Photography and the construction of collective memory in Ghent, Belgium

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Abstract

The paper investigates the shifting role of photography in the construction of collective cultural memory. It focuses on urban photography in Ghent, Belgium, at two particular periods of time. The paper is situated within the framework of the exhibition *Edmond Sacré. Portrait of a City*, curated by Ghent University in STAM (Ghent city museum), and a parallel artistic research project at the School of Arts at Ghent University College (2011-2012). At the turn of the XX century, new monumental squares and historicizing architecture created a new sense of history rooted in Flemish patriotism, especially in the run-up to the 1913 Ghent World Fair. The photographer Edmond Sacré created canonical images of the renewed city centre that went around the world for the promotion of the World Fair. Since the 1970s, the role of photography in the construction of cultural memory in Ghent has altered. In contrast to Sacré, photographers of the late XX and early XXI century have created a more complex image of the city. A number of contemporary photographers who worked on the *Wondelgemse Meersen*, a brownfield site north of the city centre, depicted the site as the locus of marginalised social groups who did not find their place in the historical city centre. The paper investigates if and how these photographers contribute to a different kind of cultural memory related to ephemeral places and practices in contrast to Sacré's image of Ghent.

1. Introduction

Based on Halbwachs's concept of collective memory[1], Jan Assmann's work on memory in early civilizations instigated the metaphorical term 'cultural memory'[2]. Collective memory, as an umbrella term, encompasses 'communicative memory' and 'cultural memory'. The first one is based on informal traditions and oral communication and spans a time period of around

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[1] M. HALBWACHS, *The Collective Memory*, New York, Harper & Row, 1980 [1950].
[2] J. ASSMANN, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011 [1992].

three succeeding generations[3]. The latter one is institutionalised, "exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms"[4], able to sustain numerous generations. Others conceptualise cultural memory on two different levels: The first level regards the biological cognitive process of remembering "that sees culture as a subjective category of meanings contained in people's minds"[5]. This level is based on individual memory, shaped by the cultural context of the individual's environment: "With regard to this first level, 'memory' is used in a literal sense, whereas the attribute 'cultural' is a metonymy, standing for the 'socio-cultural contexts and their influence on memory'"[6]. This level is similar to Assmann's conception of communicative memory; however, it has a stronger focus on individual cognitive matters. Assmann's concept refers explicitly to collective memory – only the mode of communication is based on the subject. The second level is identical with Assmann's conception of cultural memory. Cultural memory is conceptualised as a metaphor transferring cognitive processes of remembering to a collective cultural level, so that one can speak of a "nation's memory" or "religious community's memory"[7]. The latter level refers to "the symbolic order, the media, institutions, and practices by which social groups construct a shared past. […] Societies do not remember literally; but much of what is done to reconstruct a shared past bears some resemblance to the process of individual memory, such as the selectivity and perspectivity inherent in the creation of versions of the past according to present knowledge and needs"[8]. While individual cultural memory is influenced by socio-cultural contexts, collective cultural memory needs to be constantly revived by individuals who share the same notion of the past. Otherwise it loses its social impact and falls into oblivion. Collective memory on the first level – Assmann's communicative memory – is carried by individuals and communicated accordingly without institutionalised objectifications or archives (short-lasting) whereas on the second level – Assmann's cultural memory – collective memory is carried by institutions and their corresponding members and therefore externalised and objectified (long-lasting).

Places of memory facilitate the reflection about and the contact with the past[9] with the help of material reminders which may recall memories which are important for a particular community of remembrance. In such places, the subjectivity of the individual or group who remember interacts with the materiality of the place[10]. However, different versions of the past may overlap in one particular place. The same place might be remembered in different ways

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[3] J. ASSMANN, «Communicative and Cultural Memory», in *Cultural Memories: The Geographical point of View,* P. Meusburger, M. Heffernan and E. Wunder, eds., Dordrecht, Springer, 2011, p. 22.

[4] ASSMANN, «Communicative and Cultural Memory», p. 19.

[5] J.K. OLICK, « Collective Memory: The Two Cultures », *Sociological Theory,* 17, 3, 1999.

