



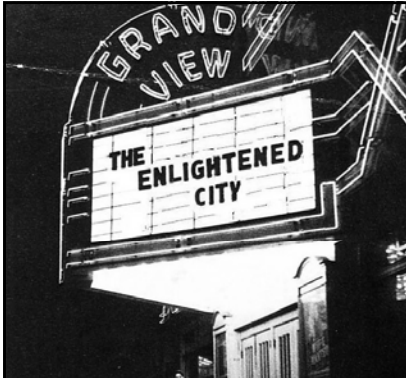
1. The 'Enlightened' city part 1
Theoretical frame / Research design / global results
2. The 'Enlightened' city part 2
Case studies and oral histories



3. Film audiences reconsidered
Experiences from contemporary audience research:
LOTR / art house / young people in Flanders



Philippe Meers
Visual Culture Research Group
University of Antwerp
Mazaryk University, Brno, 15-16 December 2008



The 'Enlightened' city

**Screen culture between
ideology, economics
and experience.**

A study on the social role of film exhibition and film consumption
in Flanders (1918-2004) in interaction with
modernity and urbanisation

The Glow in their Eyes

Global perspectives on film cultures, film exhibition and cinema-going
International Conference, Brussels, 15-16 December 2007



CARL DE KEYZER © *Men waiting in front of a film theatre.*
Hyderabad, India, 1985

History of Moviegoing, Exhibition, and Reception
HOMER Project <http://icarg.wordpress.com/>

institutional context of the project

- Fund for Scientific Research Flanders-Belgium
 - 4 year funding / two researchers (2005-2008)
- promoters:
 - Philippe Meers, Dept of Communication Studies, Visual Culture Research Group & Dept Of Communication (UA)
 - Marnix Beyen, Dept of History, Centre for Cultural and Urban History (UA)
 - Daniël Biltreyst, Working Group Film and Television Studies, Dept of Communication Studies (Ghent U)

theoretical framework

Film audiences history

Film history has been written as if films had no audiences or were seen by everyone and in the same way, or as if however they were viewed and by whoever, the history of 'films' was distinct from and privileged over the history of their being taken up by billions of people who have watched them since 1894.

(Robert C. Allen, 1990)



theoretical framework

New cinema history

For cinema history to matter more, it must engage with the social history of which it is part, not through the practices of textual interpretation, but by attempting to write cinema history from below; that is, to write histories that are concerned not with the kings and queens of Hollywood but with their audiences and with the roles that these performances of celebrity played in the ordinary imaginations of those audiences.

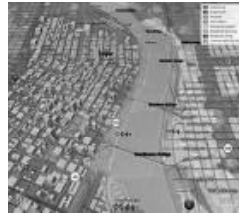
(Richard Maltby, 2006)



theoretical framework

The **spatial turn** in film historical research
(Robert C. Allen, 2007)

The **social geography** of cinema going
(Jancovich et al. 2005, Nottingham project)



Triangulation through multilevel analysis: (re-)constructing cinema culture in Flanders

context: screen culture

- screen culture in Flanders
 - » commercialised, subject to international tendencies
 - » pillarisation and the struggle for modernity



context: screen culture

- film as a case in point
 - » tension between commerce and ideology
 - » prominent part of cultural and social life in metropolitan, provincial and rural contexts
 - » top down economic and ideological forces
 - » actual experiences and embeddedness in everyday life

context: screen culture

- new perspectives:
 - » pillarisation, film & ideology as lived experiences vs ideological strategies of the elites
 - » interaction with urbanised culture
 - » metropolitan – provincial – rural areas

central aim

- A diachronical analysis of the social role of screen culture in Flanders (1918-2004) as a result of the tensions between commercial and ideological forces (in particular 'pillarisation') and the actual consumption, through a study of cinemas and film consumption in interaction with modernity, public space and urbanisation.

structure of the project

- part 1: map of cinemas
 - an extended inventory of existing and historical cinemas in Flanders with attention for the geographical distribution and the relations between the commercial and the pillarised circuit
- part 2: institutional developments, geographical location and programming trends
 - analysis of the interaction between ideology, economics and screen culture through diachronical research on cinemas, film exhibition and programming in metropolitan (Antwerp & Ghent), provincial (Mechelen) and rural context

structure of the project

- part 3. audience and film experiences in urban and rural contexts
 - Analysis of the interaction between ideology, economics and film consumption through historical audience research on the role of cinemas and film consumption in the experience of leisure culture in different cities and areas

