

# The Homomonument. A Public Space of Transgression

Carlos Álvarez Hernández <sup>1</sup>

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## Resumen

Este artículo examina la adquisición del espacio público por *dissidentes sexuales* como un medio de desafío de la heterosexualidad hegemónica. Esto fue alcanzado mediante el análisis de literatura relevante a espacios y ciudadanía sexual y el Homomonumento de Amsterdam, así como de información obtenida por entrevistas en el lugar y observaciones de actividades diarias y especiales. Esto reveló el contexto económico y social del lugar al igual que su relación con lugares de poder preestablecidos. Se muestra que el Homomonumento es un sitio importante de referencia para la ciudadanía sexual, donde nuevas oportunidades para disidentes sexuales deben de ser creadas.

## Abstract

This article examines how sexual *dissidents* claim public space as a way to challenge hegemonic heterosexuality. This is achieved by analyzing literature of spaces, sexual citizenship, and the Homomonument in Amsterdam as well as taking into consideration data obtained from in situ interviews and observations of daily and special activities. This reveals the economic and social context of the place and its relationship with pre-established holders of power. The Homomonument is an important reference site for sexual citizenship where new opportunities for all sexual dissidents can be created.

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<sup>1</sup> Bachiller en Geografía, Universidad de Costa Rica. Agosto 2008 a agosto 2009: Universiteit Van Amsterdam. International School for Humanities and Social Sciences. Undergraduate Certificate Programme. Correo electrónico: carlosalvarez@amnet.cr. El autor desea agradecer a Mattias Duyves (Universiteit Van Amsterdam) por la colaboración brindada.

## Palabras clave

Homomonumento de Amsterdam, Ciudadanía Sexual, Espacio Público, Monumentos Gay.

## Keywords

Homomonument, Amsterdam, Sexual Citizenship, Public Space, Gay Monuments

## Resumo

Este artigo examina a demanda do espaço público por *dissidentes sexuais* como uma forma de desafiar a heterossexualidade hegemônica. Isto foi alcançado através da revisão da literatura relevante a espaços e cidadania sexual e o Homomonumento de Amsterdam, assim como informações obtidas por entrevistas presenciais e observações de atividades diárias e especiais. Isto revelou o contexto econômico e social do lugar e a sua relação com lugares de poder pré-estabelecidos. É demonstrado que o Homomonumento é um importante lugar de referência para a cidadania sexual, onde novas oportunidades para dissidentes sexuais devem ser criadas.

## Palavras-chave

Homomonumento de Amsterdam, Cidadania Sexual, Espaço Público, Monumentos Gay

## Introduction

Space can be defined and claimed by different actors who can use it to perform and proclaim identities. Some have perceived and understood the claim of public space by sexual dissidents as basic for the struggle and achievement of civil rights<sup>2</sup>. Obtaining and administering space as a way to develop new ways of promoting tolerance and acceptance of queerness has become a new standard in the quest for equal opportunities. In addition,

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2 Rubin Gayle. 'Thinking sex: notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality', in Vance, Carole (ed.) *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. London: Pandora. 1989. And Kitchin, Rob. "Sexing the city: the sexual production of non-heterosexual space in Belfast, Manchester and San Francisco". *City*, Vol 6, Issue 2, pp. 205-218. 2002. I adapt this term from its use by Kitchin who uses it to refer to "individuals who do not perform as 'good' heterosexuals, for example, gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and heterosexuals who practice 'deviant' sexual acts". I also include individuals who challenge their immediate spaces by bonding or breaking normative gender rules.

sites of transgression have been established as new places for marketing strategies and for the *commodification* of exclusions

Angela Jones combines queer theory and the use of space into *queer heterotopias* that are defined as real spaces for the transgressive “other”. She draws from the work of Michel Foucault, arguing that queer heterotopias are places where individuals can challenge the heteronormative regime and are “free” to perform their gender and sexuality without fear of being labeled, marginalized, or punished<sup>3</sup>. Queer relates to unspecified social practices, as opposed to heteronormative social practices, that challenge the hegemonic discourses on sex, gender, sexuality. To perform queer through everyday practice means to constantly behave in ways, whether through sexual practice or aesthetically transforming one’s body, that defy the conventional sex/gender system<sup>4</sup>.

A practical and concrete way to understand the effects of acquiring public space with the intention to challenge heteronormativity is to study a public monument, one that was specifically designed to transgress traditional values and in which visibility and interactions are constantly present.

The Homomonument in Amsterdam<sup>5</sup> is notoriously known as a site of public sexual dissidence listed in articles, books, tourist guides, and maps. Placed on a public square, its limits are well defined. Nonetheless, as I will argue, these limits are fluid and either constrict the monument within visible boundaries, or go beyond its physical placement to include new elements and actors.

