



1. The 'Enlightened' city part 1  
Research design / theoretical frame / global set up

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 December 2008

## Case study: Antwerp

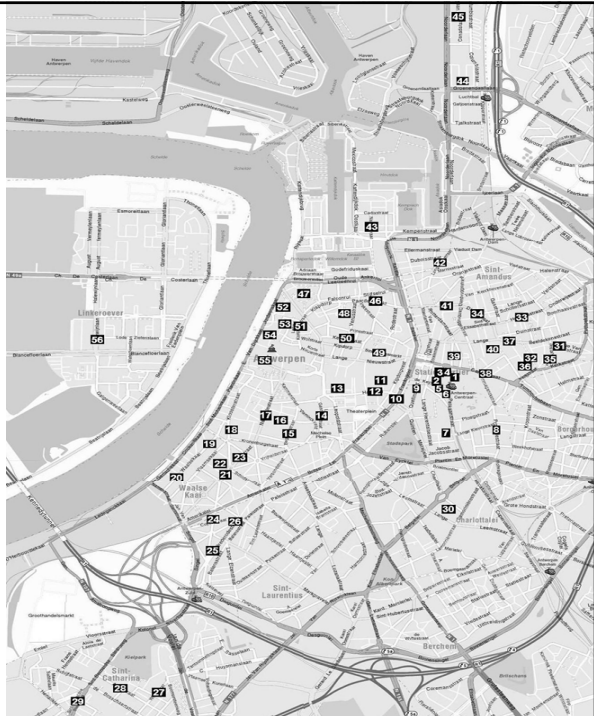


*Movie Theaters in Antwerp*  
Collection Paul Corluy

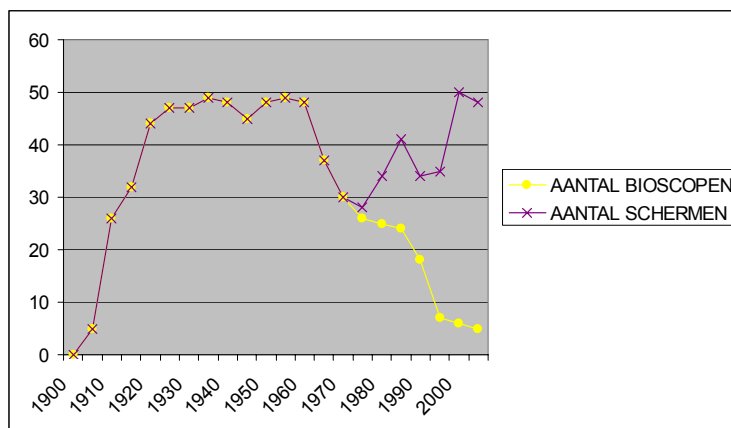
# local cinema history research in practice

- descriptive analysis based on databases:
  - Texts
  - Figures
  - Graphics
  - Tables

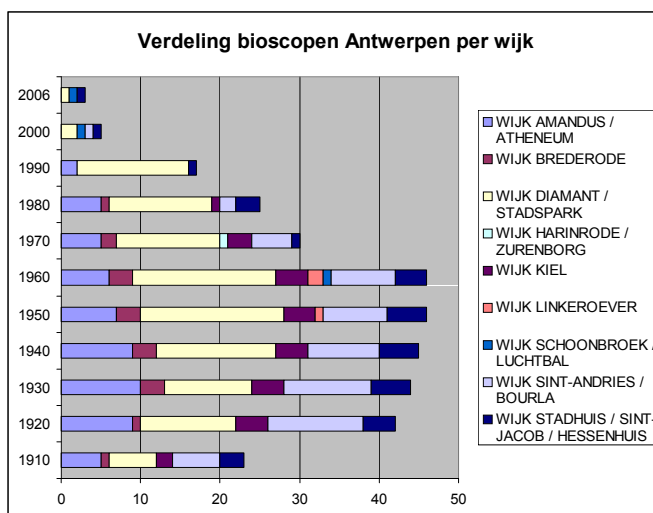
Diachronical  
map of  
cinemas in  
Antwerp



# Number of cinemas and screens in Antwerp



# Number of cinemas in Antwerp per neighbourhood



## Cinemas of the Rex concern

- Antwerp cinema tycoon Heylen
- Heylen cinemas through 3 decades
  - 1952: 50 cinemas Antwerp - 14 *Rex*
    - 3 central, 7 peripheral, 4 Borgerhout
  - 1962: 43 cinemas Antwerp – 18 *Rex*
    - 16 central, 2 peripheral, 0 Borgerhout
  - 1972: 26 cinemas Antwerp – 13 *Rex*
    - 10 central, 2 peripheral, 1 Borgerhout

## Cinemas of the Rex concern

- Decline of cinemas in general, growth of the Rex imperium
- Monopoly Heylen in city center!
- 1970s conflict with American major distributors
- “multiplex on De Keyserlei”

# programming of the Rex concern

## Genre and first / second run

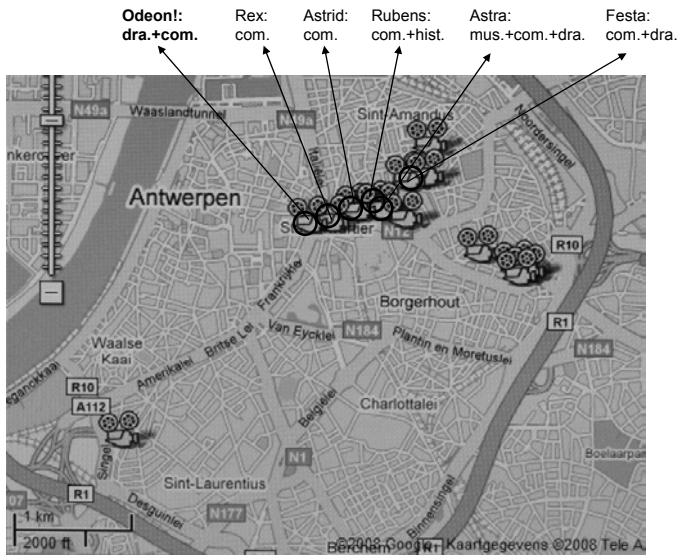
- *Astrid*: German films
  - *Odeon*: French films
  - *Rex*: première cinema, Western European films
  - *Astra*: short running time (one week)
  - *Rubens*: American films
- 
- growth of erotic film in 1972 (10 %)

