

**READING BETWEEN THE LINES: SPATIAL COMMUNITIES
OF MEN WITH SAME-SEX ATTRACTIONS IN LATE 20TH
CENTURY LITHUANIA**

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Abstract

This qualitative research which can be situated in the fields of queer geography and historiography is based on fifteen individual in-depth interviews with gay men (40 to 60 years old) from Lithuania. By looking at these fifteen oral histories focussed on experiences of men with same-sex attractions in late Soviet and early post-Soviet Lithuania, I analyse how back then these men saw themselves and others, how they searched for and made sense of scarcely available public information about same-sex attractions, how they created and transformed spaces and through that built communities and constructed their social identities. I argue that men with same-sex attractions were not plain victims of Soviet heteronormative discourses but they were subverting these discourses from inside. They were shapers of counter-discourses which were in turn followed by new (in-group) hierarchies between men with same-sex attractions. I argue that male same-sex desires, even though opposed and marginalised by the Soviet state, did not necessarily exist on the social margins. Rather, men with same-sex attractions were shaping spaces of tactics which allowed them to live and perform their sexual identities on the central Soviet stage.

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Introduction

Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice. For this reason, spatial practices concern everyday tactics, are part of them, from the alphabet of spatial indication . . . , the beginning of a story the rest of which is written by footsteps, to the daily ‘news’ . . . , legends . . . , and stories that are told . . .

Michel de Certeau (1984, 115-6)

It is one of my last interviews. Artūras¹ – a 54 years old gay man I am interviewing – and I are sitting in a dusky corridor of his flat in Kaunas. He is smoking his fourth cigarette and talking about inaccessible information about same-sex attractions in Soviet Lithuania; while I am peeking at my notes, scribbling new remarks and trying to keep eye contact. It is the fourteenth interview and I am still not sure what the best way to refer to men with same-sex attractions as a group or groups in 1980s is. Some of the other men I have interviewed reservedly mentioned the words ‘žydras’ (‘light blue’) and ‘savas’ (‘of the kin’), or simply used ‘gėjus’ (‘gay’) which appeared in the Lithuanian language only in the 1990s. So far, Artūras has not mentioned any specific term which could have been applied to the group: he mainly talks about his ‘circle of friends,’ ‘these people’ and ‘these questions.’ Thus, using a next break in his narrative, I ask him if there was a particular appellation which men with same-sex desired used to refer to each other. Artūras shrugs his shoulders and repeats my question while taking a minute to think:

Somehow there wasn’t any common name; at least I can’t recall anything. Maybe we could say that there was some avoidance to identify this thing in general because there wasn’t [any term]. Well, maybe ‘draugės’ [‘girlfriends’], or ‘podružki’ [‘подружки’] in Russian, was used sometimes as a joke. But it wasn’t widely used; let’s say only in a company of some well known people, in a middle of a good drinking spree, after a decent amount of alcohol, maybe then. But in general there wasn’t any.

¹ All the names (and some other personal details) of the men I have interviewed have been changed in order to ensure their anonymity.

Artūras' answer is rather similar to what I have already heard from some other men I have interviewed. Once again I am left wondering if there can be a community without a linguistically defined identity. I form another question about communication in the circles of friends. And while Artūras explains how they used to organise separate "birthdays for relatives, birthdays for co-workers and birthdays for *this* kind of friends," I suddenly remember the phrase he has already repeated a couple of times – "reading between the lines." In the USSR some things were not meant to be said, at least not in the public, at least not explicitly. As Kevin Moss puts it "[c]ompulsory heterosexism and compulsory political orthodoxy cause[d] sexual and political dissidents to conceal their dissidence" (1995, 229). Thus, men with same-sex desires kept their existence encoded and publicly unidentifiable. As many other Soviet citizens, they needed to "become adept at functioning in both public and private modes. . . . Knowledge of the code allow[ed] one to reinterpret the public message as private information" (Moss 1995, 234). In this way, people managed to perform often contradicting roles at the same time. And they had to learn to *read between the lines* in order to participate in encoded communications. However, whereas many stories of political dissidence of the Soviet times have been decoded and entered rewritten Lithuanian history and generic language with the independence of the country in 1990, stories of sexual dissidents remained largely in between the lines, never outspoken, never historically revealed. Thus, in this paper I would like to offer a history – or a travel story, a spatial story of unsaid identities and communities – of men with same sex-attractions in the late twentieth century Lithuania (before decriminalisation of consensual sex between men in 1993).

This qualitative research which can be situated in the fields of queer geography and historiography is based on fifteen individual in-depth interviews with gay men (40 to 60 years old) from Lithuania. By looking at these fifteen oral histories focussed on experiences of men with same-sex attractions in late Soviet and early post-Soviet Lithuania, I analyse how back then these men saw themselves and others, how they searched for and made sense of scarcely

available public information about same-sex attractions, how they created and transformed spaces and through that built communities and constructed their social identities. I argue that men with same-sex attractions were not plain victims of Soviet heteronormative discourses but they were subverting these discourses from inside. They were shapers of counter-discourses which were in turn followed by new (in-group) hierarchies between men with same-sex attractions. I argue that male same-sex desires, even though opposed and marginalised by the Soviet state, did not necessarily exist on the social margins. Rather, men with same-sex attractions were shaping spaces of tactics (as defined by Certeau (1984)) which allowed them to live and perform their sexual identities on the central Soviet stage.

However, I do not intend to portray the Soviet regime (as well as post-Soviet democratisation) as harmless or favourable for men with same-sex desires. Following Michel Foucault (1978), I would like to demonstrate that no power or discourse is total, *even* the one called ‘totalitarianism,’ but also that no person or group is totally powerless. Furthermore, the very power which is intended to eliminate or confine a person or social group participates in the process of establishing and defining them, or as Judith Butler puts it, “[p]ower not only *acts on* a subject but, in a transitive sense, *enacts* the subject into being” (1997, 13). In this way, the subject can be ‘empowered’ (to identify, to unite, to act, to subvert) while being restrained. That is a paradox of power which no power is powerful enough to avoid.

Building on the work of Michel de Certeau (1984) in this paper I analyse how changing spaces in late Soviet and early post-Soviet Lithuania effected identities and communities of men with same-sex attractions, while seeing these identities and communities as spatial creations. In other words, I propose to view identities as spaces of social interactions which, even though constantly shifting, overlapping and clashing with other spaces, cannot be completely overpowered and devoured by them.

Shaping the research

Collecting stories

This April during three weeks of my fieldwork in Lithuania I have conducted individual in-depth semi-structured interviews with fifteen gay men of 40 to 60 years old. The interviews focused on their experience as men with same-sex attractions in Lithuania of 1980s and early 1990s – before decriminalisation of sex between men in 1993. Most of the interviewees I found through my personal contacts with gay communities and activists, others – by using snowball sampling or through the website *www.gayline.lt* (the most popular Lithuanian gay and lesbian website for news and online communication) where I had posted a short article about my research calling for respondents a few weeks before the start of my fieldwork.²

Even though, as Donald A. Ritchie puts it, “[s]ingle-session oral histories are like ‘audio snapshots’” (1995, 60), because of limited time and other resources I conducted single-session interviews. On the average one interview lasted an hour and a half. It consisted of several general questions followed by more specific and pointed ones. Open ended questions left enough space for the interviewees to explain what they thought was the most relevant and significant within the given theme. Then more specific questions narrowed the themes down to discussions of particular issues and events. The same core questions were directed to all the interviewees. However, since “[o]ral history, after all, addresses neglected areas of knowledge” (Ritchie 1995, 76). I was prepared to deviate from the questionnaire in order to uncover new topics and important information. All of the interviews were digitally sound-recorded and transcribed; and only the excerpts quoted in this paper were translated to English.

² However, the search for interviewees was a complicated process. Gay men of more than 40 years old were difficult to access and convince to talk to a recorder. Quite a few men I found through my personal contacts or *www.gayline.lt* were afraid of publicity (even though I ensured them that the interviews would be anonymised) or claimed that they had not had any contacts with other men with same-sex attractions before 1993. Also, even though my article on *www.gayline.lt* had been read more than nine hundred times, no one responded directly to the call.

Interpretative practice: ‘the myriad hows and whats of everyday life’

For my analysis of the interviews I use an analytical approach which Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein (2003) define as *interpretative practice*. Interpretative practice is based upon a combination of ethnomethodology and Foucauldian discourse analysis. According to Gubrium and Holstein, “ethnomethodologists focus on how members [of society] actually ‘do’ social life, aiming in particular to document how they concretely construct and sustain social entities, such as gender, self, and family” (2003, 218). What matters then is how people make sense of the social world, that is, how they construct their own social realities. “Ethnomethodology sets aside the idea that actions are externally rule governed or internally motivated in order to observe how members themselves establish and sustain social regularities” (ibid, 219). Objects become meaningful only through their contextualization. The meaning production is an ongoing process (of everyday life) which is happening in a certain context but it also produces this context. Ethnomethodologists use a discourse analysis to look at how (local or otherwise specific) meanings are produced through conversations and talk (ibid, 220-1).

Foucauldian discourse analysis (which of course is based on the work of Foucault), is concerned with “how historically and culturally located systems [or discourses] of power/knowledge construct subjects and their worlds” (Gubrium and Holstein 2003, 224). Discourses are “socially reflexive, both constitutive and meaningfully descriptive of the world and its subjects. . . . [T]he analytic accent is as much on the constructive *whats* that discourse constitutes as it is on the *hows* of discursive technology” (ibid, 225). Subjects and objects are constituted through discourse, but at the same time subjects also participate in production of discourse. In other words, power functions through discourse, which imposes certain social meanings and hierarchical structures, but even the most marginalised members of the society participate and thus influence the discourse which marginalizes them (ibid, 225-6).

Gubrium and Holstein argue that:

[W]hat Foucault documents historically as ‘discourse-in-practice’ in varied constitutional or cultural sites may be likened to what ethnomethodology traces as ‘discursive practice’ in varied forms of social interactions. . . . Neither [of them] . . . is viewed as being caused or explained by external social sources or internal motives; rather, both are taken to be the working mechanisms of social life itself, as actually known or performed in time and place.

(2003, 225-6)

Thus, according to Gubrium and Holstein (2003), Foucauldian analysis and ethnomethodology can be combined and analytically applied together as interpretative practice. They describe analytics of interpretative practice as “a skilled juggling act, concentrating alternately on the myriad *hows* and *whats* of everyday life . . . [which] requires a new form of bracketing to capture the interplay between discursive practices and discourses-in-practice” (Gubrium and Holstein 2003, 234). Such *analytic bracketing* means that sometimes the analyst has to bracket “the structures of everyday life in order to document their production through discursive practice” (ibid, 234) and vice versa, to be able to treat “everyday realities as both the *products* of members’ reality-constructing procedures and the *resources* from which the realities are constituted” (ibid, 234).

Since my research focuses on interactions between men with same-sex attractions and changing social environments in Lithuania of 1980s and 1990s, by applying interpretative practice in my analysis I am able to better position men with same-sex desires in these interactions. I look at how men with same-sex desires were influenced and limited by discourses, but also how the discourses were created and influenced by these men, their everyday interactions and tactics. I analyse how men with same-sex attractions actively constructed their realities and social identities and how they made sense of their everyday lives, but I also pay attention to how these realities further influenced men’s lives and choices. As Certeau’s puts it, the “styles of action intervene in a field which regulates them at a first level . . . , but they introduce into it a way of turning it to

their advantage that obeys other rules and constitutes something like a second level interwoven into the first” (1984, 30), and in return this first level is forced to change too.

Spatial identities, or identities as spaces

Certeau defines the first level of interactions as the rules and limitations of place and the second one as the space of tactics (1984, 35-7). They are different but interdependent. Unlike Foucault, Certeau recognises that power can be hegemonic and more concentrated around some centres than others; however, for him it is also never total and always followed by resistances, inversions and diversions (1984, 31-3). This understanding is useful in analysing the interactions between the Soviet and post-Soviet state and men with same-sex attractions in Lithuania, because while both parties exist in a complex interaction where none of them is completely separate from another and none of them is void of power, there is still a division of who gets to decide what. While the place of rules is usually set by a hegemonic power or discourse, the space of tactics could be performed, formed and transformed, by anyone. As Certeau puts it:

Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. On this view, in relation to place, space is like a word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conversations, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by transformations caused by successive contexts.