Even if “the social organization of sexual culture and the use of space frequently overlap”<sup>6</sup> there is a lack of studies of public space and their relationship with the concept of sexual citizenship. In this article, I will therefore answer the following: Is claiming and acquiring public space by sexual dissidents an effective way to challenge hegemonic heterosexuality? More specifically, in what way does Amsterdam’s Homomonument fulfill this challenge? In order to answer both questions and to achieve a better understanding of the past and present role of the Homomonument, I will start by performing an analysis of literature on sexual citizenship, on the use of space, and on the monument itself. I will furthermore draw conclusions from a case study on the Homomonument by looking at data from in situ interviews and observations.

3 Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* ( A. Sheridan, Trans) New York: Vintage. 1977. And *Idem*. “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* Vol 16. Spring, pp. 22-27.1986. Jones, Angela. “Queer Heterotopias: Homonormativity and the Future of Queerness”. *Interalia* 4, p. 1, 2009.

4 Jones, Angela, *Op.cit.*, pp. 1-2,

5 Karin Daan, Homomonument, 1987, Amsterdam. (fig. 1).

6 Duyves, Mattias. “Framing Preferences, Framing Differences: Inventing Amsterdam as a Gay Capital”. In: Parker, Richard. Gagnon, John. (comps) . *Conceiving Sexuality, Approaches to sex Research in a Postmodern World*. 1995. p. 52.

## Spaces of Sexual Citizenship

The concept of social spatialization designates the “ongoing social construction of the spatial, which is a formation of both discursive and non-discursive elements, practices and processes at the level of the social imaginary (collective mythologies, presuppositions) as well as interventions in the landscape (for example, the built environment)”.<sup>7</sup> Social spatialization can be used as a tool to fully understand the performance of sexuality and its processes. Duyves, for example, uses the concept to describe Amsterdam as a gay capital according to different manifestations of urban gay life.

The sociologist Ruth Lister notes that citizenship goes far beyond the body and sexuality. “The sexual pertains to the ‘private’ sphere, whereas citizenship is quintessentially of the ‘public’ sphere. The idea of ‘sexual citizenship’ thus defies and disrupts the public-private divide, which has traditionally underpinned citizenship”.<sup>8</sup> Defined by the same author, the concept itself has two clear meanings, one that induces the concept of citizenship to include

“the body, its possibilities, needs and pleasures” and a second one that introduces sexuality as a factor “in the allocation of the rights (and to a lesser extent, responsibilities) associated with citizenship”.<sup>9</sup>

The spaces of sexual citizenship are “locations where a citizenship, constituted through the citizen’s sexuality, whether autonomously or by some regulatory regime, can be played out”.<sup>10</sup> Boundaries can limit and contain these locations and bind them to specific private and public spaces. The performance of queer gender and sexuality in public spaces can furthermore create tension and rejection and can leave the public-private dichotomy metastable, in constant change without plunging it into crisis, by affecting heteronormativity.

As an example of how sexual spaces are limited, the social geographer David Bell notes how gay male citizenship can be mapped in specific and exclusive territories, and how, within a late-capitalist context, spaces of sexual citizenship are constituted through consumption.<sup>11</sup> For instance, male gay citizenship can be articulated through the consumer market. Examples of these are gay tourism, gay-oriented services, and leisure places that partly define what sexual citizenship is. On the other hand, the

7 Shields, Rob. *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*, Routledge, London, 1991 in Duyves, Mattias. *Framing Preferences, Framing Differences: Inventing Amsterdam as a Gay Capital*. Routledge, New York, 1995.

8 Lister, Ruth. “Sexual Citizenship”. In: Isin, Engin. Turner, Bryan (comps), *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*. 2002. pp. 191.

9 *Idem.*

10 Bell, David. “Pleasure and danger: the paradoxical spaces of sexual citizenship”, *Political Geography*, Vol. 14, Issue. 2, p. 139, 1995.

11 *Idem.*

use of consumer market as a tool to defend certain aspects of public performance of sexuality can bring about confrontations and promote public awareness. An example of this is the boycotts by the gay public on companies that fund homophobic institutions or organizations.

