homosexual playscape is of course pretty different in the two cities.

Paris, with about 150 commercial establishments, ranks after London but before Berlin in terms of gay and lesbian businesses (Leroy, 2005). Paris has a long tradition in this respect, representing a sort of idealized mythic space in the eyes of many homosexuals worldwide. Today, there are about eight lesbian bars and one lesbian night-club operating continuously in Paris, but a new type of lesbian party is flourishing, that is itinerant nights taking place in different parts of the city. Organizers emphasize the quality and the novelty of the venues in which the parties take place; as one of them told us,

> 'I believe in securing beautiful venues for women. The aim is for women to be proud of being in a nice place where they will be lavishly received' (Paris, February 2011).

Such parties contribute to defy lesbian spatial and social invisibility by allowing lesbian appropriation, even if it is only the fleeting of symbolic places of ostentatious consumption. The energy spent by the organizers in order to find new places and new contents to animate and label each event underlines the need to continuously sustain the emotional aspect of the night, also by the means of space. Also, lesbian parties construct a network of places through which lesbians can negotiate their access to the city representing nodes in the lesbian geography of emotion far away from the homosexual territory of the Marais (Cattan and Clerval, 2011).

Turin presents a rather different geography of the homosexual scene. Turin is a medium-size city (about 910.000 inhabitants in 2008) in the North-West of Italy, particularly tied to the car manufacturing. Given its industrial identity, Turin is an important 'laboratory' for the Italian Left parties, and it is generally considered a progressive and relatively open space in the field of Italian queer politics and culture. Particularly, the first Italian gay club-discoteque, named '*Break*', appeared in the 60s in the province, in a small city called Pinerolo. Despite the evolution of the homosexual leisure scene during the years, in Turin there are basically not 'fixed' GLBTQ discos and clubs, but just particular thematic nights (a part from three gay-friendly bars). Currently, mainstream GLBTQ events take place every Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, organized by different associations, while minor events take form in residual and 'alternative' spaces. The spatial presence of the gay commercial spaces is therefore limited to certain times, and dispersed in the city space, so there is nothing like a 'gay area'. Moreover, all these spaces are basically gay and hetero friendly, and therefore open to different customers (with a dominant masculine presence). It derives a polycentric, hybrid and dynamic geography, sharing many spatial logics with the Parisian lesbian scene, with GLBTQ events continuously moving from one place to another (the winter geography, for example, is quite different from the one in summer) emphasizing the relational and contingent nature of territoriality. In this sense, it is difficult to image a sort of affection towards the materiality of the club: the emotional field of the homosexual leisure is not strictly embedded in a stable space, and the resulting ecology of spaces and emotions is fluid and temporary.

4. The emotional spaces of the club

Being inside/outside: emotional attachment to place

The physical space of the club/venue is little more than a basement or a loft crowded with people, music, lights and other technologies. The space of the club is nevertheless rich in meanings that are important for many queer cultures; for example, it may be argued that the space of the club on the one hand reproduces some of the traits of city life, as anonymity and density together with spatial closeness, and on the other hand it offers a subversion to those urban traits, for example by allowing 'emphasized' sociabilities (dancing, touching). Moreover, the club time-space allows the experimentation of alternative temporary nighttime identities, different from those based on daytime professional, economic and cultural status (Bottà, 2010). In the course of the fieldwork, we have tried to reflect on the spatialities of the emotional spaces.

In turn to discuss the different conceptualization of the gay and lesbian club space, let us start with the more banal identification of the club, that is a physical space bounded and separated from the 'outside' by walls, doors, physical bodies (security staff) and other human and non-human elements. Such a representation of the club implies a sort of rigid, dualistic division between an 'inside' and an 'outside', that is between the space of privacy of the club and the public space of the street. But, at a more careful observation, the transition from the 'outside' to the 'inside' may be experienced as the passage through a number of intermediate and different emotional fields, defining different 'frontiers' rather that a single 'boundary'.

