

Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies

Paper 232

Hipsterification and Capitalism

A Digital Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis of Ghent

by

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November 2019



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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: HIPSTERS, SUPERDIVERSITY AND THE POST-DIGITAL WORLD

The hipster is a popular figure in newspapers, fashion magazines and memes on social media. Bars, restaurants, streets, neighbourhoods and even cities are labelled as 'hipster'. Intuitively, everybody seems to know what a hipster is and how hipster places look and feel. Not surprising that this social, cultural and economic phenomenon has also generated a booming stack of academic literature in the last years (Arsel and Thompson, 2010; Bogovic, n.d.; Greif et al., 2010; Ouellette, 2013; Reeve, 2013; Stahl, 2010a, 2010b; Maly & Varis, 2016; Hubbard, 2016; Scott, 2017; Hairon et al., 2017; Steward, 2017; Le Grand 2018). At the same time, nobody seems to be self-identifying as a hipster. The hipster is always somebody else. This 'hipster paradox' raises numerous questions. If nobody is a hipster or wants to be a hipster, then what is all the fuzz about? And how come – if nobody is a hipster – that so-called hipster places and practices are booming around the world? And if the hipster does not exist (or died already according to others (Greif, 2010a)), why then, when we start observing who frequents these so-called hip(ster) places, we encounter a mind-boggling uniformity of hipster-emblems on display.

HIPSTERS AND HIPSTERIFICATION AS SOCIAL FACTS

This book engages with the hipster and more particularly with what I will describe as the process of hipsterification of cities as a social, cultural, economic and material phenomenon. 'The hipster' is a social fact. As a social group, hipsters are detectable online and offline, in identity discourses, specific styles and practices and in shops and bars, in streets, neighbourhoods and cities. For now, I will define hipsterification – as in the becoming (-ification) hipster – as a specific form of gentrification that shows itself through the presence of semiotic material and practices associated with hip(ster-) culture (Maly, 2017). Hipsterification from this perspective is less about the presence of a specific social group – the hipsters – than it is about the visibility and mobilization of 'hipster semiotics and discourses' in a certain space. This starting point generates a plethora of questions. Who is a hipster and when is a place, a street or a city 'hip(ster)'? And to whom is it 'hip'? What semiotic, linguistic, or architectural material makes something hip? And maybe more important, what are the effects of hipster-culture on a city and its population? All these questions beg for answers, answers that understand hip(ster)ness in context. Answers that capture hipster culture in relation to larger social, economic, political, technological and historical changes.

This last element is crucial according to me. Studying the hipster is more than just about hipsters. Analysing the hipster and processes of what I will coin as hipsterification in context, forces us to think about the relation between social groups and the construction of meaning-in-place and about meaning and social groups in a world characterized by mobility, neoliberal globalization and digitalization. It also forces us to update methodologies and theories about identity, the city and the relation between individuals, social groups and space. The questions mentioned above are the starting point of this little digital ethnographic book at the intersection of culture studies, (digital) ethnography and sociolinguistics in particular, sociology, and social geography, urban studies and political and social economy in general.

The topic emerged out of the data. The research presented here started in the beginning of the 21st century. Since the end of the 20th century, I have been living in Ghent, Belgium. In those decades, I not only lived in this city, I also observed, reflected and researched it as a student, a young professional, a partygoer, a citizen, a parent, a public intellectual and an ethnographer. I started writing about the (changes in) Ghent in student papers, in policy-documents (as a civil servant) (Maly, 2002), in columns (as a public intellectual) (Maly, 2007a, b, c, d) and in books and papers (as an ethnographer) (Maly, Blommaert and Ben Yakoub, 2014; Blommaert and Maly, 2016; Maly, 2016) since 2003.

The focus of much of that work was dedicated to the mapping and analysis of the diversification of Ghent. The process of ‘hipsterification’ was strangely absent in many published analyses. Strangely, because when looking back at the data, it was manifestly present in most of my fieldwork notes, in the pictures I collected and in my reflections. Only in a series of essays I wrote in the city magazine *TiensTiens* in 2006 and 2007 was this process of hipsterification already visible. From 2013 onwards though, it became more and more obvious that ‘the hipster’ and the hip Ghentian scene was not just a small niche of marginal importance: it visually reshaped the entire city. It became mainstream and that showed itself in the semiotic landscape. Throughout this book, I will argue that the hipster and the process of hipsterification of the city cannot be understood as a local, Ghentian phenomenon, but that it is best seen as a social and cultural phenomenon in the online and offline nexus that is emblematic of much larger social, economic, political and technological changes in the world.

ANALYSING SOCIAL GROUPS IN A SUPERDIVERSE AND POST-DIGITAL WORLD

In these decades of commitment with the city, I have observed and mapped change. Fast and structural changes. Four large evolutions coincided in the last 20 years: (1) The birth of the competitive, neoliberal city (Harvey, 2008, 2013; Zukin, 1995). That is the city that uses the symbolic economy to position itself in the global market. Or in other words, the city that is run as a business and needs tourists and substantial middle and high class residents to pay the bills. (2) The impact of digitalization on culture, identity and communication. (3) A rising

diversification of diversity, or what Vertovec and many others label as superdiversity (Vertovec, 2006; Zukin, 1991) and last but not least (4) the emergence of the hipster and more importantly what I label the hipsterification of the city (Maly, 2017).

These evolutions are all deeply interconnected and each topic has generated a large body of academic literature. Academic literature that addresses all these issues and connects the dots between these evolutions is extremely rare. I hope this book contributes to making those connections explicit.

Interesting example in this light, is that the hipster for instance has rarely been described as part of the diversification of diversity. Even though in some studies on superdiversity, the hipster pops up as a side figure (see for instance Wessendorf, 2014), in general the presence of hipsters and hipster places and practices has not been described as part of that 'superdiversification' of cities. In most sociology literature, a superdiverse society is a society that is characterized as a majority-minority-city. Crul (et al., 2013: 105) for instance concludes his book with saying that in 21st century European cities are becoming 'majority-minority cities'. When the majority of the population exits out of migrants or their descendants we can, according to Crul, speak of superdiverse cities. This conceptualization has a wide academic (see for instance Geldof, 2013) and societal uptake. A good example of this common sense understanding of superdiversity in the context of this book is found in the following official statement of Geert Bourgeois, Flemish minister of integration and member of the nationalistic Flemish party N-VA: *'The term superdiversity is not just about the number of different nationalities in our Flemish society, there are now 176 nationalities present, but also about the size of these groups. In some cities more than half of the population is of foreign origin'* (Bourgeois, 2009). Superdiversity is, in this meaning, solely linked to the numbers of migrants present in terms of the number of nationalities they represent and their proportion of the total population.

The problem with such interpretations is that they look at society through an ethnic and national lens. The adjective 'superdiverse' in this type of discourse represents a *"statistical essentialisation", where people's background and countries and cultures of origin are turned into percentages in a population in a specific location, and hence neatly defined groups"* (Varis, 2017: 26). This perspective on superdiversity not only doesn't avoid the ethnic fallacy, it fails to realize and incorporate the impact of globalisation and digitalization. True, Vertovec from the start points to the importance of transnationalism in shaping superdiversity when he states: *'The degrees to and ways in which today's migrants maintain identities, activities and connections linking them with communities outside Britain are unprecedented'* (Vertovec, 2007: 1043). Vertovec recognizes the impact of new and rather cheaply available modes for transnational communication and thus for cultural flows and identity production on a global

scale. New communication technologies are only – so it seems- being used by migrants to ‘maintain identities and connections’.

Implicit in this notion of superdiversity is that the changes that are characteristic of superdiversity only affect society when there are a lot of ‘migrants’, and that superdiversity is thus something of the migrants. This conceptualization of superdiversity generates an enormous bias. As we have seen above, ‘the hipster’ but also emo’s, skaters petrolhead or snobs cannot be detected in such an approach and as a consequence a whole empirical reality is hidden from the analytical scope or understood it as an autochthone, local phenomenon. Indeed, also in the case of Ghent, the label ‘superdiversity’ is only used in the context of integration and migration policies to refer to the presence of ‘other ethnicities’. Hipster culture is not being imagined as part of that ongoing translocal structural change in the city, or at least, it has not been described as part of the diversification of diversity (Maly, 2017: 57). At least implicitly, the autochthone hipster is imagined as a local cultural phenomenon and social group and this imagination, as we shall see, has powerful effects on the structure and reshaping of the city.

All too often, when scholars analyse cities and neighbourhoods, the material world seems to be imagined as something that is produced locally and offline (see for instance: Hall, 2014; Peterson, 2017; Albeda, et al., 2017). *“Social action, it seems, is located within a geographical circumscription – a neighbourhood, a street, a town – which is seen as the locus of action of a sedentary community”* (Blommaert and Maly, 2019: 1). This implicit assumption is also present in a lot of research in urban studies, superdiversity, gentrification, and linguistic landscaping. Social action is still imagined as sedentary action, taking place locally and offline while studies in digital culture and digital ethnography let us understand that offline action and space is in many cases also shaped by digitalization (Varis, 2016; Pink et al., 2016; Zukin, Lindeman, and Hurson, 2017). Life in the 21st century is characterized by high mobility, globalization and digitalisation (Arnaut et al., 2016). The material world is a networked or post-digital world. Post-digital is a concept introduced and used among others by Cramer (2014) to describe *‘a state in which the disruption brought upon by digital information technology has already occurred.’* The post-digital world is thus still very much affected by digitalisation and refers to the *“technical condition that followed the so-called digital revolution and is constituted by the naturalization of pervasive and connected computing processes and outcomes in everyday life, such that digitality is now inextricable from the way we live while forms, functions and effects are no longer perceptible”* (Albrecht, Fielitz and Thurston, 2019: 11).

Social groups, superdiversity, hipsterification, their social order and structure, from an ethnographic perspective, do not exist in an abstract sense. They are *“enacted constantly by people in contextualized, situated moments of interaction”* (Blommaert and Maly, 2019: 3) and

a large part of that interaction is now digitally mediated. It is through social action and discourse in the online/offline nexus that people are constantly shaping and (re)constructing their place, street, neighbourhood, city and themselves. The discourses in that material world represent a social world that gives meaning to the actions of people in the light of those discourses (Scollon and Scollon, 2003) and vice versa. In the 21th century the result of the contextualized interaction of social actors is thus not only a constantly changing offline ‘*geosemiotic landscape*’ (Blommaert, 2013), but also an ever-changing online landscape. And the dialectic between online and offline interaction, between the online and offline landscape create the meaning of space, infrastructures and social action.

SUPERDIVERSITY REVISITED

Seen from this post-digital constellation of the world, it becomes clear that the notion of superdiversity needs to be updated. In his seminal paper, Vertovec (2007: 1025-6) coined super-diversity as a ‘summary term’ in order to capture the enormous diversification of diversity. The concept was introduced to favour a “*multidimensional perspective on diversity both in terms of moving beyond ‘the ethnic group as either the unit of analysis or sole object of study’ (Glick Schiller et al., 2006: 613) and by appreciating the coalescence of factors which condition people’s lives.*” Vertovec stressed that ethnicity does not equal homogeneity. Ethnic groups are diverse and we should also look at variables as gender, religion, languages, statuses, places where migrants’ lives and transnationalism in order to make sense of diversity in times of cultural complexity.

In recent years, superdiversity has been a very influential concept to capture fast (demographic, (socio)-linguistic and cultural) changes and the diversification of populations in cities around the world (Vertovec, 2006, 2007, 2010; Blommaert, 2013; Maly, Blommaert and Ben Yakoub, 2014; Wessendorf, 2013, 2014; Hall, 2014; Maly, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017; Albeda et al., 2017; Peterson, 2017). As an analytical concept, superdiversity, has been taken up by sociologists, social-geographers, anthropologists and sociolinguists. Of course, this uptake, has had an effect in the way superdiversity has been understood and put into practice. In general, we can see two ways in which superdiversity is picked up: (1) superdiversity as a quantitative and measurable phenomenon that I criticized above and (2) superdiversity as a paradigm shift (see also Arnaut, 2012). In this book I explicitly will subscribe to this second, sociolinguistic approach to superdiversity as a paradigm shift.

In 2011, superdiversity was taken up by sociolinguists, and more in particular it was introduced in the field by Blommaert and Rampton (2011) in the online publication ‘Language and Superdiversity’. This position paper heralded the ‘voyage in’ of superdiversity into large sections of sociolinguistics (Arnaud et al., 2017). This voyage in, came with a more complex understanding of superdiversity that connected superdiversity not only to rising migration or

statistics, but also to digitalization, globalization, power, inequality and surveillance (Arnaut et al., 2016). This voyage into sociolinguistics resulted in attaching a research program to the concept. Superdiversity was used as *“a heuristic tool (‘a lense’) or a working hypothesis (‘a perspective’) impelling and guiding us to better understand the global condition of interconnectivity”* (Arnaut et al., 2017: 6). This research program placed the need to empirically investigate *‘the diversification of diversity’* beyond the realm of statistics and the expected. And even more, it stressed that ‘superdiversity’ is not only about migrants making a society ‘superdiverse’, but about the way people live their lives in this post-digital world.

Superdiversity-as-paradigm, starts from the idea that what was considered ‘normal’ in modernity – that we have one national identity, speak one language, live a sedentary life, be a member of one community – is rather rare in times of superdiversity (Blommaert, 2010, 2013; Pennycook, 2012; Maly, Blommaert and Ben Yakoub, 2014). Blommaert describes the paradigmatic impact of superdiversity as follows: *“it questions the foundations of our knowledge and assumptions about societies, how they operate and function at all levels, from the lowest level of human face-to-face communication all the way up to the highest levels of structure in the world system”* (Blommaert, 2013: 6). It questions the methodological nationalism and furthers the idea that people give meaning to their life in a multi-scalar world, even if they live statutory lives and thus never migrated.

Superdiversity-as-paradigm starts from the ‘non-predictability’ of reality and in that sense, it forces us to work ethnographically. Labelling spaces and places as superdiverse or not based on the stats approach can be extremely problematic in conditions of rapid social change. Not only can this quantitative essentialist paradigm fetishize diversity or reproduce old essentialisms, it also constructs ‘superdiversity’ in itself as abnormal, an abbreviation (see Varis, 2017 for an excellent discussion) as it comes with a normative baseline level of diversity, and thus with a normative vision on the ‘expected’. In a quantitative perspective of superdiversity, most of Ghent would not yet be considered as ‘superdiverse’ as ‘only’ 15% of the population has foreign roots. In such conception of the city, old discourses reappear and stress the locality of the Ghentian population. As will become clear in the remainder of this book, such conceptualization completely misses what is really going on. Not only does it fail conceptualize the city as characterized by mobility, or as shaped by translocal processes, the hipster would just be understood as ‘local Ghent hip’ people. Note also, that the digital economy and concrete cultural practices are completely absent in this understanding of superdiversity and thus in our understanding of social groups and spaces in a post-digital world.

Varis is therefor right to point out that the statistical approach to superdiversity *“may obscure the fact that what is essentially changing is the available horizons of meaning, both in places and spaces that can labelled as ‘very diverse’ as well as in those that are seem not to be so from*

this perspective" (Varis, 2017: 28). If we take the paradigmatic impact of superdiversity serious, we need to direct detailed attention to concrete cases where people interact in concrete contexts. This is as Blommaert and Rampton (2016: 35-36) stress, not a retreat from larger generalizations, but it is a plea that *"in the process of abstracting and simplifying, it is vital to continuously refer back to what's 'lived' and expressed in the everyday."* And important, the 'everyday' in post-digital and superdiverse times is offline and online, layered and polycentric. This is exactly the exercise I present in this book. Hipster style and discourse, seen in the rising numbers of infrastructures, cities and real-estate developers mobilizing it to address people, points to the fact that this addresses a rising number of people.

ETHNOGRAPHY, SUPERDIVERSITY AND THE POIESIS-INFRASTRUCTURES NEXUS

Since its uptake in sociolinguistics, superdiversity generated a very productive (but niched) research production (see for instance: Arnaut et al., 2016, 2017; Maly, Blommaert and Ben Yakoub, 2014; Maly, 2014, 2016, 2017; Maly and Varis, 2016). In that literature, superdiversity became a lens to capture change and complexity in today's world characterised by *"in Hedge's words (2005:61) (...). The emergence of new forms of sociality and cultural practices constructed by the coming together of media, migration, mobility and the flow of capital.'* Along with this 'coming together', *new unevennesses, inequalities and discrepancies have emerged*" (Varis, 2017: 27).

Two axioms were taken on board in this type of research (Blommaert and Rampton, 2016: 33-34): (1) contexts should be investigated rather than assumed. Meaning never takes shape in a vacuum, but within interactions in specific place in a post-digital, multiscalar, polycentric world. (2) the analysis of the internal organisation of semiotic data is essential for understanding its significance and position in the world.

Instead of labelling activities, or neighbourhoods and cities as superdiverse by looking at stats, superdiversity-as-paradigm forces us to understand discourses, practices, neighbourhoods and study meaning making in context. Or in the words of Bauman: *"if superdiversity announces the collapse of traditional classificatory frameworks, then ethnography is a vital resource"* (quoted in Arnaut et al., 2017: 12). In many of the research within the sociolinguistics of superdiversity, ethnography was used to grasp the creativity and richness of semiotic processes and outcome, as well as the more structural elements, the infrastructures and linguistic ecologies/economies. Arnaut et al. (2017: 13) conceptualized this as the *"poiesis-infrastructures nexus"*.

Calhoun introduced 'poiesis' as a concept to draw attention to the fact that even in social constructivist theories one rarely finds research that focuses on the concrete human activity as their key research: *"While the terms social construction and human agency both point toward the study of creative activity, they tend to operate at a level of abstraction that seldom contains*

analysis of how things are actually created, including the conditions of creation as well as the products that come out of it (Calhoun et al., 2013: 195). *“Poiesis”, the authors make clear, “means making. It means making our world, but it also means making ourselves”* (Calhoun et al., 2013: 195)

Infrastructure in the usage of Calhoun, is about *“all the various infrastructures that make possible ways of life, social practices, and urban culture. While this includes infrastructure as a matter of material technology — the most common usage — it also includes other sorts of infrastructure like legal arrangements, cultural conventions, financial systems, and language”* (Calhoun, et al., 2013: 197-8). The poiesis-infrastructure nexus focuses the attention of researcher on understanding human activity as creative social interaction as embedded in infrastructures and allows to better grasp *“how creative activity is both enabled and constrained by the conditions in which it takes place”* (Calhoun et al., 2013: 197). The poiesis-infrastructure nexus *“envisages the double process of emergent normativities and sedimentations, on the one hand, and the creative and material production processes unsettling these on the other hand”* (Arnaut et al. 2017: 15). People in algorithmic culture, should thus not be understood as passive nodes, but as *“interactional actors embedded, but never fully conditioned by the systems that organize that experience”* (Van Nuenen, 2016: 19). The internet is one of these infrastructures that not enables creativity and a diversification of diversity, but it is also a space *“where diversity is controlled, ordered, and curtailed. This control involves both explicit forms of normativity and more implicit ones that emerge and are negotiated and monitored in online micro practices”* (Varis and Wang, 2016: 219). Layered, polycentric and translocal manifestations of micro-populations like hipsters are clear examples of this creativity-structure nexus. It also means that the local city or neighbourhood cannot be fully understood without also analysing the online and the global and the interaction between both. That is the main argument presented in this book.

THIS BOOK

The broad lines of the book are clear: the connection between people, culture, identity, language and semiotic material in a certain context. Or more concretely, how the symbolic economy of Ghent, Belgium is constructed in the neoliberal and post-digital 21st century. As already mentioned, but it deserves emphasis, the online, global and mobile dimensions of the contemporary material world pose important methodological and theoretical challenges. The research presented here thus not only makes an empirical, but also a theoretical and methodological argument. I have the explicit aim to contribute and stimulate further interdisciplinary research on social groups and space in the post-digital constellation that characterizes superdiversity.

Throughout this book, I will address these challenges. I will start by tackling the methodological issues in the next chapter where I will introduce my methodology: Digital Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis or ELLA 2.0. This methodology puts space, or more precisely the geosemiotic landscape and the symbolic economy of spaces central. Space is analysed as constructed through (digitally mediated) social action in context.

In Chapter 2, I will introduce the field. I will understand hipster the hipster as a translocal, layered and polycentric micro-population manifesting itself through a very specific style and identity discourse. And just like the hipster is a translocal phenomenon, we see that the hipster-city is also found all over the world. From this translocal introduction of the field, I will zoom in on the process of hipsterification in Ghent Belgium in the 21st century.

In Chapter 3, I go back in time to the beginning of the 21st century and analyse the party scene in Ghent as a process of meaning making in the context of neoliberal capitalism. The identity discourse of the Culture Club as edgy, cosmopolitan and hip, created added value for all kinds of big brands. The hipster is not only a transnational, polycentric cultural phenomenon, or a consumer, but also a producer. The identity discourses and semiotizations of the hipster create added value which not only shape micro-enterprises but also cities and platforms. The imagination of Ghent as a hip city is therefor only partly the effect of the presence of hipsters, it is also the effect of neoliberal urban policies.

In Chapter 4, I will show how the hipsterification of the historical centre of Ghent is expanding and how new hip infrastructures contribute to the understanding of Ghent as a hip city. At the same time, I will show how the construction of local hipness and originality cannot be understood in full without looking at the higher scales. Hipster culture is a niched, layered and translocal phenomenon and the cultural products and strategies of hipster entrepreneurs, seen from a global scale fit a genre or a format.

In Chapter 5, we move from the centre of the city, to a poor and 'superdiverse' neighbourhood in the 19th century belt and show how ELLA 2.0 allows us to describe the changes in the social composition of the neighbourhood and the process of hipsterification. In Chapter 5, we move attention to two other sites in the 19th century belt – The Old Docks and the Watt complex – to show how authenticity discourses and hipster semiotics are used to start up a process of hipsterification.

I end with a more general reflection and conclusion on the relation between people, cities and capitalism in post-digital Ghent and on the theoretical and methodological impact of the findings. I will explicitly do this from the ethnographic perspective on social space, social groups and social action I developed throughout the book. Maybe even more than a mere

methodological contribution, I hope that this book can help to get the conceptualization of superdiversity '*out of sociolinguistics*' that Arnaut (et al., 2017: 4) hopes for.

CHAPTER 2: DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHIC LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS (ELLA 2.0)

The paradigmatic impact of superdiversity not only forces us to go beyond accepted notions regarding the relation between people, identities, language, and space. It also forces to engage with the development of new methodologies. The central case under scrutiny in this book – the process of hipsterification of the city of Ghent – puts the digital and geosemiotic landscape of the historical centre of Ghent, and the 19th century belt around that centre central. Analysing the linguistic and semiotic landscape of Ghent and its online representations and echo's grounds this book in a very concrete social and material world.

The methodology used in this study – Digital Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape analysis or ELLA 2.0 - is the result of intense collaboration over the last 8 years with my colleagues of Babylon, the Centre for the Study of Superdiversity (Tilburg University). In particular, I further engage with a methodology I had the pleasure to help develop with Jan Blommaert (Blommaert, 2013; Maly, Blommaert and Ben Yakoub, 2014; Maly, 2014, 2016; Blommaert and Maly, 2016, 2019) and Piia Varis (2016; Maly and Varis, 2016; Maly, 2016). This collaboration under the umbrella of Babylon generated a constant methodological fine-tuning to study semiotic landscapes in cities as sites enabling and constraining social interaction. This methodological development started with a commitment with a relatively recent booming research discipline within sociolinguistics – Linguistic Landscape Studies – and ended up with injecting a (digital) ethnographic approach in this methodological toolkit.

ELLA 2.0 combines three elements: (1) a disciplinary concern with small details in concrete empirical cases of momentary events in the material world, (2) a methodology that '*compels us to historicize these unique cases and to understand them as an interplay*' (Blommaert, 2013) between systemic and non-systemic, local and translocal, online and offline features and (3) a focus on social action in a networked and post-digital society. This focus starts from the assumption that social facts and the geosemiotic landscape are the result of '*interactional co-construction*' (Blommaert and Maly, 2019) on the online/offline nexus. The linguistic landscape, from this perspective, is an effect of social life, of collaboration, response or conflict with others offline and online. And equally important, social life in the 21st century means interaction between local and global actors on that nexus. In the remainder of this chapter, I want to introduce this methodology and the type of data it yields.

ETHNOGRAPHIC LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS (ELLA)

Classic Linguistic Landscape Research drew our attention to language on public signs like advertising billboards, street names, small commercial communication, shop names, and so on (Landry and Bourhis, 1997; Backhaus, 2007; Cenoz and Garter, 2006; Hélot, Barni and Bagna, 2012). The early stages of the development of LLS were dominated by a quantitative approach, in which publicly visible languages were counted and used it to map the distribution of 'languages' over a specific area (Backhaus, 2007 is an example). The major pro of this kind of LLR is that it is a very useful first diagnostic instrument. It enables researchers to detect the major features of sociolinguistic regimes rather quickly and in the case of a multilingual regime LLR is well suited to document the occurring languages (c.f.e. Saez Rivera and Castillo LLuch).

While this approach yielded useful indicative 'catalogues' of areal multilingualism, it used a very narrow and essentialist categorization of language (see Deumert, 2014 for a critique), even more, it failed to explain how the presence and distribution of languages could be connected with specific populations and communities and the relationships between them, or with the patterns of social interaction in which people engage in a particular space. Such levels of analysis require a more maturely semiotic approach, in which the signs themselves are given greater attention both individually (signs are multimodal and display important qualitative typological differences) and in combination with each other (the landscape, in other words) (see Blommaert, 2013 for a substantial critique of LLS)

Even in the light of these criticisms, the study of linguistic landscapes not only possesses high descriptive potential, but analytic potential as well. LLS can be used to make space itself a central object and concern. Not as empty space, but space as an environment in which publicly visible written languages document the presence of (linguistically and semiotically identifiable) groups of people and the social, political and economic relations between them (see Maly, 2014, 2016). However, before we can arrive there, the diagnostic instrument needs upgrading. It is at this point that ethnography comes in. Following Hymes (1996), I understand ethnography as an approach to analyse language in its wider context. It falls beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss this ethnographic approach in full detail (Briggs, 1986; Hymes, 1996; Blommaert and Dong, 2010; Blommaert, 2013 provide a useful and illuminating stack of literature), but the following points deserve emphasis:

- (1) Ethnography is more than just a mere collection of methods or a complex of fieldwork techniques (doing interviews for example) (Blommaert and Dong, 2010; Blommaert, 2013; Varis, 2016). It is a total and theoretically inspired program of scientific description and interpretation. Ethnography is a paradigm. In this understanding, fieldwork amounts to more than collecting pre-existing knowledge; it is always a work

of interpretation of complex social phenomena in specific, methodologically, ontologically and epistemologically grounded ways (Hymes, 1974).

- (2) As Blommaert and Dong (2010: 7–10) stress, one important consequence of the ethnographic ontology is that language (understood in its broad semiotic meaning) is seen as *“a socially loaded and assessed tool”* that enables humans to perform as social beings. Within ethnography, language is understood as the architecture of social behaviour. The description of the meanings and functions of linguistic resources is thus always an undertaking in understanding them within their contexts (see Blommaert 2005, 39–67 for an in-depth discussion).
- (3) From this ethnographic point of view, language cannot be contextless, and what is more, context is an integral part of language (Gumperz, 1982: 130–162). As a consequence, part-whole relations are central to any good ethnography. An ‘interview’ is thus not per se ethnographic; to make an interview ethnographic is to analyse and interpret it within its contexts (see Briggs, 1986 for a seminal discussion). This is of course true when we try to interpret signs in general. Barthes (1957: 111–116) already pointed out that the sign as ‘language-object’ can be affected by myth, ‘meta-language’ or use-in-context and as such acquire different meanings for those in the know.
- (4) It is at this point that the ethnographic epistemology enters the picture: knowledge of meaning—within an ethnographic paradigm—is processual and historical knowledge (Blommaert and Dong, 2010: 9). The ethnographer tries to find out things that belong to the implicit structures of people’s lives. This is a process and it is based on a careful analysis of an archive consisting of potentially very diverse sets of data: fieldnotes, pictures, interviews, and so on (see below for further details).
- (5) Ethnography, Hymes (1996: 7) stressed, is *“open-ended, subject to self-correction during the process of inquiry itself. All this is not to say that ethnography is open-minded to the extent of being empty-minded, that ignorance and naivete are wanted. The more the ethnographer knows on entering the field, the better the result is likely to be.”* Two lessons follow from this.
 - a. First, ethnography does not start with interviews, long-term participation or observation, nor can it be limited to these. Ethnography starts long before entering the field with the gathering of knowledge. In this pre-fieldwork phase the researcher gathers as much information as possible on the field and the larger context. The better one is prepared, the better the end result will be.
 - b. Second, researchers should be prepared to reconsider their initial framework. Ethnographic research is dialectical, based on a feedback loop or an interactive-adaptive method usually referred to as ethnographic monitoring (Van der Aa and Blommaert, 2015). Self-reflection is a key-ingredient of good ethnographic work (Pink et al., 2016)

Drawing on works such as Scollon and Scollon (2003) and Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) Blommaert and I argued (2016) that infusing traditional LLS with ethnography makes qualitative LLS possible, especially when we take the following points into account:

1. Public spaces are social arenas – circumscriptions on which control, discipline, belonging and membership operate and in which they are being played out. Furthermore, public space is also an instrument of power, discipline and regulation: it organizes the social dynamics deployed in that space. The public space of a market square or a highway is, in contrast to the private space of e.g. one's dining room, a shared space over which multiple people and groups will try to acquire authority and control, if not over the whole of the space, then at least over parts of it. It is an institutional object, regulated (and usually 'owned') by official authorities whose role will very often be clearest in the restrictions they impose on the use of space (prohibitions on smoking, loitering, littering, speed limits, warnings, and so on). Public spaces are normative spaces.
2. Communication in the public space, consequently, is communication in a field of power. The question thus becomes: how does space organize semiotic regimes? (cf. Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck 2005: 198; also Stroud and Mpendukana, 2009). This question assumes that regimes can be multiple and competing but that they nevertheless function as regimes, i.e. as ordered patterns of normative conduct and expectations, authoritative patterns of conduct to which one should orient.
3. All signs can be analysed by looking at three 'axes':
 - a. *Signs point towards the past*, to their origins and modes of production. Elements of material and linguistic make-up are indices of who manufactured the signs, under which conditions they were manufactured, which resources were used and, so, available and accessible to the producers of the sign. The history of the sign, thus, leads us towards the broader sociolinguistic conditions under which the sign has been designed and deployed.
 - b. *Signs point towards the future*, to their intended audiences and preferred uptake. Signs are always proleptic in the sense that they address specific addressees and audiences with specific effects in mind: a non-smoking sign is intended specifically for smokers and intends to prevent them from smoking (not from standing on their heads, for instance).
 - c. *Signs also point towards the present*, through their 'emplacement' (Scollon and Scollon, 2003): their location is not a random given, and neither is their 'syntagmatic' position relative to other signs.

Given these three axes, we can understand the social function of public signs: signs demarcate public space, they cut it up into smaller fragments and regulate these in connection to other fragments. Signs thus always have a *semiotic scope* – the communicative relationship between producers and addressees, in which normative and regulative messages are conveyed (e.g. local authorities messaging “don’t smoke” to smokers), and a *spatial scope* (“don’t smoke here”). They are always specific in terms of meaning and function, and qualitative differences between signs are thus of utmost relevance.

4. The three axes and their functions turn LLS into an ethnographic and historical project, in which we see signs as indices of social relationships, interests and practices, deployed in a field which is replete with overlapping and intersecting norms – not just norms of language use, but norms of conduct, membership, legitimate belonging and usage; and not just the norms of a here – and now, but norms that are of different orders and operate within different historicities. The linguistic landscape has been turned into a social landscape, features of which can now be read through an analysis of the public signs.

Blommaert and I (see Blommaert, 2013; Blommaert and Maly, 2014, 2016; Maly, Blommaert and Ben Yakoub, 2014; Maly, 2014, 2016) called *this ‘Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis’* (ELLA), and we used it to analyse the urban working-class neighbourhoods: Berchem in Antwerp (see Blommaert, 2013), Rabot in the city of Ghent, Belgium (Blommaert and Maly, 2014), Vorst (Ben Yakoub, 2014) and the Westerkwartier in Ostend (Maly, 2014, 2016). The point of these exercises was to demonstrate that ELLA enables us not just to identify with a very high degree of accuracy the demography of the neighbourhood – who lives here? – but also the particular dynamic and complex features of the social fabric of a superdiverse neighbourhood.

ELLA allowed us to draft sociolinguistic stratigraphies. Globalisation comes with a layered and stratified sociolinguistic distribution of languages and signs (Blommaert, 2010: 12). Prestige variants of a language are deployed on a certain scale level, and not on others, and the same is true for any semiotic resources deployed. For instance, prestige (standard) English in combination with high-end semiotic material found in the shopping area indexes a different producer and addressee than a handwritten bit of truncated Dutch on a piece of paper on a window in a peri-urban area. Language in the real world is marked by inequality and ELLA allowed us to map this inequality.

Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis (ELLA) was thus developed as a way of addressing in a more satisfactory way the structure and significance of linguistic landscapes as an object in

the study of sociolinguistic superdiversity (Blommaert and Maly, 2016). The effort was inspired by a refusal to perform ‘snapshot’ linguistic landscape analysis based on hit-and-run fieldwork and yielding a Saussurean synchrony as analytical outcome. Instead, we wanted to emphasize the dynamic, processual character of superdiverse linguistic landscapes through a combination of longitudinal fieldwork, detailed observations of changes in the landscape, and an ethnographic- theoretical framework in which landscape signs are seen as traces of (and instruments for) social action (cf. Blommaert, 2013).

ELLA, SOCIAL ACTION AND MOBILITY

One effect of the ethnographic perspective is that what could be considered as a mere detail in the traditional LLS—the presence of a particular type of commercial poster in a shop window for example, can be a very revealing and important piece of data in an ELLA approach. The digital ethnographic injection in linguistic landscape research produces a type of ‘*nano-sociolinguistics*’ (Parkin, 2012). A sociolinguistics that not only digs deep into ‘details’ but contextualizes those details in relation to that post-digital, translocal and polycentric world (Blommaert, 2011). It was this approach that enabled us to perform a fine-grained analysis of societal interaction constructing geosemiotic landscape. And it was the data gathered during that fieldwork that directed attention to the presence of the hipster. Research in Ostend and Ghent showed that hipster-semiotics and infrastructures were more and more present in the neighbourhoods we engaged with. From fixie bike shops and barista’s, to foodie restaurants and authenticity discourse used to sell lofts: it all popped up in the data and it led to a search to define and study hipsters as micro-populations (Maly and Varis, 2016). This search also led to incorporating ‘digital ethnography’ in our study of semiotic landscapes (Maly, 2017) (see further).