## Antwerp 1952



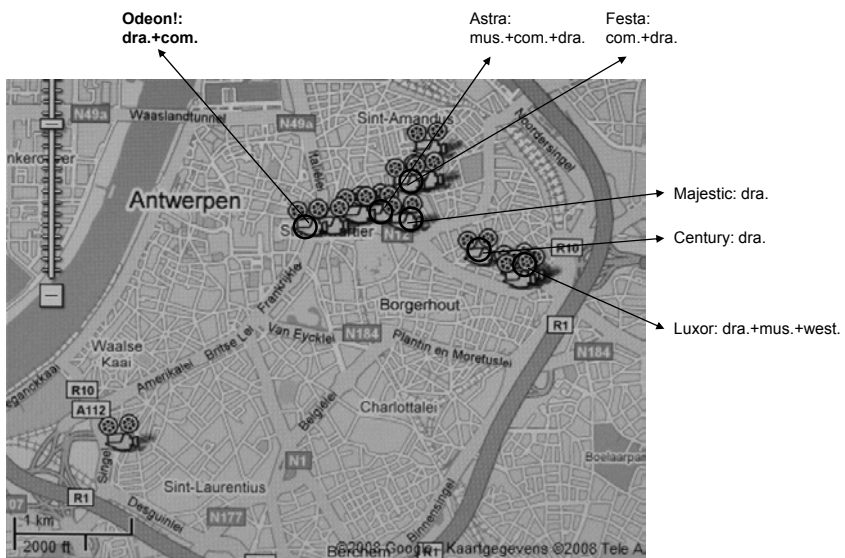
## Antwerp 1952

Longest screen time per cinema and genre: ○ comedy



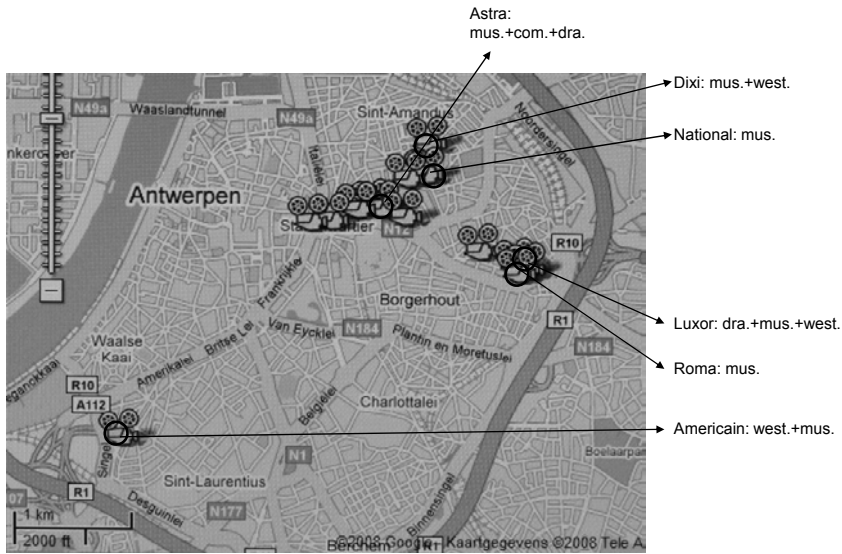
## Antwerp 1952

Longest screen time per cinema and genre: ○ drama



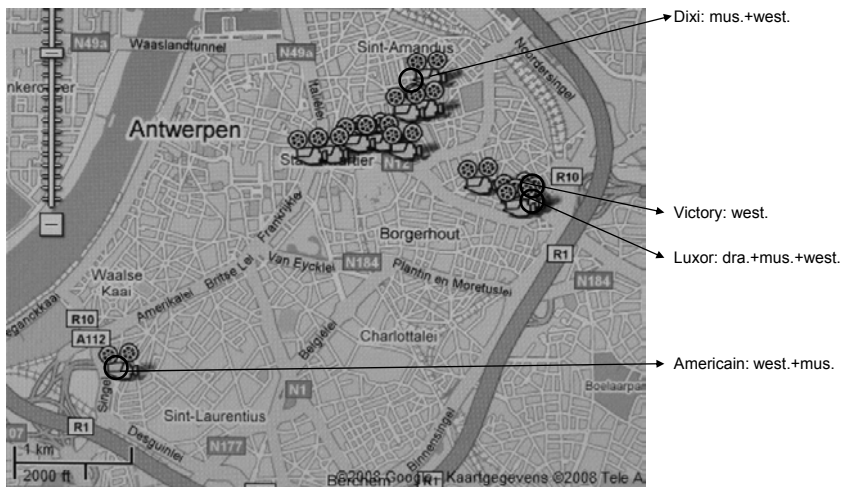
## Antwerp 1952

Longest screen time per cinema and genre:  musical



## Antwerp 1952

Longest screen time per cinema and genre:  western



## Antwerp 1952

Longest screen time per cinema and genre: ○ historical film

Rubens:  
com.+hist.



## programming of the Rex concern

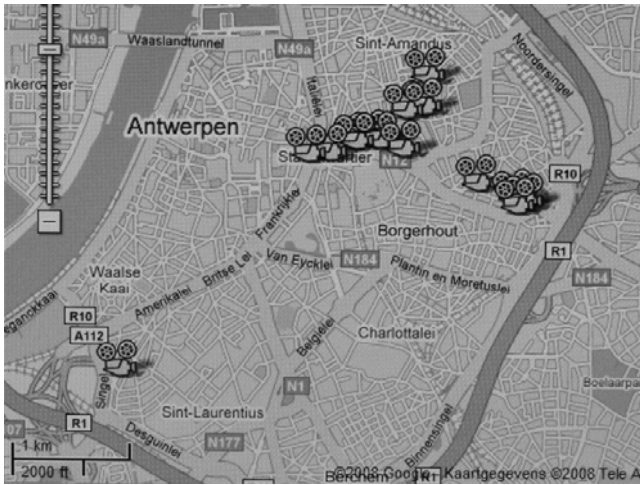
- Origin of films

substantial decline in US movies over the three decades

- 1952: more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  films from US; 2. France and Germany (both ca. 5%), 4. UK 3,6%; 5. Italy 1,8%
- 1962: less than  $\frac{1}{3}$  films from US; 2. France 12%, 3. Germany 11%, 4. UK 9%; 5. Italy 3,4%;
- 1972:  $\frac{1}{5}$  films from US; 2. Italy, 3. UK, 4. France; 5. Germany

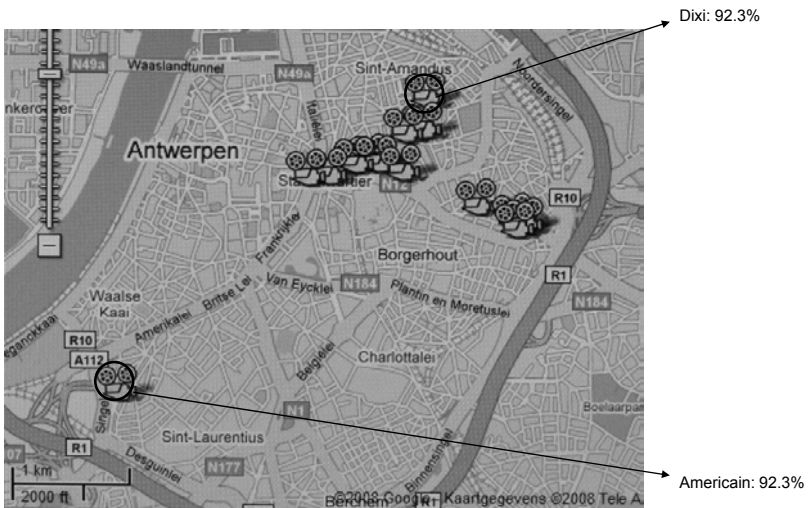


## Antwerp 1952





## Antwerp 1952

Cinemas with  > 90% films from USA





## Antwerp 1952

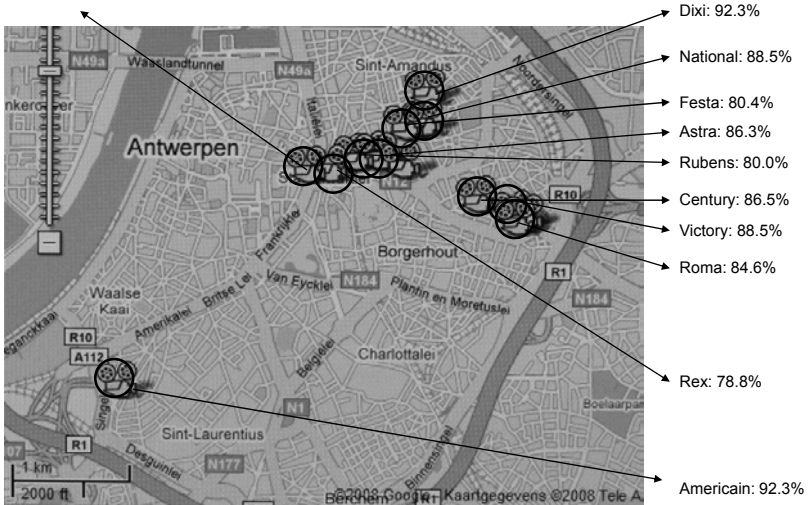
- Cinemas with  > 90% films from USA  
 >75% films from USA





