**Hidden Constellations**

**Mapped and Unmapped Queer Sapphic Space in NYC**

[小字]Note: The term 'sapphic' is used in this project to describe individuals who experience emotional, romantic, sensual, or sexual attraction to women or non-men. It intentionally includes people across diverse gender identities and orientations, such as nonbinary individuals and asexual people who feel romantic or emotional connections toward women or non-men.

New York City has more than 250,000 bars.

[1，右侧：纽约市范围地图+顺直酒吧layer]

Of those, only 57 explicitly serve LGBTQ+ communities

[2，右侧：纽约市范围地图+LGBTQ酒吧layer]

And only 4 are officially lesbian bars.

[3，右侧：更缩小范围地图+lesbian酒吧layer]

**Absent, or Unheard?**

At first glance, the data tells us a stark story: the presence of queer sapphic communities is vanishing.

But is that the full story? Or is it simply the story that’s easy to count?

Tati, an active sapphic community member and artist, speaks to the difference it makes when a space is designed with queer sapphic in mind:

*“It’s different having something sapphic... more comfort to be around people who are consciously excluding themselves from patriarchy—rather than being in a space where queerness still includes men.”* — Tati

[4，右侧：纽约范围地图+lesbian酒吧layer]

From 1977 to 1992, lesbian bars in the U.S. rose briefly—then rapidly declined. The numbers suggest collapse. But part of that collapse was already written into how the data was collected.

[5，右侧：地图消失；出现一张从左至右出现的折线图

As sociologist Greggor Mattson notes, the national bar guides tracking queer spaces were produced by all-male teams until the early ‘90s. Lesbian bars were likely undercounted—not absent, just unacknowledged. A woman’s guide didn’t appear until 1990. Before that, lesbian life largely existed in the margins of male-centric records.

The maps we inherit often reflect the eyes that made them.

[5，标明几个重要的时间点]

**Beyond Nightlife**

Gwendolyn Stegall has compiled a database that documents the opening and closing of queer sapphic’s spaces in New York City, including bars, events, and pop-ups, over decades. This new map not only traces the flux of bar spaces, but also broadens the narrative beyond nightlife persistence.

Still, the data reflects certain biases.  
The presence or absence of bars often says more about what was documented than what actually existed. For example, the notable cluster of Harlem bars in the 1930s appears largely due to the inclusion of the *Map of Harlem Night Spots Frequented by African American Lesbians in the 1930s and 1940s*, from *The Other Black Woman*.

[5，右侧：地图再次出现；纽约范围地图+lesbian space layer，根据’decade’做成可以交互的时间轴，每10年为一单位，数据点根据’category code’显示不同的颜色]

**There are limits to what maps can show**

Maps don’t reveal who felt welcome, who felt priced out, or who chose not to enter.

*“When I talk about money... I’m not earning a steady paycheck yet, so that definitely shapes the kinds of places I end up going to and what feels accessible to me right now.”*— Alex

They can’t capture how someone adjusts their posture, or who hesitates at the door.

*“I attend women’s and non-binary community events in my friend’s living rooms near K-Town or in Brooklyn, making me feel safe and comfortable.”* — Kloe, a non-binary lesbian

Some places feel safe, others don’t. But maps aren’t sensitive to atmosphere. They don’t read discomfort, silence, or relief.

*“There’s something comforting about going to an intentionally sapphic space, where everyone knows why they’re there—even if it’s unspoken.”* — Esha​

Access is shaped by more than geography. It depends on cost, gender expression, social dynamics, and who’s already present.

Maps record presence. But they can’t show how space feels.

[6，地图消失；全屏文字居中]

**Why Queer Sapphic Spatiality Matters**

The scarcity of lesbian bars, and the way they’ve been tracked, remembered, or omitted, points to a deeper issue: queer sapphic have rarely been centered in spatial narratives.  
In queer culture, sapphic individuals are often peripheral to spaces dominated by gay male visibility. In mainstream feminist spaces, queerness is frequently sidelined. For many queer sapphic, neither world feels fully theirs.  
This double exclusion doesn’t lead to absence. Instead, it leads to adaptation. Their spatial practices are often quieter and more flexible, shaped through negotiation rather than immediate recognition. What they do often appears coded, relational, and subtle—never simply absent.

[7，左侧文字，右侧：两个图层叠合的照片，拖动轴可以左右对比现在和过去，照片下方有注解文字]

**Positioned by Experience**

These complex negotiations don’t stem from theory alone—they come from lived experiences.

Different people’s perception of "spatial boundaries" comes from their experiential positions (gender presentation, family, class, race, immigrant background)

[8，全屏文字]

These drawings—some crowded, some nearly blank—reflect how each person approaches the idea of space.  
They do not map where they went, but how they move, hesitate, remember, or hold back.

* Someone grew up in a family environment that discourages expression. She is used to taking a step back, not speaking up, and not entering public queer spaces, even though she cares about the existence of these spaces. For her, "non-participation" is also a response to space.
* Someone carries a deep body memory of "female behavior" from East Asian culture. She manages her queer visibility in space with her sitting posture, clothing, and tattoos, relaxing in familiar occasions and remaining vague in unfamiliar spaces.
* Someone realized her queer identity very early and is more familiar with how to move freely in the city. She does not rely on formal queer places, but believes that the atmosphere and experience generated in relationships allow her to "make places queer."
* Someone is active in queer nightlife and sees the power inequality in it. She actively reconstructs space through drag king performances, community activities, etc., to resist the male-dominated or gender-exclusive structure in queer places.
* Some people participated in the construction of sapphic-only spaces as community organizers, and at the same time reflected on the formation mechanism of thresholds: price, atmosphere, and way of speaking all effect who can stay. Her spatial awareness is clearly critical and is constantly adjusting.

