

Making Queer Space: Peculiarities of Queer Space in Moscow and San Francisco

By
Alexey Kotlyarov

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Supervisor: Professor Allaine Cerwonka
Second Reader: Assistant Professor Hadley Zaun Renkin

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Abstract

Born out of the interconnection and interrelation of notions of *space*, *gender* and *sexuality*, this work explores the gay club as an institution. The gay club, as a form of *queer space*, allows us to interrogate the causes for differences between queer space found in a variety of locale. In this research project I aim at discovering grounds for these distinctions and possible related consequences. Objects of my comparative analysis were two gay clubs located in two major world cities, namely Moscow, Russian Federation and San Francisco, United States of America. Looking at the club my aim was to show how historical background, cultural heritage and social discourse impact upon localities of queer sociality. Therefore, my work reveals that queer space in a particular geographical location is bound to be different from its counterparts elsewhere in the world.

To investigate the question of the creation and function of the gay club for the gay community I employed an ethnographic approach. During my field research I made participant observations of the two localities of my interest as well as interviewed a number of people frequenting these establishments.

This work shows that while queer space of Moscow is tense, queer space of San Francisco is more relaxed; while the club in Moscow offers overwhelming commodities, the club in San Francisco is not as plentiful. Despite a number of differences between the spatial arrangement of the clubs and the number and variety of products they offer, the role of the club in both locations does not significantly differ. Both in Moscow and San Francisco queer space is mainly, but not only, used for socializing. Besides that, however, in Moscow there is a strong emphasis on sexual activity.

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Introduction

My first acquaintance with the concept of *space* occurred in the course of my studies at the Department of Gender Studies in the class “Space, Gender and Sexuality” offered by Allaine Cerwonka. Back then, while going through the readings on the syllabus, I started thinking how differently we experience space around us and how many diverse spaces there are out there. Space of home is different from space of the university; space of the bank is different from space of the club; mainstream space is different from queer space.

While talking about sexuality, it is possible to consider mainstream space as heterosexual space. Queer space, therefore, is bound to represent diverse sexualities. It is probably not going to be surprising to affirm that heterosexual space is prevailing in most cases. Where can we find queer space then? The answer is anywhere but you would have to look for that, as sometimes it is not seen with the naked eye as heterosexual space is. One of the institutions where queer space prevails is the gay club. What is the space of the gay club? How does it get constructed and who makes queer space? Is it possible to assert that queer space is a whole continuum of different powers interweaved into a particular picture? How is it different from the mainstream space? Is space of the gay club globally similar or does it have specific features depending on the geographical location? In terms of the gay club, what are the purposes of queer space and how does it get used by its participants? These are the questions and issues I am set to investigate in this work.

The topic of my thesis is the analysis of how spaces of queer sociality reflect the powers and the broader context of the locations they are set in as well as the inquiry into the meaning that the patrons of these localities ascribe to them. Therefore, the aim is to show how, depending on different circumstances of particular locations, queer space alters and

becomes unique if compared to its counterparts elsewhere in the world. Proceeding to the meaning of the club, I investigate what function the club serves for the frequenters.

Because the term *queer* is problematic, I have to specify that in my research project I am looking at two gay clubs which aim at gay male population. I do not, however, claim that this is the only one or the main characteristic of the concept of *queer locality*. Nevertheless, I prefer to use the term *queer* in my analysis. There are two justifications for choosing and keeping the word *queer* rather than narrowing it down to *gay*.

The first argument in favor of using the term *queer* is based on the historical background. The term *queer* was first used in application to homosexual men in the late 19th century. Later on in the early 20th century some gay men used the word to distinguish themselves from *fairies*, being effeminate gay men. Only closer to the end of the 20th century gay men as well as lesbian women started using the term as something to be proud of.¹ Even though now the word has become an umbrella term for people of diverse sexualities well beyond denomination of gay men and lesbians,² there is a history of close connection between gay men and *queer*. Therefore, naming the localities of my interest *queer* implies inclusion of gay men, the social group on which I am focusing.

The other advocacy for the use of the term *queer* is based on the conviction that defining *the gay club* as a space occupied only by gay men would be a simplification of the whole picture of such localities. Naming such localities *gay space* may be interpreted so that gay clubs are only frequented by gay male population which is not true. Even though these places mostly host gay men and in my field research I mainly focused on this particular group of people, I argue that gay clubs should be seen as a *contact zone*, a space in which a clash of

¹ Brent L. Pickett, *The A to Z of Homosexuality* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009), 156.

² Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2003), 6.

cultures occurs.³ Therefore, all other identities, who do not necessarily identify themselves as gay men, as well as historical, social and cultural circumstances of the places play an important role in these settings and may influence how gay men experience this space and what they make out of it.

In my thesis I look at and compare localities of queer sociality in two different locations, being Moscow and San Francisco. I, therefore, pay special attention to patrons frequenting chosen gay clubs in the two cities. One of my main arguments is that queer space cannot be looked at as something peculiar in itself and separate from the rest of the world but rather as an interweaving of different factors which influence its creation and representation while queer space in its turn influences queer identities filling it.

Important factors to consider are location, past and present political situation of the location and social attitudes to the question of queerness prevailing in a particular region. I argue that queer space is, what Mary Louise Pratt calls, a contact zone and, therefore, reflects not only desires and culture of the minoritarian LGBTQ⁴ community but also cultural and social practices of the heterosexual majority in a particular place. This research is important to see how queer space is constructed and by what powers it is influenced and how it in its turn reflects the broader situation around itself as well as to sketch the desires of people who frequent the club.

During my field research, through the representation of the club I learned and explored different actors which are at play while queer space is being made; I investigated how comfortable/uncomfortable it is to be a part of the gay club community where I focused on gay men; I explored to what extent queer space is fruitful / not fruitful for the LGBTQ community, meaning how abundant/scant the commodities are that the clubs can offer. There were a number of agencies that were important to consider in the context of each

³ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4.

⁴ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer.

geographical location: historical background, cultural heritage, and social discourse. These are bound to influence the level of tolerance which is essential in a project of this kind; and the level of tolerance in its turn is bound to determine certain characteristics of queer space.

In this project, drawing upon scholarly literature as well as exploring the locations of my interest, I show how space, gender and sexuality are closely interconnected. Moreover, they are related to the broader scene and circumstances and should be looked at in conjunction. I reveal what the queer space of Moscow and San Francisco looks like today and why; what queer space, embodied by the club, can offer to its visitors; and last but not least, what its visitors take from it.

Chapter 1. Situating the Project

What Had Been Done

There has been a profound amount of research done on the topics of space and gay/queer culture. Yet, these two concepts are rarely looked at in a combination in one given research. Geographers are mainly concerned with space as referring to different countries and cultures based first of all on national identity. Queer activists or queer politics are mostly concerned with queer identity or queer movements. In my research I would like to combine these two aspects and fill a gap in academic literature on the topic like “making queer space.”

As queer space is not well researched, it is significant to refer to the bodies of literature discussing notions of spatiality and queerness as separate subjects. As Judith Halberstam writes, such postmodern geographers as David Harvey, Edward Soja, or Fredric Jameson never consider wide spectrums of sexuality in relation to space. To be more precise, according to Halberstam’s critique of these authors, Harvey, for example, touches upon sexuality but only fractionally and only in regards to the reproductive heterosexual family. All other kinds of people, either non-reproductive heterosexuals or homosexuals, are left aside.⁵

While Halberstam notices the lack of research on space and sexuality, and especially space and homosexuality among western scholars, Dan Healey too reveals, for example, that the environment of the Soviet Union was not at all encouraging in this respect and prevented anyone from talking on the topic of homosexuality. Even today, he says, while on a global scale more and more researchers are interested in the question and a great amount of literature is devoted to the discussion and exploration of diversity of sexual expression,

⁵ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), 10.

Russia continues to be unexplored in regard to the topic.⁶

Scarce research on queer/gay space is mostly concerned with gay bars, gay neighborhoods or other institutions, or urban space. In this respect the following scholars can be named: Lawrence Knopp,⁷ Nancy Achilles,⁸ Gill Valentine,⁹ Peter Lugosi.¹⁰ Even though this body of scholarship is very significant in general and for my research in particular, it leaves space for exploration of such an important institution for gay men as the night club. Here *Impossible Dance* should be mentioned as it looks at interaction and behavioral patterns of identities visiting the club. Even though Fiona Buckland took the club as a point of departure, her main interest was in the music, the dance and the body,¹¹ while my project investigates the spatial arrangement, the commodities, and the role of the club for gay men more broadly.

As long as I argue that queer space is a combination of influences coming from within as well as from without I use philosophic contemplations of Yi-Fu Tuan's writings, for example *Space and Place* where he argues that space is "a complex set of ideas."¹² Therefore, it helps me justify the general idea, which is significant for this work, that any particular given space is not separate from the rest of the world. Also I employ ideas of Henri Lefebvre who says that space is a combination of different products and that it is a certain materiality or mechanism constructed by the interrelationship of these products.¹³ Hence I will situate my

⁶ Dan Healey, "Homosexual Existence and Existing Socialism: New Light on the Repression of Male Homosexuality in Stalin's Russia," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8, (2002): 351.

⁷ Lawrence Knopp, "Sexuality and Urban Space: A Framework for Analysis," in *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*, ed. David Bell and Gill Valentine (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁸ Nance Achilles, "The Development of the Homosexual Bar," in *Social Perspectives in Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Reader*, ed. Peter M. Nardi and Beth E. Schneider (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

⁹ Gill Valentine, "Queer Bodies and the Production of Space," in *Handbook of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, ed. Diane Richardson and Steven Steven Seidman (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2002), 145-160.

¹⁰ Peter Lugosi, "The Production of Hospitable Space: Commercial Propositions and Consumer Co-Creation in a Bar Operation," *Space and Culture*, 2009: 396-411.

¹¹ Fiona Buckland, *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002).

¹² Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 34.

¹³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford UK and

main idea about construction of space among social influences of a particular place but I intend to go beyond and see how local-national-international discourse plays out in this respect.

Here the already mentioned concept of contact zones by Mary Louise Pratt can be employed very productively in order to show the phenomenon of *transculturation* which takes place in “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other...”¹⁴ As Pratt explains, the term *transculturation*, coined by the Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz, is used to illustrate how marginalized groups selectively accept and adapt means of a dominant culture but transforming them according to their existence context.¹⁵ Even though this term is originally used in regard to linguistics and language construction, it promises to be workable in connection to social groups as well. Indeed, language and social reality are closely connected and influenced by each other.¹⁶ Hence, these two actualities are closely related and, therefore, there do not seem to exist obvious reasons why transculturation could not be used for the purpose of analyzing social groups.

In my research I regard gay clubs as contact zones where different constituents are at play, e.g. homosexuals and heterosexuals visiting the place, laws created by the majority and influencing minorities, normative social discourse influencing non-normative spaces, etc. Looking at these relations it is obvious that ideas of Doreen Massey may be put into operation as well. He says that basically every action and movement that we do has some effect onto someone else in this world even if we do not know about it, e.g. using cars undermines public transport; going to a mall damages a shop on the corner.¹⁷ Massey also mentions that depending on the “status” (ethnicity, class, gender...) we may experience space

Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1991), 73.

¹⁴ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 6.

¹⁵ Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession 91*, (1991): 34.

¹⁶ Steve Eliason, “Language and the Social Construction of Reality: Spinning Social Reality with Euphemisms,” (master’s thesis, Montana State University, n.d), 62-63.

¹⁷ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 150.

differently.¹⁸ She does not mention queer “status” but this hypothesis is something that could be as well referred to queer identities (and not only) experiencing queer space. Gupta and Ferguson express a similar idea from a different angle saying that “space... is a kind of grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization is inscribed.”¹⁹ They, therefore, conclude that any particular space is not defined by certain geographical location which is fixed and has certain cultural background but rather created and experienced differently depending on a lot of factors, e.g. class, gender, race... and in the case of this research sexual orientation.²⁰

All mentioned authors theorize the idea of space which is very helpful for this research. However, they are not precisely talking about queer space. Nevertheless, these general ideas on the construction and representation of space in my research will be connected to queer identities and “their” space. It is interesting to see if ideas and workings of, let us say, transculturation would be similar in the context of queer space. I have to underline that using the term transculturation I intend to slightly change the meaning of the concept. Rather than talking about interaction of two different cultures, I am applying this idea to interplay of relations between the heterosexual majority and the homosexual minority.

Gill Valentine in her article “Queer Bodies and the Production of Space” brings up some interesting issues writing about mutual influence of identities and space where they are located²¹ which I also examine in my research. She also mentions that spaces are not fixed and that the global, the local and the body are interrelated and connected. However, she does not contemplate deeply on the topic and leaves her reader with the lack of understanding how exactly they are interconnected and what influence each of them makes onto the other.²²

¹⁸ Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 164.

¹⁹ Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 34.

²⁰ Ibid., 50.

²¹ Valentine, “Queer Bodies.”

²² Ibid., 151-152.

Taking “the body” by Gill Valentine and going to Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst we discover that sexuality is an important part of a person. Johnston and Longhurst explain that it matters a lot what place you are in: either it is home, a bar, or a casino. Depending on the space you find yourself in, you dress and behave differently. By this the authors prove that sex and space are so closely interconnected that they “cannot be “decoupled.”²³ In terms of research of gay clubs this plays out as a significant part of the spatial arrangement.

Another very important writing for my research which I look at is *Queer Space* by Aaron Betsky. He pays a lot of attention to architecture which, according to Betsky, “allows us to place ourselves in the world.”²⁴ In this sense I am doing observations and detailed descriptions of chosen clubs in two locations and compare how similar or different their inside and outside architecture is. I analyze how spatiality of clubs in Moscow and San Francisco is organized and suggest presumptions of my understanding why these places become to be what they are. And as Doreen Massey rightly mentioned that “space is always in a process of becoming,”²⁵ it is just a capture moment that I am dealing with, and the space I explore in this work will inevitable change under various circumstances.

