



Research article

Restoring broken journeys in the framework of urban reconstruction after a disaster: the Ypres case

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Submission date: 5 September 2023; Acceptance date: 15 November 2023; Publication date: 1 October 2024

How to cite

Nevejan, M. and Gantois, G. 'Restoring broken journeys in the framework of urban reconstruction after a disaster: the Ypres case'. *Architecture_MPS* 29, 1 (2024): 3.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.amps.2024v29i1.003>.

Peer review

This article has been peer-reviewed through the journal's standard double-anonymous peer-review process, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

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Open access

Architecture_MPS is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

Abstract

The destruction of the West Flemish city of Ypres, Belgium, caused by the violent battles of the First World War, sparked an intense debate on urban reconstruction strategies. The disruptive consequences forced the government to provide a rapid, large-scale response while choosing between preserving the past or ambitiously embracing the future, thus following the main discourses among urban planners of that time. Beyond this emergency phase, however, more in-depth questioning about national identity and people's sense of place arose, which translated into embraced or rejected architectural styles and urban planning proposals. The interplay between remembering and forgetting exhibited divergent urban planning proposals, which made the decision on how to rebuild the city difficult, delaying the reconstruction process. Since opinions on what to remember rely on people's personal sense of remembrance, the spatial translation

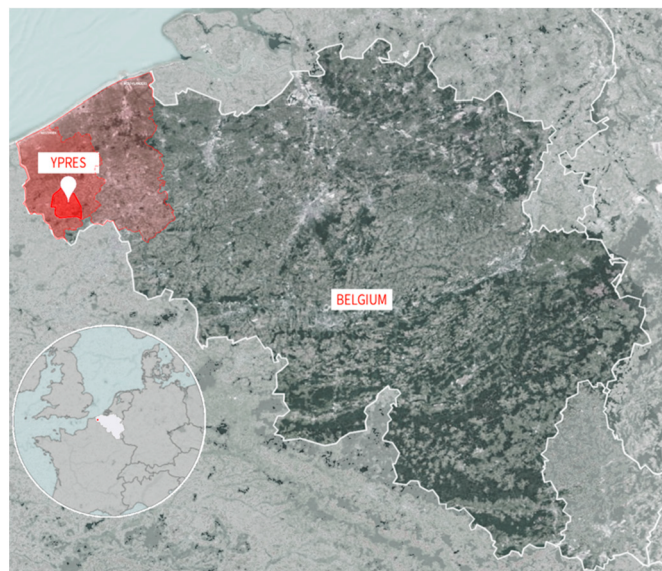
of how to remember requires a multi-layered approach where spaces for memory, such as memorials, cemeteries and monuments, and memories of places that relate to experiences in the everyday life of the residents, intertwine. When the spatial translation of these spaces for memory and places to which individual memories are attached is unbalanced, it might counteract the residents' recovery while hindering the restoration of their broken journeys. This article elaborates on how this spatial translation proceeded within the reconstruction of Ypres, known as 'the city of peace', where the war memory became part of the identity of the place, which up until today attracts many international war tourists.

Keywords urban reconstruction; spatial memory; place-attachment; everyday heritage

Introduction

During the First World War, the formation of the 'Ypres Salient', a bulge around Ypres (Ieper) on the Western Front, transformed the peaceful Belgian city into an international battleground (Figure 1). On 4 August 1914, the German invasion of Belgium caused an enormous refugee flow, forcing Belgian civilians to find safety in nearby countries. Despite the determination of Ypres' inhabitants to stay in their city as long as possible, the last brave residents were evacuated by the Friends' Ambulance Unit (FAU) on 9 May 1915.¹ With the last residents leaving the city, the city was heavily bombed and 'The Death of Ypres'² was announced, illustrating a farewell to the rich history of the medieval metropolis.³ Plans were made to rebuild the city before its fate was sealed and soon after the Armistice between the German Empire and the Allied Powers was signed on 11 November 1918, Ypres' pioneers came back to their beloved home, living in barracks and houses self-constructed out of scattered war waste.

Figure 1. Ypres is a city in Westhoek, in the southwest of the Belgian province of West Flanders, with about 35,000 inhabitants (as recorded in 2024)⁴ (Source: Marie Nevejan, based on data from Google Earth, 2024)



The international war scene (claiming almost 600,000 victims from more than 100 different nationalities)⁵ uplifted the collective war memory of the West Flemish city to an intercultural debate. The city's new post-war identity was internationally claimed as a symbol of war atrocities caused by 'the enemy'

and the victory of the 'heroes'. This was reflected in the complicated reconstruction process and the many international, national and regional discussions that preceded the redesign of the city with many memorials, cemeteries and monuments as part of it.

This article introduces the role and meaning of spatial memory in picking up the thread of everyday life after a devastating disaster to enable the 'restoration of broken journeys'⁶ to both find what was lost and repair what was destroyed during the war, while new experiences are also added.