(1984, 117)

That is where I argue it become possible and analytically useful to see social identity as a space – not as a fixed ingrained set of norms and regulations, but as an ever changing field of social interactions which is limited but not sealed up by these norms and regulations. This notion of identity is similar to the one proposed by Judith Butler in her conceptualisation of queer theory and performativity. Butler (1988) argues that identities are socially constructed and come into existence through a citational practice of particular norms. Identities are “a performative

accomplishment compelled by social sanctions;” however, their “very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting [their] reified status” (Butler 1988, 520). In other words, since citation of norms is never exact and each performance is at least slightly different from the previous ones, there comes a possibility for subverting these norms, changing the discourse which sets boundaries for these identities. As Butler puts it, “‘agency,’ then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition” (1990, 146). “It is the *supplement*, the excess that necessarily accomplishes any effort to posit identity once and for all” (ibid, 143). But if we see identities as spaces which are continuously being shaped and reshaped through changing social interactions, then this ‘excess’ becomes not just a supplement but an integral part of what identities are.

Imagined communities

Since spatial identities are inseparable from social relations, they constitute, while being constituted by, communities which can be also spatially defined. However, this space just like communities themselves very rarely are strictly bounded and directly experienced. Benedict Anderson introduced the term ‘imagined communities’ in 1983. He argues that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (1983, 6). They are imagined because their members never really know each other. They are seen as “a deep, horizontal comradeship” (ibid, 7) but never really experienced as such. Thus, this imagining creates a possibility for a sense of community and common social identities to develop between people who do not meet or know each other. However, as David Valentine phrases it, “[t]his does not mean that . . . identity or community are figments of the imagination, but rather that they are *products of an imaginary*” (2007, 68). In other words, to say that communities and identities of men with same-sex attractions are imagined is by no means to say that same-sex attractions and relations between men are meaningless. To the contrary, it is to say that any communications and social formations are being constructed in particular circumstances and by

particular people. Thus, understanding of communities and identities as imagined entities enables seeing them as products of a *particular* imaginary, as historical and contextual creations. As Jeffrey Weeks vividly puts it:

Sexual identities are fictions – but necessary fictions. Sexual identities are historical inventions, which change in complex histories. They are imagined in contingent circumstances. They can be taken up and abandoned. To put it polemically, they are fictions. . . . But to say that something is a historical fiction is not to denigrate it. On the contrary, it is simple to recognize that we cannot escape our histories, and that we need means to challenge their apparently iron laws and inexorabilities by constructive narratives of the past in order to imagine the present and future.

(2003, 129)

Since, as Joan W. Scott notices, “history has been largely a foundationalist discourse” (1991, 780), which has been uncritically constructed on supposedly unconstructed experiences, in my analysis I attempt to challenge this discourse by critical historicising of social (sexual) categories. While I see identities and communities as historically changing, I believe it is useful to explore this change by focussing my analysis on space and shifting social (and political) environments. That is why in my research I turn to queer geography as an analytical method which, as Larry Knopp (2007) points out, goes beyond conventional understanding of space and being “suspicious of certainties, universal truths, and ontological imaginations” (Larry Knopp 2007, 22) relies on critique of taken-for-granted categories and essentialisms.

I agree with Robert Padgug when he argues that “[s]exual categories do not make manifest essences implicit within individuals, but are the expression of the active relationships of the members of entire groups and collectivities” (1979, 12). Thus, my analysis is analysis of spaces of communication – spatial communities of men with same-sex attractions in late Soviet and early post-Soviet Lithuania, at the time when these attractions were still legally condemned. It proposes a travel story – and not a totalizing map – which tells how identities can be created and

constituted through space which often exceeds boundaries of physical place of bedrooms, cities, states and continents.

I start my analysis by defining the Soviet space in the first chapter '*Spatialising the (post)Soviet state.*' I look at how this space was constituted through the law criminalising sex between men and restricted flows of information about same-sex attractions. I analyse how the Soviet system was setting boundaries for men with same-sex attractions, and how the men were resisting these boundaries.

In the second chapter '*Urban spaces,*' following Certeau's distinction between 'place' and 'space,' I analyse how men with same-sex attractions were creating spaces of communication in public places, and how these spaces depended on their secrecy. I look at how this secrecy influenced the development of spatial hierarchies which situated some spatial communities and identities on lower ladders than others.

In the final chapter '*Beyond the Lithuanian cities*' I look at spaces outside of the Lithuanian urban routines which became possible through travelling and remote communications in the 1980s and early 1990s. These spaces more explicitly crossed physical borders and provided new ways of self-organising and conditioned different community developments, expanding the imagined communities of men with same-sex desires throughout the Soviet Union and beyond.

Chapter 1 Spatialising the (post)Soviet state

Sexual behavior is not, as is too often assumed, a superimposition of, on the one hand, desires that derive from natural instincts, and, on the other hand, of permissive or restrictive laws that tell us what we should or shouldn't do. Sexual behavior is more than that. It is also the consciousness one has of what one is doing, what one makes of the experience, and the value one attaches to it.

Michel Foucault (1997, 141-142)

Vilnius, Kaunas and Klaipėda – three rather small but major cities of the Republic of Lithuania, or what used to be the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) from 1940 to 1990. All of the men I have interviewed in this research have spent most of their lives in these cities. In the 1980s the trip from Vilnius to Kaunas by train used to take at least an hour and a half. I know it very well because I used to travel there all my childhood, to visit my grandmother, in a children's carriage with Soviet cartoon characters glued on the windows. Though during Soviet times I never travelled by train to Klaipėda or other places on the Baltic coast, I know that the trip was ridiculously long – time, not distance wise. It is only some 300 kilometres but massive soviet trains were very slow. Vilnius–Kaunas–Klaipėda, add a few more kilometers and that is the whole length of the republic. Of course the Soviet space did not end up here, one could also freely go by train to Kaliningrad, Riga, Minsk, Moscow or even Vladivostok, however, not to Warsaw – the wide Russian railway track gauge, as the Soviet Union itself, ended on the border with Poland.

In this chapter I analyse how this isolated Soviet space with its internal laws, regulations and restricted flows of information was setting boundaries for men with same-sex attractions who in turn were resisting and constantly pushing these boundaries. I make a distinction between legal and extra-legal sides of legislation criminalising sex between men, and argue that this legislation

was mainly used as a political tool in controlling (sexual) dissidence. Furthermore, this very law and other Soviet information condemning same-sex attractions and, thus, attempting to regulate and control them also provided a space for (self-)definition of men with same-sex attractions and, thus, created an additional possibility for identities and communities to appear.

Article 122.1: between legal place and extra-legal space

To paraphrase one of the men I have interviewed: the flag changed in 1990 but the railway track stayed the same, at least for awhile. Consensual sex between men was criminalised during state-socialism and remained criminalised for more than three years after Lithuania's declaration of independence. Article 122.1 of the Criminal Code stated that "[s]exual acts between men shall be punishable by incarceration for a period of up to three years" (Greif, Coman, and M Bell 2001, 44). Even though the Russian Soviet Republic, as most of other Soviet Republics, interpreted these punishable sexual acts (or 'muzhelozhstvo' in Russian) as anal sexual contacts between men, Lithuanian and Byelorussian SSRs interpreted them as also covering oral sexual contacts (Greif, Coman, and M Bell 2001, 24). Furthermore, though, as Masha Gessen (1993, 7) writes, the law against consensual sex between men was passed as an all-Union law (compulsory to all Soviet republics) in the 1930s (1993, 7), at least in 1980s it had foreseen different punishments in different Soviet republics. For instance, the Estonian SSR punished sex between men with confinement of up to 2 years (Greif, Coman, and M Bell 2001, 24) while the Russian SFSR – up to 5 years (Gessen 1993, 9). Lithuania was in between, at least on paper. In reality it might have not necessarily mattered what sex men were having and in which part of the Soviet space. Actually in many cases it might not have mattered if men were having sex at all.

Gessen argues that sex between men was considered a political crime by Soviet authorities, that it was perceived as a danger to the state and the system. She analyses some cases when Article 121.1 (an equivalent to Lithuanian Article 122.1) was applied in the Russian SFSR and concludes

that basically “[a]ny man could be sent to prison under this law. Like other soviet political laws, Article 121.1 was primarily a law against undesirable, misfits and rebels, not against people with a particular sexual or social identity” (Gessen 1993, 14). Of course, this is not to say that the law did not affect lives of people with same-sex attractions. It did, but often in less straightforward ways than it might seem.

Laurie Essig’s ‘Queer in Russia’ starts with a chapter on the infamous Soviet law. However, unlike Gessen, Essig mostly focuses on direct and indirect effects the law had for men with same-sex attractions, not society as a whole. She writes that it is almost impossible to find out how many men were actually prosecuted for same-sex desires in the Soviet Union, because not all official records are available and even the ones which are available often are difficult to read (1999, 8). There were no separate records on Article 121.1 in the Russian SFSR (or 122.1 in the Lithuanian SSR). Cases prosecuted under Article 121.1 were lumped together with the ones prosecuted under Article 121.2 dealing with sexual intercourse between men with physical force, i.e. same-sex rape (Essig 1999, 8; Greif, Coman, and M Bell 2001, 44). Men prosecuted under Article 122.1 were also often prosecuted under a number of other articles and only the one with the highest sentence got registered (Gessen 1993, 12-14). However, Essig argues that in one way or another many men with same-sex attractions suffered because of the Soviet legislation. She describes horrors which men sentenced under these articles had to experience in prisons and labour camps where they were considered the lowest of the low (1999, 9-12). As Essig puts it, consequently,

[t]he law against sodomy embedded itself in the bodies of queer men and insinuated itself into their lives. The terrifying nature of imprisonment as a “degraded one” ensured that the effect of Article 121 was always out of proportion to the actual number of men prosecuted under it. Its power was always more symbolic than actual. It created fear and mistrust.

(1999, 13)

Was this “fear and mistrust” equally felt in the Lithuanian SSR? All the men I have interviewed were well aware of the Article 122, but none of them had any friends who had been persecuted or arrested because of their same-sex practices. Actually, most of them did not know any cases when the article was applied in the Lithuanian SSR. Tadas (46 y/o), who is a human rights activist, does not discount the possibility that the law against sex between men was applied during the 1980s, however, he says:

It wasn't that the community was hearing some horror stories that there were some militia's raids or someone was peached upon. . . . Of course it very much depends on the situation but I just want to witness that . . . *P* don't remember any rumours that there was some kind of danger from the militia or someone was being chased.

Tadas claims to having seen some official information from the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania in the early 1990s. It stated that only one or three men have been imprisoned during the last years of the Soviet era. However, they could have been charged with same-sex rape as well, because the ministry could not provide information whether these men were sentenced under Article 122.1 or 122.2, i.e. for a consensual sexual relations or sex with the use of force between men. In his opinion the second part of the article created perfect conditions for blackmailing and basically anyone could have suffered from it. If someone wanted to denounce a man to militia he could have easily said that the man had attempted to sexually seduce him. Artūras (54 y/o), who used to work as a surgeon in Soviet military institutions, confirms that in the 1980s men were no longer prosecuted for their same-sex relations:

No confinement [for sexual relations between men] was applied any more . . . but since I worked in military structures . . . where I had an opportunity to communicate with those famous members of military KGB . . . they knew everyone by name, so to say kept [a list] just in case⁴, to be able to use it [against men who were suspected of same-

³ All the emphases in the quotes provided in this paper are original emphases, unless stated otherwise.

⁴ Here Artūras refers to the secret security files which were supposedly administered by KGB. For men there was a risk to be listed in these files if they were anyhow suspected of same-sex sexual relations. These files (or lists, as some men refer to them) provided a possibility for Soviet authorities to blackmail enlisted men and, thus, to use

sex relations] if something unexpected happened. . . . But during the last years [of socialism] there was no confinement, well, maybe in Russia, but definitely not in the Baltic region. I was serving in the Soviet army in Lithuania, Kaliningrad region, not any more, no more.

Thus, it seems that in the Lithuanian SSR of the 1980s Article 122.1 was mainly used extra-legally, as a tool to control (in)visibility of men with same-sex desires, while ensuring that they remained loyal to the Soviet regime. In any case, this law was signifying that same-sex desires were meant to stay hidden from the public eye. As Gayle Rubin puts it, “[e]ven sporadic enforcement [of laws] serves to remind individuals that they are members of a subject population” (1984, 219). A suspicion of involvement in same-sex practices sometimes led to men being listed in the security files, which then put a stigma on them and haunted them the rest of their lives. Thus, even though men with same-sex attractions might no longer have been sentenced to jail, just the existence of this legislation created a good ground for threats, pursuit and blackmail (both from civilians and officials), but most importantly at least for some men with same-sex desires it created an atmosphere of fear of surveillance and need for constant self-control. As a result people were watching others while watching themselves. Rimas (53 y/o) also defines Article 122.1 as a purely political one:

[T]he gay problem . . . was a political one. There was this article of the Criminal Code but in practice it wasn’t applied, unless a person was somehow tainted in security terms [e.g. was not loyal to the Socialist system]. Then he was told [by authorities]: ‘listen, fellow, don’t do that, then we won’t cause any problems to you,’ and so on. This whole article was for a comfort of the security [KGB], so that it would be easier to recruit people from the gay environment. . . . [Thus, KGB] always wanted to have maximally thorough lists of which people are gay . . . On the other hand it was very formal [i.e. did not have real consequences for those who stayed ‘loyal’ to the regime], at least in Lithuania.

them for various tasks (e.g. spying or reporting). It also ensured their loyalty to the Soviet system. Men who appeared in these security files were under increased KGB surveillance and risked to be openly condemned (losing their jobs and some state services) and maybe even charged under Article 121.1 (also see Česienė (2007, 125-6)).

