**Name: Tati**

***She envisions sapphic space as shaped by shared energy, mutual understanding, and care.***

**Brief**:

Pronouns: she/they

9th Year in NYC

Core member of Sapphic Surf, surf instructor

**Full**:  
Tati’s relationship to space is relational and energetic—she notices how safety, camaraderie, and gentleness shape how people show up and connect. In *Sapphic Surf*, she saw people more willing to take risks in the water because the environment was affirming and respectful. “The etiquette was a little more respected... people cheering once you got a wave, that kind of energy.” Her interest in the group emerged not just from love of surfing, but from the absence of spaces where queer women could gather without being centered on men or substance-driven nightlife.

For Tati, the term “sapphic” offers both a clearer emotional boundary and more fluid entry points. “It’s different having something like sapphic vs. the umbrella of queer... to be around people who are consciously excluding themselves from patriarchy.” She values the community’s informal nature—there’s no strict vetting—but she trusts that those who come in know how to respect the space. “People have been pretty good at making the determination of: do I identify as sapphic, am I an ally to this community...”

While she sees the group as welcoming, she doesn’t shy away from noting the gendered imbalance of queer spaces: “We need more [lesbian bars]!” Her vision for space is everyday, joyful, and anchored in emotional safety. She speaks warmly about the idea of building a home base for *Sapphic Surf*, a place to extend the vibe beyond the water into meals, movie nights, and shared rituals. Her reflections suggest that queer women’s spaces don’t need rigid borders—but they do need intentionality, rhythm, and softness.

**Representative Quotes**:

“Surfing is a hard sport to learn... there was something powerful about watching a bunch of people collectively do the same thing, fall over, wipe out—but still get up and try again.”  
“It goes like a more comfort scene... rather than being in a space where queerness still includes men.”  
“We got the bi and pan girlies showing up... people are down to come and respect the space.”  
“Especially in something that’s centered around an activity—it creates a different energy than a bar.”​

**Name: Julia**

***She transforms a male-dominated surf zone into a joyful, sapphic gathering grounded in shared presence and ease.***

**Brief**:

Pronouns: unknown

7th Year in NYC

Co-founder of Sapphic Surf

**Full**:  
Julia brings a deeply personal history to her understanding of space and power. Having grown up surfing competitively in male-dominated environments, she witnessed how men in the water would ignore, cut off, or even verbally undermine women— “They’ll say things like, ‘Oh, I didn’t expect you to actually catch that.’” These experiences shaped her appreciation for what it meant to reverse that dynamic with *Sapphic Surf*, a group where dozens of women and sapphic individuals claimed visibility and joy together in the water. “I could see guys looking over and feeling small... They’re territorial about their breaks... But it’s a beach—it’s huge. Nobody owns it.”

Her view of space is grounded in physical presence and communal rhythm. Unlike bar-based queer scenes where she previously socialized—often in lesbian bars like Cubbyhole or Henrietta Hudson—surfing offered something lighter, freer, and less dependent on alcohol or performance. While she acknowledges that *Sapphic Surf* is lesbian-centered, she doesn’t enforce hard boundaries, instead trusting in shared social cues: “Anybody could come and feel—I think—feel welcome. I hope so.”

When asked about the lack of lesbian bars in NYC, her reaction is clear: “It is sad.” She acknowledges that even the existing bars are “becoming progressively less sapphic,” and she expresses a desire to expand *Sapphic Surf* into a permanent base in Rockaway—“a house, a place to rinse off, cookout, hang out.” Her reflections reveal a longing for spaces that are both rooted and open, where women are not just included, but prioritized.

**Representative Quotes**:

“Men typically don’t [drop in] to each other—but they do it to women a lot... They don’t even see that you exist.”  
“Surfing’s a really male-dominated sport... I was used to being the only girl around a bunch of guys in the water.”

“Then suddenly seeing the roles reversed—I could see guys looking over and feeling small in the water.”

**Name: Jean**

***With a mix of care and urgency, she holds onto lesbian visibility as queer spaces shift and fade around her.***

**Brief**:

Pronouns: she/her

3rd Year in NYC

Lesbian bar worker, drag king, active in online lesbian community

**Full**:  
Jean examines the loss and response of lesbian space from a historicized and politicized perspective. She not only works at a lesbian bar, but also participates in it as a drag king, forming a deep understanding of women's visibility and spatial power dynamics. She is clearly aware that in this era and its subsequent political tendencies, the visibility and right to exist of the lesbian community are structurally squeezed, which makes her understand visibility as a kind of survival: "It's about survival, honestly... if we miss it, things will just keep fading."

