

Next Year in Tel Aviv:

Queering the Representations from the "Outside" and the "Inside"

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1. Introduction: "Next year in Tel Aviv"

In this paper we are going to present different narratives of the city of Tel Aviv, which is the cultural and economical capital of Israel and the most liberal city in the country. As such Tel-Aviv serves as the LGBTQ center and as a magnet for those people that are immigrate to the city from all parts of the country. We would like to concentrate in the narratives of the city as a *queer* space from two different and complementary perspectives that will illustrate our peculiar points of view and our identities: the "outside", an Italian straight researcher which spent her last two years in Tel Aviv, and the "inside", Israeli gay researcher that actually live in the city for many years.

We will start talking about the historical Zionist narrative that contributed to construct the role of the city of Tel Aviv in the Israeli society and in the Israeli LGBTQ community, to move into some insights that arrow from the academic work. We will try to explore and to show the different ways people might experience the city, whether they are straight or part of LGBTQ community, citizens or foreigners, and we will illustrate this position by few kinds of visual methods, such as popular culture products, "regular" maps and "mental" maps.

We will use these two points of view in order to represent and to examine the interesting constructions of this complex multicultural, multisexual and full of different identities space.

2. From "outside"...

The name of the city of Tel Aviv (תֵּל־אָבִיב), comes from Yechezkel (3:15) and literally means "hills of spring", but it represent also a conflation of "old" an archeological mound [tel](#), and "new", symbolized by the sprig: *aviv*. Therefore [Nahum Sokolov](#), one of the [Zionist](#) leader in the late 19th century, decide to use this toponym in order to translate in Hebrew *Altneuland*, written in 1902 by Theodor Herzl. In his last work, the father of modern political [Zionism](#) outlined his vision for a new Jewish state in the [Land of Israel](#) and he summed up his peculiar vision for an open Hebrew society: "It is founded on the ideas which are a common product of all civilized nations. (...) It would be immoral if we would exclude

anyone, whatever his origin, his descent, or his religion, from participating in our achievements. (...) There is only one way to do it, the highest tolerance”.



Original and Hebrew version fo *Altneuland*, written in 1902 by Theodor Herzl

In the actual Israel, this role was to be taken by [Tel Aviv](#), a city which did not yet exist at the time of writing and whose name was inspired by the book itself. In fact the [Sokolow](#)'s translation of *Altneuland* directly influenced the choice of *Tel Aviv* for the Jewish-Zionist Jaffa suburb founded in 1909 which was to become the “first Hebrew city”, a peculiarly different front the “Jewish” Jerusalem, even if the term “Zionism” itself is derived from the word [Zion](#) (ציון), referring to the Diaspora’s dream to return in the “Build Jerusalem”, according with the Jewish tradition and commemoration: “*Next Year in Jerusalem*” (“לשנה הבאה בירושלים הבנייה”).

The 20th century Zionist narrative contributed to construct the role of the secular city of Tel Aviv in the Israeli society and, starting from the 90s, in the Israeli LGBTQ community.

Actually, the First Zionist Israeli LGBTQ Association, known commonly as *Aguda* (האגודה), "the association", it was founded in 1975 in Tel Aviv and, still today, is a national non-profit organization working on the [grass-roots](#) level to help advance the rights of [LGBTQ](#) in Israel, where the Law regarding same-sex sexual activity was the same since the British Mandatory until the 1988, when the ban on consensual same-sex sexual acts was formally repealed by the national legislative assembly [Knesset](#), and since 1993, homosexuals have been allowed to openly serve in the military, including special units.

Nevertheless, more than Knesset, Tel Aviv's municipality covered a decisive role to represent the LGBTQ Israeli community, and in January 2008, established the city's [LGBTQ Community Center](#), providing all of the municipal and cultural services to the LGBTQ community under one roof, the first in the world completely financed by the municipality itself.



Poster and shot of [Eytan Fox's](#) 2006 film “[The Bubble](#)”

One of the more representative movie describing the LGBTQ life in Tel Aviv is the [Eytan Fox's](#) 2006 film “[The Bubble](#)” (ה בועה). The movie follows a group of young friends in the city of Tel Aviv and is as much a love song to the city as it is an exploration of the claim that people in Tel Aviv are isolated from the rest of the Country and the turmoil it's going through. The movie looks at young people's lives in Tel Aviv through the point of view s of gays and straights, Jews and Arabs, men and women. What all of them they have really in common is the love for the City of Tel Aviv. This love is paradigmatically well represented in one of the T-shirt dressed by the main character, quoting, in English “I love Tel Aviv”, as symbol of “urban living” the own *metrosexuality*. As a matter of fact, all the character of the movie use to go in the same *hipster* restaurant, club, shop, that represent all the benefit to live an urban quality life: leisure, employment and consumption of services, in an open and liberal atmosphere. The atmosphere that in the last 2 years, as “outsider”, I experimented directly on myself, as part of the peculiar “urban living” of the Tel Aviv’s “Bubble”, consuming the same *metrosexual* place of most the citizens of Tel Aviv.