## Antwerp 1952

- Cinemas with  > 90% films from USA  
 >75% films from USA

Odeon: 28.8% French films



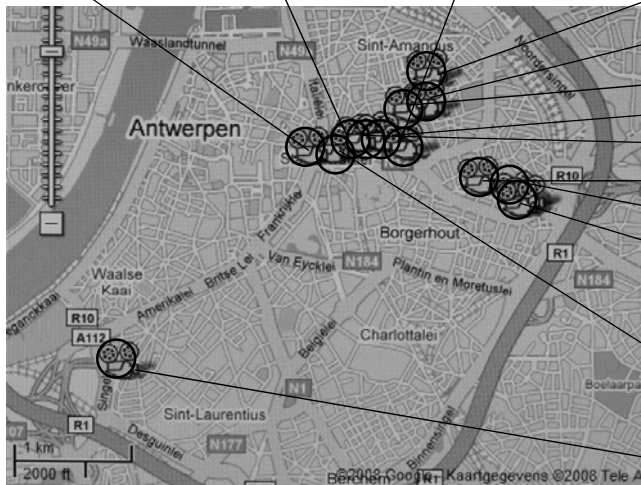
## Antwerp 1952

Cinemas with  > 90% films from USA  
 >75% films from USA

Odeon: 28.8% French

Astrid: 25.0% German

Majestic: 24.4% German



Dixi: 92.3%

National: 88.5%

Festa: 80.4%

Astra: 86.3%

Rubens: 80.0%

Century: 86.5%



Victory: 88.5%

Roma: 84.6%

Rex: 78.8%

American: 92.3%

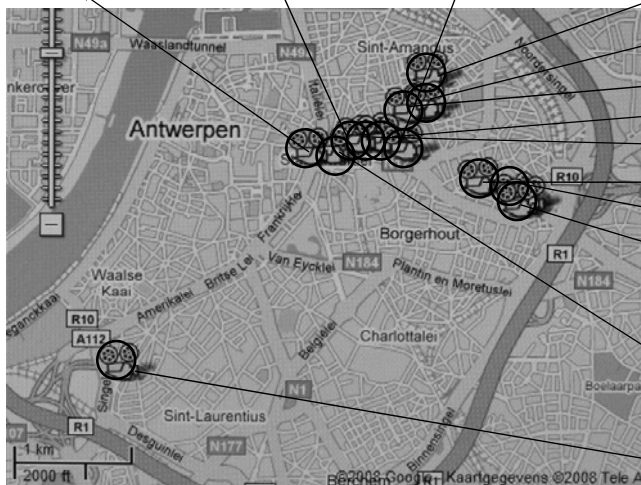
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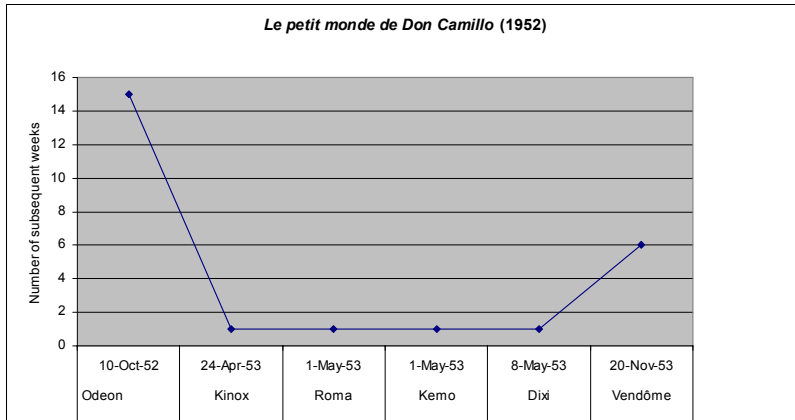
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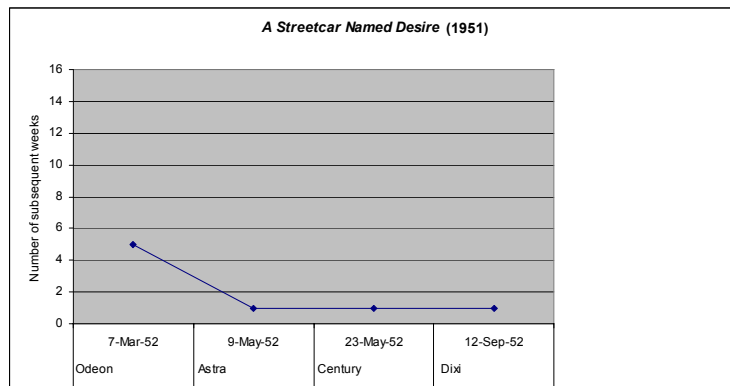
# programming of the Rex concern

- Longest running films of 1952



# programming of the Rex concern

- Longest running films of 1952

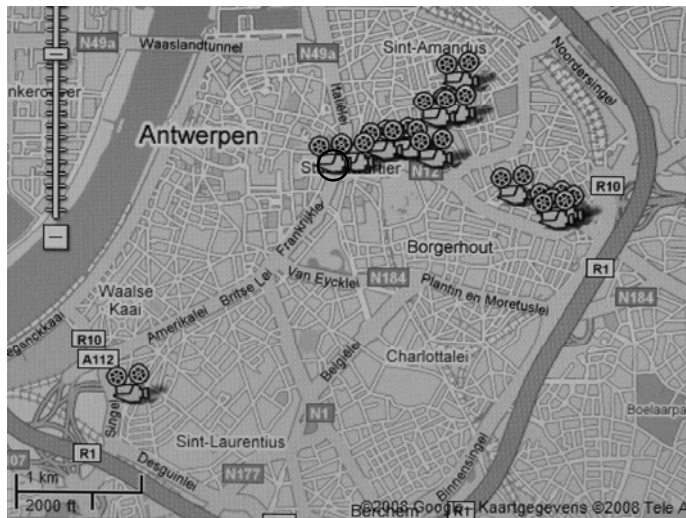


## Antwerp 1952



## *Le petit monde de Don Camillo* (1952)

Odeon

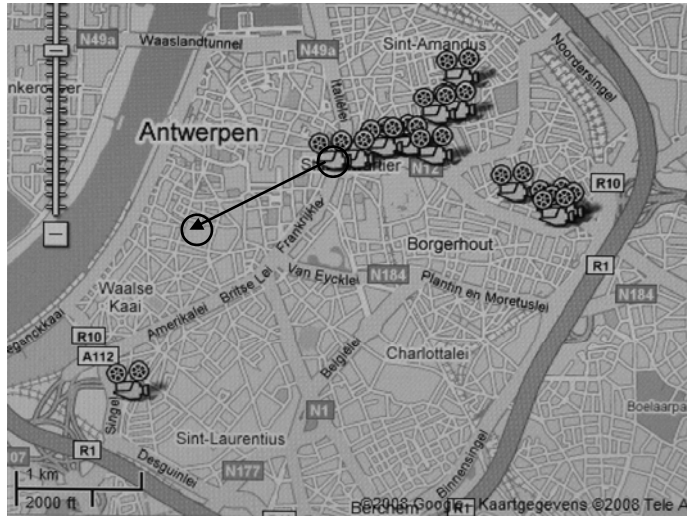


*Le petit monde de Don Camillo (1952)*

Odeon



Kinnox  
(1953)



