

**Gay Bar to Gei Bā, Shots to Shōchū:**  
Comparing NYC and Tokyo's Queer Nightlife Sites

SOC 72500 - Urban Sociology / Spring 2023  
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## I. INTRODUCTION

During the week of this course when we explored the topics of Urban “Culture,” I found myself particularly resonating with the readings on “Nightlife” as an aspect of urban culture. I found the Harvard Business Case Review of the nightclub Marquee of particular interest as I occasionally attended Marquee as a reveler. In the case review, Marquee’s influential main doorman Wass speaks on who he lets into the club each night:

The key... is to make it like a salad. A salad with too many mushrooms isn’t very tasty, a salad with too much lettuce is just lettuce; it’s a nice big mix of all the elements that make a delicious salad. So we’re talking about some of the gay crowd, some of the Upper East Side crowd, some of the trendy crowd, very heavy sprinkling of the model crowd, just so that there’s not too much of one thing. That can be very boring. My goal is to make it a mixed salad every night of the week (Elberse et al. 7)

In Wass’s metaphor, members of the “gay crowd” are mushrooms, and “too many” of them makes a salad that “isn’t very tasty.” Although the statement seems to portray Marquee as an inclusive space for queer-identifying people, I found Wass’s statement revealing of a tokenizing attitude that regards queer people as props for the enrichment of a heterocentric social milieu. Indeed, I remember Marquee and the “club row” of West 27th Street to be particularly homophobic.

I moved to New York City in 2005, and I was particularly drawn to its queer club scene. I identify as a gay man, and suffice to say I spent many nights in New York City gay bars and clubs from 2005 to about 2009, at which time the after effects of the 2008 economic recession altered the nightlife landscape, resulting in the closure of high-rolling bottle-service style clubs, and an emergence of speakeasy style bars emphasizing bartenders as taste-makers and artisanal craft-style cocktails, typified at the time by the venues *Milk and Honey* and *Death & Co.* Prior to this shift, however, the “club row” of W. 27th St. in Manhattan was NYC’s eminent nightlife hotspot, and Amanda Lepore was the center of the queer nightlife scene. Amanda Lepore, at the time was known as the “world’s most famous transsexual,” and was the center of a queer party “circuit.” I remember reading an article in the Village Voice where Michael Musto declared her New York’s “downtown it girl” and Tinsley Mortimer the “it girl” of the uptown. Unfortunately I can’t find the citation. Each night of the week, Amanda would show up as a host at a given club with a few free bottles of vodka and some mixers, and her coterie of club kids and hangers-ons would dutifully sit around her and drink from her bottles. During my time on the “circuit,” I remember attending Amanda’s Sunday party “Hiro” at the Maritime Hotel in the Meatpacking District, her Tuesday party “Beige” at B Bar on Bowery, her Wednesday party at Cain on W. 27th St., and her Friday party at Marquee, also on W. 27th St. I don’t remember if she had a Thursday party, and on Saturdays you took the night off because that was when the “bridge and tunnel” crowd were out.

When Amanda was hosting, it was easy to get in the club as a visibly queer man. You would tell the doorman you were on Amanda’s list, and they would let you in. But when Amanda wasn’t hosting, no chance. The spaces were not amenable to queer identities and bodies the other days of the week. Even within the clubs on the nights I was allowed inside, there was

potential for homophobia from club staff or patrons. The further the radius one was from Amanda's bottle, the less safe the club became. I can recall being called homophobic slurs by other club goers, being ignored or denied service by bartenders, and having my behavior monitored and policed by club security when using the toilet. I was once using the toilet at the club Lotus in the Meatpacking District when security kicked the door of the stall in and physically removed me from the club because they thought I had entered the stall with another person, despite it being evident after the door was kicked in that I was in the stall alone. Despite these homophobic aggressions, every week I kept coming back. I know the allure and power that nightlife has on the queer psyche.

This project emerged from my desire to explore my personal connection to the queer nightlife space as a site of both community building and of identity formation and maintenance. I will be comparing sites of queer nightlife in New York City and Tokyo first in terms of history and culture using traditional academic texts and ethnographic accounts drawn from these texts and first person video logs from YouTube. Secondly, I will use mapping data to compare these sites in terms of quantity, location, and density. Analysis of these comparisons will reveal that differing historical influences and sociocultural attitudes towards homosexuality between New York City and Tokyo have resulted in different urban layouts of these city's queer nightlife sites. The city of Tokyo has been chosen as a foil for NYC due to its positioning as a cultural capital of the East.

## II. QUEER NIGHTLIFE HISTORY AND CULTURE

Prior to WWII, in both America and Japan, we see male sexuality organized differently than our current conception of sexuality as a homosexual/heterosexual binary. In his seminal work *Gay New York*, George Chauncey "argues that in important respects the hetero-homosexual binaries, the sexual regime now hegemonic in American culture, is a stunningly recent creation" (13). Prior to the emergence of the contemporary binary categorizations of male sexuality, we see same sex behavior in America conceptualized as "queerness" or "perversion," rather than as an identity. Chauncey writes that prior to the emergence of a codified homosexual identity:

The abnormality (or "queerness") of the "fairy," that is, was defined as much by his "woman-like" character or "effeminacy" as his solicitation of male sexual partners; the "man" who responded to his solicitations—no matter how often—was not considered abnormal, a "homosexual," so long as he abided by masculine gender conventions.

Indeed the centrality of effeminacy to the representation of the "fairy" allowed many conventionally masculine men, especially unmarried men living in sex-segregated immigrant communities, to engage in extensive sexual activity with other men without risking stigmatization and the loss of their status as "normal men." (13)

We see a similar organization of male sexuality in Japan. McLelland writes that during the Edo period (1600-1867), "there was no necessary connection made between gender and sexual preference, because men, samurai in particular, were able to engage in both same- and opposite-sex affairs" (16). "Edo-period sexual culture was phallocentric and organized around an active/passive polarity—that is, one sexual act was of overwhelming significance: penetration by a

penis” (17). Thus, we find prewar male sexuality in both America and Japan following a somewhat gendered binary; rather than both participants of a same sex act being identified as “homosexual,” one active partner was considered masculine and normative, and the other passive partner was deemed feminine and “perverse.”

