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Queer Monuments: Visibility, (Counter)actions, Legacy

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ABSTRACT

This article synthesizes original comparative perspectives of visibility, (counter)actions, and legacy regarding queer monuments: public artworks dedicated to, and questioning or *queering* normativities around, the lives of LGBT+ people. It pursues a dialogic, interdisciplinary, and multisite and intercultural argument, drawing from approaches and preliminary insights from a scholarly project (*Queer Memorials*) and artist's project (*Strange Inheritance*) with topical case studies covering North America and Europe. After abductive ethnography, the analysis oscillates between theory/literature and scholarly and creative practice. It attends to the critical roles queer monuments have played in engaging with how sexual "others" have fallen in and out of place through social struggles, radical politics, and collective memory. The peer exchange provides a cross-case taxonomy of queer monuments' roles, navigating between sorrowful, celebratory, provocative, and informative types and values. It advocates both arts-based enquiry and practice as grounded pathways for narrating queer monuments' activist potential to memorialize, and visibilize, sexual and gender minorities and their overlapping rights in/to space.

KEYWORDS

Queer monuments; public art; LGBT+; visibility; (counter)actions; legacy; abductive ethnography; arts-based enquiry; Queer Memorials; Strange Inheritance

Context, method, and contributions

Monuments in public space can lend visibility to the legacy of cultural and collective memory and legitimize present authority and prevailing norms. They may, therefore, operate as important mnemonic tokens of dominant powers (see Nora, 1989). Since the 1980s, there has been a memory turn amongst sexual and gender minorities to remember *their* past experiences and struggles (Dunn, 2017). This went hand in hand with a rising number of "queer monuments": public objects/artworks dedicated to—and questioning or *queering* normativities around—the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people, and people with other gender and sexual characteristics (LGBT+).¹ As such, we can render queer monuments as reactions or counter-monuments (see Young, 1992), which relay alternative memories to hegemonic heteronormativities (see Dunn, 2011) as represented by the majority of public artwork including monuments (see Zebracki, 2020a)—often erected in the image of a (white, male) "hero on a horse" (Raven, 1993, p. 1).

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In this context, we want to foreground that we use the term “queer,” or rather its verbal/gerundial form queering, in a distinctive way alongside LGBT+.² That is, we employ it as a critical tenet in challenging identity categories, representations, and assumptions and norms around sexuality and gender. These are, in this case, spatialized, visualized, and socially (re-)constructed through the monument’s materiality and related embodied memorial practices (see Dunn, 2011, 2017).

In their notable analysis published in this journal, Orangias, Simms, and French (2018) provided a comprehensive inventory of queer monuments that have been established worldwide since the ‘80s. This inventory, as of its online publication date (2017, August 22), counts 47 queer monuments in total from its first entry: George Segal’s replica of the *Gay Liberation Monument* (1984) based in Stanford, Madison, NYC.³ Counting queer monuments, of course, depends on definition, which these authors spelled out as officially dedicated “heritage sites that honor gender and sexual minorities, [which] represent communities that have often been excised in dominant public narratives” (Orangias et al., 2018, pp. 705–706). Moreover, they pointed out visibility and stigma reduction, public education about historical persecution and exclusion of sexual and gender minority subjects, and the promotion of their rights as the general key functions of queer monuments (Orangias et al., 2018, p. 705).

This article scales down to select first-hand, topical case studies to contribute original comparative perspectives of queer monuments across Northern America and Europe. It primarily draws from approaches and preliminary insights from Zebracki as principal investigator on the *Queer Memorials* scholarly project⁴ (in collaboration with co-investigator Professor Robert Vanderbeck and postdoctoral researchers Drs Katarzyna Wojnicka and Freek Janssens, amongst others) and Leitner’s *Strange Inheritance*⁵ artist project—both projects were launched in 2018. This article, in so doing, pursues a dialogic, interdisciplinary, and multisite and intercultural argument.

Elaborating on Orangias et al. (2018), our joint examination highlights aspects around visibility, public (counter)actions,⁶ and legacy to be particularly at play, and negotiated, across our cases (explained in the sections hereinafter). Our argument attends to the critical roles that such monuments have played in engaging with how sexual and gender “others,” and absent or “othered” sexual and gender relations—whilst acknowledging the complex intersectionalities involved (see Dunn, 2017)—have fallen in and out of place through social struggles, radical politics, and collective memory in the recent past. Hence, this study advocates the expansion of knowledge of how queer monuments may memorialize, and visibilize, sexual/gender minorities. Thereby, we are interested in how they address, or redress, exclusionary processes that affect “othered” ways of living and knowing.

For context, we, the authors, met at the colloquium Queer Memorial Culture: International Critical Perspectives, which Zebracki convened with the *Queer*

Memorials project co-investigator, Professor Vanderbeck, at the University of Leeds on 17 May 2019, the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia.⁷ Our meeting turned into a *queer(ing)* project/dialogue (see Note 2). Our collaboration was driven by mutual interest and learning through challenging our different conceptual and methodological approaches along the different geographical idiosyncrasies that attend our work.

Subsequent to the Queer Memorial Culture colloquium, we penned the majority of this article in June–September 2019. It reflects our continued discussion about the colloquium’s key concern with how the design, public uses, and curators’ communications about LGBT+-dedicated monuments are *queering* contemporary processes of social inclusion and exclusion of sexual/gender minority subjects.

As such, this article takes the form of a critical cross-disciplinary exchange between the positionalities of two protagonists of queer monuments: an interdisciplinary scholar, Zebracki, whose research and activist work straddle the areas of public art, sexuality, and inclusivity, and an interdisciplinary artist, Leitner, who works in painting, photography, film, installation, and performance. Both of us are committed to examining the roles, or potentialities, that monuments can, or may, play in questioning/queering the space established for the representations and memories of the lives, and places, of LGBT+ people. Also, our continuing work shares the ambition to impact expanded, inclusive provisions of sexual/gender variant communities through everyday creative practices and radical, transformative politics.

There is increasing interest in the inclusive imperatives of socially engaged public art (e.g., Cartiere & Zebracki, 2016). However, the nexus of inclusive public art/monuments, sexuality, and identity politics provides much more uncharted territory—where public responses to sexuality-inflected artwork can be very pronounced (see Dunn, 2017; Zebracki, 2020a). We open up a particular niche by diving into some ingrained, and at times aggressive and violent, forms of cleavages and opposition around queer monuments—which are, by extension, targeted against LGBT+ rights. Activism, as we will discuss, seems to have a significant role to play in the empowerment of minority voices (see Zebracki, 2020b).

We scrutinize queer monuments through auto-/ethnographic, observational research practice, whilst relating our primary “archeological” data to secondary data including archival and literary sources (see Reed-Danahay, 1997). Such auto-/ethnographic research methodology places the self (i.e., the researcher), and the research subject and community, within wider culture and society. Specifically, it probes into elements of positionality and identity politics, typically demonstrating a concern with social justice issues in both research and practice contexts (see Jones, 2007).

Through our cross-case auto-/ethnography and archival study, this conversational article contributes novel grounded, comparative insights into

debates on queer monuments and how they aid in remembering, and providing critical reflection on, LGBT+ lives and experiences (e.g., Dunn, 2017; Orangias et al., 2018; Zebracki, 2017a, 2020a). Despite some multi-authored publications, this research field, and the particular canon on queer monuments/memorializing, is still governed by single voices in lieu of dialogic texts as we pursue on these pages.