*Le petit monde de Don Camillo (1952)*

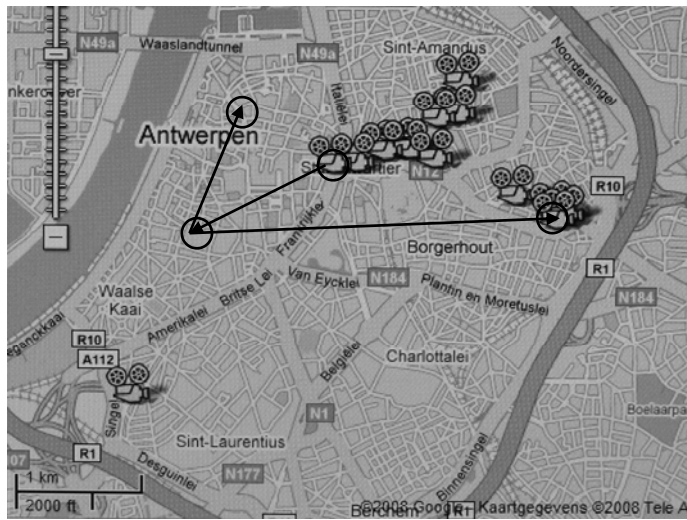
Odeon



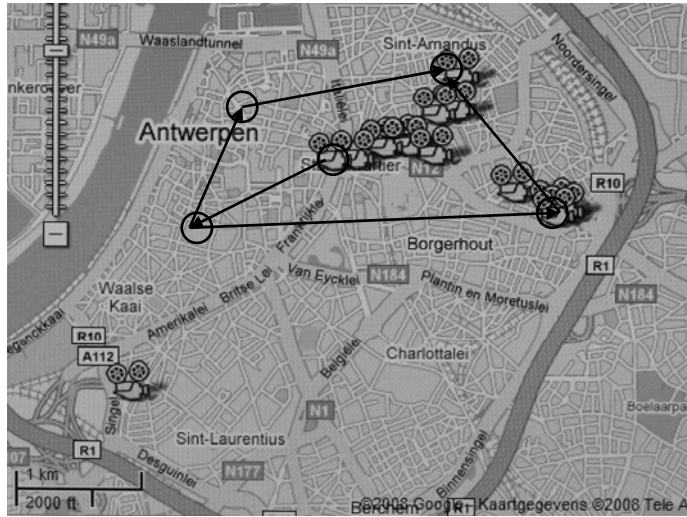
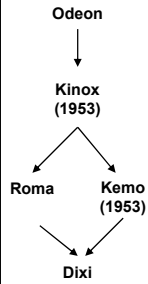
Kinnox  
(1953)

Roma

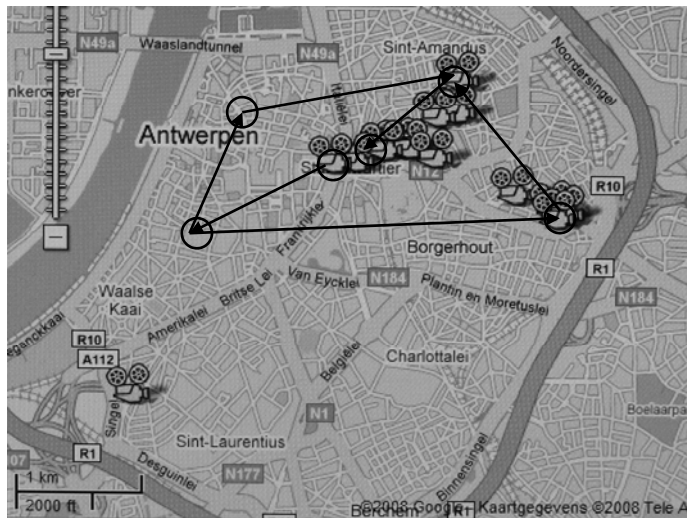
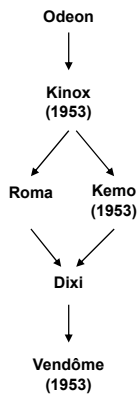
Kemo  
(1953)



*Le petit monde de Don Camillo (1952)*

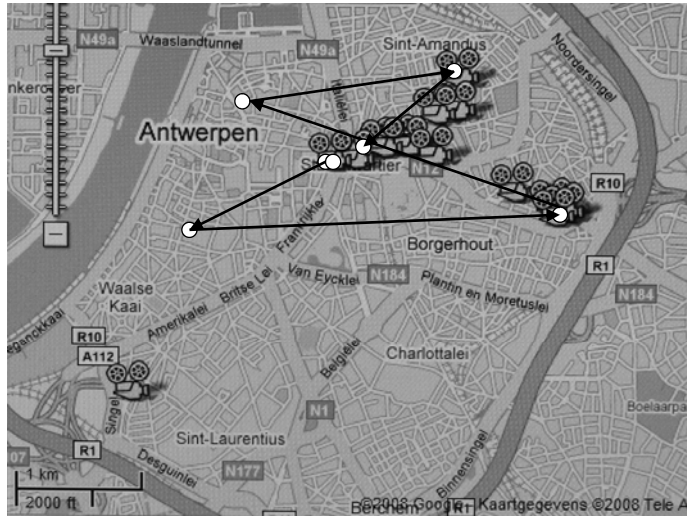


*Le petit monde de Don Camillo (1952)*



*A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)

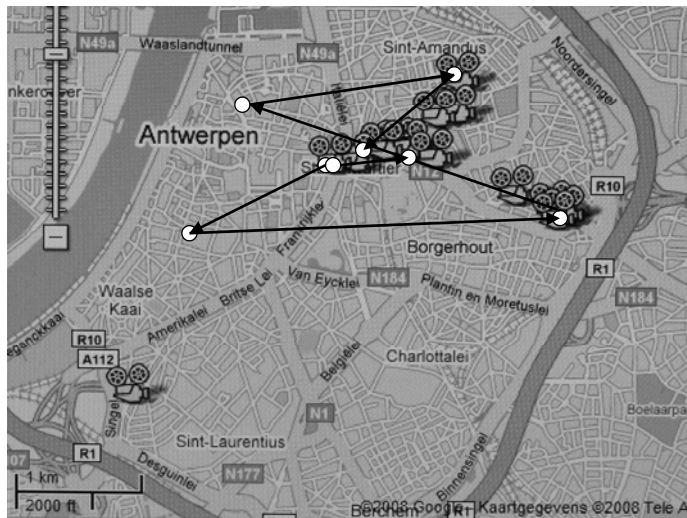
Odeon



*A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)

Odeon

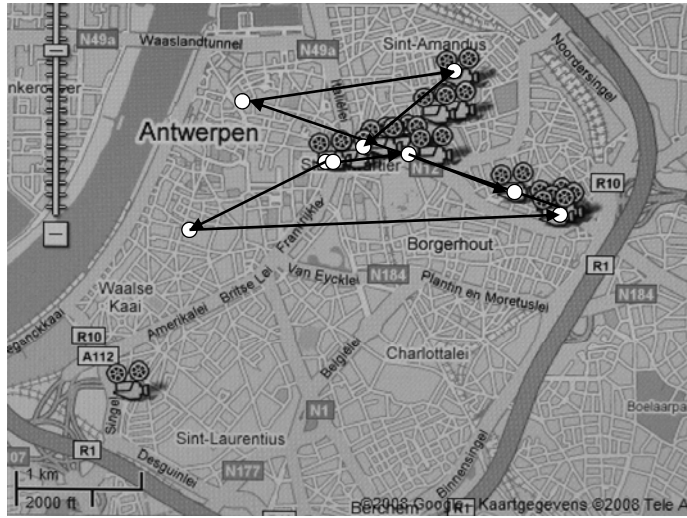
↓  
Astra





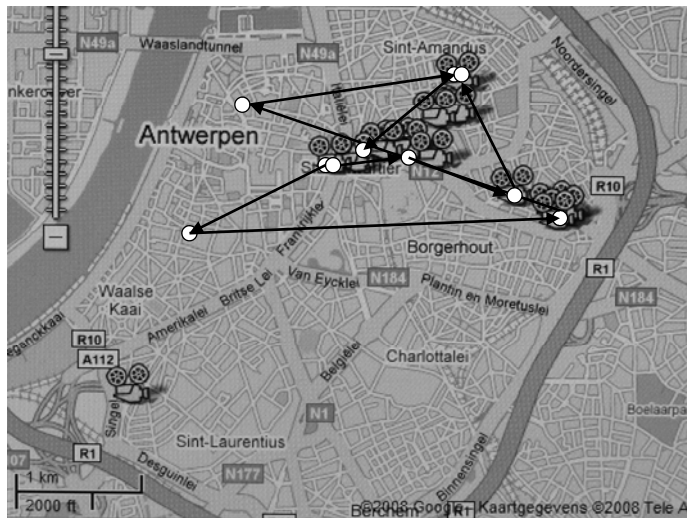
*A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)