Further on, Betsky argues that first, “queers continue to queer out cities” and second, “queers are disappearing.”²⁶ In trying to interpret Betsky’s suggestion and put it in simple words, by this I understand the following: as long as queers go beyond their comfort zones (such as gay districts) and appear in more and more places elsewhere, they “queer the city;” yet, as they are seen everywhere they stop being noticed, and therefore, stop being queer, so they disappear. I address this hypothesis and see if this idea seems to be working nowadays and if it is applicable to my locations of interest.

²³, Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst, *Space, Place, and Sex: Geographies of Sexualities*, (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), 2-3.

²⁴ Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same Sex Desire* (New York City: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1997), 7.

²⁵ Doreen Massey, “Spaces of Politics,” in *Human Geography Today*, ed. Doreen Massey, John Allen and Philip Sarre (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), 283.

²⁶ Betsky, *Queer Space*, 14.

Overall, queer space is not researched enough. Moreover, I have not yet found any academic literature that would be focused on examining precisely gay clubs. So far, there is literature investigating gay bars,²⁷ baths,²⁸ and locations of public practices of sexual intercourse.²⁹ However, I am tempted to argue that clubbing is one of the main streams of gay culture nowadays, and a significant amount of time is spent by queer identities precisely in clubs, and therefore this phenomenon should be investigated. Having done these observations and analysis of the existing literature I contribute to the knowledge production on the topic of queer space and, therefore, contribute to filling the gap in the scholarship.

The Process of Research

For the analysis of queer space of two chosen locations, that of Moscow and San Francisco, I employed an ethnographic approach. Queer space in general cannot be identical in every location. Moreover, queer space inside boundaries of one particular geographical location is very diverse, meaning that there are a number of subcultures or as Susan Krieger puts it, “smaller communities”³⁰ within the gay community. Therefore, it was not my aim to embrace and include in my research every aspect of the gay scene in Moscow and San Francisco.

Rather, for the purpose of this work I intended to determine the mainstream of gay night club life nowadays. By applying the notion of “mainstream”³¹ to gay night clubs I mean those localities of queer sociality which posit themselves as gay clubs and are the most visible and famous among gay population in a particular geographical location. I limit myself

²⁷ Achilles, “Homosexual Bar.”

²⁸ Betsy, *Queer Space*.

²⁹ William L. Leap, ed., *Public Sex / Gay Sex*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

³⁰ Susan Krieger, “An Identity Community,” in *Social Perspectives in Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Reader*, ed. Peter M. Nardi and Beth E. Schneider (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

³¹ See Glossary.

to the inquiry solely on mainstream gay clubs and am not going further to analyze “smaller communities” within the larger community. The limitation is explained by the length of this work as well as by the length of my field research. The mainstream is/was easier to identify and for me to get access to. Besides that, narrowing it down to a particular point of interest allowed me to have a closer look at peculiarities of the gay club culture.

A great part of this work is based on my own participant observations of queer space of two chosen cities. Before singling out one particular gay night club in each city that could be used as a basis for the discussion, I visited indeed many venues and observed how busy or not the places were and if they were advertised in any kind of print materials or online. I also talked to my friends as well as people I did not know and asked what gay clubs they knew in the city and what clubs they went to. People, who I was not acquainted with, I found online, in bars, cafes, clothes stores, in the streets, etc. I did not have a specific trait of looking for people but rather took any opportunity to start a conversation with anyone when it was possible. I do not quote people who I did not properly interviewed but bear in mind the thinking that has been expressed by any people I came across with, so that to be able to analyze the topic of my interest in greater depth.

Another big part of my research is constituted by the thoughts of my interviewees who were sought out by snowball sampling. I conducted fourteen interviews altogether, seven with residents of Moscow and seven with residents of San Francisco.³² Each interview lasted from thirty minutes up to an hour and a half depending on how much time my respondents had and how much they were willing to share with me. Some of the informants were interviewed by means of Skype and some in person. With many there was a follow up activity in the form of additional meetings, social interaction, messages, emails or more Skype conversations, in cases when I wanted to clarify information I already had or ask

³² For the full list of my interviewees see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

additional questions. Thirteen of the respondents that I use in my work are men who identified themselves as gay. One of my respondents described himself as bi-sexual. Ages of my Moscow respondents fluctuate between 22 and 34, while my informants from San Francisco are aged between 23 and 41. One of my Moscow respondents is a British national. One of my San Francisco interviewees is a Russian national.

I met my informants in different ways without using specific traits because I wanted my respondents to be as diverse in thinking as possible. Some respondents were my friends, some were friends of my friends; others I met in gay localities (not necessarily clubs) that I frequented; and some of them I met online. With some of the interviewees I have been acquainted for many years, others I met solely for the purpose of interviewing them.

I should specify that in my work I will only use pseudonyms and no real names as to be on a fair basis with all of my respondents. However, for this kind of work it is important to highlight attitudes and reactions of people whom I presented my project and asked to give me an interview. This data is different in Moscow and San Francisco. Those who agreed to share their thoughts with me had to go through another challenge. I asked them if they would like their real name appear anywhere in print or online. Some patterns of attitudes to the project and answers to my question regarding their name in the two cities can be easily seen.

None of people in San Francisco I talked to refused to be interviewed. However, not everyone who agreed on the interview actually talked to me. Some of them ended up saying that they were busy and could not find time to spare. Besides the obvious explanation, it may be also assumed that some people in San Francisco were not interested in the research, or did not wish to be engaged in this kind of research. Even though not everyone I asked gave me an interview, the readiness and willingness to participate in this kind of project was very high. One of my San Francisco interviewees, who is a Russian national, did not wish his real first or last name appear anywhere. Another of my San Francisco interviewees expressed a certain

worry about using his real last name in my project. He, however, was not opposed to the idea of using his first name. “Well, you don’t know my last name, so... how many people can you find with the name [like mine].” The rest five respondents agreed to share their full name with me and allowed me to use it in my work. My San Francisco informants generally seemed to be free to discuss any facets of gay life in the city and were ready to share their own interests with me.

In terms of Moscow I had some troubles gathering information, especially looking for informants I could interview. As Dan Healey accounts only the bravest people in the Soviet Union could dare speak about homosexuality.³³ The fear is still echoed today and it was difficult to persuade men to give their opinions on the topic of gay life in Moscow. A large number of people refused to talk to me. Many of them were concerned with where and what information I would use and if their names would appear anywhere in print or online. Only one interviewee, a British national, agreed on using his real name. Another respondent was not opposed to using his real first name. And one more of the interviewees was hesitating giving me the permission to use his first name but finally agreed on that making sure that I would not show my work to anyone in Moscow. The rest four refused their real names to be used in any context. I had to assure my informants that this was completely anonymous and only I would have access to their real names and data. Once my informants got assured that their names were not going to appear anywhere they seemed to be holding themselves in a free manner. However, it may also be the case that because of the fear (even if unconscious) they still could hide some information and therefore not share everything they could. Besides patrons, I managed to interview Director General of *Central Station*.

Analyzing my interviews I employed some of the recommendations from *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* by Irving Seidman.³⁴ I tried to find “connective

³³ Healey, “Homosexual Existence,” 351.

³⁴ Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and*

threads” between my respondents³⁵ paying attention to each and every piece of information they had to express. Just like Seidman mentions, with the help of in-depth interviews we can learn individual experiences of people and see how these are connected to the broader settings.³⁶ Interpreting my interviewees I not only considered the relations in their thoughts to each other but also connected their understanding to scholarly literature.

In my work, after having analyzed the existing bodies of literature on the topics of space and sexuality/homosexuality in Chapter 1, I start with the discussion of the context which exists in geographical locations that I am preoccupied with. Looking at such dimensions as culture, history and social discourse should allow me to do the analysis of the spatial arrangement of the queer space and see the connection between the construction of queer space and the broader landscape of power interrelations. Therefore, in Chapter 2 I give anthropological description of queer space in Moscow and San Francisco derived from ethnographic observations. Depending on these I conclude how the mentioned dimensions around queer space influence its construction and how they are reflected inside the club. Therefore, I look at what queer space of Moscow and San Francisco has become to be at this period of time. Further on, in Chapter 3 I consider the prevailing conditions of two places and commodities that the two chosen clubs can offer to their patrons and analyze the role of the club for gay men who frequent queer space offered by the gay night club. I conclude by summarizing the main characteristics of queer space in Moscow and San Francisco and by looking at what localities of queer sociality can offer and what is actually used by patrons who frequent these locations.

Social Sciences (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 1998).

³⁵ Ibid., 110.

³⁶ Ibid., 112.

Importance of History, Culture and Social Discourse

In order to see the specifics of queer space in Moscow and San Francisco we need to explore peculiarities which influenced its creation in two locations. There are several dimensions that go into that. We can see influence coming from different sources. In the frame of this work not every facet could be taken into consideration and, therefore, here some important constituents like racial differences, ethnic diversity, media influence or impact of globalization are omitted. Among other dimensions I chose the following factors as determining:³⁷ history, culture, and social discourse.

History is apparently an important factor. There are numerous authors who narrate about more favorable attitudes towards homosexuals in Ancient Rus, long before communism came into power. In his article “Sexual Minorities” Igor Kon argues in support of such a phenomenon.³⁸ David Tuller writes that for many centuries homosexuality was accepted and practiced among different classes in the Russian Empire. Citing Karlinsky he says that Grand Prince Vasily III (1505 – 1533) and his son Ivan the Terrible were attracted to people of their sex.³⁹

Even though the topic of homosexuality was not completely erased from the information space in pre-soviet times I would dispute that it is not possible to call the prevailing attitudes of the time favorable. Even though evidence of monarchs’ homosexuality can be found, they still had to be married to a woman and have a traditional family. Therefore, this can hardly be counted as a favorable attitude to same-sex attraction. It seems at times that pro-gay activists try very hard to find affirmation of their thoughts and sometimes see what they want to see rather than what is depicted.

³⁷ Gupta and Ferguson, *Culture, Power, Place*. 50.

³⁸ Igor Kon, “Sexual Minorities,” in *Sex and Russian Society*, ed. Igor Kon and James Riordan (London: Pluto Press, 1993), 89.

³⁹ David Tuller, *Cracks in the Iron Closet: Travels in Gay and Lesbian Russia* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 87-88.

Some “concealed” evidence of underlying homoerotic message has been constantly “discovered” in works of poets and writers, for example, Nikolai Gogol, Leo Tolstoy, Anna Akhmatova, etc. As it is not explicit, it will take a great deal of an effort to prove these underlying messages to be of a homoerotic nature. Some of them do seem to be true to express some homoerotic feelings of different authors. However, Russian thanks to the conjugation and declination system accurately communicates the gender aspect and it is very difficult to avoid specification of your own gender and of the gender you are referring to. Therefore, authors would have to endeavor very hard to dazzle their inattentive reader. That is why effort is needed to decipher the real meaning hidden behind words and that is exactly what numerous authors who expressed homosexual desires were doing.⁴⁰ All these facts only provide evidence that those who created their works of art were not really free to express their same-sex affection openly. Therefore, it shows that attitudes towards LGBTQ people in Russia of earlier times can hardly be described as favorable.

Though it is contestable if the attitudes towards homosexuality in Ancient Rus or in Russia momentarily preceding the Soviet times were tolerant, it is a fact that a “tradition” of outlawing homosexuality with inclusion of some not very severe punishments was started by Peter the Great in the 18th century leading to a total criminalization of gay people with very severe punishments registered in the Article 121 in 1933 that was signed by Stalin during the communist era.⁴¹ It stated that *muzhelozhstvo* (man lying with man) should be punished with up to 5 years of prison.

Homosexuality as well as non-reproductive sex of heterosexual couples became the biggest sins ever. “In fact” there was no sex in Soviet Union, meaning that sex could only exist for reproductive purposes. Any publications containing sexual matters were and some of them still are kept in “special collections” in Russian libraries and it was/is extremely

⁴⁰ Wayne R. Dynes, ed., *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality* (New York: Garland Press, 1990).

⁴¹ Kon, “Sexual Minorities,” 89-91.

difficult to have access to such printed materials. It is believed that in these collections there is a lot of valuable information on the repression of homosexuality.⁴²

As Masha Gessen recounts, starting in 1934 “the state went about reconstituting the family, re-regulating abortion, and rewarding childbirth” which resulted in a strict censorship of any matters mentioning sex and full removal of any topics touching upon homosexuality; sex was treated as a “social ill,”⁴³ homosexuality as an immorality. The Great Soviet Encyclopedia that comes in 31 volumes devotes only 29 words to the notion of homosexuality; it is called “*homosexualism*” and is defined as “a sexual perversion” indicating that in “USSR and also in some bourgeois states” homosexuality is punishable by law.⁴⁴ Dan Healey in his article “Homosexual Existence and Existing Socialism” quotes the historian Manfred Herzer who argues that “the “thoughtless acceptance of heterosexism was part and parcel of bourgeois culture and [was] imitated in a diluted form by leftists” of that era.”⁴⁵

In the United States, because of the racial and ethnic diversity as well as geographical segregation into separate states it is difficult to talk about the issue of homosexuality applicable to the whole country of the United States. The fact of segregation presupposes that in different parts of the USA attitudes towards homosexuality have been different and at times strikingly different. Still nowadays there is no consensus on the question of homosexuality and homosexual relationships inside the country; and different states have different legislature on the matter.⁴⁶

The A to Z Homosexuality by Brent L. Pickett gives, however, a concise history of general attitudes towards homosexuality in the country. There is evidence of male

⁴² Healey, “Homosexual Existence,” 351-352.

⁴³ Masha Gessen, “Sex in the Media and the Birth of the Sex Media in Russia,” in *Post-communism and the Body Politic*, ed. Ellen E. Berry (New York City: New York University Press, 1995), 205.