Furthermore, as methodological contribution, we have adopted an abductive analytic. This pushes at the conventional research boundaries of induction and deduction through an iterative navigation between—and reciprocal evaluation of—theory (i.e., literature) and practice (see Khan, 2020; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014), involving our ethnographic/observational and secondary case-study data. In other words, abductive analysis embeds our observed and perused relations between sexual and gendered selves and others within interlaced conceptual, discursive, and socially practiced contexts of queer monuments.

As put by Khan (2020, p. 143, in reference to Emerson, 2001), “abductive ethnographies, by retaining flexibility in the chronological sequence of sifting through literature, discovering surprising outcomes and collecting data, offer a scientific route to deriving symbolic meanings of discourse and engagement in the field.” Khan (2020) continued to argue, even, that “abductive analysis enables ethnographic work to take the most creative route to data collection, analysis and theory building” (155).

Inspired by abductive analysis and its creative premise, the original locus of our article, moreover, resides in foregrounding (self-)expression as well as the performance and reporting of research conversation as coordinated study method. This choice of format involves a narrative, arts-based enquiry and primary speech genre, employing artwork and creative expression as research data to reveal both information and action through dialogue (see Leavy, 2015).

This article, thus, proceeds with our collaborative journey in the form of a dialogic treatise. We highlight common grounds as well as variant perspectives of what existing queer monuments “do”—and may or should “do”⁸—to people and places. In so doing, the buildup of our argument synthesizes a taxonomy of queer monuments’ roles, which, in our study cases, appear to navigate between sorrowful, celebratory, provocative, and informative types and values—whilst we situate our cases within pertinent scholarly discourse and practice.

Strange Inheritance: Moving beyond a sorrowful monument

Leitner: Since the summer of 2018, I have been working on a project titled *Strange Inheritance*, where I visited queer monuments throughout the Southern and Midwestern regions of the US in an attempt to help with any cleaning or restoring assistance they may need. Inspired by the “maintenance

work” of Mierle Laderman Ukeles (see Ukeles, 1969) and the socially active art practices of Theaster Gates (see Gates, 2019), I started this project by questioning the ways in which I can visibilize the broad question:

How can I, as a queer, carry and continue the work of my chosen family heritage? Knowing that this had to be a simple yet meaningful action, I began to research places where queerness is visible in public settings. Where is queerness interjected in everyday public life and how can I, through an action, interject myself into its history?

These questions led me to researching queer monuments throughout the US. I chose monuments that were more nationally recognized, rather than internationally—such as the *Stonewall National Monument* (i.e., Stonewall Inn) in NYC’s Greenwich Village and the *Homomonument* in Amsterdam (discussed by Zebracki below). I began conversations with the organizations that created these queer monuments, and related heritage sites, about their choices in terms of locations and visual iconography. I wanted to know why they decided to be bold, or subtle, in their queer visibility.

Their answers tended to be colored by various regional and/or urban realities. But they all reflected upon the sexual and gender minority communities in their midst, the resources available at the time of creation, and the unique events or sociological climates that precipitated a monument in the first place. These reasonings also had a direct relation to their sustainability, degradation, and their visibilized queering of their public spaces.

Three sites did stick out to me as expressing key forms of queer visibility through their location, symbology, and verbiage. Using symbols such as the rainbow or upside-down triangle, being located in sidewalks or in cemetery gardens, they all created different experiences for the viewer to better understand the many ways in which a queer subculture exists or did exist in their communities (see Giesecking, 2016; Halberstam, 2003).⁹

In New Orleans, Louisiana, there are two queer monuments, as of writing, which are set in public spaces. One of them, the *UpStairs Lounge* memorial plaque (Figure 1), created in 2003 by a set of queer citizen leaders, memorializes the 32 lives lost in a 1973 arson fire at a local gay bar called the *UpStairs Lounge* (not included in the inventory of Orangias et al., 2018). Located at the corner of Iberville Street and Chartres Street near the famous French Quarter, this bronze plaque displays an upside-down triangle, two *fleurs-de-lis*, a written description of the tragedy, the names of the victims, and the image of an eternal flame.

The upside-down triangle is an iconic symbol for the queer community that resembles the pink upside-down triangle patches used for identifying sexual and moral “offenders” placed in labor or extermination camps during the Nazi regime. It is a symbol that has since been reclaimed by the queer community as a sign of pride and resilience in the face of oppression and adversity.



Figure 1. *UpStairs Lounge* memorial plaque (2003) on sidewalk during restauration in 2019. New Orleans, LA. Photograph by Ryan Leitner, July 2019.

For many, the “pink triangle” is an instant signifier of queer association, much like the rainbow flag of Pride marches. The triangle is the most prominent design in the *UpStairs Lounge* plaque and what many people see at a glance of the sidewalk-bound monument as they walk from bar to bar in the tourist-heavy location. Similar to the majority of monuments I visited on this journey, it would be considered as an informative monument, because it reflects the history of queer people transnationally, pulling from Holocaust queer references, while also displaying the names of all 32 people who were killed in the arson.

Conversely, another queer monument, the *AIDS Memorial* (Figure 2) in Indianapolis, Indiana (neither included in the inventory of Orangias et al., 2018), does not utilize traditional queer symbolism. Instead, it features “queer-friendly” language in its textual inscriptions. This *AIDS Memorial*, erected on 19 October 2000, is located in Indiana’s Crown Hill Cemetery, which is open to the public most days from dusk to dawn. Next to the monument is the city’s highest point, where many locals go to view the cityscape and, inadvertently, pass the statue.

Recently, the city upgraded the monument by giving it wheelchair access and seating for viewers. It has yet to see any vandalism. It is also part of



Figure 2. AIDS Memorial, 2000. Indianapolis, IN. Photograph by Ryan Leitner, June 2019.

a local driving tour where tourists are presented with what the local community and elected officials have worked together in creating. Behind the monument, there are three monoliths that include names of donors to the plaque, as well as those lost to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The associated website allows people to donate 100 USD and to receive a name engraving of their choosing.

The monument consists of two hands interlocking as they go upwards to the sky. It takes a shape that appears more like the pink breast cancer ribbon—a common symbol in the US for cancer awareness and fundraising—rather than a piece of queer iconography. The artist, Guy Grey, was commissioned by The Bag Ladies and The Health Foundation of Greater Indianapolis to create the monument in the Cemetery. It should be noted that Grey is a self-identified straight cisgender male. This was his first and last queer monument. With seating and ample walking space, these elements move the site visitors toward a peaceful perspective on queer heritage.¹⁰ They make this memorial monument more celebratory of the life these AIDS victims had, giving the viewer a more reflective experience.

With various visuals and approaches to creating queer monuments, and their sites, it becomes interesting to find the ways in which people perceive the history of “our” (i.e., LGBT+) community. Much like the diversity within the

LGBT+ alliance, which itself is a (politicized) amalgam of many tinier sub-groups, monuments come in a plethora of different forms, sizes, experiences, and locations. In your research, Martin, how have you observed the task of creating queer space, and queer history building, through monument-making?

Queer monuments: What makes them “queer”?

Zebracki: First of all, I would like to spark off my observation of the oft-indiscriminate use of the word “queer” in creative placemaking and heritage/monument management that address/involve sexual and gender minorities (see Zebracki, 2021). The latter are often jointly taken, if not lumped together, as LGBT+. And this is the label we most frequently hear or see.

How much does “queer” do justice to articulating, visibilizing, and providing space for differences “within” LGBT+ communities? Rather than seeing queer as *being* an identity, queer holds a disposition, or a propensity, to challenge fixed identity notions or categories around sexuality and gender (Zebracki, 2020a; see also Note 2). So, a queer monument is not “queer” in and of itself; it becomes “twisted” as such (see Zebracki, 2017c).