Following WWII we see the emergence of the modern conceptualization of homosexual identity in both America and Japan, though with variance. Chauncey writes that in America, “the transition from one sexual regime to the next was an uneven process, marked by significant class and ethnic differences” (13). However, what eventually emerged was “a reorganization of male sexual categories and the transition from a world divided into “fairies” and “men” on the basis of gender persona to one divided into “homosexuals” and “heterosexuals” on the basis of sexual object-choice” (358). McLelland notes a “similar process” taking place in Japan which he attributes to a diversity and change in sexual practices between Japanese men, but the author cautions that the trajectory of the concept of *gei* (gay) in Japan developed differently from its English homophone due to cultural reasons (77).

It is within this environment of shifting norms surrounding same-sex practices and identity in the post-war era of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s that we see the genesis of gay bars in New York City and Tokyo with some structural dissimilarities. Chauncey delineates this connection in New York City thusly, writing:

Perhaps the most telling evidence of the new sexual and cultural patterns was that growing numbers of bars served homosexuals exclusively... As more gay men identified themselves as homosexuals interested in *other* men who were homosexuals, bars where they could meet one another became more attractive than bars where they could meet trade (358-9).

The term “trade” in this passage refers to a partner in a same-sex act; thus, the quote is implying that bars serving homosexuals were now fomenting the creation of a homosexual identity rather than merely facilitating sexual acts between patrons. In Japan during this time we see the “*gei bā*” developing from an established Japanese brothel system in connection with the developing “postwar homosexual scene” (McLelland 78). Structurally, these “*gei bā*” were more similar to the Japanese *danshoku kissaten* (coffee shops) and *sakaba* (drinking spots) that facilitated prostitution than their American analogs: “...by the early 1950s the bars were staffed by between three and seven professional hosts, known as *gei bōi*, who served drinks and provided conversation for customers, often making themselves available for after-hours assignations” (78). In 1956, Japanese women’s groups successfully forced the government to pass an anti-prostitution bill. The passage of this bill had a huge effect on the *gei bā*, resulting in a proliferation of these venues due to a less severe prosecution of homosexual prostitution than of heterosexual prostitution (McLelland 106). This is when we see the neighborhood of Shinjuku Ni-chōme transition from a heterosexual red-light district to the gay neighborhood that it is today. Additionally, due to the policing of heterosexual prostitution, these *gei bā* that more structurally resembled traditional Japanese brothels rather than what one might consider a western style bar began to draw clientele from outside the “homosexual world.” “*Gei bā* were no longer catering to an exclusively male (or homosexual) clientele but also provided companionship for women... The growing popularity of the *gei bā* among a more mainstream

clientele makes it difficult to equate these institutions with the developing gay bar subculture in the United States or other western countries" (McLelland 107).

We see a further difference between the politicization of gay identities in America and Japan. Although gay and lesbian activism was present prior to the Stonewall Riots of June 1969, these riots are attributed with crystallizing the American homosexual identity into a political one. These riots were a direct response to the hostile policing of homosexual behavior at the Stonewall Inn, a New York City gay bar. As for the immediate impacts of the riots, Poehlmann writes,

For LGBT people living in Greenwich Village, the Stonewall Riots were life changing. Many of them had participated, of course, but even among those who had not protested, there was a profound change in attitude. Their community had succeeded and bested the police. This accomplishment encouraged a new sense of confidence and hope for the future. (74)

The Stonewall Riots are attributed to the foundation of the Gay Pride movement, commemorated in New York City annually by a parade and celebration on the date of the riot's anniversary, and to "the rise of radical politics in LGBT activist circles, leading to a fundamental shift in how such organizations function" (93). Indeed, one can tie a direct line from this activism to the nation-wide recognition of same-sex marriage in America with the Supreme Court's landmark ruling in the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case. In Japan, a similar gay and lesbian liberation movement did not occur due to a lack of institutionalized persecution of homosexuality:

The Stonewall rebellion, that iconic event in which U.S. sexual minorities first glimpsed that they had the power to overturn the legal, medical, and religious discrimination that sought to contain them, could not have eventuated in Japan, where the *gei bōi* was a public entertainer, not a subcultural pariah, and where regular masculine-identified homosexual men could carry on discreet sex lives largely ignored by authorities.

(McLelland 160-1)

Although modes of homosexual organization and activism emerged later in Japan, it is the only country in the G7, a group of the world's major industrialized countries, that today does not legally recognize same-sex marriages or civil unions.

Despite structural differences between New York City and Tokyo gay bars and the politicization of queer identity in the countries of America and Japan, these sites exist as important loci for community building, identity formation and maintenance, and activism. The value of these spaces can be best read from ethnographic accounts. We see all of these utilities in an account of the Clit Club, a "queer, sex-positive women's club night" in the Meatpacking District of New York City that ran from 1990 to 2000 which "brought together communities that were largely underserved by the surrounding gay nightlife of the time" (Tolentino et al. 469). The following passage elucidates how the space directly engaged in both community building and activism:

The relationships, meeting points, and links between the Clit Club and caregiving and support systems for friends with HIV and AIDS might be understood as webs of care, by which people and methods traveled in and out of many sites and spaces. Many friend of the Clit Club were AIDS activists trained in passive resistance, as well as registered nurses, emergency responders, people working on the front lines of providing support to

LGBTQ youth, and people involved with harm reduction approaches to drug use and safer-sex organizing. The Clit Club was a space where such different lines of experience moved, and their struggles were acknowledged and supported. (472)