⁴⁴ The Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 3d ed., s.v. “Гомосексуализм.”

⁴⁵ Healey “Homosexual Existence,” 350.

⁴⁶ “Gay Rights in the US, State by State,” [guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2012/may/08/gay-rights-united-states), last modified May 8 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2012/may/08/gay-rights-united-states>.

homosexuality existing before Europeans came to the American continent but female homosexuality has not been registered so far. It is believed that European colonizers put a lot of emphasis “on the story of Sodom” and made laws against male homosexuality while leaving female homosexuality most of the time untouched by rules. In the 19th century, it is believed, male homosexual relations were common.⁴⁷ For example, as Nan Alamilla Boyd informs, in the course of the California Gold Rush of 1848 – 1855⁴⁸ and the lack of women in San Francisco during this time⁴⁹ same-sex dances appeared in the city.⁵⁰

The A to Z Homosexuality continues along the history line and tells us that in the late 19th and in the early 20th centuries homosexuality was perceived as a disease. It is noted that even during that time San Francisco was one of the locations where homosexuality was more or less accepted and there were places for socializing popular among gay men. In urban San Francisco homosexuality became visible and was to some extent accepted in the end of the 19th and the beginning of 20th centuries.⁵¹ New York was also one of the centers of attraction for homosexual people in the 1920s.⁵²

As early as in the 1920s there were bathhouses and dance places in San Francisco frequented by homosexuals. Even though in the 1930s and 1940s repressions of homosexuals were taking place around the United States, port cities were fairly good for gay men to be in. Gay bars were developing in such places, and San Francisco was one of them. While in Russia Article 121 appeared in 1933, almost six thousand miles away⁵³ in San Francisco “queer history blossomed” in precisely the same year as Boyd accounts.⁵⁴ 1969 was marked by the Stonewall riots and from there on homosexuals started their slow but to some extent

⁴⁷ Pickett, *The A to Z of Homosexuality*, 188.

⁴⁸ Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *Days of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the American Nation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 7, 269.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵⁰ Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 1.

⁵¹ Pickett, *The A to Z of Homosexuality*, 189-190.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 190.

⁵³ Robert Famighetti, ed., *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2000* (Mahwah: Primedia Reference Inc., 2000), 720.

⁵⁴ Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 5.

successful crusade.⁵⁵

Another, and perhaps the most important, aspect is culture, however it can be defined, and consequent cultural practices. Here it is useful to remember Gupta and Ferguson who wrote that “culture” is understood as something being peculiar to a certain country which is arbitrary as our world is divided really by ourselves.⁵⁶ Indeed, in terms of Russia or the United States it can be clearly seen how it is very subjective and unreasonable to define “Russian culture” or “American culture.”

In Russia there are more than 140 nationalities according to population census conducted in 2002 and in some regions ethnically Russians constitute a minority.⁵⁷ However, the overall majority of the country well advances in imposing their values on non-Russian minorities. U.S. Census Bureau also shows that the country of the United States of America is very diversely inhabited. Not only there are more than a hundred nationalities among white people in the United States, there are also different races and people of different ethnicities.⁵⁸ It is well known that the USA are famous for being a “melting pot” or a “tossed salad”⁵⁹ where “cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other.”⁶⁰ For this reason delineating my research within the boundaries of the chosen cities is wise. Yet, I acknowledge the importance of the situation in each examined country as a whole.

Even though Moscow (as probably any multimillion city) is a multinational city only the culture of the majority prevails and is visible in the city. Contrary to a popular destination San Francisco where one can find Japantown, Chinatown, Little Italy, or Russian Hill, etc., in Moscow there is no such a representation of other cultures. It is not to suggest that cultures of

⁵⁵ Pickett, *The A to Z of Homosexuality*.

⁵⁶ Gupta and Ferguson, *Culture, Power, Place*, 34.

⁵⁷ “Results of the Population Consensus in Russia 2002,” perepis2002.ru, last modified May 21 2004, <http://www.perepis2002.ru/content.html?id=7&docid=10715289081450>.

⁵⁸ “Total Ancestry Reported,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed Junq 1, 2012, http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_10_1YR_B04003&prodType=table.

⁵⁹ It is also a topic for a contestation but I only mention this to show that United States are a country of diverse races, ethnicities, nationalities and cultures.

⁶⁰ Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” 33.

other countries do not exist in Moscow, but rather to witness invisibility of those. San Francisco is segregated into different neighborhoods, and different cultures/subcultures are represented in the city but people travel through the city and come across with all sorts of people who are different from them in a range of dimensions. In Moscow all people are mixed and no cultures or nationalities other than Russian seem to have formed distinct enclaves or marked neighborhoods in the city. It might be regarded as the aim for multicultural societies meaning that heterogeneity is perceived as something to strive for.⁶¹ However, heterogeneity can hardly be observed in Moscow nowadays.

In San Francisco people seem to be tolerant to others most of the time. In Moscow quite the opposite could be claimed. Statistics show that hate crimes figures (including based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) in San Francisco have been going down⁶² while in Moscow escalating over the past years putting Moscow on the highest level among other Russian cities.⁶³

Social discourse on the topic that prevails in the two chosen locations as well as current law production are essential to consider. It has been slowly changing but the word homosexual is still perceived as offensive by many in Russian. In Russia societal prejudices about the topic of homosexuality make it impossible for people of non-normative sexual orientation express their views and desires. Therefore, it is extremely difficult for queer space to emerge and exist. It is especially true for smaller cities and towns and as a consequence more and more gay people decide to move to agglomerates with greater population to find a community of those “like themselves” and to have a “different life.”

Even today there are a lot of “prominent” people who, for example, affirm that

⁶¹ David Theo Goldberg, “Introduction: Multicultural Conditions,” in *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Oxford UK and Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1994), 29.

⁶² “FBI Hate Crime Statistics (2007),” SFGate.com, accessed June 1, 2012, <http://www.sfgate.com/webdb/hatecrimes2007/?appSession=339295813782176>.

⁶³ Alexander Verkhovsky and Galina Kozhevnikova, “Hate Crime in Russia: Brief Analysis, Statistics, Recommendations” (Moscow, 2006).

homosexuals are inclined to be pedophiles.⁶⁴ Therefore homosexuals can be referred to as *pedophiles* because people are simply not educated in a sense (albeit Russians are one of the most educated nations in the world⁶⁵).

Anti-homosexual movements are very popular in Russia nowadays and are implicitly encouraged by the government. In recent years the Russian government has banned gay prides but they constantly allow protests against homosexuals disguised under such names as “Family Day” and others. Church is also working in cooperation with the government and every now and then organizes “Family Day” celebrations and other festivities that have anti-gay slogans as a part of their agenda.

It is obvious that nowadays Russia as ever holds very hostile attitudes to the question of homosexuality and is not likely to produce anti-homophobic laws in the near future considering the latest events. Recently, the whole movement of homophobic legislature known as “Don’t Say Gay” started around the country. Recently in St. Petersburg (famous for being the most cultural and liberal city of the country) the law proposed by the party of Putin has been passed by the majority of votes that outlaws “propaganda of homosexuality.” The description of the law is so vague that even saying the word “gay” in the street or wearing garments containing the rainbow symbol could be considered as “propaganda.” By now there have already been cases of detention on the basis of walking in the street with a rainbow flag.⁶⁶ Following St. Petersburg several other regions have passed the same law and now it is due to hearings on the federal level.⁶⁷ Therefore, Russian legislature goes against Russia’s constitution, European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil

⁶⁴ Nikita Sorokin, “Morality Beyond the Good and Evil,” The Voice of Russia, last modified November 2, 2011, <http://rus.ru/r/2011/11/02/59781936.html>.

⁶⁵ Emily Coleman, “EU lags Russia, Korea on higher education: report,” Reuters, last modified September 8, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/09/08/us-eu-education-idUSTRE6872UG20100908>.

⁶⁶ “Saint Petersburg: Police Grabbed People for Rainbow Suspenders,” Gay.Ru, last modified May 2 2012, <http://gay.ru/news/rainbow/2012/05/02-23413.htm>.

⁶⁷ “A Law Bill Proposed to the State Duma on Propaganda of Homosexuality Ban,” Lenta.ru, last modified March 29 2012, <http://lenta.ru/news/2012/03/29/propaganda/>.

and Political Rights.⁶⁸ It is very alarming, especially considering St. Petersburg's influence and status of "the cultural center of Russia."

In the United States the situation around the topic of homosexuality is also problematic. However, in the two past decades homosexuality has been widely discussed in the media. As Ron Becker states, starting in the early 1990s and further on television could not disregard the topic of homosexuality any longer as it used to do before.⁶⁹ By now there are a number of gay TV channels that air in the United States. Among them are Here!, Q Television,⁷⁰ WGAY-TV⁷¹ and others. Meanwhile in Russia, not only there are no channels that aim at gay population, with the introduction of new laws around the country which ban "propaganda of homosexuality" there is a fear that programs featuring sexualities other than heterosexuality will be banned, shares his thoughts Director General of MTV Russia.⁷²

Nevertheless, in the United States there are many opponents of homosexuality who strongly advocate against it. Very recently a pastor during his speech to the congregation said: "Dads, the second you see your son dropping the limp wrist, you crack that wrist." Reporters of abc24, however, say that this message provoked a lot of criticism in the country.⁷³ CBS News polls show that over the past two decades attitudes towards same-sex relationships have become better, meaning that less people now consider homosexuality as something wrong than in 1992.⁷⁴ Moreover, more and more people are in favor of gay marriage. After the vice president Joe Biden and the president Barack Obama had voiced their support of

⁶⁸ "Russia: Stop Draconian Homophobic Bill," HRW.org, last modified February 8 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/02/08/russia-stop-draconian-homophobic-bill>.

⁶⁹ Ron Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America*. New Brunswick (New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 5.

⁷⁰ Gary Levin, "'Underserved' Viewers Get New Gay Channel," USATODAY.com, last modified June 27, 2005, http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2005-06-27-gay-tv-main_x.htm.

⁷¹ James Welsh, "US Gets First Free-to-Air Gay Channel," digitalspy.co.uk, last modified November 28, 2006, <http://www.digitalspy.co.uk/ustv/news/a40065/us-gets-first-free-to-air-gay-channel.html>.

⁷² "Fighting 'Homopropaganda' Contradicts Putin's Line, Believe at MTV," Gay.Ru, last modified May 22 2012, <http://gay.ru/news/rainbow/2012/05/22-23545.htm>.

⁷³ Marcus Holliday, "Pastor's 'Beat the Gay Out' Message Draws Criticism," ABC.com, last modified May 3, 2012, http://www.abc24.com/news/local/story/Pastors-Beat-the-Gay-Out-Message-Draws-Criticism/HzFGKPC2iEOsB8n11_l2bg.csp.

⁷⁴ Brian Montopoli, "Poll: With Higher Visibility, Less Disapproval For Gays," CBSNEWS.com, last modified June 9, 2010, http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20007144-503544.html.

same-sex marriage⁷⁵ ABC News in cooperation with Washington Post conducted polls. These have revealed that 53% percent of Americans support gay marriage nowadays in contrast to 36% in 2006.⁷⁶ This shows that the social atmosphere around the question of homosexuality in the United States may be viewed as more supportive to the LGBTQ community than this in Russia.

⁷⁵ Robin Roberts and Barack Obama, "Obama Discusses N.C. Marriage Ban," last modified May 10, 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/video/obama-supports-gay-marriage-discusses-north-carolina-ban-16317627>.

⁷⁶ Alexandra Lopata, "Results of New Polls Demonstrate: 53 Percent of Americans Support Gay Marriage," last modified May 24, 2012, <http://gay.ru/news/rainbow/2012/05/24-23561.htm>.

Chapter 2.

Putting the Club in Theoretical, Cultural and Geographical Context

Choosing the Venues

In this part I will explore the question of the creation of so called queer space in Moscow and San Francisco and analyze how queer space has been constructed and what it has come to be depending on the circumstances of the two locations. By this I mean how not only the LGBTQ community but also the larger context (culture, history and social discourse) of the two cities are involved into making queer space. For example, how the level of tolerance/intolerance presupposes certain characteristics the club. I analyze visibility or invisibility of LGBTQ community in Moscow and San Francisco which is dependent on the wider scene of gay life. Grounding my discussion on the gay club as an institution I examine the spatial arrangement of the two places and see what queer space represents and how it looks like at this point of time in Moscow and San Francisco.

On the example of *Central Station* in Moscow and *The Café* in San Francisco I look at queer space of the two cities and draw a picture of gay clubbing in the chosen locations. These localities of queer sociality are set to allow us to see some of the main characteristics of queer space in the two locations. There are several reasons I have chosen these clubs for a discussion. In Moscow there was no problem of choice because the choices are very scant. Also, having conducted a poll among my friends and having read blogs online it was easy to determine that *Central Station* may be claimed to be one of the most famous and popular localities of queer sociality in Moscow. Reasons for choosing *The Café* in San Francisco as a basis for the discussion are the following. First of all, this club is situated in the famous gay district The Castro which can be a sign of attraction of a large number of gay identities.

Second, it is open every day, unlike some other gay places in San Francisco and seems to be at full operation every day. Third, it seems to be a very famous destination because it is widely advertised and known in the city.

However, I do not claim that these clubs can describe and provide us with a complete understanding of every part of localities of queer sociality in the two cities. Neither do I want to suggest that peculiarities of these venues may necessarily be found in every other queer locality in Moscow and San Francisco respectively. Nevertheless, these definitely belong to the mainstream destinations for queer people nowadays and they set certain standards which are appreciated by a big part of the LGBTQ community and which other clubs may follow. Therefore, analysis of *Central Station* and *The Café* can bring substantial understanding of queer space, and queer identities and their desires, fears and hopes in Moscow and San Francisco and can reflect the current state of things in Moscow and San Francisco regarding homosexuality and gay club scene in particular. However, before going directly to the analysis of the actual venues as illustrative examples of queer space in Moscow and San Francisco we need to consider a wider space of gay scene in the cities.