In the case of Turin, for example, the researcher was previously accustomed with gay environments, thanks to the knowledge and the relations with some friends, but was essentially an outsider and not intimate to the scene of gay clubs. His experience of the liminal space of the entrance in a homosexual night in a club assumed therefore the traits of an unfamiliar – but not really exotic – experience. As a case, the general outlook of the entrance in the Sunday night event in Turin was imbued with an ironic sense of excess, caricature and carnivalesque – a trait of the queer-clubbing culture – as testified by the presence of door-staff dressed like Roman warriors. Another example that highly provides an impression of a real difference between an inside and an outside refers to several lesbian itinerant event occurring in Paris. Indeed in one of these 'soirée' the organizers distributed bracelets to the girls entering the place. The color of the bracelet indicated whether the person is single, in couple, open to encounters, or doesn't want to be

categorized. This example puts under perspective a kind of *rite of passage* between two spheres. By entering the place, each person must complete the rite and assume and display her 'new' identity. The bracelets become a technology in order to manage the emotional inclination of the person, her predisposition towards contacts. In this case, the biopolitic of the body is, differently from several other types of rite of passage, ephemeral and limited to the specific time-space of the event, disappearing when the person re-enters the society (van Gennep, 1960; see also Bardzell and Odom, 2008). This contributes in defining the idea of a boundary between an 'inside' and an 'outside' of the club: the impression of the researchers have been that, by entering the clubs, they were submitting to specific 'disciplines of the spirit', including the acceptance of the intimate and symbolic presence of almost-naked Roman warriors or the wearing of a bracelet.

The topic of submission to specific discipline emerged not rarely during the fieldwork; for example, according to an occasional chatting with Angelo (self-declared male gay, 28, looking not enthusiastic),

> 'The club is a private space, the music is incredibly loud –next time I'll bring earplugs –, the word is negated, and it's hot. I feel *constricted* to stay here' (Torino, 3 May 2011).
>
> 'And the fact that you have to pay in order just to get a look is also frustrating' (Carlo's friend, no name declared, same discussion).

In the case of Turin, it has to be noticed that many clubs adopt 'drink cards' or other forms of 'cards' (as *Arcigay* membership card, in many Italian clubs), certainly intended as technologies for the accounting of the clubbing performance (how much to pay at the moment of leaving the club), but also contributing to the separation of the 'inside' from the 'outside' (the card is *needed*). In the case of Paris, itinerant parties are advertised via social networks, both informal and structured, and to attend for example a *Primanotte* itinerant party you have to be registered on a mailing list, which requires being sponsored by a member. The parties are therefore halfway in-between private and public, and organizers take care to keep it that way, by filtering access carefully. Several thousands of people are on the list according to one of the organizers, and members are not only Parisians – not only are there provincials, but also residents of Belgium, Switzerland, Italy or England (Cattan and Clerval, 2011).

These practices indirectly tend to invest with a sense of exclusive territoriality spaces that, in many cases (in all the gay events in Turin, and those in the lesbian scene in Paris), are quite ephemeral:

as mentioned, gay nights took place just one night per week inside spaces that, for the rest of the time, have a clear heterosexual dimension.

If the dimension of an 'inside' opposed from an 'outside' is evidently present, it has anyway to be noticed that, at the phenomenological level, many other spatialities may be identified. For example, being inside and outside is not univocally linked with the physical position within the boundary of the club. In the experience of the researchers, staying in front of the entrance of the club in order to wait for laggard friends is not really being 'outside': for example it implies the display of the intention to get inside. And, also, a person passionately moving on the dance floor is evidently much more 'inside' than an annoyed one, lingering with a glass with an annoyed expression at the margin of the club space. Put in differently, the emotional space defines the 'inside' and the 'outside' using different coordinates.

