

Report James Bell (per mail 27.07.19)

Reading the news of attacks by extreme right-wing nationalists on an equality march in the Polish city of Bialystok, shared by queer Polish friends on Instagram and Facebook, makes my stomach drop. The ruling Justice and Law Party espouse a venomous and sadly familiar anti-LGBT rhetoric. The LGBT movement is an Western ideological import, a threat to the family and a threat to Polish identity. Familiar homophobic tropes pervade. It reminds me of just how critical the work of activists who recover the erased histories queer communities is. Like the work of Polish artist Karol Radziszewski and Queer Archive Institute – an arts project that is a reparative queer history; one that asserts queers have lived and do live in Poland – both pre and post Soviet Bloc. The terms by which we know queerness may be geographically and temporally contingent, but Karol's practice builds queer affinities across time and space. His paper at Queering Memory ALMS Conference spoke to the vital work that artists and cultural workers do in the struggles over knowledge and history. The conference as a whole was a timely reminder of the role of activists – be them academics, archivists, artists, community organisers, or librarians – in the combatting of the erasures and exclusions that are used to validate violence against queers across the globe. I end this short reflection, as the conference began, with Sanni Es highlighting the woeful lack of QPOC and trans POC representation at ALMS (and to this I would add classed and queer crip voices). These voices throughout history and today continue to be at the fore of queer activism and struggles, and a conference like ALMS must continually engage in a critically queer self-reflexivity and reform of their administration, governance and programming to ensure these voices are centred.