[6] A. ERLL, «Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction», in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook,* A. Erll and A. Nünning, eds., Berlin, De Gruyter, 2008.

[7] ERLL, «Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction», p. 4.

[8] ERLL, «Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction», p. 5.

[9] A. ASSMANN, «Erinnerungsorte und Gedächtnislandschaften», in *Erlebnis - Gedächtnis - Sinn,* H. Loewy and B. Moltmann, eds., Frankfurt am Main, Campus, 1996, p. 19.

[10] D. HOFFMANN, «Authentische Erinnerungsorte. Oder: Von der Sehnsucht nach Echtheit und Erlebnis», in *Bauten und Orte als Träger von Erinnerung: Die Erinnerungsdebatte und die Denkmalpflege,* H.-R. Meier and M. Wohlleben, eds., Zürich, vdf Hochschulverlag, 2000, p. 43.

involving multiple, plural and often controversial memory constructions[11]. It has been suggested that single buildings or entire urban landscapes, help recall individual and collective memories[12]. The historical built environment has been understood as "architectural memory"[13]. The notion of 'urban memory' regards "the city as a physical landscape and collection of objects and practices that enable recollections of the past and that embody the past through traces of the city's sequential building and rebuilding"[14]. Urban places have been conceptualized as multi-layered inscriptions, or 'palimpsests'[15], referring "to history in a specific context through the creation and utilization of a physical setting"[16]. They have been described as "a locus of collective memory in a double sense" expressing "group identity from above, through architectural order, monuments and symbols, commemorative sites, street names, civic spaces, and historic conservation", and "the accumulation of memories from below, through the physical and associative traces left by interweaving patterns of everyday life"[17]. It has been assumed that the collective value of a material object needs to be comprehensible to enable the transfer from an individual to a collective cultural level[18]. Against this background, remembering has been understood as the process of decoding traces which are communicated by particular 'memory carriers'[19]. It has been argued that architectural canon and tradition, change throughout time, and explicit messages such as inscriptions make an architectural artefact a carrier of collective cultural memory for a particular community of remembrance. 'Charging' an architectural object with memories has been conceptualised as a continuous process based on material changes (e.g. changes of

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[11] The list of publications regarding multiple memory constructions and related heritage and identity concepts is extensive including F. ECKARDT, «Erinnern und Vergessen in Hamtramck: Eine Soziologie des städtischen Gedächtnis», in *Positionen zur Urbanistik I: Stadtkultur und neue Methoden der Stadtforschung,* O. Frey and F. Koch, eds., Wien/Berlin, LIT Verlag, 2011; D. HAYDEN, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press, 1995; J.F.J. INWOOD, « Contested memory in the birthplace of a king: a case study of Auburn Avenue and the Martin Luther King Jr. National Park », *cultural geographies,* 16, 1, 2009; S. KATTAGO, *Memory and Representation in Contemporary Europe: The Persistence of the Past*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2012; M. LANDZELIUS, « Commemorative dis(re)membering: erasing heritage, spatializing disinheritance », *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* 21, 2, 2003; J.E. TUNBRIDGE, «Plural and Multicultural Heritages», in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity,* B. Graham and P. Howard, eds., Farnham, Ashgate, 2008, p. 299-313.

[12] See, for example, M. BEREK, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2009, p. 83-84; M. CRINSON, «Urban Memory - An Introduction», in *Urban Memory: History and Amnesia in the Modern City,* M. Crinson, ed., London, Routledge, 2005; M. HALBWACHS, *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte: Etude de mémoire collective*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1941.

[13] ASSMANN, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, p. 161.

[14] CRINSON, «Urban Memory - An Introduction», p. xii.

[15] See, for example, M. CRANG, « Envisioning Urban Histories: Bristol as Palimpsest, Postcards, and Snapshots », *Environment and Planning A,* 28, 3, 1996; J. DONALD, «This, Here, Now. Imagining the Modern City», in *Imagining Cities,* S. Westwood and J. M. Williams, eds., London, Routledge, 1997; M. SAMUELSON, « The Urban Palimpsest: Re-presenting Sophiatown », *Journal of Postcolonial Writing,* 44, 1, 2008; C.W. SIZEMORE, «Reading the City as Palimpsest: The Experiential Perception of the City in Doris Lessing's The Four-Gated City», in *Women Writers and the City: Essays in Feminist Literary Criticism,* S. M. Squier, ed., Knoxville, TE, University of Tennessee Press, 1984.