This is not to say that physical space is not intimately connected to the ecologies of emotions of the gay clubbing space. For example, it emerged from discussions that the time-space of the clubbing is very much perceived in a *territorial* sense. Here the claims about networked individualism, showing how new travel and communication technologies can empower individuals to create better relationships and therefore better social lives, are strictly linked and complementary to more traditional positions putting emphasis on the importance of spatial and temporal contexts to strengthening social networks (Clark, 2007). Co-presence, meaning physical relation between people and travel between places, is necessary for making of connections (Urry, 2002). It is as if territory and territoriality are ever central in the feeling of a sense of belonging; also in the case of ephemeral, temporary or utopian spaces.

> 'It is a long time I come here: I like to think that this is *my* club' (discussion, 3 April 2011, Turin)

> '*Primanotte* is for me a place where I feel free away from the majority rule, and secure away from the insults or aggressions lesbians are likely to suffer in public space. It is like a sort of *deuxième maison*' (for a Swiss lesbian that attends very often parties in Paris, February 2011).

'Do you have fun' is not a good question!

One hypothesis may be that this sense of territoriality is much in line with Michel Maffesoli's vision of a world of 'neo-tribes', to be intended as voluntary, unstable and sensuous micro-cultures interconnected in networks, with each note representing a possible site of ephemeral belonging for contemporary nomads, each achieving their fullest expression in the festal, in the frame of a 'passional logic', a 'collective non-rationality' (Maffesoli, 1988; St John, 2003). This is also in line with Bell and Binnie (2000), arguing that, with the weakening of the nation state, new types of politics and communities that might be considered a form of intimacy emerges. The topic of leisure is quite relevant since a diffused idea is that, along with meeting people, one of the main reason for people performing clubbing is *to have fun*. Anyway, this is not necessary always true, and the questioning of the idea of 'fun' has been particularly illustrative of the limits of a linear interpretation of the spoken word as an investigative tool. Consider the following dialogue with Carlo, a barely-known club user.

> Carlo: 'I like being here because it is *different* from the *external* world: here I have the freedom to express and *have fun'*.
> Researcher (having in mind the idea of the 'oceanic feeling'): 'So you feel much tuned with the crowd tonight: are you *having fun* in this sense?'
> C.: 'Well, I do not really feel tuned with all the people: they're so exhibitionists, it is a bit like a parade!'
> R.: 'So what's funny with that?'
> C.: 'Actually, to tell the truth, I am not really having fun. But I feel free and I may know people' (Turin, April 2011).

According to a Parisian girl self-declared as lesbian, 45:

> 'For me, a lesbian bar is a place to meet and share experiences with other that share the same sexuality than me and also, I can add sometime the same 'perception' of living in a dominant heterosexual world; in the sense that having fun is not the main reason for being here' (Paris, March 2011).

