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***Homomonument* as queer micropublic: An emotional geography of sexual citizenship**

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Abstract

Emotions have remained under-addressed in scholarship on public memorial art, particularly with sexuality content. This case study on the Amsterdam-based *Homomonument* attends to this gap by differentiating emotions according to multi-scalar, multi-temporal and multi-semiotic dimensions of everyday lived experiences of sexual citizenship. Based on discourse analysis of secondary materials and social media coverage, supplemented with auto-ethnographic experience, the study explores how present-day feelings of respect, agitation and celebration around *Homomonument* are mediated at intersecting levels of the body, local community, broader society and especially emergent virtual community spaces. Such understanding requires critical interfaces with reminiscences, contemporary values and normativities, and future imaginaries. Specifically, this paper puts in perspective how *Homomonument* operates as queer micropublic: a space for intercultural encounter and 'queering' sexual difference. This appears to be a multifaceted meaningful process, too: *Homomonument* ambiguously holds contesting, reconciling, indifferent and empathic sentiments alongside belongings and sexual identity expressions in quotidian life.

Key words: *Homomonument*, public art, sexual citizenship, emotional geography, discourse analysis, Amsterdam

INTRODUCTION

Such an endless desire for friendship (Jacob Israël de Haan).

Epigraph (translated from the Dutch) on *Homomonument's* triangle at street level (see Figure 2).

Formally commissioned public memorials devoted to people who are (self-)identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT¹) can be regarded as visible (authoritative) support for LGBT rights and sexual citizenship (Binnie 1995). However, there is a lack of knowledge of everyday emotional ('embodied') encounters with monumental public art with LGBT content, termed queer memorials hereinafter. This paper presents an explorative case study on everyday lived experiences of *Homomonument*, unveiled at Westermarkt square in Amsterdam's city centre in 1987 (Figure 1). *Homomonument* consists of three pink granite triangles, respectively referring to the past, present and future (Goldman 2002). Together they make up a larger triangle that is subtly architecturally integrated and chimed with the square (Figure 2) – which for me symbolises the ideal that LGBTs should be wholly integrated into everyday life. The pink triangle is a symbolic antipode of the Nazi concentration camp badge that marked homosexuals and has become widely adopted as symbol of pride (Reed 1996; Goldman 2002). More broadly, *Homomonument* commemorates people who, based on their 'atypical' sexuality, were (and are still) discriminated, subject to prejudice, persecuted and murdered throughout history and space. It symbolises the widespread ongoing struggle of sexual 'dissidents' for equal rights, social respect and legal recognition (Koenders 1987). Being world's first reported 'gay'-dedicated monument, it has set the trend for the formation of queer memorials in a few other places, including Barcelona, Berlin, New York, Montevideo, San Francisco and Sydney.

This paper is based on discourse analysis of secondary materials and social media coverage about emotional engagements with *Homomonument* in the present-day context. The paper also reflects a personal intellectual journey by including auto-ethnographic experience (2010–13). I do this in my positionalities as queer scholar, self-identified gay individual, and someone with an intimate knowledge of Dutch LGBT life.

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Figure 1. *Homomonument* during its construction in 1987, Westermarkt, Amsterdam. Monument design by Karin Daan. The monument consists of three equilateral triangles (10m on each side) (SKOR 2012).

Photo credit: Rob Bogaerts – Algemeen Nederlandsch Fotobureau (ANeFo), Nationaal Archief/ Fotocollectie ANeFo, 1987, licence CC BY 4.0.



Figure 2. *Homomonument* directly after its unveiling on 5 September 1987. Three smaller granite triangles (denoting the past, present and future) visually shape one larger triangle (36m on each side).

The structure presents a spatial commemorative constellation: the 'sunken' triangle points to the National WWII Monument on Dam Square. The left elevated triangle (used as event podium and seating furniture) points to the former location of COC, the Dutch (and world's oldest continuing) LGBT organisation. The right triangle at street level points to the Anne Frank House (SKOR 2012).

Photo credit: Rob Bogaerts – Algemeen Nederlandsch Fotobureau (ANeFo), Nationaal Archief/ Fotocollectie ANeFo, 1987, licence CC BY 4.0.