The concept of spatial memory

The notion of spatial memory as approached within this research can be found at the intersection of memory studies and architectural and urban planning studies. Although the field of memory studies, expressively expanded since the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs defined the concept of 'collective memory'⁷ in the 1980s, is mainly embedded in the humanities, social sciences and cultural history; the architectural perception of spatial memory has always been present.⁸ Halbwachs's statement that the past is reconstructed based on the collective framework from the present has been reflected spatially by scholars such as Kevin Lynch,⁹ Aldo Rossi¹⁰ and Christine Boyer,¹¹ reading the city as a 'palimpsest', as introduced by Corboz in 1983.¹² As space is constructed by a particular group during a specific period with the group's memories closely linked to the prevailing zeitgeist, their perception of history is formed by the then-driving collective memory. These 'collectively shared representations of the past'¹³ influence spatial memory. The Italian architect Aldo Rossi embedded Halbwachs's concept of collective memory in his book *L'architettura della città* (1966), theorising the temporal depth of cities.¹⁴ In this way, Rossi extends Halbwachs's idea by addressing the city as the site of the collective memory: the landscape and architecture, including statues, memorial sites and buildings, form the physical expressions of memory¹⁵ that have been studied as expressions of cultural memory, being 'mnemonic landscapes' and 'cityscapes'.¹⁶ However, the spatial memory of a city held by its residents, both individually and collectively, is shaped by the physical and static characteristics of the built environment and their daily trajectories to which experiences are linked within the urban surroundings, such as going to church or meeting at a café. Hence, it is important to consider these in the reconstruction processes.

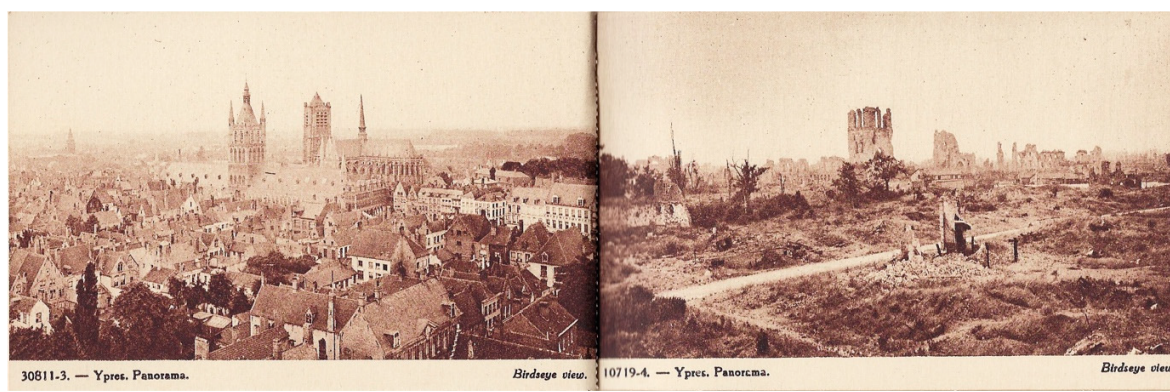
The reconstruction of Ypres is studied within this dual conceptual framework as places in the city, both those with official heritage value and the everyday places. Together, they shape the collective and individual memories that were given a new indelible layer after the war.

Urban planning proposals for the reconstruction of Ypres after the devastating war

To analyse the reconstruction of Ypres (Figure 2), it is crucial to understand the prevailing zeitgeist in the aftermath of the First World War, which considers the framework of the multiple stakeholders. The development of a unified vision has been hampered by the existence of multiple decision-making bodies at different administrative levels, resulting in an increased administrative burden.¹⁷

The future of the city was discussed in international conferences that can be summarised in four proposals, each offering a different spatial translation of past representation.¹⁸ In the first proposal, Winston Churchill, who was appointed as Secretary of State for Air and War shortly after the end of the war, took 'commemoration' as a starting point. Ypres was meant to be a symbol of pride that would dispel the immeasurable sadness of loss. Referring to the perseverance of the Allied forces, Churchill expressed his desire to preserve Ypres as an eternal pilgrimage destination in 1919. 'I should like us to acquire the whole of the ruins of Ypres. A more sacred place for the British race does not exist in the world,' he declared dramatically,¹⁹ while totally neglecting the people of Ypres. However, one year earlier, in 1918, the Belgian government had already enacted a law stating that the residents had the right to rebuild their homes.²⁰ The idea of preserving the entire city as a ruin was rejected and although an alternative proposal for a *zone de silence* (quiet zone) was discussed at length, this proposal was dismissed too.²¹

Figure 2. Aerial view of the city in 1911 (left) and after its destruction in 1919 (right) (Source: author's postcard collection No.1, by Photo Antony d'Ypres)



The second proposal was represented by the then so-called 'modernists' who wanted to use the *tabula rasa*²² to experiment with modern planning theories.²³ Following the Town Planning Conference in London (1915), a Belgian town planning committee was established, studying and promoting the British garden city model and the French-influenced '*hygiène urbaine*'.²⁴ Joris Helleputte, Minister of Agriculture and Public Services and Professor of Architecture, sent his former pupil, Raphaël Verwilghen, as a delegate to the committee in England. Inspired by the conference in London, a decree law regarding 'the reconstruction of the destroyed Belgian municipalities' was announced on 25 August 1915, which obliged the municipalities to design a city masterplan that would serve as a basis for granting building permits.