The aspect of social action in a post-digital reality remains, an underdeveloped aspect of Linguistic Landscape Studies (LLS) and urban studies in general. And here, too, the Saussurean synchrony can be identified as an underlying sociological imagination in much work. As I already indicated in the previous chapter, social action, it seems, is regularly located within a geographical circumscription – a market, a street, a neighbourhood, a town – which is seen as the locus of action of a sedentary community (Blommaert, 2013; Hall, 2014; Hiebert, Rath and Vertovec, 2015; Peterson, 2017; Maly, 2016; Albeda et al., 2017). LL signs are routinely interpreted as reflecting, in some way, the linguistic repertoires of those who live sedentary lives in the area where the signs have been emplaced. This, then, enables LL researchers to make statements about the demographic composition of such areas of emplacement, projected into statements about the sociolinguistic structures in that area.

The concept of social action, thus interpreted, remains superficial and deserves and demands far more attention. The question that needs to be raised is: who is involved in social action in such areas? And what is the locus of such actions? Linguistic landscapes in superdiverse areas often offer clues that significantly complicate the assumptions about sedentary populations mentioned above. ELLA not only allowed us to capture mobility and complexity, but also to generalize and connect local action with transnational actors. Below are two pictures in two different settings. The first picture was taken in the 19th century belt around Ghent (see Maly, Blommaert and Ben Yakoub, 2014, and Blommaert and Maly, 2016) and the second picture was taken in the inner-city district of Oud-Berchem, Antwerp (Belgium) in the summer of 2018.



IMAGE 1- ELSTUK VAN SPOTTED IN GHENT 2013 – © ICO MALY

Image 1, shows a white van from the company (ELSTUK) which is registered in Kielce, Poland and has branches in Belgium. The bilingual nature of the van points to a company operating on a transnational scale. According to their website (accessed in March 2013), the company works in Poland as well as in Belgian cities like Ghent, Knokke and Beernem. The first time I registered the van they were working in a new apartment building for some weeks in August and September 2013. Then the van disappeared, to reappear again 6 months later in February 2014 for some weeks. From 2015 onwards, several companies vans and cars would be visible in Ghent.



IMAGE 2: ANTWERPSE ALGEMENE DAKWERKEN VAN SPOTTED IN BERCHEM, ANTWERP © JAN BLOMMAERT

In Image 2, we see a similar van with a Dutch-language inscription “Antwerpse Algemene Dakwerken” (‘Antwerp General Roofing Works’), again with a Polish license plate locating the van in the area of Poznan. While the inscription suggests locality – a reference to Antwerp on a van emplaced in Antwerp – the license plate suggests translocality. Thus, building work performed in Antwerp and Ghent appears to be connected to actions performed in Poznan and Kielce – recruiting a workforce, manufacturing bespoke materials, warehousing heavy equipment and so forth. The use of Dutch, the Belgian mobile numbers in combination with the Polish number plates and websites are all indexes of the transnational set-up of these companies. Their presence in the local landscapes points to higher scales, namely the creation of a transnational labour market that was created by EU-regulation. The vans thus function as indexes of transnational life and supra-national decision-making organs changing not only the local landscape, but also the actors in that landscape.

In an era of transnational mobility and supra-national organisation, such things are evident, but they raise the fundamental questions outlined above. Such questions are becoming even more pressing and compelling as soon as we adjust our baseline sociological assumptions and accept that contemporary social life is not only played out in an ‘offline’ physical arena of co-present participants encountering each other in public space (the focus of Goffman, 1963), but also as we indicated in online spaces crosscutting the offline ones in complex ways (cf. Blommaert, 2018). We live our lives in an online-offline nexus. This simple observation renders us aware of

the fact that social actions can be organized, set up, 'staffed' and distributed in online as well as offline spaces; and it helps us realize that much of what we observe in the way of social action in 'superdiverse' (offline, geographical) areas has, at least, been conditioned and perhaps even made possible by online infrastructures, in terms both of actors and of topography and meaning-making processes. This point we intend to illustrate in the following chapter.

SOCIAL ACTION IN THE POST-DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

Before moving on towards the concrete analysis, I need to clarify the focus on action. The view of action Blommaert and I put forward is deeply influenced by an older tradition of action-centred sociology, of which Goffman (1961, 1963), Cicourel (1973), Blumer (1969) Strauss (1993) and Garfinkel (1967, 2002) can be seen as co-architects (see Blommaert, Lu and Li, 2019 for a discussion). A number of principles characterize this tradition.

- (1) The first and most important principle has already been mentioned above, namely that of *interactional co-construction of social facts* – the assumption that whatever we do in social life is done in collaboration, response or conflict with others. In fact, the people mentioned above argue that one can only talk of social action when it is interaction (e.g. Strauss, 1993: 21), and for Blumer (1969: 7) "*a society consists of individuals interacting with one another.*"
- (2) *Interaction*, in turn, is "*making sense*" of social order in concrete situations – this is the second principle. For the scholars mentioned, social order and social structure does not exist in an abstract sense but is enacted constantly by people in contextualized, situated moments of interaction. In Garfinkel's famous words (1967: 9), in each such moment we perform and co-construct social order "*for another first time*". The social is concrete, ongoing and evolving, in other words.
- (3) The third principle is derived straight from Mead and can be summarized as follows: "*we see ourselves through the way in which others see and define us*" (Blumer, 1969: 13). Somewhat more precisely, "*organisms in interaction are observing each other's ongoing activity, with each using portions of the developing action of the other as pivots for the redirection of his or her own action*" (Blumer, 2004: 18). This is the essence of Mead's understanding of the Self: it is greatly influenced by anticipated responses from the others, and adjusted accordingly. *The Self* can thus never be an essence, a fixed characteristic, an a priori attribute of people: it is *a situationally co-constructed performance ratified by others*. Of course, Goffman's work has greatly contributed to this insight.
- (4) Fourth, we engage in this *interactional* monitoring and anticipating of the others' responses *on the basis of an assumption of recognizability*. When we experience

something as meaningful, as something that “makes sense” to us, by recognizing it as something specific (cf. Garfinkel, 1967: 9), a token of a type of meaningful acts which we can ratify as such. These types of acts can be called “genres” (Blommaert, 2018: 51); Garfinkel called them “formats” (2002: 245), and Goffman (1974) theorized them as “frames”.

- (5) Fifth, all of the preceding has a major implication for how we see the Self, how we theorize it and address it in research. Rawls’ (2002: 60) comment on Garfinkel nicely captures it, and the point can be extended to almost all the work in the tradition addressed here. Individual subjectivity, she writes, “*which had originally been thought of as belonging to the actor, [was relocated] in the regularities of social practices. (...) [A] population is constituted not by a set of individuals with something in common but by a set of practices common to particular situations or events.*”

The latter point is of crucial importance here. It emphasizes that actions generate those who are involved in them, or to quote Rawls again, we see “*situations that provide for the appearances of individuals*” (2002: 46), and not vice versa. Converted into the vocabulary of this book: identities and social space, individuals and collective, are effects of social actions and not their ontological and methodological point of departure. They constitute, as it were, the ‘personnel’ of social actions, and in a post-digital society identifying this ‘personnel’ is the challenge: who is actually and concretely involved in social action as actor? Who actually contributes to the actual form and structure of social actions? To these questions we can now turn, and we shall use ELLA as our tool.

(IN)VISIBLE LINES

The method we employ in ELLA is very simple: we observe everything we notice in the way of publicly displayed language material. But we do not stop at the level of language – even if that language is, evidently, an important clue for locating e.g. diasporic audiences – but we look at what is actually contained in the signs: from images, logo’s, colours and letter types to furniture and architecture. And one feature of a great number of publicly displayed signs nowadays is online information: references to websites, social media accounts and so forth. This banal fact already directs us again towards a highly relevant insight: that ‘public’ as a feature of sign emplacement now has at least two dimensions: the local public emplacement of signs – the concrete place where signs are put and shown to potential audiences – as well as a translocal, online public sphere with which the local signs are profoundly connected. This insight, again forces us out of the local area and out of the customary modes of LL fieldwork: we have to move from the street to the computer, and we follow the online information displayed in the signs.

When we follow the leads from locally emplaced signs towards the online sphere they point towards, we begin to see vastly more. This move from offline to online and back, Blommaert and I consider to be of major importance for ELLA, for it directs us towards a far more precise view of actors and topography of action and it gives a more complete perspective on how meaning is created through social action. As we already stated in the introduction, the meaning of a place, a neighbourhood or city is not only constructed offline, but also online on social media, on Google reviews and websites (see for instance Zukin, Lindeman and Hurson, 2017). This of course, immediately raises the question about the ‘actors’. The actions performed in specific offline places are dispersed and operate locally as well as translocally and through time. The ‘personnel’ of locally performed actions, thus, is far broader and more diverse than what an exclusively offline LL analysis would show.

In many cases, the linguistic landscape itself points the direction by mentioning website and social media-addresses, but in the post-digital society these lines can also be ‘assumed’ by the producers or the addressees of the signs – and thus completely invisible in the linguistic landscape. A good example is the relatively new ‘Bar Oswald’ in the 19th century belt around Ghent. The bar is located on the inner ring around the historical city centre in a neighbourhood called ‘De Muide’ in-between two other neighbourhoods of that 19th century belt around Ghent which we will discuss in detail in this book: Dok Noord and The Rabot – the city’s poorest neighbourhood. The bar and party room opened its doors in 2017 and it was an immediate statement in the semiotic landscape.



IMAGE 3: BAR OSWALD -MUIDE, GHENT - 2019

The overall design of bar Oswald makes it pop in this rather visually deprived offline landscape. The emplacement of the bar – on the ring, next to a canal in the poor 19th century belt – makes that not that many people would walk past this place without noticing it. This same emplacement, also makes advertising their online existence on the façade rather redundant as most people would only drive by the place in a car or on a bike and thus not be able to actually read the tag. The façade of the bar does address these car-driving and bicycle riding audience. The white and black stripes not only give the place a vintage, cool feel, they make sure that the building stands out and is noticed by the traffic passing. The logo of the bar is not only big and thus readable from a distance, it is professionally designed and crafted. Its Art Deco styling subscribes to a very specific genre or formats that is recognized by people in the know as hip. It thus constructs the ‘hipness’ and ‘authenticity’ of the bar.

The emplacement of that sign stirs the curiosity of people recognizing the ‘coolness’ of the style. Or put it differently, the semiotics of the bar could be seen as having a high ‘googleability’ to it. The fact that there is no visible line to the online landscape on that façade, of course doesn’t mean that there is no online dimension, on the contrary. In a post-digital world, an online presence is normal. Googleability is, just like a Facebook or Instagram-account is assumed to exist. From the moment one enters ‘Oswald’ (and not even Bar Oswald) in Google (when you are surfing in Ghent even with fully cleared browsing history), one sees how the meaning of Bar Oswald is not solely constructed ‘offline’ in the 19th century belt, but also online.

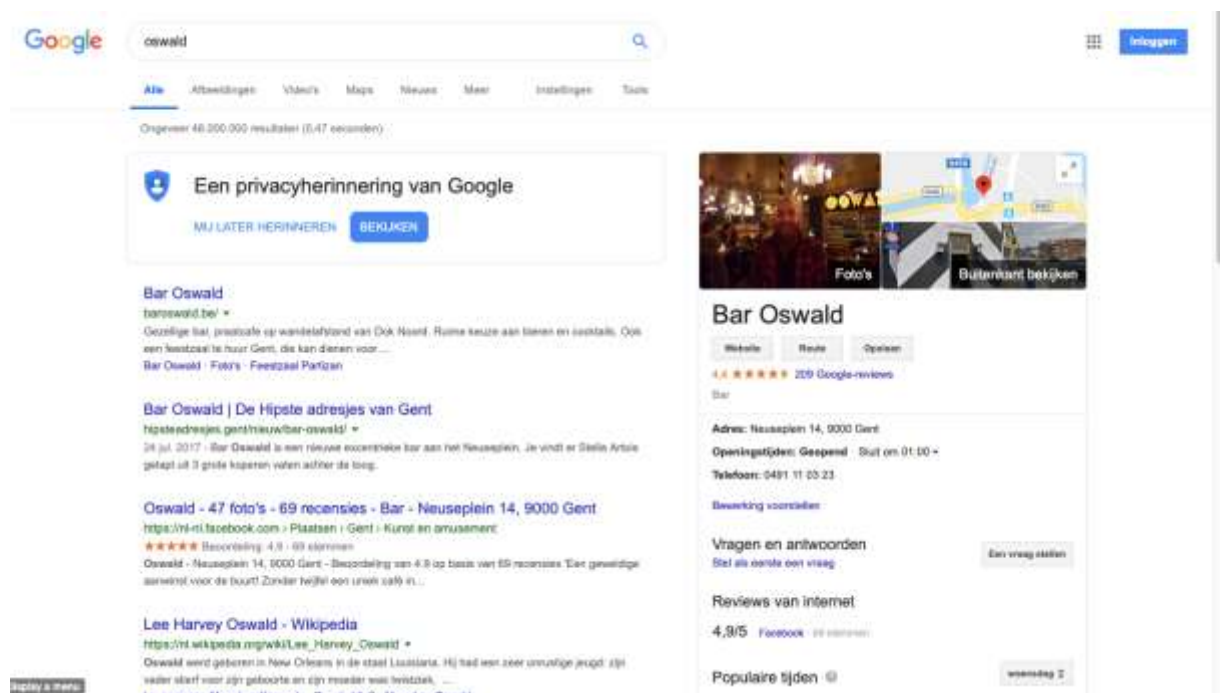


IMAGE 4 - SCREENSHOT GOOGLE SEARCH BAR OSWALD-2019

The first three links, just like the Google business highlight, all refer to 'Bar Oswald' and not for instance to Lee Harvey Oswald or Restaurant Oswald in California (as in DuckDuckGo). The first hit directs us to the well-made website of Bar Oswald with a homepage directing visitors to their Facebook and Instagram account, a picture page and a contact page. The pictures on the site, and the overall feel, contribute to the 'pureed out' and vintage feel that the owners want to establish (the nostalgic eighties parties and party's in roaring twenties style are testimonies). The bar is presented in a toned-down voice as '*Cosy bar, a chat café on walking distance from Dok Noord, Ghent Muide. Broad range of beers and cocktails.*' (Oswald, 2019). In interviews with mainstream media, the owner state that they see Oswald as a place '*like home*', an old type of bar that never closes (Tollenaere, 2017).

The second Google result directs people to a 'blog-review'-site called: 'The hippest addresses of Ghent'.¹ The site presents small reviews of hip Ghentian bars, restaurants, shops and much more and welcomes around 15 à 20k individual visitors a month. Even though, there is no real review of Bar Oswald – just a short (advertisement) description accompanied with some pictures of the interior on the site – the mentioning alone contributes to the perception of Bar Oswald as a cool, hip and an '*eccentric place*' with art & beer and special loos.

The first thing that Google wants us to notice, are not the search engine results, but the Business Profile Google made for Bar Oswald (and that its owners have potentially tweaked for uptake as the Business profile has been claimed). The profile looks very up to date with dozens of pictures, movies and maybe more importantly: 209 reviews awarding the place with 4,4 stars. How 'Oswald' is conceived, is not only done 'locally', but also online (Zukin, Lindeman and Hurson, 2017). 209 people construct 'Bar Oswald' as a '*great*', '*authentic*' and '*well-designed bar outside the city centre*', with '*great beers*', '*non-average*'-lemonades, '*a cool atmosphere*' and '*spectacular*' '*must-see*' loos'. Let us look at one (emblematic) review in detail:

Cosy hidden gem old-Belgian bar at the edge of town in the port district. Feels like your walking straight into a Felix Van Groeningen movie. Nice place to meet up with someone on a dark and rainy Wednesday evening.

This review is a good example of what Van Nuenen (2016) calls scripts, that is "*interface performances and interactions through computational frameworks from which social relations arise*" (Van Nuenen, 2016: 15). This notion implies that within computational ecologies, users interact with interfaces – in this case the interface of Google Reviews – and register to certain '*identity templates, formats or ideal types*'. Google Reviews' interface is based on gamification,

¹ <http://hipsteadresjes.gent/nieuw/bar-oswald/>

and 'local guides' are not only giving reviews, they are hoping to move their way up to become top guides. The reviewer of this review, is a level 5 reviewer with a score of 711. Providing reviews as a 'local guide', and talking about places foster identity work in relation to that place and the platform that is used. In this case, the reviewer is presenting himself as romantic, loving the good life and in the know of cosy and special places. Scripts are thus matters of performance, in this case the performance of 'a local guide' in the know of what is cool in Ghent.

This performance also contributes to the meaning of Bar Oswald – it discursively constructs this place as a 'gem', 'in the port district', 'at the edge of town', with a typical Genthian flavour just like in a 'Felix Van Groeningen movie'. Such language is at least partially triggered by the interface and tourist review formats that are mobilized in such socio-technical contexts. The reviewer taps into typical tourist reviews describing Ghent as 'hidden gems' (see for instance *The Guardian* (Brunton, 2009)). The choice of the reviewer – living in Ghent and speaking Dutch – in interaction with the Google Review interface – to use English show that (s)he doesn't only want to address 'locals' but also potential tourists from abroad. This is not exceptional, as 16 from the 59 written Google Reviews of Bar Oswald are in English even though most of the users (but not all) are Dutch speaking people. If we zoom in on the language itself, it is interesting to note how the reviewer not only adopts classic tourist writing jargon – hidden gem, port district – but also how (s)he construct 'authenticity' – old Belgian bar (even though it just opened), 'a Felix Van Groeningen' -feel (Van Groeningen is a famous Genthian movie-director who made films about Genthian party scene). This 'authenticity' discourse is, next to a specific style, as we shall see later, a crucial ingredient of hipsterism.

Interestingly, several written reviews mention the location of the bar 'as outside' the centre Ghent, and 'a bit far', but worthwhile. These reviews not only contribute to the construction of meaning of Bar Oswald to a broader audience or the discursive construction of the centre and the margins of Ghent, they also draw in people from different neighbourhoods, cities and countries. If we look at who is an actor in the meaning making process of Bar Oswald, we encounter people living in Belgian cities like Bruges, Antwerp, and people living outside Belgium, in Wales (but working in Ghent) and tourists from Bulgaria, Slovenia, Malesia (but studying in Brussels), and Massachusetts in the US. This online construction of the meaning of Bar Oswald is also encouraged by the owners. Inside the bar, you can see a poster with chalkboard -look to inform the audience to ask for the Wi-Fi-code and inform them about the website URL, the Facebook and Instagram-account of the Bar. This small example shows the complexity of meaning making in the 21st century. It also illustrates the importance of 'the unexpected', or in other words what is expected to be local is all of the sudden global and superdiverse. And crucially, it shows the importance of the online in the construction of the offline landscape.

DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHIC LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS (ELLA 2.0)

We thus find ourselves in an ELLA 2.0, an ethnography starting from linguistic landscapes and taking us to the online and offline structure of social actions in neighbourhoods. This small example, indicates that if we want to use linguistic landscape studies to actually grasp how meaning is construction in a 'superdiverse' landscape, it will have to be injected with digital ethnography. Whenever we do that, we see that what we should '*expect the unexpected*' (Pennycook, 2012). Bar Oswald when looked at from an offline perspective, had all the semiotics of a 'local', offline hip Ghentian place. From the moment we explored the online landscape, we saw that 'Bar Oswald' was constructed as a far more diverse place with people living in different neighbourhoods, cities and countries contributing to the 'total linguistic' fact (Silverstein, 1985: 220). The total linguistic fact was always defined as an unstable mutual interaction of signs by people in context and thus dialectical in nature. In post-digital societies however, another dimension is added: meaning today is also constructed through digital practices, and thus not only in offline interaction online, but also in interaction with humans, but also with interfaces, algorithms and social bots. Digital media (from Google to social media) are infrastructures that not only enable or constrain certain practices of meaning making, they themselves should be understood as active mediators in de construction of that total fact. Digital media (partially) shape the performance of social acts (Van Dijck, 2013: 29) and as such they are an inherent part of 'meaning making'.

The infusion of digital technologies in our understanding of the landscape, of course, means that we should upgrade our ethnographic approach. Digitalization forces everyone who studies discourse (online) to rethink the "*definitions of terms such as text, context, interaction and power*" (Jones, Chik, and Hafner, 2015: 5). Digitalization comes with "*new types of issues related to contextualisation that ethnographers of digital culture and communication need to address*" (Varis, 2016). *The technological properties of the online world (persistence, searchability, replicability, scalability, algorithmically constructed reality) shape online interactions*" (boyd, 2014) and should thus be considered in the understanding of the processes of meaning making on the online/offline nexus. How a place is discursively constructed online in reviews (Zukin, Lindeman and Hurson, 2017) or pops up in a game like Pokemon (Zuboff, 2019), has considerable offline effects: it is, if we like it or not, an inherent part of social life in a post-digital world. Liking, retweeting, sharing and editing are now not only enabling but also shaping communication (Maly, 2018b, c), offline social action (Blommaert and Maly, 2019), and affective attachment (Papacharissi, 2015).

Digital ethnography is first of all ethnography: the study of language-in-society. It thus builds on the long ethnography tradition, its ontology and epistemology (see Blommaert, 2018 and Blommaert and Dong, 2010 for useful introductions). What is new, is the 'online dimension' in

online and offline meaning making. The object of study is thus language-in-a digitally networked society (Castells, 1996) or post-digital society (Cramer, 2014). I follow Varis and Hou's (in press) understanding of digital ethnography as *"interested in the ways in which people use language, interact with each other, employ discourses, and construct communities, collectives, knowledge and identities, through and influenced by digital technologies."* This approach not only builds on the classic linguistic ethnographic approach described above, it also advocates a non-online-centric approach in the sense that also offline data can be included. This digital ethnographic approach focuses on the interaction by humans, interfaces and algorithms on the online/offline nexus and it thus considers that offline data can be shaped through online action. A classic example would be the reappearance of 'keep calm and ...' meme on a t-shirt.

Digital ethnography is to a large extent still based on more traditional ethnographic approaches complemented with engagement in digital practices (See Pink et al., 2016, and Jones, Chik, and Hafner, 2015 for overviews). The classic methods of ethnographic research – interviews, interactions, fieldwork and text – are still usable, but depending on the research topic and the field, they can be in need of adaptation and flexibility or even more, new concepts, methods and methodological approaches need to be developed (Jones, Chik, and Hafner, 2015; Crosset, Tanner and Campana, 2018; Varis and Hou, in press). This post-digital and networked reality poses new challenges for ethnographic research (See Varis and Hou (in press) for an elaborate discussion) and for linguistic landscape studies. A good example, was already given above, and it will reoccur throughout this book: namely how people's interaction with interfaces (and algorithms) will script their online and offline practices – taking pictures from barista coffees, gourmet hamburgers or fancy cocktails- before drinking and eating so that 'good life pictures' can be posted as 'stories' and posts on Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat using hashtags, and tagging friends and infrastructures and liking posts and reviews. All those practices together create meaning. Media and technology are themselves mediators in this meaning making process and an important context and should thus be studied as such (Varis and Hou, in press).

Secondly, it is this complex dialectical interaction shaped by digital and non-digital practices in shared and non-shared TimeSpace that creates the meaning of a place. City-scapes cannot be grasped from a merely synchronic perspective. A diachronic perspective, understanding the landscape as a multi-layered historically and socially constructed space on the online/offline nexus, is thus necessary. The meaning of place is constantly evolving as it not only shapes new offline and online practices that interact with the previously established meanings, these new processes of meaning production in turn also create new meanings and identities. It is this process of continuous re-constructing of the meaning of the linguistic landscape that is our research target here. Space, as in the words of Springer, is understood as *"a relational assemblage."* With this re-theorization Springer (2011: 90) wants *"to open up the supposed*

fixity, separation, and immutability of place to instead recognize it as always co-constituted by, mediated through, and integrated within the wider experiences of space.” The linguistic landscape is thus best understood as part of a (online/offline) network of texts, mediated practices, artefacts, experiences and semiotics.

The ethnographic field in the 21st century is a highly stretchable concept as it is in essence a polycentric, transnational and layered field (Blommaert, 2010; Maly and Varis, 2016). And while digitalisation provides ethnographers with an enormous mass of data – a simple example, would of course be Google Street View that allows us to look at the past landscape – it also complicates ethnographic research. Ethnographers have to realize that a lot of these data are not straight-forward usable in ethnography. As we already made clear, context is of crucial importance in ethnographic approach, extracted data-logs are thus quite problematic and useless. (Jones, Chik, and Hafner, 2015: 15). Even though digital media allow us to go back to several points in the recent history to document change, and allow us to find people’s contributions in the construction of meaning of place throughout time and thus allow the ethnographer to get an idea of a place before (s)he entered the field, digitalisation also comes with complex issues considering contextualization and access. Digital technologies for instance enable multi-situated use of communicative tools. What happens in the front and the back office is not necessarily all ‘observable’ by the ethnographer. The context of a Google review is not necessarily knowable, but the review in itself (and answers and other evaluations of a review) can be analysed as contributing to the establishment of meaning.

ELLA 2.0 AND THE DATA

Poiesis, we already stressed, means making. And as ethnographers we should be conscience about our role (in relation to our methodology and thus infrastructures) in the making of facts (Bellah, 2007). Ethnography is in essence a process in which the ethnographer plays a substantial (and hopefully a reflective role). Ethnography, as Rabinov (2007: 117), in his seminal work on Fieldwork in Morocco, pointed out, is always mediated by our own presence, and by the self-reflections of others. The research presented here, is thus unavoidably connected to my own learning process as an ethnographer and as a citizen of Ghent and my own learning process, has had a substantial impact on the use of methods. That was especially the case, because it was such a long-term project that connects myself as somebody who has lived the city to my academic work. This long-term engagement with the city in different roles, led to the fact that over time I have used multiple methods. This multiplicity of methods is partially planned – in the sense that I was committed to make sense of the neighbourhood and embarked on an ethnographic voyage in my own living space, but also partially coincidental as an effect of the different roles and times I engaged with the city.

My first public writing on the city of Ghent focussed, as I already mentioned, on the discursive construction of the city of Ghent in discourses of politicians and tourist marketing. From 2006-2007 I started publishing a monthly essay in TiensTiens (Maly, 2006, 2007a, b, c, d, e), a local, Ghentian critical city-based magazine dedicated to urban developments. The essays appeared as 'linguistic reflections' on the city and addressed topics like city marketing, tourism, identity shopping and gentrification, identity spaces and consumption practices. These topics were the result of my first jobs. Working for the city as a diversity consultant, I was confronted with all kinds of city policies to put Ghent 'on the map'. As an activist engaged in civil society, I focussed on exclusion, discrimination and inequality. My engagement with the city in those essays was 'Barthesian'. I looked at the city through a discourse analytically gaze.

In the second decade of the 21st century, I embarked on a linguistic landscape study in collaboration with Jan Blommaert. It had as its explicit goal the study of 'complexity in superdiversity' in the Rabot neighbourhood in Ghent central and the 20th century belt using the 'template' Blommaert developed in his 2013 book: *Ethnography, superdiversity and linguistic landscapes. Chronicles of Complexity*. The most basic and most systematic exercise, was mapping the linguistic landscape according to the maxim to 'collect it all'. Linguistic landscape analysis was used as a first diagnostic tool to map the sociolinguistic regimes in the neighbourhood.

The first time, I started photographing all the shop windows, the commercial vans, and posters, I found something that I didn't expect. I knew the neighbourhood, I had worked in that neighbourhood, I did my groceries there, I walked and I bicycled through the neighbourhood. I of course knew it was a diverse neighbourhood, but I didn't expect to find 7 and later 11 different languages in one street (Maly, Blommaert and Ben Yakoub, 2014). And I wasn't prepared to find 17 (Blommaert and Maly, 2016) and later 23 different languages (Maly, 2017). Even though, counting 'languages' as nicely delineated entities is what Deumert (2014) calls a '*theoretical cul-de sac*', it did provide a useful first indication of complexity. Just like most 'users' of the Rabot neighbourhood I understood the Rabot neighbourhood as a multicultural space with people from Turkey, Morocco and Algeria maybe. What we encountered during that first run, was far more complex and served as an invitation to revisit old *prima facie* ideas about the neighbourhood.

In the first, two years, I pictured the street in a monthly 'capture it all' session. After that, I made a habit of picturing all the new shops and infrastructures when I encountered them and at least every 3 months I would plan a 'capture it all' walk. Over the last 7 years, this resulted in an enormous database of pictures (one façade, usually generated several pictures – from the general view to zoomed pictures of details) mapped per month and year. This linguistic

landscape project immediately morphed into a larger ethnographic and thus a historic project. Not only, did these LLS walks immediately generate non-structured talks to owners of shops about the neighbourhood and especially about change in the neighbourhood. I engaged in hours and hours of (participant) observation by hanging out in restaurants, shops and bars. Listening to conversations, taking notes but also collecting flyers and bringing research results back to the shops that figured in research. In 2013, my investment in the neighbourhood was complimented by data collection done by two students: Steven Clark and Missale Solomon. They camped in the neighbourhood for 3 full days, and interviewed 40 people about the neighbourhood, religion, language-use, life and countries of origin.

DIGITAL DATA

From day one, this whole project necessarily moved online too. In first instance, not as a conscience step toward digital ethnography, but as (1) databased memory tool and (2) a general research-tool. I refer here to the fact that I lived the neighbourhood for more than 8 years before I embarked on this project. And that I thus had memories of this place, memories that sometimes were partial, sometimes wrong but more importantly, sometimes without any grabbable data. Google Street View, websites of owners, the data of Amsab (the Socialist heritage foundation), the heritage website of the Flemish government, the website of the city of Ghent, policy and city council reports and many more sites of stores, restaurants from the neighbourhood and other online data were used to form a better picture and triangulate the gathered data.

As already mentioned above, the initial focus of this research project was an empirical study of superdiversity in this neighbourhood. The definition of superdiversity as described by Vertovec as the 'diversification of diversity' as a result of new migration patterns was connected to concepts like 'multilingualism', 'digital communication', inequality, discrimination and conviviality and the (non)-effects and anachronisms of the integration policy. The hipster popped up in the data as a side-effect. A lot of the data and observations on Culture Club and the Ghentian party scene date back to reflections and data collection in 2002-2007 that was used for the TienTiens essays. From the moment, I consciously started focussing on the presence of 'the hipster', it turned the whole project into a digital ethnographic project. I embarked on that journey in 2014 with Piia Varis. The hipster led us in three directions:

- (1) An expansion of the linguistic landscape from the Rabot neighbourhood to different neighbourhoods and sites in het 19th century belt around Ghent and into the historical centre. This expansion was driven by 'hipster semiotics' and by guidance provided by self-proclaimed (and denying) hipsters.

- (2) An expansion to the past. Many new ‘hipster’ infrastructures not only adopted highly stylized graphic design, interior design but also identity discourses reminiscent of the Ghentian party-scene the end of the nineties and the beginning of the 21st century, especially Culture Club. Nightlife, is known to be of importance in the symbolic economy of the city and in gentrification processes. I ended up talking with party-goers, looked (and found) old versions of the websites, delved into my own archive of personal pictures, posters and flyers of that era. I searched for interviews with the owners in newspapers, magazines and documentaries.
- (3) A digital expansion of the field. Not only do a lot of these businesses refer their public to their social media and websites, a lot of the overall semiotic material, the architectural and interior design of these places could not be explained without including a global cultural niche into the analysis. This meant engaging in digital practices – from searching information, to interacting with informants to following offline actors online. The affordances of digital media I described above enabled large parts of this research, but inherently also constrained it.

Fieldwork, as always, was thus more than just ‘data collection’ (Blommaert and Dong, 2010: 26–28, it was also a learning process not only as ‘native ethnographer’, but also a learning process as a researcher and an ethnographer. I started as a discourse analyst looking at communication on the city, and I ended up engaging in Digital Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape analysis. The journey was thus also a methodological and theoretical learning process. The field directed to start reconfiguring methodologies (from LLS, to ELLA and from digital Ethnography to ELLA2.0) and updating our knowledge on processes of urbanisation. The material result of this learning process created the so-called archive: not only fieldnotes, reflections, interviews, pictures, screenshots, flyers, paper bags, folders, policy documents, newspaper articles, but also previously published essays and papers were all turned into data. The data used in this book are thus ethnographic data, not just decontextualized pictures of the landscape, but pictures in connection to interviews, fieldnotes, policy documents and digital data. Context is key here. It is the total archive to co-construct context (Blommaert, 2018).

Not only did this project become a long-term project, it also became a collaborative project. I already mentioned the collaboration with Jan Blommaert, Piia Varis, Steven Clark and Missale Solomon. All these people also contributed to the data-collection and the analysis presented in this little book. These expansions in turn caused this project to take ever greater proportions, it also led to an explosion of data (and mapping of fast change) and it caused an expansion in time and thus added complexity. What started off as 2-year project ended up being an 8-year project (re-integrating and re-analysing data collected in the decade before this project started)

and substantial changes in focus, methods, fields and in the ethnographers themselves. I also have the pleasure to thank Karin Berkhout for her meticulous editing work!

Some of the work presented in the next chapters was finished in 2014–2015, at the same time when work on the same data was published in the book *Superdiversiteit en Democratie* (2014) that I wrote with Jan Blommaert and Joachim Ben Yakoub. Parts also appeared in a co-authored chapter with Jan Blommaert in *Language and Superdiversity* (Arnaut et al., 2016). The chapter on Culture Club was presented at the Superdiversity Conference in Birmingham in 2015. And the first product from the digital ethnographic work on hipsters, was published in the *European Journal for Cultural Studies* (Maly and Varis, 2016). The first publication, zooming in on the process of hipsterification appeared in *Tijdschrift over Cultuur & Criminaliteit* (Maly, 2017).

CHAPTER 3: INTRODUCING THE FIELD: HIPSTERS AND THE HIP CITY

In 2012, an article in the travel section of *The Guardian* labelled Ghent as the hipster capital of Belgium (Verlinden and Tack, 2012). This framing of Ghent by a renowned paper like *The Guardian* with one of the best-read travel sections in the world, was immediately shared by several Belgian media as excellent news for Ghent (see for instance Staes, 2012). Such mass mediatisation constructs the city as a cool place, attractive for tourists and for hip young people. In 2012, the hipster was clearly a welcome guest, and the labelling of Ghent as ‘hipster’ city was read as a great advertisement for the city.

HIPSTER-CITIES

‘Hipster’ is by now a ubiquitous label used to categorize most large(r) cities and neighbourhoods in the world. Montreal, Sidney, Bordeaux, Copenhagen and Helsinki have all been labelled hipster-cities by bloggers, tourist guides and websites. In most cases, the label is reserved as an adjective for specific neighbourhoods, think of Kreuzberg in Berlin, Shoreditch in London, Södermalm in Stockholm and of course the ‘über’ hipster neighbourhood: Williamsburg in New York. The label hipster-city is very popular topic among bloggers, tourist guides and newspapers. And not surprisingly, the hipster is regularly used in clickbait-y articles using classic titles like *‘The 10 Most Hipster Neighbourhoods on Earth’* (Jacomma, 2014) or *The World’s 27 Most Hipster Neighbourhoods* (Kim, 2017). It is probably rarer *‘not to be a hipster-city’* than to be labelled as one.