Evidently, asking people 'are you having fun' is not the best way to investigate the emotional object 'fun', and probably similar considerations may partially fit also with the idea of 'being free in the club'. This is not to say that the analysis of spoken word is non-useful, but straightforward relations between emotions and their representations in discourses have to be taken cautiously. The reasons why people go to clubs are evidently various and different: some people love dancing, others hate that; some people love drinking very much, others are disgusted by the excessive use of alcohol (and, eventually, drugs) taking place in clubs. But inside the space of the club, it is possible to perceive sub-groups of persons showing a certain diffused positive and relaxed attitude towards each other. Drawing on Malbon (1999) we may refer to 'emotional communities': essential spaces and modes of 'being together' that exist only in the actuality of dancing bodies, in the crowd, in being at the party. A number of technologies, machines and materialities work for enhancing the emotional surface of the experience: the assemblage of body, spirit, loud music, lights, alcohol, images, gay symbols provide an important basis for emotional disposition towards various forms of empathetic sociality. For example, a banal experience in the fieldwork has been that loud music, by making it difficult to speak (or, to be more precise, to listen), emphasize the pre-linguistic and pre-cognitive pleasure of a sensuous communication, that is the emotional field. But this is far from universal within the space of the club: the 'passionate community' produces also outsiders, that are individuals at the margins, those being annoyed and those that seem to continuously search for something to do (as searching for someone to chat with, searching for something to drink, searching for new messages on the mobile phone). For many people, going to the club is not necessary the construction of an intimate space or the participation in a public ritual. Put it differently, the ecological relations between bodies within the club have much to say with our different emotions and with our *self*. For example, embarrassment may emerge in feeling inappropriate, unbeautiful, and unconfident in a dancing performance. While such arguments may be largely applied also to the heterosexual performance of clubbing, some peculiarities of the homosexual case have to be considered. Particularly, the 'passionate community' is relevant because of the sensation that, by getting inside the club, and by the contact with the homosexual crowd, it is possible to escape from a condition of isolation characterizing many homosexuals living in a unsatisfactory and oppressive heteronormative landscape. Coming back to the metaphor of the island, the club may be imagined as an inverted image of the myth of the 'desert island': an insulated space where not to feel alone. In this sense, the co-presence in space and the sensation of feeling the crowd may also assume a political-aesthetic dimension: a sort of grassroot

subversion of the idea of isolation and/or being part of a minority, and the celebration of the multitude, of the 'how many we are'.

'It is so good to see how many *we* [gays] are here inside' (discussion, 7 May 2011, Turin)

Where going out starts?

Reflections on the affective nature of the performance of 'going out' have been already developed by authors as Rojek (1995) and Hubbard (2005). One important element, crucial to our reflection, is that the affective field of the club starts operating and shaping the surfaces of bodies quite before the actual performance of the clubbing: it manifests in the construction of the idea of going out, in organizing the night-out with friends, in the dressing and general preparation of the body, and in all the anticipatory feelings involved. In a certain perspective, the body preparing for the feast is very much 'inside' the affective space of the feast, arguably much more than the body sitting at the margins of the feast, alienated from the party. And, it has to be stressed, the emotional space we are dealing with is not the space of social ties, friendships and senses of community: it is more abstractly the space of contact, intimacy with spaces and body, predisposition towards the closeness with the other. But it is very much a space – and not a mere spatial metaphor for space – because of the centrality of place (the club) in the building up of this complex ecology.

The physical space of the bounded club, in fact, is not ontologically separated from the emotional space, but the ways in which bodies interact and collide in the ecology of place are far from linear and univocal. And, it may be argued, the micro-politics of pleasure in the club have much to do with the visual and the aesthetical. As discussed, the space of the club is not rarely perceived as a locus of relative freedom, far from the heteronormative gaze of many daytime environments (the home, the work, the street): the vision of homosexual kisses may be considered highly symbolical, a reificatory event definitely contributing in territorializing the homosexual space. At the same time, the space of the club is imbued with a politics of exaggerated and amplified gestures, symbols, metaphors and allusions: it is a space in-between surveillance and the breakaway of surveillance, with a relevant role played by the pleasure of being watched and desire to exceed.

The aesthetical dimension of the feast, the assemblage of bodies, the performance of the rituals of gay clubbing creates and transforms space, producing in many cases a sense of intimacy: the one described is not a community based on identity or identification (or the common absence of identity), but on the simple presence in that particular time-space and the submission to the discussed discipline of the spirit. In many cases, the transitory and hedonistic experience of the gay club provides enough room from a transformation of the self and the experimentation of a sort of 'sensation of oneness'. It derives a very fluid interpretation of space: the emotional space of the clubbing – expanding far beyond the boundaries of the club – is the space for a passionate community by providing intimate space as a consequence of 'being there' or 'going there', in a framework where the physical basis of the territory are going to fade away at the end of the night. Meaningfully, one recurrent element in dialogues concerning the reasons why people choose to perform nightclubbing (particularly in the case of people not willing to dance) concerns the expectation to *meet* someone, that is nothing more that the shaping of the surface of the body in the (pre)disposition of meeting the Other. It is in this sense the club may be also imagined as a mythic island where to project dreams, expectations, hopes, and the erotism of the encounter with the Other. This is particularly relevant for the homosexual world, where the sense of disconnection of the island from the rest of the heteronormative world is crucial. The island is a space of possible (even if hardly possible) realization of dreams, hedonism, transformation of the self, contact with existing or idealized Others, and the simple and actual existence of the possibility of actualizing these expectations produces a very real and tangible space of emotion, an 'inside' completely disconnected from common conceptions of geographical distance and proximity.