Research in practice

- Part 1. Inventory of movie exhibition places in Flanders
 - construction of a database
 - Flanders and Brussels
 - 1924 - 2005
- Part 2. Case-studies
 - institutional evolutions, geographical sites, and programming
 - case studies:
 - Ghent and Antwerp
 - Mechelen
 - rural areas
- Part 2. Audience research
 - experience of movie-going
 - oral history



Roma, Berchem, 2006
www.deroma.be

Part 1. Inventory

Mailings and follow-up mailings

- Archives and local governments
- Local history societies
- Local heritage associations

Sources collected

- Industry yearbooks
- Local publications
- Material collected in archives: building plans, company files, licence applications,...
- Photographs

Problems with historical data gathering

- Inconsistency of different, non-continuous sources



Rubens, Antwerpen, 60's
Collection Paul Corluy

Part 1. Inventory

Information collected in database

- **Movie theatres:** location / name / address / opening and closing date / number of screens and seats / architecture / ticket prices / ideological and economical identification
- **People:** names and functions of cinema-employees
- **Companies:** name and organisation of companies behind movie theatres + management
- **Films and exhibition:** frequency of exhibition + titles of films mentioned in sources
- Database : +37.000 entries

Results

- Large scale analyses of major tendencies and changes: movie theatres and screens
- Tension between metropolitan, urban and rural areas
- 'Pillarisation'

Part 2. Case-studies

- Aim
- diachronical research on cinemas, film exhibition and programming in metropolitan, provincial and rural context
- **Case-studies**
 - Metropolitan level: Antwerp & Ghent
 - Urban level: Mechelen
 - Rural level
- **Data gathering**
 - Local and private archives
 - Contacts with local heritage associations
 - Contacts with key-players in local exhibition industry



Part 3. Audience research

- Aim
- historical audience research on the role of cinemas and film consumption in the experience of leisure culture in different cities and areas
- **Method: oral history**
 - Metropolitan level: Antwerp & Ghent
 - Selection of respondents
 - interviews are conducted by students
 - Urban level: Mechelen
 - Local heritage society of Mechelen conducted interviews
 - Rural level
- **Research topics**
 - Role of cinema in everyday life
 - Importance of context of moviegoing
 - Influence of 'pillarisation'



Palais du Cinéma, Gent, 1907
Collection UGent

Work with students

- **Local cinema history**

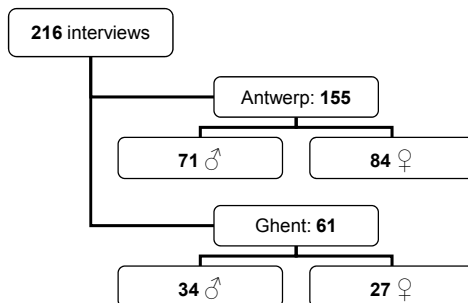
- 2005: 49 students (University of Antwerp & Ghent University) did research in their home town.
The data they gathered were added to the database
- 2006: 16 students (Ghent University) did research on their local cinema history

- **Film experience**

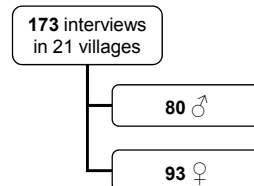
- 2005: 17 students (University of Antwerp) interviewed 173 people in 21 villages on their film experience in historical perspective (1930-2005)
- 2006: 11 students (Ghent University) and 16 students (University of Antwerp) did historical reception research on film experience in Antwerp (155) and Ghent (61)

Interview data

CITIES

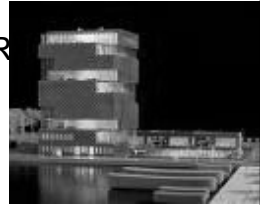


VILLAGES



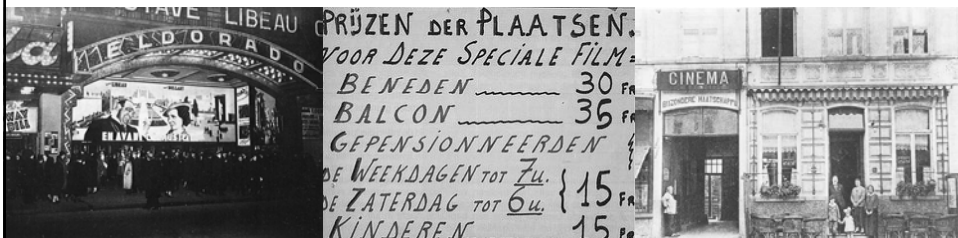
Plans for the future

- map of cinemas in Flanders
 - GIS-software
 - Searchable database (levels of entry)
 - Open page for respondents
 - Integration in www database HOMER
- Case study on Antwerp
 - Commission for the MAS
 - City of Antwerp Museum
 - Concept for museum
 - installation/website