The hipster is a very productive label. To illustrate this productivity, we can zoom in on a couple of ‘research-reports’ that MoveHub – a platform dedicated to help people move locally or internationally – launched in 2017 and 2018. In 2017, they launched the ‘US Hipster Index:’ and the year after that a ‘Global City Index’. That labelling was done by collecting metrics from hip digital platforms (helping hipsters locating microbreweries, thrift stores and vegan restaurants). In the light of their first ‘index’, MoveHub took the following five stats into account: *“the number of microbreweries, thrift stores, vegan restaurants, and tattoo studios per 100,000 city residents, while the fifth scales rent inflation”* (O’Brien, 2018). This focus on hipster infrastructures is very common in the ‘labelling’ of cities or neighbourhoods. The Belgian authors of the above mentioned Guardian article, and owners of the blog www.ilovebelgium.be awarded Ghent the hipster-label as a result of the *many* barista bars, the vintage furniture shops, the hip snack bars, the restaurants of the internationally renowned Flemish Foodies and the party scene (see also Brunton, 2012). Not the presence of the ‘hipster’ *per sé*, but the

presence of hipster-infrastructures enabling consumption is what makes a city 'hipster' in this popular discourse on hipster cities. Even more, quantity is valued above everything-else: there should be *many* hipster infrastructures.

It is also telling to note that MoveHub not only counts 'hipster infrastructures' like thrift stores and vegan restaurants, but also includes 'rent inflation'. Rent inflation is understood as rising rental prizes as the result of gentrification processes connected to the influx of hipsters. A hipster neighbourhood, is thus a neighbourhood that is in *the process of becoming hip* and thus characterized by rising rental prizes. The hipster influx is understood as '*revitalizing*' the neighbourhood or '*realizing*' a '*renaissance*' by setting up hip infrastructures like microbreweries, thrift stores and vegan restaurants. The influx of the hipster is thus connected to the creation of added value through gentrification, but also with conflict. Hipsterification has a fundamental impact on the neighbourhood and this impact is not univocally positive. In her research on the role of thrift-store consumption, Steward (2017: 18) for instance found that during the process of hipsterification, a thrift store can become a '*potential space of struggle*' between two middle class groups: one the one hand "*the creativist*' or *hipsters who shop there to acquire a certain style (and thus cultural capital) and the 'thrift-seekers' people shopping there for economic reasons*" (Steward, 2017: 18).

The influx of the hipster is a real phenomenon, and the label a productive one. Even though 'the hipster'-hype may be over and the hipster 'dead', this online commercial clickbait research at the very least shows the contemporary relevance of the hipster -label. The hipster clearly draws attention. And especially in the context of tourism, the hipster keeps generating 'news'. MoveHub's index generated an avalanche of media-attention all over the world: *The Business Insider*, *CNBC*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Mail* and also Belgian media like *Gazet van Antwerpen*, *Het Laatste Nieuws* and *Newsmonkey* all reported on this 'research report'. This report, which was not much more than a blog using the metrics of other hipster-platforms like *BreweryDB*, *The Thrift Shopper*, *HappyCow* and *AAA Tattoo Directory*, not only generated free publicity for MoveHub, it generated clicks for hundreds of other sites – from newspapers to blogs. All those mainstream newspapers see news in this label (and expect people to search for it and/or to click on this type of news). At the same time, this type of reporting 'constructs' cities as 'hipster' by labelling them as such.

HIPSTERS AS A MICRO-POPULATION

'The hipster' has become part of everyday parlance around the world but the notion 'hipster' itself is rarely clearly defined. It seems to be used as if its meaning is universally fixed and transparent, while in reality its meaning is opaque and fluid. The common-sense notion seems to have entered academic discourse and to some extent it blurs our understanding of the

hipster as a social group and its impact on spaces in all corners of the world. While it may seem that the 'hipster' and 'hipster subculture' are purely globalised and mono-cultural phenomena. Reality is far more complex. The realisations of 'hipsterism' are multi-layered and polycentric. What is labelled as 'hipster' differs contextually depending on who uses the concept and in which part of the world.

In order to describe how hipsters manifest themselves as a social identifiable group, Varis and I (2016) defined them as a *“translocal, polycentric, layered and stratified micro-population that is not only visible in style and (both local and translocal, and online and offline) infrastructures, but also constantly (re)produced through identity-authenticity discourses”* (Maly and Varis, 2016: 14). Micro-populations, Varis and I argued, are the material and cultural expression of temporary and emerging micro-hegemonies (Blommaert and Varis, 2012). Micro-populations group people together by their 'style', by the places where they hang out and the places where you can't find them.



IMAGE 5: HIPSTER STARTER KIT – MEME-CENTER

In the case of the hipster, this micro-hegemony can be named as hipsterism. Hipster fashion, a particular ethic of consumption together with an authenticity identity discourse are the major markers of hipsterism. These three elements are of course interconnected, and become visible in a certain recognisable style. In image 5 we see a whole ensemble of hipster indexicals – such as wearing skinny jeans, big sunglasses and an ironic moustache – bundled together makes a hipster. However, carrying big glasses alone does not make one a hipster, nor does sporting an ironic moustache. Being a hipster is the result of a very complex assemblage of indexes and identity discourses to become recognized as a hipster in a certain context. This assembly is always performed in interaction with other people in other (digital), local and translocal places.

Hipster identity from this perspective, is a matter of *'enoughness'*: one has to have, display and enact 'enough' of the emblematic features in order to be ratified as an authentic member of an identity category (Blommaert and Varis, 2012, 2013, 2015). This also means that mobilising an identity discourse about oneself can be a matter of attending to the most infinitely small details – sometimes even only observable to those 'in the know' – and a very small number of recognisable items, such as a piece of clothing (Blommaert and Varis, 2013, 2015). The question is, then, what would be enough in terms of (accessorised) identity work in order for somebody to be recognisable as a hipster?

Drinking a barista coffee is not enough to become a hipster, it needs more complex identity work to align oneself with a specific chronotopic understanding of hipness (Blommaert and De Fina, 2017). Enoughness is thus not an abstract principle but a contextual one. What is enough in Ghent in 2014 is not necessarily the same as what is enough in New York in 2019. Certain identity markers of hipsterism function in a certain time on a truly global scale, while others are only operating on lower scales. Skinny jeans, cutting-edge hairstyles, beards or ironic moustaches, big glasses, vintage clothes, vinyl records, barista coffee and beanie and trucker hats were the 'truly global' hipster elements, that is, the most recognisable ones on a global scale in 2012-2015 (see for instance, the Wikihow on how to become a hipster as an example²) or all kinds of memes making fun of hipsters (see Image 5). What is also crucial – and global – in defining a hipster is the claim to authenticity, uniqueness and individuality. Being a true hipster is about 'being real', and not 'trying too hard'. 'Being real', however, demands identity work, and being a hipster comes with very strong and reoccurring identity discourses that all focus on authenticity, yet paradoxically form the basis of a very collective style.

It is this global recognizability and discourses that explain the use of the concept in common day parlance and academic research. This common day notion of the hipster with its 'global universal and timeless bias' hides a much more complex cultural phenomenon. In the case of Belgium, for instance, if we examine the way in which hipsters are being typecast in mainstream media such as the newspapers *De Standaard* and *De Morgen*, we see many commonalities with the descriptions we find on American webpages, or in research on hipsters elsewhere in the world. Big glasses and skinny jeans are also recognisable hipster indexicals in Belgium. However, we for instance do not find references to vintage sneakers (which are seen as of crucial importance for the American hipster) – in fact, wearing Nike sneakers seems to be *enough* to qualify as a hipster. Furthermore, while in North America hipsters are associated with the indie scene (Arsel and Thompson, 2010; Stahl, 2010a), in Belgium there seems to be more room for variation: the hipster taste of music is defined by 'finesse' (De Morgen, 2014), 'obscurity' and 'not mainstream' (De Standaard, 2011). Hip hop can also be an option, as long as it is not Kanye

² <https://www.wikihow.com/Be-a-Hipster>

West. Beyoncé and 1990s R&B are also hipster cool (De Morgen, 2014). The internationally known discotheque Culture Club in Ghent, Belgium – in its heyday an infrastructure for hipness – played not only hip hop, R&B and old-school funk and soul, but was also known for mash-ups of alternative rock, Prince and beats by locally grown stars such as the Fucking Dewaele Brothers and The Glimmers (see chapter four of this book). Culture Club was a normative infrastructure in the emergence of the Ghentian hipster.

Being hip is thus always about performing a hip identity in a polycentric, and layered niched and chronotopic culture (Blommaert, 2010). This type of identity work orients to different normative centres operating on different scale levels (Culture Club in Ghent or fashion blog the Satorialist on a global level) and thus in practice it exists as a very complex assemblage of identity indexicals. Identity work in the context of this book is understood as discursive orientations towards sets of features that are seen (or can be seen) as emblematic of particular identities (Blommaert and Varis, 2013, 2015) in specific contexts. These features can be manifold and include a variety of semiotic means (artefacts, forms of language, etc.), and these appear as constellations – specific arrangements or configurations of such emblematic features. The features are rarely organised at random; when they appear, they are presented and oriented towards ‘essential’ combinations of emblematic features that reflect, bestow and emphasise one’s ‘authenticity’ as a specific kind of person.

The hipster is constructed through social interaction on the poiesis infrastructures nexus. Some of these infrastructures operate locally and others globally on the online/offline nexus. The truly global elements of hipster culture are circulated by large infrastructures. Borovic (n.d.) calls this the *‘bureaucracy of the hipster’*. Clayton (2010) sees the Internet as one of the primary instruments in the globalisation of the hipster culture. His hypothesis is that “[T]he emergence of each global city’s hipster can probably be correlated to internet penetration there – the Limeno hipster [in Peru] is new, because internet remains slow and expensive there” (2010: 27). Apart from the media and the Internet, we can think of record labels such as Sub Pop and niche media such as Spin, The Face and Vice as part of this hipster infrastructure, without forgetting fashion brands such as A.P.G., Obey, Urban Outfitters and American Apparel which circulate images and discourses on a global scale.

The fact that hipsters and (certain) hipster indexicals have global purchase should not be mistaken to mean that hipster culture is a homogeneous globalised subculture. As already mentioned above, some indexicals work only on more local levels (cf. Leppänen et al., 2009; Varis and Wang, 2011). Hipsters in Ghent are therefore not exactly the same as hipsters in Toronto or New York. This is why we need a polycentric vision (Blommaert, 2005, 2010) to see the hipster culture as layered and orienting towards a number of centres of normativity operating and interacting on different scales. And that is why hipster culture is best understood

as a layered, translocal and polycentric phenomenon that rests on a complex network of digital and non-digital infrastructures. Very local styles, tastes and attitudes can become fully integrated into and dominant in a global hipster culture and vice versa. Clayton (2010) gives the example of cumbia music within the Peruvian hipster scene where the local hipsters, middle-class Peruvian kids who had always looked down on cumbia music, were suddenly throwing parties and dancing to it. This was the result of the release of a compilation called *Roots of Chicha: Psychedelic Cumbias from Peru* which, issued by a French-run Brooklyn record label Barbés, made ‘cool’ something that was originally seen as ‘uncool’ by the Peruvian hipsters. This illustrates the dialectic between the local and the global, where local cultural phenomena can be recontextualised and globalised (and hence made ‘cool’).

Note that the formation of the hipsters as a micro-population cannot be understood as a ‘cognitive phenomenon’ alone (see Blommaert, 2005: 162–165), hipster culture is socially constructed and materially embedded. This is not just ‘a trend’ flowing around the world (without real actors) and being picked up: it is the result of (mediated) interaction. Made more concrete, hipsters are constructed as a social group because people while interacting “*are observing each other’s ongoing activity, with each using portions of the developing action of the other as pivots for the redirection of his or her own action*” (Blumer, 2004: 18). In a post-digital society, that interaction is not limited to local face-to-face interaction, but is in many cases mediated interaction with people in all corners of the world, and even algorithms, bots and interfaces.

HIPSTERIFICATION

Hipster culture thus relies on a specific style, specific identity and authenticity discourses, and a specific material infrastructure for its existence. Like any cultural form, hipster culture has a material base. This material base is not limited to the internet and media in general, the hipsters manifest themselves in cities all over the world. As Cowen (2006) states, hipsters are not only ‘different’ in their looks and love of design, they also frequent ‘different spaces’ (2006: 22). They have material and spatial effects, and, according to Cowen, such a profound impact on cities that she speaks of ‘*Hipster Urbanism*’. Hipster culture, she argues, not only materialises in specific spaces in a city (in her case Toronto), but changes the city as a whole: “*One after the next, block after block, downtown strips are becoming so hip and so different, lined with very different bars and cafes and art spaces and restaurants and bars and cafes and art spaces and restaurants and bars and cafes ...*” (Cowen, 2006: 22).

Thus, the hipster’s focus on style, ‘good living’ and authenticity discourses becomes materially visual in the city, transforming it. It is thus not surprising that a lot of the academic literature on the hipster is found in urban studies focusing gentrification, boundary making and changing neighbourhoods in relation to cultural capital of the hipster (infrastructures) (Stahl, 2010b;

Valli, 2015; Hubbard, 2016; Le Grand, 2018). Greif (2010c) for instance witnessed hipsters *'gathered in tiny enclaves in big cities and looked down on mainstream fashions and 'tourists'* (n.p.). And also in Stahl (2010b), we see a similar connection between hipster culture and urban impact. Stahl refers to a small subculture of hipsters in the Mile-End neighbourhood in Montreal, organised around an indie music scene. One article in Spin magazine managed to make this scene quite visible to youngsters in North America, resulting in Mile-End becoming a hipster magnet, and consequently profound changes in the city. According to Stahl, within the context of Montreal hipsters function as an identifiable locus for anxieties regarding larger issues affecting Mile-End, such as gentrification processes; the Mile-End hipsters transformed a multicultural and cheap area into a high-end area with the necessary baristas. Stahl (2010b: n.p.) summarises this as follows:

The hipster becomes an uneasy but productive vehicle for mapping out spatial and social strategies of distinction, articulating a neighbourhood/neighbourly ethos, which in the subcultural marketplace that Mile-End has become means that the scene here must adhere to a preferred logic of consumption. (Stahl, 2010b: n.p.)

The settlement of the hipster, mostly in (former) 'superdiverse' and 'poorer' working class neighbourhoods, as we have seen, comes with a very particular type of infrastructures: authentic food places, food trucks and pop-up stores, cocktail bars and barista's, artisanal bakers, thrift stores and vintage shops, vinyl record stores, foodies, micro brewers of craft beers and bio-wineries and street art (Hubbard, 2016; Zukin, Lindeman and Hurson, 2015; Maly, 2017; Hairon et al., 2017; Scott, 2017). The hipster changes the urban economy and the general feel, image and perception of the neighbourhood. The semiotic, linguistic and architectural resources have a real impact. In many cases the working class or superdiverse image of the neighbourhood becomes commodified in authenticity discourses used to promote the new hipster infrastructures (Bridge, 2007). Or in other words, their cultural capital changes not only changes the perception of the neighbourhood it creates 'added value' by reframing and reconstructing former 'sketchy' and 'superdiverse' neighbourhoods into safer and navigable 'cosmopolitan' neighbourhoods' (Hubbard, 2016; Zukin, Lindeman and Hurson, 2015)

The reframing of the neighbourhood's image is not only accomplished through the material hipster infrastructures in the neighbourhood; as important, is the online landscape. Bars, restaurants, barbers and shops all have websites, Facebook-pages, Instagram accounts and other social media sites. This online landscape not only draws new populations to the neighbourhood to consume, it also creates an image of a 'neighbourhood' in transition and contributes to the perception of a certain place as a hip or 'sketchy' place. Those new audiences in turn, are not passive consumers of hipster culture, in many cases they become prosumers (Millner, 2011) and actively co-construct the image of a certain place, street or neighbourhood

by word-to-word talk, social media-posting and reviewing places (and their neighbourhoods) on sites like TripAdvisor, Yelp, or Google Review (Zukin, Lindeman and Hurson, 2015).

This complex interaction between hipsters, their semiotic, linguistic and architectural presence in the neighbourhood, the media -discourses on the neighbourhood in transition and the online landscape shaped by owners of hip businesses and prosumers give those neighbourhoods a new, 'authentic' and 'hip' identity. It is this dialectic discursive reframing of the neighbourhood through complex modes of social interaction between humans, infrastructures, algorithms and interfaces that reconfigure the meaning of a certain place (and its economic importance). The result of that interaction not only recreates the perception of that place, it usually results in particular forms of gentrification. I call this 'hipsterification'. I thus understand hipsterification as a specific form of gentrification that shows itself through the online and offline production and circulation of linguistic and semiotic material and practices associated with hip(star)-culture attracting (or in case of top down gentrification set up to attract) a new (creative) middle class in a certain neighbourhood (Maly, 2017). This process of hipsterification, just like classic gentrification processes, can be a top-down or a bottom-up-process (or a dialectic dynamic between both).

EMBRACING THE HIPSTER-LABEL

In the neoliberal capitalist era, cities compete against each other to attract tourists and middle-class residents who are able to consume and pay taxes. In this context, cities seem to embrace the hipster label to position themselves in the market and sell themselves as different, authentic, counter-cultural. The label not only generates welcome exposure for cities, it also provides the city with an identity discourse. The city (or certain neighbourhoods) is thus constructed in a complex dynamic of populations, infrastructures, discourses and prizes. Framing 'Ghent as a hipster capital' is as much a social fact as the presence of hip people or hipster-infrastructure. The article published in The Guardian, just like an endless stream of blog posts, Facebook updates and Instagram posts all construct Ghent as hip and cool. And it is no surprise that the classification of the city as 'hipster' is done by focussing on classic 'hipster-elements: authentic food places, hip music, art, design and architecture:

Not only is it the home of David and Stephen Dewaele, better known as Soulwax, aka the Fucking Dewaele Brothers, and the street artist Bue the Warrior, whose colourful creations can be found all over the world, there is also the art critic and curator Jan Hoet, who put Ghent on the map with the opening of the city's new museum of contemporary art, S.M.A.K. (smak.be), in 1999. Since then this small attractive historic city has steadily gained a reputation as a place for foodies, fashionistas, music fans and

design lovers, with a surprising selection of great shops, restaurants, museums and architecture, ranging from a medieval town fortress to a contemporary new city hall.³

Ghent is seen as hipster-capital as a result of the interplay between people and infrastructures. It is a blend of successful individuals, the presence of shops, architectural buildings, museums and food places presented in a classic tourist discourse. Even more interesting, is that 'today's' Ghent is presented as the result of a longer history: the presence of SMAK, but also DJ's like Dewaele brothers all refer back to a scene that was booming at the end of the 20th century. What was very niched at the time, is now presented as part of the essence of Ghent, an essence ready to consume. A hidden gem waiting to be taken in.

The framing of Ghent as hipster capital of Belgium, a hidden gem or as a city 'keeping it real', in such tourism reviews provide the city with an identity. This identity discourse is not limited to the travel sections, Facebook pages or blogs. This discourse on the city as a hip city, is also officialised, embraced and incorporated in a much older city-identity discourse that portrays Ghent as a progressive and left-wing city, with a legendary social model. In that discourse, Ghent and the Ghentians are seen as stubborn rebels making a 'unique', 'authentic', 'rebel' city.

The identity discourse of the hipster, with its stress on authenticity, realness, counter-cultural positioning is now merged with that older identity discourse constructing the city as rebellious and used to present the city to potential tourists. On the Visit Ghent website of the city, the city is presented as follows: *'Quirky Ghent offers a fascinating cultural cocktail brimming with trendy, modern urban life. Ghent is a city where people enjoy life: a chilled-out place where anything goes and a city that feels human. Its friendly, welcoming people who love the good life'* (Ghent, 2018a). The keywords are all there: Quirky, cultural, trendy, urban life, human, and the good life. The lay-out of the Visit Ghent site is very similar to the interface of Airbnb: it not only incorporates classic pictures of food, it also sells 'the experience'. If we zoom in on the embedded YouTube movie on the site which claims to be *'Based on the true findings of the international press'* (Ghent, 2018b), the same identity emblems are there: The city is presented as a non-mainstream, authentic, eco-friendly hidden gem where *'even camera-strewn day trippers are nowhere to be seen'*, with lots culture, historic buildings, an *'underground night-life scene'* and a *'rebellious population'* (Ghent, 2018b).

It is the claim to authenticity, uniqueness, individuality and the imagination of being countercultural and edgy that is absolutely crucial – and global – in defining a hipster (Maly and Varis, 2016). Being a true hipster is about 'being real', 'not trying too hard' and thus about authenticity. Distinction is an essential ingredient in the hipster subculture, linked to extensive

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2012/sep/28/ghent-new-holiday-tips>

discourses on what is ‘real’ and authentic. It is no coincidence that several authors (Arsel and Thompson, 2010; Greif, 2010b, c; Stahl, 2010a) have referred to Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of distinction to make sense of hipster culture – distinction, claims to authenticity (and not being ‘like everybody else’) and rejection of ‘the mainstream’ lie at the core of the hipster culture. And as we have seen, it are these discourses that are being used by micro-enterprises, sharing platforms and cities to present themselves to the market.

Why choose Ghent for a weekend trip?

Vibrant Ghent is well worth a weekend trip. It’s ideal for a last-minute city trip as well. Quirky Ghent offers a fascinating cultural cocktail brimming with trendy, modern urban life. Ghent is a city where people enjoy life: a chilled-out place where anything goes and a city that feels human. Its friendly, welcoming people love the good life. Don’t miss the chance to admire the world-famous masterpiece—the Mystic Lamb by the Van Eyck brothers—during your weekend trip.

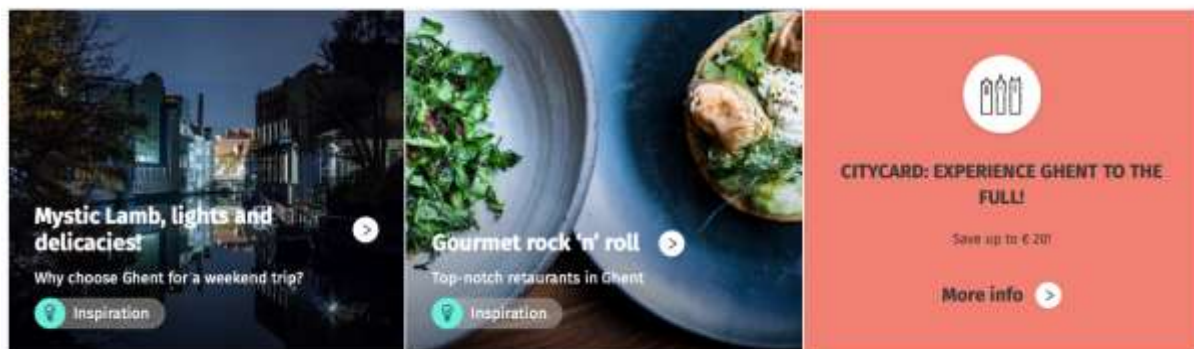


IMAGE 6: SCREENSHOT VISIT.GHEENT-WEBSITE-2019

Ghent is again no exception here. It sells itself as a city worthy of consumption by using this hipster identity discourse. In 2013, on the tourist section of the city’s website, potential tourists could click on the following three titles as answers to the question ‘why’ one should visit Ghent: (1) ‘History’, (2) ‘Why Ghent, the city of the Mystic Lamb, light and culinary delights’ and (3) ‘Authentic!’. In the light of the identity discourse on hipsters, these answers are telling. ‘Authentic!’ clearly resonates with the hipster-discourse. Ghent mobilizes the authority of *National Geographic Traveller Magazine* to claim that authenticity. The mobilization of History functions as an extra emphasis on that claim. Ghent did not suffer all that much during WWII and is thus still authentic. History is on the one hand mobilized to put the spotlight on the ‘historical relevance of the city’ and the fact that a lot of that history is still visible in the city (houses, churches, art, ...). On the other hand, history serves as a fundament for an identity discourse. The nature of the Ghentians is historically constructed and that motive is present in the concise tourist history of Ghent: ‘Over the centuries the inhabitants of Ghent remained true to their reputation of being headstrong and awkward. They even rebelled against their own child prince, Charles V.’ (Ghent, 2014a). The last answer makes sure that the historical quality of Ghent is not being mistaken for boring: ‘Ghent breathes history but is also brimming with culture and modern city life’ (Ghent, 2014b).

So what makes up that ‘culture and modern city life’ that tourists should experience? Besides the classic touristic events and the fact that Ghent is a university city, the hipster infrastructures get a central place. Especially the rock & roll gastronomy and the graffiti art is mentioned here. The site of the tourist department of the city of Ghent (Ghent, 2014a) has following tabs ‘must see’, ‘to do’, ‘what’s up’ the history of the city, accommodation & plan your trip but also a tab: Food & drinks. That last tab has five submenu’s: (1) breakfast and brunch, (2) coffee bars, (3) Culinary Ghent, (4) Ghent specialties and (5) pubs. These categories sound very familiar, the places they refer will pop up in the remainder of the book.



IMAGE 7: GHENT, CITY MAGAZINE DECEMBER 2015

The hipster is not a ‘marginal’ niched figure anymore, but has become emblematic of Ghent. In December 2015, on the cover of the Ghent’s city magazine we see a happy hipster couple sitting before the award-winning city-hall by the famous architects Robbrecht and Daem. The man wears all the classic identity emblems of the hipster: fade haircut, large glasses, hipster-beard and flannel shirt. The wife wears a beanie and the baby a hip hat. We see two obligatory coffee mugs, ice-skating shoes, brown leaves and cosy Christmas lighting. The cover depicts Ghent as a hip and cosy city. That identity of the city usually invites us to ‘consume’ the city, to visit places, to buy stuff and eat something there. And of course this case is no exception. The cover picture introduces the Winter fests – another event set up to compete in a global market for tourists - in the historic city centre of Ghent. The hipster aligns with a decade-old identity-discourse. The image of hipster-Ghent is deeply connected with the rise of the neoliberal city. A city modelled to be consumed.

IMAGINING GHENT

The imagination and presentation of Ghent as a hip city is usually confined to the inner-centre of the city. It is this centre that is competitive in the global market, and is ready for consumption. This so-called 'historical centre' of Ghent is the Ghent that is marketed to potential tourists as Ghent and most Ghentians would also see that centre as 'Ghent'. This centre contains the historical sightseeing sites like the Gravensteen Castle, the Belfort, Portus Ganda, the Graslei and the Vrijdagmarkt. It also contains the important shopping streets, cultural centres, museums and hotels.

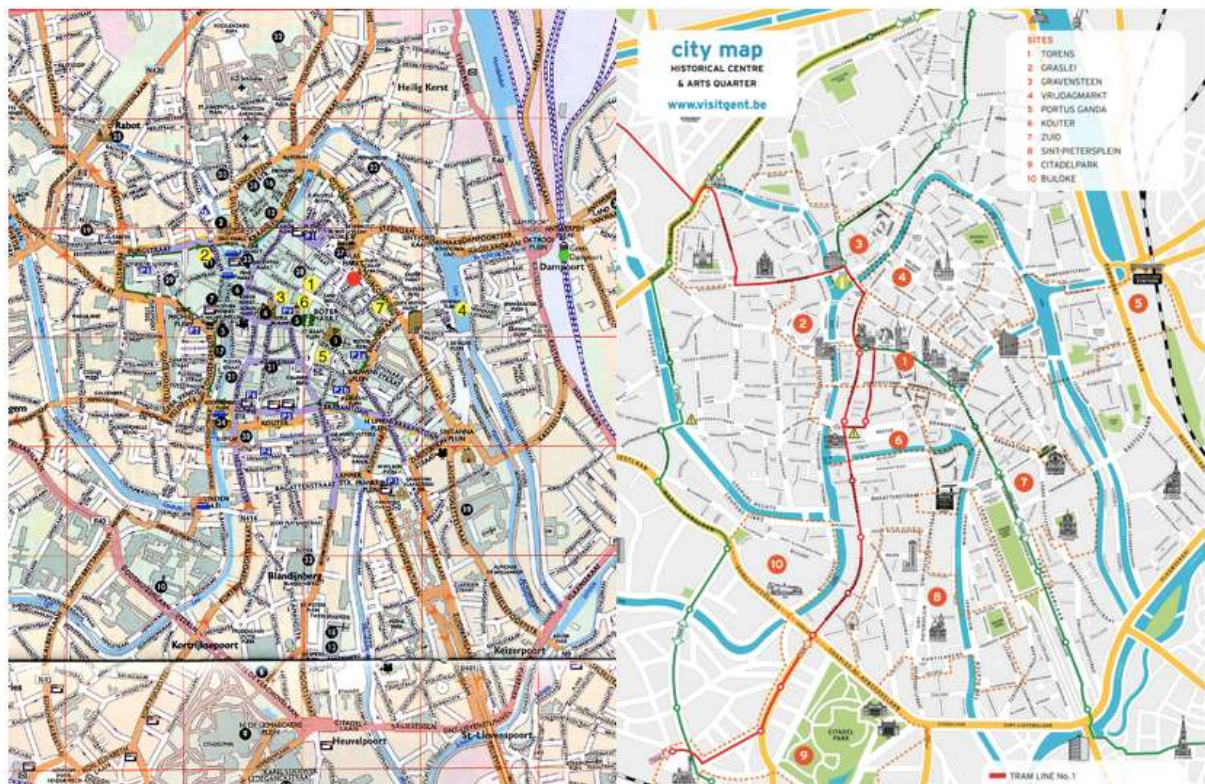


IMAGE 8: MAP OF THE HOTELS (LEFT) AND TOURIST MAP (RIGHT)

Even though this image of Ghent is presented as 'historical Ghent', it is a very contemporary visualisation of Ghent that has its roots in the nineties of the 20th century. This visualisation reflects the city renewal plans that were put in place at the end of the century. In the nineties, the historic centre of Ghent had a dark and poor image. The 'place to live' in the eyes of the new middle classes and the elites was since the sixties and seventies suburbia. In those decades, places like Wondelgem, Mariakerke, Drongen, Sint-Amandsberg, Sint-Martens-Latem saw an influx of middle-class families. Different private housing projects were set up and nature was parcelled up. Bungalows and houses in a row with a garage, and front –and back gardens became the norm. The nuclear family created a 20th century belt around Ghent.

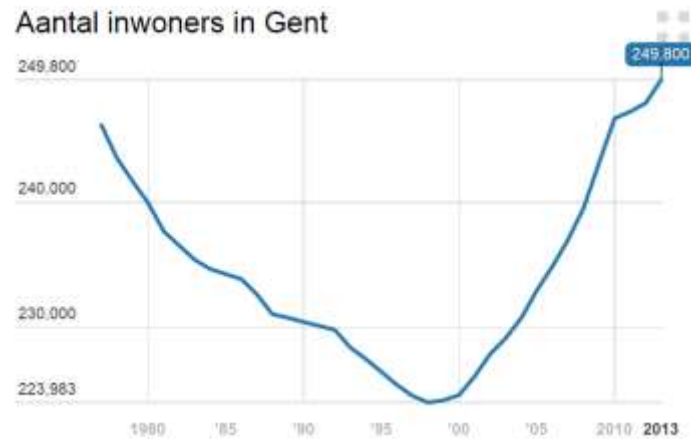


IMAGE 9 - DECLINE AND RISE OF INHABITANTS IN GHENT

The economic crisis of the seventies was also an urban crisis (Oosterlynck, 2015: 28). The middle class fled the city centre and the 19th century belt of Ghent. The historical city was tremendously unpopular and unhip. The tipping point, came in the end of the 20th century and especially in the beginning of the 21st century. In those nineties, Ghent became more and more popular. This evolution is no coincidence. The 'urban renaissance' (Debruyne and Oosterlynck, 2009: 1) of Ghent is not a thing of nature, it has political and economic causes. In the nineties, the city actively tried to counter the urban exodus of the middle class by intervening in the physical context of the city and investing in social cohesion (Van Bouchaute, 2013: 63–64).

The contemporary imagination of the historical centre is at least partially the result of urban policies designed in those nineties. The presentation of this part of the city as 'the historical centre' is only one choice among many different other options to imagine 'the historical city'. In the nineteenth and the beginning of the 20th century, Ghent would for instance be imagined as the historical city centre and the 19th century belt around the city. Neighbourhoods like Rabot, Dok Noord and the Muide were the pride and joy of Ghent in the industrialization century which explains their inclusion in 19th and early 20th century maps (see Image 10).



IMAGE 10: 19TH CENTURY MAP OF GHENT

This visualisation of Ghent disappeared in the second part of the 20th century. The deprivation of the 19th century belt was a direct consequence of the industrial decline. From the seventies onwards, most of the larger textile factories closed their doors and the industrial pride of the city turned into the poorest neighbourhoods of the city. The old industrial plants and the small workmen houses – saw an influx of Labour migrants mostly from Turkey and Morocco (Verhaeghe et al., 2012). From the nineties onwards these neighbourhoods became layered, superdiverse and polycentric neighbourhoods (see Blommaert and Maly, 2016).

These neighbourhoods were discursively constructed as ‘problem area’s’ that need investments. Since the beginning of the eighties of last century, the old industrial neighbourhoods in the 19th century belt were described as ‘re-valuation -territory’ (Debruyne and Oosterlynck, 2009). The official discourse was a discourse that portrayed those neighbourhoods not only as superdiverse, but also as neighbourhoods that have an illegal economy. They were defined as problem neighbourhoods that need top-down policy to make them liveable. Since the eighties, several public-private projects have been set up to achieve this. This project invested in policing (Het Nieuwsblad, 2011), make-over budgets for shops (De

Standaard, 2008), social mix policies, the creation of a common cultural identity (Ghent, 2012) and gentrification (Van Bouchaute, 2013).

The imagination of Ghent as ‘only the historical’ centre is thus not a coincidence or arbitrary, it reflects a broader discursive construction of the centre as hip, cool and nice following the urban renewal policies of the nineties of the last century. The embracing of the hipster -label seems to be understood as a good thing, as proof that the city has done a good job. And now that the centre is popular, attracts a wealthy middle class and tourists, it is time that the 19th century belt follows. The immigration of the hipster and the hipsterification of the city is welcomed with open arms.

The contrast with how policy makers speak about the 19th century belt and superdiversity is large. Even though Ghent is a ‘rebellious’ city, known to be left-wing and taking a daring stance in the battle against racism, the overall understanding of the reality of superdiversity is rather different than the warm embracement of the hipster. When municipal councillor Sofie Bracke for instance was asked to comment on the fact that half of all the children in Ghent in 2016 had foreign roots, she answered,

Superdiversity is becoming the norm (...) This creates one of the biggest challenges this city has to face. The diversity in Ghent can be an enormous enrichment, but we have to be careful that it doesn't turn out in an 'us' vs 'them' story, that everybody feels like a Ghentian and actively lives the city. (Het Nieuwsblad, 2016).