Therefore, even though neither the men I have interviewed themselves nor people they knew had any direct experience with the Soviet legal system because of their same-sex attractions, their lives were still somehow influenced by the existence of such legislation which created an atmosphere of surveillance and fear. For instance, Marius (47 y/o) tells that for him trying to recognise and meet other men with same-sex attractions on streets and in parks it felt

rather dangerous because you hear all these stories of raids. Someone was saying that the militia were taking those people and making those lists, and then if something, as far as I heard, that actually never happened to me, they were instantly bringing them to check [if there was a possibility of anal intercourse] to venereological clinic and so on, and supposedly made those lists.

Thus, even though nothing similar had happened to him personally or his friends (and it is easy to sense lack of details and on-going uncertainty in his telling), Marius was affected by rumours of possible threats. If, to put it in Butler's word, the law remains "the law only to the extent that it is reiterated as the law" (1993, 15), Article 122.1 was still reiterated, since it was still well known and often caused at least some fear to most of the men I have interviewed. However, this reiteration was practiced not as much through legal prosecutions and imprisonments (which were foreseen by the law) as through continuous policing and surveillance.

To be caught or persecuted by the militia or KGB meant a threat to be named and publicly revealed. Moss argues that "[i]n East European culture in the Soviet period the major axis of definition that structures thought is not sexual, but political: dissident/pro-Soviet" (1995, 229). While many people might have been 'dissidents,' publicly they had to appear as pro-Soviets. And, since basically everything was owned and governed by the Soviet state, there were very few possibilities to escape from the public. People had to constantly conceal their views and practices which could have been interpreted as anti-Soviet (Moss 1995, 229, 234). Thus, men with same-sex attractions also had to develop a system of codings which allowed them to live their desires in public. To be revealed as a (sexual) dissident meant to be categorised as such once and for all.

Thus, it meant to be decoded which in turn complicated one's participation in communities which were also threatened to be revealed.

A few men I have interviewed mention that the existence of Article 122.1 and the stigma it carried prevented them even from looking for other men with same-sex attractions. For instance, Simas (41 y/o) remembers that his first knowledge about homosexuality at high school was connected with the Soviet legislation:

This mouth-to-mouth information was that, for example, some senior pupils talked: 'I know this one 'pederastas' ['pederast,' or a Lithuanian equivalent of 'faggot'], we can bring him to militia and we'll get a reward.' . . . I didn't know if the Soviets were giving any rewards but the whole idea was very bad, not the idea itself, but there was no positive information and you hear some prison stories instead. You hear that people are using the word 'pederastas' as the worst thing which can ever happen.

Aurimas (40 y/o) used to hear stories about pederasts too. He says a pederast was "some kind of a bugaboo" associated with criminality and child molestation. It was someone who "awaits you round a corner and knock you off" on your road from school. However, he thinks that so many things were presented as 'bugaboos' during the Soviet times that many people learned to be selective. In his opinion many laws during the Socialist times were not effective:

[T]hose soviet times, they were... I don't really know how to explain this to you. Now your attitude towards laws has completely changed, you start to follow them. Then the laws were something, how to put it, everybody lived like this: you have to steal stuff from work, and not in disguise. . . . [I]f you kill someone, then maybe you'll get a rap over your knuckles . . . ; but if you go to a warehouse and steal something, it wasn't theft. Thus some laws weren't really applied. . . . I didn't know anyone . . . who would have been convicted [of same sex relations]. Yes, there is [some law], you can't do that, but you know how many things were not allowed in the Soviet Union, starting with the music I was listening to . . .

Thus men with same-sex attractions had to learn to live with the law which was directed against them. They did not completely obey the law but found ways how to obviate punishments while questioning and challenging the Soviet system. The view that people with same-sex attractions should not exist under state-socialism did not erase their existence. On the contrary, it registered and documented their presence. As Butler put it, “[s]ubjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency. ‘Subjection’ signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as a process of becoming a subject” (1997, 2). Thus, the legislation condemning same-sex sexual relations might have made these relations possible for some men. Without a doubt Article 122.1 presented male same-sex attractions in a negative way but it still was a source of information which might have led men who could identify themselves in the law to search for further answers and for each other. Furthermore, since the Soviet system was full of contradictions and official notions which people no longer took seriously at least in the 1980s, towards the end of the Soviet era, men with same-sex attractions might have felt that their non-normative sexualities were just another part of the life which they had to hide from the authorities.

Like other dissidents, men with same-sex attractions were creating spaces of concealed communication. They were figuring out their own tactics in the space of imposed restrictions transforming it in the ways that allowed them to stay within the Soviet system, appear as good Soviet citizens, while engaging in same-sex sexual activities and friendships. According to Certeau, tactics (as opposed to strategies) are “an art of the weak” (1984, 37). As he puts it,

[t]he space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. . . . It takes advantage of “opportunities” and depends on them . . . It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of propriety powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them.

(1984, 37)

In this way men with same-sex attractions were situated in the space of tactics. Since they could not change the official dominant discourse, they were making use of the cracks within this discourse they found useful. A few men I have interviewed say that in the Soviet Union there was no possibility of other public identity than a Soviet citizen. Quite a few were married because that was one of the elements of the public identity the system required. Essig writes that “the label ‘married’” was necessary in order to access a better housing or job in what she (in Adrienne Rich’s (1980) terms) calls “the ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ of the Soviet system” (1999, 97). In Essig’s opinion this label made identities organised around same-sex attractions impossible; as she puts it, “[a] man married to a women is not allowed to call himself gay” (ibid, 83). I suggest viewing identities not as totalising entities but as multiple centres of communications, or spaces of interactions. Then it becomes possible to imagine different or contradicting identities performed in the same locus. As Artūras (54 y/o) points out, marriage was just one out of many double lives men had to live during the state-socialism:

Well, you just keep a double life. In general we lived not a double life, but triple, quadruple, quintuple life because at work we had some particular slogans, different talks; you always have to read between lines, always. For example one person I knew . . . a nurse, she somehow managed to improve her passport, to change her birth date from February 14 to 16 [which is the Lithuanian independence day of 1918], then we celebrated her *birthday* (laughing). So, how to call this? . . . Let’s say in all spheres of your life you had a double life. The more spheres you had the more double lives . . . don’t confuse the corners.

From these words of Artūras and earlier from Aurimas it seem that there was a fair amount of cracks in the Soviet system of the 1980s which people continuously used for their own benefit. But of course to work out their tactics people had to have knowledge some of which was far more difficult to access than other knowledge. For instance, most people knew how to use their workplace for knitting, reading and endless coffee breaks or how to take part of their factory’s production home since it was generally considered somewhat acceptable (even some Soviet

movies did not hesitate to demonstrate that), yet to find information about same-sex attractions and relations which would contradict the discourse officially supported by the Soviet state (or even any information about same-sex practices, as some of the men I have interviewed would claim) often was a significant challenge.

Information: from *scum* to community

All of the men I have interviewed emphasise lack of information about same-sex relations in Soviet Lithuania of the 1980s. Some of the men say that it was only possible to feel and experience same-sex attractions; naming and defining of what was happening came later. For example, Romas (51 y/o) believes that in many cases there were no resources to define same-sex relations. He had his first sexual experience with a man during his student days:

[W]e were staying at the dorm, studying. You return from a disco, sit, talk, go to a balcony. I remember it very well, we went to a balcony and somehow hugged, talked, kissed or otherwise touched, and liked it. It was more or less a physical feeling, more bodily. Because in those times there were no conditions or resources to . . . discuss something, there was simply absolutely no information about that. Probably you could only feel it bodily. There was no literature . . . It happened spontaneously. And then you think: *Jesus*, that's very interesting, something *new*, something undiscovered (laughs). And only then you start searching for more [information and experiences].

Therefore, sometimes first knowledge of possibility of same-sex relations came through experience. Antanas (60 y/o) says it is as simple as smoking: "How can I explain it to you? I asked you if you smoke. You said that you don't. That's it. You just feel what you need." However, probably one has to know what smoking is in order to be able to tell if one needs it or not. Since positive information about same-sex attractions was hard to find, for a number of men any communication with other men with same-sex desires was much more complicated

than smoking. For instance, Juozas (42 y/o) tried to suppress his same-sex desires by avoiding any physical contact with men until his 20s. He explains:

You couldn't exist the way you were. You were a mistake of nature, you were scum, you were a shame. And those things which [you got] from your surroundings, school, peers, what their attitude was towards that [same-sex relations], it influenced your own views, want it or not. . . . So I viewed myself very negatively. I saw it as a perversion. And for me all those lessons of physical education were a horrible nightmare because I tried to repress, I had to suppress everything which was connected with body.

In this way the information that men with same-sex attractions cannot exist in the society where Juozas was growing up influenced his own self-perception. Since he knew that he actually did exist, *even* if as someone unthinkable and unnameable (to put it in Butler's (1991) terms), that the nightmare is a part of his reality, this information created a possibility of Juozas' self-identification. He did not know anyone personally who shared feelings similar to his, but he knew that 'mistakes of nature' happened. Thus, he was actively looking for any alternative hints about same-sex attractions which consequently made his involvement in communities of men with same-sex desires possible. In contrast, Marius (47 y/o) says he did not have any information about a possibility of same-sex relations until he was 23. He gives an example of his student days:

[T]hroughout all the period from 81 till 86 in Petersburg [Saint Petersburg, or Leningrad back then], [even though] I am a very interactive person, this theme [homosexuality] never occurred, never. . . . so let's conclude, this question was so deeply hidden that there wasn't even a chance for it to appear. . . . There was no talk at all. Never there was any gossiping . . . *never*.

Marius thinks that this lack of information conditioned his late 'understanding of himself.' He says he did not feel any pressure from his social environment to have a girlfriend or to have sex with women because his student days were so full of other activities and many peers did not

have sexual relations back then either. He names his first encounter with homosexuality which happened outside of the Soviet space as an eye-opener but a painful one:

I'd like to believe that a *personal* coming-out is a celebration for some, for me it was suffering . . . It seemed that I'm left alone in the whole universe, I can't talk to anyone and it was a tragedy . . . and then, when you discover yourself, you suddenly realise . . . the context you are in . . . you understand that you are illegal and so on . . . and you consciously hide yourself so deep . . . and it doesn't help.

After understanding his same-sex desires Marius sought for means of identification in the Soviet space but all he could instantly find in the public discourse was the law which defined him as a criminal. Thus, his search for community of men with same-sex attractions in Lithuania was followed by many personal struggles and uneasiness.

Many younger (40-45 y/o) men I have interviewed point out a book by Latvian author Janis Zalytis (1984) 'In the Name of Love' ('Meilēs vardu'), released in Lithuania in 1984, as their first educational text about homosexuality. The book focused on sexual maturing and reproduction. It also included a section about 'sexual perversions,' one of which was homosexuality. It was presented as a curable disease and for those who experienced same-sex attractions it recommended to turn to a doctor or psychiatrist. As the interviews with the older men suggest, a similar public understanding of homosexuality as a disease or mental disorder was prevalent in the beginning of the 1980s too. Even though none of the men sought help from a health professional, some of them were hoping the 'disease' would pass if they didn't masturbate, tried not to think about boys or just waited patiently. As Simas (41 y/o) says:

The information which reached me . . . was that homosexual thoughts could be caused by onanism. I was . . . like 12-14 years old and I just waited until they pass somehow. And they didn't pass, and then I married when I was 19. All this time I had no sexual relations – *neither* with men, nor with women. I had tried with the woman I married

before the marriage and it was ok. And I started to wait until I heal and everything gets great. Strangely, nothing was changing.

Later Simas divorced his wife. His decision was largely influenced by the increase of positive (West-influenced) information about homosexuality in the 1990s and his self-identification as a homosexual man. Since none of attempts to erase their same-sex desires worked for other men I interviewed either, all of them sought for alternative sources of information or other men who experienced similar desires. This made ‘imagined communities’ of men with same-sex attractions and thus homosexual identities possible. However, negative information often functioned as a stirrer inciting men to search for further answers and possibilities.