The Wider Scene around the Club

In Moscow there is no “gay district” and it lacks variety of places for queer identities. The scene is rather limited to very few gay clubs and saunas scattered around the city, which does not allow talking about gay space in the city which would be recognized inside certain boundaries. There are no gay friendly day-time venues such as cafes, restaurants, bars, etc. Gay clubs or any other places aimed at people with non-normative sexual orientation are hidden in order not to be recognized. Nevertheless, these very few places may be considered to be very important by LGBTQ identities. Just like Peter Lugosi traces, localities aimed at

queer population are not only places of common interest but also places free of homophobia.⁷⁷

I argue that due to invisibility of the gay community in a larger context of Moscow night clubs aimed at gay population tend to be filled with overwhelming commodities. At the same time boosting development of few gay clubs in Moscow is continuing to promote invisibility of gay identities by restricting appearance of other gay locations in the city. “Normal” or “natural” people (as they are referred to in Russia) will be very unlikely to recognize them. Therefore, queer places are secluded from the Russian mainstream culture.

In San Francisco there are different ghettos, as Stephen O. Murray calls them, that is Little Italy, or Chinatown or The Castro. Of course, it does not mean that in Little Italy only Italians live, neither may it be said that in the gay district The Castro there are no heterosexual people. However, it is easy to label the areas according to predominant presence of a certain community. These ghettos are easy to locate and cruise from one to another.⁷⁸ While The Castro is the most visible and famous district that attracts gay people, it should be also noted that there are other neighborhoods in the city of San Francisco with a high concentration of gay men and lesbian women.⁷⁹

In the circumstances of Moscow, so called gay culture may be said to find itself at a very early stage of formation but it may also be claimed that all the factors mentioned above promote development of queer space. Contrary to San Francisco, gay clubs in Moscow have become not only clubs but also, with Betsky’s words, momentary places of satisfaction⁸⁰ with overwhelming commodities.

As there is no variety in gay scene of Moscow as well as gay life is closeted, you are most likely to find everything you wish in a gay club and clubs are somehow forced to offer a

⁷⁷ Lugosi, “Hospitable Space,” 400.

⁷⁸ Stephen O. Murray, “Components of Gay Community in San Francisco,” in *Gay Culture in America*, ed. Gilbert Herdt (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 109.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 109, 138.

⁸⁰ Betsky, *Queer Space*, 44.

range of services in one place. As Director General of *Central Station* mentions, LGBTQ population are very demanding category of people and “do not forgive you if something goes wrong.”⁸¹ It can also be seen as a business strategy: instead of restricting themselves to a particular idea why not offer everything they can think of in one place and therefore maximize their profit. Going back in time to the 1960s we can see an interesting comparison of the gay scene of San Francisco and Los Angeles. As Achilles reveals, gay life in San Francisco was way more visible than in Los Angeles at the time. An interesting finding was that gay bars in San Francisco were more visible and, therefore, more policed. Hence, there were a lot of rules and patrons had to behave within tight limits. Meanwhile in Los Angeles or Chicago gay bars were closeted “but,” as Achilles quotes the then president of a homophile reform group, “once you get in you can do almost anything.”⁸² Therefore, it may be assumed there is a certain pattern that is played out by interrelationship between closetedness and openness of gay localities.

Central Station is the most famous locality among gay people in Moscow and it seems to be the mainstream leisure activity among gay population. Director General of the club definitely supports this idea and is confident that *Central Station* is the most visible and most attended locality among other gay venues in Moscow.⁸³ This is supported by my interviewees as well. Even those who generally explicated certain negativity towards gay clubs in Moscow agreed that *Central Station* is one of the places to visit. As Mark said, “other places are not even close to any standards.”⁸⁴ This gives us certain confidence in ascribing the status of popularity to *Central Station*.

The Café can also be ascribed the status of fame because it is first, widely advertised in free printing materials circulating around the city and especially around The Castro district;

⁸¹ Director General of *Central Station* in discussion with the author, April 2012.

⁸² Achilles, “Homosexual Bar,” 176-177.

⁸³ Director General of *Central Station* in discussion with the author, April 2012.

⁸⁴ Mark in discussion with the author, April 2012.

and second, was referred to by many people I came across with when asked what places are good for a night out. Whenever I visited the venue it was always filled with a large number of people. The club is also known for welcoming any kinds of population. Hence, the patrons who frequent the place are very diverse according to a range of criteria, including their gender identification, ethnic origin, color, race, sexual orientation, etc. *The Café* does not seem to aim at a specific group of people or a certain subculture. I may assume that this policy is one of the reasons why the club is famous among a wide range of people.

Central Station and *The Café* are positioned in different settings and therefore differ in the quality and quantity of services they provide. *Central Station* in Moscow is advertised as a dance club. However, dancing is just a part of the whole scene. While in San Francisco most of the time localities of queer sociality are strictly divided according to interests, Moscow queer space offers “all in one” most of the time. Unlike in San Francisco, gay scene in Moscow cannot boast a range of spaces for homosexuals. This makes the gay scene of Moscow lacking the number because there is no variety of places to choose from, and there is no gay district in the city. In San Francisco there are many choices in the gay district and beyond it but gay localities tend to be oriented at specific interests of people. Meanwhile, as LGBTQ population in Moscow have different tastes and desires, owners of few existing gay clubs tend to implement as many ideas and provide as many services as possible inside their venues. Deriving from different circumstances but an important similarity can be pointed out between the two clubs. *Central Station* and *The Café* both aim at the gay community as a whole rather than restricting themselves to a certain subculture. While in Moscow aiming at a particular smaller community within the gay community is not viable at this period of time, *The Café* chooses the tactic of appealing to any groups of people for unknown reasons. It makes the two venues similar in terms of the diversity of clubbers inside.

Locating the Club

Now I would like to go through the whole process of experience that a gay man can evidence on a regular night out in Moscow and San Francisco and show a more detailed picture of an outline above. I start my discussion with the positioning of the clubs which in terms of marginalized groups is a very important factor. Then I will move on to pick on peculiarities of the actual buildings rented by the owners and see what the architecture can imply. After the exploration of the “outside world” of the club I lead the main discussion of the “inside world” of the club and not only refer to the facilities that *Central Station* and *The Café* have but what is more important, I explore the public who frequent the club and their feelings and behavior.⁸⁵

The location of *Central Station*⁸⁶ can tell a story of its own. Visiting the web page of *Central Station* can make Russian gay population feel liberated as the club introduces itself in such a way. On the very first page you can see a flashing text picture saying “Who said that a gay club should be located in suburbs and off the central streets? We change stereotypes.”⁸⁷ Director General of *Central Station* in my interview with him affirmed the idea that, among others, the main factor for choosing the location was “centralization and its close proximity to the metro stations.”⁸⁸

I argue that, despite the bold assertions, the club may not be considered as visible as it is presented by the management. Let us have a look at the exact positioning of the venue in detail. The Garden Ring can be a point of departure here because this ring street encloses the center of the city, and everything inside the boundaries of The Garden Ring is considered to be quite central. First of all, the club is located outside The Garden Ring. Moreover, if we

⁸⁵ In this context I will use my observations as well as thoughts spoken out by my interviewees.

⁸⁶ See Appendix 3.

⁸⁷ “‘Central Station’ is Back,” [centralclub.ru](http://www.centralclub.ru), accessed June 1, 2012, <http://www.centralclub.ru/home/frame.php>.

⁸⁸ Director General of *Central Station* in discussion with the author, April 2012.

analyze the exact positioning of the locality, we can see that it is not something to be proud of.

If you take public transport you can get to the club from two metro stations as the club is located between *Komsomolskaya* and *Krasnye Vorota* metro stations. It is a 10 minute walk from both stations which is quite a short walk considering the size of the city. There are no bus lines leading to the club, so the only way is walking or taking a taxi. As it is not far, people using metro prefer to walk to the club. However, the way to the club is not lit from any of the two stations. The way from *Krasnye Vorota Metro Station* starts along a big road and then turns into small narrow dark streets that seem to be abandoned and it is not clear at times if it is a residential area or not.

There are no signs leading to the club and even there are no signs on the actual building. The building looks like a former factory and therefore is very old, definitely have not been remodeled for a very long time, some pieces of the wall seem to come off any time soon. The area around the building can hardly be called welcoming, as it is dark, dirty, lacks both street lights and good pavement. The other way is from the *Komsomolskaya Metro Station* (at *Komsomolskaya Square*). *Komsomolskaya Square* is famous for being surrounded by three railway stations. The area is famous for being dangerous and dirty. It is full of drunks, drug users as well as drug dealers, homeless people, robbers, etc. The way from *Komsomolskaya* is also dark and goes along narrow streets. Moreover, there is a railway bridge on the way to the club which makes the only underpass available on the way to *Central Station*. There have already been cases of homophobic violence that resulted in murder of people in this area.⁸⁹

Therefore, taking into consideration all the details, the announcement of the web page of the club saying that their club is central and supposedly visible can be viewed as fake.

⁸⁹ "One Killed and Two Wounded in a Fight in Moscow," youtube.com, last modified July 18 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRST5NJW8GA>.

Playing around with the geographic location they do not specify the peculiarities of the location. The use of the word “center” may also be perceived as misleading because the club is outside the central area and definitely far away from the actual center of the city. In this we can see that localities of queer sociality are still in the closet and are invisible to the majority of population.

Going to the positioning of *The Café* in San Francisco a number of features can be also pointed out. The club is located in the globally famous gay district of San Francisco The Castro. San Francisco can be put in contrast to Moscow of 2012 or New York City of the second half of the 1990s. As Fiona Buckland reports, in New York City queer clubbers had to take into consideration the question of safety while heading to the club in the night because clubs were very often situated in dark streets with no lights.⁹⁰ Meanwhile in San Francisco of today the club is situated on a well-lit street. Besides that, it is easy to get access to the location by metro or by tram and the club is located in the closest proximity to both of them requiring only a less than a minute walk. As the web site of *The Café* says, the club is “[l]ocated in the heart of the Castro.”⁹¹ The name of the district must say it all. It may be interpreted in different ways. On one hand, having identified that the club is located in the gay district the message may be viewed as an indication of a safe environment. On the other hand, however, I have shown earlier that San Francisco is generally a gay friendly city, and therefore, signifying its positioning in The Castro should not necessarily be considered as a flag of safety. It may be better interpreted as a mark of centralization in the gay area and hence implying that there are many choices of other localities in the close proximity.

The Café does not bear a rainbow flag to specify their orientation at the LGBTQ community. However, it may be speculated that being located in the gay district of San Francisco implies being oriented at gay population and being open to any kind of gender

⁹⁰ Buckland, *Impossible Dance*, 44.

⁹¹ “About *The Café*,” *The Café*, accessed June 1, 2012, <http://www.cafesf.com/about/>.

identification and sexuality. The venue is right on the intersection of big well lit Market Street and Castro Street⁹² and it can be easily located if the name of the club is known. It is also in vicinity of “the giant rainbow flag in the Castro Harvey Milk Plaza.”⁹³

The area around the club is very much welcoming and seems to be safe. For the reason of the gay district which contains a lot of localities aimed at LGBTQ population the area is full of identities who may include themselves to be a part of the LGBTQ community. Gay men seem to be prevailing in the area and building up the majority but the percentage of identities who do not belong to this category may be estimated as high. The area is vibrant any time of the day or night at least until three o'clock in the morning, an hour later than *The Café's* closing time.

From the Outside to the Inside

Discussion of the outside and inside architecture is another factor to show what the club comes to be in the context of the two cities.

When (if) you safely reached the actual location of *Central Station* you are likely to see a line in front of the club and this will be the only sign to identify that it might be the place you are looking for because there is no name of the club on the building and the rainbow flag is missing. Therefore, the missing signs on one hand can be viewed as security measures, and on the other hand this fact makes the club invisible to “outsiders.”

The name of *The Café* in San Francisco is there illuminating and can be seen from a distance. There is no a rainbow flag as I mentioned earlier but being located in the gay district presupposes the public. Contrary to *Central Station*, *The Café* has large windows almost

⁹² See Appendix 4.

⁹³ Amy Crawford, “Castro district’s rainbow flag to fly at half-mast for 9/11,” *The Examiner*, last modified September 7, 2011, <http://www.sfexaminer.com/local/2011/09/castro-districts-rainbow-flag-fly-half-mast-911>.

across the whole venue. Lugosi, for instance, mentions the fact that having large windows is something new and specific to localities of queer sociality of today rather than the past.⁹⁴ It is, however, may be applicable only to the gay clubs in the West. The club is known in the city because it is advertised in such magazine as *Gloss* or other magazines that are distributed around the city for free. *The Café* was always named and pointed to among the first ones by my interviewees when asked what clubs they usually frequent. According to Adam, “It’s like the place where everyone goes.”⁹⁵ Having combined the three factors mentioned above, that is location, large windows and advertising, it is viable to assert that the level of visibility of the club is much higher than its comparative in Moscow.

The opening hours of *Central Station* are from 10 p.m. until 6 a.m. but the preferred time when the most crowd is gathering is around 1-2 o’clock. According to my experience and experiences of my interviewees you may spend up to 40 minutes and more outside before entering the semi-entrance. Once you reach this, you appear to be in a little yard (which is still outside) and only here it is possible to realize you are about to enter a gay club. In this semi-entrance guarded by several security bouncers there are posters with men in underwear and pictures of travesties. Posters of naked men can be recognized to be the same ones from famous Spanish parties like *Matinée* and pictures of transvestites most likely represent “the divas” who you will see during the show time in the club. In this yard you would proceed directly to the actual entrance but recently another obstacle has appeared. Two or three months ago there has appeared another three meters high fence featuring the intercom. Frequenters have to press the button to call some other security to be let in. However, there are also security right behind the fence during the rush hour. Finally, you enter the building and there are more security to check your clothes and pockets to make sure you are not bringing anything illegal or dangerous inside the club. As one of my interviewees John who

⁹⁴ Lugosi, “Hospitable Space,” 401.