The councillor here uses the common-sense notion of superdiversity: a city or neighbourhood is superdiverse if the minorities become the majority. Ghent, in this imagination, is a ‘minority-majority city’. This imagination of the city is not being used to attract tourists, it is framed and understood as an immense challenge. And this challenge is understood not in terms of rights, but in terms of culture and identity. Superdiversity in the understanding of the councillor generates cultural and identity challenges. This understanding of superdiversity is not only found in this particular answer, it was the official discourse in the policy documents of the city (see for instance: Ghentian governmental agreement, 2013–2018). Implicit in this document, is the idea that Ghent and the Ghentian population shares one identity, an identity that is questioned by the presence of migrants. Both ‘the Ghentians’ as ‘the migrants are now portrayed as representatives of their ethnic or national culture. As result, the hipster is embraced as ‘typical Ghentian’, whereas superdiversity is seen as a problem. The answer to superdiversity is found in ‘*finding and embracing a common identity*’ and city renewal projects. Such discourses on diversity are not only statistical essentialisms, they make blind for the actual cultural identity processes reshaping the city. This categorization, is not trivial, as we shall see throughout this book, it shapes the imagination of the city. This visualisation of ‘hip Ghent’ as the historical centre of Ghent reflects these different discourses on the historical centre and

the 19th century belt and it has a profound effect on discourses and policies constructing the city.

The absence of the hipster in debates on city policies in Ghent thus points to the fact the hipster is embraced because of the usefulness of hipness in a neoliberal economy. The absence of the hipster in political debates on the city contrasts with the hip character of Ghent that is consistently used in city marketing, in reviews of Ghentian places and in blogs that are set up to guide tourists to the '*cool, hip places*'. The many hipster-businesses are imagined as good for the city. Hipster infrastructures are understood as adding value. The hipsterification of the city is nowhere understood as a potential problem, and this explains the lack of political reflection and policy attention. There are no heated policy debates on their presence and impact on the city. The diversification in terms of ethnicity on the other hand, has a long tradition of being problematized or is at the very least understood as a 'challenge' (Het Nieuwsblad, 2016). As something that was and still is in need of (urgent) policies. This framing of the hipster, I will argue throughout the book, tells us a lot about the contemporary historic, social, economic, political and technological context.

CHAPTER 4: CULTURE CLUB, HIPSTER BRANDING AND CREATING VALUE

The historic buildings are still there, as is its general lay-out. But Ghent in the second decennium of the 21st century, is very a different Ghent than in the eighties or nineties of the 20th century. In the eighties and nineties, the city was a rough industrial city with high unemployment figures and a large drugs problem. Today the city is known to be a hip and cultural city with nice shops, barista's, restaurants and parties. That dramatic change in the outlook of the city is the result of two movements reinforcing each other: (1) in the nineties the city unfolded a policy towards city renewal and city marketing and at the same time (2) a new scene of youngsters lightened up the party-scene in Ghent. This cultural impact is largely overlooked in any urban studies (Zukin, 1991, 1995 are welcome exceptions). In this chapter we will zoom in on the birth of the new party scene and how it used identity discourses to construct the 'hip nightlife' temple Culture Club and functioned as a translocal centre of normativity. We will connect this hipster branding to the neoliberal phase of capitalism in which cultural strategies are key to position oneself in a (global) market.

THE IDENTITY OF THE PARTY

At the end of the nineties we see that the total population is rising in Ghent. For the first time in decades more people come to live in the city. Parallel with this evolution we see a very dynamic party-scene developing. Ghent always had bars, and long ago, in the House and New Beat-age it had the famous discotheque Boccaccio (Brewster and Broughton, 1999). At the end of the nineties though, all discotheques had disappeared. Dance-music was marginalized in favour of Grunge and alternative rock. Only one bar in Ghent – the Zodiac – gave room to DJ's like Mo & Benoelie, later known as The Glimmers (Twins). This small scene grew steadily during the nineties and more and more pop-up parties were being organized on different ad hoc-locations. It's out of this scene that a lot of the party concepts would arise that were new and cumulated into the existence of Culture Club.

What we saw emerging at that time were parties that all invested a lot in identity discourse or marketing to create a perception of hipness and a certain decadence. The Eskimo-parties (held in the old buildings of a local underwear producer Eskimo), the Free the Funk-parties (with the already mentioned DJ's Mo & Benoelie), Pop-Life and the Belmondo-parties at the museum for contemporary art SMAK created a general atmosphere of coolness. All of the sudden, Ghent could be envisioned as a place where 'it' happened. All these parties presented an 'avant-garde mix' of music, not classic 'house' music but an eclectic and funky mixing of music genres. Think of the Pixies meeting Prince, Joe Dassin and Serge Gainsbourg in the mix with heavy house

beats and all this could be combined with sixties and seventies soul and obscure funk records à la Patti Jo & Cheryl Lynn that came straight out of the sixties and seventies. The so-called mash-ups were born, something that is the trademark of the Dewaele brothers and is now a truly globalized phenomenon. This musical hybridization was new and exciting for a small crowd (what we would now call hipsters) and excluded other people (classic discotheque-people). It was a very local phenomenon as Ghent's DJ Thang states it: *"The main difference: in Antwerp it's more straightforward, they don't mind if you play house or techno all evening. In Ghent it's different, in Ghent there is variation on the dance floor. I'd even go so far as to say it's a typical phenomenon from Ghent; far-reaching eclecticism."*⁴

All these parties came with a carefully designed or image. Thornton, in her classic study on club cultures (Thornton, 1996: 118) already stressed the importance of media (from flyers and posters to specific fanzines, record labels and mainstream media) as the disseminators of subcultural capital. The posters and flyers of the Ghentian pop-up parties at the end of the nineties had a very distinctive, artsy feel to it. These images combined art and fashion with sex, drugs and decadence. The flyers for the parties were one of the major tools in projecting this image.



IMAGE 11: DAVID LACHAPELLE, 'SNIFFING DIAMONDS'

⁴ [http://www.cityzine.be/en/blog/article/Fredo+Thang+\(Villa\)+Ghent+is+different](http://www.cityzine.be/en/blog/article/Fredo+Thang+(Villa)+Ghent+is+different)

One of the many sought-after posters for the Pop Life parties used the iconic picture of David LaChapelle, 'Sniffing Diamonds'.⁵ Pop Life - posters were that special at the time that people collected them for themselves. The flyers established an image of 'exclusive' parties. Even though the pop-life parties, like so many other parties in Ghent, were held in the Vooruit, an art-centrum build on the ashes of a former socialist cultural temple, the atmosphere was very different. The organizers of these parties invested in the look and feel by restyling the place just for that one night. Huge screens were erected on which they projected cult movies and videoscapes. They installed catwalks with the famous John Travolta-disco-lights. Huge DJ-booths in architectural clean white blocks were erected to oversee the public. And the classic cheap plastic cups were replaced by fancy plastic glasses that were made especially for that party with the Pop Life logo and the date of the party. Besides the main room were eclectic up-tempo mash-ups were mixed, there also was a side room where French chansons, most of them with a typical Serge Gainsbourg-decadence twist, filled the air.

Pop Life was part of a bigger nightlife culture at that time. DJ Thang says it like this: "*Boccaccio and New Beat, The Glimmers, R&S Records, 2manydjs, Culture Club... It's all related.*"⁶ And this scene kept on evolving. The Eskimo-parties, at their heydays attracted over 7000 party people.⁷ Out of these Eskimo-parties grew one of the most legendary and infamous party-concepts in Ghent: the Belmondo parties. As Victor Ackaert states, this is the forerunner of Culture Club.⁸ The fact that parties were held between the prestigious and costly art works enhanced the elite and unique character of these parties. The setting to use Goffman's (1959) words was high-end and this was the explicit goal. Everybody there felt a little bit like a VIP. Not only were the parties held in the SMAK, the interior was filled with design seats from Quinze & Milan⁹, everywhere you could watch image-scapes, the advertisements for the party were made by professional companies like Lucky Tree¹⁰ and at the time avant-garde artists were playing new mixes and sounds. Victor Ackaert, one of the organizers of the Belmondo-parties, frames those parties as follows:

The Belmondo-parties were new, in the sense that we didn't focus on the DJ's. In these years there existed a real deejay cult with people like Dave Clarke and Jeff Mills. This was different in our concept. We played R&B and rock 'n roll and electro in different Halls and mixed this all with the Dewaele –brothers, who were rising then and who mixed different genres. The decor was important to us, the whole atmosphere and styling, not the DJ.

⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/arts/pictures/image/0,-1060329464954,00.html>

⁶ [http://www.cityzine.be/en/blog/article/Fredo+%26+Thang+\(Villa\)+%22Ghent+is+different%22](http://www.cityzine.be/en/blog/article/Fredo+%26+Thang+(Villa)+%22Ghent+is+different%22)

⁷ <http://www.dlso.it/site/2012/11/21/intervista-the-glimmers-eskimo-recordings/>

⁸ <http://www.nieuwsblad.be/article/detail.aspx?articleid=R01BI8MA>

⁹ <http://www.quinzeandmilan.tv/products/primary-solo>

¹⁰ <http://www.luckytree.be/projects/view/128/belmondo-ghent>

Image and perception were key in the success of the Belmondo-parties and that image was from the start avant-garde and arty. It was a micro-culture, not only separate from mainstream culture as such, but also different from mainstream House culture with a high focus on mass parties and DJ's. In first instance these parties sold an identity of the party but also of the people that were coming to these parties. It made partygoers feel as if they were part of something exceptional. These individual experiences were structured, they were part of a larger emerging cultural niche 'in the know' of a hidden and cool scene. Very soon, the scene would be connected to a globalized world of design and hipness. From the start art, design, fashion and music came together in a concept of the party. "Art meets nightlife", was not surprisingly one of the slogans of Belmondo. Pop Life, Eskimo, Free the Funk and Belmondo constituted a vantage point in the 'emergence' of a certain micro-population that can be labelled as Ghentian-hipsters.

CULTURE CLUB AND THE INFRASTRUCTURAL DIALECTICS OF HIP LIFESTYLE

As already mentioned, Culture Club grew out of the Belmondo parties. First, they started off with a small discotheque (on 69 square meters) called Club 69 in the historical centre of Ghent. In 2002, Culture Club opened its doors in the Afrikalaan, a big street that runs next to the old harbour of Ghent. The club was housed in the peripheral and industrial region of Ghent. A region for car salesmen, wholesalers and industry. Not what you would describe as a fancy place for the hip crowd. So seen from a geographical viewpoint the site of Culture Club wasn't located in a high-end centre of globalization. Culture Club wasn't even located in the centre of Ghent but in its periphery. But it was – as we shall see – very much part of the highest scale of globalization.



IMAGE 12: ENTRANCE OF CULTURE CLUB IN THE 19TH CENTURY BELT AROUND GHENT

In Image 12 we see the main entrance of Culture Club, with its slick logo put up on a rather shabby looking brick gate. The oldest layer in this layered shine – the shabby gate – was there for decades and symbolizes the general old rundown industrial neighbourhood near the old Ghentian harbour where Culture Club is located. Upon that layer we see a very different constructed sign: a black billboard with a finely designed logo and advertisement for Beck's beer. Not only is the billboard professionally made, it is also the result of a marketing bureau that made a corporate style of the club. The paperclip logo of Culture Club is present on all their art work, on the walls of the club and on the cd's. Next to the logo we see the brand name and the logo of the sponsoring beer Beck's.

The first thing that strikes us is here is the professionalism of that billboard and the contrast with the general neighbourhood. The billboard is an index of what's behind these gates: a truly globalized space of cosmopolitan chic: it demarcates space. Once passed the gate, the visitors entered another world, a territory that was cut off of its industrial context. The first thing behind that gate is the parking lot for the VIP's. 15 cars could park before the entrance of the club: space reserved for the Porsches, Ferrari's, Maserati's and the cars of the owners and habitués of the club. Of course these cars and the fact that not everybody can park there enhances the idea of exclusivity and installs hierarchy and inequality.

The identity of exclusivity, glamour and urban cosmopolitan chic was also integrated in the general setting of the Club. At the time, average discotheques were not much more than black boxes with a lot of party-lights, a DJ-boot, a bar and of course the sound system. Culture Club was clearly different. As one of the first or maybe even the first club in the world, the interior had to be seen: it was an inherent part of what the club was. Maybe the interior was even more important than the DJ's. It functioned as a very important ingredient of the 'party-experience'. Or more correctly it was designed to create the image of the club and project an identity of the club. The interior was designed by high-end architect Glenn Sestig. An architect that puts himself in the (international) market as follows:

Glenn Sestig Architects is synonymous with contemporary chic. His work can be seen as unrelentingly urban and contemporary - materials are slick, with lots of lacquer and concrete, and he uses the occasional splash of primary colour for effect. To give his work coherence, the architect uses his own method of calculation, a sort of mental model from which flow the intelligence, equilibrium and soul of a place. Each completed work is considered as a minor work of art. The architecture is no longer a movement in time but becomes a declaration of a global luxurious lifestyle. (Glenn Sestig, about Glenn Sestig on his personal Website 2015)¹¹

¹¹ <http://www.glennsestigararchitects.com/glenn-sestig/>

This sales pitch sheds an interesting light on the analysis of the semiotics of the interior design of Culture Club. Sestig presents his work not only as 'contemporary chic' or 'urban', but also as a 'declaration of a global luxurious lifestyle'. The architecture is not only aiming to be art and lifestyle, he also states wanting to create a 'soul of a place', an identity. The materials that are used in his design are not just functional, but in first instance create a general atmosphere and that atmosphere should appeal to or better become an integral part of the identity of the building and the visitors. It's a genre that is recognized by the global design elite as top-notch. He work and discourse is not modest. The lifestyle that is advocated by the semiotics of the interior design are made to be transferred onto its visitors. And here we see a first glimpse of the dialectic between infrastructure and the identity-discourse that accompanies or functions as a structure of feeling (Williams, 2009), a structure that facilitates the emergence of a micro-population.



IMAGE 13: INTERIOR CULTURE CLUB -2004

The interior of the club is sleek modernist interior that has more in common with fancy modernist villa's or hotel lobby's than with the regular black box-disco's. We see before us soulful lighting creating visibility of the party-people, a black mirror bar and natural stones that refer to the work of top architects like Frank Lloyd Wright. The Club is divided into several different rooms, with different music genres each with a different styling attracting a different segment of the local hipster-population based on their music taste. The overall look is one of globalized modernism, contemporary design and glamour chic. The Club's interior communicated globalized chic. That image was also made explicit in the baseline of the club:

“Nightlife is lifestyle is nightlife”. The newness of Culture Club is illustrated here: it is in first instance an infrastructural translation of an identity and a lifestyle.

CULTURE CLUB AS IDENTITY INFRASTRUCTURE

The lifestyle advocated by the image of the club was that of a top-notch lifestyle: a lifestyle that is characterized by high-end street fashion, design and modern architecture. A hipster lifestyle, but with a twist: alternative, vintage, edgy, cosmopolitan, niched and arty, but also chic. The hip lifestyle is reflected in the brands that are sold at the bar and in the prices for these beverages. Culture Club wasn't cheap and you won't drink a fake cola or a nameless beer or vodka. The same hip and arty identity is created in the flyers for the parties. On the flyer below we see a complete remake or re-interpretation of the famous picture for the Queen single (1978) 'Bicycle Race'. The picture does not only have an edgy and decadent feel, it also has a distinct vintage character and picture several vintage elements.



IMAGE 14: CULTURE CLUB REMAKE BICYCLE RACE FLYER

The flyer for the yearly Closing Night-party on 7-7-2007 was made by Glossy.tv, “a creative design agency based in Ghent”, that is specialized in “a diverse range of work across multiple disciplines, focussing on identity creation.”¹² This ‘identity’-agency has created numerous flyers, little movies¹³ and designs for Culture Club and these designs all underline the hipness and the glamour chic of the club. The flyer above combines a retro-feel with a touch of cosmopolitan decadence; indigenized cosmopolitanism. The remake was a local Ghent product. Created by local marketers and with habitués of the club as photo models. The retro-feel sits in the details. One example here is the medal with the coloured straps. This vintage quality is also accomplished by the general intertextuality with the original Queen picture.

¹² www.glossy.tv

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/events/205017386291673/>



IMAGE 15: ORIGINAL QUEEN COVER: BICYCLE RACE

It is in this intertextuality that another ingredient of the Culture Club identity-discourse is present: namely decadence. In the classic Queen-picture all the women are naked and this image still sticks on the Culture Club flyer even though all women there wear (a little bit) of clothes. It is of course no coincidence then that a respected niche cultural review website like Cutting Edge discusses the fact that '*women are not so naked as in the original.*'¹⁴ This 'edgy eroticism' was always present. It was visible in the murals of Club 69, in flyers and posters and was also illustrated in the fact that a famous Belgian or better alternative Ghentian lingerie brand – La Fille d'O – celebrated the birthday of the brand in Culture Club with a show that ended up in models spraying each other with whipped cream (Herregodts, 2006). Note here the resemblances with feministic commodification of niche hipster magazines like Frankie or even the sexist campaigns of American Apparel.

The interior, the identity-discourse on flyers, the sponsoring and sold brands, they all communicate the same world of decadence, cosmopolitan chic and high-end hipness. Of course this all wouldn't hold up if the parties would communicate a different image. Certainly in the first 5 years, the heydays of Culture Club, the club met up with this image. They organized legendary parties like Luna Park where the whole Club became a fair where the party-people could ride bumper cars or play games while top DJ's were spinning their records. The first edition was organized in 2003. By 2006 the concept was sponsored by MTV, Coke and Seat and

¹⁴ <http://www.cuttingedge.be/telex/culture-club-bicycle-race>

was advertised with a YouTube-clip.¹⁵ World Famous DJ's and artists like TIGA, Erol Alkan, Martin Solveig, Moby, Bob Sinclair and Mr Oizo joined the party.

Here we see the poiesis-infrastructures nexus in full detail. The lifestyle or identity of the club was not limited to the interior design or the design of the flyers: Culture Club not only answered a need among a niche of the population, it also functioned as a centre of normativity. The image of Culture Club was also the image that was projected by the micro-population in and around the club. If the Ghentian hipster is different from the American hipster, Culture Club is one of the reasons. Whereas the American hipster is understood as an alternative indie-music and art-movies consuming figure, the Ghentian hipster is constructed as having a more eclectic music taste and not afraid of being stylish. The infrastructure created normativities and thus had a structuring impact on the identity of a micro-population. This is illustrated in the door policy. The doormen worked with a strict door policy, a policy that was and is announced on the website:

Culture Club has been designed with a keen eye for detail and style. It's our home, you are our guests, and yes, we expect you to dress up for the occasion. No idea what we're talking about? Check the pictures on this site and it may dawn to you. Or check any fashion magazine at hand. It's not that difficult, it's just a matter of taste.¹⁶

Style, and not just any style, but hip street fashion-style is the ticket in. The identity of the club (see further) functions as a space where certain normativities are installed. This normativity creates constraints for the creativity of the visitors of the club. It would be a mistake to understand this normativity as a purely locally constructed set of norms and formats. On the contrary, the enforced normativity was inherently translocal. One explicit example is found in the fact that the website of Culture Club provided their future visitors with some inspiration on how to dress by pointing towards the New York based and highly influential fashion blog among the higher echelons of the industry: the Sartorialist.¹⁷ This fashion blog was set up by Scott Schuman who '*began The Sartorialist with the idea of creating a two-way dialogue about the world of fashion and its relationship to daily life*'. Especially in the earlier years, during the heydays of Culture Club, he mostly pictured fashionable people on the streets of New York, fashion runways and shops. This little line, what a New York based fashion blogger captured in the streets as fashion, informed the door policies of club in Ghent. The way people were dressed and what they found cool and fashionable was the result of interactional co-construction, not only with the people present, but also in relation to people in New York mediated through the Sartorialist blog. 'Local' signs were thus inherently connected to a

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pr1Q-IPoTIE>

¹⁶ www.cultureclub.be

¹⁷ <http://www.thesartorialist.com/>

translocal online public sphere. It even became, more complex. During the parties, there would always be a photographer present capturing the coolest and most fashionable people. Those photos were later uploaded on the Culture Club website, and party-goers eagerly scrolled through the pics to see if they made it. That scrolling also functioned as a learning environment where (potential) party-goers could learn what was fashionable. The visitors become part of the image of the club and the club helped shape the image and identity of the visitors and the Ghentian hipsters. This micro-population emerges in a complex dialectic between the online and offline; the local and the global, between individual creativity and infrastructural constraints. Architecture, design and fashion came together and formed one identity.

CULTURE CLUB, ENOUGHNESS AND TIMESPACE

If we now look through the glasses of enoughness (Blommaert and Varis, 2013, 2015) we see a club that from the start created an identity of cosmopolitan chic and hip identity discourse and presented itself as a place where music, architecture, fashion and lifestyle come together. And this lifestyle is presented as a lifestyle on the highest scale: a top-notch identity fully integrated in a globalized niched culture of hipness. The question now sounds is: is it enough? Is Culture Club really an infrastructural translation of globalized an upper-class globalized world culture or is it an instance of vernacular culture (Appadurai, 1996)?

The first point to be made is that Culture Club is a layered product. We already stressed how it grew in Ghent and that this gave the club and even the music that was played a distinctive style. The club was the result of a very local context with a lack of bars in Ghent that played electro music. Over time this gave birth to a very lively party scene and to a different style of music: namely eclectic musical mash ups. It was that local style that was created by DJ's like The Glimmers and the fucking Dewaele brothers in combination with the general identity-discourse in flyers and architecture that was the new thing Culture Club introduced. And that combination very soon became a globalized hype. The Sunday Times labelled the club in its early days as the 'Coolest place in the world'. In 2003 The Face Magazine listed Culture Club as one of the hottest clubs in Europe.¹⁸ If we look at the interior design, we not only see references to a hip modern and slick architecture, the architecture is high-end architecture and more important the interior design is recognized on a global scale as 'top notch'-design. The interior of the club for example featured in the book "Bar Design" of DAAB publishers (Serrats, 2006). This book says to collect a selection of 'the best bars in the world', and more specifically 'fashionable bars' of the world from the hand "of the most internationally renowned architects". The architecture of Culture Club was in touch with the global trends. The same thing can be said about the music. The (fucking) Dewaele brothers, also known as Soulwax or 2manyDJ's and the Glimmer Twins

¹⁸ The Face Magazine (Review 2002, Jan. 2003) cited in http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/CCN_Ghent_Application_Music_EN.pdf

travelled around the world to play their sets.¹⁹ These DJ's drew in other big names towards that Club: Tiga, LCD Soundsystem and Madonna producer Jacques Lu Cont came to deejay at Culture Club and this drew in partying people from over the world. One emblematic story is the private party that the trendy Fashion store Colette from Paris organized in the Club. To realize this they chartered a train for more than 600 Parisian party people to Ghent. It shouldn't surprise that English was the only language used in Culture Club's communication. Not only is the name of the club English, we see that the website – certainly in the heydays of the club – used English as lingua franca. And that English was good quality English: a hip English in touch with the globalized niche of hip-ness. It was the English of Fashion-magazines like The Face Magazine, Vice Magazine or Wallpaper and the English of the music and party-scene. It was an English with credibility in the globalized niche where they aimed to be part of.

Culture Club, between 2002 and 2007, was integrated in a global niche culture of hipness. Especially in the very first years it was an avant-garde club. The Club first worked for a small local scene or micro-population. A scene of people engaged in music, fashion, design, graphic arts and advertisement. In that time, says one of the directors of Culture Club, *'we were hipper than the world-famous magazine Wallpaper'*. This success had to be monetized to pay for the larger than live, decadent and extravagant parties. The Club attracted the attention of larger brands who detected that money was to be made by being associated with this uber-hip micro-population. Seat, MTV, Dior Perfume, L'Oreal, Moët & Chandon all collaborated with Culture Club. And also Coca Cola became one of the sponsors of the Club, but under the name of Coke. Around 2005 Coca Cola wanted *'to reintroduce Coke to Generations X, Y and Next'*²⁰ Therefore the company hired designers who were *'charged with creating an 'iconic experience' for fashionable club-goers with collectible packaging, videos and music.'*²¹ The idea was to introduce the new trendy Coke bottle to trendy people in trendy Clubs. The concept of this marketing strategy came from Peter Schelstraete, the global brand manager who *"based the idea on earlier experimental work he'd done in Belgium [...] to create branded parties at trendy clubs such as Culture Club in Gent, Belgium."*²²

Within a particular TimeSpace Culture Club entered the centre of globalization. Even seen from the most prestigious orders of indexicality (Blommaert, 2005) on the highest global scale. Culture Club was in tune. All the accents were correct and they all pointed towards the perception of hipness: the interior, the flyers, the music, the beverages and even the cloths of the party-people all made the right noises. For a small period Culture Club was the centre of the world. And even if geographically it was part of the periphery of Ghent, once you passed

¹⁹ see their Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/2manydjs>

²⁰ <http://adage.com/article/news/design-shops-raise-coke-marketing-art-form/104173/>

²¹ <http://adage.com/article/news/design-shops-raise-coke-marketing-art-form/104173/>

²² <http://adage.com/article/news/design-shops-raise-coke-marketing-art-form/104173/>

the brick gate you entered a centre on the highest scale of globalization: elite-globalization. This attracted the attention of all sorts of brands that wanted to be associated with the Club in order to sell their products and more in particular to gain the image of hipness.

HIPSTERS AND NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM

'The hipster' is clearly not just a cultural, but also a social-economic phenomena as Scott (2017) has argued. As we have seen, multinational corporations have understood this impact of hipster branding quite early. The hipster was at the forefront of new consumption practices, they are the so-called early adopters. If they find something cool, chances are that they add their cultural capital to the product. But hipsters are not only consumers or prosumers, they are also producers. The hipster deploys taste in the marketplace and this injection of cultural capital creates 'added value'. Just like Culture Club was in reality a place in the margins, it was made über-hip through identity discourse and design. Cultural strategies create added value. We all remember the empty, rundown shop that all of the sudden becomes a hip barista, a gourmet hamburger restaurant, a barbershop or a hip cocktail bar and attracts whole new young hip populations. Even though, most of the interior and exterior hasn't changed all that much – adding a layer existing out of some vintage furniture, a cutting-edge logo and a specific narrative and concept is in many cases enough to construct a new type of infrastructure that serves the needs of new groups of people, in most cases spending more money. Culture Club was an excellent example of these cultural strategies targeting and creating the Ghentian Hipsters. That model will reshape the city of Ghent in the next decades.

Hipsters are thus not just consumers, they are also entrepreneurs commodifying cultural capital in search for profits. Scott (2017) defines the hipster in social-economic terms as a subgroup within the new petite bourgeoisie. This new subgroup of the new petite bourgeoisie creates distinction from people of that same class using style. When looking at hipsters as a socio-economic phenomenon, we see that their stress on style, bike culture, vintage, their 'maker' culture (ranging from urban agriculture to brewing beers and making jewellery), DIY-lifestyle, arts and durable and ecological products results in a commitment to the creation of cultural micro-enterprises: *"the hipster then emerges as a credentialed cultural producer who – following shifts in employment structures, ongoing state austerity policies and digital revolutions – turns to creating micro-enterprises trading on everyday aesthetics, taste and style"* (Scott, 2017: 66).

Scott distinguishes between two ideal-typical reconversion strategies adopted by these micro-enterprises to deploy taste in the market places. One of these strategies is primarily cultural-capital oriented and focuses on using cultural capital (for instance aesthetic experience, skills, competences and knowledge) to produce objects and provide services in order to generate an upward social trajectory. This can range from fashion bloggers to the setting up of support

shows or platforms for creative ‘edgy’ professions. In short, what Duffy (2015) calls aspirational labourers who “*pursue productive activities that hold the promise of social and economic capital.*” Duffy sees this aspirational labour as an inherent part of the digital economies, and in that sense as a classic example of the neoliberal organization of that economy. The hipster, even though they possess cultural capital, is not necessarily wealthy and thus is better understood as product of a larger economic system.

The defining feature of the second, economic-capital strategy is “*the aesthetic re-composition of ‘old’ petite bourgeoisie forms of self-employment*” (Scott, 2017: 68). This strategy mobilizes semiotic and linguistic means to re-frame ‘old’ petite bourgeoisie forms of self-employment using a hipster authenticity and ecological friendly discourse. This can range from the tea-room (that is now an ‘authentic’ barista) to the bio-butcher. ‘Old skool’ skills are repackaged in an ‘authentic’, real and local discourse mostly by using new technologies and fancy design. In many cases, these new crafts(wo)men use opportunities created by policy makers (for instance, tax-benefits when opening pop-up stores) and existing digital platforms in order to create a living. “*Hipster capitalism*”, as Scott (2017: 71–72) calls it is thus part of a larger economy and not an alternative to it. This is not only true in the case of ‘micro-enterprises’ or the urban economy. From the aspirational labour of the wannabe paid vloggers to the ‘sharing platforms’, hip clubs and barista’s, the identity emblems, discourses and semiotics are part of the story. The ‘hipster’ is thus not only creating a local micro-entrepreneurial capitalism. Hipster capitalism, and the figure of the hipster is also entangled with neoliberal capitalism, and the digital economy and sharing platforms in particular.

HIPSTER-BRANDING AS A SIGN OF THE TIMES

Airbnb is as an excellent example. Airbnb not only started as a bohemian platform (the founders, so goes the story, couldn’t pay the rent of their loft and try to rent a mattress), it has become a crucial infrastructure for those travellers who want to distinguish themselves from ‘tourists’ (Van Nuenen, 2016: 105–126) as ‘travellers in search of an authentic experience’. Airbnb does not only let people rent a bed, they sell an experience or a mythology in the sense of Roland Barthes (1957). Airbnb makes money of cultural capital. “*Staying at a private Airbnb accommodation instead of a hotel room signifies a daring and reflexive traveller identity in opposition to that of mass tourist*” (Gyimóthy, 2017: 66). Airbnb taps into the DIY-attitude and counter-cultural imagination of many hipster identity discourses. See how Airbnb sells its platform and construct a corporate identity:

There’s something else that’s always been a little different and special about us. Today, so much of the way we travel has been mass-produced and commoditized. Airbnb is just the

*opposite. We're a community of individuals. We're powered by people of all different backgrounds and beliefs, each with our own outlook and our own story to tell.*²³

Airbnb taps into the cosy, homey and sharing narrative and claims wanting to create all place into 'homes'. This stress on cosiness, feeling at home was also used in the case of Bar Oswald. The manifesto reads as testimony to 'sharing' and 'friendship': enabling to experience the city as a local, not as a tourist. Airbnb appropriates the hipster countercultural and authentic discourse and sells itself as 'different', not 'mass-produced' and not 'commoditized', it's the infrastructure of a global community of 'individuals' celebrating superdiversity. The origin story and the community discourse of Airbnb let us look at this company as 'sharing', 'authentic' and 'non-commercial'. But what is marketed as 'sharing' and 'freedom' is in the end about profit Srnicek (2017: 81).

The sharing economy, just like the 'hipster economy' does not exist in abstract, both are an intrinsic part of neoliberal capitalism. And thus it is organized, as Srnicek (2017: 93) argues, along the lines of one of the "*fundamental drivers of capitalism: intracapitalist competition*". This platform even though presented, in the case of Airbnb, as a solution to the financial crisis, is in fact contributing to the exploitation and informalisation of workers and pressure the regular hotel circuit. And that is exactly why, platforms according to Srnicek are so willingly taken up by capitalists. Hipster identity discourses, practices and emblems are thus potentially highly profitable and upscale-able. Just like the urban hipster economy, Airbnb and other platforms contribute to the construction of the identity of a neighbourhood, they have a tremendous impact on the cities themselves, from rental prices going up, inequality, to house shortage and undermining of city polities to prosumers reviewing places.

Hipster-branding, including its stress on authenticity, uniqueness and durability are best understood within the larger social economic structuring of the world. The neoliberal phase of capitalism is not only characterized by financialization (Varoufakis, 2018), deregulation, privatization and the withdrawal of the state from social provisions (Harvey, 2005: 3), but also by the masking of naked capital in "*commodity fetishism, niche marketing and urban cultural consumerism*" (Harvey, 2013: xi). The post-Fordist era is characterized by the deindustrialisation and as a result,

culture is more and more the business of cities - the basis of their tourist attractions and their unique, competitive edge. The growth of cultural consumption (of art, food, fashion, music, tourism) and the industries that cater to it fuels the city's symbolic economy, its visible ability to produce both symbols and space." (Zukin, 1995: 2)

²³ <https://blog.atairbnb.com/belong-anywhere/>

The shift from producing products to a service economy lead towards investment in cutting edge industries like the digital economy, investments in niche markets, real estate and creative cultural products. The economy globalized, multinational companies delocalized production (Standing, 2011) and became networked multinationals (Castells, 1996). Real estate projects, the digital economy and the cultural strategies in cities were trying to manage the economic decline that followed from that restructuring of the economy and create and economic growth (Zukin, 1995: 272). Culture Club, with its strong identity discourse and its integration in a global cultural niche of design and decadence, was in line with cultural strategies unfolding worldwide in search for growth and profit. It helped to place the club on the global map, and it helped to co-construct Ghent as a hip city.

Nightlife, travelling and the consumption of other cultural products (be it music, art or barista coffees and gourmet hamburgers) are thus not only about living 'the good life'. They should be understood as part of those cultural strategies of cities and companies to create profit. This larger socio-economic context has a profound impact on our understanding of the good life. Realizing that good way of living is about individual consumption first, and in that sense redirecting attention to older conceptions of the good life that are thought in terms of empowerment, self-development, let alone that 'the good life' is envisioned as a social life and thus intrinsically connected to realization of equality and a good society for all. Contemporary visions on the good life are all deeply commodified. On the scale of the city, all these infrastructures connected to the growth of cultural consumption, the selling of products and the positioning the city in a global tourist market. Nightlife, tourism, shops, bars, museums and events are at the heart of the city's symbolic economy.

CHAPTER 5: THE HIPSTERIZED CITY

Fast forward ten years later. The heydays of Culture Club are a long-forgotten memory, but the style they introduced and the marketing model is still visible in the city. Culture Club, together with the hip party people added a particular aura or symbolic and cultural capital to the city. Ghent became a 'hip city'. Ghent has since acquired a whole new meaning. It has become acknowledged by outsiders and insiders as a 'hip city'. The relation between certain places or infrastructures, hipsters and the imagination of the hip centre of Ghent is not only produced by city marketing discourses, it is also reproduced by Ghentians themselves and more importantly through all kinds of new micro-enterprises *"at the forefront of urban cultural production promoting the art of living well"* (Scott, 2017: 72).