Aldo Hernandez, a Clit Club DJ, elaborates that, “The activism of [ACT UP and its subgroups, like Art+Positive] was an integral part of our parties, and was reflected in the safe-sex posters we pinned up, and the prophylactics and reading material we distributed” (481). At a time when New York City’s queer community was contending with the devastations of the HIV/AIDS crisis, queer nightlife spaces were integral to confronting and mitigating the dire circumstances of those times. Queer nightlife spaces also have positive impacts on their surrounding communities. In an account of *Queer Spaces*, an activist art project by the collective REPOhistory, participants recall the undertaking of placing a historical marker at the site of the now-shuttered Everard, a gay bathhouse:

...we were eyed suspiciously by the owner of a small family luncheonette. Assuming that he or his regular customers would be offended by the reference to a notorious bathhouse and pull the sign down, we decided to try and gain his sympathy by showing him our permit and explaining our “art project.” To our considerable surprise, he not only remembered the Everard but reminisced fondly about how much safer the street was late at night, and how much brisker his father’s business, when the Everard’s gay clientele was drawn to the neighborhood. (Hertz, et al. 366)

In this narrative it is evidenced that a queer nightlife space was a boon to a neighborhood’s well-being and economy.

We see a similar utility of queer spaces in Japan. In a 1955 account of “Lifestyles in the Gay Bars” Kabiya Kazuhiko writes that “gay bars are places of real comfort and shared pleasure for their customers” (117). Forty years later, in the 1995 account “True Tales From Ni-chōme,” Otsuka Takashi, a prominent figure in Tokyo’s gay scene, offers a critique of those maligning Japan’s lack of a politicized homosexual identity that also establishes Ni-chōme as an important site of queer community:

It is true, though, that Ni-chōme does not possess an organized system for critiquing hetero society, or voicing dissent against its norms, so gay lib should be valued as a mean for pursuing these goals. However, the tendency of gay lib to deny significant aspects of Ni-chōme just because Ni-chōme lacks organized systems of political critique is unjustified. On the contrary, Ni-chōme is valuable as a place where many gay people can liberate themselves and establish important relationships. (259)

The value of Ni-chōme to queer identity creation and maintenance can also be read in Baudinette’s investigation of the neighborhood’s Linguistic Landscape. Baudinette posits, “space is central to the processes of identity formation explicitly tied to sexual desire... I suggest that many of the identities I explore are in fact constructed through a circular engagement with the self, language ideology, and the spatial environment” (240). To Baudinette, Ni-chōme is a “queer space” described as “the liminal space which emerges through social processes that challenge the default nature of public space as implicitly heteronormative” (242). Interestingly, these accounts of queer spaces in Japan locate queer identity production and maintenance agentically as an affinity with ideals in contrast to the American accounts which locate the same identity production and maintenance structurally in opposition with institutions.

The importance of queer spaces directly correlates to the inherent homophobia in contemporary American and Japanese culture. Hartless connects the rise of queer spaces in opposition to heteronormativity: “Because heterosexuality and gender conformity are treated as natural, LGBTQ people have traditionally been viewed as polluting the public sphere” (1036). In response to the difficulties of managing a queer identity within such a heteronormative, and thus homophobic, public sphere, Hartless continues that:

LGBTQ folks have constructed their own social spaces, such as the gay bars which began to emerge in urban queer enclaves around the turn of the 20th century. These bars have traditionally served as ‘third places’ where LGBTQ people have found protection from the homophobia that they encounter in the public and private sphere, making them vital sites of resistance for the LGBTQ community. (1037)

Anyone looking for evidence of America as a heteronormative culture these days can simply look at the news on any given day. In a *New York Times* article dated April 20, 2023, Dr. Nathaniel Frank, the director of the What We Know Project at Cornell University’s Center for the Study of Inequality discusses the impacts of Florida’s recently implemented “Don’t Say Gay” law. Frank writes about “Don’t Say Gay” that, “scientific research has linked the gag order’s implicit message of exclusion, shame and unworthiness to tangible harms for LGBTQ youth” (1). Heteronormativity has also resulted in homophobia in Japanese society. In the YouTube video log “What Japanese Think of LGBT People (Interview),” eight non-queer identifying Japanese people are asked a series of questions about homosexuality in Japan. I have transcribed the responses to the question “Do you think life is easy or hard for LGBT people in Japan?” because I find them particularly revealing of normative Japanese attitudes regarding homosexuality:

*Interviewer: Do you think life is easy or hard for LGBT people in Japan?*

Person 1: I think life is hard. There are restrictions to getting married. For example, if two people want to move in together, they can’t get a joint mortgage unless they’re married. I think it’s hard because of the legal restrictions.

P2: I think it’s hard.

P3: Mhmm.

P2: Because same-sex marriage isn’t recognized.

*I: Why isn’t it recognized?*

P3: Prejudice.

P2: The low birthrate and aging population. Maybe that’s why.

P4: I think it’s still pretty easy. There are gay bars and things so they have places to go.

P5: I think it’s pretty hard. I see it a lot on Twitter, where people mention it’s hard. I think young people don’t mind, but older people can be pretty prejudiced.

*I: Do you think age affects how accepting you are?*

P5: Quite a bit. Even with my mom, whenever the topic comes up she frowns upon it. So I think that’s where the difference is.

P6: I think that even among younger people, there are many people who discriminate. On Instagram, I saw a celebrity make a post encouraging people to stop discriminating against the LGBT community because it's so common in Japan. I realized it happens a lot.

P7: It's hard. Compared to other countries. For example, in drama series on TV, they aren't represented at all. And that's because they will be treated as a weirdo. In Western TV series, you would always have a black, white, and a gay person.

P8: I think it's still quite hard. There are still many people who have prejudices. Just because they are "different," it may be hard for people to accept them. As a result, it's not as bad as verbal abuse, but they might say something that is discriminatory. I think this still exists.