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This study explores multi-scalar emotional aspects of *Homomonument*. I explore how it is appropriated at traversing scales of quotidian life (Figure 3), including the body, local community and broader society. Considering digital technologies' emerging relevance to everyday society (Crang 2015) and to public (monumental) art (Zebracki 2016) and urban queer life specifically (Boelstorff 2014), the paper contributes to understandings of online social engagements with queer memorials (as performed in hybrid relationship with the material world). Mediated emotions are reckoned in interface with past memories, current values and normativities and imaginations of the future, which accentuate the monument's multi-temporalities. Everyday sexual citizenship construction is, moreover, approached as multi-semiotic process: *Homomonument* holds different emotions for diverse (un)intended end users, termed as 'publics'.



Figure 3. Author's photograph of the everyday use of *Homomonument*. The 'sunken' part of the monument, i.e. terrace hanging over the canal, is a popular site for sitting and placing wreaths.

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Along space, time and meaning, the paper examines the extent to which the monument is activated as queer micropublic (after Amin 2002): a space for intercultural encounter and for 'queering' (i.e. questioning) sexual difference. Queer micropublics potentially enable publics to expose and negotiate emotions and possibly transgress (self-)imposed boundaries of sexual citizenship.

The paper proceeds as follows. I first elaborate sexual citizenship in relation to queer micropublic. Then I present methods, followed by the empirical exploration of emotional engagements with *Homomonument*. I conclude with a discussion of key reflections. This paper is a thought piece and encourages follow-on work on how queer memorials evoke emotions along more-than-LGBT, intersectional concerns with everyday gender identity (as constructed through, e.g., class, ethnicity, geographical origin, religion, age and (dis)abilities).

SEXUAL CITIZENSHIP AND QUEER MICROPUBLIC

Homomonument is widely known as symbol of (pro-)LGBT activism in the Netherlands and beyond (Binnie 1995; Hekma 2004; Hernández 2010). As yet, everyday emotional engagements have largely remained 'placeless' in scholarship on commemorative public art (Stevens & Franck 2015) and queer memorials in particular. Specifically, attention is needed to emotional articulations of sexual citizenship, which contain 'unique personal geographies' of identity as grounded in the complexity of quotidian place-based social interactions (Davidson & Milligan 2004, p. 524). Richardson (2000, p. 106) rightly argued that 'everyday practices of individuals are increasingly becoming the bases of citizenship'. This paper, therefore, approaches citizenship as an everyday sociocultural relational practice (rather than abstract formal and legal status), where sexual identity construction should be rendered fluid (Evans 1993; Browne 2006).

According to Richardson (2000, p. 128), sexual citizenship should be viewed as an informal 'system of rights, which includes a concern with conduct, identity and relationship-based claims'. It has, notwithstanding, been overly correlated with formal rights discourse (Lister 2002). Similarly, *Homomonument* discourse has mainly been inflected by grander LGBT agendas and claims on equal rights. They pronounce the monument's mnemonic role

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in light of sexual prejudice, discrimination and persecution and fights for equal LGBT treatment and legislation (Goldman 2002).

This paper calls for more ethnographic and personalised work articulating queer memorials through the mundane sensorial body with its composite emotions. Emotions are performed and inscribed on monuments at various, intertwined and fluid social scales, thus asking for a multi-scalar understanding of citizenship (Stevens & Franck 2015). People express and negotiate sexual identities along values, norms, moralities and ethics in political, social and cultural contexts intersecting the body, home, locality, community, region, globe, and the virtual sphere. Also, 'real-imagined' sexual identity expressions are multi-temporal, as they embody senses of past activities, current performances, and future actions and conceptions (Grundy & Smith 2005).

Emotional performance of sexual citizenship should, therefore, be understood in informal, multi-level spatial and temporal frameworks. They are, nevertheless, embedded in formal socio-political power structures as well as related spatial governance and planning praxes (Hubbard 2008; Doan 2011). Acts of sexual citizenship can challenge and deconstruct hegemonic (hetero)normativities on the one hand, and reproduce and reinforce them on the other. I consequently argue that public queer memorials possess the potential agency to elicit material and socio-emotional counter-voice to prevailing sexual norms. Notwithstanding, I realise that the creation of such memorial objects, although anti-hegemonic in conception, might further consolidate sexual 'othering'.