Hipness is not just a discursive construct, it has a material reality: it is visible in the city. The urban planning and development, the infrastructures and the mobilized semiotics, the attention to aesthetics and the events that take place in private and public spaces: they all contribute to the look and the feel of the city. Together with the online and offline discourses on the city, they create the meaning of space. The contemporary symbolic economy of the city (Zukin, 1995: 7–9) exists in the combination of micro-entrepreneurs, consumers, real estate development, new businesses, politicians, urban planners and a wealthy class wanting to make a lasting impression on the city. In this chapter, we will zoom in on the contribution of those micro-entrepreneurs and consumers in the symbolic economy of Ghent as a hip and trendy place.

HIPSTER SPOTTING

The teacher of my oldest daughter will be our guide in this chapter. During a parent evening, discussing the wellbeing of my daughter at school, I got a text message from my colleague Piia Varis saying that our paper on the 21st century hipster (Maly and Varis, 2016) was accepted by the European Journal for Cultural Studies. That message was met with some non-verbal celebrative facial expressions. The teacher, who at the time wore some distinctive Ghentian hipster emblems – think of fifties – inspired glasses, fashionable clothing, a Betty Davies-inspired hair-cut, Nike shoes and a retro-bike – looked surprised. I subsequently offered an apology for my sudden lack of attention and an explanation for the happy-face. This triggered the teacher's ironic reaction: *"if you ever have a need to interview a hipster, you know where to find me."* On which I answered, *"well beware, I will hold you to that promise."*

This positive identification with the hipster and the fact that I wanted to interview her became a running conversation over the next months. Remarkable though, the identification of the teacher switched over time. She ended up distancing herself from the hipster-label. Even though she denounced the label, she still claimed to be 'in the know' of hipster-places in Ghent and offered to draw up a list where one can engage in some 'hipster-spotting' [see Image 16].

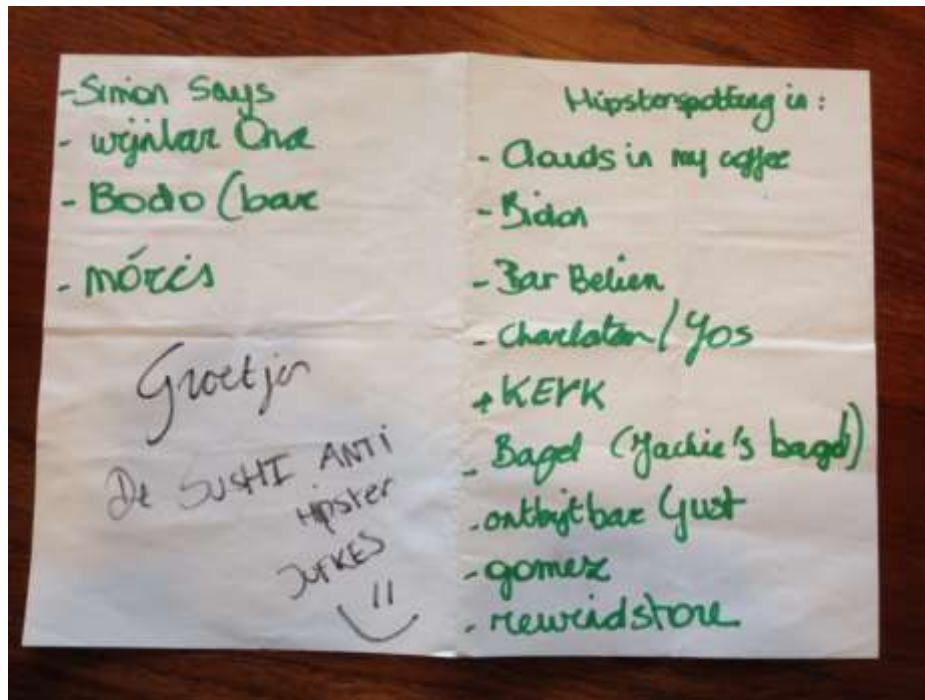


IMAGE 16: HIPSTER-SPOTTING-NOTE - 2015

The list is signed off with 'Greetings. The sushi anti hipster teachers ☺'. The self-identification with the hipster-label has now turned into the complete opposite. They (the teacher of my daughter and her colleague) were now self-defining themselves *ironically* as 'anti-hipster', which ironically puts their discourse perfectly in line with the hipster identity discourse Varis and I described in our paper.

What in the context of this book is more relevant than such 'self-labelling' is the fact that the teachers, of which at least one of them combined the different hipster-emblems, claimed to have knowledge of the different 'hipster-places' in Ghent and claimed to be able to recognize 'hipsters and their infrastructures'. Not only is this micro-population thus visible in the city, but people are able to categorize not only that population, but also its infrastructures. It is through such day to day discursive categorizations that the city is imagined as a hip city, not only by tourists, but also by the inhabitants. And the stylization of those infrastructures and the people they attract play a crucial role here.

The hipster-spotting list of the teachers is far from complete, but it gives us a very interesting starting point in describing contemporary hipsterized-Ghent. Three things are worth to be highlighted:

- (1) All the places, with the exception of Clouds in my Coffee and Kverk, are located in the historic centre of Ghent. It is an index that the heavy point of hipsterification is still located in the city centre. The presence of two 19th century belt places - Clouds in my coffee and Kverk – are just like the presence of Bar Oswald in De Muide indexes of a process of hipsterification that has been unfolding. In the last decade, we see that as the result of the successful hipsterification of the city centre, this process is now expanding to the 19th century belt around Ghent.
- (2) Secondly, the teachers listed very different categories of infrastructures. Categorized by their function(s), we see infrastructures that provide people with (1) coffee (Simon Says, Bidon & Clouds in my coffee), (2) food (Bagels, Gust, Gomez, Simon Says, Bidon), (3) drinks (Ona, Móres, Charlatan, Jos) and (4) fashion (Rewind).
- (3) Thirdly, most of the places are relatively new, and are considered ‘places to be’. Almost all of them for instance are listed on the – also very hip website ‘New Places to be – independent hotspot website’ and the truly hip ones make it into the book of the same website (New Places to be 2015).
- (4) And, last, but not least: each category of infrastructures aligns with some of the basic identity emblems and consumption practices of the hipster (clothing, food, drinks and coffee in particular): they are the infrastructures promoting and enabling the Good Life.

The infrastructures that made it in this little note are far from complete and the landscape is changing at a fast pace. We could have added different bicycle shops, clubs, clothing shops like Marmods and a specialist grocery shop like Moor & Moor. What really matters is that the hipster is not just a small-niched social group anymore, or a series of an individual identity supported by online media: their presence is not only visible in the city: it changes the face of a city online and offline.

BARISTAS AND FIXIES AT BIDON

The barista bar is by now widely recognized as a classic and truly global hipster infrastructure. No surprise thus that three coffee bars made it on the hipster-spotting list (Simon Says, Clouds in my Coffee and Bidon). The hipster and the barista are so closely associated that the barista-hipster has become a classic meme on Quickmemes²⁴ and Memegenerator.net.²⁵ The barista-hipster macro series first appeared in 2011 and immediately went viral. These memes depict a

²⁴ <http://www.quickmeme.com/Hipster-Barista/>

²⁵ <http://memegenerator.net/Hipster-Barista>

tattooed man and reproduce common ‘hipster stereotypes’ *‘being judgmental yet hypocritical, Hipster Barista acknowledges the snobby side of American coffee culture’*.



IMAGE 17: BARISTA MEMES
IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTPS://KNOWYOURMEME.COM/MEMES/HIPSTER-BARISTA](https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/hipster-barista)

The many derivatives of the original meme construct the barista as a prototypical hipster: as somebody with large cultural capital, imagining himself as countercultural and characterized by a very specific style. The hipster-barista sees himself as an artist, not as a waiter. The man pictured in the meme is an actual barista called Dustin Mattson now working at Counter Cultural Coffee and at the time working at Octane Coffee in Atlanta. And interestingly, his reaction to his rebirth as a living meme reproduced the idea of the ‘hipster-barista’ as a craftsman: *“To me, it’s very telling on how we laud farm-to-table food, craft beer, cocktail mixology, but it’s ok to have no respect for the specialty coffee world and the people who are committed to it”*.²⁶ Coffee is more than ‘just coffee’. Interestingly, the barista refers to all those other hipster micro-enterprises that rediscover and rebrand old craftsmanship as part of the authentic, ‘good life’ that equals consumption with caring for ecology and durability. That same identity – discourse is also deployed by Octane, the coffee bar where Mattson worked at the time:

We like to think local. We roast our beans right next to the cafe and we use milk from a nearby dairy so that our baristas can craft a quality, enjoyable experience that makes

²⁶ <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/hipster-barista>

you feel like you're really at home. We use the same sensibilities in our bar program. We take inspiration from around the world, but in the end, we're a community; and our friends and neighbors deserve a delicious drink and fun time when they visit. (Octane coffee, visited on 21/12/2015)

Locality, authenticity, craftsmanship, quality, community building and making the customer to feel at home and serve them with superb drinks. These discursive ingredients are also being deployed on the other side of the world, in Ghent Belgium. The coffee bar, the barista and this authenticity – locality discourse are all present. Serving coffee is more than poring coffee in a cup, it is about the experience and the feel of the place.

Let's zoom in on Bidon, one of the coffee bars on the hipster-spotting list. This coffee bar can be found in the historical centre of Ghent near the former Animal market (where several hip bars are housed). The emplacement of Bidon is telling, on the next corner, you have the trendy shop 'Elle et Gand', across the street you have the hip Aperó-bar Gomez (also mentioned in the hipster spotting guide), the legendary Club 69 and the alternative café Video. Bidon is thus surrounded by hip- infrastructures and semiotically the place fits in.



IMAGE 18: BIDON - COFFEE & BICYCLE - EAT & LIVE

Bidon puts itself in the market as a place for coffee, and a place where you can buy a new bike or other bicycling gear. According to the city's tourist website, Bidon is a '*hip coffee bar*'.²⁷ The bar is housed in a former gas station, which now has large black thin-framed windows with a professionally styled logo on the front. The logo shows a graphic interpretation of a bike, with underneath the shop's motto: '*Bidon, coffee & bicycle, eat & live*'. Etymological speaking, Bidon

²⁷ <https://visit.gent.be/en/eat-drink/bar-bidon>

is a French word that is now used in English and in Dutch to refer to the water bottle carried by cyclists. In countries like Belgium and France Bidon is immediately associated with the heroic cyclists of the sixties and seventies like Eddy Merckx. It is thus no coincidence that the banner of Bidon's Facebook pages is picture of a magazine featuring Eddy Merckx on the cover (see Image 19). Bidon has a nostalgic, vintage and hipster feel to it.



IMAGE 19 FACEBOOK PAGE BIDON - 2019

Inside, we see vintage furniture combined with a newly handcrafted plywood furniture, vintage bikes, new fixies and at the time even a 1970s Volkswagen beetle. A blackboard cannot be absent and the menu is – again classic hipster – just printed-paper in a clipboard. A little sign on the façade of the shop mentions that the coffee is made on a 'La Marzocco' which the owner of Bidon calls *the 'Rolls-Royce' among coffee machines* (Cavyn, 2014).



IMAGE 20: INSIDE BIDON: FIXIES, VINTAGE AND PLYWOOD © ICO MALY - 2015

Bidon is the only coffee bar in Ghent where you can buy a bike or a saddle and get a real barista-coffee. The concept is clearly unique, at least in Ghent. If we zoom out and look from a global perspective, we bump into the layered and translocal character of the hipster micro-population. Barista coffee, fixies, vintage bikes and interior design are truly global identity emblems of the hipster. What is original on an individual level or the level of the city becomes part of the uniform if we upscale the perspective. If we look at the global scale, we see that Bidon is not unique, nor original. In Utrecht, you can go to Freem to get your bike fixed and have a coffee, while in Maastricht you have to go to Alley Cat to encounter the same concept. In Den Haag, you can visit Lola to have your bike mended and taste superb barista coffee. In Florida, you have Velo Creek Bike & Brew while in Chicago you can go knock on the door of Heritage and in Minneapolis you sip your coffee while your bike gets fixed in Angry Catfish bicycle.



IMAGE 21: FREEM UTRECHT (GOOGLE IMAGES)

If you now look at the interior of Freem, all the elements that define Bidon are also in place: vintage furniture, plywood bar, blackboards, and coffee. Bidon seen from a global scale is local duplicate of a widely distributed concept. When we look past the –in-your-face-originality of the individual infrastructures, we paradoxically encounter an astonishing uniformity. ‘Hipster-infrastructures’, just like the hipster itself, are only unique when looking at individual persons and places, but from the moment you zoom out, we encounter consistency: certain elements

are global – in this case the combination of vintage, fixies, blackboards and coffee – other things are local. The reference to Merckx, the local emplacement and the name give Bidon a distinctive Belgian, even Ghentian feel. Infrastructures get indigenized to borrow Appadurai's concept. Bidon has a different ring in Ghent, than it has in The Netherlands. Not only does it refer to old cycling legends, it also has a nostalgic feel as French – in Ghent – has a long history. Ghent still has French-speaking elite. But even more, French was made hip again through the legendary Pop life parties (and the cd of the party with Gainsbourg alike chansons) and Culture Club. Point is thus, that these infrastructures meet the needs of a locals, and international visitors. Bidon manages to thicken all the boxes of the hipster genre and get the details right to be recognized as hip and cool.

HIPSTER INFRASTRUCTURES

Bidon is of course not the only local hip place; we already mentioned it is emplaced next to other hip places in the historic centre. These conceptual infrastructures are emblematic of the deployment of style and taste in the making of a livelihood. It is the concept and the style that make it stand out between all the other baristas that are popping up in every corner of the city. Barista culture has been indigenized since 2007 when Barista coffee & cake started. These Ghentian barista pioneers now have three different bars including one boat bar. Panorama opened its doors in May 2013 and closed two years later). Since 2014, True Beans pretended to serve you 'high end' barista coffee and breakfast in a bar cluttered with gold and wood, but also had to close. Le Jardin Bohemian combined vintage, coffee and drinks with a B&B. Bar Jan Cremer is a coffee & drinks bar designed by architect Wim Goes and is named after the famous Dutch writer Jan Cremer of which the owners are huge fans. Café Labath – the successful follow-up of Café Walter – and of course Or Coffee should be mentioned. Or Coffee is a highly successful roastery and chain of coffee bars in Ghent, Antwerp and Brussels. The rise of the barista is a clear index not only of transnational barista culture, but also of the presence of hip people willing to pay more for a barista coffee in a cool place.

Next to the baristas, we see the emergence of 'authentic' food place. The teachers named GUST. Every little detail of breakfast bar GUST – from the food, over the napkins, the design of the front of the shop, the website and the interior – everything communicates the same message: superb food made with locally produced and handmade qualitative products, including the so-called superfoods. One can not only order soya yoghurt and milk instead regular dairy products but also a full '*power breakfast*' which consists out of soy yoghurt with blueberries, chia seed, pumpkin and sunflower seeds, almonds and goji berries. The design of the logo, the architecture and even the glasses, plates and the interior, it all matches. Every little detail is in tune. The dull breakfast, has now been re-imagined as an art of the good life and Gust can also help you to acquire that art form and organises workshops.



ZIJN JULLIE EEN BENDE VRIENDINNEN OP ZOEK NAAR EEN LEUKE ACTIVITEIT
 VOOR EEN BACHELORETTE?
 OF WILLEN JULLIE GEWOON GRAAG LEKKER KOKEN EN NIEUWE RECEPTEN
 ONTDEKKEN?
 EEN GROEP COLLEGA'S OP ZOEK NAAR DE IDEALE TEAMBUILDING, EVENTUEEL

IMAGE 22: WEBSITE GUST - ORGANISING WORKSHOPS

Another food place on the list is Jackie's Bagel bar which sells itself as '*your one-stop-shop for deliciousness*'. The place opened in January 2014 and according to its website²⁸ it is '*the first real Bagel bar in Ghent*'. Even though Bagel's are not a thing in Belgium, the place is presented as an authentic Deli. The red round logo refers to a 'classic deli' and has an American feel to it. The background of the website is inspired by the brown packing paper of the bagel. Jackie claims to be '*the meeting place for hipsters, stylish thirty-somethings culinary world travellers and young souls with children.*' Next to Jackie's and Gust, Ghent is full of 'hip' new food places. If you now look at the Holy Food Market (a hip redesigned old chapel now housing different types of food stands), WasBar (Eating breakfast or brunch while doing your laundry) or the many Gourmet Hamburger places growing like weed (From Uncle Babe's Burger And Bar, Ellis Burger, Jack Premium Burgers, Jilles Beer and Burgers, 't Koningshuis Burgers to Paul's Boutique), all places are highly stylized, selling an experience more than a product, and as such they facilitate (and commodify) the good life style. All these places are clear examples of what Scott (2017: 68) labelled economic-capital oriented reconversions: instead of just selling hamburgers, these new places sell 'gourmet hamburgers'. Customers can now choose how the patty is baked (rare or medium), they are informed about origin of the meat, the type of cow that is used and they sit in a stylish place with a grand narrative.

Next to food and drinks, the hipster also needs fashion. Rewind was mentioned on the hipster spotting list. Rewind sells designer clothing and Scandinavian Design and has three shops in the

²⁸ www.jackies.be

historical centre. But also thrift stores cannot be missing. Marmod is then the place to go. Marmod pretends to be more than a shop: local designers and artists get a place and you can have fair drinks while listening to local artists. According to the website,²⁹ *'It is the meeting place for creative pioneers and open minds.'* Marmod is thus not conceptualized as a store, it is a concept and *'a breeding ground for expression where conscious shopping became central [sic].* Marmod, according to their website, *'is a conceptual vintage store with exclusive recycled clothing, local art a fair drinks are being intertwined'*. The main motto of Marmod as a *'meeting place'* is to help you *'being yourself'* by selecting clothes, introducing local art, giving you advice on hairdressers and where you can eat.

The face of Ghent is reconfigured. The tea-room, the café, the restaurant or the shop are more and more replaced by highly stylized hipster infrastructures. They are being rebranded as concepts selling style, taste and experiences. Aesthetics are crucial in this branding. The highly stylized infrastructures, be it coffee bars, foodie restaurants or gourmet grocery shops, they put the city "on the map" (See also Zukin, 1995 for a more in-depth analysis between style and the symbolic economy of the city). All these hipster infrastructures come with professionally designed graphics, highly stylized interiors combining vintage with design (with some splashes nostalgia and ethnic design) and an identity discourse that reshape dull restaurants into cultural hot beds, in *'authentic'* infrastructures of the good life. The rise of these hipster infrastructures is also connected with the rising rental prizes and labour costs: by injecting cultural strategies and marketing in their business they cannot only distinguish themselves from other competitors, they can also ask higher prizes. A gourmet hamburgers can easily cost three times as much as a regular Mc Donald's hamburger.

The linguistic, discursive and semiotic intertextuality between all these different places is striking. They all use short names, and mobilize hip English, French or local hipsterized Dutch to underline the hipness or the authenticity of the infrastructure. They all are concerned about the environment, durable consumer culture, and craftsmanship. They all have unique and authentic concepts and they all invest quite a lot in on –and offline communication. From the moment you enter these places, you'll notice that they all combine contemporary and vintage design, organic and sustainable products, with a nice presentation. And all of them invest quite a lot in the creation of *'authenticity'*. And just because all these places are *'new'*, authenticity is something that needs extensive identity work.

If we zoom in on the different places mentioned in the hipster-spotting list, we see a *'hipster format'* or *'genre'*. It is interesting to establish, that the identity discourses, the semiotics and the architecture of all these infrastructures are quite uniform. Bidon is just one of many different places in Ghent that combine a highly stylized exterior, interior, graphic design and

²⁹ www.marmod.be

identity discourse targeting the needs of the prototypical hipster. A look at their logos alone shows a uniform.



IMAGE 23: LOGOS OF GHENTIAN HIPSTER PLACES

We do not only witness clean and well designed and hip logo's, they all share several characteristics. None of these places has just written the name on a paper or for instance used a family name of the owner. All the logos professionally designed. They are all black on white or vice versa, and all of them seem to subscribe to the less is more motto. Most places only use the name itself. The only exception is Bidon, which has an abstract bike in the logo. All logos have 'vintage qualities'. Several refer to the eighties (Marmod, Bar Belien, XOX, Rewind, ...), others have more art deco references (Belien, see also Oswald in Chapter 2). French vintage chic is still in vogue (Bidon & Bodo) and in line with the 'nostalgic authenticity' vibe, simple names like Gust, Alice and Oswald are in.

CLOUDS IN MY COFFEE

Not only the historical centre sees the rise of 'hipster infrastructures', in the second decennium of the 21st century the 19th century belt we also see the influx of infrastructures for the creative class. Those first new micro-businesses are bottom-up gentrifiers realized by new individuals buying houses and setting up businesses. Not all of those businesses are hipster infrastructures, but several places clearly set the tone by mobilizing the hipster format with varying degrees of success. Just like in other hip cities, we see that the next 'edgy' neighbourhood attracts a young hip and creative class setting up hip and authentic places. As we have already seen, Ghent is again no exception.

In the 19th century belt, we see one after the other hip place popping up. Clouds in My Coffee can be seen as the hippest of them all. No coincidence thus that this hip place made it on the teacher's hipster spotting list. Clouds opened in 2012 and is part of a larger collective of activities under the umbrella-name Clouds: B&B, interior design, food and coffee. Clouds in My Coffee is located just outside the historical centre of Ghent, in a so-called 'not evident' – read migrant – neighbourhood in the 19th century belt around Ghent. Clouds is put up in an old school that had a complete makeover. The owner started by renovating the school and creating several living unit with friends. The central motto was 'living apart together'. Clouds functions as an island in the neighbourhood: private living, bread and breakfast, lunch, coffee and objects are grouped together on one site. The design of the site clearly differentiates from the neighbourhood [see Image 24].



IMAGE 24: CLOUDS IN MY COFFEE WITHIN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD © ICO MALY - 2015

On the left with the red bricks, you see a cheap PVC white door with some remnants of the blue packing being stuck on it and a cheap house number on it. The electric cable of the doorbell runs on the wall. This door can be understood as an image of decline (Blommaert and Maly, 2016). Next to it, you see the front of Clouds in My Coffee. Nicely white painted walls with a design window with architectural qualities sticking out, two benches and grapevines. On the window and the door, we find some highly stylized letters:



IMAGE 25: FRONT OF CLOUDS IN MY COFFEE © ICO MALY - 2015

On the large window, we see the logo 'Clouds in My Coffee' in golden and black letters and in the middle, we can read 'Drinks & Dreams'. On the door, the same letters are used saying 'coffee. Food. Objects.'. The styling of the letters, together with the architecture creates a very distinctive place in the – rather poor – neighbourhood. Here we enter a kind of oasis in tune with a global design language. It is no coincidence (look closely next to the handle of the door) that they advertise for the yearly 'Day of the architecture'. This is a creative hotspot where you can eat, drink a coffee and dream. Clouds is thus not just about coffee, it is about the total experience. Clouds sells you a dream.

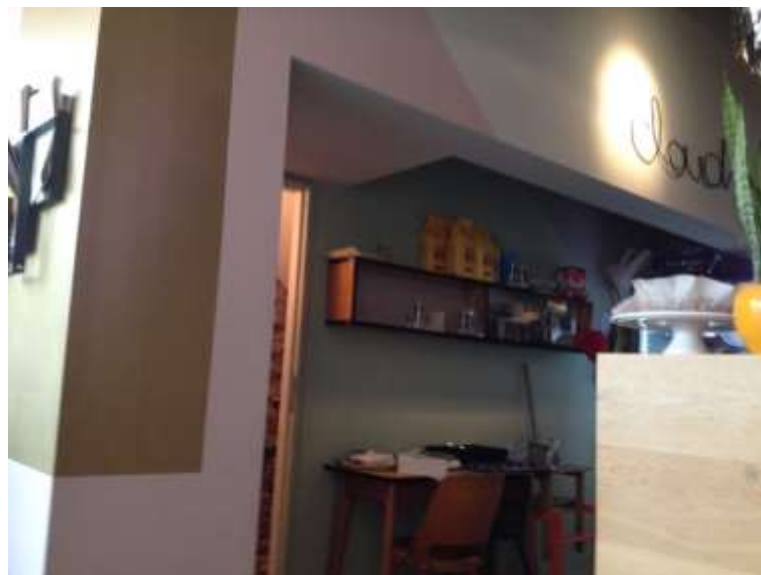


IMAGE 26: INTERIOR OF CLOUDS IN MY COFFEE © ICO MALY - 2015

of Ghent, but certainly worthwhile to go out and discover it'.³¹ The press reproduces the myth and the myth helps to reconfigure the neighbourhood and its image.



IMAGE 28: HIP PLACES IN A RUNDOWN NEIGHBOURHOOD – © ICO MALY - 2016

The migrant neighbourhood is seeing an influx of hipsters with their own infrastructures. In the next years, the area around Dampoort Station will be urbanized: new buildings will be created to answer the need of youngsters in search for a place to life (see Chapter 6). This recreation of the neighbourhood is probably only an appetizer for what is coming. Clouds is the forerunner of the hipsterification of the neighbourhood. And even though Clouds is categorized as a hipster-place, not only by the teacher, but also by a paper like *De Morgen* (2014)³², you can bet that the label is being denied by the owners. When *De Morgen* published a 'hipster-recognizing-manual' in which they described Clouds as a hipster-place, the following picture was posted on their website with the comment '*It is certainly not true that our client base is limited to hipsters. The older generations also feel at home here.*'

³¹ <http://www.feeling.be/leven-met-stijl/gastronomie/235195/hot-new-places-to-be-koffiebars-met-eeen-plus>

³² <http://www.demorgen.be/tvmedia/hoe-herken-je-eeen-hipster-b68cb837/>

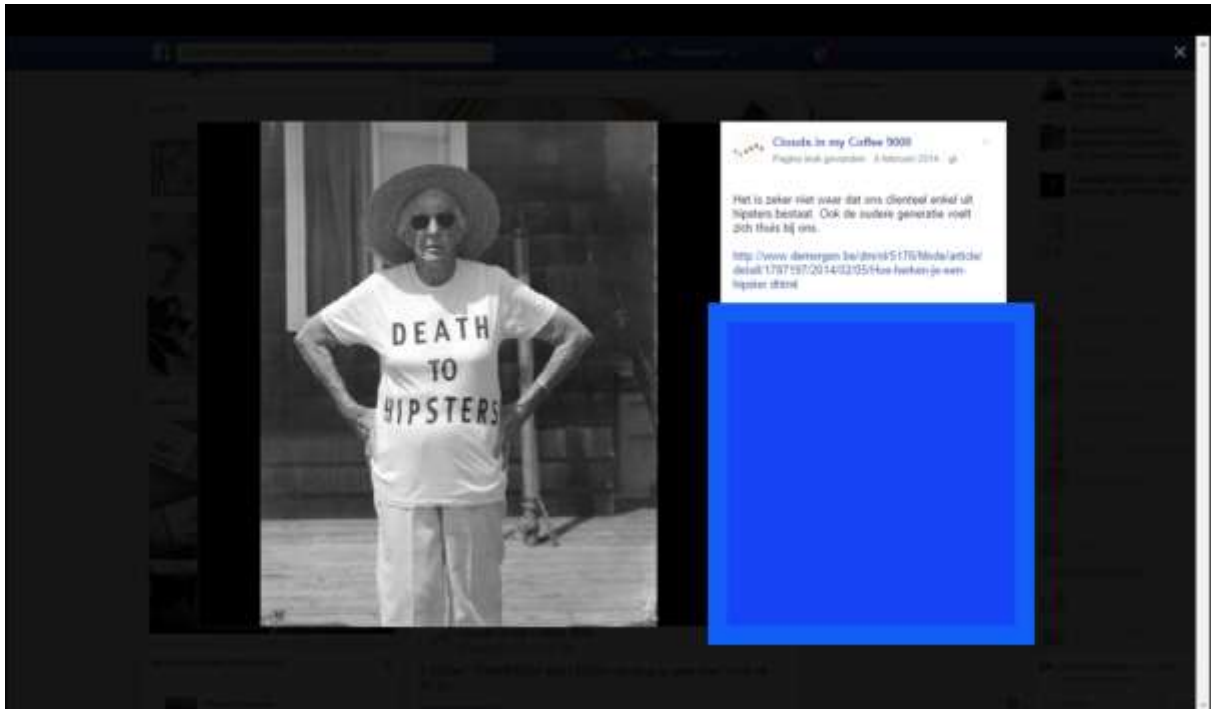


IMAGE 29: TWEET: NOT ONLY HIPSTERS IN CLOUDS IN MY COFFEE

THE RISE OF THE BARBER

Another index of this hipsterification process in the 19th century belt is the rise of the barber-shop. Beards are to hipsters; what sand is to the beach. These beards and ironic moustaches are not just facial hair; they are highly stylized identity emblems. And in the wake of the beards and the special haircuts, we see a worldwide rise of 'barber-culture' and barber-shops (Holliday, 2013; Reindl, 2015; Russell, 2017). All of a sudden, barbershops were '*hipster chic*' and back '*on the cutting edge*' (Croft, 2015) and just like Barista culture, barber culture was *englobalised* (Blommaert, 2010). 'The American barber shop, with its barber pole and its vintage chrome seat has become the model for barbers all over the world. This globalisation of the barber, according to barbers themselves, can be linked to (1) the 'backing of Hollywood and television' (Croft, 2015), reference to *Mad Men* occur frequently in this context, (2) hipsters and mainstreaming of hipster culture (Reindl, 2015; Banigan, 2017), (3) the rise of social media – Facebook first and later also Instagram (Holliday, 2013).

Social media, and especially Instagram has proven to be a crucial medium within this transnational barber-culture. *Hairdressers Journal International* (Charlottegw, 2018), for instance, dedicates a long read on the importance of Instagram for the neo-barber-scene. The article not only advises barbers (how) to use Instagram to get noticed, but also as a learning tool. Hashtags like #barber, #barberworld, #fade are used on a massive scale by barbers from all corners of the world and form transnational spaces where barber-culture, and especially

techniques and looks are distributed. Instagram is a key infrastructure of barber-culture and connects the offline with the online, the local with the translocal and helps the distribution of neo-barber culture.



IMAGE 30: KAPSALON GÖKHAN - DAMPOORT – © ICO MALY 2019

In Ghent too, we see the rise of the barbershop, especially in the 19th century belt. From Rabot to Dampoort, old hair saloons are restyled into barbershops and new barbers pop up. Kapsalon Gökhan is a good example. Kapsalon Gökhan can be found in the 19th century belt near Dampoort Station and Clouds in my Coffee in Ghent. The logo of this new barber salon is an outline of a 'fade' haircut and trimmed beard. This logo indexes barber-culture, but also 'the hipster' cut can be recognized here. Clearly, the logo gives a 'hip' character to what was previously a 'Turkish hairdresser'. The name 'Kapsalon Gökhan' and the word 'Herenkapper' (men's hairdresser) still refers to the pre-barber history of the salon. The interior of the Kapsalon Gökhan in its pre-barber era looked like many Turkish hairdressers in and around Ghent.

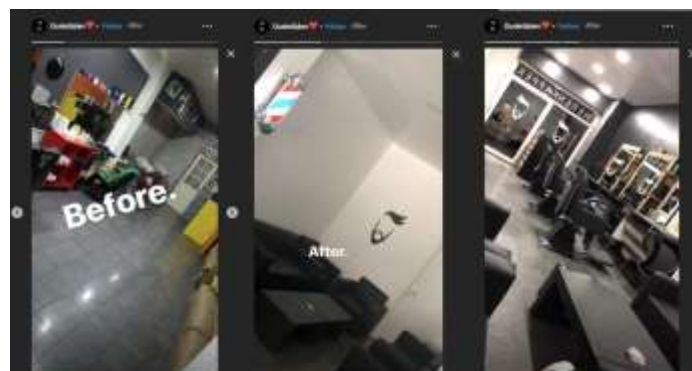


IMAGE 31: KAPSALON GÖKHAN INSTAGRAM HIGHLIGHTED STORY 'OLD TIMES' BEFORE AND AFTER

The saloon was in first instance functional. The floor in ceramic fake marble tiles, the old leather seats, the recycled eighties/nineties hairdresser seats and washing tables, the Ikea rack: it was functional, but not 'stylized' according to the hipster format. The use of many different colours (grey, red, flashy and pastel green, yellow, blue and white) is very different from the 'after'-situation. The floor is still there, but today, the walls are sleek white and black, the shabby old leather sofa has been replaced by black leather seats. The old door with windows is now a sleek white one. The recycled hairdresser stools have been replaced by black items with a vintage feel. And most importantly, the barber's pole was mounted on the white wall and the hipster with fade -outline was printed on the wall and on the windows of the shop. Here you buy style, not just a haircut.



IMAGE 32: BARBER A - RABOT NEIGHBOURHOOD- © ICO MALY 2019

The latest barbershop that opened its doors is Barber A, near the Rabot neighbourhood. The shop opened November 2018. All the classic elements of the (American) barbershop are in place. On the front, we see the index of the classic American barbershop: the red, white and blue pole. The barber's pole dates back to the Middle Ages, where hair dressers would also perform surgery on customers. The colour red refers to the blood, and in most countries, the pole would be red or white and red. Only in the United States, would 'blue' be added to the pole as a reference to the colours of the flag. The new Ghentian shop is not a 'coiffeur', 'kapper', 'kapsalon' or 'hair saloon' anymore (something that would have been quite common only 5 or 10 year ago), it is also not a 'barbier', but a 'barber'. The centre of normativity to which this shop orients itself is the 'American barber'. On the front window, we see drawing of a barber

with a fade cut and trimmed beard in front of the 'blue-red-white-colours' indexing an 'authentic barbershop'. Below, we see the name of the barbershop.



IMAGE 33- GENERIC SHUTTERSTOCK LOGO - RETRO BARBER MAN

Interestingly, though, is that this logo is made from a generic Shutterstock logo³³ called '*retro illustration of barber man*', which is used all over the world as the logo of the 'authentic barbershop'. This globalized logo is deglobalized. Barber A ('s graphic designer) changed the background and added the name of the barbershop. The barber was also given a pair of hipster-glasses. The adding of the hipster glasses is telling in the context of the hipsterification of Ghent. The shop can be read as orienting to two centres of indexicality: on the one hand global barber culture, and on the other hand 'hipster' culture. In this sense, the barbershops becomes an ecumenical place (Blommaert, 2013): it proves to be an important infrastructure for hipsters, but also for hip hoppers, black customers and Moroccan and Turkish hip youngsters. Inside the shop, we see the barber wearing a barber's apron, classic old-skool barber stools, coffee beans and hip stylizing products. The barbershop presents itself as not only about haircuts and beard trims, but also as the provider of hipness and thus as a cool place. More even, as 'an authentic barbershop'.

