CULTURES OF SPECTACLE UNDER MILITARY OCCUPATION : A REFLECTION

- Sophie De Schaepdrijver -

Across Europe, the world wars' military occupation regimes wrought various forms and levels of misery. At the same time – and this need not be a paradox – both occupied populations and their occupiers avidly sought entertainment. Specifically, *public* entertainment, the only kind that was widely available to ordinary citizens in an era before private screens – in an era in which the shared enjoyment of spectacle was part of the spectacle. The nexus of military occupation and "cultures of spectacle" in 20th-century Europe is a promising research field. This theme issue focuses on occupied Belgium. This concluding article identifies overarching themes and formulates wider questions. What do we mean when we use the term "cultures of spectacle" ? When we link this concept to military occupations, what exactly do we seek to uncover both about the cultures of spectacle and about military occupations ? Lastly : what avenues of research offer the most promise ?

I. Spectacle and the Imagined Community

In order to specify what we mean by "spectacle," and cultures thereof, it might be useful to start with two examples taken from outside this theme issue's subject of Belgium in the world wars. The 1828 opera *La Muette de Portici* dramatized a seventeenth-century uprising of Neapolitan fishermen against Spanish overlordship. In the fashion of early 19th-century Romantic nationalism, it staged heroic figures, vile intrigues, and the stirring duet *Amour sacré de la Patrie*. It was set to be staged in Brussels in the summer of 1830, a volatile season - in Paris, in July, the edifice of the restoration regime collapsed. The authorities in the restoration state that was the 1815 United Kingdom of the Netherlands, deemed the mood in Brussels too explosive for such a rabble-rousing opera, and temporarily banned the performance, before reversing course over the argument that a ban would generate more protest. And so, on August 25 1830, *La Muette* was duly performed at the *Théâtre de la Monnaie* in central Brussels. Matters duly ran out of hand: excited crowds streamed out of the theater, mixing with the throngs in the streets, and started attacking the houses of representatives of "Dutch" rule. These representatives never managed to regain the initiative, and Belgium's independence was declared on October 4.

This dramatic episode in Belgian history was long taken as a spontaneous explosion of patriotic feeling stirred up by the rousing strains of *Amour sacré*. Belgian historian Els Witte has deconstructed this fond myth by showing how these events in Brussels were long in the making (not to say in the concocting) by separatist political interests, and how the "opera" protests that night merged with social protest in the streets. Witte's definition of the *Portici* episode as a staged charivari – a carnivalesque rejection of an authority perceived as illegitimate-is entirely correct.[1] It should, however, not lead to a dismissal of the *Portici* episode as a feat of clever staging of a political event that would have happened regardless. Such a reading would obscure what the staging itself tells us about the political culture and the *sensibilités* of the time – the theatricality; the *tableau-vivant*-ready poses; the catchy arias; the choruses; the crowds; the firm belief that "History" was in its essence a pageant of peoples yearning for liberty (so that transporting the story of an early modern Neapolitan uprising to an industrializing region of modern northwestern Europe struck no-one as incongruous); and contemporaries' ready belief that an opera performance could lead to an uprising. In brief – the *Portici* episode *forged* collective imaginings (to use Linda Colley's felicitous term which unites the manipulative aspect of collective imaginings *and* the actual creation of bonds[2]).

Cultures of spectacle, then – the spectacle itself and everything surrounding it: the audiences, the venue, the reception in the retelling or in reviews, visual representations afterwards, and so on - are among the media that create or undo imagined communities, alongside the maps, museums, censuses, novels, and other vehicles analysed in Benedict Anderson's classic *Imagined Communities*.[3]

A second example of how "cultures of spectacle" can be analysed as vectors of an imagined community - this one concerning audio performances transmitted by technical means in the twentieth century-is Peter Fritzsche's astute analysis of the German Nazi-era radio programme *Wunschkonzert*. This programme was organized along the popular request-concert format (similar to *Sincerely Yours,* the English singer Vera Lynn's iconic wartime BBC radio programme for the

1. Els Witte, *De constructie van België : 1828-1847,* Tielt, Lannoo, 2006, pp. 53-56.
2. Linda Colley, *Britons : Forging the Nation, 1707-1837,* New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1992.
3. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* 2nd revised and expanded edition, London-New York, Verso, 1991.

troops).[4] In *Wunschkonzert,* listeners – at first, civilians and military personnel both; from 1940-1941 onwards, soldiers received priority - could request pieces of music, both highbrow classical pieces and lighter fare, which were then played before a live audience. In this way, "radio (…) reproduced the collective body of the German nation": the people sending in their requests; the orchestra performing them; the live audiences in the studio; the celebrities (the movie star Zarah Leander, the boxing champion Max Schmeling) stopping by for a chat with presenter Goedecke; the mix of rarefied, middlebrow, and popular music; listeners' recollections afterwards in workplaces and cafés; the 80% of German radios tuned in to *Wunschkonzert* – all of it contributed to the sense of "one big family" (pointedly excluding Jews who were forbidden from owning radios or even just listening to broadcasts). The wildly popular 1941 romantic-heroic film *Wunschkonzert* – seen by an estimated 26 million Germans – cemented the programme's iconic status.[5] To sum up: spectacle and its cultures – venues, décor, audiences, reception, memory, reproduction – contribute to the imagining of communities.

II. Spectacle and Occupation

The study of the imagining of communities through cultures of spectacle may be especially promising with regard to exceptional situations in which official vectors of communication and purveyors of content (the state; education; established media; political parties) may be silenced or censored and/or *gleichgeschaltet*. The present theme issue studies the nexus between cultures of spectacle and the military occupations of the two world wars.

There *was* spectacle under military occupation, as historiography shows. As Jovana Kneževič has demonstrated, at the start of the Habsburg occupation of Serbia in 1915, its capital, Belgrade, was a badly bombed city with a depleted population – down to 10% of its citizens (some 9,000 instead of 90,000).[6] Yet, Habsburg-occupied Belgrade, as it regained some of its population, developed a thriving, though borderline louche entertainment scene around cafés. Entertainment life flourished likewise in other occupied European cities. German-occupied Lille, Warsaw, Brussels, and many other large and small centres offered various forms of spectacle. In Salonika, which was de facto occupied by the Allied *Armée de l'Orient,* much enjoyment was to be had after hours.[7] In occupied Western Europe in the Second World War, cities developed an even more marked entertainment culture. In Paris, rather frantically, "the show went on";[8] as it also did in Bruges;[9] the Danish Royal Theatre in Kopenhagen staged *Porgy and Bess* on March 27, 1943 to a house filled to the rafters.[10] *Eastern* European cities, slated for cultural annihilation, were another matter, though this policy did not extend to the "Nordic" peoples of the Baltic - Nazi-occupied Tallinn, for one, had a thriving classical-music scene.[11]

4. On request concerts, see, a.o., Christina L. Baade, "Sandy Calling: Forging an Intimate Wartime Public at the BBC Theater Organ," in Pamela M. Potter, Christina L. Baade and Roberta Montemorra Marvin, eds., *Music in World War II: Coping with Wartime in Europe and the United States,* Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 2020. I thank this article's anonymous reviewer for this reference.

5. Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich.* Harvard, Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 70-72.

6. Jovana Kneževič, *The Austro-Hungarian Occupation of Belgrade during the First World War: Battles at the Home Front,* Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 2006, pp. 28, 85, 264-265.

7. As described with accurate details in Clive Aslet's historical novel *The Birdcage: A Novel of Salonika,* Inverness: Sandstone Press, 2016.

8. Alan Riding, *And the Show Went On: Cultural Life in Nazi-Occupied Paris,* New York, Knopf, 2010.

9. Luc Schepens, *Brugge bezet 1914/1918 – 1940/1944: het leven in een stad tijdens twee wereldoorlogen,* Tielt, Lannoo, 1985.

10. Michael Fjeldsoe, "Getting away with Cultural Bolshevism: the first European performance of *Porgy and Bess* in Copenhagen, 1943," in David Fanning and Erik Levi, eds., *The Routledge Handbook to Music under German Occupation, 1938 – 1945: Propaganda, Myth and Reality,* London, Routledge, 2019.

11. Kristel Pappel and Anu Kolar, "Power through music: strategies of the German occupation authorities in Estonia," in David Fanning and Erik Levi, eds., *The Routledge Handbook to Music under German Occupation, 1938 – 1945: Propaganda, Myth and Reality,* London, Routledge, 2019.

One immediate reaction to these findings would be to say that they fly in the face of accepted views of cities being "under the heel" of occupying regimes. It remains to be seen, however, whether the two cannot be compatible – whether the quest for entertainment cannot coexist with a stunted public life, a hamstrung economy, and an atmosphere of menace. It might be more fruitful to expand the question to ask what the existence of (various forms of) entertainment reveals about a specific occupied city at a specific point in time.

The present theme issue concentrates on occupied Belgium – specifically, Flanders and to a lesser extent Brussels – in both world wars. (Needless to say, this avenue of enquiry could and should be extended to French-speaking Belgium.) In what follows, I will tease out the main themes of this body of research and formulate avenues for further research.

III. Belgium in the World Wars : A Multiplicity of Spectacles

As the articles in this theme issue show, the theme of spectacle in Belgium in the world wars – specifically, under military occupation - is a capacious one, encompassing opera, variety shows, radio concerts of symphonic music, lectures with magic-lantern slides ("the projection lantern," as Klaas de Zwaan points out for WWI, "was highly visible in the 'matrix of media' that spectacularized the global conflict"), and, of course, the cinema. Entertainments on offer ran the gamut from the highbrow to the lowbrow – from Wagner's *Lohengrin* (played to awed audiences at the Antwerp opera in October 1940) to the Wild West show of *Les Declerco's,* the household troupe of variety artist August Declercq (1884-1947) which delighted the Leuven public during the Great War. (And one might expand the range of public thrills even further to include popular songs, studied for WWI by Barbara Deruytter ;[12] WWII-era Walloon puppet shows, such as the *Théâtre du Farfadet,* launched in 1940 ; and others.)

The articles also demonstrate the many angles of the "spectacle" theme. The subject of spectacle venues, for one, proves to be particularly rich, allowing a closer look at how occupation-time audiences *experienced* spectacle. Leen Engelen's research focuses on a theatre that opened in 1916 in the city of Leuven, the most famous of the badly mauled "martyr cities" of the German invasion of 1914. *Louvain-Palace,* incongruously sumptuous in these surroundings – though perhaps not as incongruous as all that - was both a cinema and much more : a theatre, a music-hall, a concert venue, a place to toast and dine. The 1914 blueprints show the *parterre,* the amphiteatre, the wraparound brasserie, the orchestra pit, the performers' dressing-rooms ; and successive changes indicating managers' deftly shifting strategies, such as the 1918 addition of a bowling-alley. Evelien Jonckheere describes the lecture-room near Antwerp that hosted the lantern-slide lectures of the local "Flemish Circle" during WWI : with its photo gallery of Flemish luminaries, cardboard plates with Flemish proverbs, and framed reproductions of Flemish artwork, the room's décor aimed to immerse listeners in an atmosphere of aspirational Flemishness. It would be interesting to compare the earnest didacticism of this lecture room with the audiovisual immersive techniques (amplified sound, moving images), the larger crowds, and the sleeker décor of Flemish nationalist events in WWII. One might give the example, mentioned in Eric Derom's article, of the February 1942 concert at the prestigious art déco *Palais des Beaux-Arts* in Brussels, held to commemorate the Flemish militant and Waffen-SS volunteer Reimond Tollenaere (1909-1942) who had died on the Russian front.

Either way, across both wars, venue was an essential dimension of the culture of spectacle in an era where visual spectacle, give or take a private

12. Barbara Deruytter, "The Layering of Belgian National Identities During the First World War", in Wouters, Nico & Van Ypersele, Laurence, eds. *Nations, Identities and the First World War.* London : Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

Commemoration of Reimond Tollenaere organized by the collaborationist Vlaams Nationaal Verbond (Flemish National League), Palais des Beaux - Arts, Brussels, February 8, 1942. Source : CEGESOMA, photo n° 14826.

performance or screening, was almost by definition "consumed" in public spaces. The question of whether and how wartime shifts in venue also corresponded to shifts in types of entertainment and shifts in repertoire, for one, may be promising. In 1916, for instance, Brussels novelist Georges Eekhoud (1854-1927) intriguingly remarked that Donizetti's 1840 *La Favorite* was more popular now that it was performed at the ice-skating rink than he had ever known it to be on the prestigious stage of *La Monnaie* opera house.[13]

The articles in this theme issue also offer clues as to *how* spectacle was "consumed" and received: the sing-alongs that went with magic-lantern slide lectures; the sundry items that made up a typical variety evening; or the range of musical offerings of Belgian radio broadcasting in WWII. Several authors dwell on press reviews of operas or concerts or movies, which are part and parcel of the culture of spectacle; and Erik Spinoy analyzes how a range of entertainments – mostly cinema, but also music-hall – is refracted in the oeuvre of the avant-garde poet Paul Van Ostaijen (1896-1928).

Another promising avenue opened up by these articles is that of the wartime careers of performers. Many had to adapt as best they could; and some did better than others. The evanescent coloratura soprano known so far only as "Madame Potoms-Crabbé" who performed in *Louvain-Palace* and other cinemas when she was used to the Brussels *Monnaie,* may have felt out of place doing those "small gigs on the side" (Engelen). Others proved versatile, such as the Brussels soprano Angèle Van Loo (1881-1960). At twenty, Van Loo had found her calling in operetta after just one season at the *Monnaie,* took her nimble voice on a tour of the world, and never looked back. During the First World War, she successfully expanded her range of activities as a singer, director, manager, and businesswoman. Van Loo reopened the *Pathé-Palace* cinema in Brussels (which was run by the French Pathé company and therefore expropriated by the German occupation regime) as an operetta venue; managed an operetta troupe; and staged as well as starred in performances, such as the wildly popular *Véronique*. (Operetta, as Georges Eekhoud noted in early 1916, was in avid demand again: "the entire repertory is being wheeled out and is an instant hit. Offenbach (…) *Véronique,* (…) and soon we'll be back to Léhar's *viennoiseries* (…), it's a peculiar sight, this craving for distraction, [this need] to take one's mind off terrible worries".[14]) In 1916-1917, she served as artistic director of the Scala theater in downtown Brussels.[15] In short, Van Loo seems to exemplify the type of entertainment entrepreneur who adapted astutely to the demands and constraints of the times, like the cinema managers who made Louvain-Palace such a "versatile entertainment venue" (Engelen). In other cases, it was top-down intervention that boosted or broke careers. Eric Baeck's article, for one, shows how music life in Antwerp under Nazi occupation saw the rise of the brothers Diels - Hendrik (1901-1974), conductor at the Flemish Opera House, and Joris (1903-1992) who directed the Antwerp theater consortium that oversaw the Flemish Opera House and the Royal Dutch (Flemish) Theatre – and the dismissal of Jewish conductor Daniel Sternefeld (1905-1986).[16]

