



Affected in the nightclub. A case study of regular clubbers' conflictual practices in nightclubs



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ABSTRACT

The nightclub as a space is presented as a free and hedonistic place for pleasure. This space is also part of a wider socio-spatial-economic framework in which various forms of regulation apply to clubbers and the cultivation of affects. This paper researches marginal and contested forms of experiences within a club as a way of understanding the complexities of pleasure. The study does so by addressing experiences through the concept of affects, which is situated within a framework of a non-representational theory of space. Anxiety, pride, anger, shame and embarrassment are embodied simultaneously with the affects of love, joy, sympathy and so on. Alcohol, illicit drugs, bouncers, music and other human or non-human actants are part of the place. It is within this heterogeneous assemblage that affects become embodied. The data consists of 273 cases from a large Copenhagen nightclub where guests have complained about being rejected or being given quarantine. The paper suggests that if the space of the club is approached as being more than a mono-affectual space of either risk or pleasure, then it would be possible to reduce conflicts and produce more inclusive spaces.

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Introduction

The nightclub is designed as a space for enjoyment. It is meant to allure through its human–nonhuman technologies of public intimacy (Cf. Thrift, 2010). Alcohol as a legal substance is used instrumentally to facilitate this intimacy, together with music, spatial design, selection of guests and so on (Hayward & Hobbs, 2007). Illegal drug use may be another, more tacit, way of ensuring a good night out (Measham, 2004; Hutton, 2006; Ravn, 2012a). As such, the state of the body/mind cannot be described as being a causal effect of substance use alone. It must include a number of other aspects related to the space. The present study investigates the affects produced within the club as a space and how they relate to the social-spatial relations of alcohol, drugs, clubs and regulation.

Alcohol and illicit drug studies have a tendency to describe the effects of drugs as either negative or positive, in line with the distinction between risk on the one hand and pleasure on the other (Auld, Dorn, & South, 1986; Coveney & Bunton, 2003; Duff, 2008; Fry, 2011; Hunt & Evans, 2008; Hutton, 2006; Monaghan, 2002; Moore, 2008; Valverde, 1998). The risk literature is mostly situated within an (quantitative) epidemiological perspective and the pleasure literature represents a critical response to this (dominant) perspective (Hunt & Barker, 2001). This has resulted in

research in which there is a tendency to fall either to one side or the other when describing alcohol and other drug use. The reason for this should be found in the perspectives within which risk contra pleasure is situated. Within an epidemiological perspective, general health improvements are the central ontological perspective, whereas the pleasure discussion has been situated within a broader anthropological-sociological perspective in which health outcomes play a minor part. This means that discussions of pleasure also have a tendency to run into the opposite pitfall of the public health-oriented risk discourse. However, the perspective on pleasure in drug and alcohol studies has opened the field towards the affectual by taking intoxication seriously (Jayne, Valentine, & Holloway, 2012). A number of researchers have investigated specific forms of pleasure in relation to ecstasy (Duff, 2005, 2008; Hunt & Evans, 2008; Malbon, 1999), alcohol (Demant & Heinskou, 2011; Demant, 2009; Fry, 2011; Measham, 2004; Valverde, 1998), and ketamine (Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 2008; Newcombe, 2008; Demant & Ravn, 2013), to name a few drug-specific studies. The tradition of pleasure research on alcohol and other drugs has also brought a very strong focus on social contexts (e.g. nightclubs, gangs, streets, friends, subcultures, school classes etc.) as well as on controlled or recreational drug use (Decorte, 2001; Zinberg, 1984). This article follows the highly situated perspective of drug and alcohol use related to the nightclub (Hutton, 2006; Ravn, 2012a, 2012b) but seeks to move away from the concept of both risk and pleasure.

This article focuses on how a group of clubbers who navigate on the edges of acceptable clubbing behaviour produce and experience very heterogeneous affects. The cases deal with clubbers

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who have been excluded but insist on re-gaining access to a club. The cases highlight the allure of the club space, while the controversies regarding access to the nightclub highlight how affects, drugs, alcohol and space become relevant. The theoretical framework on non-representational theory of affects includes aspects such as alcohol and other drugs, but also rejects a one-sided view of how alcohol and other drugs affect people. The paper argues, in line with Jayne, Valentine, & Holloway, 2010 and Jayne et al. (2012), that the affective (drinking) space, in this case the nightclub, is an assembly of much more than alcohol and other drugs alone. As such, this framework opens up for studying how bodies, nightclubs, behaviours and other social-material actants are relevant alongside alcohol and drugs in understanding affects amongst clubbers.

Research on space and controversies

There is already a solid base of studies of space in relation to alcohol and other drugs. British researchers, for example, have examined young people's leisure time and cultural consumption habits within drinking spaces (Jayne, Holloway, & Valentine, 2006; Jayne et al., 2010, 2011b, 2012; Measham & Brain, 2005; Measham, 2006). The main focus in the research on alcohol is the relationship between alcohol, drunkenness and public urban night spaces. Studies of illegal substance use often considers the nightclub space as being a predominant stage for the use of drugs (Aas, 2006; Duff, 2005; Hutton, 2006). Specific electronic music profiles and commercial foundations at some clubs are described as contributing to enhancing the experience. However, the literature on drinking and taking drugs has often also taken a political-economic perspective on drinking entertainment venues in the city through using the term "night time economy (NTE)".