[16] A. PRED, « Place as Historically Contingent Process - Structuration and the Time-Geography of Becoming Places », *Annals of the Association of American Geographers,* 74, 2, 1984, p. 279.

[17] M. HEBBERT, « The Street as Locus of Collective Memory », *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* 23, 4, 2005, p. 592.

[18] BEREK, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit*, p. 84-85.

[19] HOFFMANN, «Authentische Erinnerungsorte. Oder: Von der Sehnsucht nach Echtheit und Erlebnis», p. 37.

design, construction, material, etc.) and authoritative re-interpretation (e.g. by urban conservation policies) for ideological, political, or cultural purposes[20].

Urban marketing strategies can be considered as another kind of authoritative re-interpretation of the city. Cities have been trying to become more attractive – and more competitive respectively – by advertising particular urban qualities with the help of images. These strategies include 'place-making' schemes as much as 'place-branding' campaigns concerned with "the selling of place as part and parcel of an ever-deepening commodity culture"[21]. 'Place-branding' has been described as "a representation of identity, building a favourable internal (with those who deliver the experience) and external (with visitors) image (leading to brand satisfaction and loyalty; name awareness; perceived quality; and other favourable brand associations […])"[22]. 'City branding' has been described as "the appropriate way to describe and implement city marketing" based "on the construction, communication and management of the city's image […] through perceptions and images. Therefore the object of city marketing is the city's image, which in turn is the starting point for developing the city's brand"[23]. The construction of collective cultural memory is therefore not only influenced by socio-cultural and physical structures, but also by the images which are produced and mediatised for a particular purpose. In the following chapters, the paper discusses how photography has been used as a tool to create urban images, and by whom and for whom photography has been utilised to influence the construction of collective memory[24]. The Belgian city of Ghent has been chosen as a case study to analyse the production of urban images at two different periods of time: The period around the late IXX and early XX century, marked by processes of modernisation and industrialisation, and the period around the late XX and early XXI century, characterised by far-reaching socio-economic changes such as de-industrialisation.

2. The image of Ghent in the early XX century

2.1. *Feeding collective memory – the images of Edmond Sacré*

Around 1900, the photographer Edmond Sacré (1851-1921), owner of the most successful photo studio in Ghent of that time, contributed to the creation of collective cultural memory of the city.[25] A part of Sacré's production was destined for the tourist market. These images were published in a wide variety of publications, from tourist brochures to prestigious

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[20] T. WILL, «Projekte des Vergessens? Architektur und Erinnerung unter den Bedingungen der Moderne», in *Bauten und Orte als Träger von Erinnerung: Die Erinnerungsdebatte und die Denkmalpflege,* H.-R. Meier and M. Wohlleben, eds., Zürich, vdf Hochschulverlag, 2000, p. 117.

[21] D. HARVEY, «From Space to Place and Back Again: Reflections on the Condition of Postmodernity», in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change,* J. Bird, B. Curtis, T. Putnam, G. Robertson and L. Tickner, eds., London, Routledge, 1993, p. 8.

[22] R. GOVERS & F. GO, *Place Branding: Glocal, Virtual and Physical Identities, Constructed, Imagined, and Experienced*, Basingstoke, Palgrave McMillan, 2009, p. 17.

[23] M. KAVARATZIS, « From city marketing to city branding: Towards a theoretical framework for developing city brands », *Place Branding,* 1, 1, 2004, p. 58.

[24] The link between cultural memory, place, and photography has, for example, been discussed in V. BURGIN, *In/different spaces: place and memory in visual culture*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996; *Photography and the geographical imagination*, J.M. SCHWARTZ & J.R. RYAN eds., London, I.B. Tauris, 2003; N.L. VESTERBERG, « Photography as cultural memory: imag(in)ing France in the 1950s », *Journal of Romance Studies,* 5, 2, 2005.