[9，左侧文字，右侧：展示每位受访者的 map 缩略图阵列（首选是缩略图 + first-name initials + one-word feeling tag）。鼠标 hover 或点击可以展开整张图 + 简短文字介绍（可由你写一句“this map reflects…”）]

Queer sapphic are not a naturally united group, they must first "perceive each other", which is itself part of the spatial practice. These internalized spatial logics form invisible maps—maps shaped not by streets, but by silence, memory, and resistance.

[10，左侧文字，右侧：还是map缩略图阵列不变]

Yet even when places overlap, experiences rarely do.

Take the West Village, home to two of Manhattan's remaining lesbian bars.

For some, it offers a rare sense of recognition—a place where sapphic belonging feels assumed rather than negotiated.  
For others, it carries the weight of cost barriers, shifting atmospheres, and a growing sense of distance from what was once imagined.

[10.1，左侧文字，右侧：地图+叠的handdrawn\_overlay map.png ←这个overlap范围和那个黑线的地图底图一模一样，用一样的方法叠就行]

Public spaces, too, unfold differently depending on who enters.

In Prospect Park, the wide lawns and wooded paths feel expansive to some, offering a rare softness in the urban fabric.  
To others, the park’s openness comes with ambiguity: safety changes with time of day, weather, and who else claims the space.

These differences don’t cancel each other out.  
They weave a richer, messier tapestry of what "queer space" means in practice—not as a fixed category, but as a constantly shifting field of negotiation, memory, and relation.

[10.2，左侧文字，右侧：地图+叠的handdrawn\_overlay map.png]

**Different scales, different practice**

These layered experiences remind us that queer space is not just a matter of location, but of how people navigate, reshape, and quietly remake the spaces around them.  
Scale matters, but so do gestures—both the visible acts of claiming space and the quieter adjustments that allow one to stay.

This tension between visibility and silence plays out not just across identities, but across space itself.

* Some take on the role of creating space—structuring gatherings, shaping tone, and setting the terms of presence.
* Others move more cautiously, entering spaces and waiting to feel them out before choosing to stay.
* Some shift between roles, both organizing and observing, navigating what’s expected and what’s possible.

But claiming space isn’t always large-scale. It also happens in subtle, everyday gestures. For many, the work happens in the smallest gestures: a posture adjusted, a gaze avoided, or speaking out in cyberspace.

These practices are relational. They take shape not in isolation, but through reading others, being read, and adjusting in response.

[11，左侧文字，右侧：icon legend 1，是一张png]

**How do they negotiate border power?**

Some leave frat parties to escape objectification; some retreat from gay bars where women still feel peripheral. Others explore how to speak and listen in ways that gently redraw the lines of intimacy. Boundaries aren’t fixed—they’re felt, renegotiated, even deferred.

Boundaries are not binary, they are a process of repeated negotiation, perception, and even delay

These negotiations are not just about self-protection, but about creating new scales

[12，左侧文字，右侧：icon legend 2，是一张png]

**Becoming Constellations**

* Jean’s transition from bar to drag king is to create a performance space that is not driven by the male gaze
* Jesse uses MOOR to weave a spatial protocol so that silent people can speak
* Alex feels "queer moments" when riding subway and chatting in the living room
* J seldom entered a lesbian bar or came out publicly, but every time she exits is political: she is guarding a possibility
* Kloe reflects on the sense of belonging of "relationship rather than space" in feminist group

These people do not belong to a unified group, but they form a non-linear, mutually responsive constellation

not represent, but resonate

[13，左侧文字，右侧：icon legend 3，是一张png]

**The Politics of Mapping**

A map is not just where someone has been. It’s where someone was willing to claim presence.  
Some maps are nearly blank—not because nothing happened, but because no place felt nameable.  
Others overflow with fragments: street corners, memories, a look exchanged.

[14，左侧文字，右侧：两张受访者绘制的地图图片并列对比]

As a practice of social-spatial identity, the map itself is a spatial practice.

Mapping is not just a representational tool. It is a political decision: what gets included, what remains unsaid, and how presence is defined through the act of drawing.

If absence is political, then so is drawing it.

[15，左侧文字，右侧：地图+手绘GIF+ data layer←这里的data是之前时间轴2020s的那波，GIF在上，或者如果很难做就直接只是地图+循环GIF]

**What is the future?**

While many mourn the disappearance of lesbian bars, a better future may not lie in simply restoring what was lost, but in expanding what counts.

Several interviewees imagine queer futures rooted not just in nightlife, but in the everyday:  
a shared house near Rockaway beach for surf meetups and cookouts; informal sports groups where anyone can show up and play without knowing the right people; and systems of sharing that don’t rely on being in the right bar at the right time.

[16，左侧文字，右侧：地图+手绘PNG，关data layer]

Quote of Julia’s dream

[17，左侧文字，右侧：地图+手绘PNG zoom in到rockaway beach]

These spaces don’t always announce themselves. They emerge in activity, relationship, and rhythm. As one interviewee put it:

*“I don’t want to have to seek out queer spaces, they should appear around me.”​*

[18，左侧文字，右侧：地图+icon on map PNG+手绘PNG，如果这个手绘能有呼吸效果就更好]

Preserving lesbian bars still matters. **But so does imagining what else queer space could be**: not only rooms with a sign on the door, but moments of recognition, softness, and shared intent.

The future may not be more bars.  
It may be **more ways to be together.**

[19，文字全屏居中，文字下方：两个图层叠合的照片，拖动轴可以左右对比现在和未来，照片下方有注解文字]