⁹⁵ Adam in discussion with the author, April 2012.

comes from England underlined he was shocked at first how well protected and guarded an entry to any gay venue in Moscow is and “bouncers galore” at *Central Station* is impressive to him.⁹⁶ After all these numerous checks and face control and dress code processes in Moscow are successfully passed you can pay the entrée fee which is \$10 for men (free if younger than 23) and \$50 for women. The price can go higher in case there are special guest DJs or famous performers. The drastic difference in price for men and women shows that women and older men are not very welcome in this place. Indeed, as Buckland says, it is not enough to be queer to be a part of the community of clubbers. You have to comply with other requirements as well, like entrée fees, for example.⁹⁷

The picture in San Francisco is more relaxed. The opening hours of *The Café* are from 5p.m. to 2a.m. (Saturday and Sunday 3p.m. to 2a.m.). The rush hour to get in is around 11p.m. and the place is full by midnight. One can hardly ever experience a line to enter the venue, or the line is nothing major and moves very quickly. This, however, does not imply that the venue is empty. This is rather explained by almost absence of security checks before entering the club. No more than a couple of minutes is spent before you pay an entrance fee of \$5 and get inside. It should be noted that many express a certain concern about paying the cover because there are many venues which do not charge an entrée fee. Nevertheless, The Café may be considered to be a cheap place, especially in terms of expensive San Francisco. What is more important, the club treats everyone equally, no matter what gender or age you are. Unless you are underage, which means you are not supposed to be let in. This is an important difference from Moscow. In San Francisco your ID is definitely going to be checked, as in most clubs in the United States, to make sure you are older than 21 and allowed to consume alcohol. The security is represented by one person whose gender I could not identify. There is no high fence or any other barriers before entering the club. Before

⁹⁶ John in discussion with the author, April 2012.

⁹⁷ Buckland, *Impossible Dance*, 47.

entering the club and right after there are no posters of naked or half-naked men trying to seduce you. The cover is the same for all patrons and does not depend on the gender issue like it does in Moscow. I have not experienced a higher price for special events at this venue and have not gathered any information from anywhere or anyone that would point this out.

Before entering the club in Moscow it can hardly ever be seen that people express any homosexual attention to others. Also, the overwhelming presence of security makes people feel very uncomfortable and paradoxically brings feelings of insecurity and danger. As Anton says, “There are so many of them and they don’t exactly look gay-friendly, you know.”⁹⁸ The process of transculturation⁹⁹ is seen here, and at this moment values of heteronormative heterosexual society are successfully imposed on gay population. Therefore, just like Samuel Delany speaks of “sexual practice[s]... that ha[ve] been suppressed,”¹⁰⁰ it is clearly seen how queer desires in Moscow are suppressed. After you finalized the payment process you proceed to the cloakroom which is working quite efficiently at the beginning of the night. You receive a paper tag for your checked clothes which many people complain about because it is easy to lose. Upon completion of all this fuss and hassle you are all set to party and can go explore the place.

In front of *The Café* in The Castro a lot of gay men walking hand in hand, hugging or kissing can be observed. As my interviewees shared with me, they do not need to visit a gay club to feel comfortable about their sexuality or to express their desires or attention to people of same sex. Therefore, going along with the ideas of Yi-Fu Tuan talking about space as “a complex set of ideas”¹⁰¹ and Henri Lefebvre saying that space and its construction depend on a wide range of factors,¹⁰² it is viable to say that the higher level of tolerance in San Francisco translates into more freedom that gay men have in expressing themselves beyond

⁹⁸ Anton in discussion with the author, April 2012.

⁹⁹ Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” 34.

¹⁰⁰ Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 775.

¹⁰¹ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 34.

¹⁰² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 73.

the gay localities.

As I have said before, there is almost full absence of the security which is represented by only one person. After your age got checked you proceed to the door where you find an immediate staircase leading up to the second level which is the only in the club. There is, however, a semi level where the cloakroom is situated. The cloakroom does not seem to be very popular among patrons. Many come to the club already without anything warm on, despite the chilly weather in San Francisco in April. I may assume that either the majority live nearby and do not spend much time outside on the way to the place, or most people drive to the club. Even though for most people clubbing implies consumption of alcohol, it does not stop people from driving afterwards. Having checked your clothes you receive a paper tag, just like in Moscow; with the only difference in the form of a string that helps you tie it to your belt loop. After an easy and quick procedure you are all set to party.

The Inside Experience

Let us proceed inside. *Central Station* is much more than just a dance venue. It features a range of services and offers a spectrum of commodities. There are three levels in the club and an open air terrace. There are two main dance floors on the first and second floors and they are full. There are three stages in the club and up to three shows can be held at the same time in the club. There are platforms around the dance floors for go-go dancers who entertain your eye all night long. The first floor has a stage where they offer transvestite show and a dance floor of a not very large size. Music is mainly of Pop and RnB styles. It can be very uncomfortable at times because it gets too packed. There is another semi-level on the first floor where tables are situated. The tables should be reserved in advance; otherwise you will not be let in the area which is guarded by security. Restaurant is open during the whole

night and food is available. It is not only drinks and fruit but a menu à la carte. A bar and a couch area share walls with the dance floor and the karaoke room. The area might have been designed as a chill out space but as long as it is not divided by doors or anything solid, it is too loud to relax and is simply a place to have a drink. Considering the overall size of the club “the chill out” area is way too small and can accommodate only about 25 people. There is a shop on the first level where goods aimed at gay population are sold, including magazines or sex-related products. There is a bar and a twice as big dance floor on the second floor. Music is electro house or vocal house. There is more space to dance and due to its size it is not as packed as the downstairs dance floor. There is a dark room in the club as well; recently a gay sauna has been opened in the same building. The motto of the club expressed in the description of the club says: “Our aim is to give everyone what they wish.”¹⁰³

In terms of Moscow a gay venue that has a range of services is greatly valued. It can be assumed that having all these commodities inside one place makes it not profitable to open other places that would be strictly devoted to a particular idea. However, this may be seen as very comfortable for frequenters who can have access to anything they wish in one location and do not have to travel to any other places.

Hence, if we remember Betsky’s argument that architecture “allows us to place ourselves in the world,”¹⁰⁴ in terms of Moscow it can be translated the following way. As LGBTQ population and their desires are suppressed in the city, they place themselves in buildings which would not be recognized by “outsiders.” At the same time as inside their mind many of queers know that they are as well as entitled to have access to anything that the normative population has, it translates into the spatial arrangement of the inside.

In this respect gay clubbing in San Francisco could be described as less flamboyant. In San Francisco “all in one” structure may not be observed in the night club. As there is a

¹⁰³ “‘Central Station’ is Back,” [centralclub.ru](http://www.centralclub.ru/home/frame.php), accessed June 1, 2012, <http://www.centralclub.ru/home/frame.php>.

¹⁰⁴ Betsky, *Queer Space*, 7.

great variety of places in the city they all serve different interests of people. It is important to keep in mind that there is the gay district within which but also beyond which a lot of localities of queer sociality are contained. Therefore, it might be not profitable or aimless for the night club to duplicate services which are already delivered by other venues in close proximity.

The Café is classified under the category “drinks” or sometimes under “bars.”¹⁰⁵ Indeed, it seems that the bar culture is taking more space in San Francisco than dance culture nowadays. However, it seems to have been specifically created and run as a dance plus the bar venue. Inside the club there is a dance floor and area for socializing which is quieter than the dancing part. There are two platforms for go-go dancers but they are often occupied by club patrons in the absence of the former ones. Besides that, there are three full bars. The picture is almost complete with just two omissions: the cloakroom and the restroom. By this the general description of *The Café* is already given.

It should be also noted that not only there is no variety of the services that could be found in the club, there is also no demand for them. LGBTQ population are not tightly bound to the gay district or to the gay club in particular. They feel more or less free in localities which are aimed at heterosexual population. Therefore, Betsky’s arguments that “queers continue to queer our cities” and that “queers are disappearing”¹⁰⁶ may be well reflected in San Francisco of today. On one hand, LGBTQ identities, and gay men in particular, go and explore “straight” places. Hence, they bring the element of queerness in a wider scope of the city. On the other hand, as more and more queers transgress the boundaries of the heterosexual space, they become regulars of that space. Hence, they lose the label of queerness.

What about the prices inside the club? At *Central Station* in Moscow the prices for

¹⁰⁵ “San Francisco Gay Bars,” GayCities, accessed June 1, 2012, <http://sanfrancisco.gaycities.com/bars/>.

¹⁰⁶ Betsky, *Queer Space*, 14.

alcoholic cocktails range between \$9 and \$16. 200 ml of bottled water will cost you around \$6, a bottle of coca cola is \$5. In the karaoke room people pay \$5 a song. The most expensive drink at the club is a bottle of Moët&Chandon Champagne (750ml) which is \$470. All of my respondents express a unified opinion that the prices are way too high.

At *The Café* in San Francisco the prices for alcoholic cocktails range between \$4 and \$8. The most expensive drink they offer is a glass of Brandy Hennessy for \$12. Any non-alcoholic drink or mix costs \$2.5. Even though my informants shared with me that there are some cheaper places to go to but the pricing at *The Café* seems to be adequate.

The question of money inside is as important as outside. So, not only patrons have to pay the cover but also they have to be able to purchase drinks. As it is seen, it may be very expensive. Again, as Buckland says the ability to afford commodities is very important as it is one of the crucial factors that can make you either belong or not belong to the community.¹⁰⁷

Leaving the Club

Leaving procedure is the final experience of the space of the locality of queer sociality. In both cities it can be a fuss situation as people tend to leave at the same time. There are complaints about the work of the cloakroom in Moscow which may be seen as slow because there is a great outflow of people at around 4-5 o'clock in the morning. It might be explained by the schedule of public transport which starts operating this time of the day.

Walking back towards either of the metro stations may be perceived as dangerous due to the reasons described earlier in this work. It is also possible to get a taxi which would be waiting right outside the club. In Moscow not official taxi service is very common. They are called *bombily*.¹⁰⁸ Official taxi should only be ordered over the phone and in terms of

¹⁰⁷ Buckland, *Impossible Dance*, 47.

¹⁰⁸ See Glossary.

Moscow it might imply a waiting time from 20 minutes up to an hour. Hence, it is more convenient to use *bombily* service. *Bombily* outside the club would definitely ask for the price which is three to four times higher than normally. People tend to go a little further away from the area of the club and catch a car. Besides the cost interest there are life interests. As Denis says, “It’s always more expensive close to a club but it’s not about the money. It’s about if I’m gonna stay alive. You never know if it’s a guy who just earns money or an idiot who is set to fight against “sinners,” you know what I mean.”¹⁰⁹

In San Francisco a certain number of people tend to leave the club half an hour before the closing time. However, the majority tend to stay until the end of the party at 2 o’clock in the morning. Contrary to Moscow, where operating time can be extended accordingly with the number of people, The Café in San Francisco stops exactly at 2 o’clock and everyone is asked to leave as quickly as possible. As the cloakroom is not particularly popular, the flow of people is quick and the club is empty in a few minutes.

Leaving *The Café* implies either going home or proceeding to an after party. Public transport does not operate during the night and the only means of transport are either a private car or a taxi. Numerous taxis circulate during this time in The Castro district as most places tend to close at 2 o’clock in the morning. Only official taxi drivers can be observed. There are a lot of taxi companies and therefore, their pricing is also strikingly different. Some people tend to order a taxi by phone either because of the prices matters or because they trust a particular company. Many go to SOMA (South of Market) district where gay clubbing continues until 4 or 5 and sometimes later in the morning. Nobody seems to express any worries about their life in case a taxi driver can identify their customers as belonging to the LGBTQ community.

¹⁰⁹ Denis in discussion with the author, April 2012.

What Queer Space Can Offer

Queer space of Moscow exemplified by *Central Station* has generated to the state when it can offer a manifold of commodities becoming a *gay mall*.¹¹⁰ However, it also panders to invisibility of gay people in Moscow. They are concentrated in only very few places like *Central Station*, which, moreover, due to their location are not visible any way. The club offers a lot inside, and with this, it limits the opportunities of new gay venues to immerse in the city.

Queer space of San Francisco is various and multifold in the boundaries of the city and especially in the area of The Castro. Numerous gay venues are located around the whole city with a high density in the gay district. Everything is already offered but it is segregated into small areas of interest. There are a lot of choices, and this limits the possibilities for a gay mall like *Central Station* to appear in San Francisco.

Having done a comparative analysis of *Central Station* and *The Café*, at this point of time it may be possible to single out the following differences between queer space of Moscow and San Francisco.

If we take *Central Station* into consideration, it may well be claimed that gay clubbing in Moscow finds itself at a thriving period of time. By this I mean that, even though places like *Central Station* are advertised as dance venues, they definitely go beyond this identification and become gay malls to a certain extent, where diverse desires of the gay community can be fulfilled. Moscow localities that posit themselves as LGBTQ oriented are extremely developed in terms of their services and ideas they implement.

Night clubs aimed at gay population in San Francisco cannot boast a wide range of services or commodities they are able to offer. While gay life in the city is more varied than

¹¹⁰ By saying “gay mall” I draw a parallel with a shopping mall. However, I do not imply the place to be a shopping place. By presenting the term “gay mall” I intend to underline overwhelming commodities that this place can offer.

in Moscow and gay men can go to places of their interests and find their accomplices, gay clubs appear to be places of scant commodities. The club is viewed more as a place for socializing as well as a place enabling its patrons to dance. Dance and socializing are the only activities that the club in San Francisco explicitly offers.