The tenet of queering sits at the heart of the *Queer Memorials* project. This entails an ongoing concern with questioning sexual and gender normativities around representation, social engagement, and how queer monuments are embodied through memorial practices, interpretations, responses, and usages or misusages. The possibilities and limitations in this regard depend on: the material affordances of the objects of commemoration (e.g., site, scale, text, design, visuality/iconography); how the monument is commissioned and preserved (e.g., publicly and/or privately); and how it involves public communities and is introduced to them (see Stevens & Franck, 2015; Zebracki, 2017a, 2021).

This complex interplay may open up a “queer potential” for destabilizing norms and visualizing, or recuperating, sexual and gender “others” through, e.g., the site selection, visual display, and performances around queer monuments, which may negotiate formal and informal rights in/to space (see Pierce, Williams, & Martin, 2016) of, in this case, sexual and gender minorities (see Dunn, 2017).

The *Queer Memorials* project includes the following three case studies (the inventory of Orangias et al., 2018 features each of them): Karin Daan’s *Homomonument* (1987), Amsterdam (see Zebracki, 2017a, 2021); George Segal’s *Gay Liberation Monument* (1992), NYC (see Zebracki, 2019b); and Julita Wójcik’s *Tęcza* [tentſa], Polish for Rainbow, which was based in Warsaw’s city center from 2012 until it was destroyed by arson and then removed in 2015 (Figure 3).¹¹ These monuments have been chosen for their contrasting contexts of material affordances, sexual citizenship rights, LGBT+ organizing, and the support for LGBT+ people at social, political, and moral levels.

Sexual and gender minorities are visualized quite differently across the three project cases concerned. We may see human forms, a standing gay couple and



Figure 3. *Top left:* Julita Wójcik, *Tęcza*, 2012–2015. *Top right:* different view of the site post-*Tęcza*, 2018. Plac Zbawiciela (Savior Square), Warsaw. *Bottom left:* Karin Daan, *Homomonument*, 1987. Westermarkt, Amsterdam. *Bottom right:* George Segal, *Gay Liberation Monument*, 1992. Christopher Park, NYC. Top left photograph by Lukas Plewnia (<https://polen-heute.de>), May 2014. Source: <https://bit.ly/3gvMp0c> Creative Commons BY-SA 2.0: <https://bit.ly/34HGrEM> Remaining photographs by Martin Zebracki, April–August 2018.

sitting lesbian couple, in the *Gay Liberation Monument* (see Thompson, 2012).¹² Three pink-colored granite triangles make up the *Homomonument*, which compose a larger triangle from bird's-eye view. The pink triangle, as noted in Ryan's discussion on *UpStairs Lounge*, is an obvious reference to the Nazi camp shame badge and became a symbol for the persecution of homosexuals during WW II (see Zebracki, 2017a).

As general observation, public reception of the NYC- and Amsterdam-based monuments has been widely appreciative of their very existence, location in the city, and LGBT+ association. Nevertheless, there has been notable criticism of the whitewashing of the queer liberation movement as memorialized through the lens of the *Gay Liberation Monument* (Autostraddle, 2015). And the naming/iconography of the *Homomonument* may tend to unearth a "homo"/gay male bias (see Zebracki, 2017a, 2019b).

Tęcza, in the shape of a rainbow figure with a radically different material legacy, is a salient contrast case within the *Queer Memorials* project. It has seen ambiguity around its symbology since its inception, as well as fierce and

vociferous opposition against its right of existence in public space—leading to its final destruction by arson and final removal from public space.

The three queer monuments as part of this project show different levels of, amongst others, natural representation vs. abstraction, and sexuality/gender-specific representations vis-à-vis the use of more general symbols (e.g., rainbow). Degrees of heteropatriarchal hegemony can be observed across all three project contexts. However, such dominance is particularly evident within Poland's largely Catholic/religious-conservative context, facing rising levels of ethno-nationalist, far-right, and neo-fascist sentiments. Whilst same-sex unions and marriage were legally recognized in the Netherlands in 2001 (as the first country in the world) and in the US in 2015, Poland demonstrates a regressive trajectory with LGBT+ rights being increasingly undermined (see Dunin-Wąsowicz, 2016; O'Dwyer, 2018).

Despite some growing public openness to LGBT+ issues/people, Poland remains largely characterized by an LGBT+-“deletionist” governmentality. The latter detracts attention from the bare realities of prejudice and oppression as experienced amongst LGBT+ populations on an everyday basis (see Dunin-Wąsowicz, 2016; O'Dwyer, 2018). Structural social injustice toward sexual/gender minorities also exists across other Eastern and Central European states. As such, the conversation around *Tęcza*/Warsaw/Poland cannot be seen in isolation from wider movements advocating for equal rights—and more inclusive and safe spaces—for LGBT+ people in this region (see Dunin-Wąsowicz, 2016; O'Dwyer, 2018).

As tower of strength, pro-LGBT+ activism has been on the rise in Poland and other post-communist Eastern and Central European states, wherein sexual/gender minorities witness similar fates of oppression and repression (see Dunin-Wąsowicz, 2016; O'Dwyer, 2018). In Poland, such activism has especially emerged under the wings of one of the *Queer Memorials* project partners, Lambda Warszawa, Poland's first-ever LGBT+ organization established in 1997. It aims to promote a positive identity and inclusion of the LGBT+ community (Lambda Warszawa Association, 2001, p. 3), and it seems that it has been using *Tęcza* as figurehead in its advocacy work (e.g., Wojnicka, 2019).

I proceed with a focus on my preliminary insights into the *Tęcza* case, drawing on an amalgamation of primary ethnographic material and secondary (including archival) sources. The following shall put this case in its social and discursive/literary contexts and criticisms.

Tęcza: Trading between a celebratory and provocative monument

Zebracki (*continued*): *Tęcza*'s journey has been colorful, just like the faux rainbow-colored flowers wired over its armature. As part of the artist-in-residence program *Flower Power*, Wójcik's first incarnation of *Tęcza* was

a half steel arch-shaped structure with cemetery flowers, which supported the walls of the former Camaldolese monastery in the northeastern Polish town of Wigry in August 2010 (*Culture.pl*, n.d.a, n.d.b).

The second and final variant of *Tęcza* comprised an 8-ton steel structure of 9 m high and 26 m wide. It took the guise of a community artwork, as Wójcik worked with volunteers in workshops in the coastal town of Sopot and Wilamowice, a southern rural town near Oświęcim/Auschwitz, to decorate the rainbow structure counting over 16 thousand ersatz flowers (*Culture.pl*, n.d.c, n.d.d).

All components, including the arch-shaped structure itself, were transported to Brussels and, then, assembled in front of the EU Commission building on 17 September 2011, in honor of Poland's rotating EU presidency, July-December 2011 (*Culture.pl*, n.d.c, n.d.d). It is interesting to ponder on whether this may have reinforced opponents' image of *Tęcza* as an emblem of the purportedly pro-LGBT+ agenda of the EU or "the West."

Tęcza was transported from Brussels to Warsaw in winter 2012. At the initiative of Adam Mickiewicz Institute, a key government-sponsored cultural organization, it was erected in the middle of a busy roundabout in Plac Zbawiciela (Savior Square), adjacent to the Church of the Holiest Savior, on 8 June 2012 (*Culture.pl*, n.d.c). This middle is closed off for pedestrians and under CCTV surveillance. The large structure could not escape the eye of bystanders, such as pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, tram passengers, and customers of the surrounding cafes/restaurants.

