

Cruising Eisenman's Holocaust Memorial

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Abstract: Profile pictures from gay dating sites of young men posing with the stelae of the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews in Europe* in Berlin have been subject to an art exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York and a tribute online blog. This paper unveils the meaning of these pictures on this particular site, in an effort to understand why these men chose to portray themselves at the Holocaust Memorial in order to cruise the digital sphere of gay dating websites. In three consecutive sections, the paper asserts that, on the one hand, the conversion of the Holocaust Memorial into a cruising scenario is facilitated by a design that – putting forward autonomy and abstraction – allows and even invites its constant resignification in terms of everyday practices. And, on the other hand, it posits that the images exhibited at the Jewish Museum can be interpreted as a performative memorial which reinscribes sexuality and gender into Holocaust narratives.¹

Keywords: Holocaust. Memorial. Monument. Berlin. Cruising. Everyday Life.

Introduction

On December 22, 2011, the exhibition *Composed: Identity, Politics, Sex* opened at the Jewish Museum of New York. Among the creations of other six artists, the show included the work *Stelen (Columns)*, 2007-2011, by Marc Adelman, a San Francisco-based artist. Although the exhibition was going to run until June 30, 2012,

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Adelman's piece was removed on May 7, 2012, due to hotly debated controversies (BENTON, 2012; KENNEDY, 2012; ADELMAN, 2012) around the appropriation of private images from online dating sites². His work comprises 150 appropriated profile pictures from gay dating sites, such as *GayRomeo* and *Grindr*, which depict young men posing with the stelae of the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews in Europe* in Berlin (from here on *Holocaust Memorial*). The exhibition at the Jewish Museum portrayed 50 of those profile pictures, individually framed, measuring 3.5 by 2.5 inches, and hung on a grid reminiscent of that of the Holocaust Memorial itself (ADELMAN, 2011)³. The sexual poses and flirtatious gazes of the depicted individuals contrast with the solemn and abstract Memorial designed by New York-based American architect Peter Eisenman. Provocative and insulting to some, these pictures redefine the meaning and interpretation of the Memorial. For some supporters it creates a new kind of commemoration (WILLIAMS, 2013), while for its critics it is an indecorous subversion (MILLS, 2013)⁴. This paper unveils the meaning of these pictures on this particular site, in an effort to understand why these men chose to portray themselves at the Holocaust Memorial in order to cruise the digital sphere of gay dating websites. Adelman's *Stelen (Columns)* has been subject to academic research before, focusing on the controversies around the appropriation and the social contract of the photographs (DAVIDOW, 2013). *Cruising Eisenman's Holocaust Memorial* develops from – and at the same time departs from – this well-debated standpoint, to inquire into the memorial space that is being queered through these images.

In three consecutive sections, the paper asserts that, on the one hand, the conversion of the Holocaust Memorial into a cruising scenario is facilitated by a design that – putting forward autonomy and abstraction – allows and even invites its constant resignification in terms of everyday practices. And, on the other hand, it posits that the images from *Stelen (Columns)* can be interpreted as a performative memorial, which reinscribes sexuality and gender into Holocaust narratives.

The first section explores Peter Eisenman's design for the Holocaust Memorial (2005), searching for the ideals and components that offer themselves as subjects for everyday life reinterpretation.

The second section analyzes the cruising phenomenon described by Adelman's work, contrasting it with the blog *Grindr Remembers* and interpreting it alongside two contemporary works of art: *Lest We Forget* (1998) by Glenn Ligon and *Mein Kampf* (1993-1994) by David Levinthal. Finally, the third section will address the *Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted Under the National Socialist Regime* (2008) designed by artists Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset. This memorial is analyzed as a material shape of the debates around the hierarchy of victims that the Holocaust Memorial promotes, and as a physical landmark of queer cruising space.

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Holocaust Memorial: a place for everyday life

The initiative of the Holocaust Memorial dates back to 1988, when two Germans, Lea Rosh, a journalist, and Eberhard Jäckel, a historian, lobbied to construct a memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe. Ten years after the initiative of the Memorial was first conceived – following two design competitions and the reestablishment of Berlin as the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany – on June 25, 1999, the German Parliament approved the construction of a Memorial to the Murdered Jews in Europe in the center of Berlin. The relevant resolution of the German Parliament stated that:

1.1. The Federal Republic of Germany will erect a monument to the murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin.

1.2 The memorial will:

- honor the murder victims,
- keep alive the memory of an unimaginable occurrence in German history and
- exhort all coming generations never to violate human rights again, to defend the democratic rule of law and the equality of all people before the law, and to resist all dictatorships and violent regimes.

1.3 The Memorial is to be a central place of remembrance and exhortation, together with the other places of memorials and institutions within and outside of Berlin. It cannot replace the authentic sites where the terror took place.

1.4 The Memorial will be erected in the site chosen in the middle of Berlin – the Ministry Gardens.

1.5 The Federal Republic of Germany remains obliged to honor the memory of the other victims of National Socialism in a dignified manner.

2. Peter Eisenman's design of a field of steles (Eisenman II) will be realized. This also includes a supplementary Information Center providing information on the victims honored and the authentic memorial sites [...] (GERMANY, 1999).