Research into conflicts related to the NTE is also substantial (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003; Hadfield, Lister, & Traynor, 2009; Hayward & Hobbs, 2007). Literature in this field acknowledges the use of the city centre as place of consumption, play and hedonism. This perspective implies that the studies have focused on how government policies, business strategies or social codes of conduct seek to direct people's actions and desires. This perspective on the NTE has somehow advocated that night spaces are produced by a political-economic alliance and that dominance is to be blamed for some of the problems associated with it (Demant & Landolt, 2013). A number of these studies have focused on bouncers and door policy (Berkley, 1998; Hobbs, Hadfield, Lister, & Winlow, 2003; Kim, 2007; Lister, Hadfield, Hobbs, & Winlow, 2001; McConnell, 1981; Monaghan, 2004; Pratten, 2007; Roberts, 2001; Tomsen, 2005; Warrell, 1994; Zedner, 2006). This political-economic perspective employs a neo-Marxist research perspective that, to a lesser degree, is able to include how young people constantly challenge and contest the spaces (Jayne, Holloway, & Valentine, 2006). As such, I would argue that a very strong "ontological domination" favouring a certain view of power can be found within this tradition (Cf. Lash & Lury, 2007). The perspectives of non-representational theory that are applied here, insist on following the provisional assembly of the space and are critical towards the highly political-economic rational perspective to understanding behaviours. To paraphrase Thrift, it may be better to understand consumer capitalism in clubs as a series of overlapping affective fields, than to describe it in political-economic terms alone (Thrift, 2010: 308). However, the cultivation of clubbers as highlighted by the NTE perspective becomes, to a great extent, part of the assembly of "affective fields" within this analysis.

Theory of club spaces and affects

The theory of the social-material aspects of affects and space has exploded in volume in the last decade. On the one hand,

actor network theory has developed from science and technology studies. Within this stream of theory, the concept of the actant has substituted the one-sided focus on "the social" within sociology and anthropology. This theoretical direction has led to an analytical shift from the social and symbolic constructions of matter toward a perspective of how the social-material assemblages matters (an ontological flat perspective (Cf. Latour, 2004, 2005)). Assemblage thinking is ill at ease with a notion of power as a resource that can be processed. The "flat perspective" of researching within this radically relational understanding also forsakes the critical position found within the NTE. As opposed to concepts like structure, culture, science, objectivity, production, agency, technology, and nature, the idea of assemblage emphasizes the material-discursive heterogeneity. Within the perspective of assemblages, no priority will be given to any specific actant. The concept is based on a Deleuzian understanding (Anderson & McFarlane, 2011: 125). Assembly is used in an actor-network theoretical perspective to "refer to the provisional assembly of productive, heterogeneous and (this is the crucial point) quite limited forms of ordering, located in no larger overall order." (Law, 2007: 6).

Within geography, focus has been directed towards an understanding of space that comprises both the spatial (material) and the social (Lorimer, 2005; Massey, 2005). The central concept becomes the place-event (Pink, 2009) or event of place (Massey, 2005) – an understanding of the place as an assembly that is only temporarily stabilized through relations between the material and social. This non-representational or relational space perspective draws on some of the same understandings of how the social and material are interrelated as within actor network theory (Farias, 2011; Hetherington, 1998; Lorimer, 2005; Murdoch, 1998). However non-representational theory not only resembles actor network theory in its ambition to move beyond space as symbolizations (perceptions of space), but further has a focus on embodiment and affects. As such non-representational theory is a central inspiration for this analysis.

A social material affect analysis has to be committed to the empirical: "we do not know what we are looking for before we find it". The crucial move is to put this highly complex, multiple and evolving entity, the "club space", at the core of our enquiries (cf. Farias, 2011). Empirical research on clubs deals with many issues: drugs, door policy, safe environments, music, décor and so on. But the underlying question we need to keep in mind is how each of these objects, processes and phenomena are reconstructed and remade; that is, how the materials, technologies and different affects are assembled in practice

Methods and approach

The data considered here comprise 273 cases from a large city centre Copenhagen nightclub where guests have written emails or letters in which they have complained about being rejected or being given quarantine, alongside police reports, and evidence relating to quarantines and restraining orders. The cases were collected over a period of eight years from 2003 to summer 2011. In addition to the accounts of the guests, the majority of the cases contain a commentary made by the bouncers as well as the manager of the club. This commentary often presents another story which in most cases is in opposition to the experience recounted by the guest. These counter-positions are the assessment-tool which the manager will use to consider whether to allow entrance again.

Based on a coding of the cases in regards to grounds for exclusion, I found that almost a third of the exclusions are drug related, a quarter are based on conflicts, a fifth on physical confrontations, and the remainder on various smaller categories, such as appearance. None could be linked directly to alcohol.

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