Seven of the eight respondents to this informal survey recognize difficulties for those with a queer identity living in Japanese society, touching on such harms as legal and economic discrimination, lack of representation in Japanese media, and prejudicial cultural attitudes. The one response to not acknowledge such hardships blithely mentions gay bars as the only recourse for making life for LGBT people in Japan easy.

Before I present the mapping data for the queer nightlife sites in New York City and Tokyo it will be of use to delineate the specific cultural practices of the Japanese gay bar in contrast to that of a western one. In his "A Quick Guide to Japanese Gay Bars," anthropologist Marcello Francioni distinguishes between two types of gay bars in Japan. The first type he refers to as "shot bars": "Also known as Western-style bars or pubs, here customers order their drinks and pay as soon as they get served, and no cover charge is applied. Shot bars are rather spacious and often work as dance pubs, too" (4). He refers to the second type of bar simply as "gay bars":

The second category is Japanese-style gay bars. There is a lot of them: For every shot bar, it's safe to say there are at least eight gay bars. Customers here, especially regulars, don't order single drinks, but buy a whole bottle and have it kept for them at the bar. The most popular spirits are whiskey and shochu, a kind of distilled liquor. Every time these regulars visit, they can get as many drinks as they want from their bottle for a set price, which is paid at the end. The charge includes snacks, *otoshi* (a homemade side-dish), and beverages to be mixed with the bottle. (5)

Furthermore, at the Japanese-style gay bars, "...rigid etiquette required staff members to toast and drink with the customers, for the most part Japanese, male-bodied and gay, and to entertain them across the counter through conversation, karaoke, and drinking games for hours at times. Entertainment by the staff counted as much, if not more, than the drinking at these venues" (Francioni 3, 2023). Japanese bars also differ from American ones in terms of physical size and arrangement. During a trip to Japan, journalist Jim Nawrocki discovers that, "most of the bars are hidden-away pockets, small rooms, really, that seat perhaps fifteen people at the most" (1). He also remarks upon the bars' arrangement:

In the typical Japanese urban center, bars, clubs, and restaurants are usually arranged vertically, with several alcove-like establishments per floor on successive levels. Visitors

are advised to “look up” if they want to be sure of finding their destination, and even with detailed directions and maps, it usually takes a while to locate a particular spot among the seemingly hundreds of individual names stacked on the thin, ladder-like vertical neon signs. (1)

These signs are of particular interest to Baudinette, who attributes them with creating the primary Linguistic Landscape of Shinjuku Ni-chōme’s queer space. The following passage from him provides an apt visual depiction of this space:

Ni-chōme is a former residential area situated to the east of Shinjuku Station in central Tokyo that was repurposed into a nightlife district by gay male entrepreneurs during the early 1960s. As such, this district of approximately 400 m<sup>2</sup> contains numerous former apartment complexes which have been converted into high-rise buildings containing small gay bars that cater to a clientele of ten customers at a time. Attached to these high-rise buildings are small signs that advertise the existence of gay bars... Typically, the signs just depict the name of the bar and only occasionally contain extra information such as the Type of bar or opening hours... (244)

### III. MAPPING DATA

Mapping data was collected via two online resources:

1. New York City site data was collected using *Get Out!* magazine. *Get Out!* is a twice-monthly gay city guide: “Featuring content from the hottest gay and gay-friendly spots in New York, each (free!) issue of *Get Out!* Highlights the bars, nightclubs, restaurants, spas and other businesses throughout NYC’s metropolitan area that the city’s gay population is interested in” ([getoutmag.com](http://getoutmag.com)). *Get Out!* is available as a digital copy via its website free as a print issue in gay and lesbian bars around the city and in vending boxes on the street in neighborhoods with higher densities of gay and lesbian establishments.
2. Tokyo site data was collected using *GClick*, an online directory described as “a gay yellow page where you can search for gay information” ([gclick.jp](http://gclick.jp)). *GClick*’s text is Japanese, and was translated for me using Google Translate.

Site data from *Get Out!* magazine was collected using their “nyc bars/clubs” map (Figure 1), a comprehensive source for stand-alone queer bars and clubs in New York City. Site data from *GClick* was collected by cross tabulating for the prefecture

FIGURE 1 - NEW YORK CITY GAY BARS FROM *GET OUT!*



“Tokyo” and the site genre “gay bar” using the websites “Search from map” tab. Addresses for these sites were then located on New York City and Tokyo city maps a red “pinpoints” using GIS programs.