However, the ideas of modernist architects, including a proposal by the Belgian architect Huib Hoste to rebuild Ypres as a modern industrial city, whether or not with the preservation of some iconic ruins as a memorial site in the centre, never received a sympathetic hearing, which resulted in a reduction of the modernist ideas to a couple of garden cities outside the city centre.²⁵ The proposals highlighted the functional value of the city as a working and living place while ignoring the deep wish of the residents to rebuild the homes to which their narratives, lives and memories were attached.

The third proposal gathered the defenders of an identical reconstruction, supported by the residents, local government (with René Colaert as Mayor) and city architect Jules Coomans. The latter had already completed detailed notes on the reconstruction of the city in April 1915.²⁶ Although a specialised committee questioned the financial investment in the reconstruction of the monuments and discussed whether priority should be given to the city's industrial revival and provision of workers' housing,²⁷ the mayor stood firm and in 1916 supported his position to rebuild Ypres identically in an emotional speech at the *Exposition de la cité reconstituée* in Paris.²⁸ The decision to rebuild à l'*identique* resulted in industrial stagnation after the First World War.²⁹

Although accepted and, according to official reports, carried out as such, the idea of an identical reconstruction should be taken with a grain of salt. Rather, the actual reconstruction is an almost identical reconstruction of the pre-war spatial configuration, reusing the street pattern, albeit slightly modified, and embellishing the architectural typologies to remember Ypres as a *ville pittoresque*, together with some adaptations in the interior organisation of the rebuilt houses. It is therefore better to speak of a fourth proposal. Guided by the insistent plea of Jules Coomans and encouraged by the upper-middle classes and local government, a historicising reconstruction architecture took the lead, upholding the memory of Ypres' prosperous Middle Ages.

The actual reconstruction: glorifying the past as *ville pittoresque*

The rupture with the past was healed in a nostalgic reflex as a yearning for a familiar living environment in a wounded society. In this way, Ypres was rebuilt upholding the image of a historical, region-specific town, being a certain beautification of the past.

The regionalist influences, which were strongly present in Belgium on the eve of the First World War, left their mark on the reconstruction. Referring to the regional building tradition with local materials and local construction methods, regionalism carried at first no political or ideological connotation.³⁰ However, during the interwar period, a nationalistic connotation discredited the original meaning, turning imagination into glorification. This political shadow abolished the use of the term until it reappeared in the 1980s, albeit with the adjective 'critical' prefixed. This so-called '*vieux-neuf*' (lit., old–new) approach had long been criticised: the reconstruction was perceived as a missed opportunity and remained silent until, in 1985, the reference work *Resurgam*³¹ charted the qualities of the reconstruction with an unbiased view. Eventually, the return to the idealised late-medieval Ypres brought unity to the city's design,³² and up until today, the region of Westhoek is strongly coherent with a unique identity.

In Ypres, except for the widening of some streets, whether to emphasise views on the main monuments or to improve traffic flows, the street pattern remained considerably faithful to the pre-war spatial configuration. Furthermore, logistical and financial chaos was blocking innovative urban planning proposals: a Belgian law to restore damaged belongings to their original state³³ established individual property rights and prevented innovative urban planning since a coherent proposal across multiple plots required complex expropriation procedures,³⁴ which would cause further delays. Although the pre-war spatial configuration was reused in the reconstruction, the architectural typologies of the early twentieth century were not: former classicist façades were replaced by neo-gothic façades with characteristic yellow bricks and stepped gables referring to the glorious Middle Ages (Figure 3). This neo-gothic approach was strongly encouraged by René Colaert, the then mayor of Ypres and a member of the delegation of den Bond der Ypersche Clubs (the association of Ypres' Clubs), and city architect Jules Coomans, who was trained in the neo-gothic style idiosyncrasies of the Saint Lucas tradition.

Figure 3. The yellow bricks and stepped gables characterise the historical city centre, Vandepereboomplein, Ypres, July 2023



The influence of Jules Coomans, who was involved in the reconstruction process up to the scale of the street furniture, cannot be underestimated. Emphasising monuments with skilful perspective views and preserving the irregularity that characterised medieval cities, Coomans strived for a revaluation of the glorious past:

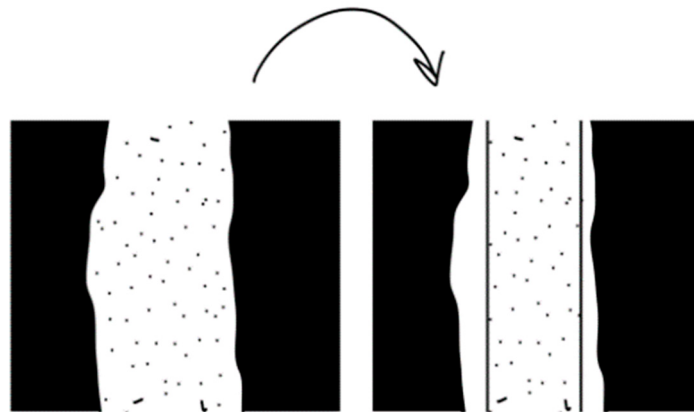
If it is essential to revive, in their primitive splendour, using the materials scattered on the ground, our ancient monuments which characterise the most beautiful period of our glorious past, it is no less necessary to concern ourselves with the same interest in our private architecture. Our ancient dwellings form, in fact, around our large public buildings a decor that our ancestors created with such taste and which all our efforts must strive to maintain.