## Transgressing Hegemonic Heterosexuality

An emerging topic in social geography is the study of spaces that transgress established norms by challenging and defying official concepts of sexuality and gender. Phil Hubbard analyzes private sexual fantasies publicly displayed and defines them as powerful political tools against conventional norms. The places where this happens become politicized and are used by gay rights campaigns to establish a space for sexual transgression.<sup>12</sup> In comparing these places to queer heterotopias, we can see that they have similar functions; they bring needed spaces for the multiple expressions of sexualities. Nevertheless, as Angela Jones argues, many academics and activists use the concept of *queer* to further a political program, centered on gaining civil rights, therefore missing its utility for individual and human growth. They are working against the term's original power<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Hubbard, Phil. "Sex Zones: Intimacy, Citizenship and Public Space". *Sexualities*, Vol. 4, Num. 1. p.12, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Jones, Angela, *Op.cit.*, p. 3,

Normalization, and encouragement, of the idealized *nuclear family* establishes two kinds of sexual acts: one good side, related to complexity and reciprocity, and one associated with repulsive and deviant notions.<sup>14</sup> In this way, other heterosexualities can be prevented from being accepted, thus contributing to the terminology of sexual dissidence. Hennessy argues that visibility can become a tool in empowering and legitimating minorities, thereby achieving civil rights or protecting previous accomplishments.<sup>15</sup> By doing so, new referents for more political fights can be established with more safe spaces for emancipation. Innovative aspirations and relations can be achieved, and therefore more opportunities for the well-being of sexual dissidents are possible.

The efforts by sexual dissidents in creating new civic spaces are either directed at the use of space in an equal and unrestricted way, or at establishing material transgression symbols that will facilitate the former. Public exhibition of transgressive sexualities begins either by individuals, by openly proclaiming their 'deviant' sexuality within their immediate spaces or by the organization of civil society into special interest groups. Hence, claiming spaces can be highly politicized.

<sup>14</sup> Hubbard, Phil, *Op.cit.*, p.8.

<sup>15</sup> Hennessy, Rosemary. "Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture". *Cultural Critique*, 29, Winter, 1994-1995. pp. 31. 1994.

## Monuments in Public Spaces

Johnson emphasizes the great attention paid by scholars to the political and cultural meaning of public monuments. Their spatiality is inherent to the symbolism they come to represent, which is created in the junction between a physical location and public interpretation.<sup>16</sup> These “Lieux de mémoire” -sites of memory- become the landmarks of a remembered geography and history, and they form the intersection between official and vernacular cultures.<sup>17</sup> In order to be effective as sites of remembrance or social encounters, both elements (monument and culture) must be present and achieve a balance in order to avoid going unnoticed. Remembrance provides opportunities for rituals, thus injecting life and meaning to monuments.

Burk stresses the importance of materiality in social relations. Space can represent and validate ideas, actions and groups. The ideals of a group need to consolidate themselves in spatial manifestation or risk being an abstraction or fantasy.<sup>18</sup> This shows that establishing and acquiring space also means claiming

it over its former function. Fights to obtain space shift between political and economical realms, as explained below. Challenging these pre-established orders can be achieved by creating monuments that are generally there to stay.

The placement of monuments in public space can be analyzed by identifying the proximity of power. Space for monuments, in this sense, can be quantified by its closeness to places of political importance. This is achieved by measuring distances to centers of power or to other previously defined centers of remembrance or symbolism.

## Creating Homonormativities

The right to acquire and manage space can also be analyzed through concepts of economic geography. Hubbard argues that the organization of space has served to give a natural meaning to heterosexuality, by the use of economical activities related to work, leisure, and consumption.<sup>19</sup> A huge amount of resources and time is daily invested in reaffirming hegemonic heterosexuality, by placing it as a mandatory requisite to play a part in the consumerist society.

Studies about the use of space show the large array of forms of queer consumption, and the possibilities of use by different actors at private and

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16 Johnson, Nuala. “Mapping monuments: the shaping of public space and cultural identities”. *Visual Communication*, Vol 1, Num. 3, pp. 293-298, 2002.

17 Johnson, Op. cit., p. 294.

18 Burk, A.L. “Private griefs, public spaces”. *Political Geography*, 22, 3. pp. 317-320, 2003.

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19 Hubbard, Op cit. p. 54

public levels. Bell and Binnie establish three main categories of study when analyzing queer populations and their use of space in cities: queer tourism, spatial formations of sexual practice, and gentrification. Another focus is the 'counterpublic' sexualized space such as cruising grounds and red-light districts.<sup>20</sup> The argument behind these categories continues to be the relation between sexual politics and the politics of space.