Jean points out that more and more lesbian spaces are turning to temporary gatherings, social apps, or "feminine" places with vibes as clues, such as basketball courts, feminist reading clubs, private living rooms, etc. These spaces cannot be mapped, but they maintain community ties through "queer code". But for her, the disappearance of spatial boundaries is not equivalent to freedom, it may mean aphasia and being replaced.

She clearly expressed her support for spaces exclusively for queer women: "A lot of them have shut down... Even if we’re not at risk of closing, it still feels urgent to make lesbian spaces more visible." At the same time, she also criticized the exclusion of gay male-dominated spaces, believing that lesbian culture and social needs are often marginalized or misunderstood in umbrella queer spaces.

**Representative Quotes**:

“It’s not just about bars anymore... they’re harder to map. And also, the boundaries are fuzzy... We find our own codes—queer codes—in other places.”

“There’s a real risk of erasure.”

“These spaces are essential, but if no one shows up, they disappear.”

**Name: Kloe**

***They value sapphic-centered spaces as sites of emotional safety and shared understanding, a stance shaped by internalized sexual shame from East Asian upbringing and their ongoing search for intimacy beyond binary gender norms.***

**Brief**:

Pronouns: she/they

2nd Year in NYC

Nonbinary queer, active in feminist communities, educated in China before college

**Full**:  
Kloe describes queer women’s spaces as emotionally resonant environments that allow them to feel seen, understood, and protected. Coming from an East Asian cultural context where sexuality was burdened with shame, Kloe’s exploration of identity unfolded gradually, finding strength in sapphic spaces and emotionally supportive feminist communities in New York.

Their complex views on spatial boundaries reflect an internal tension: politically, they champion fluid, dynamic borders in order to create more inclusive futures, but personally they maintain strong boundaries as a strategy of self-protection. Now living in New York, they continue to rely on these boundaries in heteronormative or male-dominated spaces, which she finds emotionally unsafe and physically charged. They resist the over-definition of queer spaces, arguing that labels can create exclusion, yet they actively seeks out safe, sapphic-centered environments—especially when in group settings.

Kloe’s ideal world is one where queer presence is normalized across all contexts—academic, social, and urban. Visibility, to them, is not just political but deeply emotional: it means not having to search, but being seen without asking. As they reflect, “I don’t want to have to seek out queer spaces—they should appear around me.”

**Representative Quotes**:

"[The sense of shame about sex comes from] society. This is a theory that has been instilled in us since childhood, especially in East Asian education."

"I am good at drawing boundaries... Drawing boundaries is a way for me to resist or seize power."

"I think people will occupy a more important part [in queer spaces] ... It's like you can feel some changes in the magnetic field. If there are no people in the space, this space is meaningless and cold."

"[Regarding the labels and boundaries of the space] I think marking them out is equivalent to defining the bar. But I think many things are difficult to express with definitions. I think "definition" is equivalent to giving a limitation."

"I don't need to look for this community, but when this community actively appears in front of me, it makes me feel that this is highly visible."

**Name: Jesse**

***With care and precision, she builds spaces where emotion leads and no one voice dominates, favoring healing over performance.***

**Brief**:

Pronouns: she/her

3rd Year in NYC

Co-founder of MOOR, reflective feminist organizer

**Full**:  
Jesse is the founder of the MOOR community. She understands queer women space as an "emotional political structure" rather than a fixed geographical form. She emphasizes healing, inclusiveness and deep listening, and rejects the excessive consumption of sex, gossip and topic dominance in noisy queer culture. The space she created advocates small scale, rotating hosting and familiar atmosphere, responding to the long-standing power issues in queer space, such as "who can speak" and "who has the right to express".

Jesse pays special attention to the microstructure of spatial power. She pointed out that a trans friend was excluded by straight women's language in a conversation about "age and intimacy", which made her realize that even in a queer women's space that claims to be inclusive, it is necessary to be vigilant about "who is being heard". She used "not daddy vibe" to describe the spatial temperament of MOOR: no authoritarianism, no loud voices, no interrupting, and no naming others. Her support for queer women's space does not come from identity labels, but from the spatial practice of "emotional matching" and "freedom of expression".

**Representative Quotes**:

"What I want to create is a space that pays more attention to each other's status and feelings, a place where people can feel at ease to talk about the issues they care about."

"Community is such a sensitive thing - it pays attention to vibe, whether you and others are in sync, and whether she can feel that this space is 'for her'."

"Our community vibe does not welcome the daddy-like aura. I think we are the kind of not daddy vibe (laughs)."