³³ <https://www.shutterstock.com/image-vector/retro-illustration-barber-man-248507959>

The front of Coupe/Coupe is clearly different from the front of Barber A or Kapsalon Gökhan. While Gökhan has restyled the interior of his place and added the hipster-logo on the front, the name has not changed: it is still 'men's hairdresser', not a barber. Also the architecture itself – the white plastic windows – and the different colours of the billboard can be read as indexes of vernacular globalization. Barber A is more consistently constructed as a barber and all the references are in place. The look and the feel of his place is in tune with a 'hipster', 'authentic' image, but the use of the generic Shutterstock picture as logo underlines a 'non-real'-discourse, a generic use of the barber semiotics and emblems. Coupe/Coupe is different in many ways. First thing that is noticeable is the front of the shop. Compared to the other shops we see that Coupe/Coupe uses 'high quality' materials. The windows are slick and made of aluminium, the front is nicely painted in white and uses greyish nature stone. The gold Coupe/Coupe logo is nicely designed and produced. The shop does not use the classic 'barber' emblems, but it does present itself as a 'barber lounge'.

The name of the shop and its self-categorization as barber lounge ties into one coherent concept. Coupe/Coupe is best read as 'French', where coupe refers to (1) a glass or a *coupe* of Champaign and (2) a haircut or *coupe*. That is exactly, what they offer: a lounge where you can drink a *coupe* of expensive Veuve Clicquot Champaign (and not cava) and get a professional barber's *coupe*. If you look into the shop, you'll see a huge one meter 'coupe' for Armand De Brignac Champaign, a vintage moustache shaped billboard with lights and typical barbershop emblems like the 'Jack Daniel's water spray, a barber knife, products and a fancy 'Coupe/Coupe' voucher in black with gold lettering, gold barber's knife, scissors and a *coupe* for Champaign. On the back, also in Gold lettering, one can read this 'VIP Exclusive' and the disclaimer that this voucher is only for '*our exclusive VIP customers*'.

The mobilization of French (in combination with the English of 'Barber lounge'), the use of gold, the connection with Champaign and the absence of classic barber emblems and the high-quality materials used, show us how this place creates distinction. This is not your average barber, this shop clearly wants to put itself in the market as 'high class', part of the top and catering for the more affluent part of society. This also becomes clear in the interior of this place, which is white with gold accents. In the front of the shop, you find the lounge with design chairs and tables. In the back, you find three more chic than authentic barber stools in a glass room. In the walls and the ceiling, we can detect led strips. And on the black and gold bar we find Champaign (of course) and Cuban cigars.

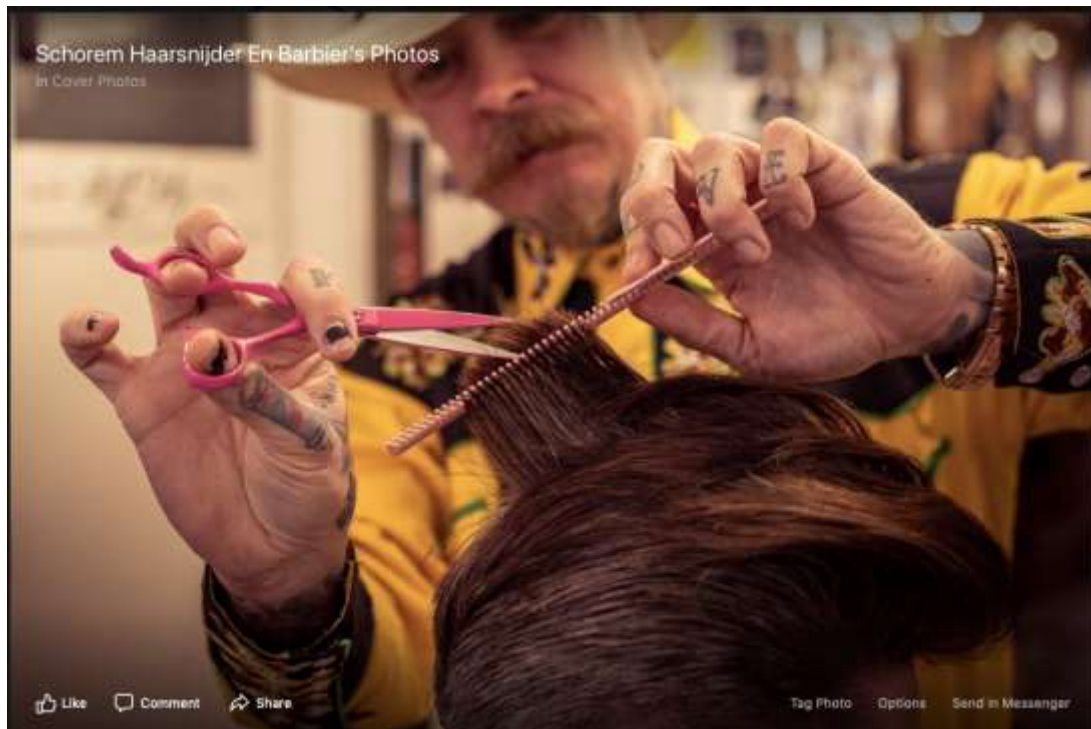


IMAGE 36: FACEBOOK BANNER SCHOREM

Coupe/Coupe is not targeting the alternative or indie hipster. If we for instance compare the semiotics of Schorem – maybe the most known barber in the Low Lands – we see a very different style in the shop and the barbers. Schorem presents itself as ‘a traditional’ barber on their Instagram and positions itself as follows on their website³⁴: “*We don’t care about fashion or trends. We love the rock ‘n’ roll subcultures and that’s why we are so much into the Poms and Quiffs. Barbering should always be about style and perfecting haircuts that have proven themselves over time.*” The interior of the shop has a vintage feel (wood, pastel colours and chrome tools). The barbers of Schorem are heavily tattooed and tend to wear white coats or edgy over the op clothing. Schorem is world top, people come from different countries to get their haircut by Schorem. On Instagram, Schorem has 360k followers. But Schorem is clearly set up as edgy and cool, more rock ‘n roll and catering for the avant-garde hipsters.

Coupe/Coupe orients to different niches than Schorem. Even though they clearly position themselves as ‘barbers’, they do not claim nor even pretend to be ‘traditional barbers’. The barber’s pole is not used, nor is there vintage furniture. Coupe/Coupe is ‘its own story’. This distinction with Schorem, the other barbershops in Ghent and the neighbourhood becomes even more evident, when we move online. In the offline landscape, Coupe/Coupe does not show links to their online presence, but as all neo-barbers, the shop has a Facebook and an Instagram page. Even more, on its Instagram page it has over 3000 followers which is – compared to other barbers in Ghent of Belgium, a very high number. Just like all neo-barbers,

³⁴ <https://schorembarbier.nl/>

Coupe/Coupe uses Instagram to show pictures and videos of finished cuts and trims. It is online, that it becomes clear that Coupe/Coupe's 'high luxury' identity discourse is backed up by the fact that one of its barbers made it in the finale of the International barber's competition. It also becomes clear that famous football stars like Noah Fadiga from Club Brugge and Mons Arno from Sporting Lokeren and many players from AA Gent to get a cut at Coupe/Coupe. We also see several pics of very expensive luxurious cars: Mercedes G-Jeep tuned by Brabus, Ferrari's, Lamborghini's, and Bentley's SUV.

Coupe/Coupe has a master narrative and this narrative is layered and polycentric. It refers to globalized barber's culture, but also to (super) car culture, Turkish high society culture and Football culture. What used to be a local 'Turkish' hairdresser is now top on a Belgian scale and this upscaling came with changes in the stylization of the interior and exterior and the online presence of this barber. Coupe/Coupe is an assemblage of different norm orienting to different orders of indexicality. The result is an idiosyncratic and ecumenical infrastructure integrated in and working for different cultural niches. What used to be a 'hairdresser' is now restyled into an infrastructure of the good life where graphic design, interior and social media discourse construct a coherent hip and cool place.

HIPSTERIFICATION, MARKETING AND THE CONSUMER CITIZEN

"The symbolic economy recycles real estate as it does designer clothes. Visual display matters in American and European cities today, because the identities of places are established by sites of delectation" (Zukin, 1995: 9). Hip cities need hip infrastructures. Being just a shop, a restaurant or a hairdresser is not enough anymore. Each place needs to have a solid communication plan stressing its uniqueness and hipness. This consistency in graphic design and discourse is not coincidental. Identity communication is in a lot of cases professional marketing communication reshaping the linguistic landscape and as such contributing to the 'symbolic economy of the city' that helps to construct Ghent as a hip city.

Marketing is taking over public space. The hip Bar Belien's communication plan is thought out by Trigrorous, a graphic design bureau³⁵. Gust is set up by a former communication professional. Clouds in my coffee is part of a larger creative business with in house communication, management, new media and graphic design skills. Alice, the hip grocery shop Moor & Moor and the magazine of the city of Ghent are all styled by DIFT – *'a creative branding and experience agency creating brands, companies and projects.'*³⁶ The net-result of this professionalization of the communication of all these infrastructures is paradoxically uniformity

³⁵ <http://www.tigrorous.be/portfolio-item/bar-belien/>

³⁶ <http://dift.be/about>

in the linguistic landscape. Not only discursive uniformity, or a uniformity in the use of vintage design and now the use of gold in your interior, but also a graphical uniformity.

This attention to detail in design and communication is essential to semiotic and discursive restyling of 'old' petite bourgeoisie forms of self-employment (Scott, 2017: 68). It is the stylization in combination with the identity discourse that elevates those places from a traditional tearoom in the case of Gust to an authentic 'infrastructure of the good live'. These new infrastructures are not just shops, restaurants or bars; they select and curate stuff. They provide you with an unforgettable experience. They let you share in their passion and love for their craft, their product. You buy a Barthesian myth (Barthes, 1957). You do not just buy a second-hand sweater at Marmod's, you buy an especially selected recycled sweater. You do not just have a drink in cocktail bar Jigger's, you have paid 25 euros for a 'connoisseurs' cocktail. The drink comes with an identity: you do not only have the money to pay for such a drink, you also understand why this is worth 25 euro: because it is superb! It is authentic, locally made and perfect.

Hipster-infrastructure not only sell goods, they provide identity emblems. It is at this point that we see the influence of 'the Culture Club'-model. All these little 'authentic' places communicate professionally and they all communicate 'authenticity', 'truthfulness', 'craftsmanship' and originality'. Claiming authenticity and individuality has become the norm. 'The hipster' – as we have established – claims to be authentic, original, creative, new, inspiring, special and above they all are truly who they are. This identity discourse is reflected in the infrastructures of this micro-population: all infrastructures positioned themselves discursively in a very small niche: recycled clothing, local art and fair drinks in the case of Marmod.

The hipster-discourse including the claim of authenticity and its semiotic material is of course branding. The hipster-infrastructure has to be 'special' in some sense. As a result of these conceptualized identity infrastructures we see a spectacular rise of new stuff, new combinations, new niches trying to answer or create new needs. One shouldn't be surprised to find a bar like Mòris which serves gins, whiskeys, beers, barista coffee, appetizers of a starred chef and hosts a petanque tournament in summer. In WasBar you can do your laundry in a washing machine with grandma names while having a drink in fifties seats. In the Counselling place, you can buy some records and have a coffee, while in *Le petit cirque* you can have a coffee in a homely interior, buy vintage furniture and fresh flowers. The hipster, in spite of all the identity discourse on progressiveness, openness, anti-consumer-culture, is no threat to neoliberal society, but is a symptom of it. The hipster aligns itself perfectly with the neoliberal ideology: we are all entrepreneurs. The hipster-brand serves another niche and with the rise of the hipster, we see that marketing enters the public domain in full. Public spaces are more and

more designed by communication and other creative bureaus. The enormity of the hype also means that the whole city is being redesigned in that 'hipster'-spirit.

That redesigning of the city and its infrastructures has consequences that are very hard to match with the identity discourse as such. One quality of the Ghentian hipster infrastructures is that they all share a certain 'chic-ness'. The hipster is a consumer of high-end stuff; but the best burger, coffee or tea in town comes with a price. That is the price of quality, but also of sustainability and the professionally constructed authenticity discourse. Authenticity and sustainability traditionally speaking come with the connotation of 'stuff for life'. We imagine them to be the opposite of the consumption society. The hipster is understood in that context, as a longing to go back to 'the good old days' where a bread was a bread out of a wood-oven, not an industrially produced fluffy thing baked in an electrical mass oven. Shoes were for life and were mended when broken and not thrown away. Interesting though. In our neoliberal times this nostalgic hipster authenticity is mobilized to let these 'anti-consumer' population buy stuff. Authenticity has now become commodified, it is a marketing story a sales pitch. Authenticity is an identity emblem that comes with the product. Any observer will notice though that the hipster – and his longing for new experiences, good food and drinks, vintage design and fashion – can hardly be defined as anti-capitalist. Let alone that one can see him as a threat to capitalism. On the contrary, the hipster is an easy target. A branding opportunity to reach that group of people that opposes consumption and lure them into consumption by mobilizing their values and identity. In the end, the urban micro-entrepreneurs catering for the hipster, by providing them goods and identity emblems, are part of 'the economy'.

Scott coined this 'hipster capitalism'. Hipster capitalism, he argued compellingly, is *"not just selling style through exchange and markets; small-scale cultural production functions within a variegated economy. Actors creating cultural goods and services are called upon to combine and stabilise these modes of integration while conducting the visible cultural and symbolic mediation to induce exchange"* (Scott, 2017: 71). Hipster Capitalism is deeply interwoven with capitalism in general. From technology and the markets to the law and regulation to industry and organisation structure, we cannot study this 'new economy' in a vacuum. But there is more. This conceptualization of hipster capitalism misses how not only micro-enterprises but also multinationals, hedge funds and real-estate companies capitalize on the hipster aesthetics and how this uptake by larger corporations (in collaboration with cities) changes the urban environment. In the next chapters, we will delve into this.

CHAPTER 6: RABOT AND RESTAURANT M

November 2012. The Rabot neighbourhood in the 19th century belt around Ghent gets a new restaurant. -M- with a View is the first pop-up restaurant that opens its doors in this poor and superdiverse neighbourhood. The change is hardly noticeable. In the Wondelgemstraat, the main shopping street of the neighbourhood, you would not encounter any advertisements for the new restaurant. Only at the entrance, on the Nieuwe Vaart, you would see a black sign with ‘-M- with a View’ written on it in grey letters with the P- parking logo below. This subtle sign indexes future changes in this old neighbourhood.

INTRODUCING THE RABOT NEIGHBOURHOOD

Rabot is a 19th century workmen’s neighbourhood located along a canal and equipped at the time with a railway station. That railway station is demolished and the new courthouse has been built on that location. The main street, the Wondelgemstraat and the neighbourhood were methodically laid out in the second half of the 19th century in the context of the industrial revolution, revolving around the textile industry in Ghent. Several major industrial plants were built, and the neighbourhood rapidly developed into a densely populated and predominantly working-class neighbourhood with some presence of company executives and a flourishing commerce in Wondelgemstraat.

Until well into the 20th century, Rabot stayed mainly a (‘native’ Flemish) working-class neighbourhood. After the Second World the textile industry experienced its last major, but short, revival. Most of the textile factories of the Rabot neighbourhood survived the war without much war damage and could restart production soon after the war. From the 1950s, its technological edge started to dwindle and the industry found itself in heavy weather. The companies had to increasingly compete on a global scale and the technological progress of the other countries required a further 'rationalization' of production: the raise of productivity and lowering of wages. From the 1960s, the textile industry tried to recruit immigrant workers from countries with which Belgium had bilateral agreements. As a result, 196 immigrant workers were employed in 1962 in the local textile industry (De Wilde, 2007). In the early stages, these workers migrated from Italy and Spain, later from Algeria and Tunisia. From 1963, also Turkish guest-workers arrived (Verhaeghe et al., 2012). Within the next decennia, this latest group became the dominant immigrant community in the neighbourhood. Their migration was a consequence of the industrialization of agriculture in Turkey as part of the Marshall Plan, which rendered many young Turks unemployed (De Wilde, 2007 provides a detailed discussion).

The vast majority of these first Turkish migrants in Ghent were men between 25 and 40 years old, coming from previously rural areas like Emirdag, Piribeyli and Posof. They spoke Turkish, were often poorly educated and mostly professed a non-orthodox Islam. These labour migrants initially intended to return to their countries of birth after a few years. The de-industrialization of the neighbourhood, however, ensured that the majority stayed and started families there. The presence of these workers ended up in chain migration of family and friends of these pioneers.

This migration profoundly changed Rabot. In 1973, 843 foreign nationals lived in Rabot, which represented 6.67% of the total number of migrants in Ghent at that time. Native Belgian workers, often retired, started leaving the neighbourhood and immigrants became house owners. As a result, of this changing demography and the decline of the textile industry, the flourishing (largely 'native' Flemish) commercial middle class gradually disappeared from the Wondelgemstraat, to be replaced by 'ethnic' (largely Turkish) commerce. Today, nearly 50% of the population in the neighbourhood has foreign roots, which is the highest percentage in Ghent.

In the perception of many citizens of Ghent, the Wondelgemstraat, is a 'Turkish' street on the one hand, and a decaying neighbourhood on the other hand. Crime, dirty streets, dense traffic and young male migrants 'hanging around' are the emblematic features of this image, which is shared by politicians, intellectuals, citizens of Ghent and of the suburbs beyond the neighbourhood. Even Turkish residents of neighbouring cities see the Wondelgemstraat as 'marginal', often pointing to the rural and 'backward' roots of its Turkish inhabitants (Emirdag) as an explanation. Today, Rabot is the most densely populated district in Ghent with 9,402 people per square kilometre (Ghent, 2019) and the Wondelgemstraat with 14,761 people per square kilometre (2007 figures, Sumresearch, 2008). Rabot also has the highest unemployment rate of the city and the lowest average income (Stad Gent, 2012). Rabot is superdiverse, densely populated and poor.

The street and its neighbourhood, however, are no longer just 'Turkish'. If we look at the origins of the (officially registered) people, we see that the district has 22.4% residents with Turkish roots, and this percentage is declining. From 2007, the year of Bulgaria's membership of the European Union, the number of Bulgarian migrants steeply rose from 112 in 2006 to 285 in 2007. In 2012, more than 800 people or 10.4% of the residents of Rabot were Bulgarian migrants. Turks and Bulgarians together with the native Belgians form the three dominant 'ethnic' groups in the district.

The different populations do not just live together; the neighbourhood is stratified. On the basis of the frequency and specific forms of emplacement of signs in the area, we see the following 'layers' in Wondelgemstraat:

- (1) The basis of the neighbourhood is made up of the homeowners and shopkeepers largely consisting of native Belgians and immigrants with Turkish roots. The natives are a diverse group made out of old working-class people and middle-class shopkeepers, and a more recently arrived community of younger people, notably students and recent graduates. The people with Turkish roots purchased their houses and shops in the 1980s and 1990s – when the autochthone middle class fled the city and the 19th century belt – some of these older migrants have left Rabot to resettle in the 20th century suburban districts beyond Rabot. Their homes were changed into rental accommodation for new migrants, often of dubious quality but generating substantial cash incomes. The influx of new superdiverse migrants results in new forms of exploitation and in the rise of a Turkish middle (and suburban) class.

- (2) Since the early years of 21st century, new immigrants arrived in the neighbourhood as a result of the further unification process of Europe. In an early stage, Albanian people arrived together with substantial numbers of Roma. The influx of large numbers of Bulgarian immigrants since 2007 has been noted above, and while most 21st century migrants use the neighbourhood as a temporary station in complex migration trajectories, the Bulgarian immigrants are resident in the neighbourhood. Some of these Bulgarian migrants speak at least some Turkish. That does not entail that the relationship between Turkish people and the people with Bulgarian roots is optimal and friendly; it merely means that there is a medium of communication between Bulgarian migrants, Turkish shopkeepers and Turkish employers. And here again we see that the different layers are characterized by inequality: they are stratified. Bulgarians, especially those whose legal status is obscure, get exploited as high-yield tenants and as cheap labour force.

- (3) Besides these three dominant groups, we find recent (often temporary) migrants from various parts of Europe together with migrants from Africa, Asia and the Middle East: French, Moroccans, Nigerians, Pakistanis, Ghanaians, Slovaks, Poles, Spaniards and Russians all live together in this small neighbourhood. Many of these migrant groups are either statistically insignificant or invisible (if they are clandestine immigrants), yet they colour the district and have started to define its linguistic landscape. Apart from their native languages, which have started to appear in the neighbourhood, this superdiverse and highly volatile layer of the population is also responsible for the rise of English in Rabot. Migrants from Ghana, Togo, Nigeria and Pakistan, for example, are potential new tenants and customers and they are addressed in English.

It is in this third layer that we find fast changes, notably with respect to the presence of Latin American migrants (see below), Polish and Slovakian people. We have seen that the Polish labour migrants stay for some weeks or months in the neighbourhood. Their presence does not translate in an enduring infrastructure of shops or bars, but we see their vans in the street and we also observe that night shops adjust their supplies to include Polish beer and phone cards offering cheap rates for calls to Poland. Also, new supermarkets focus on their presence.

- (4) A fourth layer consists of the users of the district often coming from the outskirts of the city. In this layer, we can distinguish two major categories. One group exists out of effective users of the neighbourhood, such as customers of the many 'ethnic' restaurants and snack bars and the (cheap) groceries there; visitors of one of the many places of worship or students of the local schools. The other group of uses Wondelgemstraat merely as a transit street to and from work in central Ghent.

A NEIGHBOURHOOD IN DECLINE?

We now know who populates the area; so let us turn to our next analytical target. We can use ELLA to get an accurate picture of the dynamics and the complexity that characterizes superdiverse environments. The clue we shall use for this is the infrastructure of the neighbourhood: the enormous range of inscribed and semiotized material facilities in the area. We shall see how the dynamic and stratified demographic composition of the neighbourhood is reflected in its infrastructure: new population configurations in the neighbourhood generate new infrastructural demands, and the outcome is a complex array of different but connected facilities.

Wondelgemstraat was historically a flourishing shopping street, catering for the traditional working-class and bourgeois textile workers in the area. The decline of the textile industry, together with the immigration of sizeable numbers of Turkish migrants, caused a shift in the shopping infrastructure: discontinued 'native' businesses were (cheaply) purchased and replaced by new shops and bars owned by Turkish migrants and their descendants. This evolution caused a shift in the semiotic landscape, with the emergent visibility of the Turkish language and Turkish symbols (like the Turkish flag and the evil eye) in the streets. It also caused a shift in the public (i.e. 'native') perception of the street and its infrastructure: the new shops are 'cheap', and this change is perceived as a decline in status. A classic image of the decline, from a native middle-class perspective, is this vegetable shop 't Fruithoekje, where an older Dutch sign is still visible behind the overlay of Turkish signs.



IMAGE 37: FIGURE 2: AN IMAGE OF "DECLINE". © ICO MALY 2013

The image of decline, however, fails to capture the intense dynamic and layering that goes on in the local infrastructure. There are clear signs of 'upgrading' of more traditional small-scale Turkish businesses, reflecting greater affluence in the community and a rising demand for more diversified commodities in the neighbourhood: a full-blown Turkish-owned supermarket opened its doors, together with Turkish lawyers, financial advisors and beauty salons. Even the vegetable store upgraded the signs of his shop recently.



IMAGE 38: ERGUN'S MARKET – © ICO MALY 2016

The transformation of 't Fruithoekje into Ergun's market is one index of the social changes in the neighbourhood. It is in line with the visual reconfiguration in the neighbourhood where infrastructures are now more and more catering for a new (Turkish) middle class. The billboard with the name 'Ergun's Market' is professionally made. It doesn't exist out of cheap laminated sticker letters that are common in the neighbourhood. This sign is not a case of handicraft, but is professionally made with a stable orthography (compare for example with Gambian billboards in Juffermans, 2008). The name 'Ergun's Market' is very meaningful. 'Market' is used in English and Turkish and understandable in Dutch. The owner of the place, Ergun, clearly doesn't choose for the Dutch word 'markt', interestingly though, he also doesn't use the Turkish genitive: Ergün'ün Marekti or Ergünün Marekti. And he also doesn't opt for Ergün Market which would be correct in English and Turkish.

This choice for English is not an isolated case. Whereas in 2013 Dutch was the lingua franca in the neighbourhood (Blommaert and Maly, 2016), since 2016 we see the emergence of English as a new lingua franca in the neighbourhood (Maly, 2017). English is here an index of the second layer making up the neighbourhood: a strong volatile and instable superdiverse layer consisting out of migrants arriving in the city in the nineties and the first decades of the 21st century from Eastern-Europa, Russia, and more and more people from Africa and The Middle East (see Maly, Blommaert and Ben Yakoub, 2014 for a more detailed description). The presence of English in the neighbourhood should now be looked at more closely. The English Ergün mobilizes is, as we already stressed, professionally stylized. It was produced by a local company in the same street that specializes in the production of these type of plexi billboards. This stylization contrasts with the use of English on the new African-Asian shops in the street.



IMAGE 39: D&D FOODS - NEW ASIAN AFRICA SHOP - © ICO MALY 2015

The semiotic material that is visible on the façade of 'D&D Foods' a relatively new Asian & African shop catering for a new influx of migrants from the Middle East, Africa and Latin-America, is clearly differently produced and stylized. Several things are important. The first thing that strikes the eye is the abundance of pictures on the windows of D&D foods, bleaching products and advertisements for Ria money transfers. The money transfer posters show us which audiences the owners of the shop try to address. Next to English and Dutch, we see the use of Portuguese (to address Brazilians), Spanish (Dominican Republic), Bengali (Bangladesh), and Filipino (Philippines). This gives the shop the image of a classic infrastructure of superdiversity: the money transfer places (see Maly, 2014, 2016 for a more detailed analysis of the front of money transfer services). More important, in this analysis is that English is used in a multilingual regime. The fact that English is used in the name of the shop, and the emplacement of 'Asian & African food' above the Dutch lettering 'verse groenten' (fresh vegetables) are both indexes of the dominance of English as main language in this shop (see Scollon and Scollon, 2003 for a theoretical approach to the emplacement of signs).

The main difference in the mobilization of English by this shop, compared to the English used by Ergün is found in the production of the sign: ready-made stickers versus a more expensive billboard. Both use 'good' English, but stylization points to different layers. Ergün is by now an established shop, and its owners are themselves part of the neighbourhoods' middle class. The shop's design is very similar to other Turkish Markets in the street, with Rabot Market being the most established one. D&D Foods represents a relatively new shop, catering for new groups and targeting those groups one for one. The stylization, compared to Ergün's Market is cheaper and messier. So even though, the English mobilized by both shops is of good quality, the semiotics and emplacement index difference. But both mobilizations of English differ from the

English that the new pop-up restaurant in the neighbourhood uses. This use of English in the neighbourhood indexes another, new population arriving in the neighbourhood: the hip and young creative middle class.



IMAGE 40: OLD BUS STOP WITH 'M WITH A VIEW' SIGN – © ICO MALY - 2016

Between 2012 and 2014, on the 'Nieuwe Vaart', a road next to the canal on the border of the neighbourhood, one could see a sign '-M- with a View'. A small and subtle, but well-designed banner was mounted on the wall of the old industrial mill 'Nieuwe Molens'. The restaurant has its own private parking and this parking space is 'highlighted' in the banner on the building using the more or less universal parking sign format: a P on a blue background. The parking space sign is a first index that the audience the new restaurant targets is not living in the neighbourhood. If one looked into the big entrance of the former industrial complex, one could see an old bus stop (see Image 40), with the same sign. Next to that sign, visitors would see advertisements for Tondelier, the new neighbourhood that is being developed on that site.

That emplacement is not a coincidence, pop-up restaurant -M- is explicitly set up as an appetizer for the Tondelier project. All the communication of Tondelier and restaurant -M- was not only professionally produced, it was also designed by communication professionals. The Tondelier brand for instance, was constructed by 'Claerhout Communicatiehuis'. The English used on these sign not only indexes a different type of producers, it also indexes a different type of addressees. Or in other, more plain words: it is very expensive communication targeting a whole new audience not yet living in the neighbourhood. An audience that is not yet visible in the infrastructures of the neighbourhood. -M- is one index of a neighbourhood that is

changing. Part of this change is the result of bottom up change ('t Fruithoekje transforming in Ergün's Market or D&D Foods), part of that change is the result of top down changes (-M- with a View).

LURING IN THE HIP MIDDLE CLASS

Next to the '-M- with a View' – bus stop, one can see the red doors of an elevator that brought guests to the new pop up restaurant in a hyper-modern construction that was placed on top of the former mill factory 'De Nieuwe Molens'. -M- with a View was visually an 'extra, new layer' in the neighbourhood. Its semiotics were a clear break with all the other signs and infrastructures. The Rabot neighbourhood is mainly characterized by the old workmen and patrician houses from the 19th century. The slick modernistic design of Restaurant -M- introduces profound changes. The upgrading of 't Fruithoekje and D&D Foods can best be described by using Appadurai's 'vernacular globalisation'. The English is of excellent quality, but it is also very local and niched. Ergün's billboard for instance is produced by Reksan, a local producer of billboards supplying to at least 10 different businesses in the street who all have very similar billboards. It indexes professionalism at a local scale, but would not be recognized globally as top-notch design. Not a chance that these signs would end up with design awards.

The linguistic and semiotic material of -M- with a View indexes a different type of globalisation, operating on an elite scale of globalization. The restaurant is set up as an appetizer for the Tondelier real estate project by the Ghentian horeca-entrepreneur who also owns Alice and Coeur d' Artichaut, two hip restaurants in the city centre. The interior, and the atmosphere of -M- with a View was realised by designer Kurt Herygers from 'Not before ten', one of the most renowned interior design offices in Antwerp working in Belgium, Germany and Austria. The name of this pop-up restaurant refers to the fictional chief of the Secret Intelligence Service in the James Bond movies (Be Gusto, 2012) and the design language of Restaurant -M- refers to the James Bond movies of the seventies and eighties and has a chic feeling, with the use of black marble in the bar, full wooden floors and well-dressed tables with cotton napkins. The kitchen is French and *'of course, the champagne is Bollinger and the phone number ends with 007'* (Be Gusto, 2012). Be-Gusto.be, a culinary blog with an integrated reservation app and many reviews of hip restaurants and bars mostly in Belgium, frames -M- as a:

mini-penthouse (...) on top of the stately factory building from De Nieuwe Molens. Here, you get an appetizer of the Tondelier neighbourhood that is being developed here with attention for future-oriented and durable living. In -M- you will undoubtedly enjoy the most exclusive south oriented terrace of Ghent with an impressive view on the skyline of the Artevelde city. (Be Gusto, 2012)

The identity communication around -M- is reproduced by an important culinary blog as hip, chic, exclusive and as a culinary adventure. -M- is, like all the contemporary hip places, selling an experience. A menu without drinks is 59 euro per person, one with drinks included is 70 euro. The public signs, the design, the communication as well as the prices show that this restaurant is not set up to cater the people living in the neighbourhood. The Facebook page, the website of the place and the Instagram posts of the owners all help to lure a new audience into the neighbourhood: the young, hip foodies who want to pay for an experience, to enjoy excellent food in a special place. The restaurant also has a close cooperation with Alpro, a quality brand for soy-based products (soy yoghurt and cream). #alpronista is regularly used in social media posts about -M-. -M- is everything the Rabot neighbourhood is not.



IMAGE 41: POP UP RESTAURANT M WITH A VIEW ON TOP OF DE NIEUWE MOLENS – © ICO MALY - 2016

On arrival, costumers had to ring a bell before they were picked up with the elevator you see on the outside of the building. While waiting on the elevator, the hip people could take in the large banners promoting the Tondelier project as a new sustainable, low traffic neighbourhood nearby the city-centre. Once on top, you entered a fancy restaurant that literally looked down on the Rabot neighbourhood. Maybe more importantly, it gave you a stunning view on the historic city of Ghent. This view was constantly highlighted in social media posts of the owners and the visitors. And that view was also, and not coincidental, a crucial ingredient of the

advertisement discourse of Tondelier whose communication managers were constantly stressing how nearby the city is to the Tondelier site.

The website of the restaurant was explicit about its function as an appetizer for the Tondelier project (Be Gusto, 2012). -M- was styled to attract hip middle-class youngsters to a neighbourhood they probably would never have visited without this new hub of coolness. -M- helped those hip youngsters to see past the image of decline that has come to be associated with Rabot and the visitors imagine what a cool place this is.

SOCIAL MIX AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF AUTHENTICITY

Since the eighties, the city of Ghent has set up several public-private investment programs to improve the 'bad neighbourhood'. One of the most important project was the construction of the already mentioned new regional Court of Law in the neighbourhood and the presence of a University Professional College. Both infrastructures attract new users to the neighbourhood. Every day 2000 students arrive in the Rabot, while the new courthouse attracts around 1700 people on a daily basis. The presence of these new users of the neighbourhood is promptly reflected in infrastructural changes. Several new lunch restaurants target the (largely middle-class) students, visitors of the courthouse, and new middle-class residents.

The Tondelier project is part of this urban renewal plan. The site of the former Alcatell factory, the industrial mill De Nieuwe Molens and the British Gas company are given a new destination. The polluted grounds get sanitized and a new eco-town is being build. The Tondelier project is a partnership between the city of Ghent and the Tondelier Development Company. The project is set up as a *'a modern neighbourhood, with plenty of space, light and green. An innovative project with a variety of living arrangements for young and old, to suit different budgets.'*³⁷ The project will be ecological, sustainable and traffic low. 530 living units are being build, of which 106 will be so called *'budget-houses and apartments'*. This last category are living units that are sold at the 20% less than their market value. A one-bedroom apartment then costs around 130,000 euros. For much of the poor families in the neighbourhood, this will not be an option. The new neighbourhood is designed to attract a new population, and thus to create a social mix.

The aim of the project developers is to convince a more affluent middle-class public (Van Bouchaute, 2013: 71) to come and live in the neighbourhood. The problem, according to Bruno Terryn of Aclagro – one of the developers of Tondelier – is that *'the ordinary 19th century belt is very negatively perceived. In Tondelier, we will have to fight to get the project sold'* (Terryn, quoted in Van Bouchaute, 2013: 71). -M- can in this sense be understood as part of a larger process focusing on bringing in the creative class and change the 'aura' of the neighbourhood

³⁷ <http://tondelier.be/het-project>

to realize the hipsterification of the neighbourhood. Already in the nineties, the hip vibes of night life proved to be able to create fertile ground for gentrification in a “*neighbourhood that had not yet attracted the attentions of real estate developers*” (Hae, 2011: 3449). Hip nightlife not only created a buzz, but gave neighbourhoods a new meaning, even long after that nightlife disappeared. Tondelier clearly invests in creating that buzz around this ‘new part’ of the city.

Tondelier of course doesn’t just rely on -M- to hip its project, it also uses social media (their Facebook account has 2703 likes and their Instagram account has 488 followers on 29 April 2019). The real estate company uses these media platforms to post links to their website, produce content on events on the site and news about the site and happenings in the city of Ghent. In other words, the website and their social media are used to construct that hip image of the neighbourhood as part of Ghent. Tondelier is put in the market as enabling ‘*the good life*’. Buying a place on that site, according to a Tondelier Instagram post (see Image 42) equals ‘*40 minutes every day of extra enjoying*’ compared to people living in the 20th century belt because the site is located ‘near the heart of Ghent’. And interesting, that good life is presented as drinking an espresso and a glass of water on wooden plate while reading the paper.