Writing about Socialist Russia Essig notes:

Despite sporadic mentions of homosexuality in publicly accessible texts such as the encyclopedia, homosexuality was *almost* completely invisible in [Soviet] Russian society. . . . For five decades [of the existence of the Soviet Union], homosexuality existed outside the public’s view, glimpsed only fleetingly in a law that forbade it.

(1999, 7; my emphasis)

However difficult it is to compare the Lithuanian and Russian contexts during the Soviet era, I believe ‘despite’ and ‘almost’ have a crucial meaning in this quote from Essig. Sporadic mentioning of homosexuality might have created a sense of silence but, as Foucault puts it, what appears as silence often is a specific ‘regime of discourses.’ It only appears as neutral silence because the issues are discussed in a different (less direct, unconventional or unexpected) way (Foucault 1978, 27).

Many writings – such as medical, psychiatry, law and other sourcebooks and encyclopaedias – included at least some information on male same-sex attractions. For instance, the fourth volume of ‘Lithuanian Soviet Encyclopaedia,’ which decorated many of Soviet Lithuanian households, had a short article on homosexuality (or ‘homosexuality,’ as it was referred back then). It noted

that this same-sex attraction is “usually specific to psychopathic and maladjusted individuals” (Aničas et al. 1978, 4:373) and gave a reference to ‘sexual perversions’ in the seventh volume of the same encyclopaedia where ‘homosexuality’ appears among zoo-, incesto-, necro- and other-philias (Aničas et al. 1981, 7:58).

Butler notes that oppression functions not only through prohibition but also through the “production of a domain of unthinkability and unnamability (1991, 20).” Thus many Lithuanian researchers (see Zdanevičius (2007, 11), Česienė (2007, 119), Reingardė (2007, 59)), just like Essig, emphasise the silence surrounding non-normative sexualities. The Soviet system managed to create an impression of silence and non-existence of same-sex desires and produce the impossible possibility of these desires at the same time. Therefore, Artūras (54 y/o) can say that “publicly sex did not exist in the Soviet times,” even being well aware that same-sex desires and practices continuously appeared in sourcebooks, laws, working tasks, anecdotes and even swearwords. Non-normative sexualities were made visible in these particular discourses in order to demonstrate what kind of behaviour was acceptable and expected from the Soviet citizen, i.e. constituted the citizen, and what behaviour was meant to stay invisible or isolated, i.e. constituted a deviant or a dissident. In this way, once again these discourses, which were meant to show impossibility of same-sex attraction, also defined their possibility. They set formal rules for men with same-sex attractions delineating the law of the place; however, these rules were constantly challenged and redefined through the space of everyday tactics. Men with same-sex desires did not cease to exist and they felt this discrepancy between the official public discourse and their everyday lives. The notion that same-sex attractions could not possibly be a part of Soviet realities increased a split between the visible and hidden layers of men’s lives and, thus, increased a need for alternative communities where this hidden layer could be practiced. These communities constituted an additional challenge to the Soviet regime which could not admit that there were *groups* of men with same-sex attractions (and not just individual deviants) existing in

the place regulated by the Soviet state and under the sign of Soviet citizenship. As Dan Healey argues, the Soviet space officially was presented as immaculate from any ‘perversions,’ including same-sex desires; thus, to admit that there were groups of men with same-sex attractions would have meant to admit a failure of the regime (2001, 254-5) In Saulius’ (43 y/o) opinion even Article 122.1 was not widely applied just to demonstrate that men with same-sex attractions did not exist:

I knew that it is dangerous [to demonstrate same-sex desires at least] in the army, but when I got to know that our regimental commander is himself [homosexual], and [he] started to hit on me . . . Just as far as I understood maybe this theme in the Soviet Union wasn’t escalated because probably the plan was that there was no such thing [as same-sex relations] in the Soviet Union, just like prostitution, but of course everything was. . . . [T]hey just tried to silence it. No one was chasing anyone.

Antanas (60 y/o), who worked as a medical doctor, says that hospitalisation was used as a way to silence men with same-sex desires during the Soviet times. He argues that, if same-sex relations had got to be known by Soviet authorities, then the persons were placed at special psychiatric hospital in Kaliningrad or Rokiškis (a town in the North of Lithuania). He says that “different thinking was punished;” thus, these men were stuffed with depressants and turned into “vegetables.” Artūras (54 y/o), a doctor too, also talks about Soviet ‘treatment of homosexuality;’ however, he says he knew about that only because he studied medicine and worked as a doctor:

In general, not in medicine, officially it was neither written nor talked about. . . . How can you talk about something which officially doesn’t exist? Medics knew about it and those who studied [to become medics knew] because you learn, you get all the information about ‘new ways of treatment,’ so to say. . . . I knew one famous professor in Kaunas who used to put ‘schizophrenia’ labels left, right and centre, to everyone.

Healey describes that there were some attempts to decriminalise sex between men in the Soviet Union in 1980s. The main arguments for these attempts were coming from health practitioners

arguing that same-sex attractions are a ‘pathology’ which required medical and not legal interventions (2001, 248-9). Even though these attempts failed, they illustrate that between Soviet authorities there were at least some competing views on male homosexuality. However, as Healey, writing about late Soviet Russia, notes, any political (legal or medical) discussions or specialised literature about homosexuality was meant to be kept hidden from the general public, so that “[l]ate-Soviet Russians, if untouched in their personal experience by same-sex desire, could easily have concluded that their country was as sexually innocent as the tripartite “geography of perversion” imagined” (2001, 256). Since the only men from the ones I interviewed who knew about actual psychiatric treatment of men with same-sex desires in Soviet Lithuania were doctors, it seems that most of Lithuanian Soviet citizens also could only guess about existence of sexual dissidents from publicly available hints in the law and a few books.

If, as Gessen notes, “persecution of lesbians and gay men . . . took root in the systematic obliteration of privacy and individuality undertaken by the Soviets” (1993, 6), then some traits of this initial project were certainly still felt in Soviet Lithuania of the 1980s, but it seems that the official Soviet ideology was more concerned with keeping people with same-sex attractions invisible, out of the public eye, and less with active persecution and aggressive repressions against them. Foucault juxtaposes discourse to silence:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. . . . Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. In like manner, silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its holds and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance.

(1978, 101)

If the Soviet system was more frequently willing to use silence and secrecy as its general strategy against men with same-sex desires, then it should have been expecting formations of at least some ‘areas of tolerance’ which people with same-sex desires could use in their own favour.

Article 122.1 and other scarcely available negative information about same-sex desires might have prevented some men from searching for other men with same-sex attractions. However, for most of the men I have interviewed this information meant a start of self-identification and search for alternative sources of information and communities. If the Soviet state was to sustain the same level of information about same-sex desires, it had to control that men with same-sex attractions publicly appeared as regular Soviet citizens. In return, men with same-sex attractions worked out tactics how to publicly appear as loyal Soviet citizens but at the same time to live their same-sex attractions, which were hard to identify also because the information about them was so scarcely available. Thus, these men were able to create spaces of resistance (as defined by Certeau (1984)) which did not obey the rules of the Soviet place. These spaces allowed men with same-sex desires to live their openly–secret lives in centrality of the cities and commonality of Soviet routines.

Chapter 2 Urban spaces

The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another.

Michel Foucault (1984, 47)

When I think of Soviet Vilnius of the late 1980s, the first thing which comes to my head is a sense of movement, but a remarkably slow one. Officially everyone was employed or otherwise engaged. Most of the prices were affordable but one could not just buy what one needed; thus, shops were half empty of goods but full of people who at least had to try to get those goods. Queues were everywhere. Since, as 'Naked Vilnius: Un-Tourist Guide' puts it, the Soviet city was designed with an idea that nobody should work where they live (Speciūnaitė and Bartkus 2007), every morning hundreds of crammed Czechoslovakian trolleybuses and Hungarian buses were moving Soviet citizens from what the same guide names a 'nowhere land' of grey residential block-houses to their workplaces in the city centre or industrial outskirts. Maternal leave was only up until a child gets a year old. So, when I turned one and my mother had to return to employment, I had to stay in a kindergarten where I waited to be picked up after her eight hours of work and maybe an hour or two of hustling in a trolleybus and queuing for groceries. And if at times one had a free hour or two, one could spend it in a queue for a free seat in a bar or a restaurant. It seems that the Soviet system managed well to keep everyone busy.

However, that was just one side of a triple, quadruple or quintuple Soviet life (to use Artūras' words cited before). While some were queuing others were getting in with a salesperson or a

director of a store or a warehouse and getting scarce goods under the counter. People were meeting and sharing their own wealth because if one worked in a chocolate factory that one always had candies, while someone else worked in a cannery and always had tinned food, and so on. People were massively spending a lot of their working hours for non-work related activities. However, that should have stayed as an unwritten or unofficial truth, or an open secret. In this way, people were constantly openly–secretly reorganising their space for their own comfort.

In this chapter I look at how ‘the regime of *the open secret*’ (Sedgwick 1993) was experienced by men with same-sex attractions in Lithuania of the 1980s and early 1990s. Following Certeau’s distinction between *place* and *space*, I analyse how these men were constructing spaces of communication and openness in public places, and how these publicly organised spaces were largely dependent on their secrecy. I argue that different spaces of men with same-sex desires, as well as spatial communities and identities they constituted, were not equally valued, and that this spatial hierarchy was highly influenced by their secrecy. Finally, I analyse how the perception of the open secret was changing with the development of new ‘gay’ spaces after Lithuanian independence in 1990.

Public places/same-sex spaces

“There was nothing in the ‘80s,” answers Robertas (49 y/o) to my question about meeting places and men with same-sex attractions in Soviet Vilnius. Guessing that he means there was nothing like a homosexual place at the time, I remind him that just a few minutes ago he mentioned that men used to meet and start relations in parks and toilets, which are places designed for a rather different purpose than sexual contacts between men but developed into spaces where same-sex desires managed to thrive. “Ah yes,” says Robertas now getting what I ask and starting to recall:

Vingio park, different cruising spots⁵, this one [in front of the cinema ‘Kronika’ (‘Newsreel’)] . . . Everybody was coming in the evening, all nicely dressed, perfumed, meeting in a park, someone was drinking, someone got beaten up somewhere. It was like that. Men were going to baths. In the 80s there was a bath on ‘Tilto street, . . . meeting there, going for a beer afterwards. There was a bar ‘Tauro ragas’ [‘Aurochs’ horn’], . . . everyone was going there, for instance. And I was going too, with friends . . . on Fridays after work . . . Next to cinema ‘Lietuva’ [‘Lithuania’] there was a bath. Men were going there [too], taking a newspaper and sitting in a line for *half an hour* or *an hour* just to get in. Probably fifty percent of them were gay, many. Baths cost only 16 kopecks – that was communism. You could go every day and stay for a whole day for 16 kopecks. . . . Afterwards – to ‘Tauro ragas’. . . . Usually there was someone from gays standing at the door, as a doorkeeper. You gave him a rouble to get in, because there was always a queue of 23 people or so. . . . Some men were going there every single day after work . . .

Robertas continues without a break for 20 minutes. He talks about parks and cafes, beaches and flats, strangers and friends, work and leisure, prices and wages. With an immense attention to details he describes an almost routine life of men with same-sex attractions to whom he sometimes refers as ‘gays’ but who could be basically any male Soviet citizen. While hearing names of different places appearing in Robertas’ narrative I try to imagine that some other Soviet citizen probably could have easily visited all of them without even suspecting or being suspected of same-sex attractions. But these were not some random Soviet citizens Robertas is talking about, and these places were not just some random baths and cafes. They were particular locations which men with same-sex attractions used as their own. For these men these places were transformed into spaces where same-sex desires could exist and made sense. However, they were so closely intertwined with other features of urban Soviet life that it becomes difficult to distinguish which layer is mostly connected with same-sex attractions. For instance, men could have gone to baths not just to find a partner, but also to wash, they queued to get in but they

⁵Here he uses a Russian word ‘pleshka’ (‘плешка’) which a couple of other men have used during the interviews as well because there is no Lithuanian analogue for a term ‘cruising spot.’ See Essig (1999, 209) for more information on the Russian term.

used the same time for making contacts with other men, they could have bribed any doorkeeper at 'Tauro ragas' but he was one of their own.

Thus, men with same sex attractions were using some publicly available places for their own needs, creating spaces of communication which was not meant to be publicly performed. Certeau argues that

[a] place (*lien*) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being at the same location (*place*). . . . A *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. . . . In contradiction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a 'proper.' In short, *space is a practiced place*. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers.