Chapter 3. Role of the Club for the Gay Community

Historical Importance of Localities of Queer Sociality

In this chapter I consider what role gay clubs play for the gay community today. Due to different circumstances that the cities find themselves in, the role of the club for the gay community turns out to be different. First, I trace milestones of the history of meeting points and their importance for homosexuals. Historically meeting points were closeted but represented widely from the bathhouse to the dance venue or the cruising area. Next, I look at the importance and the role that gay clubs play at this period of time in the two locations.

To understand the role of the club as a social institution for the gay community we have to consider and examine the two chosen cities on the matter of spaces which have been historically used as meeting points for men who identified themselves as homosexuals. As Carol Warren claims, “[w]hereas straight people may find companionship, sex, and lifetime love in all kinds of settings, from church to the workplace, secret gay people may neither find others like themselves there, nor be gay in those settings.” Therefore, “gay people” need “gay settings.”¹¹¹ Moscow and San Francisco are two diverse cities and have been experiencing different conditions determined by political situation, social discourse, cultural practices, etc. in the past as well as nowadays. Therefore, the situation around the localities of queer sociality in these geographical locations has been and is different and requires separate inquiries.

Dan Healey in his revealing article on “Male Homosexuality in Stalin’s Russia” brings up some very valuable data revealing facts of homosociability in Soviet Russia during the 1920s in such establishments as “bathhouse cabinets, hotel and restaurant rooms, bars,

¹¹¹ Carol Warren, “Space and Time,” in *Social Perspectives in Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Reader*, ed. Peter M. Nardi and Beth E. Schneider (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 183.

and dance halls.”¹¹² During this time there was a lot of effort put into surveillance of these places but not because men-on-men encounters were sought out. The aim was to fight female prostitution. This, however, also influenced homosexual men as well and is believed to have moved them to “marginal spaces for homosexual liaisons: public toilets, boulevards, courtyards, and parks.”¹¹³ The most famous *pleshkas*¹¹⁴ (probably due to their centralized position) could be found in Sverdlov Square right in front of the Bolshoi Theater and Manezh Square in close vicinity. However, there are no accounts of any commercial establishments aimed at or at least frequented by and famous among gay population in Moscow until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and establishment of Russian Federation.

Gay history of the United States shows that one of the first gay activist organizations “Society for Human Rights” appeared in Chicago in 1924.¹¹⁵ Already in the 1920s there existed bathhouses and dance parties popular among gay men. Police used to arrest a lot of men cruising in parks or elsewhere in the vicinity of these establishments. However, generally it was safe to frequent some dance venues which had a fame of being aimed at gay population, even though not officially. Emergence of the gay subculture is bound to the dance scene during this time.¹¹⁶ Therefore, localities that may be seen as prototypes of modern gay clubs were not only important for spending time and socializing but for the creation of the gay movement to some extent.

In the 1930s homophobic movements intensified their presence and the gay subculture was forced to be as invisible as possible. The 1940s were still a hard time for homosexuals who were victims of homophobic violence. However, revival of the gay

¹¹² Healey “Homosexual Existence,” 359.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ See Glossary.

¹¹⁵ Lindsey Bauer, “My Dance, My Space, My Voice” (master's thesis, Arizona State University, 2007), 18.

¹¹⁶ Pickett, *The A to Z of Homosexuality*, 191.

subculture slowly started and the number of gay bars was growing, especially in port cities.¹¹⁷ John D’Emilio recounts that the pioneers of the gay movement, as he calls them, in the United States can be traced back to 1940s while in 1950s and 1960s the gay subculture was growing and it was slowly becoming easier for homosexuals to seek out those who would coincide with their ideology. Indeed, Lindsey Bauer in her research referring to Neil Miller also traces the growth of the bars scene and says that these become “organizational centers” for homosexuals in the 1950s.¹¹⁸

The crucial moment for the gay liberation movement happened in 1969 at the Stonewall bar. People who were in the bar (many of them were “transvestite and transsexual hustlers”¹¹⁹) at the moment of another common police raid decided to fight for their right to be inside “their space.” As it is well known, this event resulted in riots of people who were advocating for gay rights and inspired gays and lesbians around the world.¹²⁰ It is obviously possible to assume that at the time participants could not be hoping for complete liberation. Hoping for being accepted by homophobic society and being tolerated expressing their homosexual desires in the streets or other public places would be unrealistic and probably was not on the agenda for many. However, people who identified themselves as “queer” (that is, somehow different from the heteronormative heterosexuals; and most of them would be gays and lesbians) wanted to have their private (but at the same time public) space where they could feel safe and not afraid of expressing their sexuality which does not comply with the normative discourse on the topic. This space at the time could be represented by the bar, and the Stonewall bar in particular.

In the 1970s homosexual men and women managed to open “some safe social space in which to exist” which was a great achievement but it was not anywhere close to being

¹¹⁷ Pickett, *The A to Z of Homosexuality*, 190.

¹¹⁸ Bauer, “My Dance,” 20.

¹¹⁹ Bruce Bawer, “Notes on Stonewall,” in *Beyond Queer: Challenging Gay Left Orthodoxy*, ed. Bruce Bawer (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 7.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

through with homophobia.¹²¹ Even though it was too early to claim that homophobia did not longer exist, gays did create “social space” of their own. Already in in the 1970s San Francisco had a reputation of a city which was comfortable to reside in for lesbians and gay men. The city was also perceived as a place providing more sexual freedom. It is assumed that during this time first gay establishments appeared to be. Gay migration to San Francisco was increasing until the early 1980s when first cases of AIDS started to be reported.¹²²

Nowadays San Francisco is famous for being the Gay Mecca of the World. Nevertheless, even now, several decades later, the problem of homophobia is still an issue for the LGBTQ community. However, it should be mentioned that San Francisco is one of the most comfortable cities in the world to live in for gay people because during this period of time explicit homophobia does not seem to take a central position in the city or to have explicit forms. It can be, however, assumed that implicit homophobia may still be in existence but it requires a more profound research and cannot be fully and accurately explored in the frame of this work. For the purpose of identifying and analyzing the role of the club for gay population I regard presented information as sufficient because explicit attitudes may be considered as more important than implicit ones for this aim.

Having briefly traced the history of gay venues, it is possible to affirm that these semi-public places¹²³ have for a long time constituted an important part of gay life and continue to be a significant component for many gay men, lesbians, transvestites and other categories of people who might frequent these venues and may consider themselves queer in a certain way.

¹²¹ John D'Emilio, *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York and Londond: Routledge 1992), 10-11.

¹²² Murray, “Components of Gay Community,” 127-128.

¹²³ Even though these places are obviously public places because they lie outside the boundaries of a private apartment or a house, and which also host a lot more people than a private apartment would allow, it is hard to consider these localities as fully public due to the circumstances of being a part of an underground subculture and being forced to camouflage themselves to a certain extent. Therefore, it seems to me best to describe such venues as semi-public places, at least in the preceding history in both cities and currently in Moscow.

In the social atmosphere of Russia and precisely Moscow where homosexuality is not accepted as one of the norms, the club might be of a more significance for the gay community than the club in San Francisco. “Live it all” attitude among gay identities in Moscow may be prevailing. It may be argued (as well as contested) that reasons for visiting the club among Moscovites can be viewed as more diverse than those among gay men in San Francisco. As Director General of *Central Station* says “LGBTQ population are very demanding” and that is why the management of the club are forced to provide more and more services and implement new ideas.

However, further I will also show that even though the club in Moscow offers a lot more commodities than the club in San Francisco does, and people’s interests are at times of a great variety, a gay club in Moscow is a very sexualized space and the search for a sexual partner is one of the main motives for frequenting a place like *Central Station*. In terms of Russia this fact may be considered as important because for many it becomes a place where people can express and practice their sexuality in safe surroundings. Warren also notes that “gay settings” like bars, for example, are among those few places which are first, “sexually defining spaces” and second, involve sexual activity of homosexuals which is not possible in other settings like work, church, etc. which are supposedly heterosexual.¹²⁴ Warren writes about the United States of the 1970s but these observations may well be applied to Russia of 2012. As homosexuality is still a taboo topic in Russia and men-on-men encounters are highly stigmatized and condemned there are two main sources to look for sexual partners: the internet and the gay club.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Warren, “Space and Time,” 184.

¹²⁵ By this I do not mean that there are no other ways to establish connections for the purpose of acquiring sexual intercourse with a person of the same sex but only presume that the internet and the gay club are the most famous ones and more or less easy to get access to.

Function of the Club in Moscow Today

A gay club in Moscow is not just a point of meeting friends to chat for a couple of hours. It is a whole way of life, the gay way of life. Here gay men can feel free to some extent to express their homosexual desires and to actually live at least inside the boundaries of the club their gay identity and not pretend to be someone or something else. As I mentioned earlier, the work place and the space of the city are highly heteronormative and imply compliance of homosexual people with the established norms. These mean no expression of any kind of behavior that can be considered to be of a gay nature. According to Valentine, this may lead to problems of establishing decent relationships with colleague, for example.¹²⁶ Hence, the space of the club becomes of a great significance. *Central Station* plays this very important role of providing safe environment for gay people who are eager for self-expression of their sexuality. Gay clubbing in Moscow has a significant attribute of sexual intercourse involved. Some men prefer clubs for this purpose over other means explaining this by safety reasons. Gay men look for sex in clubs and preferably it should be done inside the club. As one of my interviewees, Ivan explains,

Well, yes, I do go to club to have a quicky with a hot guy. It's better to go to a club and actually see what is out there, rather than look online and... you never know if the pictures are going to coincide with reality. Also, it's safer than looking online, you know... especially with these recent incidents (my remark: recent murders of three gay men in Moscow¹²⁷).¹²⁸

He also expresses some anger towards security who make sure that people do not have sexual intercourses in the bathroom: "And what are these notes on the cubicle doors "only one

¹²⁶ Valentine, "Queer Bodies," 153

¹²⁷ Nikita Tersky, "First Men from Dagestan Only Robbed Moscow Gays, Murders Were After," Gay.Ru, last modified March 24, 2012, <http://gay.ru/news/rainbow/2012/03/24-23125.htm>.

¹²⁸ Ivan in discussion with the author, April 2012.

person at a time””? At least in *Three Monkeys*¹²⁹ they didn’t have those and it was easy to actually relax and do what you want.”¹³⁰ Another interviewee, Konstantin, supports the idea of over sexualized character of the club, though with an opposite opinion saying that “gay clubs seem to me disgusting! All those men indulging in lust, it’s disgusting. You definitely would not be looking for a relationship there.”¹³¹

Ivan and Konstantin are two opposing parties in a sense. The former wants to have more freedom and liberation and to do something in a gay club which is seen problematic to do anywhere else. The latter on the other hand may view presence of the security as a good sign. For Konstantin they try to keep *Central Station* in a decent state. It is possible to assume that these two types of people would prefer to be in different types of settings in order to feel more comfortable. It is not, however, easily achieved as there are no many choices of gay venues in Moscow. Gay men who would otherwise prefer to belong to different subcultures conform to sharing space with people of ideologies contradicting their own. It may be hypothesized that opposing interests clash in the space of the club and this may bring some tension in the club.

To show a fuller picture of the use of the gay club by patrons and to delineate a more plentiful spectrum of the gay clubbing scene in Moscow I would like to present some other thoughts on the role of the gay club expressed by my other informants. One of them says that he

“goe[s] to a club to dance the night away and forget about the rest of the world for a little while... and yeah, it’s a way to find someone for sex... not necessarily do in the club but it’s the way to meet other guys, you know... I wouldn’t be looking for a guy in the streets of Moscow and flirt, it’s kind of dangerous. A gay club is a good place for that.”¹³²

¹²⁹ *Three Monkeys* is a former gay club which no longer operates.

¹³⁰ Ivan in discussion with the author, April 2012.

¹³¹ Konstantin in discussion with the author, April 2012.

¹³² Artem in discussion with the author, April 2012.

My other interviewee is trapped between his dubious thinking and is a little hesitant and indecisive in his opinion about the atmosphere in the club. He is first inclined to express positive thinking but then communicates his concerns with the overwhelming presence of security in the club settings which makes him feel uncomfortable. He says:

“I like everything. I feel comfortable and I like spending my time here. The majority of people are young and cute guys. Lately I don’t like that the number of security guys has risen. They are literally in every corridor and in every passage way, at every entrance and exit between rooms, and in the toilets. The feeling of freedom and enjoyment has evaporated. There is too little space to relax from “unnecessary eyes.” I’m so tensed because of the situation. I am too shy to hold another guy’s hand in front of them, not even talking about kissing. But well, better to have something than nothing.”¹³³

Views about the club are very different among my respondents. People go there with different purposes and sometimes, as we have seen, can be opposed to each other in questions like having sex in the club. Even though my respondents express strikingly different attitudes towards the idea of having sex in a gay club, it can be presumed that sex is a visible part of gay night clubbing. Supposedly, those people who express strong negative attitudes towards sexual intercourses in clubs, would not be involved into this kind of action while going out. Nevertheless, they seem to be absolutely positive that this is a part of night clubbing for a great number of men. Therefore, it is possible to assume that having sex or looking for sex in gay clubs is quite visible and hence, can be considered an important part of gay clubbing scene in Moscow. My participant observations also show that the staircase to the darkroom is never abandoned. However, not all men are satisfied with the presence of a dark room as a solution for satisfaction of sexual needs. As Ivan says:

Yeah, there is a dark room there but it really should be called black room. You cannot see anything in there and it is kind of not what I want. I want to see who I am doing

¹³³ Anton in discussion with the author, April 2012.

that with. It's better to find someone on a dance floor and go to the bathroom. I mean, you can see who's in front of you but also you are one on one and there are no crowds of people walking around. But with these signs, and constant presence of security... you know...¹³⁴

Indeed, security men often check the restroom to make sure the flow of people. On one hand men who would like to find a private space and spend some time tete-a-tete complain that in a gay club it should not be an issue that they would not be allowed to have sex in the toilet. On the other hand security have to make sure that the line to the toilet would not grow in enormous proportions. In fact, there is only one restroom for both men and women with only 5 cubicles inside. Even though there is a separate urinal room for men it can only host 3 to 4 men at a time. Apparently for a big club like *Central Station*, it is not enough. Therefore, security have to make sure that the restroom is used according to its assigned purposes.