Let us reform the chain that connects us to the past and, remembering that our architecture is the synthesis of our local history we would like to reread it both in our old houses from the Middle Ages and our constructions from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The elevation façades we have designed can be adapted to the variants of the plans annexed to this note. It seemed sufficient to us to determine the exterior perimeter, forming the front-to-street alignment, without indicating, for each of the buildings, the interior distribution; this can, however, vary according to the particular convenience of the buyers.³⁵

Residents thus had free rein in the design of their homes, since the cooperation of an architect for works requiring a building permit had only been compulsory in Belgium since 1939.³⁶ Coomans emphasised the importance of preserving the irregular building lines (Figure 4), recognising and valuing them as such:

According to the system implemented in most of our ancient cities, the streets are traced without any search for apparent regularity; even the parallels between the axis and the line closed by the facade of the buildings are rarely maintained. In plan, the raised edges of the sidewalks, of modern construction, correct this irregularity for the part of the road reserved for rolling and facilitating the construction, use and maintenance of the pavement. While considering the needs of the building, hygiene rules and the comfort of the residents, the roads in the regulation always show an originality combined with a picturesque and artistic appearance.³⁷

Figure 4. Even the irregularities of the road, adapted by the pavement but with non-parallel façades, were to be preserved in the reconstruction



Ypres' 'identical' reconstruction: a decision of the people?

The question arises as to what degree of collectivity the image of the past has been created since mainly the elite classes persisted in this regionalist reconstruction. Both the modern urban planning proposals and the beautification of the past glory aim at a utopia of an idealised society. They are both forms of imagination, albeit each with a different interpretation. At first, the decision to rebuild the city as it was before its destruction seems to be a truly bottom-up wish, as claimed by the residents. The Westhoek region was completely razed; some residents could only recognise their village by a sign in the vast muddied landscape. All were confronted daily with the consequences of the war, from the invisible threat of unexploded ammunition to frustrations with the administrative burden that delayed reconstruction, while longing for a familiar living environment. Therefore, returning to a familiar surrounding seems natural in the fragmented post-war chaos. With everything familiar taken away, there was no scope for experimentation as the community yearned for the ordinary routine of daily life. Reclaiming the city, as an expression of their identity, provided a stable foundation for the revitalisation of society. This was supported by the local government rather than by an establishment of higher government. On 20 March

1920, a petition³⁸ addressed to the king of Belgium, issued by a delegation of den Bond der Ypersche Clubs, written 'in the name of all classes of the population', states:

We want the city to remain as it has been since its existence, with the street pattern and appearance of the time. We will respect the ruins of our great pompous buildings; our grandchildren will make the necessary decisions about them later. But in the meantime, we want to rebuild our residential cities where they stood, where our parents and we were born, where we grew up and where we have known love and loss of life. Ypres is the Fatherland of all the 'Yperlingen', just as Belgium is the Fatherland of all of us. It is up to no stranger to drive out the former inhabitants on the pretext of turning the city into something artistic. The sense of beauty may be pursued, but never when it must be done at the cost of the ruin and exile of thousands of domestic families. Therefore, we ask that the designs that intend the destruction of 'what is so close to our hearts' should be rejected. It is to Ypres as it always was, neat, quiet and artful, that we want to return and not to a city unknown to us.³⁹

This statement suggests that the residents themselves were the greatest supporters of an identical reconstruction; they wanted to go back to what existed before with the full intention to 'restore' their 'broken journeys'. The question arises whether this petition was indeed written 'in the name of all classes of the population' since the delegation consisted of white men from the upper-middle classes. As the indemnities from the government were mainly directed at private property, workers and peasants who had been tenants were not involved. The contribution of these silent voices, such as the working classes and women, is barely included in the narrative of the reconstruction today.

War memory as a new protagonist

The city, cherished as a nostalgic souvenir, became the storyteller of past glory. The war memory claimed its space as a new protagonist translated into 'spaces for memory', such as memorials, cemeteries and monuments, which nestled themselves into the pre-war urban fabric. Ypres struggled with this unsolicited, newly assigned function of memory landscape since different opinions about what to remember caused many discussions: returning residents and visitors, such as former soldiers, widows or war tourists, had divergent expectations of coping with 'memory'. On the one hand, returning residents, who remembered Ypres as a vibrant city, wanted to forget the destruction of both their material and social living environment. For them, the war was not over since they were confronted with the consequences of it daily. The residents could not envisage any mental or physical space to remember the past with the symbolic load of commemoration. On the other hand, widows and veterans, who had a familiar environment back home, aspired to connect a personal past to a larger macro-historical narrative.⁴⁰ Visiting the city in search of meaning and mourning, the appearance of the reviving city felt disrespectful to everyone who died there. How can it be justified to celebrate life in a former city of death?