I infer the latter critique from the reproduction of self-discriminating templates of sexual identity and practice as seen in the development of 'gaybourhoods' (Lewis 2013) and even 'gay capitals' (Van Dalen et al. 2011). Queer memorials might be deployed as strategic instruments to bypass 'heterosexual forgettings' (Dunn 2011). At the same time, they might boost homogenisations of 'the' LGBT community and dualistic sexual 'otherings': LGBTs/non-LGBTs (ibid.).

Uncritical reproductions of the status quo might enhance stereotypes and entrepreneurial commodifications of citizenship lifestyles of 'the (good) homo' (see homonormativity in Brown 2012). They might exclude those who do not neatly fit normative images and hence depreciate very diverse quotidian sexual lives. Furthermore, normative reproductions may adopt 'the' homosexual life as model for national democratic citizenship and cosmopolitan

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ethics. This is aligned with the desire to create 'gay-friendly' places and nations and accordingly 'improve' values of 'the heterosexual other' accordingly (see homonationalism in Puar 2007).

Thus, queer memorials might evoke in/ exclusionary feelings by rendering visible/invisible or informing/misinforming differences in sexual identity performance (within as well as beyond LGBT communities) (see Dunn 2011; Stevens & Franck 2015). I argue that agonism (Mouffe 2000) is a useful concept in addressing struggles in negotiating and challenging norms of sexual citizenship. Agonism approaches democratic society as a positive constructive struggle, entailing a paradoxical complexity of conflicting and accommodative emotional processes. This would precisely uncover the everyday fragmented nature yet entwinement of publics and their sexual citizenships.

Agonistic practice, hence, could reveal queer memorials as potential micropublics: sites for meaningful encounters where sexual normativities are exposed, juxtaposed, questioned, opposed, contradicted or corroborated. Multiple co-emerging (counter-)publics could 'queery' sexual difference, where profound engagements meet commonplace banalities in the interstices of social encounter (McCann 2011). For example, queer memorials might carry strong raw emotions and deep critical messages for some people at some moments, while others may experience them as merely beautifying street furniture.

As such, sexual citizenship construction through queer memorials entails a multisemiotic process embedded in publics' diverse cultural 'capitals' and everyday uses of public space (Milani 2013). Queer micropublics could lay bare a mixture of emotions ranging from, e.g., indifferent, self-effacing and apathetic to disdainful, vicious and hatred reactions. They could concurrently encompass common grounds of compassion, emancipation, respect and pride as well as deeply entrenched conflicts between various counter-publics (McCann 2011).

METHODOLOGY

In this explorative-grounded research, I gained conceptual understanding of emotional engagements with *Homomonument* through analysing secondary materials (informational coverage about the *Homomonument* project, policy documents, public communications and news stories) as well as examining social interactions online. I adopted data triangulation by co-incorporating autoethnographic experience, typically boosting in-situ transcultural

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awareness (Butz & Besio 2009). The latter implicated personal authentic encounters with socialisations of *Homomonument*. In the data analysis, I have ensured the anonymity of research subjects in my best possible capacity.

The qualitative discourse analysis of collected narrated data (in the forms of text, image, audio, video and first-hand experience) involved the identification of main threads. Particularly in my auto-ethnographic inquiry, the focus was on proxemics (Lefebvre 1991): the inter-personal microgeographies of *Homomonument*, where sexual citizenships were lively constructed along spatial (micro)distance, social interaction and emotion.

Van Doorn (2011) and Boelstorff (2014) emphasised the major importance of digital technologies in present-day sexual identity constructions. The virtual sphere, therefore, comprised an important fieldwork locus. This implied cyber-ethnographic work on 'online embodiments' (Farquar 2013): publics' sense makings of *Homomonument* through online interactions. They primarily took shape on news platforms, weblogs, forums and social media, primarily Facebook and Twitter. Online embodiments were not considered practices disembodied from the material world, but viewed in relation to senses of the socio-physical environment.

EMOTIONAL ENCOUNTERS WITH *HOMOMONUMENT*

My empirical study focused on social interactions, online embodiments and autoethnographic experience regarding *Homomonument*. I disentangled three not mutually exclusive threads of emotional engagements: respecting, agitating and celebrating. I explain them by providing salient illustrations of *Homomonument's* lively sensorial contexts of ordinary commemorative space.