Another dimension that shows importance of sexual satisfaction is the presence of the gay bathhouse in the same building. As the opening hours of the sauna are 2 hours longer than these of the club on Friday and Saturday (the main clubbing days as it is the weekend), it implies that even the latest patrons who managed to stay awake until 7 in the morning can still proceed to the sauna next door. As the center of my attention is the club and not the sauna, I bring it in just to show that gay clubbing in Moscow plays a role of more than just dance.

One of my interviewees John, who comes from Britain and maybe looks at things in different cultural settings with a fresh eye, I think, very accurately described what gay clubbing in Moscow looks like:

I think there are three types of clubber, there are those who, and I class myself in this category, go to dance around in a silly way, be a bit coquettish perhaps and have a

¹³⁴ Ivan in discussion with the author, April 2012.

drink. That is not to say I don't go to pull (kissn dance with) and meet guys, of course I do. But going home with them isn't the norm. Then, there are those who go to find a guy to go home with, and spend their night hunting prey. Often moving from one to another, just like men in straight venues. Then something which I saw in Moscow more evidently was a culture of people going to clubs to have sex, either in dark rooms, specifically designed for the purpose, in a corner or in toilet cubicles...¹³⁵

Translating his words and putting his thinking into the frame of this work, it is clear that John was familiar with the first two defined by himself “types of clubber” before coming to Moscow, that is “dance-around-in-a-silly-way” type of clubber and “find-a-guy-to-go-home-with” type of clubber. He has come to know the third type of those who do sex in clubs in Moscow. It is not, however, feasible to assert that this type of patrons exists only in Moscow. Indeed, John admits later that “[he] ha[s] since learnt this is not uncommon in Britain.”¹³⁶

According to my investigation and opinions of my interviewees it is possible to conclude that the club offers a great range of services, and people visiting *Central Station* have different interests and purposes to accomplish inside the gay club. Once these interests become to be of the opposite nature, it is viable to assume that it might create some tensions among gay men who attend the locality. Another obvious finding is that, even though there is a whole spectrum of desires that could be fulfilled in the club, one of the most important activities present in the club is the search for a sex partner. As John says, “Gay clubbing is all about sex. You know... I would probably go with my mum to a straight club but not to a gay one. I would feel uncomfortable with her in a gay club, cause it’s all about sex.”¹³⁷

While contemplating on John’s words, it should be kept in mind that Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst claim that “[t]here are no spaces that sit outside of sexual politics. Sex and space cannot be ‘decouples.’”¹³⁸ Therefore, not only gay clubs are sexualized but other heterosexual establishments as well. The difference is that often heterosexualization of space

¹³⁵ John in discussion with the author, April 2012.

¹³⁶ John in discussion with the author, April 2012.

¹³⁷ John in discussion with the author, April 2012.

¹³⁸ Johnston and Longhurst, *Space, Place, and Sex*, 3.

is usually perceived as normal, while homosexualization of space is perceived as deviant. Hence, Pratt's transculturation¹³⁹ is obvious here. Heterosexual society, at least to some extent, succeeds in imposing their views on homosexual identities making LGBTQ population accept values of the heterosexual society. This results in a marked difference between the perception of heterosexual and homosexual spaces.

Function of the Club in San Francisco Today

In San Francisco clubs seem to be just another link in a chain of entertainment products, which include bars, discos, sex clubs, cafés, coffee shops, massage parlors, restaurants, etc. It is possible to find all of these places specifically aimed at gay population. Besides that, gay population may feel comfortable in venues that do not explicitly manifest their acceptance of queer identities. Gay people do not necessarily need to hide their sexuality in the streets or in localities which do not necessarily position themselves as gay friendly. Explicitly most social spaces in San Francisco would have to comply with the norms of tolerance.

When asked if San Francisco is a liberal city and if it is comfortable to be outside the comfort zone (like The Castro) and express your sexuality beyond the gay venue, Aaron says:

San Francisco is very liberal. It's way more liberal than LA, for instance. The Bay Area is way more liberal than LA in general. Cause a lot of people already know there are a lot of gays there. So, in SF they are liberal. No matter where I am in the city I would go hand in hand and kiss a guy. I don't care. I think they just don't care either. Honestly, because of the way the city got its start gay people had problems at the beginning but not anymore. So it's comfortable everywhere. I feel very comfortable.¹⁴⁰

It is not to suggest that all and everyone in San Francisco are gay friendly but hatred towards

¹³⁹ Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," 34.

¹⁴⁰ Aaron in discussion with the author, April 2012.

homosexuals is not explicitly expressed in public places, which was confirmed by my other interviewees as well. Hence, we can assume that there is no need to go to gay places to feel free or comfortable for many of gay men residing in or visiting San Francisco.

It should be kept in mind here that in San Francisco gay life is thriving in terms of the boundaries of the whole city. By this I mean it is possible to find and to have access to almost any kind of services offered by localities either aimed at gay people or representing themselves as gay friendly. They include clubs (which are also different in a lot of terms), bars, bathhouses, cafes, restaurants, clinical services, etc. However, all the services that can be found in the city seem to be segregated and seem to be serving different subcultures inside the gay community who are interested in different things. While talking to my interviewee Robert and sharing with him my observations of gay scene in Moscow he said:

It kinda reminds me here when I moved here like 20 years ago. Big clubs, high ceilings, all fancy fabulous guys doing drugs. And you'd see all sorts of people in there. I think it's changed over the time. Now it's... more segregated maybe? I don't know but... If you go to The Café, you see a younger crowd; you go to Badlands – you see older people, those who have learned a lesson in The Café, I suppose. The city itself is very segregated as well.¹⁴¹

In San Francisco gay venues are geared toward specific needs of their patrons. Those interested in drinking mostly go to a bar where it is also convenient to meet with friends so that the music would not be too loud. If sex is on your agenda, it would be wise to try out a bathhouse, or a sex club, or a cruising area; another option which is becoming more and more popular would be the internet. Aaron declares with no doubt, “If people are gonna look for sex they would look online, absolutely.” He also thinks that “[i]n San Francisco a lot more people are online and not that many in clubs.”¹⁴²

What is the purpose of a gay night club then? People who are eager to dance or

¹⁴¹ Robert in discussion with the author, April 2012.

¹⁴² Aaron in discussion with the author, April 2012.

simply spend some time out go to clubs. Aaron thinks that the gay life in San Francisco and in the United States in general is simpler than in Europe and that people do not really have any purpose while going to clubs:

In San Francisco a lot more people are online and not that many in clubs. In Europe it's the other way around. I feel like... in Europe people go to clubs to meet people. It's more to be seen than to meet people here [in San Francisco]. Purpose of being seen? I don't know ... satisfaction? I don't think I wanna figure that out. [Here] they are not trying to find a guy... I don't think they go to have sex in clubs... I'm not sure to what degree drugs are in there. I'm sure there are some... Usually people go with their group of friends but not really talk to each other but just spend time together.¹⁴³

The Café as one of the most famous places in San Francisco for gay people offers a dance floor and two full bars. The place is pretty crowded starting 10 o'clock in the evening and until closing time at 2 in the morning. It may be arguable to say that the place is incredibly popular and attracts a lot of people because the size of the club is not exactly enormous. However, as the majority of gay venues in San Francisco tend to be of a small size, we can conclude that *The Café* is one of the most famous localities as the dance floor of the club at times cannot host all those willing to be there.

Even though the club posits itself as a gay club, it may be better described as a queer club. The majority of patrons frequenting the club seem to be gay men. However, there are all sorts of people in the club. Roughly assumed it may be said that about 30-35% of the club visitors are not gay men. Among this group of people there are straight and lesbian women, straight and bisexual men, transgender people and people whose sexuality or gender identification is hard to discern. I do not mean to claim that in Moscow only gay men visit the gay club but young gay men definitely constitute an absolute majority which is achieved by different strategies of the club management as I showed earlier in this work. Despite abundant diversity people seem to be very friendly and accepting. Mikhail, who is quite new to San

¹⁴³ Aaron in discussion with the author, April 2012.

Francisco, says, “It seems like they are not pretentious here, like simple maybe. Nobody looks upon you trying to put you on scale and determine how much you cost, you know. In Moscow you have to spend time getting ready for club, so that you would be good enough according to some standards. Here you just go. It’s really relaxed here. You know you gonna be accepted no matter what.”¹⁴⁴

There are of course different desires that people might have going clubbing in San Francisco. However, *The Café* seems to be a place to go to with friends and have fun, talk and dance. Many dance venues in San Francisco seem to carry out this function. For those who pursue other desires there are other places that can fulfill them. Bars would offer you drinks and space for socializing. Restaurants will guarantee you food. In sex clubs as well as in saunas it is possible to find quick anonymous sex; in the sauna, however, in addition you can relax here and use conventional services that sauna can offer.

Returning to night clubs and analyzing the audience inside *The Café* it may be observed that there can be seen very few singles who are looking to meet someone. Either you fall in the former category of those who visit the club accompanied by friends or you join the latter one of those who meet someone on the spot, it can be easily seen that about 60% of the club space devoted to socializing. The actual dance floor takes about 40% of the space. Speakers seem to be present only around the dance floor and not around the whole place. Therefore, it is not as loud in the rest of the place, which allows space for socializing. It is easy to meet people and have a talk on different matters over a drink. The place does not seem to be sex driven, neither does it explicitly represent drugs. When asked if clubbing in San Francisco involves socializing, dancing, drinking, taking drugs, looking for sex or having sex in the club, Steve is concise saying that it involves “some dancing but mostly socializing.”¹⁴⁵ Christian elaborates more,

¹⁴⁴ Mikhail in discussion with the author, April 2012.

¹⁴⁵ Steve in discussion with the author, April 2012.

I would answer yes to [socializing, dancing and drinking]. It's a place where like-minded individuals congregate to socialize - whether that be socializing for sex, with friends, or just to hang out. With a lot of gays in the bay area, it's also a way to de-stress from the work week. I feel a lot of gays in the bay area are professionals in tech and other areas. After a stressful work week, it's nice to unwind. [Drugs and sex inside the club...] maybe not that much. You can meet someone but you'd bring a guy to your place or something.¹⁴⁶

Robert supports this idea saying

“People do drugs online nowadays, not in clubs. Back 15 years ago drug dealers used to bring in drugs and sell; not any longer. I presume, Ecstasy could be done at *The Café* sometimes but rarely and it makes you happy. Ecstasy releases serotonin. You feel happy. You wanna dance, touch. You want to have fun. After the reaction is gone you're dead.”¹⁴⁷

The purpose of *The Café* is for people to socialize and relax after the work week. There are no overwhelming commodities that the club could offer to its patrons. All my interviewees either rejected the idea of sex in the club or were very doubtful that this happens inside the club. A higher probability was attributed to finding someone to leave with. As Diego said: “You don't have a lot of space in the restroom. Never done it there. I'd take a guy home.”¹⁴⁸ Yet, looking for a one-night-stand has neither been specified as the main purpose for frequenting a gay night club by my respondents. My respondents tend to think that drugs and sex have moved to the internet and can be found online. Meanwhile clubs are considered to be places to relax in a company of friends, to have a drink and socialize. Therefore, sociability may be seen as one of the most important attributes of the gay club in San Francisco.

¹⁴⁶ Christian in discussion with the author, April 2012.

¹⁴⁷ Robert in discussion with the author, April 2012.

¹⁴⁸ Diego in discussion with the author, April 2012.

Role of the Club – Different or Similar?

While gay club scene in Moscow cannot offer a great number of venues to the gay community in the boundaries of the whole city, it does offer overwhelming commodities to its patrons in those singled out locations. Despite the fact that, as has been mentioned in Chapter 2, queer space of Moscow is represented by gay malls, interests of patrons of such localities are mostly limited by socializing and being on the lookout for sexual satisfaction. We can, therefore, call the club in Moscow a momentary place of satisfaction.¹⁴⁹

San Francisco, on the other hand, offers all the same and maybe more commodities that the gay community may be interested in, but these are spread across and around the city. Meanwhile, gay night clubs in San Francisco seem to be, as Aaron puts it, “simpler.”¹⁵⁰ It should be reminded that my Russian interviewee who resides in San Francisco used the same very word describing people in the club scene of San Francisco.¹⁵¹ Desires of different subcultures within the gay community get segregated, hence, gay clubs as *The Café* are more perceived as locations for socializing with no or few other intentions.

It is not viable to generalize and claim that the described above characteristics are the only attributes of the scenes in Moscow and San Francisco but it is reasonable to assert that these traits can be easily observed and recognized with the naked eye.

¹⁴⁹ Betsky, *Queer Space*, 44.

¹⁵⁰ Aaron in discussion with the author, April 2012.

¹⁵¹ Mikhail in discussion with the author, April 2012.

Conclusion

In this work I have analyzed *queer space* of Moscow and San Francisco. To see the peculiarities of the two chosen localities of queer sociality I had to do comparative analysis of the two locations, precisely Moscow and San Francisco. I paid special attention to the culture, the historical background and the social discourse of the two cities. These factors turned out to have an impact on queer space. Therefore, a number of differences between the gay clubs of Moscow and San Francisco have been derived.

As it has been showed, queer space of Moscow, and precisely the club, represented by *Central Station* may be viewed as advanced and blossoming nowadays. The club becomes a gay mall which offers a range of products and services. With these diverse desires of the gay community can be fulfilled. Night clubs aimed at gay population in San Francisco, on the other hand, are limited to the purpose of providing the space for socializing and dancing. The club in San Francisco is much smaller and, therefore, is able to host less people. The amount of space is, however, enough for the number of people frequenting the place. This can be explained by a greater number of such venues than in Moscow.