Odeon  
↓  
Astra  
↓  
Century



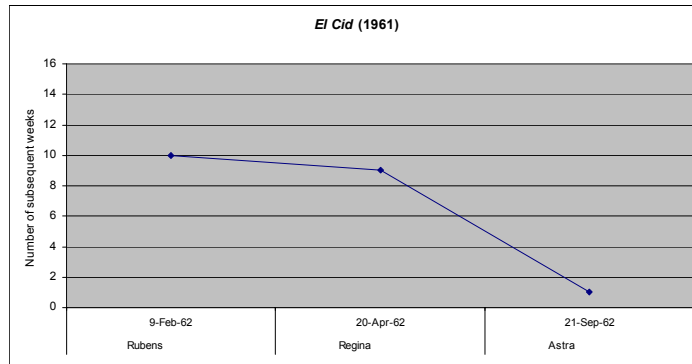
*A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)

Odeon  
↓  
Astra  
↓  
Century  
↓  
Dixi



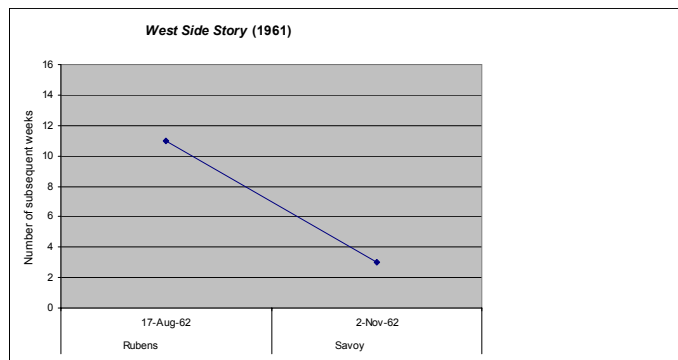
# programming of the Rex concern

- Longest running films of 1962



# programming of the Rex concern

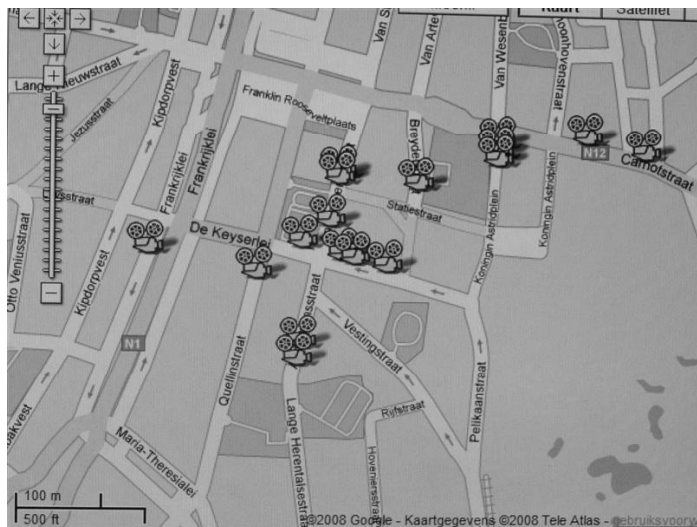
- Longest running films of 1962



## Antwerp 1962

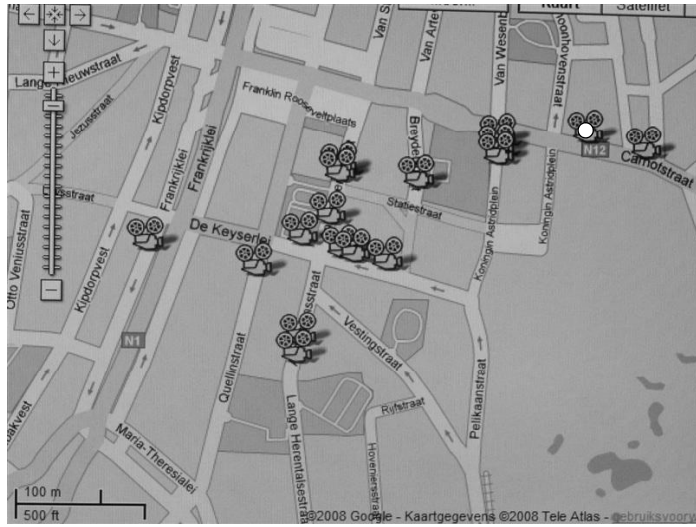


## Antwerp 1962



*El Cid* (1961)

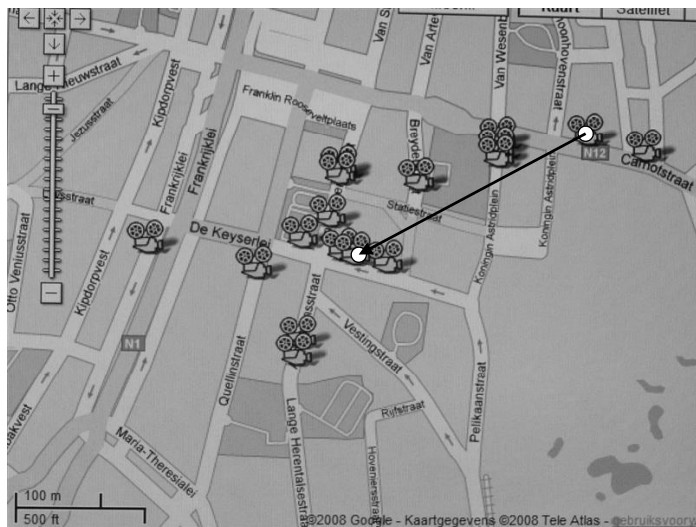
Rubens



*El Cid* (1961)