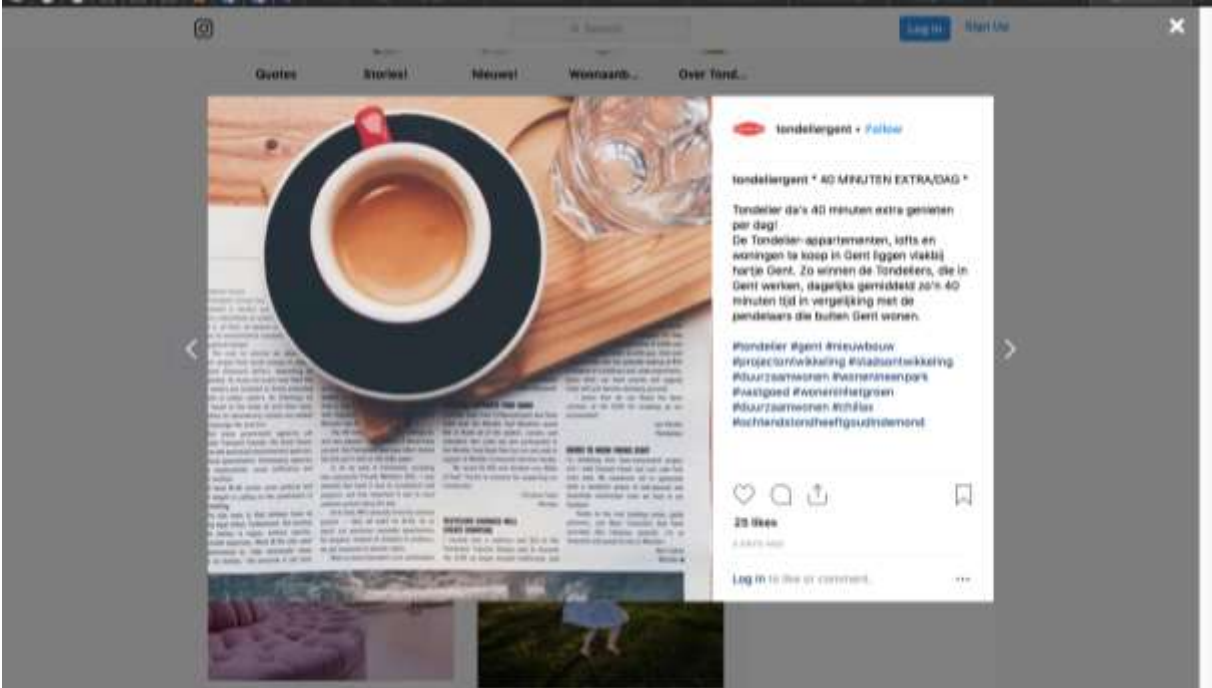


IMAGE 42: TONDELIER INSTAGRAM POST - 40 MINUTES EXTRA

On their website, Tondelier sells its project, the apartments and the lofts as ‘*located in the heart of Ghent*’ and as ‘*durable and green living*’ reinvented’ (Tondelier, 2019a). The historic neighbourhood – the sales pitch stresses – is a ten-minute walk away. The canal and the

industrial heritage are then used to stress the authenticity of the neighbourhood. The 'old' Gas infrastructures, that provided the city lights with gas in the 19th century are then integrated in the new park on the Tondelier project. These landmarks are put central in the sales pitch to construct the project's authenticity. Not a surprise then that the first apartments and exclusive lofts are sold as *'authentic'*, with an own identity, but also as part of *'a new part of the city nearby the Rabot-Neighbourhood'*³⁸. The Tondelier quartier is discursively pulled out the Rabot neighbourhood and integrated in the city centre.

The website is not only used to show the Tondelier site and the different apartments and lofts for sale, it also adopts the known social media format of 'stories'. Those stories highlight different places in the (wide) neighbourhood and are used to present the Tondelier site as a part of a vibrant and hip environment. The stories on arts-project Diffusion capturing *'the essence of Rabot'* (Tondelier, 2019c), interviews with famous (future residents) of the site (Tondelier, 2019e) and articles on hip places Be-Angeled and Sculpt & Victory (Tondelier, 2019d), social-restaurant 'Het Toreke' and Bar Oswald (Tondelier, 2019c) are highlighted on the site to help construct an image of a vibrant, hip, green, durable and sustainable neighbourhood that enables 'the good life'.

CIVIL SOCIETY, SOCIAL COHESION, BUZZ AND THE ABSENCE OF RESISTANCE

Tondelier's framing also capitalizes on the investments of civil society, the city and the Flemish governments in the neighbourhood. In anticipation of the construction works, civil society was given the empty space to set up participatory projects. On The Site³⁹ allotments were created for the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, a skate park was installed, a BMX parkour was set up, youngsters could play football or rehearse with a band. Especially the gardening project proved to be a very successful participatory project. First, second and third generation migrants were deeply committed in the project. They not only gardened there, they also participated in thinking about the future neighbourhood. As a consequence of their participation for example the number of future houses dropped and open green space rose (Maly, Blommaert and Ben Yakoub, 2014). These projects were set up from a perspective of 'social cohesion' in the neighbourhood.

These civil society projects had a profound effect on the neighbourhood. It gave a lot of people – most of the poor and living in a densely populated neighbourhood – a place to go, to meet people and to grow their own vegetables and even earn 'money'. The neighbourhood has its own monetary unit: De Torekes (The Towers). The name of the money refers to the Rabot towers that give the neighbourhood its name.⁴⁰ One can earn these Torekes by working on The

³⁸ <http://www.urbis.be/nl/pand/1026335#horizontalTab3>

³⁹ www.derabotsite.be

⁴⁰ <http://www.torekes.be/>

Site and use them to buy stuff in local shops or eat in the social restaurant Het Toreke. The Site became a central instrument in the neighbourhood, raised participation and wellbeing. The linguistic landscape on The Site reflects this embeddedness in the neighbourhood. On the fence round the geoses, chickens and ducks on The Site, we can see the note 'don't feed the animals' in Dutch, Turkish, Chinese and English (and one funny adaption which mentions to not feed the dinosaurs). Not only the multilinguality but also the semiotics of the notes: printed-paper in a plastic wrap are all indexes of the embeddedness of The Site in the Rabot neighbourhood. This are cheaply made targeting the three layers that make up the old Rabot neighbourhood.



IMAGE 43: COLLAGE OF 4 NOTES - DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS – © ICO MALY - 2016

The contrast with the communication of Tondelier (which is predominantly monolingual Dutch) and highly stylized couldn't be greater. Even though Tondelier uses this social dimension in its marketing, the fact remains that this open and cooperative space will disappear when the 'new ecotown' gets build. The synchronization of The Site and the social dimension with the Tondelier project in the communication is in reality diachronic. The Site is not a structural part of the Tondelier project, it is only used in an instrumental way by the project developers. When one ask what will happen to the people working there, one is not optimistic anymore. 'Capital always wins from the common man' was the answer I got from several respondents. The gardening would in the future be reduced to a bare minimum and the open inclusive character of the site would disappear. One employee of The Site stressed that the usual suspects will be excluded from the new neighbourhood. The Tondelier project is tailored on the needs of the middle class he says.

Here we see the impact of public-private corporation in urban policies. In the end, Tondelier is a development company and profit making is on top of the list. Civil society is given the space to act as long as the building has not started. Their activities are subsidized by the city in order to create social cohesion. The success of the activities created a buzz for the Tondelier project and gave it a 'social and ecological image'. An image that is useful to sell property to new 'progressive middle-class youngsters'. Social cohesion and harmony is created by civil society actors and facilitated on the grounds that Tondelier wants to develop, but only as long as the building process has not yet started. The future of the collective city gardening projects in the neighbourhood is unclear, but Tondelier does promise each new resident of their lofts and apartments a private gardening lot (Tondelier, 2019a). The collective gets privatised.

Another welcome by-product for the developers is that the participation project has led to an absence of critique and resistance to the project. Civil society organisations are engaged as partners in the project; they can use the ground and participated in thinking about the future of the neighbourhood. But the social workers do have frustrations. They understand that their large role within the neighbourhood has a temporary character and that the enormous success of De Site will come to end. The openness and the inclusiveness that targets the old inhabitants of the neighbourhood will be replaced by far more exclusive project of Tondelier.

HIPSTERIFICATION AND THE CREATIVE CLASS

Civil society is not the only actor within the urban renewal project. The city itself and private actors are also deploying activities in the neighbourhood. As we already mentioned, the Rabot neighbourhood was the subject of renewal plans since the end of the 20th century. The changes in the linguistic landscape of Rabot thus reflects decisions and evolutions on larger scales. They reflect hipsterification as a policy. Since the eighties of the 20th century, Rabot was understood as a problem: a dense, poor part of the city. The first research and plans for renewal of Rabot date back to 1998. The dominant idea at the time was the idea of social mix. 19th century neighbourhoods like Rabot and Brugse Poort were seen as 'ghetto's' and the solutions that one imagined were found in the enhancement of social cohesion, urban renewal policies, and the construction of a shared identity in combination with cultural integration. In this logic, hipsterification is not understood as a problem (for instance causing rising prices for the population living there) but as a potential solution.

In order to plan urban renewal, the city of Ghent in collaboration with the Social Impulse Fund of the Flemish government organized different research and design teams. One design team proposed to construct living blocs in the neighbourhood aimed to put into motion a process of gentrification (Borret and Notteboom, 1998: 3; Pletinckx, 2010: 17). When the Flemish government stopped the Social Impulse Funds and created Het Stedenfonds (The Cityfund) it issued subsidies for '*innovative urban renewal projects*'. The big difference between the two

funds was that the first fund focused on attacking poverty, while the second one focused on *'the quality of life in a neighbourhood'* for all the present and future inhabitants. More importantly, the city itself and not the Flemish government got the freedom to plan and subsidize. The private developer Tondelier thus developed the former brownfield of the Gas site and grounds of the Alcatell factory within the framework that the city of Ghent has decided.

Hipsterification is thus clearly not only a bottom up process, but also organized top down in public-private-partnerships. Hipsterification is the result of a complex interplay of *'technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organisation structure, occupational career, and market'* (Scott, 2017: 71) and one should add political ideology and the political economy in general. Hipsterification, from an economic perspective, is best understood as the 'neoliberal urban policy' that since the 1980s became common sense policy throughout the European Union. This type of urban policy *"concluded that redistributing wealth to less advantaged neighbourhoods, cities, and regions was futile, and that resources should instead be channelled to dynamic 'entrepreneurial' growth poles. A spatial version of 'trickle-down' would then, in the proverbial long run (which never comes), take care of all those pesky, regional, spatial, and urban inequalities"* (Harvey, 2013: 28). The ideology of social mix, cultural integration and a shared identity can also not be dissociated from the electoral rise of the extreme-right and their stress on anti-migration rhetoric in Europe and Flanders in particular. It is this rise, that in the last decades causes the city to finance initiatives aimed at social cohesion and social mix (instead of for instance focusing on redistribution of wealth).

One of the social mix initiatives is called 'Creatief Kwartier Rabot' (Creative Quarter Rabot). Creatief Kwartier Rabot is a pilot project aimed at *'stimulating the creative economy in the neighbourhood and the interaction between entrepreneurs, organisations and inhabitants'*.⁴¹ The Rabot is presented as a quartier that *'offers opportunities for entrepreneurs in the creative sector economy'*. Selling points are its *'central location and the industrial heritage combined with modern architecture and the diversity of residents and businesses'*. In order to attract that creative class the city sets up three initiatives: (1) Co-working and food & drink services (2) Renovation funding and (3) Cooperation funding.

In the context of the Creatief Kwartier Rabot funding, one initiative that was funded was the co-working space called LikeBirds.⁴² Likebirds rents working space to a set of creative entrepreneurs. Architects, IT and marketing people all use this infrastructure. The initiative explicitly facilitates co-working and networking and thus does not only rent space. Likebirds is

⁴¹ <https://oog.stad.gent/nl/creatief-kwartier-rabot>

⁴² <http://www.likebirds.be/>

dressed up as a hip place: It is clearly carefully designed and the existing architecture matches the overall vintage feel.



IMAGE 44: HOMEPAGE 'LIKE BIRDS'

The contrast of this infrastructure with classic images of decline in the neighbourhood is great (Blommaert and Maly, 2016). This infrastructure is not placed there because it answers a need of the local population. It works the other way around: the infrastructure, just like restaurant - M- is set up to lure in a whole new group of young professionals in the neighbourhood. Together with the two other initiatives, it's clear that the city wants to realize an influx of the creative class in the neighbourhood, not on a 'work only' or pop-up -basis, but as a structural part of the neighbourhood. Likebirds, and the discourse of the city to praise this new neighbourhood can also be read as an index of the neoliberal economy where 'the good citizen' is the hip entrepreneur, the hip start-up. The city and the subsidies now flow towards hip young potentials and real-estate developers; this is a structural break with the principles of the welfare state.

HIPSTERIFICATION, PROFIT AND SOCIAL MIX

All the activities deployed in the neighbourhood help to recreate the neighbourhood in a hip neighbourhood. These policies and the semiotic translation are visible in the linguistic landscape and show us the image of the 'good city' as a neighbourhood where the young, creative and highly educated class would love to work and live. The influx of this creative class followed by middle class inhabitants is seen as a solution in the eyes of the policy makers. One of the answers to the concentration of poor people in a neighbourhood, and in the case of Belgium this generally paralleled with a concentration of migrants, was the creation of a social

mix in that neighbourhood. It is at this point that we see how the ideology of 'social mix' gets operationalized and more, how the city functions as an actor in creating a new social mix.

The hipsterification of a neighbourhood is thus not only to be understood as the result of a classic 'social mix'-policy, it also reflects policies in the context of the state in neoliberal capitalism. The model that is set up to deal with the challenges of the neighbourhood is a classic neoliberal model private-public partnerships (Roberts, 2014: 43). In the policy plans it is circumscribed as follows: *'The City of Ghent further acts as steering body, director and coordinator of urban renewal and urban development projects, while for the implementation the city engages the private sector'* (Stad Gent, 2013). Especially in the industrial belt around Ghent a lot of city renewal projects were set up and most of them are set up in such a private-public partnership. In these projects, we can detect different actors: commercial real estate developers, building firms, civil society and the city.

This set-up of the Tondelier project – engaging civil society and setting up hip pop-up stuff – seems to be aimed at realizing this gentrification by creating social cohesion (The Site) and making living there 'hip'. The current inhabitants of the neighbourhood are not the premier target audience of the new lofts, apartments and lofts of the Tondelier project. Many of the people in the neighbourhood are unemployed or do not even have a legal permit to stay there. They cannot afford to buy a living unit in the new project. Tondelier's target audience is the ecological conscious middle class. Tondelier can thus be understood as instrument of the 'social mix' ideology where interventions in poor neighbourhoods are focussing on attracting a new middle class to create a social mix. It is the influx of the middle class that will provide the return on investment of the developers.

Here we see how the ideal of the social mix goes hand in hand with neoliberalism. Social mix cannot be mistaken for social policies. The new urban policies do not redistribute wealth to help the poor inhabitants to be less poor, but the poor inhabitants will get redistributed over a different areas. The capital of the middle class is of course key here. Social mix policies demand that the city and the developers should convince that middle class to live in a 'bad and poor neighbourhood'. It is at this point that hipster-branding comes in. It not only lures in 'target groups' – that is progressive, eco-loving and hip (the creative class) middle-class youngsters, it also creates a completely new perspective on the neighbourhood. Restaurant -M- replaces the Rabot neighbourhood's image of decline with an image of 'eliteness'. The industrial sites are renovated and made into lofts to capitalize on that added values.

Ella 2.0 allowed us to identify with detailed accuracy the social construction of a process that is visible in all corners of the world. Urban policies, in the era of neoliberal capitalism, have witnessed a *'building boom for the rich – often of a distressingly similar character – in the midst of a flood of impoverished migrants'* (Harvey, 2013: 12). The good life is not about self-

emancipation, acquiring knowledge or realising justice, equality or a good society. In the end, all those lifestyle barista bars, authentic food places, artisanal market places are, just like shopping malls and fast-food restaurants, are about 'consumption'. The good life is commodified and has become a product. A product that only the wealthy can afford. These ecological, durable urban dreams are not questioning neoliberal urban policies; they are sustaining them.

CHAPTER 7: THE OLD DOCKS AND THE CASE OF WATT

This hipsterification model is also deployed in several other (future) neighbourhoods of the 19th century belt city. In this chapter, we will discuss two of these projects: the old docks and the Watt projects. The old docks is just like Tondelier set up as public-private-partnership I. Watt is private real-estate project. Both projects use different but at the same time also similar strategies to recreate the meaning of those places in the margins of the historic hip centre of Ghent.

INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE, DOK BEACH AND STRATEGIC AUTHENTICITY

The old docks were part of the old harbour and can be found at the Northeast side of the historical city between the Muide and Dampoort train station. The first renovation project there was Dok Noord where the old industrial buildings of ACEC were transformed in a new living, working and shopping place called Dok Noord (Northern Dok). The new docks real estate project is found just opposite of Dok Noord where the old harbour domains are being transformed in a new neighbourhood. The plans are huge: 400 living units should be built there in the next years. In anticipation of the new neighbourhood, a civil society organization was created named DOK. DOK is mostly known for DOK beach and the DOK flea markets, but the civil society organisation also has a more activist set up where it functions as a platform for participatory projects.

The most iconic image of the old docks must be the old harbour cranes and the large silo's full of graffiti (Image 45). The restored cranes and the redone quay construct clean 'authenticity': the old has gotten a makeover and has now received a new function, not as industrial tools anymore, but as landmarks giving identity to the new neighbourhood. Together with the former concrete silos of InterBeton, which will also remain as part of the park on Dok Noord, they are remainders of the old industrial use of that space. The integration of this industrial heritage can be understood as an instance of *'strategic authenticity'* (Gaden and Dumitrica, 2015). Gaden and Dumitrica introduced this concept in the context of blogging where bloggers (and vloggers) are expected to offer honest representation of the self as part of an ongoing process of communication. In blogging and vlogging, this perceived authenticity has become highly valuable *'as it promotes credibility and likeability leading to increased visibility/popularity'* (Gaden and Dumitrica, 2015).



IMAGE 445: OLD HARBOUR CRANE AND SILOS OLD DOCKS – © ICO MALY - 2019

The contemporary function of the cranes and silos is exactly this: it helps to create a perception of authenticity. The cranes, silos, the quay and the living boats in the docks all communicate the ‘authentic’ identity of the place by producing a highly stylized reference to the old usage. Not surprisingly thus that the Instagram-account of the real-estate project ‘The Old Docks’, the advertisement movies of real-estate sellers and the pictures on the website of the real estate company regularly include the silos and cranes. The industrial heritage is part of a performance of identity of the neighbourhood and is aimed at selling the neighbourhood as historic and (thus as) authentic. It is this authenticity, the history and the presence of water that is used to sell this future neighbourhood as different as all kinds of generic new real estate. This is real.

Authenticity is thus not an essential characteristic of the place, but something that is created through formatting and stylization. The industrial heritage not just gives the place an aura of authenticity, this authenticity is produced through mediated discourse. Here too, we see how the authenticity is part of a commodification process, a strategy to sell. In the era of neoliberal capitalism, as Zukin (1995) already stressed cultural strategies have become crucial in the positioning of the product in the market place. Creating authenticity is a key ingredient of success. Just like bloggers and vloggers adopt authenticity as *“recommended strategy for the presentation of the self that results in a loyal audience and an increased visibility (through links, likes, shares, or re-tweets) in the public arena”* (Gaden and Dumitrica, 2015, n.p.), we see that real-estate companies use hipster branding to sell property and neighbourhoods as authentic. When we search for the old docks as a place on Instagram, we see that the cranes and silos, Dok Beach and the graffiti’s are the décor for professional fashion and music band shoots and

of individual pictures of visitors of Dok beach take selfies, or frame the neighbourhood as interesting, a contemplating area or as place where cool stuff happens.

The meaning of the old docks is reconstructed from an old run-down industrial era, to a cool place enabling the good life and referencing to other places in the world. Visitors of the old docks validate and co-construct this image of the new neighbourhood by posting and re-posting, linking, liking and sharing. Through these practices of social media use, individuals are not only constructing this place as cool, they become part of the authenticity strategy framing this new neighbourhood as authentic. It helps to commodify it. Authenticity is constructed by the real-estate developers and by the people liking the media-posts, visiting the place and posting pics online. Prosumers are thus key to the creation of meaning, and if 'authenticity' and coolness is to be created, the place should attract 'cool' 'authentic' people willing to construct the meaning of this place through social media as cool and hip.



IMAGE 456 – DOK – © ICO MALY - 2019

As already mentioned, an important actor in the construction of the real estate project as 'authentic' and a place of good living, is the civil society project 'DOK'. In 2011, before the start of the real estate development of the old docks, the civil society organisation DOK was established after being chosen to provide a temporary usage of the old docks. What was planned to be a two-year period eventually became a project of nine years. DOK set up flea markets, a bar, a beach and organized workshops, rock shows and much more. The general idea behind DOK was to create a kind of 'free state'. The semiotics of DOK reflected that ideal:

it had a distinct edgy and alternative look. The buildings and halls they used for their activities are rundown, rusty and have a recycled feel to it. At the same time, the added semiotics were all highly stylized and hip. The wooden logo of DOK on the building (see Image 46) is a good example of this layeredness. The letters are made of recycled wood, probably found on the territory. At the same time the stylization of the graphics are very similar to the style adopted by 'Bar Oswald'. This style, in combination with the graffiti on the doors and the beer bins on the pillar from the hip brand 'Vedett' contribute to the hip image of the place. Not the material, but the form communicates 'hipness'.

DOK was given the permission to operate on the site. In nine years' time, it set up a meeting space for young and old and the site was used to launch numerous projects and functioned as a platform for activities organized by other civil society organisations, concert organisers, artistic productions and start-ups – the so-called 'DOK'-residents⁴³ who co-produce DOK (DOK, 2018). DOK was imagined as an alternative bottom-up project, setting up collaboration between civil society and individual citizens to imagine the future of city living and the future of the old docks in particular. It focused on key values such as building alliances, representing the superdiversity of the city, trust, hospitality, flexibility and mobility, radical, autonomy, self-governance and horse sense (DOK, 2018: 13–14). In 2019, the last working year, DOK works around 'concreet/concrete' which refers to making the temporary – concrete and durable. Or in other words, to make a lasting impact on the real estate project and city living in general before they are shut down and DOK as an organisation is dissolved.

The activities of DOK, the semiotics, their social media communication, the civil society, the individual entrepreneurs and the visitors all contribute to the construction of the new neighbourhood as 'authentic', durable, green, committed and hip. This of course, doesn't only happen 'offline'. DOK, from its first conception heavily invested in online communication to draw in audiences from all over the city. DOK's Facebook page was created in March 2011, before the start of the first working year. In 2019, 2400 people follow DOK's Instagram and a whopping 34,414 people follow DOK's Facebook page. 260 people reviewed DOK on their Facebook page and awarded the project with 4.6 stars on 5. Whereas the Instagram page constructs DOK as a place where families, older people and hip young people meet, the Facebook page is used to communicate about new events, share posts of their website and post photo reportages of the events that took place.

⁴³ <https://dokgent.be/bewoners>



IMAGE 46: DOK - RESIDENTS 2019 HOMEPAGE

Their social media and own website construct DOK, and the neighbourhood as an infrastructure of the good life. DOK is captured in the one-liner: *'a construction site for leisure and creative manoeuvres'*. The 'construction site' refers to the fact that DOK is literally located on the building site for the new lofts, houses and apartments of the real estate project. The crane in the logo of DOK can be read in a similar way, as locating it firmly in place in that new neighbourhood near those landmark cranes. The idea of the construction site also refers to the fact that it is a place to work. DOK is not only a place to hang out, to brunch, to go to concerts and the flea market or to party, it also a place where one imagines a better world, a durable future. The website, the flyers and the social media posts wrap it up in hip semiotics. DOK clearly invests in online communication and their social media communication is a crucial element of place making: it results in hip but also more alternative people and civil society organisations using and co-constructing the place. If we take a look at the 2019 residents on their website, we see how art projects meet durability projects. All these residents co-construct the image of the DOK and more broadly of the new neighbourhood.

THE OLD DOCKS BECOME THE NEW DOCKS

The emplacement of the semiotics of DOK in the linguistic landscape index one layer. A new layer added on top of the old industrial buildings indexes new addressees that are invited to

explore and use the neighbourhood. This is a temporary layer restyling infrastructures to attract new groups of people who are mostly young, hip and eco-friendly-minded. The semiotics all have an edgy, alternative and recycled feel to it. In an online advertisement video for the new living units in the old docks, Tom Balthazar, counsel of the city, highlighted that because of “*the temporary activities of VZW DOK many Ghentians have discovered this neighbourhood, which was not yet well known and of which one thought that it was located further away from the city centre that it in reality is.*”⁴⁴ (Van Roey Vastgoed, 2019). Just like Restaurant -M- in Rabot, DOK succeeded in getting hip young people acquainted with this new location and experiencing it as part of the city itself. And DOK, just like -M-, is an index of the potential influx of a new population. It also is a crucial platform for the meaning making process of the neighbourhood. The semiotics of that first layer not only reflect the general set-up of DOK as a Free State, but also reflect the lack of means of the organisation (and maybe also of a large part of the visitors). DOK was partially funded, but also rested on the shoulders of volunteers, interns and the good will of other organisation.



IMAGE 47: ADVERTISEMENT FOR NEW REAL ESTATE – © ICO MALY - 2019

This lack of funding creates a huge distinction with the newest layer that is visible in the linguistic landscape. In Image 48, we see a huge banner hanging on a future building at the old docks. The banner is clearly professionally styled and produced cloth banner in an aluminium frame. On the left side, a render of a future apartment is shown. The apartment is spacious and has a nice view over the water and the historical city of Ghent. The interior is full of hip design

⁴⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=359&v=aeHmiqN51fw

and soft pastel colours. On the wall, we for instance can spot the famous and expensive Serge Mouille lamp costing around 1700 euros new. Together with the other furniture, the loft not only has a very different feel than the semiotics of DOK, it indexes different production resources and different targeted audiences. This is a fancy and slick design loft targeting (higher) middle class audiences. This reading of the picture is enforced when on the right side of the banner we can read: *'Living near water, bathe in light. Searching for a penthouse with a view on the city and the docks? Soon, launching phase two.'* The sale pitch focuses on the most expensive living space in that block – the penthouse. The penthouse always comes with connotation of wealth and VIP's.

Not also, that the old docks have been re-imagined and branded as 'The New Docks'. When around 2004 OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture) from the famous top architect Rem Koolhaas started drawing the urban planning for this area, the project was still labelled 'The Old Docks'. The New Dock real-estate project stresses the newness, and thus the fact that it creates a new layer, a new and future proof neighbourhood. The semiotics of The New Docks real estate project also index upscaling when compared to the semiotics of DOK, but it is not a full break. The New Docks build further on the image of authenticity, durability and ecology that was created through DOK's activities. Just like the Tondelier project, The New Docks are presented as a future proof project with attention for durability and ecology and The New Docks go even further than Tondelier. Key investors in this real-estate project set up the cooperative company DuCoop. This cooperative company is responsible for integrating the ideas of the circular economy in the new docks. All 400 living units are connected and all heating, water and energy circuits will be closed so that water *'energy, raw materials and waste materials are recovered and exchanged'*⁴⁵ (Rensen, 2018). There is no individual heating anymore; all living units are connected to a district heating system run by the cooperation and using the heat of nearby industry. On the roof of the buildings, solar systems are installed, cars are not allowed, sharing platforms are put in place and businesses who want to rent or buy a space should not only pay rent, they should apply: *'In The New Docks there is also room for restaurants and shops. In doing so, resolutely opted for sustainable businesses that are committed to the sharing economy and / or the future of mobility'* (De Nieuwe Dokken, 2018a).⁴⁶ In order to find the right places, the site publishes 'good practices' like Ohne (a shop without plastic wrapping), Wasbar (the hip place where you wash your clothes while having a drink) or Bolides (a platform to share luxury cars).

The New Docks even launched a charter that asks 'commitment' from the new residents. When you subscribe to the charter you become a *'real' inhabitant of the New Docks'*. You are a real New Dock inhabitant if (1) you live in the city and have everything close by, (2) you go fast to

the city by bike, instead of slowing down with the car, (3) you enjoy car-free zones, (4) you once in a while use our car-sharing vehicles, (5) you heat your house with waste-heat and bio-gas – from your own fermentation, (5) you share a coffee with your neighbour, (6) you enjoy a diverse neighbourhood, (7) you are ready to help each other, (8) you become happy when somebody says hello, (9) you know that garbage can become raw material again and (10) you cash in by participating in DuCoop (De Nieuwe Dokken, 2018b).

The New Docks, just like DOK frames itself as an infrastructure of the good life, as durable and pro-diversity, social and ecological. But it does add an extra – more luxurious dimension. The alternative, edginess is replaced by a luxury feel. When one for instance promotes new mobility, one not only refers to hip fixies or vintage bikes, but also to the latest electric BMW I-series. When the ‘real’ New Docks charter is signed, it is done with Champaign, food from Noah, a hip lunch and apero bar located on a boat in the dock and especially for the occasion designed beach chairs. Durability and sustainability are connected to luxury, chicness and foodie-culture. Sustainable is part of the narrative on the new neighbourhood as a hip, good, cosmopolitan and trendy place to life.

The new neighbourhood is set to become a piece of *‘Copenhagen in Ghent’* (Van Roey Vastgoed, 2019b). This reference to Copenhagen is key. Denmark’s capital city is known as a *‘mega-cool city’* dicit the Lonely Planet, that combines *‘old architecture’*, *‘an old harbour’* with *‘cutting edge design and modern architecture’* that succeeded *‘in regenerating the older areas too. Former industrial areas like the Meatpacking District which are now filled with really cool contemporary bars and indie spaces’* (Lonely Planet, 2019). The sales pitch for The New Docks by real-estate sales partner ‘Van Roey Vastgoed’ is very similar to the story of Copenhagen. Ghent according to them *‘is one of the hippest cities of the country, with a rich cultural-historic past and with a unique range of cool boutiques, nice bars, cinemas and theatres, nice bookstores, an international range of high-end restaurants and cosy bistros’* (Van Roey Vastgoed, 2019b). According to Van Roey Vastgoed, *‘Ghent has always been a region that attracted young, creative and entrepreneurial personalities. The New Docks will become the place to be’*. The New Docks are thus aligned with the discourse of the city as trendy and hip. This alignment not only co-constructs Ghent as hip, it first and foremost frames the new neighbourhood as even more hip and ‘in’.

THE CASE OF WATT: FROM BROWNFIELD TO ECO-TOWN?

On the other side of Ghent, we find another site that uses hipster branding and pop-ups to sell a former brown field as a space for good living. Watt is another hipster eco-town in the making. Watt is a new real estate project in Ghent on the factory grounds of Elektrion, a company producing lubricating oils since 1926. When the factory moved its production to Wallonia, Belgium in 2014, it left heavily polluted grounds that were classified as a so-called brown field.

Immotrion, a real estate company that now owns the ground, is realizing the sanitation of the ground, and plans to give a new destination to the former factory ground. Just like The New Docks and the Tondelier project, the Elektrion field lies closely to historic city of Ghent near the Coupure, the fancy restaurant Volta and the Ghentian prison.



IMAGE 489: WATT COMPLEX, NEAR THE HISTORICAL CENTRE OF GHENT (ON THE RIGHT)

The first redestination plans of the grounds included a huge student complex and rows of modest family houses.⁴⁷ Against these initial plans, protests immediately rose. Re-Vive, which is also a partner in the New Docks, then entered the picture. Re-Vive is specialized in redevelopment of brown fields and thus in *'the sustainable transformation of old industrial sites'*⁴⁸ and positions itself as a company that matches profit, societal and ecological gains resulting in the building of passive houses, avoiding as much of possible the use of oil and gas and buying locally when possible.

The scope of the project has changed since Re-Vive has entered the picture. The idea now is to build an ecological neighbourhood of 75 living units. Just like in the Tondelier and the New Docks projects, the car will be banned from the living site, but there will be an underground parking lot. Part of the hangars and the former office buildings are recognized and protected as heritage and should thus be maintained in the project. The protected heritage hangars will be restored, as will the former office buildings. The office buildings dates 1958, the year of the World Expo in Brussels and a high point of modernistic architecture and design.

⁴⁷ <http://www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/8e3njhoq#>

⁴⁸ <http://www.re-vive.re/revive/view/over-re-vive1>

The sanitation of the grounds started in 2015 and the definite plans for the development of the terrain were to be submitted in the same year. During that period, the terrain itself only costed money. An expensive sanitation was needed, and as long as the city did not deliver the license to start with the building process, there is no return on investment. To make matters worse, the site was not exactly a hot spot at the time. Not many people knew about the plans and if you did not live there (or have to visit the prison), you will not be aware of this location. The Elektrion site, at the moment it started with the development plans, was not exactly a hip place, nor was it known by hip middle class youngsters. Even though, it is close to the historical centre, the neighbourhood was not on the hotspot list of the Ghentian hipsters. With the exception of the fancy restaurant Volta and a large supermarket, not many (cool) infrastructures are to be found in the area. Even more, the Nieuwe Wandeling, that is the road where you can find the site, is a very busy road, so it is certainly not a neighbourhood one would imagine as eco-friendly or durable. On the contrary, it was area defined by lots of traffic and as highly polluted.

SAY WATT? HIPSTERIFICATION, AUTHENTICITY AND THE BUZZ

Hipster-branding to the rescue! In anticipation of the start of the building process, the Elektrion site was renamed as Watt. The dirty industrial history was recontextualized in a hipster discourse and functioned as indexes of 'authenticity'. On their website in 2014, Watt was defined as '*a one-year playground for all design and culture lovers*'.⁴⁹ The fifties office building became the décor for several pop-up bars, shops and food places. Industrial heritage is once again transformed in an infrastructure of hipness.



IMAGE 50: PONY'S @ WATT – © ICO MALY - 2015

⁴⁹ <http://www.watt.gent/>

The exterior and interior design of that office building can be described as classic Belgian fifties ludic modernism. The green panelling and the square design is typically for the era and fits in very nicely with the ‘no nonsense’ vintage trend in Ghent anno 2014–2015. This particular kind of modernism had a global dimension, as its trendiness aligned with the success of the series *Mad Men*. Whereas a decade before – in the the Culture Club era – hip vintage design in Ghent equaled space age plastic seventies design (think of Verner Panton, Eero Arnio or Saarinen’s Tulip chairs), in 2014 we see a move towards more modest fifties and especially Belgian design (think of Van der Meeren and Tubax). The Lost and Found-brand⁵⁰ of the local Ghentian vintage connoisseur Frederic Rozier is emblematic for this shift. The man sells reissues of obscure design developed by modernistic Belgian architects. The office building and especially the interior fits this style nicely. The wood panneling, the floors and the glass doors all sustain an image of ‘authenticity’. They create an excellent environment and atmosphere to turn it into a hipster infrastructure. The building is stuffed with hip pop-up places and all main categories of hipster infrastructures are present.