Tęcza was not created as a permanent public artwork in the first place. It fell under a temporary agreement between the initiator and sponsor/custodian, the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, a relatively progressive cultural state organization, and the City of Warsaw (*Culture.pl*, 2015). Contemplating this public artwork as a liberal/LGBT+ sign against the background of state conservatism, a paradox perhaps lurks in *Tęcza*'s state sponsorship.

Wójcik's reported intention for *Tęcza* was different, to say the least, from conservative and right-wing backlash. With its rainbow-colored artificial flowers, the artist wanted to create a "universal symbol," eliciting the rainbow's long history of "positive associations" (*Culture.pl*, n.d.c). The artist wanted to give expression to abstract values such as beauty, joy, love, peace, hope, and optimism, adding that her "main message [was] that the Rainbow is not socially or politically involved, but is free of any kind of imposed meanings. Simply there—to be beautiful" (*Culture.pl*, n.d.c).

In an interview with Kozlowska (2013) for the *New York Times*, Wójcik conveyed that the Rainbow, in light of Poland's reputation as "homophobic country," promoted that "we're not closed, but open-minded." Whilst the artist acknowledged *Tęcza*'s reference to "movements on behalf of the emancipation of sexual minorities" (*Culture.pl*, n.d.c), the artist initially denied this connection (O'Dwyer, 2018, p. 294).

Concurrently, Wójcik imparted that the rainbow figure may symbolize the covenant between God and humankind (*Culture.pl*, n.d.a), indeed fortified by *Tęcza*'s proximity to the Holiest Savior Church. So, one might think that this narrative would sound like music to a Polish Catholic's ears.

However, a discursive consolidation of religiously conservative, far-right, and neo-fascist echelons of the Polish society, as well as conservative/Catholic political leaders, rather took umbrage against *Tęcza*. This large, hyper-visible public artwork associated with the LGBT+ Pride flag, situated next to the Holiest Savior Church, was rather read by them as homosexual propaganda promulgated by "the West," allegedly insulting Polish national and Catholic values (see Dunin-Wąsowicz, 2016; Kozłowska, 2013).

Such perception did not just drop out of the sky, considering high-profile controversial comments of Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the ruling right-wing, populist and national conservative, or "heteroactivist,"¹³ Law and Justice party. He denounced the "import" of LGBT+ rights, or so-called gender ideologies, as a "threat to Polish [Catholic] identity, to our nation, to its existence and thus to the Polish state"—as "these are not internal Polish mechanisms" (AFP, 2019).

Feelings about *Tęcza* were running high, putting it mildly. Whilst it stood for a desired progressive future for some, opponents saw in it an unwanted social order requiring immediate radical counteraction. And some significant counteractions followed indeed, rendering *Tęcza* as a kind of anti-monument to the religio-conservative/Catholic family values and ethno-nationalist feelings that dominate large segments of everyday life in Poland (see Dunin-Wąsowicz, 2016; Kozłowska, 2013).

Despite strong levels of social control in a lively city center place such as Savior Square, there were repeated arson attempts against this artwork—seven times in total as noted by Jagielski (2018, p. 128). A notable arson attack was caused by far-right nationalists during National Independence Day demonstrations on 11 November 2013. This incident was followed by a kiss-in demonstration under the surviving remnants of the structure a few days later (*The Economist* [L.N.], 2013).

Notwithstanding the sustained assaults, *Tęcza* was painstakingly renovated upon each of them with the moral support from leading figures, including activists, artists, and the then mayor, Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, who conveyed that "the city authorities will rebuild the Rainbow 'many times' if necessary," which turned out to be five times (*The Economist* [L.N.], 2013). However, the authorities removed the artwork when the temporary agreement between the City of Warsaw and its caretaker, Adam Mickiewicz Institute, terminated in August 2015 (*Culture.pl*, 2015).

Tęcza was then harbored in the collection of Warsaw's Center for Contemporary Art (Plińska, 2015). As part of its Late Polishness exhibition in 2017, the Center invited citizens to donate personal photographic memories of

this artwork to its public collection on Polish post-communist collective memory and national identity since 1989 (Center for Contemporary Art, 2017).

Relocation of *Tęcza* to a public site is under debate, facilitated by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute which has been soliciting ideas from the wider public (see *Culture.pl*, 2015; O'Dwyer, 2018). As conservatism is ever-intensifying in Poland, it might prove to be challenging to secure a new, not to mention permanent, location for *Tęcza* (read: largely conceived LGBT+ symbol) under the sky of Warsaw—despite the relatively more favorable situation for LGBT+ people in the country's urban capital (see Dunin-Wąsowicz, 2016).

In all, the above tells a queer story about *Tęcza*, seeing that the practices and discourses surrounding it have been ambivalent and antagonistic. Although not originally instigated as an LGBT+ monument by the artist, it has become a major landmark, simultaneously perceived in positive and abject ways. Within the purview of the lack of a larger, widely shared political commitment to fight forms of sexual and gender prejudice and inequality in Poland, *Tęcza* became part of the struggle against LGBT+ phobia and bigotry. And so, it turned into a public “conversation piece,” a notion that Kester (2004) associated with artwork driven by critical dialogue and antagonistic engagement (see also Bishop, 2004).

Ryan, can you reflect on how members of the public, in your project's context, have differently acted in favor of, or against, the same queer monument with emphasis on its symbolic repertoire? How do engagements with such monument become reactionary—as “action pieces,” if you will—as such that they are visibilizing and queering social norms and dominant practices? Accordingly, how does your project approaches queer monuments through public response and social transformation?

Visibilizing queer resistance: Informative monuments

Leitner: First off, thank you for diving into the term “queer” and how it is being used today. Historically, this word was a derogatory slur used by LGBT+ opponents. But since its deliberate reclamation in the late 1990s and common use in many urban “gayborhoods” (see Ghaziani, 2014),¹⁴ it has become a non-binary way of defining a person’s “othering” that is outside the heteronormative lens. At least in my use of it, it is a way of talking about people or objects within the LGBT+ community without unintentionally adding a sexual and gender binary to the discourse. Of course, there are ways in which LGBT+ folks can direct the term, for instance when people call themselves not just queer but “gender queer.”

Personally, I like to use the term “queer” when referring to monuments in our community because it is not exclusionary. The term is amorphous and delightfully multipurpose, because it has been redefined through an act of willful repossession and a rejection of its previous denotation and

connotations. One can even use the term queer post hoc, to apply to say “fairy” cultures of the 1920s (see Capó, 2017), or “romantic friendships” of the late 19th century, for example (see Oram, 2011). This can be done in a way that I believe is more accurate than applying the medically-derived term “homosexual” from the late 1880s or the mid-20th-century political word “gay” (see Jagose, 1996).

I think that the term queer is holistic as well as broad enough to describe the monuments and public spaces that evolving LGBT+ alliances have created to reflect a collective heritage. Perhaps because of this multifaceted dynamic, the conversations and reactions that happen around queer monuments, including their heritage sites, can be as diverse, or even uproarious, as any parliamentary debate. But there are ways of dissecting and even predicting how the public might engage with a queer monument—or a public queer space such as a park or garden where such monument is sited.

Since June 2019, Lexington, Kentucky, US has displayed three separate text plaques in the heart of the city that describe historic events, protests, and law changes that have progressed the equality of people in their LGBT+ community. These three plaques (falling beyond the scope of the inventory in Orangias et al., 2018), only a block away from one another, have already seen vandalism by way of being tied to the back of a car in order to be dislodged from their placement in the sidewalk.