Rubens

↓  
Regina



### El Cid (1961)

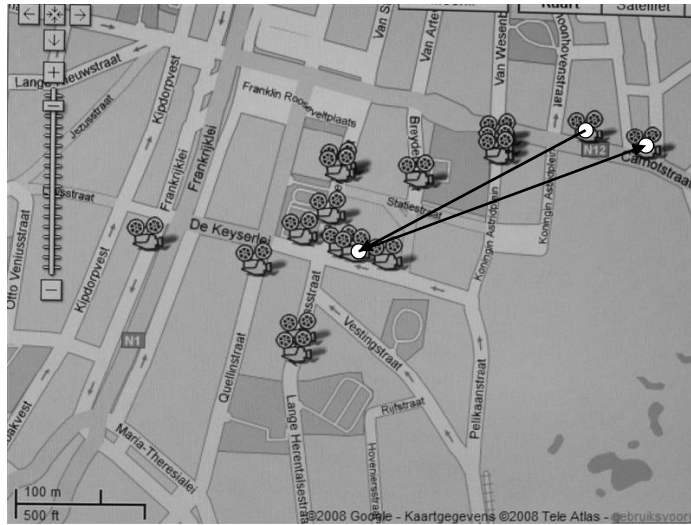
Rubens



Regina

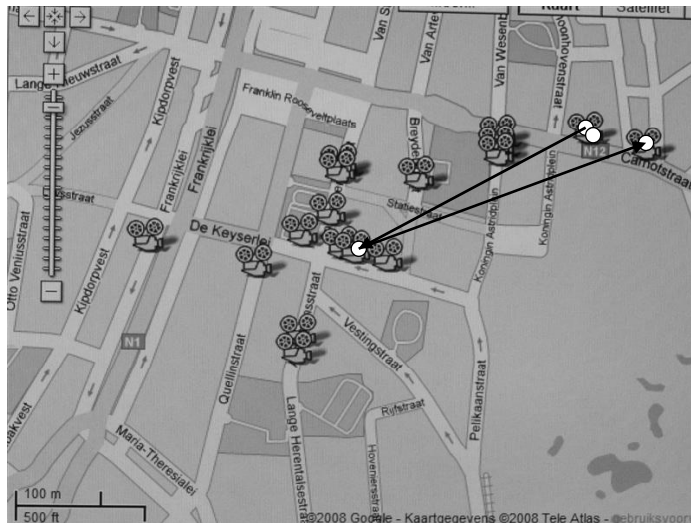


Astra

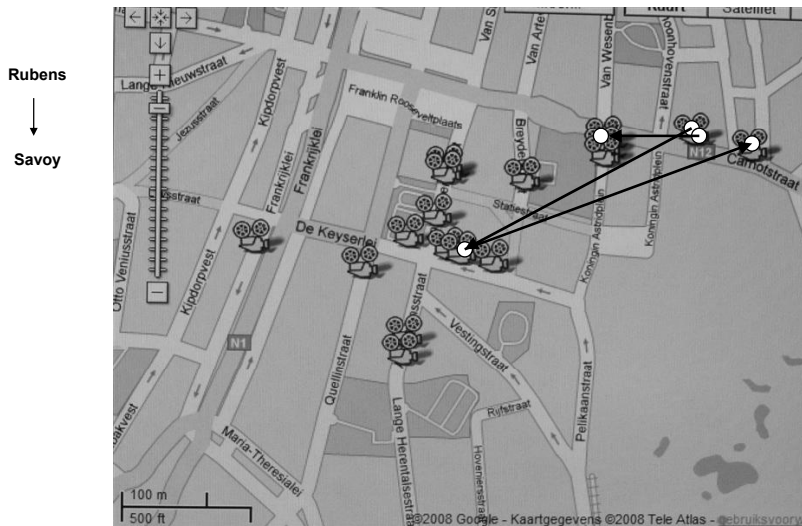


### West Side Story (1961)

Rubens

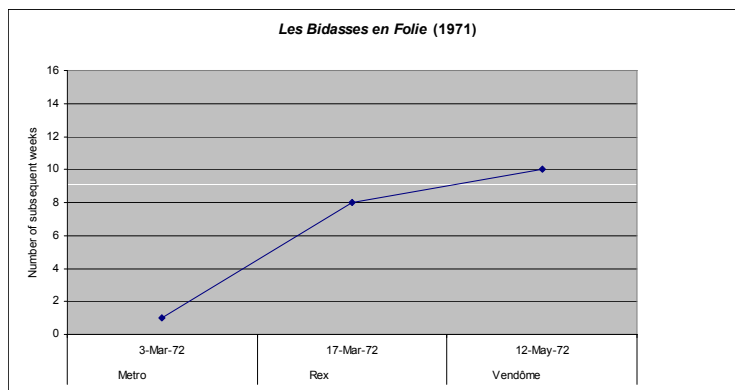


## West Side Story (1961)



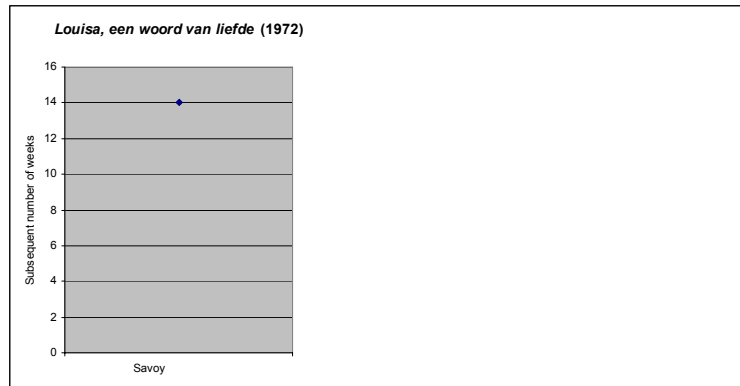
## programming of the Rex concern

- Longest running films of 1972



# programming of the Rex concern

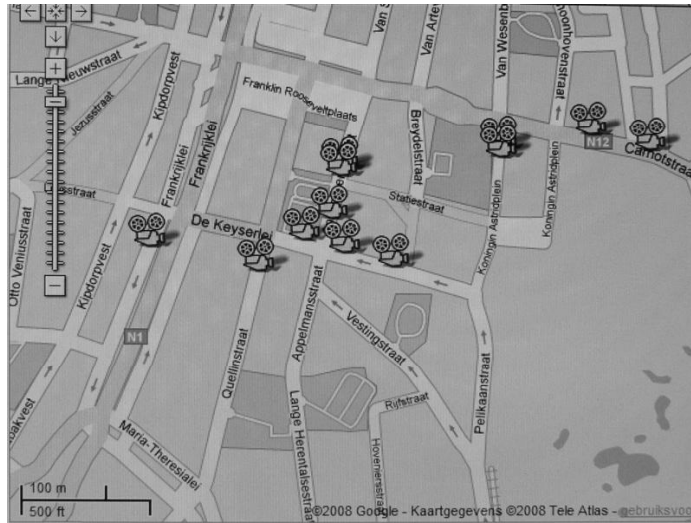
- Longest running films of 1972



## Antwerp 1972

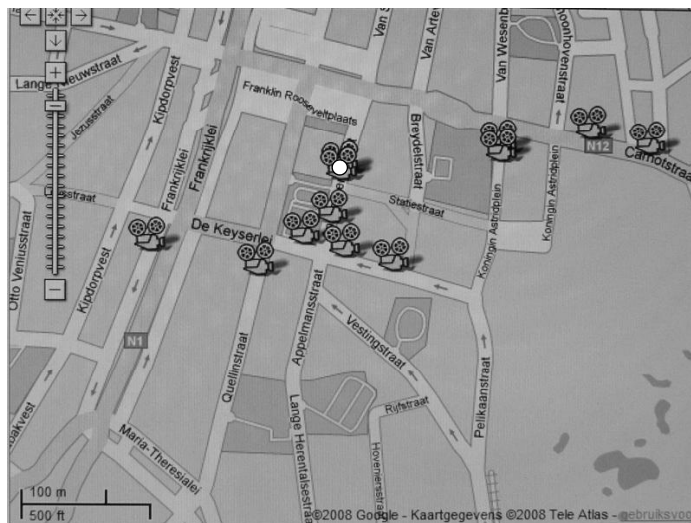


## Antwerp 1972



## Les Bidasses en folie (1971)

Metro





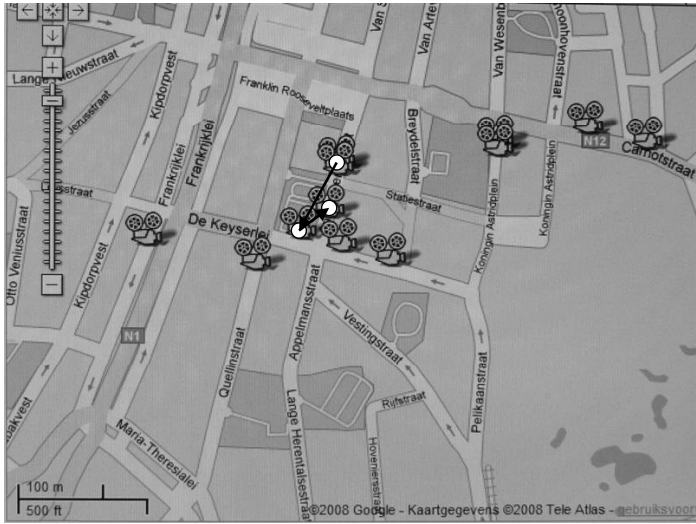
Les Bidasses en folie (1971)

Metro  
↓  
Rex



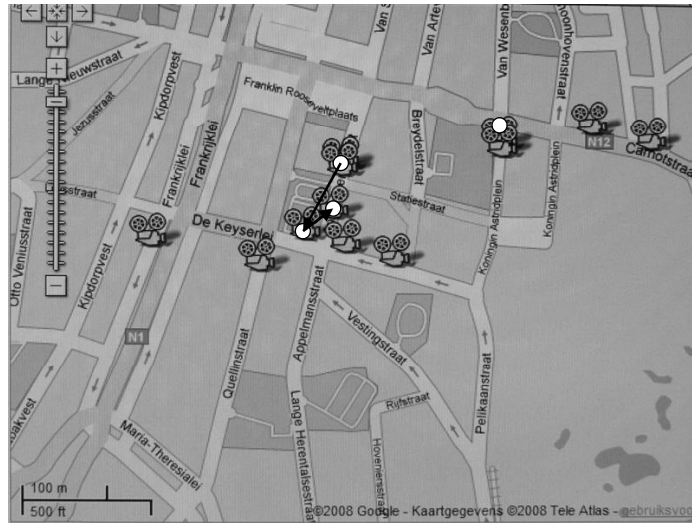
Les Bidasses en folie (1971)