(1984, 117)

Since there is no 'proper,' a space always has an element of unpredictability. It is in a constant process of change and transformation. But, being connected to a place, a space always has a pre-assigned purpose. In other words, places are constructed with an idea that they will accommodate a particular space but, since it is actual users of the place who assign a meaning to it, there is always a space for improvisation, and this improvisation constitutes the space. Thus, if a public bath is planned for bathing, the actual bathers (or bath-goers) not only can decide how they personally use the bath but can also influence unwritten rules or collective use of the space. In this way the users can even amend the initial purpose of the place for a particular group without changing the overall concept. Thus, Robertas can say that there were no places for men with same-sex attractions (i.e. no places designed to accommodate men with same-sex desires) in the 80s but then talk how these men were spatially organising themselves (i.e. creatively using available places for their own needs) in Soviet Vilnius for 20 minutes and more later on in the interview.

Spaces and their relations to communities became one of the central themes of most interviews I conducted. The men talked about main streets, central squares, parks, beaches, public baths, public toilets, train stations, bars, cafes and private flats. They identified their first and subsequent contact zones with other men with same-sex attractions, while these contact zones in turn identified them. But it was not always a fluent two-way process. For instance, Marius (47 y/o) tells it took him quite some time until he learned what are the gathering places where men with same-sex desires meet and how they function:

I was already suspecting [that I was attracted to men] but I didn't take any specific actions. Then it happened that I met this guy at work, and then all this process of integration into community started . . . Everything was rather hidden, there were these rituals of communications, let's put it like this, . . . you had to go through all of that . . . and you slowly discover that hidden, that other, that hidden life . . . which you have never seen, but [you meet] one person, another and you enter this invisible layer of communication. . . . [T]hat all communication, search for other people and everything was coded. I tell you, we lived like partisans (laughs) . . .

Thus, the spaces were associated with particular signs which were supposed to be readable only by those who were the actual users of the space (but not necessarily everyone at the place). Once Marius got to know more men with same-sex attractions, he learned the language and joined the space which he had not known before. However, he says he found it difficult to identify with the group he knew because he did not find anything in common with most of them except the attraction to men. He continues:

I tried to avoid all that business because I still didn't want to belong to that community. Inside I felt resistant. At that time it just seemed if I found some friend, I could meet him from time to time and that could be it . . . [I]n that circle which I saw there were many these feminised personas, which I never really admired but I only saw that and thought *this* is probably something I should follow but it wasn't in me.

Even if Marius did not feel comfortable in the group of men with same-sex attractions he knew, to some extent he still continued to socialize with them because of the sense of his own difference in the society he lived in. In the course of time he managed to built his circle of friends of men with same-sex desires which, as he puts it, was a sort of community which helped him to ‘overwinter,’ i.e. to survive through the times when he could not find any support in other social environments.

Marius is not the only man talking about marginality and secrecy of the spaces for men with same-sex desires in the 1980s. For example, in Dainius’ (40 y/o) opinion all these public spaces were “hideous and horrible;” he thinks that they were needless and served only as a hideout for men who were “afraid to come out into the daylight,” “afraid of their own shadows;” for him these were “marginal places for marginal people,” which he would never call a community. Since he did not feel marginal himself, he says he avoided any contact with these spaces, even though he can name most of them and describe how ‘horrible’ they were. Among other things he talks about ‘*repulsive*’ public toilets and “lovers of toilet acquaintances” and a cafe ‘Akimirka’ (‘Blink’ or ‘Blink of an eye’) where he tried to go “being a young kid . . . but instantly ran away when he saw how horrible it was there . . . [because he found] only old codgers of retirement age sitting with a pint of beer and cigarettes . . . [and] their lewd eyes.”

Spatial hierarchies: shifting centralities and marginalities

Most of the *places* (or locations) around which men with same-sex attractions were organising themselves were not marginal at all. For instance, in Vilnius some of the places, such as Lenino and Černechovskio squares and a popular cafe ‘Akimirka’, were located on the very central street of the city – Lenino avenue (currently Gedimino avenue). A large and usually crowded bar (beer-house) ‘Tauro ragas’ was situated just a few blocks from the same avenue, and a park in front of the cinema ‘Kronika’ – next to a rather busy trolleybus and bus conjunction. Even several public

toilets and baths which men were using for cruising and same-sex contacts cannot really be considered marginal as *places* because they were centrally located and frequently circulated by general public. However, as *spaces* for men with same-sex desires they were marginal since they were the spaces of the Other. They were the outcomes of somewhat risky tactics which men with same-sex desires keyed to confront the official strategy of the Soviet state and pervert the preassigned purpose of the public places. Even though, as pointed before, most of Soviet citizens used tactics which contradicted with the requirements from the Soviet system in their everyday lives, these tactics were more or less openly supported by their colleagues, relatives or other social environments. Since information about same-sex attractions between men was very limited and mainly negative, the spaces for men with same-sex attractions within the city center became associated with danger and pollution. They became 'in-between' spaces (to use Julia Kristeva's (1982) term) which, as Marius puts it, one had to go through, to pass in order to develop a circle of friends, in a way to upgrade to what at least by some men was considered the 'higher' or 'truer' level of communication. Through this passing these spaces of the Other got abandoned by some men with same-sex desires while others stayed, in this way these spaces were constantly becoming spaces of the Other of the Other.

Kristeva proposes the concept of 'abjection' in order to illustrate the operation through which the self is being formed by excluding anything threatening its borders. The abject becomes the other. She argues that:

"It is . . . not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior.

(1982, 4)

In a similar manner some spaces for men with same-sex attractions became abject even for their users because not only they disturbed the common order of the place but also blended together

sex and friendship, femininity and masculinity, old age and youth, publicity and privacy, insiders and outsiders, elements which were supposed to be kept separate. These spaces became to be seen as shelters for losers and misfits which were either too young or too old, too poor or too feminine or simply too unfortunate to pass these transitional areas and to move up in a hierarchy of spaces, where public toilets (especially those situated next to train stations) appear to have been placed on the very lowest ladder. This hierarchy is especially vividly described in Saulius' (43 y/o) mapping of spaces for men with same-sex attractions in Kaunas, Vilnius and Klaipėda:

In Klaipėda, Vilnius, Kaunas [men] were meeting each other next to the train stations, I knew that, but they were called 'tualetiniai' [which is an adjective used as a noun and could be translated as 'toilet-men' or 'toileters']. We were one step higher – we were 'parkiniai' [it is a self-made word meaning 'park-men' or 'parkers']. In Klaipėda there was this Park of Sculptures⁶, in Kaunas there was Ažuolyno Park⁷ and the one next to Four Communards⁸, in Vilnius – the park in front of Klaipėda bus stop⁹. And yes, those 'geležinkeliečiai' ['railwaymen'] who met at train stations. Then it was like this: if you meet some person, then you get into a circle where they communicate all the time. . . . Usually those who were homosexual and were a bit older, at least 30 years old, they were already better-off. . . . And you get into one circle or another. At that time in Kaunas there were five prevailing groups: at Juozas' place in Šilainiai [district], at Mantas' place in Aleksotas, at Romas' place in the Old Town... Then there was one apartment where more exclusive men met, you couldn't get in there, not if you are a student, only in case if somebody introduced you.

Saulius calls these circles who gathered in private flats 'communities.' He tells each of them united up to thirty men, who were changing from time to time. He started as a 'parker' where he met his first long-time partner, but then he moved up to communal spaces in Juozas, Mantas and Romas' apartments. There is a very distinct division between 'us' and 'them' in Saulius' narrative, which is even more visible in the following lines:

⁶ The biggest park in the city centre with a lot of walkways around many various sculptures.

⁷ Oak Park – a very large and rather central park in Kaunas.

⁸ A central park which is currently named Ramybės (Serenity) Park. During the Soviet times there used to be the monument for Four Communards.

⁹ The park which is located in front of the cinema 'Kronika.'

I was lucky that I did not end up in the circle of those who were on the lowest ladder. Somehow I managed to get where I needed to get where people of a bit higher morals were circulating. Maybe in the society they were perverts but they had better positions and were better-off, tidy people who had money and good flats. . . . I can tell you I was lucky. Because if I had ended up with those who I knew lived four in a dorm room, with various orgies, older men making fools of themselves, who knows, maybe I would have ended up being some sort of a bozo.

Thus, in order not to a 'bozo' one had either to be wealthy himself or find (or rather be found and chosen by) someone who was wealthy. Wealth led to 'higher moral' standards which for Saulius seems to be associated with tidiness, privacy and what he called 'cultured communication' which was separate from sex. Private flats also became a space where male same-sex couples could socialise. Men who did not have enough 'luck,' wealth or other required qualities, but sought contacts with other men with same-sex desires were forced to stay in spaces which were considered marginal and inferior by many men. Even though all the spaces for men with same-sex desires, mentioned by the men I have interviewed, and their users seem to be parts of the same spatial and identity system, the internal inequalities and divisions are hard to miss. Interestingly, when a space was named certain people who were associated with the space also were labelled; therefore, hierarchy of spaces transformed into hierarchy of men.

Artūras (54 y/o) also talks about small private circles as a privileged space of communication between men with same-sex attractions during the 1980s, which was not accessible for everyone:

But for youth it was a rather *tragic* pattern, because at least in Kaunas there was this Ažuolynas [Ažuolyno Park] with wild sex in the bushes . . . There was . . . a toilet at the train station which started to work after 11 pm. And in a case of more decent youth there were public showers, baths. . . . But in most of the cases it was 'just for sex,' how to say, only to find some partner for sex because everyone tried to forget even a name – god forbid if something [happened], someone remembered, found out . . . [E]veryone avoided any larger gatherings, any noise. Everyone tried to avoid contacts with more camp people . . .

Thus, while for some men spaces could change with their age and social status, for others, e.g. 'more camp' or 'feminised,' and, thus, more visible, the change was probably more complicated. Rimas (53 y/o) points out that some non-married men were better-off because they did not have to spend their earnings for families and children. However, one already had to have a very good reason for not being married. As Artūras puts it, marriage was one of the compulsory components for achieving a better social status in Soviet Lithuania which included an access to good employment and housing. Therefore, an unmarried wealthy man with his own apartment was a rather exceptional case. From the interviews it seems that in Soviet Lithuania after reaching a certain age, finishing their higher education or military service, a large percentage of men with same-sex attractions were getting married and living with their families. However, often they did not part company with other men with same-sex attraction but had to either befriend someone who owned his own place, limit communication with other men with same-sex attraction to rare occasional meetings or occupy less desired spaces and "within community to be looked upon with scepticism and irony," to put it in Juozas (42 y/o) words. Rimas (53 y/o) says that for many men with same-sex attractions "[t]here was no other social environment [than parks, toilets and baths], this was *the* social environment where people were driven by the situation." Nonetheless, this environment was also becoming increasingly associated with danger and violence towards the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s.

Writing about men with same-sex attractions in Soviet Russia of 1930s, Healey points out that criminalisation of sex between men did not prevent them from gathering in certain parts of central Moscow and other cities. He notes that "[m]en seeking sex together continued to rely on the techniques of concealment and outwardly innocent sociability that had long disguised their purpose from the dominant sex/gender system" (2002, 364). It seems that the same could be applied for Soviet Lithuania 50 years later. However, the situation was changing. The secrecy of spaces for men with same-sex attraction was slowly becoming a matter of public discussions.

Aurimas (40 y/o) says that he remembers the first articles about homosexuality appearing in popular daily 'Komjaunimo tiesa' ('Komsomol Truth') in the very end of the 1980s, which disclosed locations where homosexuals were gathering in Vilnius and Kaunas. Simas (41 y/o) also recalls an article from the same daily which discussed how to identify a homosexual man (from his engagement with children or interest in 'men with large butts'). Consequently, the information was transforming the ways men with same-sex attractions related to each other and their communicational spaces.

A few men I interviewed told stories about violent group attacks, blackmail, thefts and even murders penetrating spaces of men with same-sex attractions in the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. Robertas (49 y/o) talks about increased criminality in the parks, bars and toilets which he had previously defined as relatively safe contact spaces:

A time came when robberies started at cruising spots. There was this academy in Antakalnis where guys from all the Soviet Union were studying to become army officers. . . . Someone from ours sold out to them, told everything, showed how everything worked. They were coming to the same bar ['Tauro ragas' or 'Akimirka'] and hitting on someone. A handsome guy approaching, talking, going to a flat and then starting to blackmail . . . Everyone was very afraid [of publicity] at that time . . . There were robberies at nights, near some bar, in the park. Taking away your jacket, stealing money and beating you up. I saw it myself. . . . I know three men were stabbed [in their homes] who had more money, a better flat.

Marius (47 y/o) says he did not feel safe going to cafe 'Akimirka' or any other more public places where men with same-sex desires gathered in Soviet Vilnius because of bashings which were sometimes happening there:

[S]o called 'repairs' were attacks against our people, that is, our community. It was happening [where men with same-sex attractions gathered] rather often . . . I managed to bypass that, but they were meeting to beat ours. And similar things happened next to 'Akimirka.' It wasn't safe, not safe. . . . It was so natural to do that [to beat]. This

was a ‘repair,’ they ‘repaired.’ . . . And it was on two levels: these lads had to unload their energy, and then you couldn’t even complain to militia . . .