Sexual dissident identities have sparked new market niches, in part because of their diversity. Rushbrook explains how the traditional rejection by the state facilitated gentrification of central-city neighborhoods by sexual minorities. Opportunistic local governments perceived them as solid enough to develop marketing, and started acknowledging them as "ethnic spaces". This led to private entrepreneurship that then took over profits and prices. "Authentic" other or others in consumable forms were shown, and notably, in spaces that are thought as markers of cosmopolitanism, diversity and tolerance. Such places can be exemplified by the well known gay streets and districts throughout the western world. "...[Q]ueer and ethnic spaces are offered as equivalent venues for consumption at a cosmopolitan buffet in a manner that erases their individual histories and functions, as well as the

differential mobilities of the bodies that inhabit them".<sup>21</sup>

Paradoxically, new forms of exclusions can be produced within these new commodified areas. Duggan defines the concept of homonormativity, one that excludes 'undesirable' forms of sexual expression and that reduces the public manifestation to consumption spaces and gentrified neighborhoods, rejecting political or cultural mobilization.<sup>22</sup> Bell and Binnie argue that the production of new 'gay' villages and spaces fits well in the concept of homonormativity as well as in the entrepreneurial governance agenda. Therefore, the claim of public spaces by sexual dissidents can create and maintain exclusions based on gender, ethnic group and resource accessibility.

## A Homomonument as a Sign of Struggle and Remembrance

Thijs Bartels in *Dancing on the Homomonument* explains how the Homomonument in Amsterdam was designed to fulfill two functions related to the the persecution of homosexuals during the Second World War: as a place of contemplation and of celebration. The commemoration of the homosexual victims of the War

<sup>20</sup> Bell, David; Binnie, Jon. "Authenticating Queer Space: Citizenship, Urbanism and Governance". *Urban Studies*, Vol 41, Num 9, p. 1810, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Rushbrook, Dereka. "Cities, queer space, and the cosmopolitan tourist". *GLQ: a journal of lesbian and gay studies*. Vol 8, Num 1-2. pp.188. 2002.

<sup>22</sup> Bell, Binnie, Op.cit., p. 1811.

is translated into a public monument that shows the presence of gay men and lesbian women. Debates on its design led to the desire of having a *living monument*, one that would not stand alone, “lie in state” and go unnoticed by the public. Even though the care and maintenance of the Homomonument is done by the Municipality of Amsterdam, celebrations and parties held throughout the year are organized by local gay and lesbian associations.<sup>23</sup>

*Dancing on the Homomonument* gives an account of the process that led to its creation. The original reason behind the creation of a homomonument was to pay tribute to and commemorate the homosexual victims of the Nazi concentration camps. Gay Liberation in the Netherlands during the 70s facilitated political approval of the initiative and the original idea was upheld throughout the process of funding and completion of the project. Later, the idea of remembering and commemorating not only men but also women who are or have been subject of oppression and discrimination based on their sexual orientation surfaced and was adopted as the official objective together with celebration and visibilization of the gay and lesbian community. Although the process of gathering funds to build it was a long and tedious one, the Monument was officially unveiled in September 1987.



Homomonument, looking up the stairs from the point of the triangle situated in the canal Keizersgracht. Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Source: Carlos Álvarez, 2009

Bartels explains that homosexual men in Nazi concentration camps were obliged to wear a pink triangle that distinguished them from the rest of the prisoners, which could be combined with other forms and colors to denote, for example, a Jewish homosexual. This demarcation led to the pink triangle as a sign of gay pride, and gave Karin Daan the basic design of the Homomonument.<sup>24</sup> Three

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Mattias Duyves, March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010. There are recent disagreements on the scale of homophobic persecution in the Netherlands under the years of German occupation. However, within months of occupation a stricter law (article 81/1940) against all male homosexual behavior was introduced on July 31, 1940, worsening their situation. Gays and lesbians in the Netherlands were not forced to wear a pink triangle nor have they been deported categorically and systematically to German concentration camps due to sexual orientation despite such beliefs. The persecution of Dutch gays and lesbians under the occupation took different forms of repression. Duyves refers to his unpublished article for the Dutch Auschwitz Bulletin and to public sources: Schuyf 2003; Müller 2005; Müller en Schuyf 2006

<sup>23</sup> Bartels, Thijs. *Dancing on the Homomonument*. First edition, Schroer Books, Amsterdam. 2003.



smaller triangles that refer to past, present and future create a larger one, bound by pink tiles, each side 36 meters long. Each triangle points towards different prominent instances. Pointing towards Anne Frank House, the past triangle is inscripted with a quote from a poem by Jacob Israël de Haan (1881 - 1924) who was the first Dutch Jewish writer to publish openly gay prose and poetry under his own name. The phrase “Such an endless desire for friendship” on this triangle joins both the silence and extermination suffered by Jewish and gay communities and the hidden relationships during the war. The other two triangles represent the present and the future, pointing respectively towards Dam Square and the COC, a Dutch gay rights organization.<sup>25</sup> These meanings, however, were not part of Daan’s design. The directions in which the monument points made the organizers believe that the architect had them in mind.