[25] B. NOTTEBOOM, «Portraits of a city», in *Edmond Sacré. Portret van een stad,* B. Notteboom and D. Lauwaert, eds., Brussels / Ghent, Mercatorfonds / STAM, 2011, p. 82-101 and 243.

photographic albums on the city of Ghent. Characteristic for this kind of photography destined for the public eye was its lack of originality. The goal of the tourist brochures and albums was not to document the transformations in the city, to emphasise its modernity or to offer new sights. It rather continued an iconography that had been developed before the invention of photography. For example, Sacré's photographic series on the Saint Bavo Abby and the Saint Nicholas Church reproduced the same views that had been part of the cultural memory for centuries by means of paintings and drawings. In the case of the Saint Bavo Abbey in particular, Sacré shared the picturesque interest of his predecessor August Van Lokeren[26]. This continuous repetition of the same view is what curator Dirk Lauwaert calls the 'iconographic persistence' of photography: collective cultural memory seems to be constructed by repetition – with minor variations - of the same points of view over generations excluding originality as an ambition.

Figure 1. Saint Nicholas Church (left and middle: Anonymus, n.d.; right: Edmond Sacré, before 1913)[27]

Another way of feeding cultural memory can be found in the images Sacré produced for documentation and archives. One of Sacré's close friends was Armand Heins, an artist as well as a commercial printer, publisher, and self-made historian/archaeologist. Heins was one of the founding members of the Ghent Historical and Archeological Circle and adjunct-secretary of the Ghent Monument Commission[28]. Apart from tourist guides and albums, Heins initiated a number of archaeological and architectural inventories, of which the most important was the *Inventaire archéologique de Gand*, initiated in 1896 and edited by the Heins publishing house[29]. This inventory is situated in the line of similar historicizing inventories that were initiated all over Europe[30]. Each file sheet of the inventory contained a heading with the

[26] M. DELBEKE, «De 'sprekende stenen' van Sint-Baafs / The 'speaking stones' of St Bavo's Abby», in *Edmond Sacré. Portret van een stad,* B. Notteboom and D. Lauwaert, eds., Brussels/Ghent, Mercatorfonds/STAM, 2011.
[27] Ghent City Archive.
[28] *Armand Heins. Etser, lithograaf en drukker*, R. DE HERDT ed., Ghent, VIATvzw, 2009; E. DHONT, «Armand Heins, kunstenaar en esteet (1856-1938)», in *Kultureel Jaarboek voor de Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen,* Ghent, Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen, 1973, p. 217-232.
[29] P. BERGMANS, SOCIÉTÉ D'HISTOIRE ET D'ARCHÉOLOGIE DE GAND & V. VANDER HAEGHEN, *Inventaire archéologique de Gand. Catalogue descriptif et illustré des monuments, oeuvres d'art et documents antérieurs à 1830*, Ghent, N. Heins, 1897.
[30] A. COUSSERIER, «Het verleden gefixeerd. De fotografische inventaris van het Comité d'études du Vieux Bruxelles», in *Citygraphy #02,* S. Humblet and D. Lauwaert, eds., Brussels, Efemera, 2009, p. 20-39.

category, the name and the century of the object; as well as a textual description and an image, a photograph but often a drawing, mostly done by Heins himself. This was the case in many of these kinds of archaeological inventories; artistic impression and archaeological research were not seen as incompatible[31]. Heins decorated his drawings often with a frivolous frame or 'medieval' banners, or he re-interpreted some of his subjects by altering details.

Figure 2*. Edmond Sacré, Ter Plaeten Hamlet, 1908. Rural dwelling that was about to disappear for a new housing quarter. From the collection L'Habitation ancienne en Belgique[32]*

A less interpreted image of the past was offered by *L'Habitation ancienne en Belgique,* a photographical inventory that Heins collected for his own documentation. This inventory of photographs of old dwellings – many of them shot by Sacré – served as the basis for the drawings Heins produced for several publications on this subject[33]. In contrast to the drawings in the *Inventaire archéologique de Gand* which filters information to construct a timeless picturesque scene or a schematic or idealized version of a façade, the photographs of *L'Habitation ancienne en Belgique* cannot erase the context of the documented dwellings: posing figures, tramlines or neighbouring modern houses unambiguously situate the object in the reality of the contemporary city.