Thus, already marginalised spaces were being further devalued while losing their secrecy and being interrupted by their new (unwanted) users. Small circles of friends in private apartments became even more appreciated and public toilets were even more debased.

In Soviet Lithuanian cities public toilets were the most accessible and thus the most betraying spaces used by men with same-sex attractions. Firstly, they were free and usually unwatched. As Robertas who had his first same-sex encounter in the public toilet next to the train station in Vilnius (at a time when he was still living in countryside) notes, it was impossible not to notice sexual suggestions on the walls in basically any public toilet within the city, “everywhere it was written: ‘Friday at 6 I suck,’ ‘I give’ and so on.” These texts on the walls meant that, to put it in Essig’s words, “[e]ven if a man knew no other place in the city to engage in homosexual contacts, he would almost certainly know that it is possible, at least at a textual level, to do so in public rest rooms” (1999, 88). But Robertas says that even the actual sexual activities in those toilets were hard to miss:

[S]ometimes even for me it felt uncomfortable. You walk to a toilet to take a piss and there are five people staring at you; somehow uncomfortable, you know. And the cabin is also already busy. Men were sitting in there, making holes, sitting for half an hour. I can only imagine how unpleasant it was for straights. There were people who [went there] every day after work. Everything was for free. There was a toilet at Černechovskio [square], other places – holes were everywhere.

A public toilet was a space of increased circulation and anonymity; thus, it provided relative safety for those who did not want to be identified. It was especially applicable for outside public toilets next to main train stations because of their convenient transitional locations. Rimantas (53 y/o) recalls that male passengers who travelled by trains to or through major cities often used toilets as a way to ‘release tension:’ “[for instance] a train going to Kaliningrad stops in Vilnius,

people have 20 minutes, get off and run to the toilet to have a quickie. It was this ‘rabbit habit.’” In his famous study of ‘tearooms’ (i.e., public toilets used for sex) in the US of the 1960s Laud Humphreys argues that “[p]ublic restrooms are [often] chosen by those who want homoerotic activity without commitment for a number of reasons. They are accessible . . . and provide little public visibility. Tearooms offer the advantages of both public and private settings” (1999, 30). However, this accessibility, anonymity and changeability surrounding public toilets also increased a chance of being harassed. Most of Soviet public toilets in Vilnius were built below ground with a single entrance and no windows which made it difficult to escape in case of unexpected interruptions. David Woodhead makes an analysis of ‘cottages’ (another term for ‘tearooms’) as ‘gay’ spaces and notes that:

the spatial specificity of the cottage and its public status are two major problems for those who use it. The contained space is also a containing space which leaves those men using the cottage in a vulnerable situation. . . . Involvement in a process of bringing the unspoken world of homosexual activity into public entails the risk of criminality . . . Having an encounter in a cubicle, for example, not only entails a locking-out of the outside world, but also signifies an imprisonment.

(1995, 239)

In this way, men who were searching for privacy in publicly located spaces could have never been sure how private or how public the sexual encounters might have ended. These men were making themselves vulnerable but at the same time other men with same-sex attractions felt vulnerable too. As a group they felt exposed to the public. Since, as David Bell puts it, “[p]ublic (homo)sex . . . runs against many societal constructs of intimacy, with the casual anonymous encounter being thought of as the very antipathy to the romantically charged (and heteronormative) model of sexual love” (1995, 306), this exposure of public existence of men with same-sex attractions meant not only undesired attention from the suspicious and at times violent public eye, but also associations of the group with often already (self)despised spaces, or

the abject. From most of the interviews it appears that if men with same-sex attractions had wanted to be associated with anything, then it would have been privacy and ‘normality,’ but not the public ‘deviance.’

Most of the public toilets in Lithuanian cities were shut down after the independence of the country in the beginning of the 1990s. Others were reorganised so that the entrance was no longer free and unwatched. The first two issues of ‘Amsterdamas’ (‘Amsterdam’) – one of the first two Lithuanian gay magazines published for a couple of years from 1994 – mentions only a few remaining cruising spots for men with same sex-attractions in Vilnius and Klaipėda. These were some new cafes or hotel lobbies (none of which were mentioned by any of the men I have interviewed) and enduring spaces in Lukiškių square (previously Lenino square), the park in front of evangelical church (previously cinema ‘Kronika’) in Vilnius and the park of sculptures in Klaipėda (Platovas 1994a, 1994b). Juozas (42 y/o) tells that he still managed to find some ‘toilet action’ in Vilnius in 1995 when he returned from his studies elsewhere, but he says these were the very last years of these spaces surrounded with fear and danger. However, new more secure ‘gay’ spaces started to emerge in post-Soviet Lithuania in 1991.

Changing spatial codings

And when it [independence] started, in 1991 they opened a club. We were driving to the forest, Nemenčinės road. It was a start, everyone was going there. But living was getting more expensive. . . . Everyone who was from somewhere else was returning home to his mother. Only those from Vilnius stayed, all the rest left.

(Robertas, 49 y/o)

Thus, it seems Vilnius was getting emptier. What Robertas calls ‘a club’ was a weekly party in Valakampiai, a sparsely neighboured district on the outskirts of Vilnius, which was becoming a major space for men with same-sex attractions from Vilnius but also from other Lithuanian

towns and cities. It was a space once again hidden from the public eye but not as much by codes and secret language any more than by a forest, distance and complicated accessibility from the city centre. Some men I have interviewed did not like the location of the party, while others think that it was too ‘primitively organised;’ however, most of them remember it as a start of something new, something promising and exciting. For instance, Tadas (47 y/o), who used to go there regularly with his gay friends, says he did not like the way the parties in Valakampiai were organised but adds:

I have to admit these parties in Valakampiai were some first step towards some legality, cohesion of this community. Because in general this independence inspired that people were no longer afraid to gather in this public place. In a way it was a public event, this party in Valakampiai, because it was . . . this transitional period when all came from their small private parties to some larger one, which . . . had some consistency. . . . At the same time there were these smaller parties of some 12-14 people, but here it was already around 30-40, maybe even more, 50 people. However, . . . most of them were men . . . mainly gay men’s socialisation.

Tadas says that it was the first public event, but hardly it was more public than cruising spots in parks and squares, than meetings of men with same-sex desires in saunas and cafes. However, this was a space of a new kind. It was a place dedicated to men with same-sex attractions; it was the ‘gay’ place. But even if it was more public than gatherings in private flats, it was still very similar to them. Since it was organised in a relatively small private house away from the city centre, the party created an atmosphere of seclusion and familiarity and reminded of communication within a closed circle of friends. It was an extended circle of friends. In any case, probably this was the first attempt to commodify homosexual identity during the first capitalist years of post-Soviet Lithuania. Tadas notes that the owner of the house was a businessman (and not an activist) who was very quick to detect a gap in the market. He says that “[t]his organising [of the parties] raised many thoughts for others that there was this gap in Lithuania and that it needed to be filled in.” But it was ‘gay men’s socialisation’ and not women’s which attracted

these commercial interests. Alan Sears, who analyses commodification of gay spaces in the US and Canada, notes that the “commercialized gay lifestyle is not equally accessible to all” and that usually it is homosexual men who are the primary target for business development firstly because of their higher incomes (2000, 23). Thus, it is not surprising that commercialized spaces for lesbians appeared several years later than the ones for gay men.

Around the same time when the parties in Valakampiai started, there were ‘closed nights’ for gay men regularly organised in small basement cafe ‘Vakaris’ (which can be translated as ‘West Wind’ but also has a connotation of an evening which is ‘vakaras’ in Lithuanian) in Kaunas. It was situated on the central avenue of the city but the entrance was located on a backstreet. Arnoldas (45 y/o) says it was also a commercial solution of the owner who was gay himself. For Simas (41 y/o) who did not dare to search for same-sex relations in parks ‘Vakaris’ became a very important space of communication:

[W]hen I found ‘Vakaris’ I found my first friends with whom there might have been no sexual relations but it was someone besides with whom you can be open. I remember this need very clearly . . . when people around you don’t know who you are, and here appears one person who knows, another, you understand how good it feels just to be together, *only* because there’s no secret or some mask in between. It was a relief.

These were parties which managed to gather more men with same-sex desires in one place than meetings in private flats. These spaces created a feeling of just the right amount of publicity so that they were more accessible by men with same-sex attractions than parties in private flats and could develop a sense of a larger community, but still remained rather hidden and isolated. Many men I have interviewed talk about the atmosphere of friendship and sincerity surrounding these first gay gatherings. As Simas puts it:

The communication was very easy in there. There was this element that if you already came, then [you were one of the kin]; this element of brotherhood so to say. . . . There

was this [feeling] that we finally came to light. And now I think that there was still this park atmosphere . . . that you see a person in a park, he sees you, [you make] eye contact . . . [which tells] that we both know each other's secret and thus we are already close.

If the common 'secret' was what was connecting the imagined community of men with same-sex desires, then the first commercialized gay spaces created a feeling of liberation related to repetitive uncovering and sharing this secret within a physical group which for most men was larger than ever before. What these spaces offered was a pleasure of announcing the 'vice' in a common language and instead of a punishment receiving an appraisal.

While during the 1980s same-sex attractions mainly existed within a codified system of signs in publicly located spaces (to put it in Juozas' (42 y/o) words, men with same-sex attractions had to learn "how to identify [each other] without an inscription"); the 1990s was increasingly locating same-sex desires within a generic language. Lawrence Knopp notes that "the various sexual codings associated with cities are sites of *multiple* struggles and contradictions, and as such are instrumental in producing, reproducing and transforming both social relations of various kinds (including sexual relations), and space itself" (1995, 151). Shifting sexual codings in Lithuanian cities influenced creation of new spaces for men with same-sex attractions and redefinition of the old ones which in turn were reshaping the ways these men defined themselves, constructed their identities and communities.

Chapter 3 Beyond the Lithuanian cities

What the map cuts up, the story cuts across.

Michel de Certeau (1984, 129)

Since all men I have interviewed come from Vilnius, Kaunas or Klaipėda, they mainly talk about these cities as the milieu where most of their interactions with other men with same-sex attractions took place in Soviet and early post-Soviet times. However, urban spaces were not the only spaces which embraced (while being embraced by) men with same-sex attractions in the 1980s and the early 1990s. There were other spaces which escaped the localities of everyday urban lives. These were spaces which more explicitly crossed physical borders and expanded the imagined communities of men with same-sex desires throughout the Soviet Union, Eurasia and beyond. These spaces became possible through travelling and remote communications. They were locations within and outside the Soviet space where different experiences and practices met. These were spaces of increased sociability between men with same-sex attractions and circulation of information about (homo)sexual relations. These were spaces where many men gained their first tangible knowledge of sexual codings and ways of communication between men with same-sex desires. For some men they marked a start of an ongoing process of (self)identification with other men with same-sex attractions. They provided new ways of self-organising and conditioned different community developments which managed to escape strict rules of Soviet places and eventually led to the rise of transnational belonging and formation of present organisational activism.

‘Summer is for finding a friend for winter.’ Palanga

Most of the men I have interviewed talk about Palanga and more specifically its men’s (nudist) beach as one of such spaces. Palanga is a town situated in western Lithuania, some thirty minutes drive from Klaipėda, which becomes a major seaside resort during summer. According to men I have interviewed, summers of the 1980s also used to transform it into a major gathering space for men with same-sex attractions not only from the Lithuanian SSR but also from various other parts of the western Soviet Union, or, as Vytautas (50 y/o) puts it, into ‘a Union-wide gay resort.’ It seems that the major attraction for men with same-sex desired was the men’s beach situated in the very north of Palanga, around twenty minutes walk from the centre of the town. It is a typical beach of the Lithuanian seaside, or rather a part of the extending beach. Thus, it consists of a wide stripe of sandy foreshore and large ragged dunes with baby’s-breaths and bushy hideouts, isolated from the town by a trail of pine forest. This lay of the beach provided a convenient setting for various types of communication between men. But the beach, marked by ‘men’s beach’ signs from all the sides of the foreshore and forest walkways, seems to have been used mainly by men with same-sex attractions. Interestingly, none of the men who talk about the men’s beach in Palanga during the interviews mentions any conflicts or interactions in general with other than same-sex attracted men in the beach (except the ‘repairs,’ violent attacks mentioned in the previous chapter, which were happening in the late 1980s). The narratives leave an impression that the men’s beach was fully occupied by men with same-sex desires. For instance, Rimas (53 y/o) shares his vivid description of Palanga:

Every day there was a plane Jak-42 with 125 passengers from Moscow landing in Palanga, *daily*. From Leningrad – several times a week. Even from *Kharkov* in Ukraine – once a week, on Mondays there was a plane landing in Palanga. There was *such* an international gay rally in Palanga that no international camp could compete with that now. It was natural; there was a real desire to communicate . . . There were no clubs where all this beach of hundreds of people could run and dance at night. There was

nothing. But this very beach was the disco. There were bushes where people were having sex. And there was this beach where [men] were sunbathing, chatting, communicating . . .