Bob van Schijndel initiated the idea for a 'homo monument' after WWII National Remembrance Day in 1979. Not only Jews and gypsies but also gays (among whom there existed a strong feeling of underrepresentation) should have the right to emotional expression through a memorial, he conveyed (Stichting *Homomonument* 2013a). With local government support, *Homomonument* Foundation was established in 1979, leading to the unveiling of *Homomonument* in 1987. This foundation still plays a vital role in local LGBT life. Discourse analysis indicated that many (pro-)LGBT parties underscore *Homomonument's* significance for the politics of both LGBT visibility and recognition as well as for resisting

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LGBT phobia, intolerance and ignorance. Accordingly, this monument is associated with sexual empowerment on the part of LGBTs (see Hekma 2004).

On its home- and Facebook page, Stichting *Homomonument* (2013b) invites publics to link any personal stories, memories and feelings to the monument. Through social media, online grassroots have also published self-created stories, photographs, posts and tweets, e.g. '#Homo Monument Is Crowded #Sotschi #[DutchPresident]RutteStaysHome^{2,3}'. The accounts — which sprung from individual residents, citizenry groups and political parties — expressed, exchanged and challenged emotional currents about *Homomonument*. They allowed other online users including myself to live vicariously through the mediated experiences. The accounts also indicated how civil society itself opened up a public debate about sexual identity performance through the lens of *Homomonument*. Emotions were mediated through virtual spheres and, in so doing, expanded the monument's 'publicness' beyond its physical locality.

A large deal of online sense making of *Homomonument* happened through sharing photographs, accompanied with slogans, catchphrases and brief statements. A case that went viral online concerned a demonstration against LGBT violence. This protest was mobilised on *Homomonument's* square after a series of widely reported gay bashing incidents in Amsterdam in 2010. I witnessed the emotionally charged manifestation and sensed a strong soul connection among attendees. One of the gay-bashing victims instigated the protest and aptly expressed such bonding as follows:

[*Homomonument*] is the perfect place to gather Amsterdam's gay community and, besides, it broadcasts a very strong signal: we stand where we commemorate our victims, celebrate our freedom and call on to exercise vigilance in the future. We might not be physically stronger than the guys who menaced us, but we will not remain quiet!
(Stichting *Homomonument* 2013b)

This quote foregrounds we-identity making on the *Homomonument* as site for demonstration. I experienced the protest as unified voice by a likewise unified visibility of in-situ participants. Notwithstanding, the protest also staged *Homomonument* as contested micropublic. Agitation apparently grounded this demonstration and engendered a clear-cut

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take-home message for society and politics: people should respect each other (irrespective of their sexual identities), embrace sexual diversity, and in a more radical sense fight for sexual liberty. This mission is yet situated within a field of tension: different people reveal different conscious or unconscious, past- or future-oriented tactics of remembering but also forgetting of LGBT aspects (see Dunn 2011).

The well-attended and widely broadcasted annual WWII National Remembrance ceremony takes place on Amsterdam's central Dam Square. A LGBT-commemorative event is simultaneously held at *Homomonument's* site, which in my experience is somewhat 'hidden' in both the city and media coverage. That said, I have come to discern this event as counter-public civic activity, critically raising social awareness about LGBT lives and combating LGBT prejudice. The event congregates LGBT people and their friends, relatives and devotees, local authorities (e.g. 'Pink in Blue' police team) and organisations (such as COC Amsterdam/Nederland and the adjacent Wester Church that facilitates the event). I encountered that emotions of respect were incited on the spot, for instance by poignant speeches and memorial flowers that were left on the site (respectively adding short-lived honouring soundscapes and material touches to the permanent monument). Also, both attendants and distant publics shared narratives and images on social media before, during and after the event. This transmitted a sensorial *inter-esse* ('between-being') between diverse in-situ as well as offsite audiences along the monument's material and symbolic dimensions.