Reed refers to the design as “not shy about alluding to oppression. The placement of the elements at some distance from each other - one in the canal, one in the pavement of the city square, the third raised

like a dais makes the whole sculpture hover on the border of invisibility”. Laid on the ground, the design was chosen by the Homomonument Foundation “creating a zone not immediately recognizable but then suddenly overwhelming in its scale... the Homomonument disappears as art in order to emerge as the embodiment of a community”.<sup>26</sup> The Homomonument was rebuilt in 2003 after the initial structure began to show signs of weakening and deterioration.

## Case Study

A public monument serves its public by remembering particular events or individuals linked to its location. In this sense, it stimulates analysis of history. The Amsterdam Homomonument, as mentioned in the introduction, provides an opportunity to check the concepts of spaces, sexual citizenship, and the new homonormativity in a substantial and controlled way. Under the terms and concepts in which it was created, it does not only offer an opportunity to understand particular events related to Dutch history but also promotes interaction between diverse visitors. The Homomonument is not standing still does not ‘lie in state’; its borders interact and complement its surrounding elements.

My case study took into consideration ten in situ interviews with visitors

<sup>25</sup> COC Nederland. COC Netherlands, [online] [Amsterdam, The Netherlands], 2010, [http://www.coc.nl/dopage.pl?thema=any&pagina=algemeen&algemeen\\_id=274](http://www.coc.nl/dopage.pl?thema=any&pagina=algemeen&algemeen_id=274). [Request date: 27 March 2010] C.O.C. meant Cultuur en Ontspannings-Centrum, or Centre for Culture and Leisure, a reminder of the pseudonym the organisation initially adopted after its foundation in 1946. COC is the oldest Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender organisation in the world.

<sup>26</sup> Reed, Christopher. “Imminent Domain: Queer Space in the Built Environment”. *Art Journal*, Vol 55, Num 4, p. 65, 1996.

to the Homomonument, performed in the course of an afternoon, as well as with different persons directly related to its functioning and creation. Workers from the Pink Point of Presence were also interviewed. The conducted interviews obtained information about general aspects of the Homomonument and the way that its visitors perceived it. These were conducted through short questions in English to ten different groups of visitors, selected randomly, in two consecutive days in May, 2009.

The interviews were designed to be anonymous and short in order to allow visitors and especially tourists to feel comfortable while answering them. Originally intended to be aimed towards individuals in a more private way, the interview was modified to include whole groups of visitors. While this modification allowed a better interaction with the visitors, it also limited the acquiring of personal perceptions of the Homomonument. Larger groups were less likely to answer, whereas small groups, such as couples or three-person-tourist groups, were more likely to cooperate.

Finally, visits were conducted to the annual open air public parties held on Queen's Day, the most famous national Dutch holiday on April 30<sup>th</sup>, on Liberation Day, a celebration of the end of the occupation by Nazi forces on May 5<sup>th</sup>, and at the Remembrance of the Dead celebration on May 4<sup>th</sup>, all three in 2009. Queen's Day and Liberation Day draw a mixed gay, lesbian and straight crowd of 1000 to 3000

visitors who come to dance and have a good time. May 4<sup>th</sup> draws hundreds of older and younger attendants, officials as well as ordinary people, who commemorate, partly in silence, the gay and lesbian victims of repression and persecution during and after the war, and for victims around the world. The following is an examination of the data obtained in the process.

## Economic Context

Situated in the junction of Rozengracht, a street with important businesses in the area of Jordaan, and Keizersgracht, one of Amsterdam's famous canals, the Westermarkt (West Square) is a highly dynamic zone in the middle of the historical center of Amsterdam. Its vicinity to previously established sites of consumption, such as the landmark church Westerkerk and the Anne Frank's House, awards the area with an enormous potential for economical activities mostly related to tourism. Westermarkt was not a random choice. The Homomonument Foundation's suitable placement of the Monument shows its advanced political capital within the local government. The local chapter of the national gay rights organization COC, involved in the organization of May 4<sup>th</sup> events on the Monument, achieved the naming of the adjacent bridge after the Monument's founder, Niek Engelschman. Despite reports of invisibility, gay groups have successfully claimed the spaces next to the Homomonument. Its physical borders are not static but are blurred and have expanded.

The Westerkerk is considered a substantial part of the city's imagery. The painter Rembrandt was, for example, buried here in 1669 and members of the Dutch Royal House are married here, creating a highly politicized space. From this perspective, the Homomonument finds itself associated to a center of power. Although Westerkerk was not officially opposed to the placement of the Homomonument and its present location, divisions among its internal authorities have prevented the church from cooperating with local gay organizations to create joint activities for the public.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, the closeness to the Anne Frank House creates flows of people, especially foreigners, who use the Homomonument as a transit route. The fact that this is a notorious spot for tourism is clearly mirrored in the use of the place by Taxi drivers as a base. Several souvenir stores are present, one of them being the Pink Point of Presence.