Thus, even not being able to officially establish their own space men with same sex attractions were subverting the intended purpose of the available place for their own needs. However, to use Woodhead's insights about public toilets used as cottages, the "change of purpose in this case . . . [was] not a completely disconnected one." Just like in a case of cottages the beach was still a men's (nudist) beach and used as such. "It [was] still a male-only space, a world reserved for masculine gaze" (Woodhead 1995, 238). Established with a heteronormatively framed intention to desexualise beach-experience for men and women (and most probably children), separate nudist beaches created the conditions which let same-sex desires thrive without much disguise. Knopp notes that "heterosexuality is still often promoted as nothing less than the glue holding . . . spatial divisions of labour . . . together. But on the other hand, these divisions of labour create single-sex environments in which homosexuality has the space, potentially, to flourish" (1995, 149). Similarly, the notion that same-sex sexual relations could not exist in the Soviet society (and especially not in such a public place as a beach) created opportunities for these relations to develop. Furthermore, since it was a resort where people came to spend their holidays from various parts of Soviet republics, men with same-sex attractions felt less restricted and less worried that someone who they knew would have identified their 'improper' behaviour. The men's beach, where a half of adult holidaymakers were not allowed to enter and a larger part of the other half was spending time with their families or searching for holiday affairs elsewhere, was considered to be a particularly safe space. But it seems that in Palanga even outside of the beach men with same-sex attractions allowed themselves to be more open and less constrained. For instance, Antanas (60 y/o) tells about his first same-sex sexual experience which happened in Palanga after he graduated from his high school at the age of 17:

I simply met this Russian guy around my age in a restaurant. We somehow talked in the restaurant at the table . . . We just understood each other . . . Then we went for a walk on the beach and then (smiles)...

Weren't you afraid? [I ask because this story comes straight after his talk about the general atmosphere of fear and how scared he was of the system and had to hide from his friends and colleagues all the time.]

Afraid of what? How can one be afraid? It was only fearful when we two were kissing in the middle of Palanga. Someone said: look, faggots ['pydarai']. I said: let's go to dunes, so that they wouldn't see, and that's it (laughing). That's all the fear. How do you think it can be fearful? You have to know how to defend yourself.

Thus, Antanas does not even relate my question to the fear of being identified by people he might have known or being punished by the Soviet authorities. It was a space which was separate from his everyday life, outside of what he calls 'the system of fear.' Saulius (43 y/o) who also had his first sexual contact with a man in Palanga says he was surprised how openly men with same-sex attractions communicated there. Since before Saulius did not know anything about spaces where men with same-sex attractions met and how they communicated, for him the first accidental acquaintance on the men's beach was the first source of knowledge about that which allowed him to develop his sense of community, network of friends and relations. He says:

[M]y whole story began in 1985 when I was in Palanga with my parents. I was 17 then. I was walking alone . . . that day and somehow wandered away. And a naked guy ran besides. I already knew, *felt* who I am. So it was interesting for me. . . . I stumbled upon the men's beach. I thought that something was strange there. One man passing through smiled at me, I smiled back – I was only 17 and well-mannered (laughs). Yeah. And then he returned, approached, we had a chat. He was from Moscow, actually an assistant of one minister of the [Soviet] Union He openly introduced himself, explained. Later on I visited him in Moscow. . . . We talked, chatted. Then the next day we accidentally met in the town and went to his place, but then this first time there was nothing serious – only kisses.

There were also a couple of other men I have interviewed who gained their first knowledge of same-sex and in general sexual relations at the men's beach (at an even younger age than Antanas and Saulius). But even for others who mentioned Palanga in their interviews it was a space where information was exchanged nationally and internationally, where men met men for sex and holiday love affairs and developed partnerships and friendships which broke laws and borders. Even for Marius (47 y/o), who generally tried to avoid publicly located spaces for men with same-sex attractions, Palanga was a real retreat from the urban environment which he defines as hostile:

It's important to note that Lithuania had a unique spot which was some paradise in the Soviet Union. It was the [men's] beaches of Palanga and Klaipėda where we were going almost every summer weekend . . . because it was cheap and you only had to survive [several hours of] travel. You rent a hotel or a room and that's it – all this community [of men with same sex attractions] was within reach of your hand. Then summer was this period of more intense communication. And there was this phrase by more experienced companions which I remember very well: 'summer is for finding a friend for winter.' And it was like that.

Saulius (43 y/o) also notes seasonality and temporality of the space which made this 'finding a friend for winter' a rather difficult task:

There was this opportunity to meet on the men's beach in Palanga. It was dense there because everyone came to one place. But it was only in summer. And you couldn't understand who was from which city. If the cities were further away then this communication wasn't that great. We had only land lines, no mobile phones. And the transport [was less developed] . . .

Thus, most of the sexual relations developed in the resort, especially those with men from other Soviet republics, were more or less short-lived ones. Nonetheless, for most of the men I have interviewed these were very meaningful experiences. The space men with same-sex attractions created in Palanga was a sort of a shelter from their daily Soviet routines, a slot to share their

realities and practices. It created a sense of expanded community. Men developed new networks and got to know the spaces for men with same-sex attractions elsewhere at least through stories they shared (if not to actually experience them). As Robertas (49 y/o) notes “[t]hen the men’s beach in Palanga was twice [the size], and if you wanted to lie down on the beach you had to come earlier [to find a free spot]. . . . There was no need to travel abroad, the whole [Soviet] Union was there.” However, people also travelled within the Soviet Union and sometimes even outside of it.

Travelling within the Soviet Union

Vytautas (50 y/o) who was a performer and often travelled within the Soviet Union for his work tells that he developed more friendships with men with same-sex attractions while being on tour than living in Klaipėda or Vilnius. Larger Soviet cities and cultural events taking place there allowed him to feel less constrained and more outspoken. He says “the larger the city the more liberal society there was;” thus, “it felt freer in Vilnius than in Klaipėda, in Riga than in Vilnius, in Moscow than in Riga.” He also thinks that artists were in general less adverse to men with same-sex desires than many other professional circles. That is why there could develop a sense of international community of men with same-sex attractions involved in cultural work:

[W]e travelled a lot within the Soviet Union. There were . . . a lot of artists at joint events and where there are [many artists], want it or not, all this [same-sex interests] comes up, especially in such city as Moscow. Then when you already have some experience you start identifying [men with same-sex attractions] within the crowd because of some behaviour, even some outfit, somehow non-ordinary looking men In Moscow . . . even at that time these emotions [same-sex desires] were rather explicitly expressed in rather public places . . . , whereas it seemed that we were more modest. . . . Then I had a more interesting international [than local] circle of friends. We were communicating, visiting each other, as friends. I was going to Moscow, Leningrad, Riga, Tallinn. Obviously, we were such, something was relating us. We did

not necessarily have love affairs or something, it was friendship, we welcomed each other.

Rimas (53 y/o) who was often travelling to Moscow and some other Soviet cities for his scholarly work also says that spaces where men with same-sex desires met in major Russian cities were less concealed and there were more opportunities to make friends and find information related to same-sex desires:

In Vilnius there was also *something*. . . . But in Moscow there were *much* better places. In Moscow there was this *absolutely superb* cafe called ‘Dom Aktera’ [‘Дом актера’ – ‘Actor’s House’], which later burned down I dare to say that it was one of the most distinctive gay spaces I have ever seen *in the world*. Inside there was not a single non-gay [male] person except waitresses . . . [who] *perfectly* knew everything. . . . [It was] a real gay community in the heart of Moscow of the Soviet times.

With fascination Rimas talks also about other publicly located spaces where men with same-sex attractions gathered in Moscow and other Soviet cities. He says for him it was very important just to see that the men like him existed: “you didn’t necessarily have to make friends with someone, but only knowing that there were gays out there allowed you to feel and identify in a totally different way.” For the same reasons Rimas also searched for literature which mentioned same-sex desires between men. He says he found some discussions about love between men in ancient Greek literature in Lenin’s library in Moscow which he could access as a researcher. But the book which made the biggest impression for him was ‘Giovanni's Room’ by James Baldwin which he got a chance to read also in Moscow (but certainly not in Lenin’s library):

I remember ‘Giovanni's Room’ very well . . . I read it from samizdat in Moscow. . . . I was reading it the whole night. I thought I would die because I cried out every single drop of liquid from my body. Because it was, *firstly*, very tragic and so on, but it was something which touches you personally when there is nothing like that around you. . . . [A]ny hint about gays which sometimes wasn’t even a hint but it seemed that *maybe* it was a hint . . . struck like a *miracle* . . .

Essig (1999) writes about the first few fictional books focussed on same-sex desires published in Russia (by Glagol Press) in the early 1990s. One of them was 'Giovanni's Room.' Essig argues that this book (as well as few others) was chosen by the Russian publisher because for Russian (post-Soviet) readers it presented a familiar pattern for same-sex oriented male sexuality:

This sexuality is neither bounded nor fixed. It is not an identity, but practice. The characters are not 'either gay or straight' but both, or neither. They are men who are sexual with both men and with women, not because they identify as 'bisexual' but because their lives are bifurcated.

(Essig 1999, 95)

But it seems what touched Rimas so deeply was neither fluidity nor an idea of 'bifurcated' life. It was the very possibility of identification with someone 'out there' (to use his earlier words) even if fictional, even if secretly typed. He looked for signs which would have contributed to his imagining of the 'gay' community which expanded throughout the Soviet Union and beyond. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson writing about imagined communities and spaces argue that

[w]e need to give up naive ideas of communities as literal entities . . . but remain sensitive to the profound 'bifocality' that characterizes locally lived existences in a globally interconnected world and to the powerful role of place [space] in the 'near view' of lived experience . . .

(1992, 11)

Thus, travelling, networks and communication with men from other Soviet republics and even scarcely available readings for Rimas and other men with same-sex attractions allowed what Gupta and Ferguson call increased "partial erosion of spatially bounded social worlds and growing role of the imagination of places [spaces] from a distance" (1992, 11). In this way locally experienced circles of friends were integrated in the larger communities connected in virtual ties within cities, countries and continents. However, it seems that for some men with same-sex attractions 'virtual' communities were the only available communities.

‘Virtual’ communities

While trying to remember when he first acquainted a person with same-sex attractions Tadas (46 y/o) suddenly remembers that his first acquaintances were pen-friends:

When I started my studies [at Vilnius University] . . . and lived in this [student] dorm in Saulėtekis, then at some point . . . it could have been only possible with Perestroika [around 1988 or 1987] . . . foreign press like ‘The Guardian’ and so on appeared in Lithuania. . . . And in this ‘Guardian’ between classifieds I found an ad for a pen-pal club ‘The Gay Pal’ or something¹⁰. . . . [After responding to the ad] they enrolled me in this club. . . . When these foreigners appeared they sublimated this Lithuanian context for me. . . . This pen-pal element was a very important one because it was communication with . . . England and America. . . . [O]ne contact with America was more . . . intense. . . . [I]t was a *real* contact, . . . this remote contact which compensated this void in Lithuania. This one American also sent me one book about homosexuality in general in English. He ripped it to chapters (laughs) so that he could put them into regular envelopes and wouldn’t send the whole book at once because there were these customs and so on. . . . So in this Saulėtekis I was receiving a lot of letters . . . maybe even up to two or three per week . . .

Thus, increased access to information allowed creation of new spaces for men with same-sex desires which in turn provided new possibilities for further information and communications to emerge. Not having any interactions with community of men with same-sex attractions in Lithuania or in the Soviet space or possibilities to travel abroad, Tadas managed to develop a global space which provided relations he needed through letters from and to people he never actually met. Furthermore, Tadas tells that the first men with same-sex attractions in Lithuania he got to know later on because of the same pen-pal service. Thus, his communicational space was continuously influenced by intertwining local and global (or should I say ‘translocal’)

¹⁰ Tadas is talking about the pen-pal project run by IGLYO (the International Gay and Lesbian Youth Organisation at that time) which was started in 1988 and continued for about 10 years. It was advertised in various publications and created an opportunity for lesbian and gay youth from various parts of the world to get in contact with one another (see <http://www.iglyo.com/memories/>).

discourses. As Doreen Massey writing about space and identity descriptively phrases, what makes a space is

a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus. If one moves in from satellite towards the globe, holding all those networks of social relations and movements and communications in one's head, then each 'place' [or 'space,' to use Certeau's definition] can be seen as particular, unique, point of their intersection. It is indeed a *meeting* place. Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extraverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local.