But this is my specific point of you from “outside”, whereas the following paragraph by Chen Misgav is going to show his specific perspective from “inside”.

3. ...to “inside”

After the Fiammetta Martegani's background on the Zionist narrative and the role that Tel Aviv plays in the Israeli society I would like to talk a little bit on the queer aspects of the city from my point of view. For almost 6 years I have been focusing on the queer dimensions of the Tel-Aviv spaces, mainly during this tree researches:

- The Urban Space in Tel Aviv-Jaffa as Viewed by Gay People (MsC on town and regional planning, Technion, Haifa)
- The Night Club: Body, Identity and Space
- Queer and Feminist Activism and construction of Space (my current PhD research)

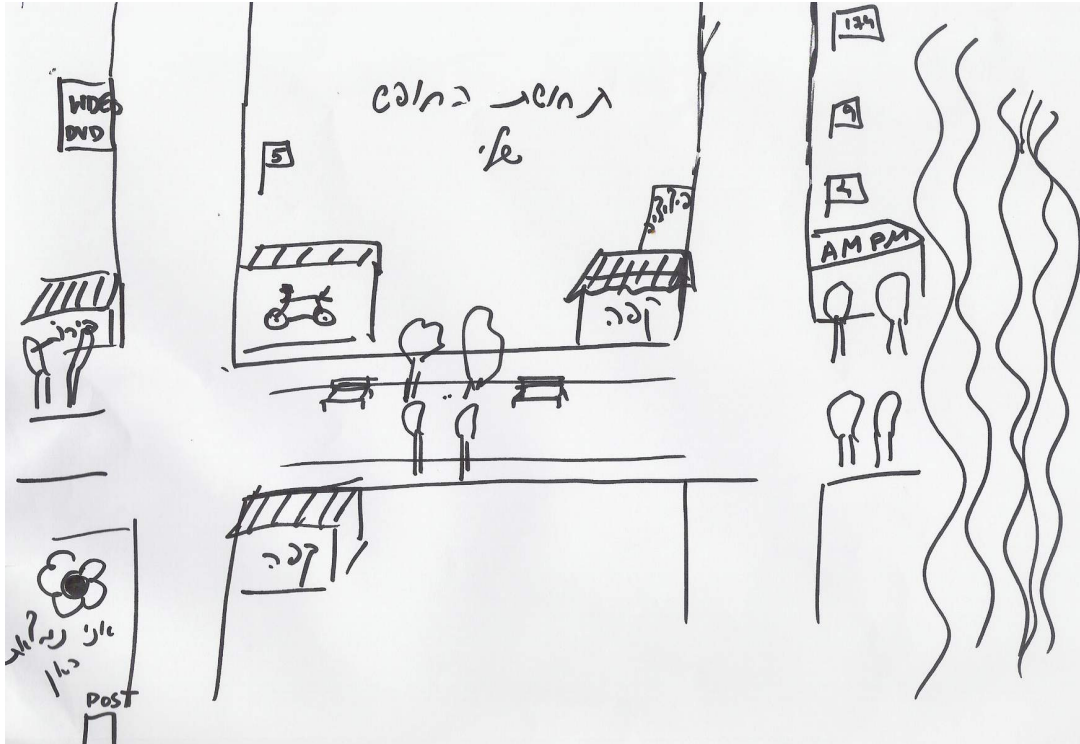
The gay community in Israel went through major changes since the eighties of the 20th century and especially in the nineties. The growing visibility of the community and its political achievements contributed largely to the possibility and to the legitimacy of research on “queer” subjects. Forming a political gay identity stirred a process of creating alternative knowledge about queer issues in different disciplines, knowledge that arises from the gay life experience and that reflects it. In Israel, Tel Aviv–Jaffa became the center of attraction for the gay population and since the end of the eighties in the last century a gay community with identity, visibility and political power started to form. In my researches I focused on few scales of the space – from the city and the streets to the gay venues as the night club and the spaces of the body.

In this paper I would like to present some insights from my current and former researches which will illustrate the notion of the "liberal" city as demonstrated by Fiammetta Martegani. I will start by pointing out one of the methods I used in my former research on the queer perspectives of Tel Aviv, the method of cognitive or mental mapping, and show you two maps that can illustrate the importance of the queer space that the city provide to GLBTQ people. The mental maps allowed me to reveal and to understand the "local knowledge" of the city that these people had. What is mental or cognitive mapping is? different people experience the same space or place in different ways, according to the knowledge that person had of the particular space a cognitive or mind

map is a diagram of individual identity. It describes the symbolic, social and spiritual needs required from a specific space and can provide a useful tool for city planners. As Lynch said: "a mental or mind map enables town planners to understand how people who live in the city identify with their urban space and this understanding can assist in planning better environments for people."