Since what is remembered depends on who remembers, the spatial translation of how to remember requires a multi-layered approach where spaces for memory intertwine with memories of places linked to experiences from pre-war, war and post-war times to please all actors. This stratification of memory is a complex phenomenon to translate into the urban fabric that complicates and consequently delays urban reconstruction processes.

In the immediate post-war years, the intangible loss was turned into pride by creating spaces for memory that materialised the moral duty to show gratitude for the war deaths. The unveiling of a monument paid the debt and was often the local event of the year. As a sacral duty, it was expected to transcend political connotation, although all too often it brought conflicts and private interests to the surface. For example, on 27 June 1926, the unveiling of the monument commemorating Ypres's war victims (this is one of the only memorials for civilian victims), civilians and soldiers went down in history as 'the Ypres fury'.⁴¹ Riots between members of the Flemish Old Warriors' Union (Vlaamse Oud-Strijders – VOS) on the one hand and the security forces on the other disrupted the ceremony. The fierce actions of the security forces caused panic and several people were injured in the chaos, as a regional newspaper described:

And the gendarmes drove their horses deeper and deeper into the crowd; women, children, elderly people, no one was spared. And while the gendarmerie trampled the Flemish Old

Warriors and the defenceless people under the hooves of their horses, people sang in [the] choir to commemorate, in front of the armoured official gentlemen: 'It is Peace, it is Peace.'⁴²

Since then, the monument has been called 'the Ypres fury', prompted by the Flemish press, which denounced the brutal action of the security services.⁴³ This example demonstrates that the agency of built heritage is not only determined by the physical appearance; it was also the memorial ceremony rather than the monument itself that left its mark on the perception of the monument.

Such commemorative monuments could be read as official heritage, being part of the 'commemorative infrastructure of modern society'.⁴⁴ They act as figurants of the urban fabric and are put in the spotlight on specific memorial days.⁴⁵ The meaning of spaces for memory is often related to one dominant narrative that Laurajane Smith describes as an 'authorised heritage discourse' (AHD), a hegemonic discourse that emphasises the nationalising values of material disciplinary debates without acknowledging the emotional and cultural meaning and value of heritage.⁴⁶ Smith transcends the AHD, pleading for incorporation of 'ideas about memory and remembering into definitions of heritage', so that 'a more nuanced understanding of the emotional quality and power of the cultural process of heritage merges'.⁴⁷ Along with 'official heritage', this article describes spaces for memory, referring to the purely physical aspects of (commemorative) heritage without acknowledging societal influence, the 'everyday heritage', as places to which daily memories are attached deserve an equally, if not more emphatic analysis in urban reconstruction processes. However, it seems that everyday heritage is often unjustly considered secondary in urban reconstruction processes after disasters such as a war.

Everyday heritage as driver for recovery

Recent studies by the National Trust have scientifically proven that people feel strongly connected with places. They examined the responses of the brain to analyse the meaning of places to people and it appears that meaningful places generate a significant response in the areas of the brain most commonly associated with emotions.⁴⁸ In architectural studies, such meaningful and everyday places, described as 'everyday heritage',⁴⁹ 'small-scale heritage',⁵⁰ 'commonplace heritage',⁵¹ 'mundane heritage'⁵² and 'community heritage' claim architectural space as a lived space where mundane activities such as walking, eating and going to work play an important role in the creation of spatiality.⁵³ The acknowledgement of this architectural experience might be essential in urban reconstruction processes since residents who face a post-war world want to reclaim the 'ordinary' or the 'normal'.⁵⁴ As the previous quotation from the petition of den Bond der Ypersche Clubs demonstrates, places are remembered not only through physical characteristics, but also through the activities taking place in that setting, whereby the urban unbuilt space equally contributes to the preservation of this memory as the built space.⁵⁵

Contrary to conservation-led approaches, the spaces for memory and everyday heritage can be changed or replaced through the agency of the people and their societal needs. Mosler states that 'acknowledging the everyday practices of the residents and the relationship between the social interaction of place and the heritage assets plays a key role in the place-making process'.⁵⁶ When several people feel connected to the same place, this simulates the sense of belonging to a community⁵⁷ since they share a common experience of everyday routine within a specific area.⁵⁸ For example, after the war, the returning residents of Ypres set up their market in the ruins of the Cloth Hall, in this way resuming their former routines (Figure 5). While the physical place had been destroyed, the residents reappropriated the place through the memory of their pre-war actions in the ruined heritage, which contributed to the feeling of place attachment. Everyday heritage as part of daily customs has the resilience to re-establish itself in a distorted context and might, in this way, be blessed with the potential to act as a driver in reconstruction processes.

Figure 5. The residents reorganise the market in between the ruins, c.1930 (Source: Westhoek Verbeeldt, private collection) ⁵⁹



However, the dichotomy between spaces for memory and memories of places does not intend to illustrate a black-and-white approach, since spaces for memory also have an everyday life. In Ypres, the war memory is part of the city's identity and its commemoration became part of the daily experience. At 8 p.m. daily, for instance, the Last Post⁶⁰ is played under the Menin Gate as a reminder of the Great War. Traffic that usually passes under the gate is stopped until the Last Post is played. Listening to the Last Post is a unique and often poignant moment for the tourists, whereas it is a day-to-day reality for the residents. This exemplifies the doubt on the dichotomy between the everyday and the not-everyday that architectural and urban historian Andrew Shanken reveals in his book, *The Everyday Life of Memorials*. Seeing 'memorials as part of a lived experience in the context of all its complicated forms and spaces'⁶¹ shifts the binary reading of the memory landscape to a circular one, which is necessary for an in-depth understanding of how spaces for memory and memories of places affect space, as the spatial experience they generate depends on both their daily use and the attention they receive on official days of commemoration.