The business of entertainment is another issue fruitfully explored here. Another example of business detail is Evelien Jonckheere's research into what it

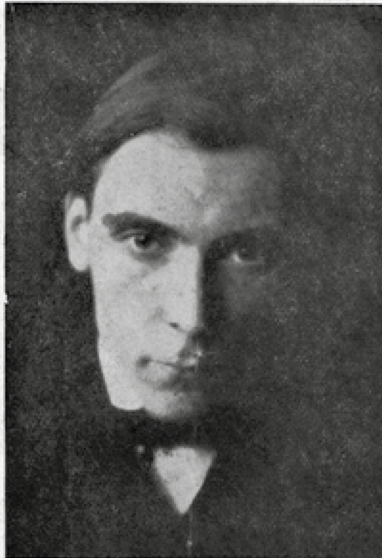
13. Georges Eekhoud, *Journal,* 31 January 1916, Archives et Musée de la Littérature (Brussels), ML 2954/16, folio 28.

14. Georges Eekhoud, *Journal,* 13 February 1916, Archives et Musée de la Littérature (Brussels), ML 2954/16, folio 40.

15. The Brussels *Archives et Musée de la Littérature* possesses a series of posters of Van Loo's wartime "grande tournée d'opérette": http://www.aml-cfwb.be/catalogues/general/sujets/4270. Van Loo's directorship at the Scala is mentioned in Pallieter Van Vaerenbergh, *Van salon tot theater : het lyrische oeuvre van Eva dell'Acqua (1856-1930),* unpublished Master's Thesis in Artistic Sciences, Free University of Brussels (VUB), 2017, pp. 74-75.

16. On Sternefeld, see also Mark Delaere, "La 'Symphonie et ut' (1943) de Daan Sternefeld: Lecture d'une composition clandestine." In Christopher Brent Murray, Valérie Dufour and Marie Cornaz, eds., *Musical Life in Belgium During the Second World War,* in *Revue belge de musicologie,* LXIX (2015), pp. 145-157.

THÉATRE VOLANT



M. Fernand Crommelynck

Directeur artistique

Prix du Programme 30 Cent.

Palais de Glace

SAISON 1916-1917

Imp. LOUIS DESMET-VERTENEUIL, 60-62, rue T'Kint, Bruxelles.

This Brussels ice-skating rink (Palais de Glace) served as an ad - hoc theatrical venue ("théâtre volant") during World War I. Avant-garde playwright Fernand Crommelynck (1886 - 1970) served as artistic director. Programme booklet, 1916-1917 season. Source : AML (Archives et Musée de la Littérature), MLTW 00072/0001/002.

cost a small cultural organization to purchase its own magic lantern; and it is perhaps no coincidence that the organization's financier, the industrialist Lieven Gevaert (1868-1935), produced the glass plates on which the slides were mounted. Fascinatingly, as Jonckheere, Buelens-Terryn, and De Zwaan all show, magic-lantern slides were rented out as sets to lecturers and organizations, which suggests that different narratives could be developed around one and the same ready-made slide series.

Overall, the articles here amply demonstrate audiences' insatiable quest for entertainment. Examples are the staggering number of cinemas in WWII Belgium; the revival of nightlife in WWI Antwerp, slyly documented in Paul Van Ostaijen's poetry – "the longer the war dragged on, the more desperately people flocked to entertainment," as Spinoy writes – or the staging, two days before the Armistice, of Glück's *Orpheus* (with the title role sung by the contralto Jeanne Montfort (1889-1964), to the regret of a local opera critic who wrote that casting a tenor would have freed the performance of "feeble femininity"[17]). This quest for entertainment gripped not just the occupied, but also the occupiers. In March 1943, for instance, the swank cinema *Select Agora* on the Brussels Avenue de la Toison d'Or – a 1911 movie palace redecorated in 1930 by the prestigious modernist architect Michel Polak (1885-1948) – joined the ranks of the *Soldatenkinos,* movie theatres reserved for military personnel, as Vande Winkel has found. In 1916, in a more modest setting, troops of the *Marinekorps Flandern* that occupied the Belgian coast gathered in Ostend to watch a comedy movie while the sound of cannon entered this "cinema fifteen kilometers behind the front," as the corps periodical described it (quoted by Guido Convents).

IV. The Impact of Occupation

If audiences craved entertainment, this was both in spite of and because of the war: the quest for a "normal" evening's entertainment became all the more frantic as life was less "normal." The material circumstances of wartime mattered too: during WWI, harsh winters and scarce coal drove people out of doors to stay warm. (As early as the first war winter, the Brussels *Théâtre de la Gaîté* let it be known that, in addition to offering a varied programme of popular favourites, "the hall is delightfully toasty."[18])

The imposition of occupation regimes, of course, deeply impacted cultures of spectacle. In both wars, censorship cut deep. This did not just, we should stress, involve censorship from the side of the occupation regime. Nor did it just involve "censorship" in the official sense of the term. It could also mean censoriousness - the kind typically incurred by popular amusements, which, as social and cultural historians well know, almost automatically tend to generate obsessive fear on the part of elites, established churches, and states. The world wars were no exception. Belgian (popular) audiences' yearning for movies in WWI stimulated the ongoing "crusade" – its champion, the Catholic politician Émile de Béco (1843-1928), used this literal term – against "bad cinemas."[19] In some cities, working-class parents who relied on wartime welfare had their benefits cut if they, or their children, went to the movies, as Convents observes. Suspicion fell mostly on commercial cinema – the "trashy" fare which Wilhelmine Germany combated in the same years.[20] It would be interesting to find out how conservative Belgian elites reacted to the "hygiene films" produced in Germany in that era - movie documentaries or melodramas on public-health issues.[21] A production documenting

17. *Het Tooneel,* November 9, 1918, p. 2.
18. Advertisement in *Le Quotidien,* November 30, 1914.
19. Émile de Béco, *La croisade entreprise contre les mauvais cinémas pendant la guerre,* Turnhout: Brepols, 1919. (Volume III in the series *Cercle d'Etude des leçons de la Guerre*).
20. Kara L. Ritzheimer, *'Trash,' Censorship, and National Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Germany,* Cambridge University Press, 2016.
21. Jill S. Smith, "Richard Oswald and the social hygiene film: promoting public health or promiscuity?" in Charles Rogowski ed., *The many faces of Weimar Germany: Rediscovering Germany's filmic legacy,* Rochester, Camden House, 2010, pp. 13-30.

the "triumph of science against tuberculosis" - *The Black Lane,* staged at cinema *Eden* in Antwerp in April 1918[22] - would not have raised eyebrows. But the multipart *Es werde Licht (Fiat Lux)* (Richard Oswald, 1917), a film that treated venereal diseases as a public-health and not a moral problem, might have. As Engelen shows, *Es werde Licht* screened in *Louvain-Palace* and other cinemas throughout the country to great success and was touted as perfectly high-minded and educational (while the managers took care to muffle the film's German provenance). Would it have offended conservative sensibilities? This question must remain open for now. In WWII, one "hygiene film" distributed in occupied Belgium was the pro-euthanasia drama *Ich klage an,* produced at Goebbels' request. Again, the question of the Belgian Catholic Church's reaction remains open – for now.