FIGURE 2 - NEW YORK CITY GAY BARS

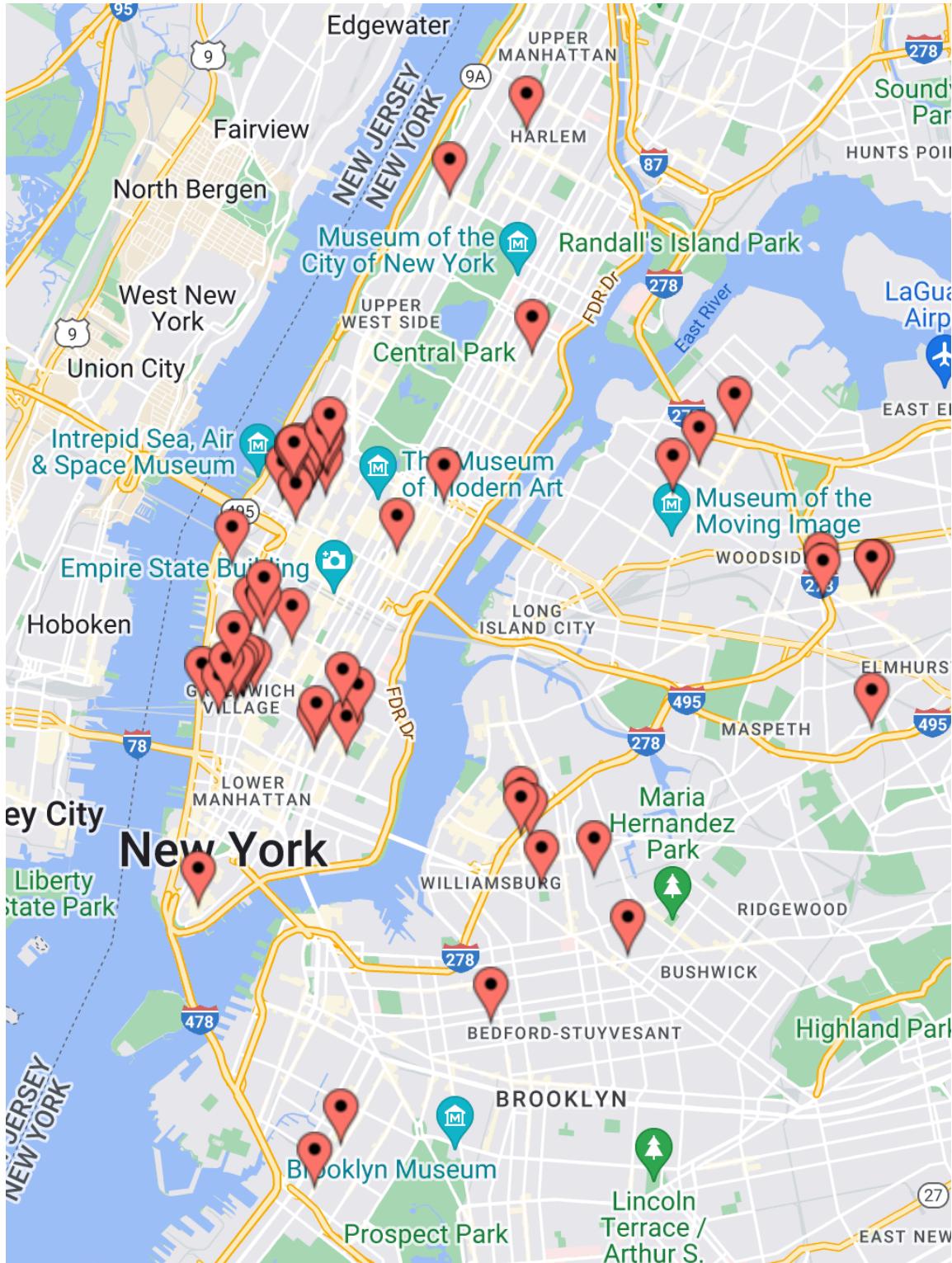
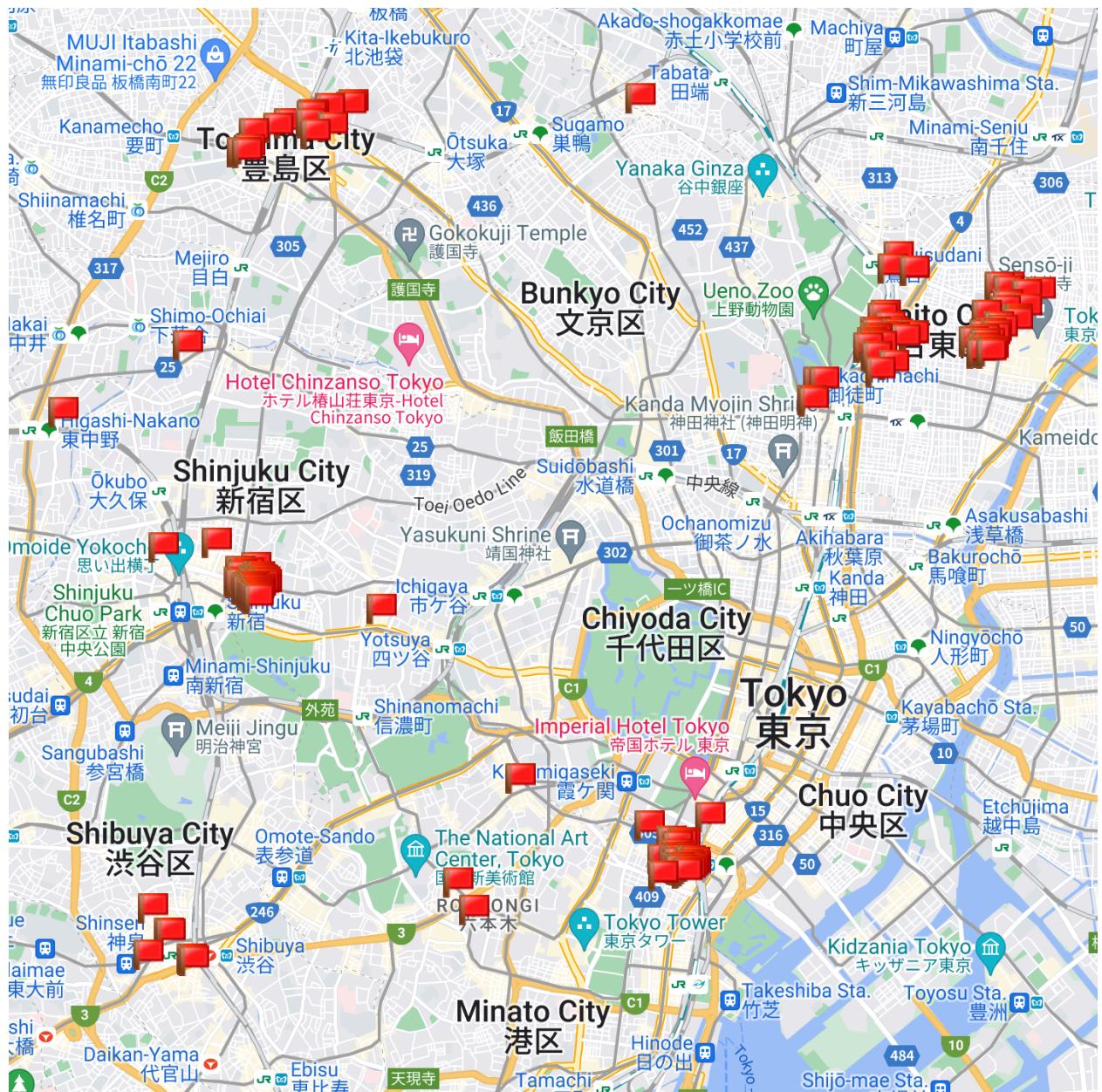
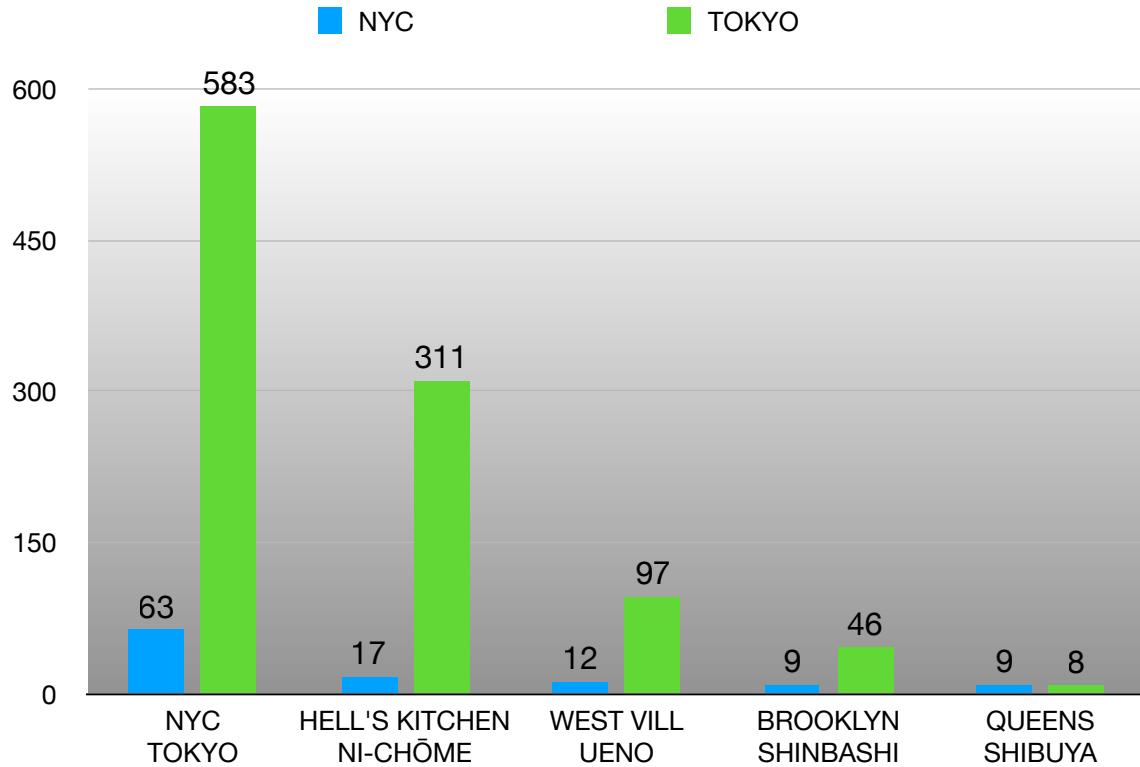