Conclusion

The perception of memory and its translation in the urban fabric develops and changes over time, depending on the interplay between remembering and forgetting. The spatial translation of the stratification of memory, affected by spaces for memory and memories of places, complicates and delays the reconstruction processes after a disaster such as a war. When the agency of everyday heritage is ignored in the reconstruction process, a place might become alienated and the sense of belonging disappears. The memories attached to this place become distorted, which might result in destruction that threatens to be more disastrous than the war itself.⁶² Therefore, preserving these memories through a conscious handling of the spatial configuration plays a vital role in the recovery process. It can be stated that the reconstruction of Ypres by reusing the pre-war spatial configuration and harking back to a glorious past through the architectural language that preserved and enhanced the feeling of place attachment, restored the broken journeys and contributed positively to the recovery of the residents.

Notes

- 1 The Friends' Ambulance Unit was established by members of the British Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). Trogh, 'Impact of the First World War'.
- 2 Gezelle, *De dood van Yper*; Trogh, 'Impact of the First World War', 31.
- 3 In the twelfth century, the cloth industry brought Ypres to prominence and the city played an important role in international trade, along with Ghent and Bruges. As a result of this success, the Cloth Hall of Ypres, one of the largest non-religious gothic buildings in Europe, was built in the thirteenth century.
- 4 leper in Cijfers, 'Demografie – leper'.
- 5 This number has recently been adjusted by The List of Names, a scientific count of all fatalities in Belgium during the Great War conducted by the In Flanders Fields Museum (IFFM) in Ypres. The project started in 2011 and resulted in a count of almost 600,000 victims from 116 different nationalities, a number that includes 25,923 Belgian civilian fatalities, five times higher than the long-assumed 5,600 deaths. The numbers indicated were collected in January 2024 but the count is still ongoing. The List of Names was part of the GONE WEST remembrance program 2014–18 whose aim was to share and collect information with and from its users: <https://namenlijst.org/publicsearch/#/>.
- 6 The term 'broken journeys' can be found in Jackson, *Politics of Storytelling*. The concept of 'Restoring Broken Journeys' was coined by Gisèle Gantois in 2017 with the publication in *Pamflet Expo* (KU Leuven) while referring to Jackson. It is also the name of the central theme in her research project *Architecture and Development of Community Heritage – Strategies for Future Spaces* to be understood as the re-establishment of a previous (social) right, practice, or situation, which was distorted while looking at the future as 'Journeys' presuppose a process of change and development.
- 7 Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.
- 8 The link between memory and space has been studied in works such as Ruskin's *Seven Lamps*, van Schaik's *Spatial Intelligence* and Yates's *Art of Memory*, which expand on historical techniques of memorising places and images.
- 9 Lynch, *Image of the City*.
- 10 Rossi, *De architectuur*.
- 11 Boyer, *City of Collective Memory*.
- 12 The word 'palimpsest' derives from the Greek *palímpsēstos*, describing the process of scraping and washing off the original text (*psáō*, 'scrape') to rewrite on the same material (*pálin*, 'again'). Corboz introduced the metaphor of land as 'palimpsest', emphasising its uniqueness and recyclability to meet contemporary needs. Corboz, 'Land as palimpsest'.
- 13 Kansteiner, 'Finding meaning', 181.
- 14 Rossi, *De architectuur*; Malaud, 'From modern utopia', 17.
- 15 Rossi, *De architectuur*, 156; referring to '*la mémoire collective*', see Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.
- 16 Kansteiner, 'Finding meaning', 190.
- 17 The population's frustration often refers to the administrative mess that delayed reconstruction. Their voice can be found in historic newspapers such as *Het Ypersche* (1920–5), representing 'the association of the afflicted'.
- 18 Conferences such as the conference in Den Haag (the Netherlands, 1914), the Town Planning Conference organised by the International Garden Cities and Town Planning Association in London (UK, February 1915), the founding of the Comité Néerland-Belge d'Art Civique (the Netherlands, 1915) or the *Exposition de la cité reconstituée* (Exhibition of the Reconstructed City) (France, July 1916), in parallel with the publication of numerous books on architectural styles; for example, Ronse and Raison, *Fermes-types*. An overview of leading secondary sources: Smets et al., *Resurgam*; Baert et al., *leper*; Cornilly, De Caigny and Dendooven, *Bouwen aan wederopbouw*; Verpoest et al., *Revival after the Great War*; Schmitz et al., *Omgaan met de wederopbouwarchitectuur*; Centrum Vlaamse Architectuurarchieven, *Het Gekwetste Gewest*; Chielens et al., *Antony D'Ypres*; Catry, 'De wederopbouw van leper'; Baillieul, 'Problematiek Omtrent de Wederopbouw'.
- 19 Proposal from Winston Churchill during a meeting of the Imperial War Graves Commission on 21 January 1919. Dendooven, 'This is holy ground', 99.
- 20 The law on the compensation for war damage was published in the Belgian official journal (23 October 1918). Baillieul, 'Recht op herstel?', 24–5.
- 21 At a conference on 14 July 1919, the Battle Exploit Memorials Committee and representatives of the Belgian government decided to preserve the ruins of the Cloth Hall and the Saint Martin's Church as a *zone de silence*. After protest from the local government, the project of the *zone de silence* was on hold until April 1921 when the Menin Gate, a war memorial dedicated to the missing British and Commonwealth soldiers who sacrificed