If we now turn to the successive occupation regimes, it is obvious that they completely controlled what was on offer in Belgian movie theaters both in 1914-1918 and 1940-1944, though the WWII German Propaganda Department *(Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien),* analysed by Vande Winkel, seems to have exercised a more active steering control of both movie programmes and the movie-theater business than was ever achieved by the WWI *Politische Abteilung.* Having said this, both sought to convert occupied Belgium to German cinema fare. As Vande Winkel shows, this policy was not without success, though it would eventually be hampered by a lack of material as Nazi Germany's movie industry was unable to keep up production. In WWI, as Convents shows, the ban on new films from "enemy" countries compelled audiences to keep watching the French, Italian, or American films already in stock at war's outbreak. While part of the audience seemed content to keep watching these "old, often worn, flickering pictures" (as one observer wrote in 1917, quoted by Convents), others started taking in new German films – which cinema managers took care not to bill as German films. Occasionally, films banned in Germany were cleared for distribution in Belgium: this was the case, for reasons now lost to us, for the 1915 crime drama *Das Geheimnis einer Nacht.* Conversely, and for more obvious reasons, openly political movies such as the patriotic *Ostpreussen und sein Hindenburg* (1917), which recounted that province's history from its medieval beginnings and dwelled on the 1914 Russian invasion and the subsequent liberation by Field Marshal Hindenburg (who by now, together with Ludendorff, was heading the German military and therefore, given the lack of civilian oversight, much of the German state), were screened in soldiers' cinemas but not in theaters for the general Belgian public. Were more subtly political films screened in Belgian cinemas? One example might be the 1917 Ibsen adaptation *Terje Vigen* [*A Man There Was*], a critique of the Anglo-French sea blockade of Germany, hidden under a story set during the 1809-1814 Norwegian-English war.) Likewise, in WWII, the *Propaganda-Abteilung* did not screen propagandistic productions such as the virulently anti-Semitic 1940 *Jud Süss* in large and high-prestige cinemas like the Brussels Eldorado, where they were likely to offend, but in smaller theaters; and they were screened for select collaborationist audiences rather than the general public. But *Wunschkonzert,* the sentimental, seemingly apolitical paean to the German *Volksgemeinschaft* referred to above, was more widely screened.

The above examples of "narrowcasting" – in other words, tailoring content to an intended audience - beg the question of whether occupation regimes, even as they sought to champion their cultural production vis-à-vis the occupied population and also to present a picture of harmonious coexistence under occupation, actually strove to create common cultures of spectacle between occupiers and occupied – or just momentary photo opportunities. The answer to this is that a comprehensive policy of creating mixed occupier-occupied audiences seems unlikely: occupation regimes sought to rein in fraternization between their troops and conquered civilians. Still, to answer this question conclusively, more research is needed. "Narrow-

22. *Het Tooneel,* April 13, 1918, p. 2.

Wunschkonzert, as this movie poster announces, "broke all records this season" with spectacular box office numbers at two of occupied Belgium's most prestigious cinemas, the Palace in Liège and the Scala in Antwerp. Source : VANDE WINKEL, Roel, "Cinema in Occupied Belgium (1940 - 1944)", <www.cinema-in-occupied-belgium.be/en/film/1579.html>. First published 17 Nov 2020. Last update : 07 May 2021.

casting" can also refer to the creation, with the might of occupation regimes at one's disposal, of separate imagined communities among the occupied, through separate cultures of spectacle. In WWI, as Buelens-Terryn and Jonckheere show, Flemish "activist" culture (that is, the separatist Flemish-nationalist culture that emerged during the war and was fostered by the occupation regime) sought to cement a sense of uniquely Flemish and not Belgian cultural striving through the didactic medium of the lantern-slide lecture, which allowed for lengthy, in-depth presentations. And, as the articles of Baeck, Baeck-Schilders, and Engelen demonstrate, the Flemish activist press (launched under the auspices of the occupation regime) tended to protest loudly at wartime spectacles' possible "Frenchifying" influence. In Antwerp, as Eric Baeck's research shows, an entire Flemish music-performance culture emerged in the course of WWI, with new troupes and new venues. But it staged familiar fare – Donizetti, Massenet, Gounod. One critic complained that this repertoire failed to bring about the necessary "purification" ; one performance of *La Favorite* prompted another critic to complain that "our national character does not at all correspond with this music" (quoted in Baeck). Self-appointed radical spokespeople used (or, tried to use) the constraints of the occupation to steer national cultural fare in the desired direction, even away from popular works.

WWII offers a striking example of deliberate segregation of cultural fare. As Vande Winkel has uncovered, the French films noirs *La Ferme aux Loups* and *Le Corbeau* (both 1943),[23] were a sensational success in Brussels, but do not seem to have been screened in Flanders. The reason is unlikely, as Vande Winkel observes, to have been market-driven, since Flemish cinema managers were probably as keen as any to screen sophisticated hit films like these ; he concludes that a strategy to bring more *German* films in Flemish cinemas might have been at play. It is also possible that creating differences in cinema consumption was a gesture towards radical Flemish opinion-makers, who insisted that there were essential differences in taste. Jeanne de Bruyn (1902-1975), for one, the influential film critic of the collaborationist *Volk en Staat,* had long claimed that "Flemings (…) have a flawless taste in films (…) compared to Walloons (…) and especially to the mongrelized Brussels set."[24] Top-down decisions to curtail a shared Belgian moviegoing culture may have catered to convictions like these, striving to make them into self-fulfilling prophecies.

As we study official censorship under occupation, we must remain aware that it did not create a uniform landscape, not even during WWII. As Eric Derom shows with regard to classical music on the radio, the French-language national broadcaster *Radio Bruxelles* and the Flemish (Dutch-language) *Zender Brussel* interpreted the censors' strictures differently : while the former continued to offer a varied programme within the remaining margins, the latter emphatically embraced a 'Germanic' repertoire. What this means is that different purveyors of spectacle interpreted the cadre of occupation differently. One might add that censors, too – even National Socialist censors – suited their perceived task to their context, whether in the *Reich,* in the East, in France versus Belgium, and so on ; and that censorship typically entails not only strictures but also inducements.[25]

But for all that censorship did not create a uniform cultural landscape, the very cadre of occupation "politicized" the cultures of spectacle as a whole. To begin with, the very enjoyment of entertainment could be a political matter. In WWI, the

23. Harshly criticized in postwar France because its unflinching depiction of venomous mores in a small community flew in the face of pious *Résistance* myths, *Le Corbeau* – remade by Otto Preminger in 1951 under the title *The 13th Letter* – is now recognized as a classic. Christophe Corbin, *Revisiting the French Resistance in Cinema, Literature, Bande Dessinée, and Television (1942 – 2012),* London, Rowman & Littlefield, 2019, pp. 66-68.