Even though these plaques do not carry iconography that is indicative of LGBT+ communities, they are informative monuments carrying text on each metal plaque that uses the words “LGBT” and “gay bar” when clarifying what is queer about queer monuments and their local heritage. In this instance, words can even be seen as symbols of unrest in culturally conservative environments, as we can also observe in the case of *Tęcza*. Here, it should be remembered that the city of Lexington is only an hour drive from Rowan County. This is home of former Chief Deputy Clerk Kim Davis, who in 2015 denied a marriage license to a same-sex couple who were legally allowed to get married. Luckily, she did not get reelected in 2018.

Another instance where words and symbols have both been used on the public site of a queer monument which has seen damage is the *UpStairs Lounge* plaque in New Orleans (Figure 1). This informative monument—with its obvious queer associations such as its triangular shape—has attracted anti-queer vandals and been paint-bombed, burnt, utilized as an ashtray, and splashed with a corrosive liquid since its installment in 2003. Taking into account that the monument is located between a group of dive bars and strip clubs, the plaque sees a lot of natural foot traffic, which makes it a challenge for police to identify or apprehend any vandal who, for example, makes quick use of a pack of gum or a can of spray paint.

As part of my project *Strange Inheritance*, I worked with the Office of Human Rights and Equity in New Orleans to restore the face of the bronze plaque and its

surrounding brickwork. As I described before, the plaque is highly accessible for members of the public—placed within the common space of a sidewalk—and, as I said, I think it is also a visibly queer heritage marker. It is also one of the more vandalized monuments I have ever researched or helped refurbish.

The reason I mention the Lexington monuments and the *UpStairs Lounge* plaque together is because the types of vandalism and abuse they receive in some way correspond to how accessible or private they are to their visitors. Such as *Tęcza*, which was situated on a central roundabout, the vandalized plaque in Lexington is quite accessible to the public. It is located next to a parking lot and on a small side street that is easily mistaken for an alleyway; all sites are out of range of security cameras. This may give a person ample time and space to, by way of example, wrap the plaque in chains, connect it to a car, and drive.

The latter cannot happen for the *UpStairs Lounge* plaque, as its location on the one-way of Iberville Street falls within a few feet of one of the more popular 24-hour bars, called the Jimani, which has rigged up its exteriors with security cameras. Basically, anything elaborate will be witnessed or documented. The only things people could do to be destructive is to use what they have in their pockets at that moment, but it is still in a location that gives access to these types of incidents. Speaking with the sole surviving member of the *UpStairs Lounge* plaque organizers, along with other local activists, it is clear that a different memorial in a different space is welcome and on their minds.

Going back to the *AIDS Memorial* in Indianapolis, that monument is located in a gated cemetery that is open to the public during set hours. The cemetery is a guarded facility accustomed to seeing hundreds of visitors a day—mostly mourners paying their respects to the dead or the recently bereaved. That is a different kind of patronage, unique from the *UpStairs Lounge* plaque, the Lexington historical markers, or *Tęcza*. It is important to note that the founding organizations for the *AIDS Memorial* also play a large role in keeping its history and significance top of mind by holding fundraisers and awareness events throughout the year.

Depending on public access, symbolism, and verbiage, these queer monuments receive specific types of vandalism that are especially indicative of their placement. Through their engagement with the surrounding communities, there are lessons to be learned and that can be carried on to future public spaces that can be made into queer monuments. As a response to the vandalism of the *UpStairs Lounge* plaque, and the lack of permanent queer representation in a city seen as a “gay haven” for many (see Foley & Lauria, 2000), I have helped organize a group of queer activists. As of writing, they are working on a proposal to the mayor’s office to create a platform for future heritage site projects involving queer monuments.

Reflecting on the locations of different queer monuments, their public engagement, and the research conducted on other cities and their monuments,

we are creating a map of possible sites. Even through the vandalism and reconstruction of the *UpStairs Lounge* plaque, and the Lexington heritage marker, we are learning how to visibilize, educate, and memorialize our communities in the face of adversity.

Martin, given your understanding and research of different public spaces and LGBT+ symbolism as part of queer monuments, how would you say that such monuments have opened a dialogue in places like Warsaw? Have they changed any local practices or set into action any activist work? I understand that sometimes the changes in a community are hard to spot, and that progress is not always linear. But are there things learned in your research that effect the legacy of queer monuments, or the representation of LGBT+ people, in specific places and communities?

Activating queer change: Solidarity vis-à-vis rejection

Zebracki: *Tęcza* forms a compelling case to expand on how public discussion and contestation took place over LGBT+ symbolism. There has been a powerful, symbolic convergence around the artwork's visual content and its locational, temporal and social contexts—which charted a delicate course between sentiments and acts of LGBT+ solidarity and rejection around *Tęcza*'s legacy.

The artist, Julita Wójcik, conveyed that neither the date of *Tęcza*'s unveiling nor its location was just accidental: it coincided with the annual Equality Parade in Warsaw (organized since 2001), the Polish national holiday Corpus Christi, and the start of UEFA Euro 2012 jointly hosted by Poland and the Ukraine. The Rainbow was also site-specific, as it chimed with the curved architecture of the roundabout and the buildings and arcade surrounding it (*Culture.pl*, n.d.c). Also, Savior Square with its cafes and restaurants, is colloquially known as a “fashionable hipster hangout” (Grabkowska & Frankowski, 2016, p. 80), frequented by queer artists and folks (who can afford to spend time and money there).

Tęcza's temporal materiality, i.e., installation in rainbow/LGBT+ iconography, has left a footprint on the public's mind/imaginary. The various social appropriations of *Tęcza* have demonstrated that it has not merely been a fleeting bystander. Material monuments and enactments can have a particularly critical rhetorical impact on queer public memory, as argued by Dunn (2011, p. 452; see also politics of materiality in Hughes & Forman, 2017, cited in Zebracki, 2020b).

Indeed, *Tęcza* has been operating as an in-your-face, LGBT+ material symbol for Warsaw and the rest of the country (see *Culture.pl*, n.d.c)—thereby producing a resonant impact, or a sense of public monumentality. Plińska (2015) imparted that the publicness of *Tęcza* manifested itself as a free “gift” (after Sansi, 2015); however, one that became converted into a “disobedient

object,” or a type of anti-monument, used by ordinary people to exert counter-power (after Flood & Grindon, 2014).

After its removal in 2015, *Tęcza* continued mediating a debate about LGBT+ visibility and rights, making possible, or restraining, certain encounters and political claims on the part of sexual and gender minorities. *Tęcza*’s ephemeron embodies an “anti-normative” rhythm, disrupting the patronage of much permanent, and indelible, (white) heteronormative statues including monuments (see also Dunn, 2011). Rather, the case of *Tęcza* speaks to the fleeting character of queer public art (Thompson, 2012; Zebracki, 2017a, 2017b), the dynamism of urban queer spaces and times (see Dunn, 2011; Giesecking, 2016; Halberstam, 2003), as well as the importance of archival practices in embarking upon research on the transience of queer cultures (Dunn, 2016; Kumbier, 2009)—as done in the *Queer Memorials* project.

Tęcza is still present in its physical absence. Indeed, when I interviewed Varsovians including members of the public and activists in September 2018, so when *Tęcza* was no longer in situ, participants relayed an immediately felt proximity (per Acknowledgments, the empirical data analysis is in progress). They elicited vivid memories and lived experiences of key happenings around *Tęcza*. Such memories and experiences stretched beyond *Tęcza*’s original site and alluded to highly polarized attitudes and political agendas that affect sexual and gender minorities in the Polish society very differently. The artwork manifestly appeared to function as a much-needed symbol in the politics of visibility as pursued by LGBT+ activists and their allies. After Gorman-Murray and Nash (2016), such politics of visibility are important as they may contribute to greater recognition of LGBT+ people and their rights.