- their lives in the Ypres Salient, was agreed on with the British government. Dendooven, 'Verwoest Gewest leper', 12–15.
- 22 *Tabula rasa* (clean slate) originated as an Ancient Greek philosophical concept, first introduced by Aristotle. The term etymologically refers to a Roman *tabula*, a wax tablet cleaned (*rasa*) by heating and smoothing the wax. The concept of *tabula rasa* was one of the key principles of modern planning theories, referring to urban renewal and expansion based on the idea of a clean slate. Malaud, 'From modern utopia', 17.
- 23 In this sense, we can say that these international debates on *tabula rasa* predate the international discussions of the 1920s in which Le Corbusier was the leading figure, which found its most radical expression in his proposal for the Plan Voisin for Paris in 1925. According to Le Corbusier, historic cities became increasingly difficult to live in because they did not adapt to the Industrial Revolution, with all the artefacts that had invaded the urban space since then. Particularly in the 1920s, car traffic grew exponentially while the width of the streets was not adapted to it. See Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme*. During the First World War, the main argument for building Ypres on a rational new grid instead of following the original historical footprint was inspired by this same argument. This idea of constructing a new ideal city can be placed in the tradition of the famous *Utopia* by Thomas More (1516). Thinkers (utopists), such as Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, developed non-situated imaginary cities where industry and people would live in a new harmony at the beginning of the nineteenth century.
- 24 Dendooven, 'Het terrein effenen', 81.
- 25 The urban proposal for the modernist garden city *Zaalhofwijk* was nullified after fierce discussions. However, three garden cities were realised (the garden city *NMBS* [National Company of the Belgian Railways], *Kalfvaart* and the *Ligywijk*), albeit on the outskirts of Ypres where no complex expropriation procedures were required. Dendooven, 'Verwoest Gewest leper', 12.
- 26 A draft of the 'Note sur la voirie urbaine' (17.04.1915) is preserved in the City Archive of Ypres, Jules Coomans, F03_161. The notes were published in Boulogne-sur-Mer in 1916.
- 27 Smets et al., *Resurgam*, 114.
- 28 Smets et al., *Resurgam*, 113; Gaultier and Coomans, 'Cité reconstituée', 512–16.
- 29 D'Hiet, 'De industrieterreinen te'.
- 30 Viérin, *Plaats*.
- 31 Smets et al., *Resurgam*.
- 32 Liefvooghe, 'Beauté de l'ensemble'.
- 33 Baillieul, 'Recht op herstel?'.
- 34 Dendooven, 'Het terrein effenen', 86.
- 35 The original text is handwritten in French, taken from the City Archives of Ypres, Coomans, F03_00161(2), p. 11. Note complémentaire à notre rapport du 5 novembre 1915, translated into English by the author:
- S'il est essentiel de faire revivre, dans leur splendeur primitive, en utilisant les matériaux épars sur le sol, nos anciens monuments qui caractérisent la plus belle période de notre glorieux passé, il est non moins nécessaire de nous préoccuper avec le même intérêt de notre architecture privée. Nos anciennes habitations forment, en effet, autour de nos grands édifices publics un décor que nos ancêtres ont réalisé avec tant de goût et au maintien duquel doivent tendre tous nos efforts. Reformons la chaîne qui nous relie au passé et, nous rappelant que notre architecture est la synthèse de notre histoire locale, nous aimerons à la relire tant dans nos vieilles maisons du moyen-âge que dans nos constructions des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles. Les façades en élévation que nous avons conçues peuvent s'adopter aux variantes des plans annexés à la présente note. Il nous a paru suffisant de déterminer le pourtour extérieur, formant l'alignement front à rue, sans indiquer, pour chacun des immeubles la distribution intérieure; celle-ci pouvant, du reste, varier suivant les convenances particulières des acquéreurs.
- 36 'Wet Op de Bescherming van Den Titel En van Het Beroep van Architect (Law on the Protection of the Title and Profession of Architect)', Pub. L. No. 1939022050, 20-02-1939 1942 (1939).
- 37 The original text is written in French, taken from City Archive Ypres, Coomans, F03_00161, p. 9. 'Note sur la voirie urbaine en réponse à la dépêche de Monsieur le Ministre de l'Agriculture et des Travaux Publics en date du 12 mars 1915', translated into English by the author:
- Suivant le système réalisé dans la plupart de nos villes anciennes, les rues y sont tracées sans aucune recherche de régularité apparente; même le parallélisme entre l'axe et la ligne fermée par le parement des immeubles est rarement maintenu. En plan, les bordures relevées des trottoirs, de construction moderne, redressent cette irrégularité pour la partie des routes réservée au roulage et facilitent la construction, l'usage et l'entretien du pavage. Tout en tenant compte des besoins de la bâtisse, des règles de l'hygiène, du confort de l'habitant, la voirie accuse toujours dans l'ordonnance une originalité alliée à une allure pittoresque et artistique.