24. De Bruyn wrote this in 1936, and her conviction only deepened during the war ; quoted in Liesbet Nys, "De heldhaftige kermis van Jeanne de Bruyn. Een katholieke Vlaamse filmcritica vóór en tijdens de Duitse bezetting," in *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis* no. 6, 1999, pp. 71-106, p. 81.

25. I owe this insight to one of the anonymous reviewers of this article.

ideal for occupied civilians was the maintenance of "patriotic distance."[26] It was considered unpatriotic to enjoy oneself in public. First, resuming public entertainment served the Germans' aim to make life under occupation look normal, to present relations between occupier and occupied as cordial, and to declare the regime legitimate. Second, it was unbecoming for civilians to seek public enjoyment when their fellow citizens, on the Yser front, were fighting and dying for *their* liberation. Young, able-bodied men not at the front suffered the greatest opprobrium for being seen to enjoy themselves.[27] This is why, as Erik Spinoy shows, the young poet Van Ostaijen's in-your-face dandyism and his paeans to wartime cinema were not just esthetic but also political statements.

By contrast, in WWII, Belgium capitulated after the so-called Eighteen-Day Campaign. And so, demobilized young men from Flanders returned home to pick up their life where they left off, ostensibly unconcerned by political implications – such as the devastating fact that *they* were allowed home, a privilege accorded as a sop to their "Germanic" ethnicity, but their Walloon compatriots were not (65,000 of them were not liberated until war's end).[28] This ghastly bias slicing across a generation may have deepened, among some young Flemish returnees, an attitude of retreat from the res publica. More in general, occupied Belgium in WWII was not dominated by what we could call the moral backdrop of the front. We will return to this.

The mere enjoyment of spectacle (or the enjoyment of a career in spectacle) could, then, be political even if – or, on occasion, especially if – it purported to be a-political. The context of occupation meant that repertoire, too, could dragged into the realm of the political. Composers' works could be presented in political terms. The great Mozart commemoration of 1942, for instance, offered the occupying regime an opportunity to present the composer, rather incongruously, as an icon of the New Europe – and Flanders, or even all of Belgium, as "a cultural province of the Reich," as Marie-Hélène Benoit-Otis and Cécile Quesney have recently argued.[29] Another example is the choral works of Belgian composer Peter Benoît (1834-1901). As WWI wore on, Benoît's oeuvre morphed into a symbol of radical Flemish – even separatist – identity. In April 1916, Benoît's work still featured in a "Belgian" context : to wit, at the opening of *Louvain-Palace* theatre. *Louvain-Palace* counted as a "patriotic" venue. Its décor, as Engelen's research discovers, garnered praise for featuring King Albert's monogram in a time when references to Belgium's exiled monarch were banned. And its programme received extensive disapproval from the Flemish activist press for allegedly contributing to the degeneration of Flemish audiences' ethnic consciousness. However, a year and a half after being performed in such a Belgian-patriotic venue, Benoît's work was performed in a completely different context : at an October 1917 all-Benoît concert in Antwerp. As Hedwige Baeck-Schilders shows, this concert was organized by Flemish activists, and in explicitly activist terms. In subsequent months, Benoît's oeuvre was appropriated ever more emphatically by anti-Belgian circles. In protest, in 1918 the heirs to Benoît's estate banned further performances of his work under occupation.[30] But no such restriction was

26. Sophie De Schaepdrijver, "Patriotic Distance," in Heather Jones et al., eds., *1914-1918 online : International Encyclopedia of the First World War,* 2015, retrieved from https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/patriotic_distance

27. Sophie De Schaepdrijver, "No country for young men : patriotism and its paradoxes in German-occupied Belgium, 1914-1918," in Richard Butterwick-Pawlikowski, Quincy Cloet and Alex Dowdall, eds., *Breaking Empires, Making Nations : The First World War and the Reforging of Europe,* Warsaw, The College of Europe at Natolin, 2018, pp. 124-153.

28. Alain Colignon and Chantal Kesteloot, "Les prisonniers de guerre, une communauté oubliée ?" in *Belgium WWII,* retrieved from https://www.belgiumwwii.be/au-coeur-de-la-belgique-occupee/les-prisonniers-de-guerre-une-communaute-oubliee.html

29. Marie-Hélène Benoit-Otis and Cécile Quesney, "Celebrating a Mozart anniversary in occupied Belgium : the Mozart-herdenking in Vlaanderen (1942)," in David Fanning and Erik Levi, eds., *The Routledge Handbook to Music under German Occupation, 1938 – 1945 : Propaganda, Myth and Reality,* London, Routledge, 2019, pp. 193-210, p. 204.

30. Sophie De Schaepdrijver, "Occupation, Propaganda, and the Idea of Belgium," in Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites, eds., *European Culture in the Great War : the Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918,* Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 267-294.

in place during WWII. In 1940, Hendrik Diels conducted Benoît's *Rubens Cantata* (also entitled *Flanders' Artistic Glory*). In 1942, musicologist August Corbet (1907-1964) declared that, if Flanders presently occupied "a full-fledged position in the breakthrough of the new spirit of the times in Europe," it owed this enviable status squarely to Benoît. Two triumphant July 1944 performances of Benoît's oratorio *The Scheldt,* conducted, of course, by Hendrik Diels, rounded off the composer's posthumous elevation to New Order icon, as Baeck-Schilders demonstrates. Likewise, Benoît's work was a staple at WWII-era performances at the Flemish Conservatoire in Antwerp, as Dewilde shows.

Lastly, artists' careers under occupation demonstrate how the political seeped into many a priori apolitical endeavours. This pattern does not hold for openly politically committed figures like the above-mentioned Diels brothers in WWII, or, for that matter, Van Ostaijen in WWI, who *intended* to be taken politically. Likewise, it does not hold for the above-mentioned film critic Jeanne de Bruyn, whose political commitment trumped her artistic judgment. (To give one example : before 1940, for all that she admired German cinema, De Bruyn uttered the occasional criticism of Zarah Leander, and could not bring herself to positively review the 1933 propaganda movie *Hitlerjunge Quex (Ein Film vom Opfergeist der deutschen Jugend) ;* but, from 1940, she silenced all critical notes.[31]) Likewise, the pattern does not hold for a performer like Paul Douliez (1905-1989), conductor for *Zender Brussel* Radio. Like the Diels brothers, Douliez was a member of SS-Flanders. But he took his New Order commitment one step further by volunteering to be sent to the Eastern Front as war correspondent with the Waffen-SS. In an 18 May 1943 radio interview on the eve of his departure, Douliez declared that he would grow as an artist by facing the "harsh realities" he was sure to encounter in this "true and glorious mission." The interviewer paid homage to Douliez for committing his many talents to "the true heroic epic battle against our common enemy."[32] Upon his return, Douliez took the reins of *Zender Brussel* on 1 January 1944, while continuing to conduct the broadcasting orchestra, now decked out in full SS uniform.