The project ran parallel in space and time to another memorial in Germany's capital: the *Topography of Terror*, situated on the Gestapo-Terrain, the headquarters of the central institutions of the National Socialist police and State security during the Third Reich. Only a few blocks apart, both sites were part of the National Socialist Government Quarter in Berlin. Unlike the Gestapo-Terrain, which housed the perpetrators, the 4.7-acre (1,9 hectare) site of the Holocaust memorial was indirectly implicated, as it had been the former site of the Ministerial Gardens, very close to the Reich's Chancellery and Hitler's bunker (YOUNG, 2002). During Berlin's division (1961-1989), the wall intentionally ran through the former National Socialist Government Quarter; the Gestapo-Terrain was on the west side, and the Holocaust Memorial Terrain was on the *Todesstreifen* or *death strip* at the foot of the Berlin Wall. Having been a no-man's land in the 80s and 90s, the site stands now in the middle of the New Berlin, an immense urban renewal project developed through the end of the 90s and the new millennium by the City of Berlin with the support of foreign investment (TILL, 2005). Its centrality in the new capital is key to understanding the multiple publics that use the Holocaust Memorial today: tourists, school children, skaters, couples, queers, and other Germans who have incorporated this place into their everyday life.

Peter Eisenman's and Richard Serra's design for the Holocaust Memorial was selected among the four finalist projects during the second invite-only competition held in 1997 and curated by a

five-member *Findungskommission*, which included the American scholar James E. Young (2002). The Eisenman & Serra design was chancellor Helmut Kohl's first choice, but in order to be selected, the team was asked to reduce the number and height of stelae in the original design and incorporate an Information Center (*Ort der Information*) at the underground level of the memorial. Richard Serra refused to modify his original design and withdrew from the competition, but Peter Eisenman decided to incorporate the chancellor's demands and went on to design the final version of the Memorial, the so-called *Eisenman II*. Construction started in 2002, and three years later, in 2005, the *Field of Erinnerung* (Field of Memory), as it was originally called, was inaugurated. The Memorial consists of an undulating field of 2,771 37.4 by 93.7-inch (95 by 238 cm) concrete pillars of varying heights, arranged along a rectangular grid with 37.4-inch corridors between the rows of pillars.

Figure 1: Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, 2015



Source: Valentina Rozas Krause

The field of stelae extends along the 4.7-acre site (1,9 hectare), leaving space for sidewalks, parking for tourist buses, and trees on each of the surrounding streets. The height of the pillars ranges from 0 to 118.1 inches (0 to 300 cm); thus, the Memorial introduces a nearly human scale to its monumental extension. The stelae can be at the ground level, knee-, waist-, shoulder-, or eye-height, providing a constant reference to the body. As the pillars grow and contract, the ground itself waves the visitors into the site. The overarching effect is a double topography – at the top of the stelae and at the ground level – surrounding the visitors as they go deeper into the Memorial. In Peter Eisenman's words: "Because of its subject, the serenity and silence perceived from the street are broken by an internal claustrophobic density that gives little relief as it envelops the visitor who enters the field" (EISENMAN; RAUTERBERG, 2005). Without entrance, exit, or signage, Eisenman's abstract and self-referenced design resists the disclosure of its meaning. On the contrary, its power relies in defying the "nostalgic kitsch" of Holocaust memorabilia (EISENMAN, 2005, p. 2), as Eisenman calls it, to embrace the uncertainty of the un-representable. He adds:

The experience of being present in presence, of being without the conventional markers of experience, of being potentially lost in space, of an un-material materiality: that is the memorial's uncertainty. When such a project can overcome its seeming diagrammatic abstraction, in its excess, in the excess of a reason gone mad, then such work becomes a warning, a Mahnmal, not to be judged on its meaning or its aesthetic but on the impossibility of its own success (EISENMAN; RAUTERBERG, 2005).

For Eisenman, the Memorial "[...] manifests its own ontology" (ÅHR, 2008, p. 284), symbolizes nothing, means nothing, and at the same time means everything. It is at once an oppressing order and a chaos defying Fascism's mania for utility and rationality.

The memorial lies in silence to be interpreted and signified by its users – Eisenman's escape from Adorno's dilemma: "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric".

In the memorial's silence in terms of the traditional ideas of images and meaning, it becomes political. Unlike other site-specific work that has no memorial or political program, it is the memorial's obdurate lack of obvious symbolism that makes its public claim to creating the sense of a dual time: one experienced in the present; the other, the possible remembrance of another experience of the past in the present (EISENMAN; RAUTERBERG, 2005).

The Memorial's silence becomes its most engaging feature; tour guides use the absence of meaning to engage in memory work with the visitors. After walking through the Field of Stelae the guides ask the visitors what they think the place means, and the answers vary: "It is like a city within a city"; "It is like a graveyard or a labyrinth"; "It is like the wall broke into pieces and dispersed"; "It is terrible" (DEKEL, 2009, p. 81). However, Eisenman was not trying to represent a graveyard, a maze, or any other symbol for Jewishness or the Holocaust. In his own words: he was not speaking the language of architecture but that of silence. Further, Eisenman states: "it is what Immanuel Kant calls the *Ding an sich*. It is a Thing; it is there" (apud ÅHR, 2008, p. 284, author's emphasis). For him, the Memorial is an exercise in formalism and the primacy of the material (Ibid., loc. cit.). Thus, in the architect's conception, the Memorial is activated by the experience of walking through and losing oneself in the Field of Stelae. This introspective experience is complemented by a more informative involvement, at the *Ort der Information*, which – as a complement to the Memorial – speaks in its silence.

Probably the most stimulated sense in this memorial experience is sight. It is all about the gaze, to see and be seen. The maze-like structure offers an ideal playground to hide and seek.