As described above, the area shows a big potential for transgression and the establishment of new rituals have the potential to facilitate an increase in visitors. A public monument in the space described above would obtain visibility because of its association to previously established powers, such as the Westerkerk.

## Uses of the Homomonument

Since visibility and flows of people characterize the environment of the monument, the ultimate strategy is using the monument itself as an instrument for the rituals. The raised triangle serves as a stage for speeches, while the lowered one acts as a seating location. Both of them boost interaction. As a clear example, the 4<sup>th</sup> of May wreaths placed close to the tip of the lowered triangle in remembrance of the deceased are noticeable, particularly because tourist guides finish their free tours on the stairs of the lower triangle. Facts about the Homomonument are spoken at this point by the tour guides, who clearly place themselves in favor of the already conquered civil rights such as gay marriage.

As a place of relative quietness right next to a bustling street, the Monument serves as a resting place with a fine view towards Keizersgracht. Groups of people are usually seen sitting on the lower triangle's stairs, as well as on the raised triangle and the benches nearby. Information plaques are present. Nevertheless, the appreciation of the Homomonument could be complemented with additional background information on its short history in service of a living past and a living present. Although quite visible, yet discreet, the main plaque is only written in three languages, whereas the second plaque with information cannot be easily appreciated and is only written in English and Dutch.

<sup>27</sup> Duyves, Mattias. (2010, March 20). Skype interview.

This is inconvenient, considering the vast array of tourists that visit the area each day.

Several celebrations are held each year since 1992. The place validates its presence and its use through a calendar of formal and informal events. On Queen's Day and Liberation Day big parties are held with different kinds of visitors who gather to dance, watch street theatre and drink beer. Young and adult men and women gather in celebration. In 2009 the parties were no longer organized by gay rights organizations but by a private company. An updated format took over, with food and drink shacks right next to a professional stage with a DJ. There were family entertainment in the afternoon and outdoor dancing from the early evening till midnight. Although this might inject diversity and dynamism to the traditional celebrations since 1992, there was a lack of resources which was reflected on the dependency in selling beer to cover expenses. Tampered down by the weather, Liberation Day 2009 was not as flamboyant or crowded as Queen's Day 2009, however, families with their children were present, an atypical element that is not often present in other manifestations of sexual dissidence in other countries.

Other examples of public activities are: the Transgender Olympics on the opening night of the annual Gay Canal Parade in the first weekend of August, photo exhibitions, a transgressive kiss day, and a focal point for the Gay Parade in August. On Sunday June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the Monument served as rally-

ing point for a demonstration against homophobic violence, organized and communicated by Facebook users. This successful event drew a crowd of thousand attendants, including the influential Member of Parliament Ahmed Marcouch and the vice mayor of Amsterdam Lodewijk Asscher. The event marks the discovery and use of the Homomonument by the Facebook-generation. On top of the use of the Homomonument for collective experiences that connects the community with the city and the nation, individuals use the Homomonument for commemorating private moments. They use it in celebration of a same-sex marriage or even 100 days of friendship, in commemoration of an aids-burial, or simply a photo opportunity for a couple of happy tourists stating "we were there". TV journalists use the Homomonument as a site for gay and lesbian related news, and educators training new immigrants in Dutch society visit the monument with their pupils. A series of activities is thus localized at the Homomonument. It is presented in different ways that attract different segments of the local population and tourists.



Pink point of Presence, situated between Rozenstraat (business street) and the raised triangle. Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Source: Carlos Álvarez, 2009

## Pink Point of Presence

There exists a daily symbiotic relationship between the Homomonument and the Pink Point of Presence. While workers and volunteers take care of the Pink Point, the monument in return attracts and sends customers. Using terminology to name it, conjugating gay imaginary and business, the Pink Point was created in 1996 as an outdoor information kiosk for the expected flux of global visitors at the Amsterdam Gay Games in 1998. It started as a mobile structure, a former ice cream car that distributed information, fliers, gay health related products, journals, and background articles and, over the years, turned into a stable and permanent structure. As another clear colonization of space by gay groups, the Pink Point today is used as a site for the distribution of magazines, post-cards and the selling of memorabilia. The most notable are granite fragments of the old Homomonument structure that was completed in 1987. The fact that very little or no profit came from selling books about the history of the Homomonument is very notable. The staff did not develop or market attractive products with background information for tourists or school kids on the past and presence of gay and lesbian history, diversity and citizenship. The interview with the Pink Point of Presence sellers revealed that the Pink Point has not ordered new stacks of Bartel's book, the only recent account of the Monument, in years.