FIGURE 3 - CENRAL TOKYO GAY BARS



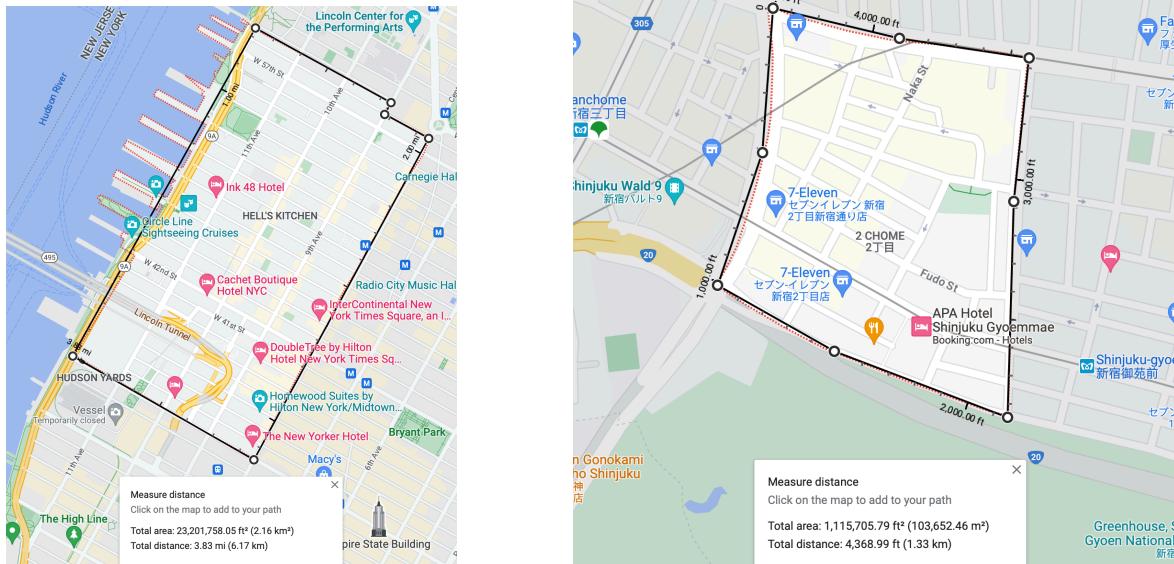
Comparing our maps of NYC and Tokyo (Figures 2 and 3) we see differences in queer nightlife sites in terms of quantity, location and density. As we can see from the following chart (Figure 4), Tokyo has a vastly larger quantity of gay bars than New York City. Tokyo has 583 gay bars as compared to NYC's 63. The chart also compares the quantity of gay bars between NYC and Tokyo's four city areas with the most number of gay bars. We see that Tokyo's areas have by far more gay bars than NYC's: 311 in Shinjuku Ni-Chōme compared to 17 in Hell's Kitchen, 97 in Ueno compared to 12 in the West Village, and 46 in Shinbashi compared to 9 in Brooklyn.