Figure 2: Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, 2015



Source: Valentina Rozas Krause

Although the long corridors of the grid offer a variable view of the street that serves as reference point, spontaneous encounters with other visitors coming from side corridors remind us of the unexpected, uncontrollable disorientation of a maze. Eisenman and one of the interviewed tour guides (ABUJATUM, 2014) agree that the space of the memorial has the ability to transport us to the unknown: it makes us feel foreign, “out of body... lost in space” (apud ÅHR, 2008, p. 285).

Visitors have accepted Eisenman's invitation to interpret, use, and subvert the Holocaust Memorial.

Figure 3: Everyday practices in the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, 2015



Source: Valentina Rozas Krause

Recognizing these practices of everyday life as part of the memorial's meaning, he states:

I continue to get letters from non-Jewish Germans, who have been to the field and have experienced everything from watching children play, to seeing kids have lunch, to people sitting on the stones, to people walking silently, to a certain sense of fear, to encounter somebody suddenly from behind a pillar. What has been so gratifying to me is the acceptance by the Germans of all those different things [...] (EISENMAN, 2005, p. 4).

However, what is not being mentioned in this account is how the rules of behavior of the Memorial are constantly being re-negotiated. The code of behavior states: "Visitors enter at their own risk at all times. Climbing onto or hopping across the stelae

is not permitted. Please refrain from noisy behavior, smoking and drinking alcohol.”⁵ Despite the warnings, visitors climbing on the stelae are a ubiquitous sight.

Figure 4: Visitors climbing on the stelae of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, 2015



Source: Valentina Rozas Krause

At night, people gather around the Memorial to drink and smoke. On other special occasions, the Holocaust Memorial has even become a meeting place for political and cultural rallies and a celebration site for the 2006 Soccer World Cup. Another rule prohibits picnicking on the stelae, but as Irit Dekel narrates: “There is an ongoing discussion among the workers about the behavior of visitors in the site, as a host told me: ‘It is okay to eat a sandwich, people get hungry, but not to have a picnic’” (2009, p. 78). These constant negotiations are possible because, as Eisenman emphasizes: “This

is not sacred ground” (ÅHR, 2008, p. 286). Unlike the Topography of Terror and all the other sites of “authentic” memory – where the crimes actually happened – the site of the Holocaust Memorial is inauthentic and secular, and thus can be interpreted and used for a multiplicity of quotidian functions. The everyday life activities that desecrate the memorial in the eyes of some critics constitute the Memorial’s active political work, testing the limits of today’s democratic and pluralistic German society.

Cruising the Holocaust Memorial: sexuality, play, and commemoration in public space

How do the photographs of gay men cruising the Holocaust Memorial fit into this landscape? Considering the Memorial’s unique approach to flexible meaning, secularity, and multiple functions such as cruising and queering, the Memorial is actually not a subversion; rather, it adds a new layer of meaning to an already complex place of uncertainties. Many of Eisenman’s objectives when designing the Holocaust Memorial coincide with contemporary definitions of queerness and queer space:

Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness’s domain (MUÑOZ, 2009, p. 1).

In short, no space is totally queer or completely unqueerable, but some spaces are queerer than others. The term I propose for queer space is *imminent*: rooted in the Latin *imminere*, to loom over or threaten, it means ready to take place. For both advocates and opponents, the notion of queerness is threatening indeed. More fundamentally, queer space is space in the process of, literally, taking place, of claiming territory (REED, 1996, p. 64, author’s emphasis).

In Reed's and Muñoz's terms, queerness and queer space are a potential ideality, an imminence, so we can affirm that in Eisenman's Memorial this potential is greater than in other places, especially compared to traditional monuments and memorials which tend to control and dictate modes of behavior and interpretation to their users.

A series of features of Eisenman's design make for an ideal queer space: firstly, the gaze structures the maze-like space, turning itself into an ideal hide-and-seek playground. As an alien place outside of space and time, the Memorial allows one to gaze into the past, the present, and the future. The only way to discover the memorial is to walk through it, and immerse oneself in this uncertain world; as melancholic *flâneurs* (REED, 1996, p. 66) we can question the failures of modernity and imagine collaborative utopias (MUÑOZ, 2009). Secondly, as stated before, the Holocaust Memorial is a space to be experienced; thus, memory is to be confronted through social performance, not upon the basis of a given set of norms and interpretations. Eisenman believes in the performativity of memory, which results in its constant creation. If we substitute memory for gender, to enter Judith Butler's realm, the Memorial can also be seen as a place to perform and subvert gender norms (BUTLER, 1999). Thirdly, the design for the Holocaust Memorial blurs the Habermasian lines between the public and private spheres (FRASER, 1990). Despite its imminent publicness, the Field of Stelae introduces private aspects into the public sphere. The narrow corridors do not allow big groups to walk through the Memorial; even more so, the undulating ground and multiple maze-like paths tend to isolate the individual spatially and mentally. The memorial work we are meant to do in the Field of Stelae is to a large extent individual; an experience that ought to change us after returning to the street surface. Collective memory is constructed in conversation with other visitors around the edges of the site or underneath the Memorial in the Information Center. The solitude experienced in the middle of the Field of Stelae is frightening for some, "A father told me that he was afraid of losing his children in the site. Benjamin, a host, told me: 'a wife lost her husband in the Stelenfeld, and the workers found him after an hour'" (DEKEL, 2009, p. 78), and liberating for others, as represented in Adelman's work.

Marc Adelman was not the only one to note this phenomenon, as the owners of the blog *Totem and Taboo: Grindr Remembers* proudly state (MOYLAN, 2013). Ariel Efraim Ashbel and Romm Lewkowicz, two young Israelis, have been collecting similar pictures since 2011, while the blog became viral in 2013. Their webpage declares in its mission statement:

In an age when ignorance is more prevalent than ever, Grindr, the latest most addictive gay obsession, has wowed its members in relentlessly promoting the memory of the holocaust. While the gay community is being under scrutiny for promoting hedonism and alienation, this tribute seems all the more compelling.