## Visitors

As stated before, the conducted interviews obtained information about how the visitors in the Homomonument perceive it. The results showed how little people knew about the origins, uses and objectives of the Homomonument. Four out of ten groups of respondents previously knew the existence of it by the use of tourist guides or media articles. The monument seems therefore to be widely advertised. Nevertheless, only two groups had an interest in visiting it, only three were interested in knowing more about it, going online or buying books, and none had formerly visited any other public monuments related to homosexuality. Four groups were aware of the celebrations but none had planned or were planning to attend any of them, and only three had been or were planning to visit the Pink Point of Presence.

As for the origins of the persons interviewed, a lesbian local couple was the only native resident example. This reflects the overwhelming touristy character that is present on a daily basis at the Homomonument, contrasted with a lack of presence by locals who do not choose the place as a leisure option except when participating in parties and celebrations.

Among the general impressions given by each group, an impression of the Homomonument as being simple with a lack of visibility was constant, "*We were expecting a bigger thing, like a statue*". Respondents

described difficulties in finding the Monument, and how they did not perceive a clear connection to homosexuality before reading the plaques. The deficiency of clear information was another complaint. The answers show a huge gap in the distribution of information and promotion of the place. This also reinforces the fact that in each group of the free tours, the guides asked if somebody knew why the pink triangle was chosen as the form of the Homomonument. In three consecutive cases, none of the attendants knew the answer.

As mentioned above, taxi cabs use the street that runs through the Homomonument as a base. This might prevent visitors from appreciating the wholeness of the monument. On the other hand, it acts as a lure together with the trees and light poles. This in fact builds upon the idea of a metaphorical appreciation of homosexuals and their lack of visibility and distraction caused by other elements in defined times and spaces.

In spite of the lack of knowledge and information, all groups presented positive attitudes towards the Monument and towards being interviewed about it, *“How good it is for gays to have a place for themselves”*.

## Remembrance of the Dead

Remembrance of the Dead, May 4<sup>th</sup>, is a Dutch national holiday dedicated to those who lost their lives in war. A main national event is held at Dam, the main square of Amsterdam.

All over Amsterdam, more than 100 smaller neighborhood events are held that include the laying of flowers and 2 minutes silence at 8PM. At the Homomonument, this day has been, since its unveiling, a day to honor the homosexuals who died in the Second World War. Members of the local government and gay and lesbian groups are present, including officials from the Amsterdam municipal staff, the vice mayor, eldersmen, the president of the members of the city council, deputations of political parties, the police, the cleaning department, the fire brigade and members of the Dutch army in full fig. Preceded by a group of people coming from the COC-headquarters in the adjacent Rozenstraat with wreaths to be laid on the lower triangle, the ceremony started with acts of presentation by the military and the police. In a very strict ceremony, with timings to match the ones in Dam Square, two minutes of silence are observed to honor the deceased. Afterwards, speeches and the laying of wreaths by other officials and attending citizens follow.

In a ceremony with military presentation that falls back on concepts of tradition and nationalism, notions of deep masculinity, embedded with patriotic honor, contrast with Queen's Day and Liberation Day. In relation to age, the crowd had shifted from being diverse to consist mostly of people aged 35 and up. In contrast to the celebration at Dam Square, the event at the Homomonument is only attended by local and provincial representatives and not national representatives.



A moment of silence during the Remembrance of the Dead celebration (May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009), with the presence of members of civil society and the government. Homomonument, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Source: Carlos Alvarez, 2009

Children from homoparental families were among the people who walked from COC towards the monument to lay flowers. Furthermore, the gender-bending community was represented by *Fabiola*, who wore a flamboyant and flashy costume. Wreaths were laid as well by gay groups on behalf of the immigrant communities, whose absence was noticeable.

Framed at a local level, the celebrations at the Homomonument occupy an important place in local politics. While being differently focused, each of them shows symbols of transgression and rebellion against pre established norms. Nevertheless,

issues about public and private space also come across gender, ethnicity, and representation. The commodification of exclusions is reflected on the absence of gender bending individuals, who might choose to assist *only* to specially designed events such as the Drag Queen Olympics later on in the year. Also, there was a clear absence of immigrants in the festivities, as different cultural values clash and might prevent them from publicly expressing their sexual preferences. However, as soon as ethnic music was performed, individual immigrants were observed hanging around the dance floor unnoticed as if they are not there. Here, the gay and lesbian crowd is not the fly on the wall, but the tables are turned and others are.

Physical and social boundaries shift and accept diverse crowds, quite different in composition according to the occasion. The Homomonument has therefore achieved its mission of acknowledging and celebrating diversity within a framework of a calendar that distributes visibility and transgression to different groups of sexual dissidents in defined days of the year. Yet, celebrations and parties can make different people come together and stimulate recognition of differences, an essential tool in building a space for sexual citizenship.