Counteractions to a radicalized monument

Zebracki (*continued*): Incessant conservative and far-right opposition and belligerence gave rise to re-appropriations of *Tęcza* as politicized statements. The conflict has galvanized some creative knock-on reactions beyond the country’s urban capital in the guise of counter-monuments to traditionalist, parochial, anti-LGBT+ values.¹⁵

Such counteractions ranged from site-specific performances, such as the symbolic burning of a rainbow at *Tęcza*’s locale as a joint guerrilla action by Aleka Polis and Ewelina Jarosz in 2014, to rainbow murals that began to appear in cities like Wrocław and Żywiec (see Wojnicka, 2019). Apparently, *Tęcza* was successful at setting the tone and parameters for queering conformative ways of life in Poland and establishing space for the visibility and rights of LGBT+ people.

As another case in point, in 2017, the small northeastern town of Supraśl, in Poland’s conservative Podlasie Province, saw unknown person/s painting over a fan-shaped, concrete sculpture titled *Garden of Arts*. This was done in a rainbow

color scheme, in reported reference to *Tęcza*. The town's mayor condemned this as an act of vandalism (see Chołodowski, 2017). However, there might have been an implicit concern with how a symbol associated with LGBT+ identity seeped into this conservative town/region as a kind of Trojan horse.

As another significant event, *Tęcza* became reimagined in its original location, Warsaw's Savior Square, in the capacity of a water and light hologram installation—playing with this artwork's queer ephemerality. This “unbreakable” comeback (Day, 2018) assumed the same size as the original. It lasted for a few hours the night before the Equality Parade in Warsaw, 9 June 2018. The creative agency 180heartbeats + JUNG v. MATT created this water-light-based hologram for an LGBT+ equality campaign for Ben & Jerry's of Unilever (in further collaboration with the Love Does Not Exclude Association and Volunteers of Equality Foundation): “we hope that Poland will become even a little more tolerant. Because it's high time for that,” the agency's chief officer said (180heartbeats + JUNG v. MATT, 2018; see this source for video coverage of the hologram).

It could be argued that the above examples of the recurrent reclaiming of *Tęcza* in original and different locations—which widely journeyed through news and social media—turned this art piece into a networked monument of the on-going struggle for LGBT+ rights in Poland, and perhaps in neighboring conservative contexts alike.

These multisite examples can be regarded as artistically informed grassroots activism, or “artivism” (see Zebracki, 2020b). The latter draws attention to, and politicizes the presence of, LGBT+ people through the mode of art practice and the use of “visual code,” i.e., the rainbow color scheme. The deciphering of visual code, following Sosnowska's (2010, p. 126) account on theatrical performance, “means ‘burdening’ images with special meaning.” The re-appropriations of *Tęcza* beyond its locale and lifetime indicate how this artwork, after its material destruction, lives on through a “ghost effect” (see spectrology in Derrida, 1994) and is, thereby, held in vivid memory in public, artistic, as well as academic discourse.¹⁶ We have seen a somewhat similar process regarding the damaged *UpStairs Lounge* plaque in New Orleans.

In this place it is, however, important to note that LGBT+ culture and symbolism may risk being incorporated as instruments into political and marketing strategies to promote diversity and progressive citizenship (e.g., Ghaziani, 2014), which would detract from their “queer potential” (Dunn, 2017).

When participating in the Equality Parade in Warsaw in 2018, I witnessed how rainbow flags and colors abundantly adorned the floats of major companies such as Google and Netflix that took part in this. They passed among the first ones in the Parade, as if this were to provide some symbolic hierarchy of importance. And to what extent was the *Tęcza*-inspired hologram, co-facilitated by the Equality Parade's key sponsor Ben & Jerry's, perhaps, in part, a marketing ploy? On the other side of the coin, such companies may

contribute to raise LGBT+ visibility and empathy awareness through mass content sharing, amongst other avenues.

There should also be noted that the use of the rainbow symbol has not only been criticized for any inflated uses, such as solely commercial appropriations, but also for its limits to intersectional representations of sexual and gender “others,” including lesbians, trans people and people of color (e.g., Dunn, 2011). Nevertheless, Wolowic, Heston, Saewyc, Porta, and Eisenberg (2017) argued that the Pride rainbow might be a generally useful tool for navigation, particularly among younger cohorts. Despite the rainbow symbol’s connotation with safety and support, they, however, argued that “its display does not always guarantee supportive places and people” (Wolowic et al., 2017, p. 557). And the same might be true for its display via *Tęcza*.

LGBT+ progress is not always linear, as you, Ryan, have duly noted. The pursuit of solidarity for sexual and gender minorities can be unbalanced and incoherent and have unequal impacts across identity markers beyond sex, sexuality, and gender, including ethnicity, class, age, creed, and nationality. Such matters have been widely critiqued under the notion of “homonationalism,” criticizing LGBT+ commodity culture as well as systemic state practices of “pinkwashing” (see Puar, 2007).

That is to say, to what extent do pro-LGBT+ policies and practices translate into any material changes for *all* sexual and gender minorities and can other minorities build on the gains of LGBT+ inclusion and rights recognition? To what extent are steps taken in favor of the situation of some but at the expense of minority others “from within,” such as women, trans people, migrants, and people of color? And to what extent might processes camouflage the oppression of other communities marginalized along ethnic, classed, and religious lines, amongst others? In this regard, what do queer monuments have in the offing for more inclusive LGBT+ futures (beyond urban window dressing)?

The profiling of political parties and enterprises under the LGBT+ Pride flag, and by extension LGBT+-related monuments, might be rendered “unqueer” should they conceal underlying interests that have little to nothing to do with the situation of sexual and gender minorities (see Note 2). Nevertheless, political and commercial sponsorship can be indispensable for LGBT+ key events such as Pride marches that involve substantial funding and organizational capital. Without such sponsorship, LGBT+ visibility might get (further) compromised —especially within contexts that manifest a stark lack of financial and moral support from political and societal leaders.

Following *Tęcza*’s destruction, there no longer seems to be a formally commissioned permanent artwork/monument in a prominent public space in Poland that relays such an explicit symbolic, commemorative link with LGBT+ people and their struggles. The LGBT+ rights movement remains challenged given Poland’s politico-social condition. The EU has repeatedly blown the whistle seeing that the independence of the judiciary, press freedom, and the

protection of minoritarian populations, including sexual and gender minorities, have been progressively jeopardized. Most recently, this has been especially the case when a rising number of local governments, particularly in the southeast of Poland, issued so-called “LGBT-free zones” (*Deutsche Welle*, 2019).

In Poland’s foreseeable future, the instigation of something like a permanent LGBT+ beacon, let alone the implementation of further pro-LGBT+ legislation, will likely fall on deaf ears. Nevertheless, the debate about LGBT+ rights in Poland has been reignited with *Tęcza* “becoming one of the symbols of Warsaw and a part of national discourse” (*Culture.pl*, n.d.a). So, *Tęcza*, by means of discursive and visual politics, has seemed to play an ambiguous part in visibilizing vs. effacing sexual and gender difference amongst opponents and proponents. It yet remains tricky to produce claims on the impacts of a single LGBT+-inflected public artwork on wider social movements and activism/artivism that propagate LGBT+ inclusion.