Totem and Taboo, our new blog, asks nothing more but to harness the vibrant blogosphere to Grindr users' innovative maneuvers to keep the memory alive, fresh and attractive. Now, you gals don't just stand and watch! Be the change you want to see in the world. We kindly urge you to join our team: Help us collecting pics of the spreading new trend.

The original blog was just called *Grindr Remembers*, but in the name of the second – and current – blog, Ashbel and Lewkowicz added a reference to Sigmund Freud's well-known collection of essays *Totem and Taboo* (1989). Although the reference is loose, and unexplored by the authors of the blog, it suggests the interpretation of the Holocaust Memorial as a totem and the manifestation of queer desire in a place of mourning as taboo. Although considering queering the Holocaust Memorial as taboo seems rather conservative and unproductive in this reading, it remains interesting to ruminate on Eisenman's or any other memorial as being or becoming a totem; standing for the sins we cannot face in everyday life. Especially this memorial, located in the center of the Nation of the perpetrators, dedicated to the murdered Jews of Europe, does not only exist as a reminder, but also stands there to send out a message of guilt and remorse. Yet, Eisenman tries to escape the totem by desacralizing the place, by making it about the living visitors instead of about the ghosts that haunt contemporary

Germany. Thus the title *Totem and Taboo* conveys more about the conservative biases of the authors of the blog, than about the actual place and phenomenon that is being named.

The photographs on *Grindr Remembers* are significantly different from the images Adelman exhibited in the Jewish Museum of New York⁶. The former are snapshots directly taken from online dating websites, and along with the photograph they show information such as “looking for”, a physical description, chat bubbles, and icons that familiarize us with the profile picture’s function in the digital sphere. This content is what makes some of them problematic and even explicitly racist, exposing ethnically exclusive dating preferences. Adelman on the other hand eliminates the dating site information and provides us with a “clean” photograph, successfully defamiliarizing the photographs of their racist content in order to address the juxtaposition of commemoration and desire. Ashbel and Lewkowicz do not try to explain the phenomenon; they merely expose it to the digital world. Adelman, on the contrary, argues that the images depict a form of commemoration of the queer lives lost to the HIV and AIDS epidemic, which was a topic present in the work of other artists in the overall exhibit *Composed: Identity, Politics, Sex* at the Jewish Museum. According to him:

I never viewed the images that comprise Stelen as irreverent as I think this would be reductive at best. There is a significant recent dialogue in queer studies about the predominantly unconscious ways in which the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s reverberates through contemporary queer life. Jewish lives and queer lives have been both informed as well as transformed by loss. It’s a central aspect to both cultures, and one that has greatly influenced my understanding of the images that comprise Stelen and their relationship to the cultural history of HIV and AIDS. To live a queer life is to live a life that is ineluctably haunted. Still here. Still queer. Perhaps still getting used to it. I posit the work in relationship to a constellation of issues around queerness and temporality – faith, memorialization, belonging, and illness (ADELMAN, 2012).

By associating the relationships with the HIV and AIDS epidemic, Adelman omits one of the most meaningful elements of commemoration portrayed by his work: the remembrance of the queer lives lost to the Nazi persecution. How the queer victims of the Nazi regime haunt this place will be further developed in the next section, in the analysis of the *Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted Under the National Socialist Regime*.

There are other dimensions to Adelman's images that deserve attention: on one level, how does the production of queer cruising images interplay with other visitors taking pictures in the Field of Stelae? And, on another level, how do the queer men's images dialogue with the six photographs of Jews in the Information Center's Foyer? The Holocaust Memorial has two levels of experience, above ground and underground. According to official figures (DEKEL, 2009) approximately 1/6 of the visitors to the Memorial visit the Information Center. Above ground, the production of profile pictures for gay dating websites is not an isolated phenomenon, as demonstrated by the ubiquitous presence of profile pictures with the Field of Stelae in the background on Internet media such as Instagram and Facebook. While the queer images subvert the Memorial by sexualizing it, the straight profile pictures destabilize the Memorial's meaning by transforming it into a "feel good" place. The images exhibited in *Grindr Remembers* were heavily criticized for their sexual content, in the words of author Jennifer Mills:

These predominantly white males have not forgotten because they are evil; they have forgotten because they have so much incentive to forget. That is privilege in action – the privilege of amnesia. When the world is a smorgasbord of casual hookups, the opportunities to forget are everywhere. How quick we are to accept them (MILLS, 2013).

Despite conservative criticisms, both kinds of images coexist as documents of the everyday life of the Holocaust Memorial: as quotidian acts, they are guarded inside a 4.7-acre (1,9 hectare) design meant to be appropriated. Not only does Eisenman's abstract non-sacred design allow for these appropriations; also, the pluralistic,

open, and democratic image that the German democracy wants to project to the world to redeem itself from being the Land of the Perpetrators contributes to this tolerance. Hence, in the general opinion, even sexual acts are accepted as part of the Memorial's everyday life, as revealed by this newspaper article published in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in May 2006, a year after the opening. It starts with a assertion: "Yes, at night loving couples bill and coo in the Stelenfeld, in the morning, children play there hide and seek, school classes gather for group photos and often people bring their lunch to the border of the memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe" (FEUILLTON, 2006 apud DEKEL, 2009, p. 77).