But next to such politically committed figures, there were artists whose choices were far less political, or even not political at all – yet who found they could not escape the political inflection of occupation-era cultural life. Another Belgian conductor may serve as an example : the eminent César Borré (1880-1950), who, as Baeck-Schilders describes, was the star of a major charitable-patriotic concert in Antwerp on 5 October 1917. Critics were ecstatic – and took care not to mention that Borré, in 1916, had accepted a musical assignment that suited the self-presentation of the occupation regime. From July through October 1916, Borré had conducted the garden concert orchestra at a high-profile German event : the *Austellung für Soziale Fürsorge* at the derelict Luna Park amusement site in Brussels. This was an exhibition on social security and national health in Germany, with maquettes of German hospitals and sanatoriums, statistics on pensions and allowances, information on Germany's battle against alcoholism and venereal disease, educational films on the revalidation of mutilated soldiers, and so on.

The exhibition was intended to bolster the legitimacy of German rule. Belgian civilians who wished to visit, received discounted train tickets. A series of post-cards highlighted the event ; the German federation of labor unions invited a delegation of Scandinavian socialists to tour the exhibition. Music and festivities furthered the exhibition's aim : at the dance that marked the end of the *Ausstellung,* Belgian women employed by the German army to manufacture sand-bags for the trenches waltzed with German servicemen.

31. Liesbet Nys, "De heldhaftige kermis," p. 101.
32. Herman van de Vijver, *België in de Tweede Wereldoorlog,* vol. 8 : *Het cultureel leven tijdens de bezetting,* Antwerp, dnb/Pelckmans, 1990, p. 88.

Bruges, February 27, 1944, concert by the Zender Brussel radio orchestra directed by Douliez. The speaker shown is war correspondent Jef Desseyn (who worked as an editor at Zender Brussel) ; on this occasion, he urged able - bodied men in the audience to enlist with the armed SS. Source : CEGESOMA, photo n° 31205.

Poster in German, Dutch, and French announcing the Brussels exhibition on social welfare ; among the attractions, the poster mentions Borré directing his orchestra. Source : CC-BY-NC-SA @ Historisches Museum der Pfalz – Speyer/Photo : Volunteers HMP Speyer/Object ID : PKS_WK_02c_014.

Belgian patriotic opinion was shocked. One diarist furiously noted that the German authorities "had the scene photoed for cinemas & their illustrated papers to make the world believe that the Belgians fraternize with them."[33] The exhibition, by highlighting German good governance, threatened to dent Belgians' recommended wall-to-wall rejection of all things German. Plus, the exhibition was a wartime spectacle that created an entire "cloud" of activities and social events – music, post-cards, dance… - that threatened to legitimize German rule, dissolve the prescribed distance between occupiers and occupied, and present to the outside world a picture of content co-habitation under a benevolent authority. (One remark in passing : it would be worthwhile to study exhibitions organized by the occupation regimes of both World Wars as social-cultural events in their own right.) In this context, Borré's acceptance of the Luna Park gig counted as cultural collaboration - a term that was not in use at the time, but a phenomenon of which contemporaries were keenly aware. One underground paper fulminated against Borré lending his prestige to an event "which all Belgians *must* shun" and reported, exultantly, that having thus "prostituted his talent" had cost Borré his position as conductor at the Trocadéro (a prestigious cinema-cum-concert hall) in Brussels.[34] Did this fracas end Borré's career in Brussels ? In Antwerp, at least, he conducted a patriotically themed concert eleven days after the Armistice, as Baeck-Schilders has found. Borré himself took care to paint his occupation-time music activity in flawlessly patriotic terms. In 1929, he moved to Canada ; in 1938, in an interview given to a Toronto newspaper, he painted himself during the war as refusing to conduct Wagner and being jailed for it, a story that may or may not be apocryphal. Borré also claimed that to elude the censors he had deliberately staged "a certain Gounod opera" with a stirring patriotic aria – probably *Gloire immortelle de la patrie,* from *Faust* – causing the German officers in the audience to flee because they feared a popular uprising, while the ecstatically cheering audience hoisted him unto their shoulders and out into the streets chanting "Vive Borré, Vive Borré."[35] This strikingly theatrical image – which, again, may or may not be apocryphal – is reminiscent of the scenes allegedly following the 1830 performance of *La Muette*'s *Amour sacré de la Patrie.* Borré's adventures show that, in occupation-time, the line between reviving one's career as a performing artist and (being accused of) crossing over into compliance with the occupation regime, was a thin one even for an apolitical artist ; his postwar statements suggest that he subscribed to the patriotic perspective, or at least deemed it necessary to present himself as something of a cultural resister, especially in Canada which had lost so many young men in a conflict billed in part as being fought for the liberation of Belgium.

V. Avenues of Further Research

To conclude, it might be worthwhile to tease out possible directions of further research and reflection. I will limit myself to three : biography ; comparison ; and sources.

Biography

I can be brief here : as the above indicates, careers in the culture of spectacle – the lives, the social network, the professional endeavours of performing artists of all stripes, of managers, critics, patrons, pedagogues, film distributors, censors, moral crusaders, and others – are a promising "way in" to the study of an era ; or, in this case, the study of world war-era cultures of spectacle in Belgium. A closer look at the likes of Angèle Van Loo, Paul Douliez, César Borré, Jeanne de Bruyn,

33. Sophie De Schaepdrijver and Tammy Proctor, *An English Governess in the Great War : The Secret Brussels Diary of Mary Thorp,* Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 58.
34. *Satirische Zeitung* no. 9, July 21, 1916, pp. 1 and 3.
35. Interview with the *Toronto Star,* quoted in Joan Magee, *The Belgians in Ontario : A History,* Toronto : Dundurn Press, 1987, p. 135.

and others provides insight into possibilities and constraints, networks, venues, audiences, taste - and the history of ambition, which is a theme in its own right. If the data suffice, one might even consider a prosopographic approach; in other words, a collective biography of a group of people who collectively – not that they would ever see themselves as forming a collective – contributed to creating their contemporaries' visual-entertainment world and soundscape. Such a collective biography could map out how individual career trajectories intersected with the world wars' occupations. Wartime markets and material restrictions could, as we have seen, make, break, or inflect careers. So could top-down intervention. One example is that of the contrasting cases of the Antwerp brothers Diels, whose careers were boosted by Nazi rule, and Daniel Sternefeld, who was dismissed. In this context, the study of postwar careers is equally instructive. (As the radio historian Céline Rase's work, for one, has demonstrated.[36]) A quick look at the postwar decades reveals that Sternefeld, who managed to escape deportation to the death camps, enjoyed a distinguished conducting career after the war. But so, tellingly, did Hendrik Diels, whose Belgian career was fully on the rails again by the 1960s. (His brother built a theatre career in the Netherlands.) A close study of such trajectories will shed light on postwar networks, mechanisms of advancement, cultural tastes and fashions, the weight of institutions, lobbies, contacts, family support; and, of course, on individual ambition and talent.