IMAGE 51: VINTAGE INTERIOR WITH WOOD PANNELING AND CEMENT TILE FLOORS

Jigger’s – the famous Ghentian cocktailbar– has opened the pop-up bar Pony’s within the Watt-complex. The interior-styling is minimal. A bar with four Bertioia wire bar stools, cheap retro formica chairs and marble coffee tables. The ‘tastecard’ – there are no labels, brands or

⁵⁰ <http://www.lostnfound.be>

ingrediënts of the cocktails being presented – is written on a blackboard and some wall decoration has been drawn. The logo has a very ironic vintage seventies/eighties feel to it.



IMAGE 492: SEVENTIES/ EIGHTIES POP CULTURE STYLE LOGO OF PONY'S COCKTAIL BAR BY JIGGER'S

A true hipster building cannot lack a 'true coffee bar'. Charlene Debuysere⁵¹ has therefore opened Watt Coffee: A coffee bar with cakes, sandwiches from Moor & Moor and tea. Charlene is an interior designer that now presents herself as a coffee consultant. She has learned the craft at 'Or Coffee' and has won multiple awards in coffee brewing championships in Belgium and worldwide. Of course, as a consultant, she not only serves coffee, you can also follow workshops or buy a good coffee brewing machine. You can acquire the craftsmanship needed to live the 'good life'.

You can also visit Watt to buy some inspiring life-style magazines. 'Not Too Arty,' an online shop of lifestyle and graphic magazines⁵² had an offline presence in Watt. Not too Arty sells niche magazines like Frankie, The Vegan Goodlife, Gentlewoman, Dansk, Another Escape or Pure Green. All magazines – chosen 'For the love of things that look great' – that have a particular hipster-like, vintage and artist feel to them and as such they fit nicely into the décor of Watt. A new local Ghentian fashion brand called Black Balloon has opened a pop-up store in Watt. In Nora Noah Nails shop you could have your nails done in collaboration with photographers and in Espoo you can buy design. Creative talent is clearly much welcomed in Watt. There is a space for expos and one has started a White Wall project to give local promising artists a white wall to expose their work. In the Dift Gallery you can see exhibitions of the work of photographer Kaat Pype and the internet phenomenon in Belgium, the blog Ugly Belgian Houses, also has an expo in the building. You can even go to the 'hipster garage sales'.

⁵¹ www.charlenedebuyser.com

⁵² <http://nottotoartyshop.bigcartel.com/>



IMAGE 503: NON IRONIC FLYER FOR A HIPSTER GARAGE SALE

Watt was not only the décor for pop-ups, on the topfloor of the office building one has installed a rooftop apartment stuffed with *'an eclectic mix of vintage furniture and modern design'*. People could rent the apartment through AirBnB⁵³ where it is praised as *'a once in a lifetime experience'*, a loft that *'is situated perfectly to discover Ghent'* and as *'place with which you will fall in love'*. Even more, the loft came with a complete hipster infrastructure. Not only are there four different bedrooms with four different styles in a loft with vintage furniture in an authentic décor.

THE CONTEXTUALIZERS

Just like DOK and -M- with a View, Watt was also set up as a hipster place and as an appetizer of things to come: *'Watt will be a lively neighbourhood in Ghent. In anticipation of construction, you can already taste of Watt's idiosyncratic character because DIFT together with Re-Vive puts new live into the building'* (Watt, 2015).

Reputable, hip and 'authentic' places like Jigger's and the renowned barista are invited to set up new branches of their activities. This not only puts life into a development zone and thus yields profits at a time when there is no return on investment, it also projects the 'authenticity' and hipness of these businesses onto the Watt site. It is not a coincidence that in the brochure (2015) Watt is sold as *'Ghentian class. Think about sustainable top architecture with an authentic character surrounded by lots and lots of green, automated comfort, communal spaces and on an excellent location'*. All the classic ingredients that were identified in Tondelier and the New Docks are again present, Watt also mobilizes an 'authenticity discourse', a stress on

⁵³ <https://www.airbnb.be/rooms/7540007>

the 'Green environment' and also stresses the fact that the historical city is close by. Soon this hipster pop-up concept became talk of the town and draws in potential future inhabitants of the area.

The difference between Watt and the other projects, is that the Watt-project is purely private financed. The city does not support civil society organizations and is not an official partner in this project. One of the results of this setup is that we see an enormous focus in the appetizer on one specific target group of people: hipsters that can afford high-end and expensive coffee, clothes, design and cocktails. All the activities and all the pop-ups target the ecologic, young, creative but also affluent middle class. Hipster branding in this case does not rely on 'alternative indie' projects, but is a pure marketing story imagined by DIFT, the '*a creative, branding & experience agency*'⁵⁴ that we already encountered in other 'hip' projects where they claim to work as 'contextualizers'. The agency is also 'contextualizing' the Tondelier development, the city of Ghent, the fashion brand Black Balloon, photographer Kaat Pype, breakfast place Alice and the new hip grocery shop Moor & Moor. They create a different context and by doing so they change the perspective and the meaning of what you see. The former Elektrion site is not a brownfield and a rundown factory anymore, but a hip and authentic site where that is about to experience a true 'Re-Naissance'.

⁵⁴ (<http://dift.be/en/about>)



IMAGE 514. FLYER TO SELL WATT

'This new era of living in Ghent', so says the brochure, will be about '*Nothing but the good life*'. Before one house is being build, the image is already there. Watt is about '*good living and good looking*'. DIFT is specialized in 'hipster-branding' and this branding clearly creates surplus. What was a brownfield, has now the perception of being authentic and is even seen as space that will evoke a renaissance of Ghent. A hot spot. Watt is a clear example of how the semiotic scope is realizing a spatial scope, including certain people and excluding others. It also illustrates how the hipster-micro-population is easily persuaded and mobilized into a neoliberal project. Watt is hip and there is a Watt hype flowing through Ghent. What we do not hear is resistance. Watt, in essence, will prove to be a very exclusive domain in Ghent, excluding poor people. Hipster-branding is also more than just 'a brand', it will materialize itself as a permanent space in the city. Before that happens, the only thing than one hear is buzz.

THE MEDIA BUZZ

In the first phase of the Watt project, the developers have one large investment: the communication plan. The hipsterification of the Watt-building itself does not need much

investment: Existing brands and companies are invited to do their thing. Rebranding or contextualizing what happens is the only added value for the moment, but it is one of crucial importance. The renaming, the logo design and the story all contribute to the creation of a buzz around the total project. And by targeting ‘hipsters’, the marketers can trust on their social media use to hype the buzz even more. The branding itself becomes the start of a grassroots/influencer campaign carried by newspapers, magazines and the hipsters themselves.

The Airbnb rented loft for instance, not only generated income, it attracted the attention of a mainstream medium like *De Standaard*, a quality Flemish newspaper. In their weekly architecture/interior design magazine a very detailed photo reportage of the loft apartment appeared (EDM, 2015) and later an extensive (travel review) piece on the apartment and the project (Van de Velde, 2015) was published. What is interesting about that review, is that it offers a reproduction of the DIFT-marketing talk on the apartment, the (location) of the site and Ghent as a living space in general. In the introduction, the apartment is being presented as a somewhat strange starting point to discover Ghent. In the two following paragraphs the Watt-complex is described as ‘*hipster heaven*’ full of design and cool stuff created by Re-Vive and ‘creative bureau’ DIFT. The Watt project is being described as a plan to ‘realize gentrification’. Note that gentrification is used here in a positive meaning, as upscaling a bad neighbourhood. And this plan – even though nothing was built yet – had already succeeded, because the journalist ‘*immediately feels that this is a special place*’. Of course, the journalist and his co-travellers enjoy the slow coffee, the gin tonics and the Indian summer. And from there, they walked to the historic centre of Ghent to enjoy breakfast at the Superette, the new Flemish foodie bakery starring the top Flemish Foodie chef Kobe Desramault. Of course, one went jogging at the nearby Coupure. The journalist concludes her ‘review’ with ‘*At such a moment, someone from Brussels can only think one thing: life is different when you live in Ghent. More relaxed.*’ And know the reader knows: Watt really provides you with everything you need to live the good life.

That same buzz is being reproduced massively by ‘common hipsters’ visiting Watt. On Instagram in 2015, you could find more than 400 photos tagged with #wattgent. 4239 people like the Watt-fan page on Facebook. And many people wrote messages on their Facebook Walls and their blogs about their experiences in the loft or drinking cocktails. Blogster Eliza has an influential interior blog called *Ergenstussenin.be*. She started blogging in 2012 when she and her lover started renovating their newly bought house. In 2015, when she posted about Watt, she had 2313 fans on her Facebook-page, a steady following and was rewarded the 14th place out of the 50 ‘*most inspiring interior blogs of 2016*’.⁵⁵ For her birthday, Eliza stayed over in the

⁵⁵ <http://baltussenparket.nl/nieuws/top-50-inspirerende-interieurblogs-2016/>

Watt loft and of course she wrote a blog of praise and full of cool pictures on the whole 'crazy' concept.

Not only 'professional' bloggers have found their way to Watt. Blogger Lyn for example, studies digital marketing in Brussels. She set up the blog 'Slightly Nervous' as a school assignment and presents herself as a 'future digital marketer' and a 'mind reader' (she has a psychology degree). The following paragraph introduces herself and her blog:

*Ghent is my great love. Besides that, I also very much like good food and drinks, beautiful interiors, and to explore the world with friends. And oh yes, sometimes, somewhere deep inside me, something of a hipster is hiding. Well, nobody is perfect, huh.*⁵⁶

At the moment of her review, she had just started with her blog. She posted four blogs in two categories (Food & Drinks and Interior). The first blogpost dates 9 November 2015 and describes her experience at Pony's in Watt. '*For some time, this bar was on my wish list and my inner hipster was therefore delighted when last Thursday I finally tried it out with two good friends.*'⁵⁷ She not only describes the nice cocktails at Pony's, '*the casual sixties interior*' or how she was well served by a gentle bartender, she also introduces the whole Watt concept. In essence, we again get a reproduction of the marketing talk of Re-Vive on the construction of a sustainable neighbourhood and the whole Watt-concept. This is also the post with the most comments, seven in total. One comment comes from one of her friends that joined her that night and agrees publicly with the post. The other six posts come from friends saying that they thank her for the tip and that they too want to visit Pony's and Watt.

The experience of Watt gets shared. The bar clearly creates a hip atmosphere and this is also being picked up by the visitors who advertise the real estate project for free. The concept is coherent and let's people imagine to live on that location. It's close to Ghent and its cool. The contextualizers use the hipster emblems to lure in these creative 'digital natives' to have a fantastic experience and above all to blog about it. This draws in new visitors and a hype is created.

AUTHENTICITY DISCOURSES, HIPSTERIFICATION AND CAPITAL

The construction of authenticity is a crucial ingredient in the creation of The New Docks and Watt as 'places to be'. Hipster culture with its recognisable style and authenticity discourse (Maly and Varis, 2016) thus has been integrated in the sales pitch for an expensive real estate project. These authenticity claims have huge economic value. '*In a world where businesses offer more and more deliberately and sensationally staged experiences, consumers increasingly*

⁵⁶ <https://slightlynervous.wordpress.com/about/>

⁵⁷ <https://slightlynervous.wordpress.com/2015/11/09/ponys/>

choose to buy or not buy based on how genuine they perceive an offering to be. Authenticity is becoming a critical consumer sensibility' (Pine and Gilmore, 2008: 35). Authenticity sells. This 'authenticity', as we have already stressed, is not an essential characteristic of a place, but is constructed as part of a strategy. In the case of the New Docks and Watt, strategic authenticity essentializes the new neighbourhood not only as hip trendy and durable, but also as '*a commodity to be consumed*' (Gaden and Dumitrica, 2015). The commitment with sustainability, the industrial heritage, the fact that Koolhaas designed the urban planning and the activities on DOK all contribute to that 'authenticity' discourse. The authenticity of Watt is constructed in the sales pitch and through mainstream media, bloggers and visitors.

It is this construction of 'authenticity', online and offline, through practices, language and graphics that gives these places their identity and appeal to a very specific group of middle-class people. The authenticity claim of Watt is a pure marketing story, supported by the discourses of hip brands and pop-ups. In the case of the New Docks, volunteers, civil society organisations, visitors and the city have invested time, money and sweat to construct this place as 'authentic', ecological, trendy and hip. The real estate projects capitalize on these semiotic and discursive investments and when the gentry moves into the neighbourhood their 'free state' will disappear. This makes the subject position of the DOK experiment visible. The young people creating The New Docks online and offline, DOK and the civil societies and entrepreneurial individuals were part of a commodifying relation where they contribute to the construction of The New Docks as an 'authentic place'.

The free state was free as long as it subjected itself to capital. The activism of DOK does not result in emancipation, in the questioning of hegemony or the realisation of a true collective free space, but in profit for capitalists. Once the site is ready for sale, the added value by DOK is monetized by the real-estate firms and DOK's free state ideals disappear. What remains is the image, the identity discourse on the neighbourhood. Their 'free state' with concerts, graffiti and edgy semiotics that has shaped the identity of the neighbourhood, that made it hip, trendy and 'authentic' will have to disappear and make room for a calmer bourgeois aesthetics, consumable for the more affluent middle class, just like the New York nightlife bars that disappeared from the neighbourhoods they helped revalorise (Hae, 2011: 3453). The collective making and its claim on the city and its future has vaporised. Even worse, just because DOK was temporary and integrated in and subject to the demands of this larger real-estate project, we could understand all the activities, the social media posts and projects as so-called '*co-creative free labour*' (Roberts, 2014: 30–31) helping to magnify difference between this and many other real-estate projects in the city so that it will stand out in the marketplace through its authentic, sustainable identity. This brand image is of crucial importance in contemporary neoliberal capitalism where small differences are presented as essential differences (Sennett, 2006).

The Watt complex furthermore shows how easily the hipster authenticity discourse can be re-contextualized in the service of capital. Hipster culture is not a counterculture, even if its members like to think that they are. Hipster culture, *'despite their self-proclaimed progressive pedigree'* (Cowen, 2006: 22), does not question neoliberalism and the consumption-driven society as such, although they do question certain forms of consumption. Consumption is fine, as long as it comes with an 'authentic discourse' to legitimize this form of consumption as durable, sustainable or real. As such, hipsters are an instantiation of the neoliberal "*consumer-citizen,*" following "*the logics of commodity activism, [where] 'doing good' and being a good consumer collapse into one and the same thing*" (Banet-Weiser and Mukherjee, 2012: 12). Hipster culture is thus compatible with neoliberal consumer culture and niched mass production – one could even say that hipsters are not only the product of this economy, but that they have become an integral ingredient of neoliberalism. Or differently formulated: they are prosumers. They produce and consume the city and in doing so they generate surplus value.

CHAPTER 8: HIPSTERIFICATION, NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM & THE (POST-)DIGITAL TURN

Digitalization, neoliberal globalisation and superdiversity have changed cities all over the world. In many social, political and academic discourses, these changes have been imagined as external and global forces changing the local neighbourhood. ELLA 2.0 has enabled me to describe these changes as the result of complex social interactions on the online/offline nexus. Shops, streets, neighbourhoods and cities are created through complex social interaction online and offline, the mobilization of semiotics and narratives, urban planning and architecture. The result is polycentric, layered and post-digital space characterized by stratification. Not everyone has the same impact or power to shape their living spaces. The construction of space is always done in a very specific social, economic and political context where certain common sense ideas and policies are influential and others are marginal. ELLA 2.0 has allowed analysing the construction of space through social interaction in a post-digital world. It is time to pull all the lines together.

COMMODIFYING THE HIPSTER

The 21st century hipster appears in a very specific timeframe: In the neoliberal capitalist phase of globalisation, an era characterised by niched mass production, a logic of consumption and commodification in self-making, and a globalised market catering not only for the elites, but also for the 'common people'. The hipster not only comes with a very particular style and identity discourses, as a social group the hipster is also connected to the rise of DIY-culture, ecological initiatives and sharing platforms. These practices give the hipster its countercultural image. But rather than a counter-cultural force, hipsters are a product of the post-digital and neoliberal timeframe. Throughout this book, it became clear that hipster culture does not resist the prevailing economic structures or fight mass-produced consumption, as for instance the Ray-Ban hype illustrates.

It is more correct to understand hipster culture as connected to a certain ethos of consumption and production. From this perspective, instead of fighting neoliberalism, it is perfectly aligned with the neoliberal structure of the world economy. Hipsters open up a new consumption and production niche instead of fighting capitalism in general. In the post-Fordist era, mass production for all has been replaced by niched mass production catering for the (identity) needs of specific, smaller groups. Hipster discourse proves to be very profitable to sell products and services, not only to hipsters, but to the mainstream as well. This niched hipster production

does not only sell products or services through cultural strategies. Customers buy a lifestyle and identity or a mythology in the sense of Barthes (1957). The DIY-culture, the sharing platforms and the ecological dreams can now be bought in the form of a countercultural identity. The good authentic life is commodified.

Even more, we could argue that this countercultural identity is at the heart of platform capitalism. The hipster as a subgroup of the middle class is not only a consumer, but also an entrepreneurial figure using style and identity discourses to recontextualize old crafts like barbering, serving coffee and food or even old rundown buildings as real, authentic and hip. The injection of this cultural capital creates added value and from the moment that the hipster-entrepreneur succeeds in its upward economic trajectory and is able to monetize his or her cultural capital, other socio-economic and political actors soon jump the bandwagon in order to also capitalize on the added value created. On a local level, one of the effects we have seen in this book, is how (local and non-local) real estate companies are using the cultural capital of the hipster to make profits. In the same vain, cities and politicians use it as leverage to realize city public-private renewal projects in times of austerity.

HIPSTERIFICATION AND CAPITALISM

In the era of neoliberal globalisation, Ghent has reconfigured itself as a hip city. City-marketing and the hipster infrastructures have changed the image and the fibre of Ghent. As a consequence not only more tourists visit Ghent, more and more people want to settle in the city. Especially the historic centre has seen a structural influx of young people. As a result Ghent was in need for more housing for these new Ghentians. The demand for houses and apartments rose and their prices have skyrocketed. To answer the demand, the city of Ghent has set up different real estate projects in collaboration with private partners in the so-called 19th century belt around Ghent. The 19th century belt had a 'bad reputation' and houses were rather cheap. Combine the rise demand with the hipster-hype and one sees how these real estate projects in this areas can create profitable investment opportunities for capitalists.

Hipster-branding is big business. The hipsterification process in the 19th century belt proves to be highly profitable for private real estate partners. The new neighbourhoods are in first instance tailored on the basis of the needs of capitalists seeking return on investment – surplus creation. Several participation projects were launched as part of these real-estate projects, but that didn't mean that this participation had a fundamental impact on the development. In the best-case scenario, the result was a compromise but in most cases, the dominant voice was the voice of the capitalist wanting to attract wealthy customers. City renewal in deprived areas does not equal redistribution to the poor, but redistribution to the wealthy. And the hipster micro-population, from a presumption and alternative consumption logic, willingly participates in sustaining this redistribution.

The historical city of Ghent has been reconstructed into a niched consumption paradise ready-made for tourists and the middle classes. We cannot understand this evolution without taking into account capitalism. As Harvey (2008) stresses, the city has always been closely tied up with the search of capitalists to make surplus through reinvestment. The myth and the construction of *'Paris as the city of light'* in the mid-19th century for instance is a urbanization process that, according to Harvey, should be understood as a solution to the surplus of capital and unemployment problem:

Paris became 'the city of light' (the greater centre of consumption, tourism and pleasure – the cafés, the department stores, the fashion industry, the grand expositions all changed the urban way of life in ways that could absorb vast surpluses through crass and frivolous consumerism (that offended traditionalists and excluded workers alike). (Harvey, 2008: 4)

The parallel with Ghent in the 21st century is easily drawn. But of course we should remember that, next to these similarities, the reshaping of Ghent occurs in a very different context as the reconstruction of Paris in the 19th century. First of all, capitalism now comes in the form of neoliberal globalization. One effect of that specific form of capitalism is that in Western-Europa, the traditional industry has disappeared and is replaced by a service economy dominated by multinational network companies (Castells, 1996). In line with this economic change, we see that in this neoliberal paradigm cities deploy culture strategies and industries to compete with other cities. Communication (city marketing), urban renewal and economic policies are all mobilized to recreate the city and attract capital in the form of tourists, industry and inhabitants. 'Ghent' is now constructed in a post-digital and deeply interconnected world. Not only the elites and the companies now operate on a global scale, also 'the common man' lives in a transnational consumer world.

In the online landscape, Ghent is not just a 'historical' city, it is constructed as a hip and trendy city. At least in part, it constructs this image by referring to the presence of 'hip infrastructures'. It also builds further on the aura that the Ghentian hipster-micro-population shaped in the same time span. As we have illustrated in chapter 4, at the end of the nineties a lively party-scene came into existence: Pop Life, Culture Club, the Belmondo parties, Eskimo, and I Love Techno put Ghent 'on the global map' as trendy and hip. Ghent became known for its party scene and especially in the first decennium of the 21st century Ghent gained a grassroots image of a hip and cool city. Two elements deserve should be taken in consideration here.

(1) This party scene was from the start translocal. The new party scene and its materialization in infrastructures like Culture Club, Club 69, the Video, Pop Life and I Love Techno were all integrated in a global scene. They were manifestations of different translocal micro-populations. Culture Club and Club 69 for instance were not only fall-

out places for bands like Soulwax, they were also the place to be for the New York band LCD sound system and the Canadian DJ Tiga. Contemporary Ghent was thus created through transnational social and cultural interaction.

(2) The concrete form of the scene should also be understood within a larger evolution and impact of marketing. In the nineties marketing was solely being used to sell classic multinational products like Coca Cola or Laundry detergent. It also entered the political sphere and the Ghentian party scene. The party infrastructures were more than just a place to party, they became identity infrastructures. The party was a myth, being there meant that you were part of an exclusive avant-garde population.

As we have seen in Chapter 5 this marketing model has penetrated the Ghentian fibre. It created a hipsterized city. Even more, the image of hip Ghent has been reproduced in the city-marketing towards the own inhabitants and tourists. Ghent does not only have the image of being a cosy city, or a social city, but is now foremost being known as a hip place, where it is good to live. Important, this construction of Ghent as a hip and trendy place is not only realized by investing in marketing or urban renewal policies, it also done by prosumers giving reviews of bars, parties and the city in general on Google Reviews, TripAdvisor or on Facebook.

HIPSTERIFICATION, SOCIAL MIX AND POLITICS

Last, but not least. This all occurs in a very particular political context. As Kriesi (et al., 2008) and Wodak (et al., 2013) richly illustrate, in the last decades the radical-right populist and nationalist parties have capitalized on the losers of globalisation (Maly, 2007, 2009). They position themselves on the new cleavages and present themselves as protectors of the people against the threads of globalization. Belgium, and Flanders in particular was no exception. Vlaams Blok was an extreme-right and explicitly racist party. (Maly, 2016; De Cleen 2013). As a result of their continuous electoral success since the nineties, Belgian saw a steep rise in nationalism and anti-migration discourses. Politicians felt the need to address the 'real problems' that this extreme-right party talked about, but provide it with different answers.

In doing so, they legitimated the presumption of that party and as a consequence the Vlaams Blok discourse had a profound effect on the mainstream parties and especially in thinking about integration, migration, our values and culture and our cities (Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998; Maly, 2007, 2009). The net-effect was that four discourses became deeply intertwined: a discourse on (in)security, one on migration, one on cultural difference and one about migrants. The city appeared as the space *par excellence* in these discourse: it was in the city that we saw the so-called 'devastating effects' of these discourses. Suburbia and the countryside in those discourses were imagined as still 'really Flemish' and thus as places where one could enjoy the good life.

The 'ghettoisation' of certain neighbourhoods and imagines of declining neighbourhoods became highly debated political issues. The underlying presumption in these debates was that a high concentration of migrants (with a different) in a neighbourhood causes problems. Blommaert and Verschueren (1998: 123) called this an effect of a nationalistic ideology of homogeneity. In this ideology too much diversity is seen as a problem which causes the decline of 'good, traditional society'. Diversity is understood in similar ways as pollution. Two answers were formulated: (1) integration policies and (2) the idea of social mix (Van Bouchaute, 2013). These answers of traditional parties legitimated the discourse of the extreme right. The integration discourse and the ideas of social mix, more policing, city renewal and communication – read marketing – all started from the same presuppositions as the extreme right discourse. They all reproduced the idea that homogeneity is necessary for a good and harmonious society.

City renewal projects were seen as answers for the so-called ghettoization. It is at this point that we see how neoliberalism, nationalism and marketing reshapes the city. In Ghent in the eighties and nineties all kinds of new projects were started up in the historic center and the 19th century belt, to create a new and attractive image of these neighbourhoods. In the 19th century belt projects like 'Bridges to Rabot', 'Ledeberg lives' and 'Oxygen for the Brugse Poort' were launched to 'revitalize' these infrastructural dense industrial and poor Neighbourhoods. The set-up of these urban renewal projects reflected the larger social-economic and political context. It was the time where the welfare state was slowly replaced by the workfare state. The state was not imagined anymore as a political tool for redistribution, but should be run as an efficient business. One of the effects was that urban policies were constructed in public-private partnerships and that redistribution of wealth was replaced by the ideology of social mix.

Creating a good social mix is implicitly present in most of these cases we addressed throughout this book. The liveability of a neighbourhood was not only defined in terms infrastructural problems like bad housing conditions, the lack of open space or parks and public transport. In many cases these poor neighbourhoods in the industrial 19th century belt were understood as places with a too high concentration of poor migrants and this is in itself was understood as a problem for the liveability of the neighbourhood (Kesteloot, 1998). Social mix was one of the most important answers. In most cases this social mix was defined in terms of socio-economic situation of the inhabitants. In Ghent for instance, during the policy period 2007–2012 20% of every real estate project which consists out of more than 50 living units has to be reserved for social housing. A liveable Neighbourhood is a socially mixed and ethnically diverse Neighbourhood that has a good image, good infrastructures and a large social cohesion. This all should contribute to 'living in harmony' (Stad Gent, 2013).

The big question is of course for what and for whom this social mix and city renewal projects is beneficial. Or in the words of Zukin (1995: 272), the city is a place of struggles over *“particular pieces of real estate, and over who might be displaced by their cultural appropriation, as well as over whose representations of whose culture are going to be enshrined by which institutions.”* The hipster and the process of hipsterification is thus not innocent or ‘just a trend’, it is also a power struggle over whose culture will dominate public space, or in other words who is included and welcomed, and who is excluded. ELLA 2.0 allowed us to show, in detail, who is addressed and invited to live in those new neighbourhoods. Social mix and hipness result in a reconstruction of the city tailored on the needs of the middle class.

There is not much proof that social mix actually is beneficiary for the local inhabitants (Sarkissian, 1976: 234). Kesteloot (1998) stresses that social mix is not intended to make poor people richer, but to redistribute poor people so that they are not concentrated in one area. The net-effect, is that the networks of the poor people are destroyed and that aide cannot be concentrated anymore. Even more, the influx of the middle class in these neighbourhoods does change the infrastructures and the prices. It’s better to be poor in a poor neighbourhood than in a rich one. Social mix is then best understood within the competition framework of neoliberalism: cities want to attract wealthy inhabitants in order to gain more income.

The hipsterification of Ghent has three main effects: (1) More and more people want to live in Ghent which creates a housing shortage. It also begs for investment in creation of new neighbourhoods, revitalizing old neighbourhoods, creating economic development and generating money to invest. (2) As an effect of that shortage, Ghent becomes expensive. Living, doing groceries, renting or buying: only the higher middle class can effort it. (3) The 19th century belt becomes an interesting area of speculation. No wonder that real estate prices skyrocketed in Ghent. In 2010 one paid on average 50.74% more for an average house than in 2005, in 2013 this has risen up to 75.3% more than in 2005. An apartment was 69.9% more expensive than in 2005 (Van Volcem, 2014). Prices in Ghent, compared to the other cities have risen a lot more. And if you know that the available income of inhabitants in the same period has only gone up with 15.8%, you know that living in Ghent is quite expensive.

Even more, living in Ghent and especially in the hip quartiers of Ghent becomes unpayable for the lower and lower middle classes. These statistics point to what Harvey (2008: 10) calls “accumulation by dispossession” or what is better known as gentrification. Processes of displacement according to Harvey lie at the heart of the urban process under capitalism. Grounds are bought at low costs and are recreated into hip living areas: the result is that the older population cannot afford to live there anymore. As a result they are easily inclined to sell property and move out.

THE POST-DIGITAL AND ELLA 2.0

ELLA 2.0 has enabled us to describe in detail, a model for successful expansion of the city. Whereas traditional LLS stop at the description of the distribution of languages in a certain area, ELLA gives an extra edge by providing a historical and stratified perspective. ELLA allows us to analyse linguistic and semiotic infrastructures as indexes of changes in the different historical and demographic layers of the 'synchronic' neighbourhood. ELLA enables us to describe, quite accurately, rapid social changes and do this long before these populations appear in the statistics. The layered and stratified population can be connected to an equally layered and stratified picture of the infrastructures in the neighbourhood. ELLA also allows us to avoid the ethnic fallacy and statistical essentialism. The focus on a broad conception of language, including semiotics, architecture and the online landscape, allows a fine-grained analysis. Through ELLA we can distinguish between the English of Ergün's supermarket, D&D Foods and the English of Culture Club or pop-up restaurant -M- with a view.

At the same time we see micro-populations of hipsters mobilising 'hip semiotics' in their infrastructures. ELLA both draws attention to such complexities and detects these different scales and historicities, and can also be used to construct a 'stratigraphy' (Blommaert and Maly, 2016): we can distinguish newly arriving populations, from bigger ones and from powerful socio-economic and highly visible actors in social space. The ethnographic focus thus reveals inequality within superdiversity, or in different words: it allows us to determine "*whose representations of whose culture are going to be enshrined by which institutions*" (Zukin, 1995: 272). Superdiverse neighbourhoods are not just about 'more migrants', it are complex, dynamic, layered and stratified spaces not ruled by one set of forces but by multiple ones. The language in public space – the semiotic scope – demarcates social space, it organizes who is included and who is excluded. ELLA enables us to understand these social functions of language use in a layered and stratified translocal context and thus allows us to detect and unravel the complex fibre of superdiversity.

ELLA did not only allow us to sketch a stratigraphy or identify local groups using the neighbourhood, it enabled to detect and describe in detail how 'edgy' neighbourhoods were gentrified. Or more in particular, it allowed us to describe a very specific model of gentrification, the addressed audiences that one wanted to attract and who benefits from this model. This model – hipsterification – uses the hipster aesthetics and discourses with its stress on authenticity, durability and sustainability as part of a top down organized gentrification process that enables real estate companies to cash in on their investments and the investments of cities, activists and civil society organisations. It also enabled us to see how a translocal micro-population becomes visible in the linguistic landscape and how this visibility is reframed for commercial purposes. Or put differently, how hipster semiotics and practices are commodified

for profit making through gentrification. At the same time, it allowed us to describe this 'hipsterification' as the result of a classic model of public-private-partnerships based on "*formal and informal networks of information, communication and cooperation between local authorities, community groups, voluntary organisations and a variety of private bodies*" (Roberts, 2014: 58). From the city to the national government, from real-estate developers to architects and from civil society organizations to hipster: they all collaborated in constructing the image and infrastructures of the neighbourhood.

The upgrading of ELLA by injecting it with digital ethnography proved to be very productive and necessary. The 'public' as a feature of sign emplacement has at least two dimensions: *the local public emplacement of signs* – the concrete place where signs are put and shown to potential audiences – as well as *a translocal, online public sphere* with which the local signs are profoundly connected. By including the online landscape (even when there were no visible lines to the online landscape), allowed us to understand how offline spaces or constructed in the post-digital world. The reconstruction of the neighbourhood is not something that is only done in the offline landscape. ELLA 2.0 allowed us to show how different actors (local and globally, online and offline, present and not) co-construct public space. A seemingly 'local' typical hip Gitanian bar – Bar Oswald – once, we included the online landscape, questioned the expected. We found that the meaning of the bar was co-constructed translocally through scripted interactions with the interface of Google Reviews and humans as a 'cool', 'authentic' and 'cosy' bar with 'must-see loos' near the harbour and just outside the city. ELLA 2.0 allowed us to move from an ethnography or sociolinguistics of offline areas and communities into a sociolinguistics of digital culture, and both are inextricably connected in a locally emplaced signs.

Digital ethnography linguistic landscape analysis (ELLA 2.0) produces stimulating results. ELLA cannot only contribute to the study of superdiversity, it can also help the voyage out from the sociolinguistics of superdiversity to other academic research fields and thus stimulate true interdisciplinary research. At the same time, it hopefully can contribute to what Appadurai saw a long time ago as the task of a new style of ethnography, namely to capture the impact of deterritorialization on the imaginative resources of local experiences and thus adds new arguments so that ethnographer cannot pretend anymore that the local is a priori more real, more thick or more elementary than larger-scale perspectives. If ethnography, sociolinguistics or Linguistic Landscape Studies want to matter in the 21st globalized century, they should be able to include this layered post-digital cultural complexity in the lives of people. Transnational imagination is a crucial part in the fabrication of social lives and these are "inescapably tied up with images, ideas, and opportunities that come from elsewhere, often moved around by the vehicles of mass media" (Appadurai, 1996: 54). And thus we should also attest the fact, as Radice (2015) points out, *that the stay-at-homes live cosmopolitan lives as well*.

When understand the locally emplaced signs as embedded in a post-digital constellation, we see vastly more. This move from offline to online and back, is of major importance for ELLA and for understanding the construction of space and meaning. ELLA 2.0 directs us towards a far more precise view of actors and topography of action. As for actors, the actions performed in specific offline places are dispersed and operate locally as well as translocally. The ‘personnel’ of locally performed actions, thus, is far broader and more diverse than what an exclusively offline LL analysis would show. As for topography, we see invisible lines connecting places from all corners of the world, and resources, formats and personnel are provided in all these places and made available for local enactment.

ELLA 2.0 puts the online/offline nexus central, it starts from offline linguistic landscapes and take us to the structure of social actions in superdiverse neighbourhoods. Its findings inevitably distort the acquired imagery of sedentary diaspora demographics as the cornerstone of superdiversity studies: ‘multi-ethnic’ neighbourhoods as the locale within which social actions by their populations must be confined, or privileged analytically. The online-offline nexus no longer affords such views.

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