Under the Field of Stelae, the visitor encounters six staring faces upon entering the Information Center.

Figure 5: View of photographs in the Foyer of the Information Center of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, 2015



Source: Valentina Rozas Krause

Six Jews from different countries of Europe look into the camera before Nazism shattered their lives. These are not randomly selected images; they represent the museum's curatorial choice to represent human life rather than death (DEKEL, 2009). Looking into the camera with the Holocaust Memorial in the background, could not we consider these men's profile pictures a kind of memorial celebrating queer life rather than persecution, then and now? If the Holocaust Memorial is a place to be enacted, what Adelman's and *Grindr Remembers'* images document are cruising men. Thus we could ask: Is the Field of Stelae an outdoor cruising place or does it work only on a digital sphere? On the one hand, the Memorial is placed next to a well-known cruising area of Berlin, the Tiergarten park. On the other hand, a narrative of loss haunts cruising in public spaces: according to Tim Dean, outdoor cruising is being replaced by Internet chat rooms (DEAN, 2009, p. 102). Additionally, recent scholarly works have identified mobile technologies, such as *Grindr*, as means by which individuals "withdraw" from public spaces (SILVA, 2012). The profile pictures of men posing in front of the Holocaust Memorial challenge these narratives by introducing public space back into the digital realm. Whether this is an actual cruising area or a digital one could be further debated, but what is of interest in this context is the ephemeral presence of queer desire in the Field of Stelae.

This is exactly what artist Glenn Ligon thematizes in his work *Lest We Forget* (1998). Conceived during a two-month residency at Artpace San Antonio in Texas, the work consists of five bronze plaques placed in downtown San Antonio. According to the artist, this place was not only a tourist attraction, but also a cruising area. Mimicking the historic plaques that already signal the important monuments of the area, Ligon's plaques commemorate an ephemeral event, a missed connection, a brief moment of desire that might have happened in that place (LIGON, 2006). Written by Ligon himself, the plaques' texts – *Hunky Guy; A Guy in Uniform; A Boy; Black Jeans* – are as much fiction as they are potentiality. *Lest We Forget* plays with the paradox of marking and tracing cruising scenes in public space while at the same time making them invisible through

the mundane media of the plaque and the missed and fictitious encounters being described. The mystery of the plaques themselves, and their quick disappearance from public space, create a desire in the viewer to trace and fix those missed connections. This work sheds light on *Stelen (Columns)* not only by offering an alternative representation of queer desire in public space, but also by subverting the official narrative of monuments and public history. Ligon makes use of the language and authority of the monument's plaque to commemorate a counterhistory, but at the same time he reminds us of the ubiquity of our monuments, turned invisible by their own excess. The images in *Stelen (Columns)* interrogate the authority of the monument, in this case the Memorial, introducing desire into a place of commemoration and creating an alternative narrative to the history displayed in the Information Center.

James E. Young reminds us that the history of the Holocaust has been split off from gender and sexuality – and the narrative of the Information Center of the Holocaust Memorial is no exception: “Built into the Nazi genocide of the Jews was the gender-specific mass murder of Jewish women, deemed the procreators of the Jewish race” (YOUNG, 2009, p. 1779). In the name of Aryan ideals of race and procreation, the Nazis not only targeted Jewish women, but also persecuted Jewish and non-Jewish homosexuals across Europe: “homophobia and anti-Semitism went hand in hand” (SÜSSKIND apud WILKE, 2012, p. 143). Consequently, it seems relevant to interpret *Stelen (Columns)* as a queer counter memorial, reinscribing desire and sexual persecution into the Holocaust Memorial. David Levinthal's work of art *Mein Kampf* (1993-1994) brings us further into this direction. *Mein Kampf* is a collection of twelve 20 by 24-inch Polaroid photographs depicting characteristic scenes from the Holocaust enacted by toy Nazi soldiers (LEVINTHAL, 1994)⁷. Levinthal creates meticulous tableaux that he photographs using an exceptionally shallow focal plane in order to get a blurry background and a foreground effect (YOUNG, 2000, p. 51). Born in 1949, as an American Jew, Levinthal's memory of the Holocaust is indirect and strongly influenced by popular mass media. He is part of a postmemory generation that has made artificially created

memories a substantial element of their work. Levinthal's toys reenact the history of the Holocaust, tempered by his own memory, which is filled with media images; the results are scenes that expose the sexual dimension of Nazi abuses. In the artist's terms, it does not matter if the photographs are historically accurate, since what he is depicting is how the Holocaust has been erotized in the media, especially in popular movies such as *Schindler's List* or *Sophie's Choice* (YOUNG, 2000, p. 55). One of Levinthal's images puts the viewer in the position of a third gunman or a Nazi photographer; framed by two rifles, we can see the bodies of four naked women in sexual poses, raising their hands in surrender, although one has already fallen to the ground. As viewers, we are involved in the shooting and its recording; on a second level, our gazing at the horror scene is reinscribing victimhood into those women. *Mein Kampf* deals with the sexuality of the victims and the deviant sexuality of the perpetrators. Susan Sontag goes even further, affirming that the Holocaust provokes sexual desires in the present because its fascist ideals never disappeared and still shape our aesthetic preferences. In her words:

If the message of fascism has been neutralized by an aesthetic view of life, its trappings have been sexualized. This eroticization of fascism can be remarked in such enthralling and devout manifestations as Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask* and *Sun and Steel*, and in films like Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* and, more recently and far less interestingly, in Visconti's *The Damned* and Cavani's *The Night Porter* (SONTAG, 1975, author's emphasis).