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[31] M.C. LALEMAN, «Armand Heins: een 'artiste peintre' met archeologische blik», in *Armand Heins. Etser, lithograaf en drukker,* R. De Herdt, ed., Ghent, VIATvzw, 2009, p. 196-215.
[32] Ghent City Archive.
[33] For example in A. HEINS, *Contribution à l'habitation privée en Belgique. Restes d'anciennes constructions pittoresques dans notre pays et dans les contrées limitrophes*, Ghent, N. Heins, 1908.

2.2.   *Constructing collective cultural memory – the 'new' Ghent*

Apart from consolidating long-standing urban views or archiving what was about to disappear, as was the case in the above-mentioned images, Sacré's oeuvre also recorded the transformation of the city. One of Sacré's most frequent clients was the Ghent Monument Commission which used photographic images not only as a documentation on constructions and city quarters that would disappear, but also as a record of restoration and construction of new buildings and urban quarters. As the commission sometimes simulated the effect of certain alterations by drawing on the photographical document, these images can literally be considered as working material. In this case, photography does not aim at feeding collective memory through the repetition of well-known views, but rather at constructing new images of the city.

Between 1870 and the First World War the city centre underwent thorough changes[34]. As was the case in most European cities, public and religious buildings were cleared from the surrounding urban tissue and broad boulevards created space for trough-city traffic, promenading and window-shopping. Two occasions allowed this transformation of the city to gain momentum. First, the plans initiated by liberal Mayor Émile Braun led to the creation of Haussmannian boulevards linking the area of the railway station to the city centre. This project resulted in the isolation of Ghent's three central landmarks: the Saint-Nicolas Church, the Belfry and the Saint-Bavo Cathedral. Second, the transformation of the city centre was completed for the occasion of the World Exhibition in 1913. The central thoroughfare was continued by creating the bridge of Saint Michael, a broad elevated bridge that allowed the ever-growing traffic streams to cross the city acting as an elevated balcony with a view on the new urban panorama. New urban spatial constellations thus created new images of the city.

Sacré was one of the protagonists in the creation and distribution of these images of the 'new' Ghent. Although the view didn't exist before the 1910's, the image of the three towers seen from the bridge of Saint-Michael, became one of the most important images in the city marketing of Ghent from the 1913 World Exhibition until today. The current city logo of Ghent depicts the image of the three towers (fig. 4). As the image went around the world in the international promotion of the city and in many tourist brochures, the continuous repetition of the same view created a new canonical image which had become part of collective cultural memory already by the interwar era. Architecture played an important role in the assimilation of what was after all a drastic operation in the city centre: although at least two housing blocks disappeared for the thoroughfare, the eclectic / neo-renaissance style of the new post office and the adjacent houses anchored it in the past. In the neighbouring site of the Graslei, many buildings and façades were brought back to (often interpretations of) their original state, referring to Ghent's past as one of the glorious Flemish cities.

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[34] B. CLEPPE & P. UYTTENHOVE, «Infrastructure and urbanism», in *Ghent. A city of all times,* M. Boone and G. Deneckere, eds., Ghent, Mercatorfonds / STAM, 2010, p. 200-249.

Figure 3. *Edmond Sacré, The three towers in 1881 (left) and in 1913 (right).*[35]

Figure 4. *The current logo of Ghent depicting a stylised image of the three towers*[36]

However, in the early XX century, cultural memory in Ghent was mainly constructed with the help of images of a city centre that was, although modernized, anchored in interpretations of the past. This focus left a whole range of other areas out of sight such as the IXX century industrial belt around the city centre. Sacré photographed a number of worker's quarters in the city centre due to his interest in picturesque vernacular architecture. However, the worker's quarters outside of the medieval city with their uniform rows of cheap, mass produced houses next to factory sites, were left out of sight. Sacré gained a large part of his income from portrait photography, commissioned by the city's wealthy bourgeoisie; he

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[35] Ghent City Archive.

[36] http://www.gent.be/images/logo.gif

portrayed only a certain part of Ghent's population. The portrait of the city that he created was in essence that of a bourgeois city[37].