Metro  
↓  
Rex  
↓  
Vendôme



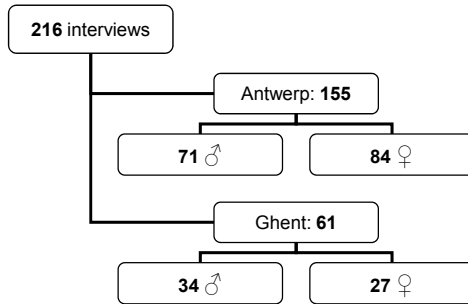
*Louisa, een woord van liefde (1972)*

Savoy

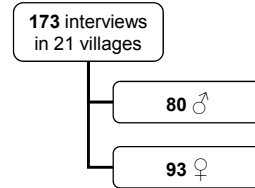


**Oral history 1.  
General results on film / cinema  
going culture in metropolitan and  
rural areas**

## CITIES



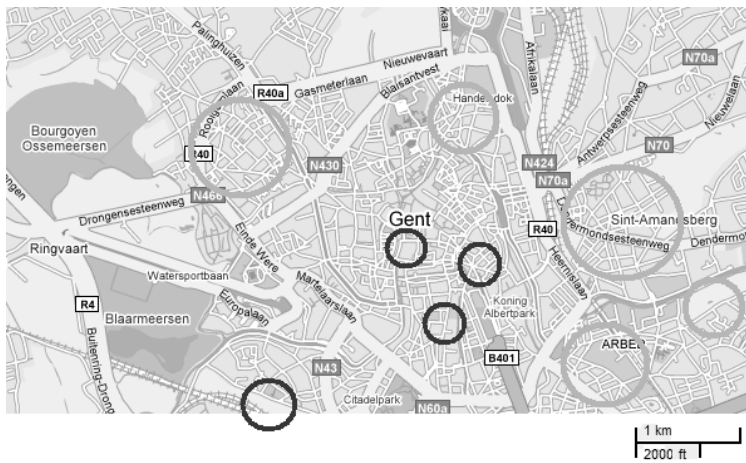
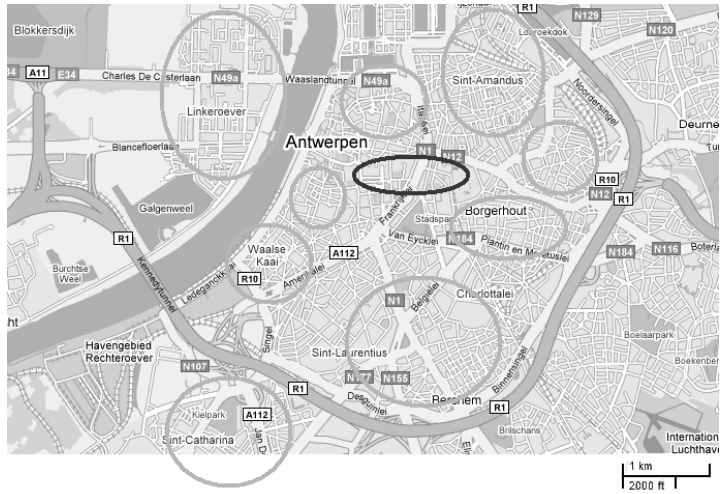
## VILLAGES



CHOOSING A **MOVIE THEATRE**

CHOOSING A **MOVIE**

CHOOSING **CINEMA**





The waiting in line was also very pleasant.

We laughed a lot. No matter who was standing there, we bonded and fraternized. Jokes went back and forth.

That was a pleasant spirit. The mentality then was very different. Now people live like individuals, but back then, people loved each other more.

(Charles, 1921)

We didn't go to the smaller cinemas. They were always packed and in our eyes a lesser kind of cinema. Because they would be belching, making noises, eating and smoking, and that wasn't for us. That was just too foul, it was the rabble making a party where one should just go see a movie.

(Agnella, 1942)



*Eldorado* was German, *Savoy* was mainly French and a bit spicy, *Rex* were quickies before catching a train, many thrillers, and *Select* was exclusively English. For the great American productions you went to *Capitole* and *Majestic*.

They'd tell you to "Come back next week" when some cowboy fell in a hole, or Rin Tin Tin was stuck somewhere or Tarzan would linger in some tree. It was always a party!

(Gilbert, 1936)



CHOOSING A **MOVIE THEATRE**

CHOOSING A **MOVIE**

CHOOSING **CINEMA**

And the next day we would fight out 'Quo Vadis' on the streets! Romans against Romans, and we would make wooden swords. And you should know how many times Winnetou passed down our street, cowboys and Indians, oh yes! And all that from watching the movies.

(Hendrik, 1941)



After the war I had to see 'Gone with the wind,' but I was only fifteen. So I put on my mothers shoes, her coat and her head. Luckily I was pretty tall, so they let me in!

(Jenny, 1930)



You know, I went to a catholic school, and we'd have these priests. And they'd tell you that movies were the 'source of all evil!' But others would claim that blouses without sleeves were the source of all evil. So we'd figure it was a bit variable.

(Sabine, 1946)



Stars played a huge part! I might have been wrong, but from the moment I saw the name of my favourite actor, we'd all go. You see, you'd feel it; it had to be a good movie, because otherwise he wouldn't be in it!

(Hubert, 1938)





CHOOSING A **MOVIE THEATRE**

CHOOSING A **MOVIE**

CHOOSING **CINEMA**



It was daily routine. You went to the movies? So you went to the movies. Whether it was a Sunday, during the week or on a holiday, it was all the same. (Roger, 1946)

That was a little cinema where they played more like sensation movies. You heard more of what was yelled and done at the back row and the balcony. From time to time, women's underwear came floating down. That was the cinema. You didn't need to go there for the movie. There were other things doing around there. Famous and notorious. It was grabbing and groping. Yes, if you wanted to do something with your woman, you went to 'Het Peterke' and you were never disturbed, because your neighbour was doing the exact same thing. ... If you talk to people my age from my neighbourhood, and you start talking about 'Het Peterke', you'll see mischief glittering in their eyes.

(Arthur, 1932)



That was a completely different world. I lived in a world where I did not have much. Being poor and then seeing that other world was a little bit of comfort. That you were able to experience that on that screen in that other world. That provided a little bit of comfort and you wanted to have the same at home, but... you know. That was another world that you really needed in a situation like that.

(Irène, 1945)

**Oral history 2.  
Commercial versus  
ideological imperatives:  
pillarisation and exhibition industry**

**The Catholic church and the movies in  
Flanders**

- The phenomenon of 'pillarisation' in society
- Catholic involvement in movies: broad and integrated structure with actions on different areas of film culture
  - Exhibition
  - Distribution
  - Documentation and press
  - Censorship board
  - But NOT production
- Contrasting these results with a 'bottom up'-perspective



- Armand: My first visits to the cinema were to a Catholic theatre. So my parents had nothing against that. But sometimes we went to another cinema, and whenever we came home from such a cinema, our parents would check with us what we saw, who we encountered there and stuff like that. Because of the strict, Catholic education back then.
- ...
- Our (Catholic) school was really negative about movies. But they screened their own movies. They selected them and before they showed them to us the movies were heavily censored.
- ...
- Int: So you could say that in your experience there was a link between your Catholic background and your moviegoing history?
- Armand: Not at all! I was receptive to all movies and chose completely free. When it came to cinema, I only took into account my own preferences.

## Catholics and the exhibition scene:

An alternative network of Catholic cinemas

I sometimes went to Catholic cinemas. But the seats there were really uncomfortable, that was not a real cinema. But Rex or Metro, that were cinemas. Really luxurious and with the best movies (Emma, 1923, Antwerpen)

The movies? That were films that were really old and totally worn-out. The remains, really. The ones they could get for a cheap price, because they couldn't afford expensive movies. They played one or two box office hits from a few years before, but all the rest ... well, that was only what they could get (Jan, 1941, Mechelen).