To follow Sontag's argument: are these queer men attracted to the Holocaust Memorial because of its fascist aesthetic? Although some German critics rejected Eisenman's design for considering it too *Speerish*⁸ and too monumental for a democratic society (TILL, 2005), this argument does not acknowledge the rich, multiple and controversial everyday life that the Memorial has had since its opening in 2005. A Memorial chosen to be on a non-sacred place,

whose abstractness invites multiple interpretations rather than one truth, does not seem to fit into the fascist aesthetic category. Yes, it is seductive and mysterious and as one of the Holocaust's globally recognized cultural icons it is haunted by Nazi crimes, but it resists the temptation to speak, to be reduced to one interpretation. Its extension is monumental, but at the same time the scale of each Stele references the human body.

In this context, the images of *Stelen (Columns)*, like Levinthal's work, engage with sexual taboos around the Holocaust, and thus reflect the post-postmemory work of a generation that has experienced the Holocaust as a global media and tourist phenomenon. At the same time, *Mein Kampf* and *Stelen (Columns)* share an approximation to the Holocaust through play: Levinthal uses toys and the men in Adelman's work transform the Field of Stelae into a hide-and-seek playground. In both cases, this media makes these artists easy targets for accusations of Holocaust trivialization. As Young interprets this dilemma, Levinthal's work is about "[...] exploring the fuzzy line between the photograph's traditional function as a documentary record of external reality and its more recently acknowledged role revealing the inner realities of the mind's eye" (YOUNG, 2000, p. 46). If we extend the same interpretation to Adelman's pictures we can recognize them not just as documents of cruising, but as images that can reveal inner realities of the men portrayed and the men who chose to interact with them on the digital dating sphere.

HomoMonument: redefining the memorial landscape

Marc Adelman exhibited a phenomenon that he registered from 2007 to 2011. We do not know whether it started together with the Holocaust Memorial itself, back in 2005, or later, but we can assume that it is an ongoing phenomenon, since the last post on *Grindr Remembers* dates from Friday, November 21, 2014. For at least the past seven years, since Adelman's project started in 2007, the Holocaust Memorial together with the Tiergarten park

have been cruising areas in the center of Berlin. This latent queer landscape was intervened and marked in 2008 by a memorial commemorating the queer lives lost to Nazism: the *Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted Under the National Socialist Regime* (from now on HomoMonument, as it is popularly called) designed by artists Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset.

Figure 6: The *Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime*, situated on the border of Tiergarten Park, 2015



Source: Valentina Rozas Krause

The HomoMonument came into existence thanks to the efforts of two German Gay and Lesbian Rights Organizations: *Remember the Homosexual Victims of National Socialism* and the *Lesbian and Gay Federation of Germany*, together with the German Parliament. The Bundestag had committed itself back in 1999 to building more memorials to the victims of Nazism, and the resolution approving the construction of the Holocaust Monument

stated that: “The Federal Republic of Germany remains obliged to honor the memory of the other victims of National Socialism in a dignified manner” (GERMANY, 1999)⁹. Consequently, the Holocaust Memorial and the HomoMonument are connected in their conception. Further, following an amendment introduced in 2009 (STIFTUNG DENKMAL FÜR DIE ERMORDETEN JUDEN EUROPAS), the *Federal Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* was entrusted with the supervision of the *Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime*¹⁰. When the Holocaust Memorial was approved, a heated public debate arose around the problematic hierarchy of victims a memorial solely dedicated to the murdered Jews would provoke. Thus, the cited clause tries to amend this controversy by opening up space and public funds for new memorials. While it is problematic how the clause has fostered the process of fragmentation of victims, it has at the same time endorsed the construction of memorials such as the HomoMemorial, the *Memorial to the Murdered Sinti and Roma of Europe*, and the *Memorial and Information Point for the Victims of National Socialist “Euthanasia” Killings*. In December 2003 the German Parliament approved the construction of the HomoMemorial to “honour those who were persecuted and murdered, keep the memory of injustice alive and act as a lasting symbol against intolerance, resentment and the exclusion of gay men and lesbians” (STIFTUNG DENKMAL FÜR DIE ERMORDETEN JUDEN EUROPAS). A public competition was held in 2005/2006 and the chosen design was a single concrete cube or stela, mimicking Eisenman's Field of Stelae, with a small square window which allowed visitors to look at a monitor inside the structure that showed a looping film of a same-sex kissing scene.

Figure 7: Visitors peeking into the *Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime*, 2015



Source: Valentina Rozas Krause

Initially, the film depicted two men kissing, but according to the initial plans to change the scene every two years, in 2012, with a significant delay, the scene was replaced with two women kissing. This was a controversial issue, since historians criticized (WILKE, 2012) the State's attempt to equal homosexual and lesbian persecution because only men were explicitly targeted through the Nazi amendment of Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code (1935), which criminalized "lewdness" and punished it with imprisonment (STIFTUNG DENKMAL FÜR DIE ERMORDETEN JUDEN EUROPAS). By restating the importance of including lesbians, the HomoMonument disobeys historical accuracy in order to frame Nazi homophobia into the present queer rights movements. While the persecution and extermination of Jews ended after the Third Reich was defeated, Paragraph 175 remained unchanged in the postwar Federal Republic of Germany until 1969, and only 20 years ago, in 1994, did the German Parliament repeal it (STIFTUNG DENKMAL FÜR DIE ERMORDETEN JUDEN EUROPAS).