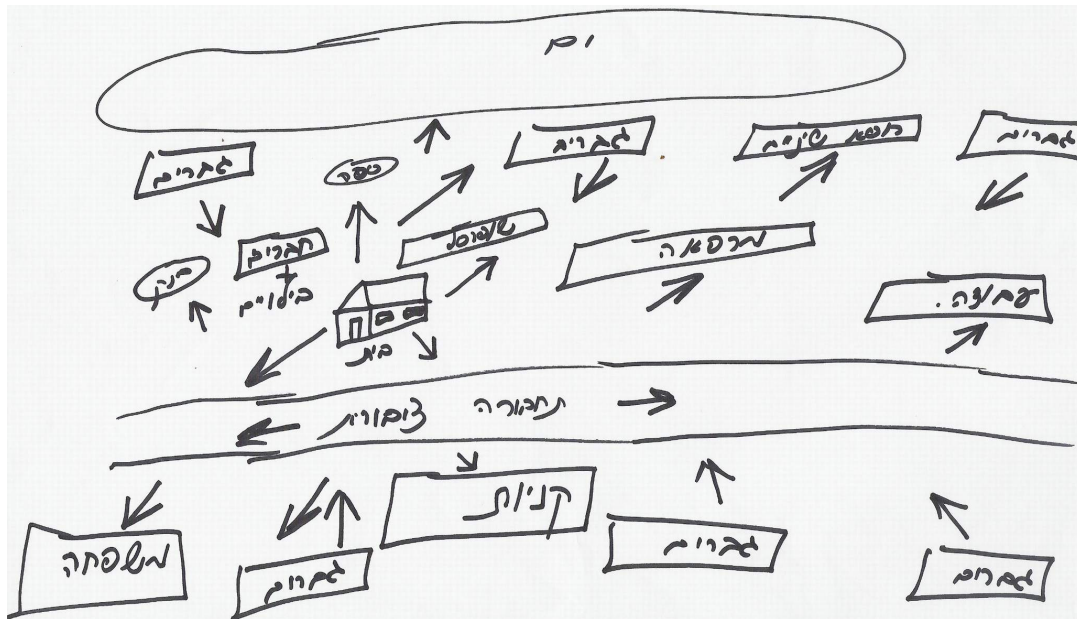
I choose two mental maps, one drawn by a lesbian women and the other by gay men, both are living in Tel Aviv but also both of them are not originally from the city: they immigrate to the big city from different places. Rina, the women, moved to the city from a small and very conservative village in the south, a fact that make her map very significant as we will see. The two maps explore the psychological and emotional aspects of the life in the city in general and the life in the city for people who immigrated to the city from ther places, and are directly connected to the gay identity of people who choose to live in the city. The city is not just a physical space but a place which profoundly influences the social, spiritual and emotional interactions of the people who live there. Gay people are seeking an open and liberal city which will accept them and their sexual identity. We can see this illustrated in the maps of Rina and Ziv.

Rina's map shows many physical and geographical elements (roads, shops, cafes, etc) which best reflect Rina's psychological and emotional situations. In contrast to these very specific geographical illustrations, she has clearly defined, in the center of the picture a blank space which she herself describes as "my personal freedom space" which she views as entirely different from her background with her orthodox religious family in a small settlement in the south of the country.



Rina's map

Ziv's map is very interesting in that it does not refer to a specific city. There are no physical elements to show that this is Tel Aviv – it could be any city. The map is full of squares. Some of the squares are marked with the names of specific places – supermarket, pharmacy, work, etc – and arrows from his home are shown pointing outwards towards these locations. Other squares are shown simply with the word "men", all with arrows leading towards his home. These are symbols of his gay identity in the urban space, very much like Rina's written comment on the blank space on her map.



Ziv's map

On my research on the gay night club i checked the role of the personal bodies of gay men and transgender women in creating "Hetrotopias" in the club spaces. Since my time is limited I will just say that the club in my case study provides a socio-political space which allows people from oppressed groups to have a space for themselves. It is much like the space that people find in the broader scale of the city as shown on the mental maps of Rina and Ziv. For the gay community, the clubs culture, took out the community from dark into light and allows them to express their sexual embodiment even outside the club spaces. It is also challenges the gender perceptions outside of the GLBT community, challenges the hegemonic notion of sex, body and sexuality and provides a safer and more acceptable space not only in the dark halls of the clubs, but also in the streets and during the day time.

4. Conclusion: queering the Representations

In this paper we tried to present and represent different narratives of the city of Tel Aviv, as a *queer* space, in order to be explored from two different and complementary perspectives that illustrated our peculiar points of view and our identities: as “insider”, and “outsider”.

We tried to explore and to show the different ways people might experience the city, whether they are straight or part of LGBTQ community, citizens or foreigners, on purpose to represent and to examine the interesting constructions of this complex multicultural, multisexual and full of different identities space. A *queer* space where hipstersim, metrosexuality and pomosexuality don't crash with fixed border, but share the same space and place, from which everyone can construct an identity in the manner of a collage, or a shuffled playlist of music, that could change anytime: as the *queer* space of Tel Aviv.