(1994, 154-5)

This understanding of space allows to see it as a constantly changing point of interactions which is never just one. It is never just local or purely global, entirely public or private. It does not exist on its own but is continuously shaped and reshaped in contact with other spaces. A sense of space, community and self becomes fluid and unique but still recognizable and identifiable *because* it is never just one. Interactions between communal spaces and identities they form create hierarchies but they also become a source of power. As Foucault puts it, "[p]ower is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (1978, 93). Thus, even if a spatial system of identities can be associated with force and hierarchies, this system is neither all-embracing nor solid. In fact, its key attribute becomes its instability and potential subversion.

Go West

For a few men I have interviewed non-Soviet world was accessible not only through books and letters but also through physical travelling already in 1980s. They had a chance to visit other socialist or even western countries because of their specific work, studies or involvement in

extracurricular activities. For many this travelling gave understanding of alternative ways of dealing with one's same-sex attractions. For instance, Romas (51 y/o) says:

I got a chance to travel a lot while working in various student platoons. I went to Czechoslovakia, Germany, also the Federal one. . . . I'm a fan of baths, discos, clubs. And of course it is always curious to go where you shouldn't (laughs). Of course where you can't go with friends you go alone. You go, see and then you like it. Especially in Germany. . . . There were all these magazines everywhere. Then for us it was a completely new and impossible thing, and they were selling them everywhere. You walk into a store and see all this literature. And then you think: wait, this is a completely different world. So it [same sex-attractions] slowly unfolds.

While Rimas already knew that he was sexually attracted to men when travelling outside of the Soviet union, for Marius (47 y/o) his trip to Berlin in the very end of 1980s revealed the very fact that same-sex desires could exist at all:

[O]ur institute [in Leningrad] was cooperating with DEFA film studio in [East] Berlin, we had student exchanges. They were coming to Leningrad and we made friends with them . . . , then we were going to them. In the Soviet times it was very unusual. . . . But even after finishing the institute I still visited them [the friends in Berlin]. . . . It was 1989 . . . when I went to Berlin without even knowing where I was going. I went there and in three days the wall fell. . . . And *then* it was probably my *first* real identification. It was the first time I entered the West. The difference was *colossal*. . . . We went there with my classmate . . . and we both found ourselves in West Berlin. . . . [H]e was searching for a video tape of 'The Wall' by Pink Floyd . . . and we were going through video stores. . . . But then *accidentally* we entered a *wrong video store* (laughs). Now it's funny but then we *totally* lost our bearings because it was a sex-shop and a specialized one. And then probably something happened in me because it was the first time I saw it all . . . but I couldn't say that it was a pleasant experience. You understand that something is happening with you . . . but you have never known about these feelings. . . . We did not talk about this experience [with the classmate] *at all*, forgot what we had seen. We went further but I understood that I would have to return to that place. And I returned later on. Then I saw this open life, how it was in the West, totally uncovered, so to say. I had never thought that there was such a way of life. And of

course this was a scratch line where you started to identify yourself . . . [N]ow I could say Berlin gave birth to me. . . . That's why I always want to come back.

For Marius his first encounter with same-sex desires in a western sex-shop (which for many other men might have been only an occasional space for spicing up their sexual lives) encouraged him to rethink his own situation and identity between Lithuania and West Berlin. It prompted to search for contacts and friendships with other men with same-sex attraction in Lithuania. But since the community he faced here and general situation of men with same-sex attractions in Lithuania did not meet his imagining of relations and spaces influenced by the experience in the West Marius found his return to Vilnius a traumatic experience. Secrecy and sexual codings surrounding communities of men with same-sex attractions in Lithuania was contradicting with an image of 'open' and 'totally uncovered' life in the West. Nonetheless, travelling inspired Marius to search for ways to create a different kind of space for men with same sex desires in Lithuania which was becoming more possible after its independence in 1990 and especially after decriminalisation of sex between men in 1993.

Out of the USSR

The independence of Lithuania also made travelling to and from the country much easier. For Simas (41 y/o), who at the time was married and did not have any contacts with communities of men with same-sex attractions in Lithuania, his first business trip to Poland in the early 1990s meant an opportunity to receive alternative information about same-sex desires:

There I got to know that there already existed some gay group. I met with them, we talked . . . Then I went to a *huge* party, at least then it seems [huge] (laughs). I don't really know how many people there were, maybe a couple of hundreds. And I still remember my first reaction – it was a crowd of normal people. Simple students. It was *unreal*. It was wonderful and I got really inspired and understood that I wasn't alone, that there were many of us, that everything . . . wasn't that bad. . . . [Before that m]y

imagining was . . . that you understood that you were homosexual, understood that this reality existed, maybe like a disease . . . and then you thought: interesting, is there at least one more such person somewhere in Lithuania (laughs). All the information was like fables. For instance, there were anecdotes that if two men lived together then one had to wear women's clothing. . . . And when I saw a lot of people in Warsaw I understood that it [community] is somehow tangible . . .

Simas says that his first contact with 'gay' community in Warsaw strongly influenced the sense of his own sexuality and identity. Before his visit to Poland he was still hoping that his sexual attractions to men (as a disease) would simply fade away. The contact with other young people with same-sex attractions to whom he could easily relate allowed him to develop a sense of belonging and to place himself within a transnational 'gay' community. It also made him understand that there might be similar spaces for men with same-sex attractions in Lithuania too. But these very spaces were also influenced by increasing interactions and information flow from the West. However, not only Lithuanians were travelling abroad, there were also westerners who started coming to Lithuania for commercial, volunteering or sightseeing reasons. As Tadas notes:

After 1991 various Americans, backpackers and so on, started coming. I mean, the information became accessible not only through the press but also through these physical visitors, so to say. . . . [S]ince we announced our post box through this pen-pal club, these foreigners . . . got in contact with us Mainly they were gay men; we showed them the city, helped to find accommodation and so on. . . . This first contact with foreigners was also very important.

These connections with foreigners helped to create a feeling of shared global gay community. It also allowed to imagine alternative ways of living for Lithuanian men with same-sex desires. The word 'gay' ('gėjus') slowly entered the discourse together with new ways of identification which were more holistic and West-oriented. However, men with same-sex attractions probably easier adopted the word than identities since, as Lisa Rofel puts it,

[w]hat gay identity ends up looking like in any place in the world today is not a foregone conclusion; certainly it is not a straightforward matter of joining the global gay human race. It involves unexpected outcomes as people who bring different imaginations to a place contend with the way in which they will connect to one another.

(1999, 470)

Thus, travelling provided men with same-sex attractions with different ways of seeing themselves and those similar to them. It created possibilities for more transnational spaces to appear which in turn influenced the development of different kind of spaces in Lithuania which also became more possible with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the beginning of the 1990s first regular and more public 'gay' parties were taking place in Vilnius and Kaunas which for the first time brought together men with same-sex desires not necessarily coming from the same circles of friends. These parties were also attended by men coming from the US, Scotland and other Western countries who were staying in Lithuania temporarily because of their involvement in multinational corporations, personal businesses or other developments which were started to take place in Lithuania.

Tadas tells that there were also first attempts to register a gay and lesbian organisation in 1992, influenced by correspondence and face-to-face communication with westerners; however, the permission was denied referring to still active Article 122 which prohibited consensual sex between two men and which was repealed only in July of 1993 – more than three years after declaring the country's independence. The law was repealed without any public discussion, hidden in a general package of legal adjustments which were a required condition for joining the Council of Europe. Many men I have interviewed share hard feelings in relation to the situation that Lithuania was the last post-Soviet country in Europe to repeal the law making them illegal and that it was done only because of the international pressure. As Marius puts it,

I did not have any illusions that the independence will bring freedom for us, for *us*. I can tell you that even the repeal of that infamous article on the 7th of July in 1993 happened in such a silence that very few knew that the article no longer existed. . . . So nobody dedicated this freedom as such for our community.

However, the independence made international pressure possible. It might have not been ‘dedicated’ for but certainly well used by men with same-sex attractions. Increasing communication with westerners influenced the development of new sense of belonging and social identities. It led to formation of new communal spaces and rise of contemporary gay and lesbian activism in Lithuania.

Conclusion

If the delinquent exists only by displacing itself, if its specific mark is to live not on the margins but in the interstices of the codes that it undoes and displaces, if it is characterised by the privilege of the *tour* over the *state*, then the story is delinquent.

Michel de Certeau (1984, 130)

To conclude something which has just been started is an uneasy task. My first interview for this research took place less than a couple of months ago, months far too short to build a concluded story. Thus, this paper offered a glimpse, a short passage of my travel through interviews and books, words written and told, but also silenced and imagined.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that “[t]he closet is the defining structure for gay oppression” (1993, 48) in the West; “for many gay people it is still the fundamental feature of social life; and there can be few gay people, however courageous and forthright by habit, however fortunate in the support of their immediate communities, in whose lives the closet is not still a shaping presence” (ibid, 46). My analysis could be framed as an analysis of the Soviet closet which was being transformed, but never shattered, through changing environments in Lithuania of the 1980s and early 1990s. It is an analysis of spaces, spatial identities and communities, of men with same-sex desires this closet limited but also defined and enacted. It produced an impossible possibility of same-sex attractions in the Soviet and early post-Soviet space where these attractions were officially unwelcome, in fact, officially they were simply not there.

In Soviet Lithuania of the 1980s Article 122.1 of the Criminal Code banning consensual sex between men was rarely applied in a direct way. It was rarely reiterated through courts and prisons. However, it served as a tool for policing and controlling sexual dissidence by creating an atmosphere of fear and surveillance. So did the scarcely available other public information

presenting same-sex desires as something which needs to be eliminated or so improbable that it was difficult to imagine how the Soviet citizen could possibly be affected by them. But this information was available enough to instigate and maintain a closeting effect for the subjects it defined. The closet became an *exile* but also a *refuge* for men with same-sex desires. It became a site for communal spaces to develop. The common secret which men with same sex desires shared allowed them to feel like ‘members of the same shop-floor,’ as one of the men I interviewed phrased it. This was the secret which all of them had to hide and communicate at the same time. Men with same-sex desires were constantly testing invisible walls of the closet which allowed them to create spaces and spatial communities in centrality of the Lithuanian cities and other locations of increased social circulations. Men with same-sex attractions could not escape the ‘shaping presence’ of the closet but they were constantly influencing its shape.

Changing socio-political and economical environments of the late 1980s and early 1990s conditioned the development of new communal spaces and identities. It became easier to imagine communities of men with same-sex desires which expanded far beyond face-to-face communication and crossed any borders of Soviet republics. Lithuanian independence and increased communication with westerners was changing the ways men with same-sex desires defined and performed their identities. Same-sex attractions were becoming more visible and recoded into generic language. However, that did not mean an extinction of the closet since, as Sedgwick puts it, “the deadly elasticity of the heterosexist presumption means that, like Wendy in *Peter Pan*, people find new walls springing up around them even as they drowse” (1993, 46). Male same-sex attractions were still mainly lived in between the lines but perhaps differently.

As Padgug puts it the “history of sexuality is . . . a history of subject whose meaning and contents are in continual process of change. It is the history of social relations” (1979, 11). Even though here I offer just a glimpse, a short passage of countless histories of same-sex desires, I believe it still is a very valuable glimpse. This research helps to read between the lines, showing

how spatial (sexual) identities and communities could develop under a regime which despises them and how this regime is marked by an ineluctable failure to control and silence them. It also helps to situate contemporary (gay) sexualities within the contextual history of now and then, of here and there.

In this paper I cite works of Healey (2001, 2002), Moss (1995), Essig (1999) and Gessen (1993), situating myself in the analysis of same-sex sexualities in the (post)Soviet space. While I believe these authors quite well describe the general situation and treatment of people with same-sex attractions during state-socialism, they do not pay enough attention for in-depth analysis of identity formations. My research focussed precisely on this under-researched area. Besides, all the above mentioned scholars write mainly about Soviet Russia and its largest European cities, smaller Soviet republics and cities are either mentioned fleetingly or not addressed at all. My analysis provides useful insights on how men with same-sex desires might have lived their lives elsewhere in the Soviet space.

However, there is still more than plenty of space and need for future research of non-normative sexualities, communities, same-sex spaces and their connections to the Soviet state. Firstly, due to lack of time and resources in my study I have not addressed female sexualities. I believe they should be addressed next. Secondly, there is very little analysis of same-sex sexualities in rural areas and smaller towns. To my knowledge, such analysis in (post)Soviet context is completely non-existent. Thirdly, it would be useful to see more research on connections between space and sexual identities in general.

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