Unlike the Holocaust Memorial, the HomoMemorial has a plaque that narrates its history and purpose in German and in English:

Figure 8: *Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime* information plaque, 2015



Transcription:

“In Nazi Germany, homosexuality was persecuted to a degree unprecedented in history. In 1935, the National Socialists issued an order making all male homosexuality a crime; the provisions governing homosexual behaviour in Section 175 of the Criminal Code were significantly expanded and made stricter. A kiss was enough reason to prosecute. There were more than 50,000 convictions. Under Section 175, the punishment was imprisonment; in some cases, convicted offenders were castrated. Thousands of men were sent to concentration camps for being gay; many of them died there. They died of hunger, disease and abuse or were the victims of targeted killings.

The National Socialists destroyed the communities of gay men and women. Female homosexuality was not prosecuted, except in annexed Austria; the National Socialists did not find it as threatening as male homosexuality. However, lesbians who came into conflict with the regime were also subject to repressive measures. Under the Nazi regime, gay men and women lived in fear and under constant pressure to hide their sexuality.

For many years, the homosexual victims of National Socialism were not included in public commemorations – neither in the Federal Republic of Germany nor in the German Democratic Republic. In both East and West Germany, homosexuality continued to be prosecuted for many years. In the Federal Republic, Section 175 remained in force without amendment until 1969.

Because of its history, Germany has a special responsibility to actively oppose the violation of gay men's and lesbians' human rights. In many parts of the world, people continue to be persecuted for their sexuality, homosexual love remains illegal and a kiss can be dangerous.

With this memorial the Federal Republic of Germany intends to honour the victims of persecution and murder, to keep alive the memory of this injustice, and to create a lasting symbol of opposition to enmity, intolerance and exclusion of gay men and lesbians.”

Source: Valentina Rozas Krause

In Elizabeth Jelin's terms, the HomoMonument broadens the specific and literal concept of the victim of Nazism to acknowledge Germany's responsibility to humankind in its totality, without restricting it to the direct victims. Therefore, the HomoMonument is exemplary to memorials around the world, because it shifts the emphasis from the reiteration of the past to a concern for the future of our societies (JELIN, 2010). To aim for the present is even more important when we take into consideration that the HomoMonument has been vandalized more than once, which demonstrates the presence of homophobia in German society (CHAMBERS, 2008).

The plaque stands on a pedestal next to the stela; the HomoMonument itself sits on the fringe of Tiergarten Park, across the street from the Holocaust Memorial. Spatially, it ties these two cruising areas together and materializes the queer desire we have described in Adelman's and *Grindr Remembers*' images. It seems as if one of Eisenman's stela had decided to leave the field and wander into the park. The HomoMonument is somewhat taller than Eisenman's stelae and leans slightly to one side. Both are made out of concrete and are empty, the difference being that we can peek into the queer stela. If cruising men queered the Holocaust Memorial before, this Memorial adds a new layer of queerness to the whole landscape. Michael Elmgreen (Denmark) and Ingar Dragset (Norway) are two

artists living in Berlin whose *oeuvre* has dealt with queerness in the public and domestic spheres for some time (VALLERAND, 2013, p. 68-73). Their design is powerful because with a little gesture it reshapes the whole Holocaust Memorial. One queer stela makes us think that more of them could be different and unique like this one. By adopting Eisenman's aesthetic language, Elmgreen & Dragset restate its authority and at the same time make it their own. The HomoMonument would survive without the Field of Stelae; it would not have the same power, but it would remain aesthetically and commemoratively significant. Elmgreen & Dragset could also be regarded as part of the countermonument movement because their monument resists the petrification of history in public space. According to them, "[...] a monument should have the character of a living organism subject to dynamic change rather than a static and final statement" (STIFTUNG DENKMAL FÜR DIE ERMORDETEN JUDEN EUROPAS, 2012, p. 2).

The HomoMonument is a significant gesture to bring sexuality back into the memory of the victims of Nazism, despite the de-eroticized kiss it depicts¹¹. The men on *Stelen (Columns)* take this a step further by entering the Holocaust Memorial to look for encounters, friendship, sex, and love. When they leave to fulfill these longed-for encounters online they take a part of the Memorial with them, extending the commemoration circle. Both the HomoMonument and the men in *Stelen (Columns)* are living manifestos of our societies' need to adapt to our present the Memorials we erect.

Conclusions

This paper started by asking why the Holocaust Memorial's abstract stelae invite the kind of queer desire portrayed in Adelman's images. The first section of this paper, *Holocaust Memorial: A place for everyday life*, argued that the queer desire flourished in the Holocaust Memorial because Eisenman's abstract design emphasized an open-ended history that had to be appropriated through experience. Non-sacred, open, public, and playful, the design invites everyday practices. Thus, the cruising men do not stand alone in

their mission to commemorate through mundane activities. Along with straight couples, hungry tourists, and thirsty teenagers they have redefined the traditional boundaries between monumentality and everyday life, mourning and desire, and memory and play.

The second part of this paper, *Cruising the Holocaust Memorial: Sexuality, play, and commemoration in public space*, provided an interpretative framework for *Stelen (Columns)* by claiming that, even if at an unconscious level, these registers of queer desire are works of memory. As part of a post-postmemory generation, the men on *Stelen (Columns)* commemorate a phenomenon that is familiar to them only through media, history classes, and historical landmarks. Their interpretation, like David Levinthal's and Susan Sontag's, is that the Holocaust has been eroticized. Not only do the men in *Stelen (Columns)* draw attention to the flirtatious consumer-driven relation between Eros and the Holocaust, but they also reinscribe the gender and sexual identities of the victims of Nazism into a Memorial landscape that is at risk of forgetting that there is no final word or memorial for any history, and that despite modern democracies' efforts, inequalities and discrimination prevail in our societies. In the words of Henri Lefebvre, the reappropriation of the body in public space is a revolutionary project:

Any revolutionary 'project' today, whether utopian or realistic, must [...] make the reappropriation of the body, in association with the reappropriation of space, into a non-negotiable part of its agenda [...] Any appropriation of sex demands that a separation be made between the reproductive function and the sexual pleasure [...] The true space of pleasure, which would be an appropriate space par-excellence, does not yet exist (LEFEBVRE, 1991, p. 166-167).