The yearly Drag Queen Olympics (2004- present) at *Homomonument's* square reverberated this space as site of sexual resistance. Occurring on the eve of Gay Pride, the Olympics are the world's largest (frivolous) event for transgenders. I experienced that the ephemeral 'trans zone' challenged heteronormativity. Also, it critically navigated through transgender identities 'from within' LGBT communities. Although the event aimed to challenge sexual straightjackets about trans people and to improve their inclusion, I cast doubt on whether it succeeded in providing such critical momentum. Judging on comical publicity and in-situ observations, I felt an (unnecessary) overemphasis on a sensation-seeking spectacle.

Although this happening might speak to a burlesque aesthetic, I found that trans people were literally staged as 'exotic others' through voyeuristic audience gazes (within and

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beyond the LGBT community). I noticed ‘microaggressions’ (Nadal 2013) towards performing transgenders: subtle sarcastic remarks, derogatory insinuations and disrespectful imitating gestures. Nevertheless, since 2012, *Homomonument* Foundation has been organising a local edition of Transgender Day of Remembrance at the monument’s site, which I consider an astute counterpart to Drag Queen Olympics. The Foundation, moreover, claimed a nexus of other local civic spaces for gender-emancipatory events (e.g. guided LGBT tours and 2011 SlutWalk), where *Homomonument* operated as magnet for socio-political assembly.

Figure 4 provides impressions of Roze [Pink] Wester Festivals (RWFs) at *Homomonument*. RWFs are popular among (pro-)LGBTs and social media richly reflect its popularity. *Homomonument* Foundation convenes RWFs around the major Gay Pride festival and the national holidays of Queen’s/King’s Day and Liberation Day. Social-media images and first-hand experiences of RWFs let me portray *Homomonument* as ‘living monument’ with an ambiguous significance. On the one hand, the monument offered social space for serious commemoration and contemplation. I experienced the monument’s spatial-symbolic morphology as effective in this regard: the granite material, the sunken form and minimalistic architectural makeup, as often used in gravestones, offered me mental space to prompt afflictive emotions of sadness (in contrast to cheerful values associated with elevated memorials; see Stevens & Franck 2015). On the other, *Homomonument* provided me with sociophysical space for joyful celebration, dance and partying (just for the sake of partying) – which nonetheless can all be seen as performative indicators of pride (see Bartels 2003).

Repeated participation in RWFs functioned as co-emancipatory vehicle in my coming out process, too. I talked, danced with ‘new others’ and sensed LGBT life on the street (the stills in Figure 4 are telling for my experiences). I did not only make sense of my encounters on the monument’s square as such, but also within my mundane social relationships with relatives in home space, friends in social life, colleagues in office space, and online users on social media and LGBT networking platforms (including Grindr).

I bonded with like-minded people, finding themselves in a similar rite of passage. I also encountered difference within real-world LGBT communities, which only existed in my imagination before I started openly disclosing my sexual identity. Within performed queer memorial space, I gained a visceral sense and tacit knowledge of who I was in previous lifetime spaces, who I am and which future sexual citizenship I envisaged for myself (while

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acknowledging the emotional triviality of just having fun on the spur of the moment). Thus, my lived experiences acted as pedagogical and spiritual-therapeutic mechanisms for encountering sexual difference of the other as well as *within* my own life course.