Looking from the perspective of commodities, San Francisco gay localities may want to learn something from Moscow scene in terms of organizing a manifold spectrum of offerings in one particular venue. However, this may not be necessarily considered as a viable venture which would be enthusiastically undertaken. There are two reasons for that. First, there are indeed endless localities of queer sociality in San Francisco. Hence, it might be speculated that everything is already offered and people tend to use services of their narrow interest elsewhere. Second, LGBTQ identities are not particularly tied to The Castro or gay clubbing. Gay men feel rather free to enjoy life well beyond the gay district and beyond gay clubs without hiding their sexuality or homosexual desires.

Meanwhile, Moscow might take San Francisco as an example and learn how to promote gay scene development in the frame of the whole city rather than inside few singled out localities. Concentrating everything in very few places scattered around the city in dark alleys makes gay life in Moscow almost invisible to the heteronormative heterosexual population. Opening smaller locations may play out to the promotion of visibility of gay identities in the city of Moscow because the smaller locations tend to be, the more of them are needed to meet the consumer demand.

However, depending on the existing circumstances in the two cities, it does not seem to be possible to achieve at this period of time. In San Francisco opening a gay mall may be considered as unprofitable because everything is already offered on the market, only in a segregated way. In Moscow, because everything is already offered in few locations, financial question of profitability may arise as well. But what is more important, neither heteronormative heterosexual population nor LGBTQ identities wish more gay places to emerge. The former, because they see homosexuality as a perversion and would not like to allow gay people more visibility. The latter, because they already “have enough, and why would ask for more when it can cause a lot of trouble.”¹⁵²

In this research it was not my intention to appraise one over another but rather show how certain circumstances determined by a range of dimensions get interpreted into spatial arrangement of places of social interaction. Either queer identities of Moscow want to indulge in exploration of freedom of expression like their friends in San Francisco, or gay population of San Francisco aspire to experience rich Moscow-kind night life, it is clear that it is not only about desires of the LGBTQ community but about a more “complex set of ideas”¹⁵³ around queer space.

The information that I explored in this research does not allow me to predict in what

¹⁵² Konstantin in discussion with the author, April 2012.

¹⁵³ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 34.

way queer space of Moscow or San Francisco are likely to change in future. For future research and in order to make this kind of predictions, the following dimensions could be addressed. First and foremost, in terms of the 21st century, the interrelation of the local and the global seems to be important. Besides, strategies of implementation of laws are important to consider. It is crucial to engage with exploration of the legislation terrain and see if certain patterns exist which trigger adoption of particular statutes. For example, as Achilles shows, there is a connection between social attitudes and existing regulations.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, the dimensions constituting this research, namely historical background, cultural heritage and social discourse, should not be left aside but rather implemented as the basis for further investigation.

¹⁵⁴ Achilles, "Homosexual Bar," 179.

Glossary

Bombila (rus. бомбила). A person who works as a taxi driver without a license.¹⁵⁵ They are usually thought of as dangerous, yet cheap and therefore affordable.

Cruise, cruising. To go about looking for a sex partner: said esp. of a homosexual.¹⁵⁶

Mainstream. The part of something considered to be the most active, productive, lively, busy, etc. A major or prevailing trend, as of thought, action, literature, music, etc.¹⁵⁷

Pleshka (rus. плешка). Meeting points for homosexuals and bisexuals.¹⁵⁸ This word has other meanings as well. Conventional dictionaries as well as slang dictionaries seem reluctant to reflect the meaning connected to the activity of homosexual people. Therefore, I suggest, what seems to me, a more accurate definition of the term. **Pleshka** is a term describing a cruising area for homosexuals. The area understood by this, however, seldom appears to be a maze in the park or a big territory usually associated with cruising as walking around and about. **Pleshka** is usually a square, very often in the center of the city, or territory around a fountain or a statue. The word has a pejorative connotation and is very often talked about in a condemnatory way by homosexuals themselves. I would like to acknowledge that the word may have slightly different meanings depending on the region.

¹⁵⁵ *Dictionary of Youth Slang*, s.v. “Бомбила,” <http://www.teenslang.su/> (accessed June 1, 2012).

¹⁵⁶ *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 3d. ed., s.v. “Cruise.”

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, s.v. “Mainstream.”

¹⁵⁸ “A Brief Dictionary of Gay Slang,” Department of Forensic Medicine and Law, Northern State Medical University, accessed June 1, 2012, <http://sudmed-nsmu.narod.ru/articles/gaylex.html>.

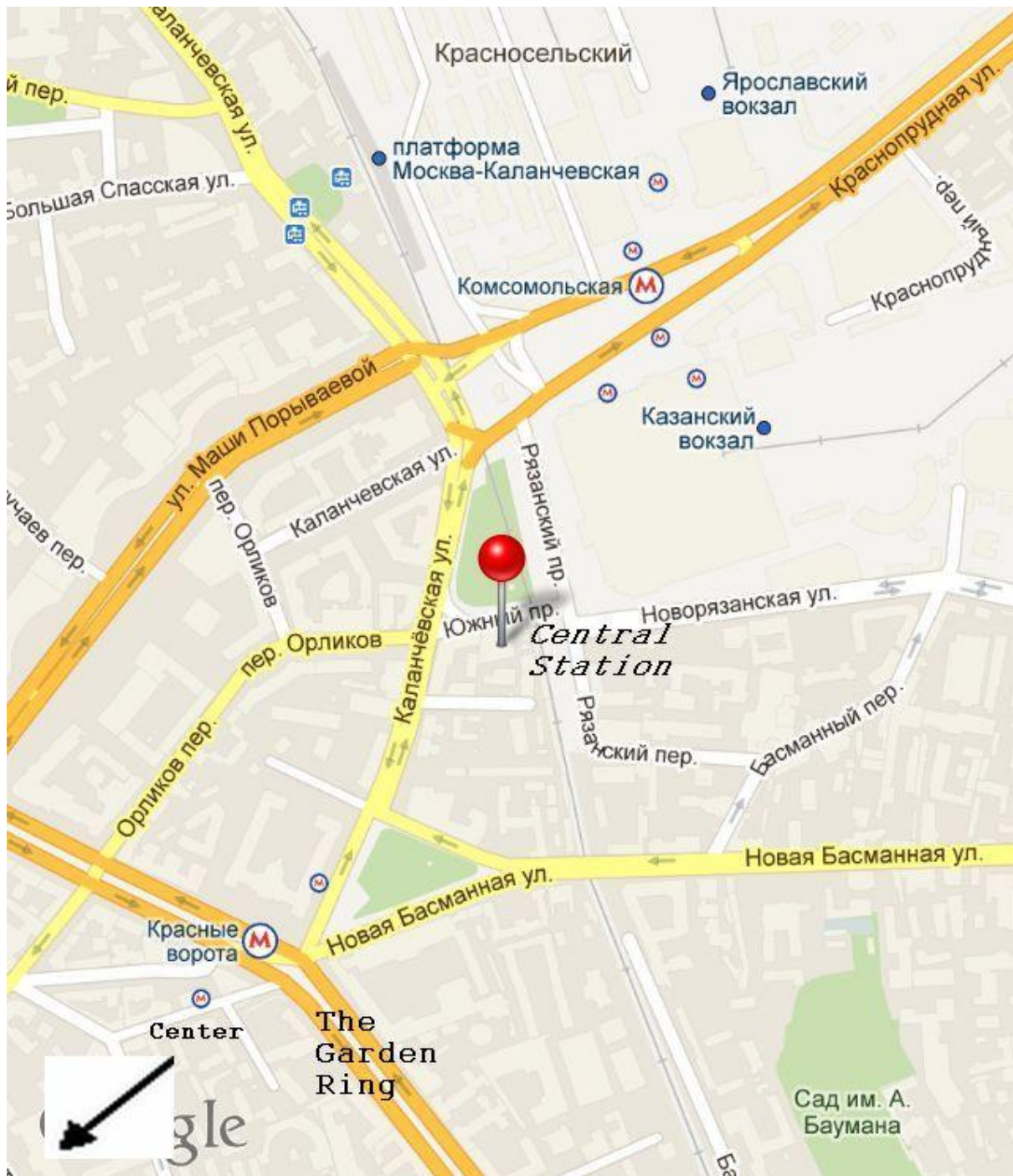
Appendix 1. List of Moscow Interviewees

Name (Pseudonym)	Self-identified Sexual Orientation	Age	Length of residing in Moscow	Remarks
Anton	Gay	29	Born and lived in Moscow most of his life	Did not wish his real first or last names to be used.
Artem	Gay	28	Lived in Moscow for 6 years	Agreed his real name to be used but expressed some concerns if I ever consider showing my work to someone in Moscow or Russia in general. It seemed to me that he considers it to be no problem if his name is seen in a work on the question of homosexuality abroad but not in Russia.
Denis	Gay	28	Lived in Moscow for 4 years	Did not wish his real first or last names to be used.
Ivan	Gay	34	Born and lived in Moscow most of his life	Did not wish his real first or last names to be used.
John	Gay	25	Lived in Moscow for 1 year	Agreed his first and last name to be used.
Konstantin	Gay	22	Lived in Moscow for 4 years	Did not wish his real first or last names to be used.
Mark	Gay	25	Lived in Moscow for 3.5 years	Agreed his first but not his last name to be used.

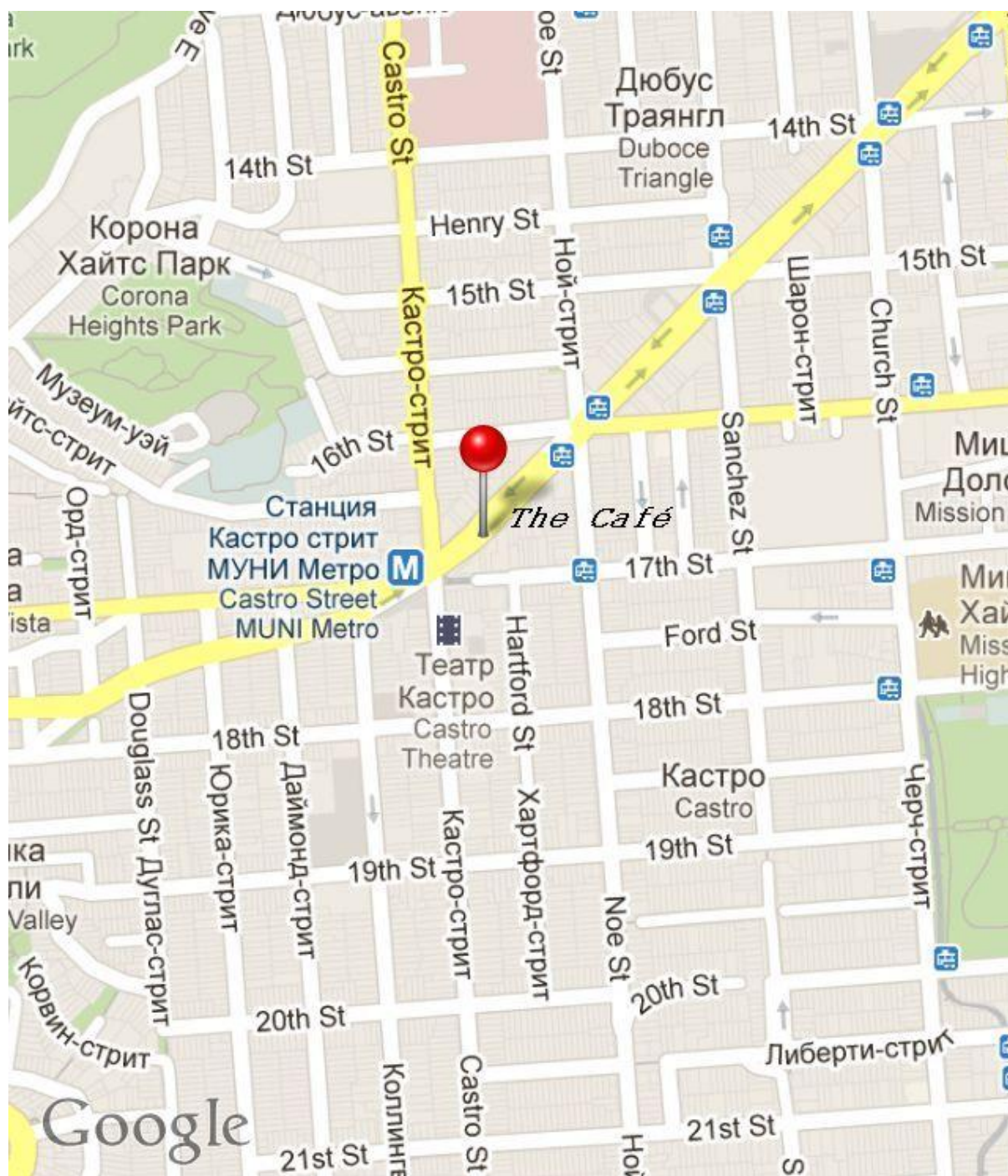
Appendix 2. List of San Francisco Interviewees

Name (Pseudonym)	Self-identified Sexual Orientation	Age	Length of residing in San Francisco	Remarks
Aaron	Gay	33	8 years	Agreed his first and last name to be used.
Adam	Gay	29	7 years	Agreed his first and last name to be used.
Christian	Gay	28	Born and lived in San Francisco most of his life	Agreed his first and last name to be used.
Diego	Bisexual	37	Born and lived in San Francisco most of his life	Agreed his first and last name to be used.
Mikhail	Gay	23	3 months	Did not wish his real first or last names to be used.
Robert	Gay	41	More than 20 years	Agreed his first but not his last name to be used.
Steve	Gay	28	2 years	Agreed his first and last name to be used.

Appendix 3. Location of Central Station



Appendix 4. Location of The Café



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