The space of the club-island is connected to other 'imagined' spaces of freedom, hope and dream: the various clubs and nights dispersed in the city. It derives an archipelago of 'islands', emotionally moving beyond the physical shape of the playscape. In this perspective, and despite their different territorialities, the two cases of Turin and Paris are not that different: in both cases we have a discontinuous, polycentric and ephemeral archipelago of emotional islands.

Conclusions: emotions, space, and islands

As discussed in the paper, the emotional space of clubbing enlarge and spread far away from the boundaries of the club, subverting traditional conceptions of proximity and distance, and 'here'

and 'there'. The geography of emotions is active in shaping the dreams, myths, expectations and predispositions towards the contact with the Other in the time-space of the club event. Particularly, the inner existence of the club performance is made possible through the geography of emotions: it is the predisposition towards contact, the attitude towards a modification of the self, and the desire to immerge in the emotional ecology of the club that 'creates' the *island*. Without emotions, the club would be nothing more than a bounded container for bodies.

In the case of the homosexual landscape, the emotional space of the club assumes particular political meanings. The space of the homosexual club is, of course, a partial, temporary, ephemeral, commercial, limited, strictly regulated and often even contradictory space. In both the case of Parisian lesbians and Turin gays, the space of relative freedom of the feast disappears with the end of the night, and the space of interaction within the club may arguably also represent a sort of ghetto for homosexuals if seen from the outside (Sibalis, 2004; Leroy, 2005). But this is just one part of the story. First, as discussed in the paper, the affective space of the club performs far beyond the space and time of the event, and the memories or dreams for the feast may represent a reassuring emotion days after/before the feast. Secondly, despite their evident limitations, the space of hope of the club, that is the island in the metaphor proposed in the paper, is very much *real*, and the emotions enacted in the contact with the clubbing ecology are, in the same way, *actual* and *concrete*. The mere fact that the limited space of hope and freedom of the club exists is a political meaning, and in the same vein the capability of the club in stimulating emotions and anticipations may be thought as an affective micro-politics of the everyday. In fact, the actual presence of the potentialities of affect widens the landscape of the possible, that is the imagination of the opportunities of homosexual emotional life. And, as stressed by various authors (as, in geography, Harvey, 2000; Gibson-Graham, 2006), the pre-figurative field of imagination and utopia is fundamental in shaping political emancipation, in fighting the idea that 'there is no alternative' and in the construction of a more just society. The club/island may therefore represent a process of *dialectical utopianism*, that is, according to Harvey (2000), an explicitly transformative spatiotemporal utopianism; in this case, the performing of the superimposition of the geographical and the affective space of the club-island, even in the extreme case of ephemeral, commercial and ultra-temporary geographical spaces, as those of Turin homosexuals and Parisian lesbians.

Secondly, the considerations proposed in the paper, concerning the two cities of Paris and Turin, may be thought – from the methodological point of view – as an assemblage of the empirical and

the theoretical, the proximate and the distant, that have very much to do with the emotional space. The overlapping of considerations from two rather different case studies, sharing little more than the common lack of stable physical space, gained geographical and methodological meanings in the intimate space of contact of a Parisian and a Turin researchers, by the development of a common attunement, and by the meeting of empirical considerations on emotions in the utopian space of the island.

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