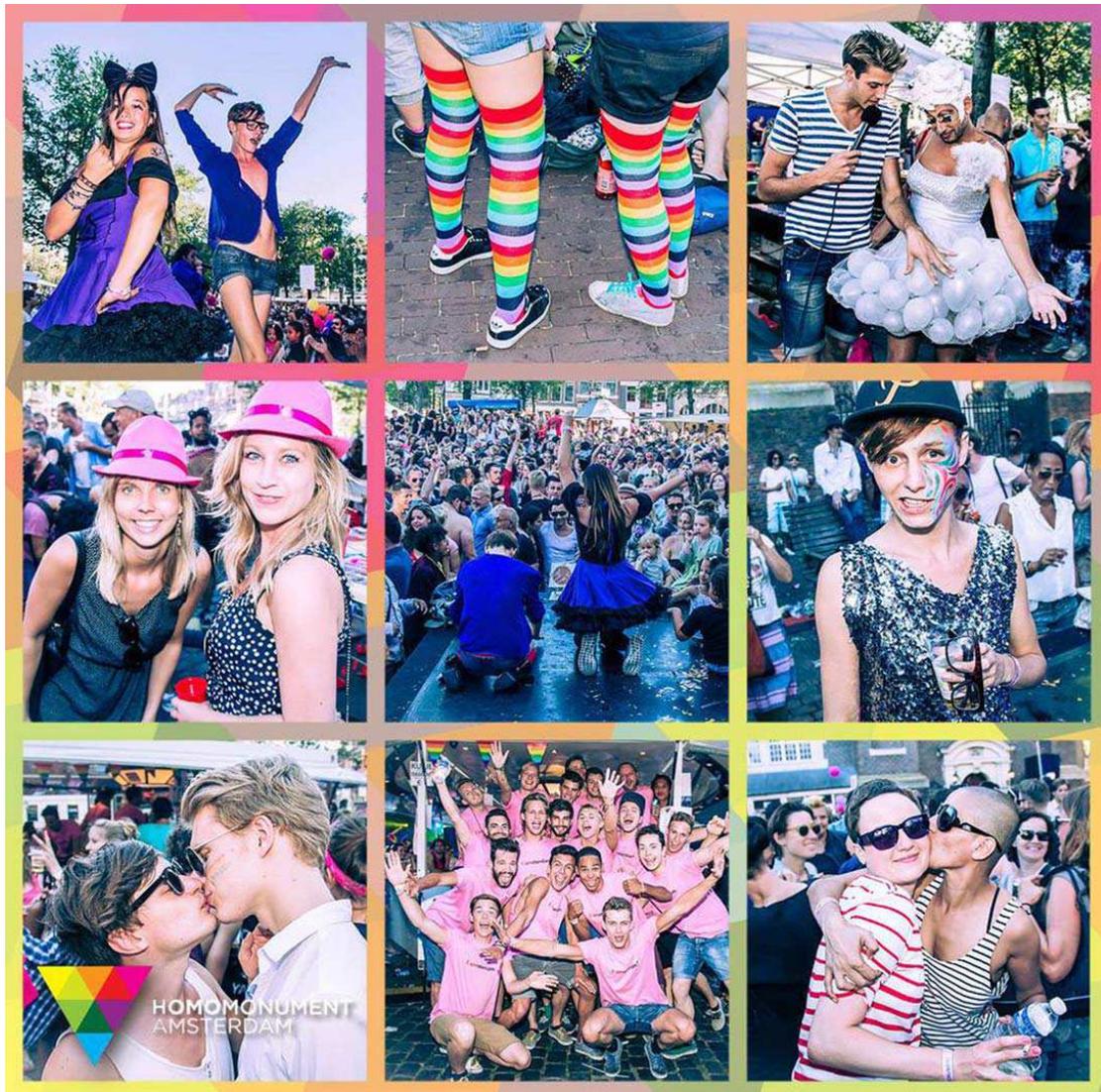


Figure 4. Roze [Pink] Wester Festivals, 2013. Photomontage on Facebook. Photo courtesy of Homomonument Foundation.

Despite their respectful, supportive and innocent atmospheres as experienced by myself, RWFs might be critically viewed as product of city-marketing strategies, especially Amsterdam World Leading Gay Capital (Van Dalen et al. 2011). Such strategies might have exclusionary consequences for the spatialisation of sexuality. They may reproduce or create new conditions and templates for the 'whats', 'wheres', 'whens' and 'hows' of sexual identity

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expression for local as well as global audiences. Basically, it is my semantic feeling that the labels of 'homo' / 'gay' preclude sexual identity markers other than '(male) homosexuals' in the monument's naming and Amsterdam's 'Gay Capital' strategy (although this can be resolved by some discursive tweaking of the monument's title and communication about it). More problematically, it is my experience that the everyday social (dis)franchisement of especially LGBTs of colour and transgender people remains under-addressed in public commemoration (who are still socially and spatially marginalised beyond as well as within LGBT communities; see Nadal 2013).

So, RWFs might be potentially not so innocent. They could stand a chance of sterilising emotions and impart the feeling of a homogenised, undiscerning happy crowd within a social environment that might be at best described as '*gezellig*' (a Dutch word that cannot be directly translated into English, but it connotes a 'nice atmosphere'). That said, RWFs' lead organiser, *Homomonument* Foundation, shows a genuine emotional commitment to LGBT organising, (online) education and activism in Amsterdam, Dutch society, and beyond (foremostly, it had promoted queer memorials and LGBT commemorative events elsewhere).