## Final conclusions

The act of claiming and occupying public spaces by sexual dissidents has the potential to challenge fixed rules and create new opportunities to develop its users' own sexual citizen-

ship. The concept of social spatialization can be used to describe how the Homomonument has constructed a new set of social imaginary, one based on form, history, and place together with acts by sexual dissidents. The Homomonument can thus be classified as a space for queer heterotopias.

As the relationship between the surrounding institutions and the Homomonument flows and changes, pre-established civic spaces or holders of power can be used to claim the use of other public spaces in a less restricted way and grant more visibility. Since the organization of civil society into interest groups makes the claim of space easier, the process can be highly politicized. However, boundaries can change or expand, and visible expressions of diversity can be seen elsewhere and not exclusively in queer-identified spaces. Bringing sexual expression to the public realm is a powerful tool that has been used for political struggle, and visibility is essential in this process.

There is a double character in public monuments: material experiences and the social symbolism they possess. The Homomonument in Amsterdam has proved to be an exceptional piece of architecture, one that takes a privileged place among public monuments related to sexuality in the western world<sup>28</sup>. It leaves the public-

private dichotomy metastable by promoting the act of showing sexual diversity and sexual citizenship. Diversity proves not to be enough due to the epiphenomenon that diversity, sometimes, really divides. This call upon diversity and citizenship is achieved by the monument's form and design and by the social activities that take place in it. By doing this, the Homomonument effectively sets up conditions to give opportunities to sexual dissidents to achieve well-being at different levels.

The relationship with the Westerkerk and other institutions show that a great amount of political capital has been achieved. This can be effectively used to establish security and continuity to the public visibility of the diversity of sexuality. Therefore, the argument that space can represent and validate ideas and efforts is proven by the great political capital that the Homomonument has gained since its construction.

The space claimed *by* the Homomonument has already been modified and cannot continue being measured by its closeness to other places of political importance; it has already begun to emanate power by being a defined center of remembrance and symbolism. Gay groups started to expand the already claimed territory by claiming new spaces in the surroundings, such as the adjacent bridge and the Pink Point of Presence.

The exclusions that it creates can be compared and contrasted to the

**28** See Matt & Andrej Koymasky - Memorial Hall – Gay Holocaust, [online], <http://andrejkoymasky.com/mem/holocaust/ho08.html>[Request date: 27 March 2010]



ones that the new homonormativity reflects. It is arguable that some of these processes of exclusion can be seen, in the case of the Homomonument, in the profits generated by different actors, such as the Pink Point and its lack of sales of books related to the Homomonument itself, the new organization of the parties and the innovative stages and music, and the participation, or lack thereof, at the Remembrance of the Dead celebration. All of these issues are related to factors such as education and economic expectations.

Sexual dissidents have already opened new spaces of interaction that contrast with normative gender rules, such as the Drag Queen Olympics and the first Facebook-related demonstration that took place. A clear example present in the observation was *Fabiola* and her eye catching performance during Remembrance of the Dead. Nevertheless, new activities should be continuously created and new opportunities of interaction for immigrants must be incorporated.

On daily interaction, the interviews showed that the area becomes a path for tourists and that locals are estranged. Activities by local groups could bring back public attention to the Homomonument and promote the use of this space for more diverse purposes. The contrast to the intensive educational use of the Anne Frank House 50 meters further away is striking. The Homomonument is so far not structurally included in the daily school tours in Amsterdam.

Also, a lack of information for tourists at every level is clear. New plaques, with comprehensible texts in different languages, should substitute the present ones.

The impressions of a general lack of visibility can be understood as part of each visitor's interpretation. However, this should not be blamed just on the horizontal design of the Homomonument. The information available both on the plaques and in tourist guides must show the real character and historical meaning of the site and its components. Sign posts at inner-city cross-roads guiding visitors to must see destinations do not mention the Homomonument consequently. The positive general impressions about the place confirm that the idea of translation of remembrance into celebration, and the coexistence of both in the same place, brings approval in the general public.

The Remembrance of the Dead was, comparably with the rest of the aspects celebrated, the 'least transgressive' celebration; its drawing on patriarchal and traditional concepts proved to be a reflection of the *normal* one at Dam Square. Even if the Homomonument is contrasting to its surroundings, this celebration and its annually growing numbers of attendants points out how the monument can easily fit into tradition by changing the context of the celebrations held in it.

In the future, celebrations for *all* sexual dissidents should be per-

formed to meet the challenges that defying hegemonic heterosexuality brings. Ethnic and other factors should be taken into consideration to expand the mechanics that facilitates new opportunities for a sexual citizenship that includes different people and backgrounds, limiting the effects that homonormativity brings.

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