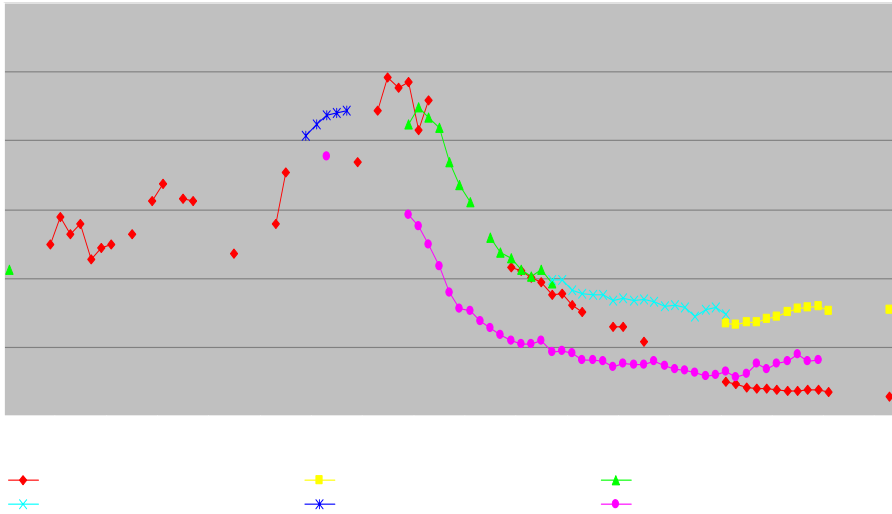


Results from part 1

a diachronical overview of cinemas in Flanders and Brussels



Number of cinemas and screens in Flanders (various sources) / cinema attendance



Urban vs. rural cinema exhibition

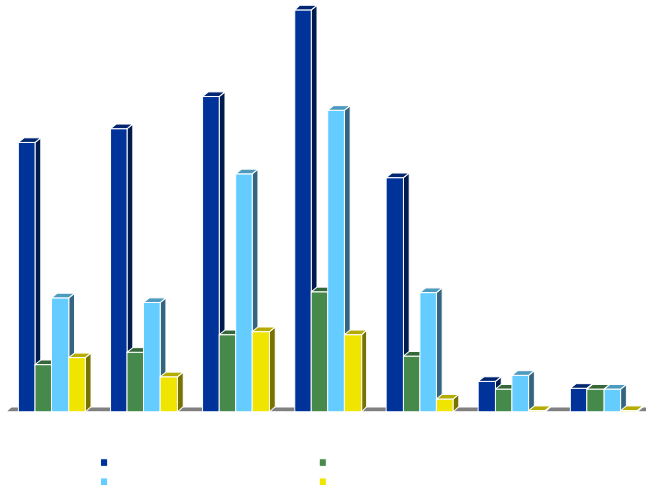


Antwerp, *Vendôme*, '50s
(Private archive Paul Corluy)



Asse, advertisement for *Kinema Elisabeth*,
(Heemkundige Kring Ascania)

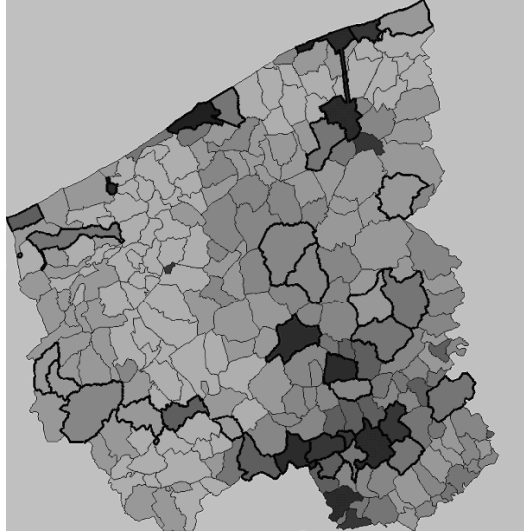
Geographical spread of the number of cinemas in Flanders according to population density (1924-2000)