My argument here construes *Tęcza* as a pivotal test case for queer(ing) monuments. This would reveal a commitment to the interrogation of the ambivalent aspects of visibility vs. invisibility, actions vs. counteractions, and legacy regarding the roles that queer *mo(nu)ments*¹⁷ can play across contexts of protecting conservatism vis-à-vis activating room for (more) inclusive change. Concerted efforts in this sphere would, or should, motivate a politics of recognition of the rights of not LGBT+ populations exclusively but the socially marginalized more widely (again including women, trans people, migrants, and people of color).

Consequently, queering should not only engage troubled situations in the here and now. Rather, it forms a prolonged project of universal anticipation/commitment concerning people in different places and times, pursuing alliances with the oppressed beyond sexual and gender minority status alone. So, there would be no queer collegiality without transnational and intersectional solidarity (see Tormos, 2017).

A story about here/now is a story about there/then. The multilayered *Tęcza* tale teaches us that it is important to remain vigilant and exude criticism of particular uses vs. misuses and appropriations vs. misappropriations regarding both material and immaterial legacies of queer monuments—or, in this case, public art that has become queer. How do queer monuments serve marginalized LGBT+ communities and to what extent do they address, or overlook, stay in touch, or lose touch, with everyday lived realities of oppression within and beyond sexual and gender minorities? How can queer(ing) monuments advance pathways for impacting creative practices, policies, and social change?

Considering all this, Ryan, could you conclude on the social potentials of queer monuments and their continuing legacy?—particularly when it has no longer a material footprint, such as seen in the case of *Tęcza*.

What is the legacy of queer monuments?

Leitner: Your analysis of *Tęcza* attends to its potentials and downfalls on addressing and creating a future for the LGBT+ community in Poland. Though the piece is not up anymore, nor was it originally introduced as an LGBT+ monument, the impact it has had on queer folks and queer allies alike is an important reminder of “our” need for visibility. Though the monument is no longer in existence, its legacy remains a reference point that is now part of the history of LGBT+ people in Poland—and sympathizers beyond. These voices, along with the protesters, have been heard worldwide really and because of that, the conversation carries on.

Much like the beginning stages of what was termed the “gay movement” (see Jagose, 1996), things were built up just to be torn down by oppressors. In many instances, this happens on a smaller scale and with materials that are temporary, and yet the message is clear and important.

For example, in 2014, a chalked pictogram for transgender residents was created and maintained anonymously in Toronto by those in the trans community for those that they have lost in the community. Throughout the years, names have been added and the chalk outline has been added, too. Many times, this piece has been erased and so the anonymous contributors put “You Will Not Erase Us” underneath the symbol. Due to the outcry from activists such as Nicki Ward, the city formally apologized and promised to keep the memorial there. Because of their voices, the city listened and tried to rectify the problem.

Of course, this queer monument in chalk (which is listed in the inventory of Orangias et al., 2018) emerged in a liberal mecca like Toronto, where the LGBT+ community has found a haven for many decades. But these events are what shape the conversation around the LGBT+ communities in many different areas, indeed. They “shape the direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity,” Kumbier (2009, p. 56) argued. If these events did not happen, where would we have started the conversation and had our voice heard? Through ephemera, voices, and grassroots community building, history can be created.

One of the major beginning thoughts that started my project *Strange Inheritance* was the understanding that “our” queer community is built uniquely through individuals that stereotypically come from straight cis-gendered parents. I began questioning how is it that we have been able to make such a strong and boisterous community when each one of us have to find it within ourselves to go out and search for it. Thinking about the nature of queer monuments, how is it that we sustain this unique type of heritage/culture? Hopefully through projects and activities such as ours, we can add to the conversation of sustainability and legacy building within queer scholarship and communities.

Zebracki: Your *Strange Inheritance* project demonstrates how visibility, through artmaking as form of monumentalizing/memorializing, is so closely intertwined with the power of persistence. Such persistence entails acts of resistance against sexual/gender oppression and the effacing of the “abject” other. I have come to render queer monuments as sorts of legacy statements, which are simultaneously *visibilizing* sexual and gender minoritarian communities and *activating* awareness, sympathy, and debates about their place and rights in society—or the profound lack thereof (e.g., Orangias et al., 2018; Zebracki, 2021).

Let me wrap up the argument with my personal investments in this research topic. My interest in *Tęcza*, and the theme of sexuality-inflected public artworks/monuments more widely, is borne out at “artivist” levels. In April 2017, my life partner, based in the Belgian city of Ghent, and I launched a campaign for establishing an LGBT+ monument for this city (Van Damme, 2017). This happened at a time when we heard disconcerting news about gay people being tortured in concentration camps in the Chechen Republic. We realized that much remains to be done to fight prejudice, exclusion, and violence against LGBT+ people, both “there” and in the “here” (despite well-developed LGBT+ rights in a country like Belgium).

In July 2017, my partner and I visited Warsaw, some time before the *Queer Memorials* project would formally start. With the project case on *Tęcza* in mind, and with the help of my partner, I decided to bring a celebratory ode to this artwork (or what has become a queer monument), done upon my first encounter with its “afterlife” (i.e., material absence). I stood upright in *Tęcza*’s former location, the middle of the roundabout at Savior Square. Gagged with a tie, as part of my performance, I held a rainbow flag in front of me. I stretched this flag with both hands so that this was clearly visible to passersby.

The next day, I tweeted the following about my action: “Incarnated as joyful #publicartwork, burnt down as symbol of deviancy—#LGBTQphobia needs #QueerMemorials” (Zebracki, 2017b). My tweet was accompanied with an animated image. It shows some stills of my action, alternated with images of *Tęcza* that display its life course—from its full glory to its final destruction.

My partner and I kept the momentum going. Immediately following a severe incident of gay bashing in Ghent in August 2018, we organized a playful activist action “from below” with the courageous support of the victims. We proclaimed George Minne’s early modern (and perhaps homoerotic) sculpture with fountain named *De Fontein der Geknielden* (Dutch for The Fountain of Kneeling Youths), situated at Emile Braunplein in the historic center of Ghent, as temporary Monument for Sexual Diversity (for [audio-]visual coverage, see Zebracki, 2018). Subsequently, along with growing local grassroots queer activism, we co-initiated the inaugural Queer Pride in Ghent, held on 11 May 2019 (see interview [in Dutch] in *Humo* [L.D.], 2019)—an event which, as it were, performed the city’s LGBT+ monument we made a passionate plea for in the

first place. Although ephemeral in scope, this grassroots event, in analogy with *Tęcza*, engraved itself as mental monument into the public discourse around sexual and gender minorities. Inspired by these empirical cases, my scholar activist journey through queer monuments is to be continued.

Conclusion

This article has inferred case-study approaches and preliminary insights from the *Queer Memorials* and *Strange Inheritance* projects to develop a conversational, abductive, and multisite and intercultural argument about queer monuments. That is to say, our discursive critique has traversed and juxtaposed discourses and practices around queer monuments in different social and spatial contexts attending identities, representations, and norms around sexuality and gender.

We have analyzed interwoven key aspects of visibility, (counter)actions, and legacy regarding first-hand cases of public commemorative artwork that has been, or become, associated and questioned/queered around issues concerning the sexual “other” (i.e., LGBT+ people). Our analysis has developed perspectives of how LGBT+-inflected public artwork may precisely turn into queer monuments through being imbued with a combination of conflict, antagonism, and activism/aktivism.