3. The image of Ghent in the late XX century

Looking at city photography of Ghent in the late XX century, it is striking how little the canonical sights have changed over time. The historical city centre (summarized in the image of the three towers) still plays a central role in city marketing. Phenomena such as museumisation and disneyfication seem to be the continuation of a process that has started in the bourgeois city of the IXX century. The constructed identity of the 'new' city for commerce and tourism was rooted in a carefully cultivated collective memory featuring an attractive and convivial Flemish city, where everybody knows his or her place. However, in contrast to photography for purposes of city marketing, artistic and documentary photography took on a much more critical role in the course of the century. Since the end of the 1970s, under the influence of the New Topgraphics exhibition in the US and the so-called Becher Schule in Germany, urban wastelands and derelict industrial spaces have captured the interest of photographers[38].

This is reflected in the work of Stephanie Kiwitt, a German photographer, who worked on a project at the School of Arts at Ghent University College that ran parallel to historical research for the Sacré exhibition at Ghent University[39]. The project was concerned with the current role of the city photographer leading to the important question what kind of collective cultural memory urban photographers produce, and for whom. In the course of a year, Kiwitt documented the *Wondelgemse Meersen*, a former swamp area of about 100 hectares, surrounded by residential quarters, an industrial zone and road infrastructure, and traversed by two railroads. According to the local development plan, the marshes will soon be replaced by a business park, a bus and tram depot, a forensic psychiatric centre and parking lots. Kiwitt took thousands of pictures throughout the year, creating an image 'archive' of an environment on the verge of disappearance. A selection of these images can be found in a book that acted as a catalogue of a small exhibition organized in 2012[40]. In there, images are presented as spreads of 18 pictures per double page, accompanied by their filename as a caption. What at first seems like a random collection of photos is in fact a carefully composed selection categorised by subject (mud, garbage, trees, a burnt-out vehicle), colour, season, or lightning conditions. The artist's archive invites the viewer to recognise patterns - and even an inherent logic - in what at first seems nothing more than the garbage dump of the 'actual' city. Instead of showing an empty area – as the term wasteland suggests – Kiwitt portrays the *Wondelgemse Meersen* as a crowded place, an area filled with traces of current and former uses that do not find a place elsewhere in the city such as the remnants of a former gypsy camp. Bart Verschaffel argues in his lecture of Kiwitt's work, that the images do not show a

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[37] Exceptions are his photos of new organisations – such as the worker's cooperation *Vooruit* – and radically new spaces produced by the industrial society. However, he does not succeed in developing a language for the new: his images of urban spaces produced by the socialist cooperation seem to mimic bourgeois urban space, and in his images of the port he seems to lose grip on the vastness of his subject. Sacré is in the first place a photographer of the bourgeois city centre.

[38] *The Düsseldorf School of Photography*, S. GRONERT ed., New York, Aperture, 2010; *New Topographics*, B. SALVESEN & A. NORDSTRÖM eds., Tucson(AZ)/Rochester(NY)/Göttingen, Center for Creative Photography / George Eastman House / Steidl, 2009.

[39] This was a pilot research project in the arts. Two photographers and one social scientist co-operated in a reflection on urban photography, each from their own discipline.

[40] S. KIWITT, *Wondelgemse Meersen*, Baden, Kodoji Press, 2012.

world on the verge of disappearance, but a world after the flood, as if a tsunami had taken place.[41]

Figure 5. Stephanie Kiwitt, Wondelgemse Meersen, 2011[42]

Another series of photos of the *Wondelgemse Meersen*, taken some years before, found their way to an entirely different audience. Ghent-based photographer Lisa Van Damme documented a settlement of Roma gypsies living in the *Wondelgemse Meersen*[43]. These gypsies had constructed an entire village out of material they found on the terrain[44]. Although the gypsies had managed to live in the area for months without troubles with the authorities or other users of the *Meersen*, they caused quite a discussion once their presence had been noticed by the public. Not long after the media started to pay attention to the gypsies - some of the images had been published in the newspaper *Het Nieuwsblad*[45] – they were evicted from the area and their settlement was demolished. Although several social workers were concerned with the well-being of the gypsies both the local and the national authorities did not do much more than pointing at the complexity of the migration problem. Originally conceived as a means to document the deplorable living conditions of the Roma, the images

[41] B. VERSCHAFFEL, *Unpublished lecture on the work of Stephanie Kiwitt on the Wondelgemse Meersen, presented at colloquium 'Identity of place', 9 March 2012*, Ghent, Ghent University College, School of Arts, 2012.