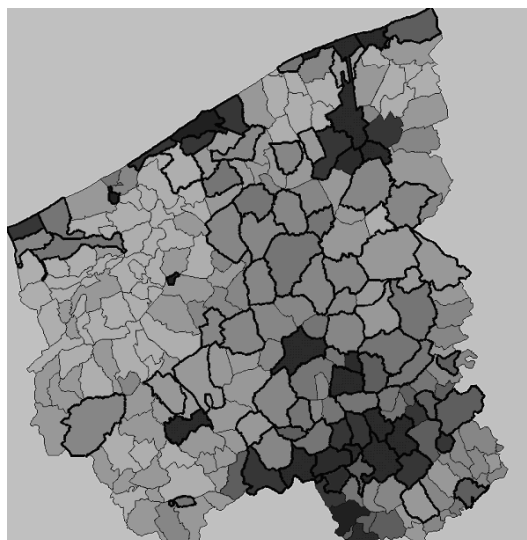
Number of cinemas per province 1924-2000

	Antwerpen	Brussels Hfdstedelijk Gewest	Oost-Vlaanderen	West-Vlaanderen	Vlaams-Brabant	Limburg
1924	125	108	112	69	53	31
1947	176	117	159	114	84	57
1961	228	131	206	153	110	88
1975	83	49	56	60	39	34
2000	18	13	11	16	7	6

Province of West-Vlaanderen
population density/ towns with at least
one cinema (1924)



Province of West-Vlaanderen
population density/ towns with at least
one cinema (1961)



Commercial and 'ideological' cinema exhibition



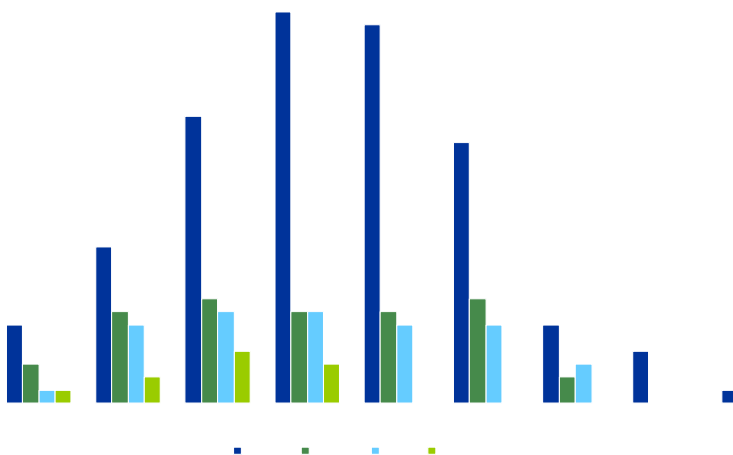
Ninove, Volkshuis *De Redding*, (Town archive Ninove)



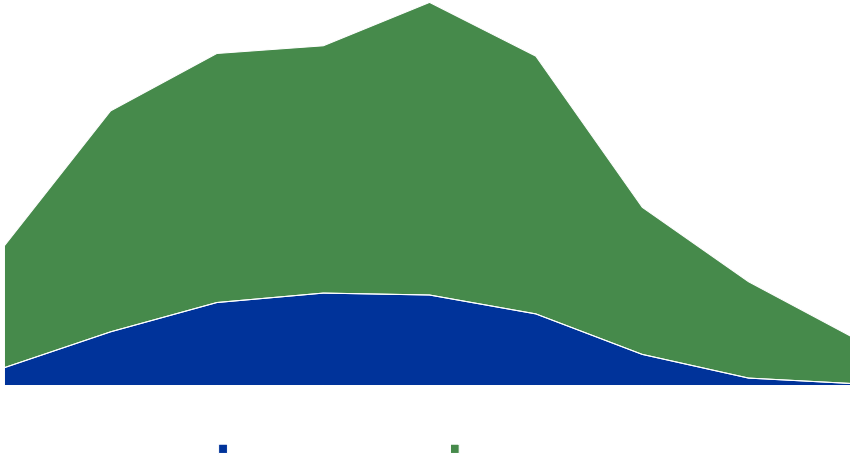
Dendermonde, cinema *Paleis Koningshof*, 1936

(Town archive Dendermonde)

Overview of pillars in 57 Flemish towns



Evolution of the number of cinema spaces and the number of pillarised exhibition spaces (case studies)



Questions and discussion