Hence, we have undergirded the importance of the role that queer monuments can, or may, play in highlighting, challenging, reinterpreting, reappropriating, and, thereby, remaking the nexus of public art/monuments, sexuality, and identity politics. Accordingly, our dialogic argument throughout this piece has provided a comparative taxonomy of queer monuments’ roles, navigating between sorrowful, celebratory, provocative, and informative types and values.

In all, our critique provides peers with pointers to think through how (more) inclusive futures for LGBT+ communities could be potentially impacted through queer monuments (including related embodied memorial and arts practices) and their concomitant social and spatial configurations and political parameters.

We advocate both arts-based enquiry and practice as grounded pathways for narrating queer monuments’ activist potential to memorialize, and visibilize, sexual and gender minorities and their overlapping rights in/to space. This could, then, further explore the study claim of our peers Orangias et al. (2018, p. 705) that “queer monuments have the potential of lessening stigma,” in terms of counteracting stereotyping and processes of delegitimization of LGBT+ communities.

In this light, we encourage future scholarship and practice, including public arts and social policies, to pursue the tenet of queering in diagnosing, and expanding, critical knowledge of the norms and agencies that emerge around queer monuments. This would involve penetrating reflections on the positionality of the makers and spectators of queer monuments vis-à-vis the scope established for minority voices. Such voices may be strategically heard vs. silenced and empowered vs. underplayed—especially when opposition meets activism.

Notes

1. The usage of specific language, terms, and initialisms to refer to people across the spectrum of sexual orientation, gender identity and identity expression, and sex characteristics is historically and geographically contingent. This usage has been subject to politics of the expanding inclusion of sexual minorities. As LGBT+ historians Jay Shockley and Ken Lustbader outlined: “lesbian” and ‘gay’ became more commonly used in the post-World War II era, whereas ‘bisexual’ and ‘transgender’ were not as frequent until the 1980s” (NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project and National Parks Conservation Association, 2018, p. 2). This coincided with emerging bisexual and transgender activism and the ensuing use of the initialism “LGBT,” “usage [that] did not exist in earlier time periods,” the historians asserted (p. 2). Sexual and gender variance has been further recognized/accentuated by initialisms, such as LGBTQIA (also inclusive of queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual, or allied, people) and QTPOC (emphasizing the intersection of queer trans people of color as particularly historically marginalized minority). Throughout this article, we have consistently applied LGBT+ to acknowledge the full gamut of sexual and gender diversity amongst “non-heterosexual” populations.
2. Queer is a multifaceted notion and we use it as critical tenet for deconstructing LGBT+-inflected monuments. Although the term/noun “queer” can, for some, stand for the sexual “other,” feminist/queer scholarship rather assumes this term in its verbal, gerundial form: “queering,” a questioning project of “methodological activism” (Jones & Adams, 2010, p. 203). Queering embraces both *epistêmê* (i.e., “know whys”; theoretical knowledge/thinkings) and *technê* (i.e., “know hows”/doings). Hence, knowledge is dialectically constructed, and reconstructed, through thinkings/“unthinkings” and doings/“undoings.” Beings/identities/expressions are in constant flux, finding themselves at fluid intersections of identity markers and agencies beyond aspects of sexuality and gender alone—such as ethnicity, class, age, philosophy of life, ability/disability, and nationality. In this, we follow the imperative of queer theory to “mark a suspension of identity as something fixed, coherent and natural” (Jagose, 1996, p. 98)—or perhaps to challenge “identity labelling” altogether (Zebracki, 2019a, p. 270). That is, queering puts critical thought in practice to challenge dichotomies around and beyond sex(uality) and gender (e.g., man vs. women, gay vs. straight), thereby emphasizing intersectional experiences and realities. In this vein, we also acknowledge that rendering representations of sexuality and gender identity as “fixed” matter in the form of, e.g., language and symbols—as one might observe in material queer monuments, or in how they are relayed via associated memorial practices and rituals—could be potentially “unqueer,” precisely because identity is dynamically and relationally performed/“done” (well beyond the representational level).
3. George Segal’s original casting of the *Gay Liberation Monument* from 1980, which appeared to be contentious, was eventually sited across the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, NYC, in 1992. This is one of the *Queer Memorials* project cases (Note 4).
4. *Queer Memorials: International Comparative Perspectives on Sexual Diversity and Social Inclusivity* (QMem), supported by a project grant (1 January 2018–31 December 2019) from the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), <https://queermemorials.leeds.ac.uk>.
5. *Strange Inheritance* (from 2018), <https://www.ryanleitner.com/projects/strange-inheritance>.
6. We use the parentheses in “(counter)actions,” i.e., actions-cum-counteractions, to stress how existing queer monuments may provoke certain critical responses and backlashes (i.e., antagonism; Bishop, 2004). That is, we focus on different and ambivalent (counter)

- actions that may co-emerge around erected queer monuments. They may involve, simultaneously, fragmented, collaborative, unifying, adversarial, and conflicting dialogs, practices, and goals.
7. Colloquium: Queer Memorial Culture: International Critical Perspectives, University of Leeds, 17 May 2019, <https://queermemorials.leeds.ac.uk/colloquium/>.
 8. The normative question about what queering monuments “should do” alludes to *phronésis*. After Aristotle, this is the ethical pursuit of critical (self-)reflection, eliciting “practical knowledge [*techné*] of how to act prudently and correctly in a given immediate and ambiguous social or political situation” (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 3).
 9. Halberstam (2003) argued that particular attention should be paid to an “epistemology of youth” (p. 313) in queering conventional understandings of subculture and how they are disrupted through particular forms of “stylistic resistance” in queer subcultures (p. 313).
 10. For informative accounts on curating queer heritage, see Steorn (2012) and Ferentinos (2019).
 11. See Wojnicka (2019) for a preliminary report (in Polish) on the *Queer Memorials* project case studies regarding the *Gay Liberation Monument* and *Tęcza*. For further information about the provenance of *Tęcza*, see, notably, Plińska (2015), and Dunin-Wąsowicz (2016).
 12. See Thompson (2012) for a critical reading of the *Gay Liberation Monument* along gay and lesbian movements since the Stonewall riots in 1969, and radical/queer activism ensuing from the start of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. These forms of activism have laid different and competing claims on public space over the past five decades.
 13. Heteroactivism denotes when heterosexuality is manifested as a “morally superior” norm in opposition to equalities for alternative (i.e., LGBT+) sexual and gender categories and lives (see Browne & Nash, 2017).
 14. See Ghaziani (2014) for an overview of the rise and transformation of “gayborhoods” and their different—and often contradictory—meanings in a “post-gay era.” The latter is characterized by increasing “straight” newcomers in such neighborhoods along with changing attitudes to sexuality, notably the acceptance of gay and lesbian people in the mainstream of everyday life.
 15. Note that such counteractions, or memorial “add-ons,” to existing queer monuments are not captured by the inventory in Orangias et al. (2018).
 16. The case of *Tęcza* has also widely traveled academic discourse first-hand; Zebracki presented case-study insights at the project colloquium Queer Memorial Culture at the University of Leeds, 17 May 2019, and at invited addresses at, chronologically, the Municipal Gallery Arsenał with the City of Poznań, Poland, 26 November 2018, the Colloquium on Public Art, Sites, and Digital Cultures: Image Streams and the Lives of Artworks at the University of Montreal, Canada, 29–31 May 2019, Yorkshire Sculpture International, The Hepworth, Wakefield, UK, 22 June 2019, and the International Conference Sculpture Today: Anti-Monument: Non-Traditional Forms of Commemoration at the Center of Polish Sculpture, Oronsko, Poland, 14–16 November 2019.
 17. This play on the words *monuments* and *moments* is inferred from Zebracki (2019b).

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