**Name: Alex**

***She maps queerness through memory and emotion, weaving together nightlife, intimate everyday spaces, and subtle moments of shared recognition.***

**Brief**:

Pronouns: she/her

3rd Year in NYC

nightlife-involved Design student

**Full**:  
Alex describes queer space as a kind of "emotional geography". She is not bound by specific places, but tracks how situations, memories and relationships make space queer. She navigates a layered queer geography that includes both nightlife scenes like Industry in Hell’s Kitchen—often shaped by gay male circles—and women-centered bars like Cubbyhole, as well as more intimate, everyday spaces: subway rides, video game cafés, shared living rooms, and quiet walks through Brooklyn with her partner.

She frankly admitted that after the emergence of dating apps, she no longer insisted on specific queer places because "the threshold for confirming that you are queer has been completed online", so all cafés, parks, and museums may become her queer space. This attitude not only shows a kind of spatial freedom, but also reveals the current situation that queer women's space is gradually becoming private and non-public.

While she still appreciates spaces like Cubbyhole, she’s noticed that others around her aren’t always as eager to return. “I expected a bit more excitement or openness,” she remarked, surprised by the lack of shared enthusiasm. Queer women’s spaces continue to resonate with her, though her approach is more emotional and non-institutional. She doesn’t emphasize clear boundaries, but is always looking for places where queer emotional resonance can emerge.

**Representative Quotes**:

“The apartment itself—specifically the living room—became a huge space for long conversations, emotional processing, and identity talk... It felt like this little sanctuary.”

“I guess I do still feel like certain things are different. Like I think maybe once it gets down to the level of nightlife, maybe there's like enough [difference]...”

“My girlfriend has mentioned a few times that she really enjoyed being part of a sapphic surfing club… it reminded me how queerness can be embedded not just in the people who show up, but in how a group is organized.”

**Name: J**

***She expresses ambivalence toward formal queer women’s spaces. Instead, she favors informal and emotionally safe environments. Her stance is shaped by skepticism toward commodified identity and a protective instinct developed under social and familial pressures.***

**Brief:**

Pronouns: she/her

1st Year in NYC

Architecture student

**Full:**

J grew up navigating queerness with ambivalence—both seeking connection and maintaining distance. While she has queer friends and enjoys spaces formed naturally through close bonds, she rarely participates in formally organized queer women’s events, expressing discomfort with commercialized or overly labeled spaces. She is deeply skeptical of commodified lesbian identity and holds a strong critique of queer visibility shaped by market forces or social media “idols.”

J often feels caught between wanting more lesbian visibility and avoiding personal exposure. Her spatial comfort stems not from designated queer venues, but from informal and emotionally safe environments—like her sapphic friends’ Brooklyn apartment, where shared meals and gaming became meaningful queer experiences.

While she sees the need for more public lesbian spaces, her own approach remains cautious and self-protective, influenced by familial expectations, fear of misunderstanding, and years of masking. Despite her ambivalence, J believes that increased visibility matters—especially for future generations—even if she herself may not be at the front lines.

**Representative Quotes**:

"I prefer the queer space that is naturally formed by friends, rather than the space that is organized because 'we are lesbians'."

"I think this kind of commercialized lesbian space can easily make people feel that you are a priced label."

"In fact, I still hope that there are more lesbian bars, but I don't want to go and I don't want to represent anyone."

"I don't think I like to sexualize myself, and I don't want to be someone's girlfriend or wife... In a space with men, I will subconsciously turn myself into a child."

"I hope others will fight for it, but I am too tired and have tried many times, but it doesn't work."

**Name: Esha**

***Her openness is rooted in a journey from a restrictive cultural context to a queer-supportive community, where identity exploration feels both safe and shared.***

**Brief:**

Pronouns: she/her

3.5 Years in NYC

Dual-degree student in Communication Design & Historical Sociology

**Full:**

Growing up in India, Esha’s awareness of queerness was shaped by an environment where open expression was rare and social norms reinforced heteronormativity. Though early childhood memories and her time on an all-girls soccer team hinted at her queer identity, it wasn’t until her move to New York City for college that she began to meaningfully explore that part of herself.

Enrolling in an art school with a strong queer presence, Esha found the freedom to gradually reconnect with her queerness through community, critical self-reflection, and everyday conversations. She speaks warmly about the comfort of queer-centered spaces—both informal ones like home dinners with friends and public ones like sapphic nights at Brooklyn bars. What makes a space queer for her isn’t only its label, but the mutual sense of understanding and presence shared among those within it.

Esha also raises thoughtful concerns about how queer community resources—like surf clubs, sports groups, or creative collectives—often remain inaccessible to those who are newer, more introverted, or outside nightlife networks. For her, queer bars aren’t just for socializing—they are key sites of information exchange and community access. While she acknowledges that visibility has improved in New York, she advocates for broader, less gatekept forms of outreach that go beyond nightlife.

Her experience illustrates how spatial and cultural shifts—from constrained environments to openly queer ecosystems—can reshape one’s self-perception and sense of belonging. In her words, what makes a queer space powerful is not the architecture, but “people who’ve thought deeply about who they are—and make you feel like you can do the same.”