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This explorative paper has sought to provide insights into multi-scalar, multi-temporal and multi-semiotic aspects of emotional encounters with *Homomonument*. Various organisations and publics use this object as mnemonic tool for reflecting on LGBT life and history. The discourse analysis of secondary materials and social media coverage, complemented with auto-ethnographic experience, explained how sexual citizenship was interconnected with emotions of respect, agitation and celebration. To some degree, *Homomonument* served as queer micropublic. It might be ambiguously viewed as venue for meaningful encounters with the accommodation and augmentation as well as subversion of hegemonic sexual norms, privileges and imaginaries throughout space and time.

Homomonument geographically occupies a central city space. Publics engaged with this material geographical context but also used social media as vicarious form of encountering this memorial (making it, in a philosophical sense, a digitally portable miniature object). Emotional encounters with *Homomonument* transpired in complex interplay with the body and the 'other' in local communities, broader society and the virtual sphere, with

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temporalities (past, present and future), and with equivocal meanings (e.g. pro-LGBT, anti-LGBT, informed about or ignorant of sexual issues). I observed that *Homomonument*, to some degree, acted as unchallenged safe place to express sexual identities and feelings of sameness as well as difference. Nevertheless, the negotiated and thus malleable realities of social engagement with this monument also unfolded its agonistic, 'queerying' nature and how publics, including myself, were consequently drawn out of their comfort zone.

Both on-site and online, *Homomonument* seemed to play an affecting role in LGBT sociopolitical organising, commemoration, demonstration and celebration. Critically, while *Homomonument* Foundation aims at a society inclusive of all sexualities, my examination on everyday sensory experience indicated how the monument might also create (self-)exclusionary spaces of sexual citizenship. Essentially, considering the super-diverse makeup of LGBT communities, I argued that the reductive label 'homo' in the monument's title might have a misinforming, male-dominating emotional-connotative impact. However, the unified and easily identifiable 'we' could precisely entail an emotionally effective strategy of wider LGBT activism (see Schlagdenhauffen 2014). Yet, ambivalently, strategic inclusionary rhetoric might meet exclusionary practice, and the other way round.

The examined engagements with *Homomonument* broadly suggested an emotional attachment to the visibility and embracement of sexual diversity. However, there remains food for thought about (un)critical spatialisations of sexual traditions and intimacies through engagements with this monument.

Homomonument-related boisterous events could produce an emotionally sterile impression of the responsabilised 'good homo'. The entrepreneurial and city-marketing 'aura' surrounding the monument might, moreover, disaffect sexual positionalities of everyday residents (see Rushbrook 2002). Rather than preserving *Homomonument* as an open-air museum piece, I assert that more active and structural connections should be made with the ordinary lives of different publics and how different uses and images/imaginings of the monument can be rendered accordingly.

I would welcome further critical work on the everyday lived spaces of queer memorials, also beyond the *Homomonument*/Amsterdam/ Dutch context. Specifically, there is a need to unravel how public officials (who are usually responsible for the memorials' commissioning, management and social organising) employ tactics for cultivating or restraining sexual

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diversity along publics' identity performances, belongings and sexual self-formations in quotidian life. Scholarship would, then, be in a stronger position to articulate the dialectics of how queer memorials' mundane spaces as conditioned by hegemonies segue into non-hegemonic spaces (i.e. queer heterotopias; see Jones 2009), and vice versa.

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Notes

1. Political and social organisations commonly use the acronymic category LGBT. However, this is not an exhaustive category and its use is contested: the more recent initialism LGBTQI1 also includes trans* (any variations to cisgender), 'questioning' or '(gender)queer', intersex and other non-conforming gender and sexual dispositions (1). For instance, 'pomosexuals' refuse to capture human sexuality by any socially constructed definitions and 'prosexuals' pursue holistic, pansexual attitudes.
2. Tweet on 07/02/14. Available at: <<http://pic.twitter.com/fvzudxiBC5>>.
3. All quotes in this empirical section are translated from the Dutch.

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