As for the third part of the paper, *HomoMonument: Redefining the memorial landscape*, there is no doubt that since 2008, when the *Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted Under the National Socialist Regime* was opened, the men in *Stelen (Columns)* have felt accompanied by a queer stela – they have been joined in their cruising adventure by an official Memorial that recognizes their status as victims.

Finally, some questions remain, the most intriguing of which may be: what is so appealing about these abstract stelae? Why do they invite queer desire? Marc Adelman says: “None of this is to write off what I think is a deep affinity between gay men and minimalist form. There is something to be said for the obvious appeal of the butch aesthetic and cruising ground that the concrete columns appear to create in Stelen” (ADELMAN, 2012). Reductionist and circular, this claim takes for granted the attraction between the minimalist, abstract aesthetic and queer desire. What if we were to unveil this association? Sontag provides some clues in the essay *Fascinating Fascism*; in her view, fascist aesthetic principles prevail in our contemporary society. By glamorizing death and seeking physical perfection, these principles permeate our media and sexual desire (SONTAG, 1975). But the Holocaust Memorial is hardly an example of the fascist aesthetic; it is not a sacred ground touched by the perpetrators. Nevertheless, can a non-historic place invoke the ghosts that surround it to gain a sacred aura? On the one hand, we need to bear in mind that the Holocaust Memorial has become a global cultural icon, and as such its original content can be defamiliarized and new associations and meanings can be constructed. On the other hand, Berlin has become an icon for queer rights, with its openly gay mayor and a thriving queer cultural life. How do the men in these images and the ones who are drawn to them relate to these icons? These questions remain open for future research, and will hopefully foster the exploration of the uncanny nature of mourning and desire.

BUSCA POR PARCEIROS NO MEMORIAL DO HOLOCAUSTO DE EISENMAN

Resumo: Fotos de perfis de sites de namoro gay de homens jovens posando junto a objetos do Memorial do Holocausto em Berlim são objeto de exposição de arte no Museu Judaico de Nova York e em um blog on-line. Este artigo revela o significado dessas imagens neste site particular, em um esforço para entender por que esses homens escolheram retratar-se no Memorial do Holocausto a fim de encontrar parceiros por meio digital em sites de namoro gay. Em três seções consecutivas, o artigo afirma que, por um lado, a conversão do

Memorial do Holocausto em um cenário de busca por parceiros é facilitada por um design que – por conduzir a uma compreensão autônoma e abstrata – permite e convida uma ressignificação constante a partir das práticas cotidianas. E, por outro lado, postula que as imagens exibidas no Museu Judaico podem ser interpretadas como um memorial performativo que reinscreve sexualidade e gênero em narrativas do Holocausto.

Palavras-chave: Holocausto. Memorial. Monumento. Berlim. Busca de Parceiros. Vida Cotidiana.

Notas

¹ This paper has been developed in the context of the research project HAR2011-23490 *Memory and Society*. Policies of redress and memory and the social processes in the construction of contemporary public memory in Spain: conflict and representation (*Memoria y Sociedad*. Las políticas de reparación y memoria y los procesos sociales en la construcción de la memoria pública contemporánea en España: Conflicto y Representación), financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación del Gobierno de España).

² The appropriated photographs of cruising men in the Holocaust Memorial will not be reproduced in this paper, in order to respect the rights of the individuals depicted. When discussed in the paper, a footnote will indicate the direct source in which the photographs were reproduced. The same source will allow the reader to retrieve the images being discussed.

³ Images from Marc Adelman's exhibition *Composed: Identity, Politics, Sex* at the Jewish Museum in New York can be seen here: <<http://marcadelman.com/>>. Details of the photographs portrayed in Adelman's work *Stelen (Columns)* can be examined here: <<http://marcadelman.com/work/stelen-columns/>>.

⁴ She writes: "These predominantly white males have not forgotten because they are evil; they have forgotten because they have so much incentive to forget. That is privilege in action – the privilege of amnesia. When the world is a smorgasbord of casual hookups, the opportunities to forget are everywhere. How quick we are to accept them."

⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/fileadmin/user_upload/projekte/oeffentlichkeitsarbeit/pdf/Denkmaeler/PDFs_Denkmaeler_2013/StiftDenk_Holo_ENG_2013_Web_01.pdf>.

⁶ Images from the blog *Totem and Taboo: Grindr Remembers* can be seen here: <<http://grindr-remembers.blogspot.com/>>.

⁷ David Levinthal's work *Mein Kampf* (1993-1994) can be retrieved from his personal webpage: <http://www.davidlevinthal.com/works_mk.html>.

⁸ Referring to Albert Speer, one of the most representative architects of the Third Reich.

⁹ For a more complete extract of the resolution see pages 3-4.

¹⁰ It is also responsible for the '*Memorial to the Murdered Sinti and Roma of Europe*' and the '*Memorial and Information Point for the Victims of National Socialist »Euthanasia« Killings*'.

¹¹ To watch the short film reproduced inside the HomoMonument visit: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6D4r-ZAtNJE>>.

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