Comparing Occupations

The above demonstrates that the data allow for a more systematic comparison between the cultures of spectacle in WWI and WWII than has yet been endeavoured. The contrast between 1914 and 1940, for one, is striking. In 1914, the imposition of an occupation regime, coming on the heels of a shocking and devastating invasion, was greeted with a refusal to resume life as normal. In protest against censorship, most newspapers closed shop. To signal disapproval of the new regime, concert venues stayed closed. While this policy was by no means general - Guido Convents shows, for instance, that the association of Belgian cinematographers could not bring itself to impose a closing-down of cinemas as this would ruin so many – the fact that it was discussed at all, is telling. No such option was even considered in 1940, when cultural life resumed with nary a hitch: radio resumed, theaters opened, cinemas thrived.

Obviously, the contrast between the two occupations is not absolute. Midway through the occupation of WWI, with misery mounting and the end of war receding from sight, a growing number of people gave in to whatever entertainment was available; a sense of a patriotic front, with attendant duties, flagged; people no longer ostensibly covered their ears when passing by German military bands. It is also true that the open rejection of Belgium as an imagined community, in the guise of activism, gained terrain. But, as Jonckheere shows in the case of the "Flemish Circle" of Mortsel near Antwerp in 1916-1917, the acceptance of activism had its limits: a speaker who scoffed at emblems of Belgian patriotism encountered vehement criticism by the audience and in the press; and it did not do for the Circle to accept money from *Volksopbeuring* (The People's Relief), an ostensibly charitable organization which, in reality, operated under German auspices to counteract the National Committee (a nationwide relief organization, funded by global aid, that functioned as occupied Belgium's unofficial government). An open embrace of the occupation regime remained unthinkable – not just because of the brutal invasion, which the regime of Governor-General von Bissing and his successors could never live down, but also because of the continued presence of the Western Front. The front severed one small corner of Belgium from the invaded and occupied greater part. It impacted

36. Céline Rase, *Des ondes impures à l'épuration des ondes. Contribution à l'histoire de la radio, des collaborations et des répressions en Belgique (1939-1950),* Namur, Presses Universitaires de Namur, 2017.

the daily soundscape: "went to the Scala to see *Véronique,* acted by Angèle Van Loo," wrote one young diarist, before adding, "cannons very loud".[37] The front provided occupied civilians with what one could call, using Reinhard Koselleck's term, an expectational horizon: that of the continued, audible liberation endeavour by the Belgian and allied armies. No such front loomed over WWII occupied Belgium until 1944. (Though it is true that the Soviet success at Stalingrad in the winter of 1942-1943, and the subsequent reversal of the German forces' fortunes on the Eastern front, restored a sense of movement which, on the one hand, prompted civilians close to the occupation regime (like Douliez) to volunteer, and, on the other hand, gave cohesion and momentum to fledgling resistance and sabotage movements.)

It is clear that the cultures of spectacle differed in important respects between the two world wars.[38] Even if post-WWI reports for reasons of patriotic piety exaggerated the occupation-era shrinkage of the entertainment industry, it is a given that the world of spectacle in occupied Belgium in 1914-1918 was very much reduced compared to that of the years preceding the war; and "patriotic distance" was not just an ideal, it was an observable pattern of behaviour. By contrast, the WWII occupation years saw a thriving entertainment life.[39] In Bruges, for instance, where spectacle had been scarce in 1914-1918, theatres, cinemas, *cafés-chantants* and other venues now heaved with people come to applaud performers such as the Dutch actress and *chansonnière* Georgette Hagedoorn (1910-1995), at the time a contract player with Joris Diels' company in Antwerp.[40] German newsreels offer another locus of contrast. Cinemagoers in 1914-1918 did not have German newsreels thrust upon them, as Convents has discovered; the risk of riling rowdy movie audiences was too great. By contrast, as Vande Winkel observes, cinema audiences in 1940-1944 had no choice but to sit through Third Reich filmreels. These came from the *Auslandstonwoche* agency, which produced news for the occupied territories and for neutral countries, under the keen eye of Goebbels' propaganda ministry, with, on occasion, personal interventions by Hitler. These newsreels featured "standard" international news alongside items astutely tailored to specific national audiences, overseen by the German authorities in situ.[41] As we know, the Nazi-era immersive cinema news magazines brilliantly exploited the medium in all of its persuasive possibilities – for instance, as regards image angle, item length, relative paucity of words, and the use of music in the service of the narration.[42] Whether audiences were convinced, certainly after Stalingrad, is another matter. But the sheer fact that audiences seem to have been trusted not to revolt - as they still had before the invasion: in 1939, as Vande Winkel has demonstrated, cin-

37. From the January 1 1917 entry of the diary of Amy Victoria Hodson (1901-1967). Monica Kendall, *Miss Cavell was shot. The Diaries of Amy Hodson, 1914-1920,* Bristol, SilverWood Books, 2015, p. 52.

38. Reference-points in Greet Barrie and Virginie Devillez eds., *Kunst aan de orde: kunst en politiek in België, 1918-1945.* Brussels-Ghent: Dexia/Snoeck Ducaju, 2002/2003.

39. On cultural life in WWII Belgium, see, a.o., Kevin Absillis, *Vechten tegen de bierkaai: over het uitgevershuis van Angèle Manteau (1932-1970),* Antwerp-Amsterdam: Meulenhoff-Manteau, 2009, p. 90; Bruno Benvindo, *Henri Storck, le cinéma belge et l'Occupation,* Brussels: Ed. de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2010; and Jan Lensen, Ludo Stynen en Yves T'Sjoen eds., *De stekelige jaren: literatuur en politiek in Vlaanderen 1929-1944,* Ghent: Academia Press, 2014. With thanks to Chantal Kesteloot for these references.

40. Schepens, *Brugge bezet,* op. cit.; on Hagedoorn, see also Peter de Bruijn, "'De mooiste oogen van de wereld': Willem Elsschot en Georgette Hagedoorn," in *De Parelduiker* 2008 (13), 3, p. 2-31, pp. 5-10. Retrieved from https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_par009200801_01/_par009200801_01_0015.php

41. Roel Vande Winkel, "Nazi Newsreels in Europe, 1939 – 1945: the many faces of Ufa's foreign weekly newsreel (Auslandstonwoche) versus the German weekly newsreel (Deutsche Wochenschau)," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 2004 (24), 1, p. 5-34; Roel Vande Winkel, "Belgische onderwerpen van de door de bezetter gecontroleerde UFA en BELGA filmjournaals, 1940-1944," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis,* 2009 (39), 1-2, p. 199-236.