**Representative Quotes**:

“I think it [the culture background] made me a lot slower to accept that side of myself.”

“When I go to queer spaces, I feel like I’m going to a ball—I feel safe and my inhibitions are low.”

“[The main element that made it feel inclusive was] the people… A lot of the most affirming moments were just at dinner parties at home, surrounded by my queer community. That felt authentic.”

**Name: Zao  
*They value queer and sapphic-centered spaces that respect bodily autonomy, emotional safety, and intersectional inclusivity. Their stance is shaped by a deep embodied sense of nonbinary identity, experiences of marginalization across multiple axes, and a strong commitment to advocacy within everyday interactions.*Brief:**Pronouns: they/them  
2nd Year in NYC  
Nonbinary AFAB Queer, mental health crisis psychotherapist, background in Hong Kong and Michigan, artist and activist

**Full:**Zao’s experience of queerness is deeply rooted in bodily awareness. As a nonbinary individual, they have never felt fully aligned with human gender categories, imagining instead an existence closer to pure code or frequency. Growing up in China and Hong Kong before moving to the U.S., they developed a keen sensitivity to belonging, safety, and recognition, valuing spaces where gender is dynamic and cultural differences are acknowledged.

For Zao, intersectionality is lived through daily advocacy: correcting misgendering, advocating for clients as a mental health worker, and using their presence as quiet resistance. Chronic fatigue limits their participation in large-scale activism, but they see small, persistent actions as essential to building inclusive spaces.

Their relationship with public space is shaped by embodied negotiation. Zao resists binary gender presentations through choices in clothing, voice, and posture, carefully navigating visibility and safety in cisnormative environments. In New York, they seek truly intersectional queer spaces that include nonbinary, sapphic, trans, and BIPOC communities, and express a particular longing for more Asian-centered lesbian and nonbinary spaces.

To Zao, queerness is not merely political—it is a daily, embodied practice of living authentically, holding space for fluidity and difference, and imagining futures where all forms of existence are seen and valued.

**Representative Quotes:**

"[Discussing why they put nonbinary identity first] I don't even feel that this body belongs to me. I would rather exist like an electronic code or a frequency, rather than as a biological human form."

"Queer culture means I don't have to fit into anything. That's the beauty of queerness—everyone can be different."

"Even just correcting someone for misgendering me—I see that as advocacy. Because if I don't do it, they will continue to misgender others."

"Many so-called queer spaces are still white-dominant and gender-binary. We need more spaces where sapphics, nonbinary people, and BIPOC communities truly exist."

“Because if I don’t correct them, they will misgender others, which is a kind of advocacy. …My way is to educate others through myself…This is the minimum practice I can do.”

"I hope that there will be a very inclusive queer space. That is, gays, transgenders, and lesbians can all come. Everyone is more fluid. There should be more lesbian bars that define themselves as lesbian bars, especially spaces for lesbians of different races, such as Black and Brown. But obviously I didn't see any Asian lesbian bars."

**Name: Morgan**

***To them, the value of sapphic space lies not in fixed labels or boundaries, but in the shared presence and connection among queer individuals. Any space can become sapphic when it is shaped by the people within it, defined by fluid belonging rather than rigid categories.***

**Brief:**

Pronouns: they/them

12 years in NYC

Nonbinary queer, artist and archivist, educated at SVA and Pratt Institute

**Full:**

Morgan is a nonbinary queer artist and archivist who moved from Michigan to New York in 2013. Their creative practice, rooted in visual and critical studies, explores the intersections of queerness, identity, and storytelling.

Morgan’s understanding of queerness deepened after undergrad, expanding from sexuality to gender identity, and they came out as nonbinary in 2021. They describe queerness as both about who they love and who they choose to spend time with, emphasizing relational belonging over rigid definitions. Their project Queer Data Portraits reflects a personal approach to data, transforming friends’ LGBTQ+ identities into tangible, intimate visualizations.

In NYC, Morgan finds affirming spaces primarily through friendships rather than venues, noting that safe, expansive spaces are defined more by who gathers there than by external signals. Although engaged with sapphic nightlife like Ginger’s and Pat, they also experience moments of not-belonging in traditionally lesbian spaces due to gender identity and bisexuality.

Morgan imagines an ideal sapphic space as an inclusive, lively bar-community hub for queer dancing, mingling, and celebration—centered around queerness in all its fluidity rather than narrow identity categories.

**Representative Quotes:**

"Queerness to me is as much about who I am attracted to as who I spend time with."

"I define queer space by who is in it. Any space can feel queer if the people within are queer."

"Since growing more comfortable in my identity, I care less and less about how others perceive me."