FIGURE 4 - NYC AND TOKYO GAY BARS BY QUANTITY



There are also perceived differences in location and density. In New York City we see gay bars spread throughout the map and at a lower density throughout the neighborhoods. In Tokyo we see gay bars concentrated heavily in the following four neighborhoods at a much higher density: Shinjuku Ni-chōme, Ueno, Shinbashi, and Shibuya. Each of these neighborhoods is a commuter hub, with nearby large, heavily trafficked train stations.

FIGURE 5 - HK AND NI-CHŌME AREA MAPS



I have used the above google maps (Figure 5) to calculate the total area for Hell's Kitchen and Shinjuku Ni-Chōme, the neighborhoods with the greatest quantity of gay bars in NYC and Tokyo respectively, finding an area of 2.16 km<sup>2</sup> for Hell's Kitchen and an area of 0.104 km<sup>2</sup> for Shinjuku Ni-Chōme. If we divide the number of gay bars in each neighborhood by the area in km<sup>2</sup>, we find Hell's Kitchen has an average of 7.4 gay bars per km<sup>2</sup> and that Shinjuku Ni-chōme has an average of 2,990 gay bars per km<sup>2</sup>. The difference in these densities is quite shocking, indicating a vastly greater density of gay bars in Shinjuku Ni-Chōme than in Hell's Kitchen. This density can be more greatly observed in the following maps of Hell's Kitchen and Shinjuku's queer nightlife sites (Figures 6 and 7). Note that each point on the Shinjuku map (Figure 7) represents only an address location for queer nightlife site, and that an address location on this map may contain multiple queer nightlife sites.