[42] S. KIWITT, *Wondelgemse Meersen*, Baden, Kodoji Press, 2012.

[43] http://lisavandamme.wordpress.com/2009/11/05/roma-gent/

[44] Kiwitt's 'tsunami' images show the remnants of this village.

[45] J. DESLOOVER, « Als honden in een hok. Roma wonen in sloppenwijk in centrum Gent », *Het Nieuwsblad,* 5. November 2009, http://www.nieuwsblad.be/Article/Detail.aspx?articleID=GM72HIKVV#.

started to play a role in a debate on migration opposed to the original intention of the photographer[46].

Figure 6. Lisa van Damme, Wondelgemse Meersen, 2009[47]

In contrast to the images of the city centre used in city marketing now and in the past, the pictures of the *Wondelgemse Meersen* touch upon a whole different kind of collective memory: a memory of a place that figures in the 'subconscience' of the city. The photos of Kiwitt and Van Damme are open to multiple interpretations: Are the Wondelgemse Meersen a pile of garbage or a place of poetic beauty? Are the Roma gypsies to be pitied or to be sent away? The work of both photographers also opens up a reflection on the agency of the image in constructing collective memory: in contrast to the city centre that is visited daily by thousands of citizens and foreigners, the *Wondelgemse Meersen* is almost exclusively communicated through images in the press and elsewhere.

Conclusions

The observation that place and memory are 'naturally' intertwined have led to the widespread notion that individual and collective memories are linked to the material constituents of place. Against this background, the built environment has been considered of playing an important role in the construction of individual and collective memories. However, the construction of collective cultural memory is not only influenced by existing socio-cultural or material structures, but also by the images of these structures which have been produced and mediatised, for example, with the help of photography. In Ghent, places outside the historical city centre such as the industrial quarters and worker's neighbourhoods of the IXX century as much as de-industrialised 'wastelands' of the late XX and early XXI century have barely been considered in any 'official' construction of collective cultural memory. These places exhibit alternative versions and relics of urban history; they have become refuges for marginalised social groups with very different collective memories. These places are contested; they exist

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[46] T. LAMBRECHTS, « Roma in Gent », *MO*Magazine,* February 2010, http://www.mo.be/artikel/roma-gent.
[47] http://lisavandamme.wordpress.com/2009/11/05/roma-gent/

next to the bourgeois image of the city, the city's commodity culture and interrelated constructions of collective cultural memory.

A reflection on collective memory also touches upon the question of the role of the archive. Apart from the collection of Lisa Van Damme, the paper mainly discussed the archive of two photographers, Edmond Sacré and Stephanie Kiwitt, who created different images of Ghent at the turn of the XX and XXI centuries respectively. The two photographers have in common that they show a city in transformation. However, Kiwitt's artist's archive fulfils a different function. While the photos of Sacré feed a long-standing collective memory, or construct new images to be added to it in order to create a well-ordered image of industrial bourgeois society around 1900, Kiwitt catalogues the derelicts of that society. In Sacrés work, the archive is used to order the world and to decide what could and should be part of a highly selective collective cultural memory. Kiwitt's work, on the other hand, shows what is not supposed to be part of the 'official' version of the urban image. An important difference between Sacré and Kiwitt is their respective position as a photographer in society. Sacré was a commercial photographer who worked on commission for a network of decision-making persons and organisations – he worked 'inside' the bourgeois society of the turn of the XX century. Kiwitt, on the other hand, is - as a contemporary artist - positioned outside of these structures. She can afford to follow her own agenda and – as she said in an interview - 'not to like urban planners'[48]. However, Kiwitt's 'archive' barely leaves the restricted context of the gallery or the artist's album, and one wonders for whom this alternative version of collective memory has been created, and if it contributed to the construction collective cultural memory of a particular group.

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