42. See the first, now classic, analyses by exiled critic Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966): *Propaganda and the Nazi War Film,* New York: The Museum of Modern Art Film Library, 1942; id., "The conquest of Europe on the screen: the Nazi Newsreel, 1939-1940," in *Social Research* 1943 (10), 3, p. 337-357.

emagoers protested when some Belgian venues showed German news[43] - is instructive in its own right. On this note, one might ask the question whether either of the wars' military occupations in Belgium gave rise to any *Muette de Portici*-type public disturbance. For WWI, research has not uncovered any yet. Was conductor César Borré's recollection (mentioned above) of having been borne in triumph through the streets of an unnamed town after a patriotic Gounod aria truthful ? The incident seems to have left no other written trace.[44] Regarding the Nazi occupation, the question remains open.[45]

Nonwritten Sources

The articles in this theme issue make deft use of written documents : reviews in the press ; reports by the *Propaganda-Abteilung ;* cinema managers' requests for permits ; correspondence ; concert programmes ; broadcast schedules. These allow for rich analysis in their own right. At the same time, the illustrations demonstrate that reaching for visual, auditive, and tangible sources rounds off the picture ; as do (written) descriptions of the *material* cultures of spectacle. Proceeding further down this avenue would bring us closer to the experiential. What did *Mi chiamano Mimi* sound like, sung in Dutch (Flemish) ? Did radio listeners typically enjoy broadcasts in their homes, or in communal settings ? How did radio presenters sound ? Did successful productions generate "merchandise" similar to the postcards issued by the organizers of the 1916 welfare exhibition in Brussels – souvenirs like badges, cigar-bands, or tea-towels ? Following this line of research would further strengthen authors' points. To give just one example : Paul Van Ostaijen wrote about the concrete cultures of spectacle he experienced in occupied WWI Antwerp ; reconstructing this world in all of its details, as Spinoy shows, makes for a richer understanding of his oeuvre. But, beyond the words, Van Ostaijen's typography and page layout are instructive too. One striking example is the carnival-crier esthetic of the lettering in the poem "The Great Circus of the H. Spirit" : a mock announcement of a performance by the circus act "Religion & King & State," touted as "the *world-famous* **TRIO** of hilarious knock-abouts !!!" This pastiche of a circus poster further demonstrates the many links between the cultures of spectacle and the realm of the political in occupation-time.

VI. Spectacle as a Lens into Cities-at-War : A Brief Conclusion

Studying the cultures of spectacle in Western European cities in the first half of the twentieth century requires resourcefulness : historians must peruse serial sources *and* ephemeral ones, official reports *and* private documents, canonic literary works *and* doggerel, written sources *and* visual traces ; book-keeping records, playbills, posters, memoirs, reviews, and so on. This variety of documentation fits the subject well. For "spectacle," as an integral part of city life, touched upon all dimensions of city life : business, careers, advertising, fashion, venues, crowds, cliques, *claques,*

43. Vande Winkel, "Nazi Newsreels," op. cit., p. 15.

44. It is not mentioned in the wartime writings or the memoirs of former censor Otto Flake (1880-1963), nor of the head of the Political Department, Oscar von der Lancken Wakenitz (1867-1939). (For the latter, see Michaël Amara and Hubert Roland, eds., *Gouverner en Belgique occupée : Oscar von der Lancken-Wakenitz – Rapports d'activité 1915-1918.* Édition *critique,* Brussels-Bern, P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2004.) Admittedly, Flake's writings do not pretend to give a systematic overview ; and von der Lancken's reports tended to represent the situation in Belgium as more satisfying than it was. Perhaps more to the point, Borré's vignette left no trace in the (now largely digitized) corpus of Belgian World War One occupation-era underground press.

45. Possible reference-points in : Marnix Beyen, "Het Cultuurleven. Een late terugkeer naar de Romantiek," in Mark Van den Wijngaert, Bruno De Wever, and Fabrice Maerten eds., *België Tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Antwerp : Manteau, 2015, pp. 125-142 ; Dirk Lauwaert, "Van publiek naar toeschouwer : Duitse films in Belgische zalen," in : *1940-1945 : het dagelijkse leven in België : tentoonstelling, Brussel, ASLK-Galerij, 21 december 1984-3 maart 1985.* Brussels : ASLK, 1984, pp. 202-217 ; in the same volume, Willem Vanden Eynde, "Het muziekleven : een nature morte," pp. 186-201. See also Paul Aron et al., eds., *Leurs occupations : l'impact de la Seconde Guerre mondiale sur la littérature en Belgique.* Brussels : Textyles-CREHSGM, 1997. With sincere thanks to Chantal Kesteloot for these references.

critics, velvet seats, buildings, policing; escapism, protest, uplift, thrills. The study of cultures of spectacle is a privileged – if not necessarily easily accessible – avenue into the study of cities.

And the study of the cultures of spectacle seems to offer particular promise for the study of cities in the world war era, specifically with regard to the distinctive experience that was military occupation. In Western Europe – let us just focus on this region – northern France and a major part of Belgium were occupied during WWI; during WWII, all of Western Europe was occupied. Military occupation impacted cities in various ways, brutally or subtly. It could enter city life with extreme violence (as in Leuven in 1914) or install a regime lethal for specific groups (such as Antwerp's Jews in WWII, targeted from 1942 by local collaborationist "Jew-hunters" under the auspices of the German *Sicherheitspolizei/Sicherheitsdienst*[46]). Occupation authorities could sideline or co-opt local government. They could launch ambitious projects (such as the activist Flemishized University of Ghent in 1916), or "merely" concentrate on exploitation and policing. But in all cases, military occupation altered power dynamics - including among the occupied. And in all cases, military occupation re-crystallized urban economies around issues of scarcity, war profits, black markets, exploitation, spoliation, demand shrunk or swollen, and other aspects.

Yet, for all that military occupation impacted cities, life somehow went on. Teachers taught, contracts were signed, sports events took place, people made plans, children were born. (If at tellingly differential rates: in Bruges, to give a dramatic example, the birth rate plummeted nine months after the 1914 invasion but barely budged nine months after that of 1940, which, as the historian Luc Schepens has pointed out, indicates that, in this city at least, the invasion and occupation of WWI were experienced as far more of a shock than was the coming of WWII.[47]) Buildings went up – even lavish theaters, even in ruined cities, as Engelen shows. And entertainment remained on offer, whether at diminished or equal strength. The articles in this theme issue demonstrate that spectacle allows historians of occupied cities to map out "continuity" – as well as its limits. It permits them to gauge occupations' impact on programmes, careers, and other aspects of spectacle. It permits them to detect the political choices (and, hence, the changes) beneath the ostensible – or even ostentatious – resumption of continuity (as in the case of Paul Van Ostaijen); or, conversely, to detect resilience (and, hence, continuity) in managers' changing of repertoire and performers' acceptance of unfamiliar gigs (as in the case of *Louvain-Palace*).

To sum up, the research field of spectacle and its cultures allows historians to fruitfully home in on the vast and unwieldy subjects of wars' impact, on "continuity" and "change", on urban history. It offers concrete examples, specific research questions, precise areas of comparison; and, even as it fans out into multiple domains of inquiry – well illustrated by this theme issue – it manages to generate an ever more coherent body of insight.

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46. Lieven Saerens, "Gewone Vlamingen? De jodenjagers van de Vlaamse SS in Antwerpen, 1942 (Deel 1)," In *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis,* no. 15, 2005, pp. 289-313; id., "Gewone Vlamingen? De jodenjagers van de Vlaamse SS in Antwerpen, 1942 (Deel 2)," In *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis,* no. 16, 2005, pp. 11-55.
47. Luc Schepens, *Brugge bezet,* p. 118.