The Catholic cinema? Yes, we went there. But that was really a family cinema. We didn't go there everyday. If we went there, it was specifically chosen. But you can't say that it was a real cinema. A real cinema is a cinema where the exhibitor needs to make a living out of it, where he needs to make sure that there is a good movie that can attract the audience. But there (the catholic cinema) wasn't it like that at all (Maria, 1927, Mechelen)



# Catholics and the movies

## Censorship and the classification system

Int: If a film was considered a forbidden movie, would go and see it?

Roger (1930, Antwerp): No, never. That was against the spirit of the age. It was like the book *Boerenpsalm* from Felix Timmermans. We weren't allowed to read that either, because he stood on the forbidden index. If I had read that book then, I would have committed a sin.

Those were just the standards then. You didn't do such things. The mentality was different back then. Everything that didn't keep you on the rails was dangerous and could lead you astray. Everybody knew that beforehand (Olivia, 1928, Antwerp).

Off course we went to Church. We had to, they controlled that. And the Jesuits there told us what we would see and what not. And our parents would never let us see a movie if the priests had told us not to see it. And when we pressed real hard, they said: 'We'll see what the *Catholic Film League* thinks of this movie.' (André, 1924, Berchem)

Sure you had to be good. But these quotations in the newspapers were excellent to see were kids weren't allowed, so you'd know that's those were the ones you'd definitely had to see! (Armand, 1933, Ghent)



I remember going to see a forbidden movie. They said it was daring, so I wanted to check it out for myself. So I went. I'll never forget. The entire movie I was thinking: when is something going to happen? But nothing happened (Liliane, 1930, Antwerp).



You know, I went to a catholic school, and we'd have these priests. And they'd tell you that movies were the 'source of all evil!' But others would claim that blouses without sleeves were the source of all evil. So we'd figure it was a bit variable (Sabine, 1946, Ghent).

## Catholics and cinema: Urban versus rural experience



Our local priest was absolutely against our cinema. But he regularly visited my aunt (who owned the local movie theatre) to drink coffee. But whenever he was on the pulpit during mass, he was always preaching against the cinema (Mark, 1934, Liedekerke).





If our local priest heard that children had gone to the movie theatre in Merelbeke, he immediately told the parents. He had a lot of contempt for people who went to the cinema. Those people were beneath him. He talked about that in schools. Many people, like the priest, thought that people who went to the cinema weren't good Catholics. He was really opposed to the cinema (Jean, 1932, Ghent).

### **Case study 3. Combining exhibition and programming data with oral histories on cinemagoing: audiences, genre, origin and social class**



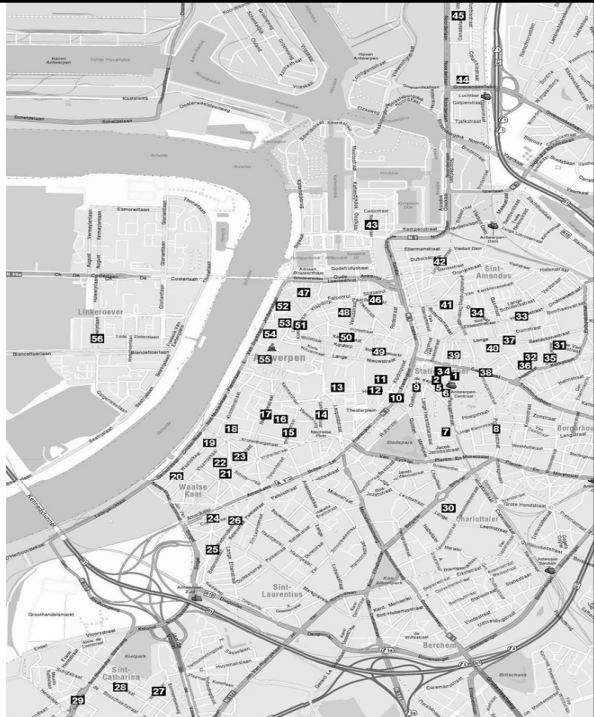
# local cinema history: research in practice

- 1. sources and input of data in 3 databases:
  - Yearbooks industry and local studies (part 1)
  - Daily programming books (part 2)
  - Newspaper advertisements (part 2)
  - Other archival material (part 2)
  - Interviews (part 3)

# local cinema history: research in practice

- 2. analysis
  - combining findings
    - 1. basic geographical data
    - 2. programming strategies
    - 3. experiences of cinema-going
  - diachronical analysis
    - Fifties through seventies
  - reconstructing layers of cinema culture
    - Center vs periphery
    - Social stratification
    - Programming: genre, origin, running time
    - Cultural geography of cinemagoing

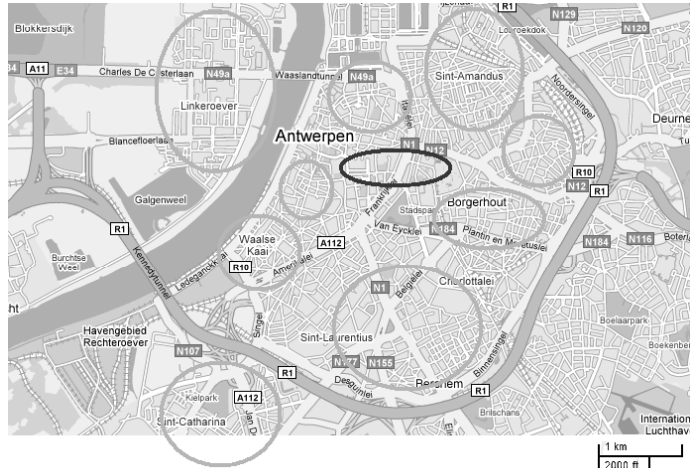
# Part 1. diachronical map of cinemas Antwerp



## Part 2: programming

- Case: Antwerp Rex concern through 3 decades (1952, 1962 and 1972)
- Genre, country and first / second run
  - *Astrid*: German films
  - *Odeon*: French films
  - *Rex*: première cinema, Western European films
  - *Astra*: short running time (one week)
  - *Rubens*: American films
- Diachronic analysis
  - growth of erotic film in 1972 (10 %)
  - substantial decline in US movies over the three decades: 1952 (3/4) 1972 (1/5)

## part 3: oral history and mental mapping



## part 3: oral history and mental mapping

RIK DE WEERDT (73 ys.):

### **City center picture palaces**

De Keyserlei, that was a street of high standing. People came there to be seen. This was not just a neighbourhood where we would go to unless it was necessary.

### **Neighbourhood cinemas**

Then there was the time that I started to get interested in girls. Back then you could still make out in the cinemas. At the *Roma* they wouldn't allow it, they would keep an eye on you. So we went to the *Luxor*. And we would sit there in the corner...

## in-depth analysis: location/ program /mental mapping

- Clear hierarchy in cinemas (according to social class and location, starting at bottom)
  - 1. neighbourhood cinemas & suburban cinemas
  - 2. City center cinemas at the Astridplein (Kursaal etc.) highly accessible
  - 3. City center cinemas at Keyserlei, Quellinstraat (Rex, Metro, Trocadero, etc) middle and upper class, but accessible
  - 4. High end city center cinemas (Anvers Palace, Scala) where evening dress was required, mainly elite audiences, not accessible for lower classes
- Diachronical analysis:
  - hierarchy diminishes over time (seventies)

## in-depth analysis: case De Keyserlei

- From the turn of the century up until the 1960s the De Keyserlei had the reputation of being *the* place to see and to be seen.
- Of the 39 urban cinemas, twelve were situated in the immediate vicinity of that cultural center and almost all of them were sooner or later absorbed by cinema tycoon Georges Heylen
- Difference between palaces on the De Keyserlei and neighbourhood cinemas
  - size/architectural design/appearance/luxury
  - infrastructure/ equipment/ staff
  - economic structure (private vs. corporate ownership)
  - (target) audience
  - Programming strategies
  - Image / reputation / social conventions of cinemagoing

## To conclude: adding another layer

- Reconstructing cinema culture
  - Multilevel approach
- Combining different layers of findings
  - institutional, programming, experience
- comparative research
  - similar cities
    - in Flanders (Ghent), Belgium (Brussels) and abroad
- From the local to the global?
  - Specificities vs universal trends

## Questions and discussion



*Movie Theater in Antwerp*  
Collection Paul Corluy