FIGURE 6 - HELL'S KITCHEN GAY BARS

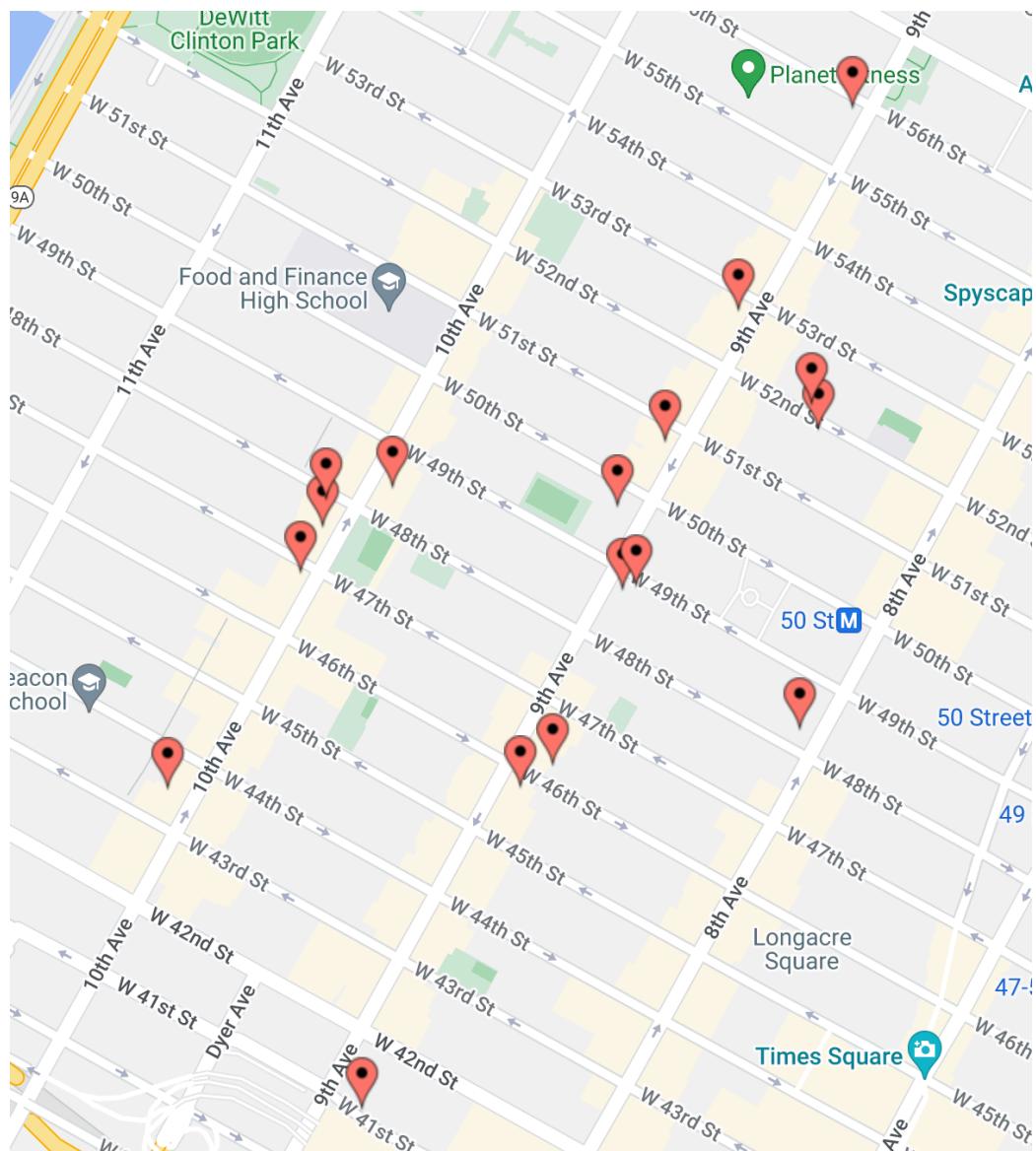
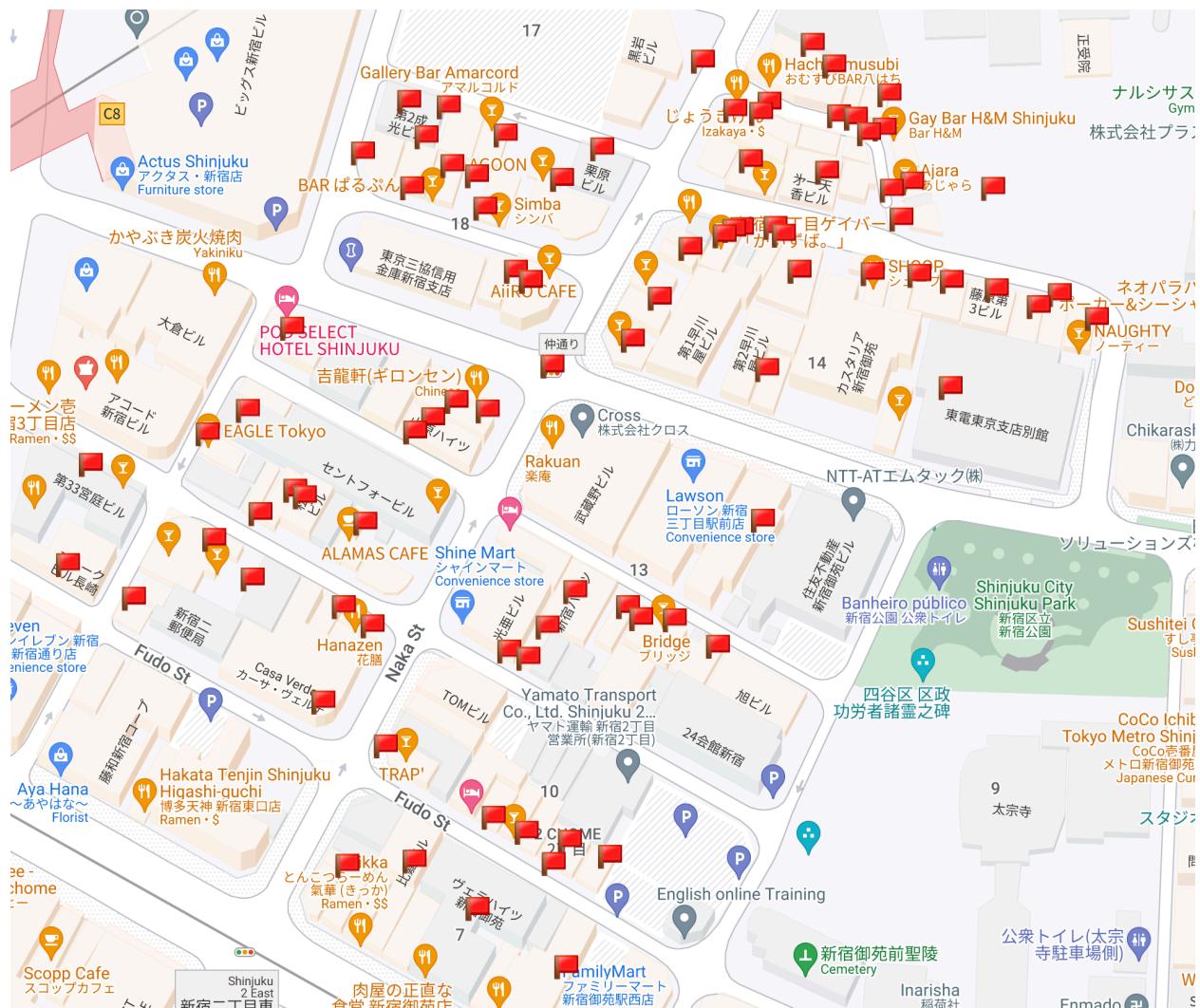


FIGURE 7 - SHINJUKU NI-CHŌME GAY BARS



## CONCLUSION

Due to the differing historical and sociocultural contexts regarding homosexual identity in America and Japan, New York City and Tokyo queer nightlife sites differ structurally in terms of economic set-up, etiquette, and physical size and geographically in terms of quantity, layout, and density. In Japan, a lack of institutionalized political and religious discrimination towards homosexual behavior resulted in traditional Japanese-style gay bars generating as off-shoots from sites of Japanese heterosexual prostitution following its criminalization in 1956. This lack of discrimination also resulted in a reduced politicization of the homosexual identity in Japan, as opposed to the radicalization of homosexual identity in America following the Stonewall Riots, typified by the Gay Pride movement and its slogan “Out and Proud” and activist organizations such as ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) and its slogan “The Personal is Political.” Due to a reduced politicization of homosexual identity in Japan, to this day many Japanese must compartmentalize their queer identity and remain “closeted” while at work, school, or with

family. This compartmentalization of queer identity directly results in queer nightlife sites in Tokyo being smaller, more numerous, and more densely located near commuter hubs as a way for queer Japanese people to be discrete about this identity and maintain its compartmentalization. In New York City, where there is more openness with regards to queer identities, we see queer nightlife sites more dispersed throughout the city, acting as community and neighborhood watering holes and gathering spots.

My hope with a project such as this is always to promote institutional equality and tolerance in America, Japan, and worldwide. I must, however, resist the temptations of ethnocentrism in assuming that our American identity politics are somehow in greater service of such goals than other political forms. Indeed, given the rampant homophobia and transphobia of the American political Right, with American identity politics it sometimes feels like one step forward and two steps back. If nothing else, a takeaway from this project is that queer nightlife spaces should be cherished as bright spots for our communities regardless of culture or nation.

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