38 The petition came partly as an expression of great dissatisfaction with the slow progress and administrative mess of the reconstruction. The reconstruction plan, designed by the city architect Coomans, had already been approved in 1916 but appeared to be missing from the ministry at the end of 1919. In February 1920, newspapers reported that the plans had been stolen. One month later, the letter was sent to the king and the request bore fruit: the principal approval for the reconstruction plan followed three days later. However, the official approval was delayed until March 1921. Dendooven, 'Het terrein effenen', 81.

39 The original quote is written in old Flemish and translated into English by the author:

Wij willen dat onze stad blijve zoals zij sedert haar bestaan geweest is, met hare straten en haar uiterlijk van eertijds. De puinhoopen onzer groote praalgebouwen zullen wij eerbiedigen, want onze kleinkinderen zullen daaromtrent, in latere tijden, die noodige beslissingen te nemen hebben. Maar ondertusschen willen wij onze woonsteden heropbouwen daar waar zij stonden, waar onze ouders en wij zelf geboren werden, waar wij groot geworden zijn en waar wij de genoegens ende smarten des levens gekend hebben. Yper is 't Vaderland der Yperlingen zoowel als België ons aller Vaderland is. Het staat aan geen vreemdeling de oude bewoners er uit te verjagen onder voorwendsel er iets kunstigs van te maken. Het schoonheidsgevoel mag wel nageleefd worden maar nooit wanneer het moet geschieden ten koste van den ondergang en de ballingschap van duizende huisgezinnen! Daarom vergen wij dat de ontwerpen die de vernieling bedoelen van 't geen ons zoo nauw ter harte ligt, zouden verworpen worden. 't Is in dat Yper zoals het steeds was, net, stil en kunstig, dat wij willen terugkeeren en niet in eene voor ons onkenlijke stad.

Butaye, 'Tekst van het aanzoekschrift', 2.

40 Meire, 'De tijd der traagheid', 291.

41 Meire, 'De tijd der traagheid', 294–5.

42 Following reports from the regional newspaper *De Poperinghenaar*, the commotion arose because the Flemish flag had not been raised at the town hall. The newspaper describes it in old Flemish (translation into English by the author): 'En de gendarmen dreven hun paarden steeds dieper in de menschenmassa; vrouwen, kinders, ouderlingen, niemand werd gewicht. En terwijl de rijkswacht de Vl. Oud-Strijders, het weerlooze volk onder de hoeven hunner peerden vertrappelde, zong men in koor voor het gedenkmaal, vóór de gepanacheerde officieele heeren': 't is Vrede. *De Poperinghenaar*, 4 July 1926, 1. Accessed 13 May 2024. <https://historischekranten.be/issue/DPO/1926-07-04/edition/null/page/1>. The Flemish press claimed that this event was covered up by the French-speaking and national press; *De Poperinghenaar*, 11 July 1926, 1. Accessed 13 May 2024. <https://historischekranten.be/issue/DPO/1926-07-11/edition/null/page/1>. The same newspaper refers to an article from the Roman Catholic newspaper *de Tijd* (not to confuse with the contemporary Flemish financial-economic newspaper): 'Ligt in dat voorzichtig doodzwijgen van die schandalige incidenten niet reeds een openlijke bekentenis van de ongehoorde vandalenstreek te Yperen uitgehaald?' [Is this careful silence about these scandalous incidents not an open confession of the unprecedented vandalism in Yperen?]

43 Meire, *De stilte van de Salient*.

44 Shanken, *Everyday Life*, Introduction.

45 Shanken, *Everyday Life*, Introduction.

46 Smith and Waterton, *Constrained by Commonsense*.

47 Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 303.

48 Gantois, 'Built heritage', 1; The National Trust, 'Why places matter'.

49 Mosler, 'Everyday heritage concept', 778.

50 Atkinson, 'Kitsch geographies'.

51 Mosler, 'Everyday heritage concept'.

52 Pendlebury, *Conservation in the Age of Consensus*.

53 Lefebvre, *Production of Space*; Mosler, 'Everyday heritage concept'.

54 Proctor, 'Reclaiming the ordinary'.

55 Viérin, *Plaats*.

56 Mosler, 'Everyday heritage concept', 790.

57 Gantois, 'Built heritage'.

58 Mosler, 'Everyday heritage concept', 782.

59 Westhoek Verbeeldt, 'Ieper: Snoepkraam Ameel-Descamps' [Ypres: Candy Stand Ameel-Descamps] HEU008508778, c.1930, private collection. Accessed 15 May 2024. <https://westhoekverbeeldt.be/ontdek/detail/f04f171a-bbc5-11e3-aafa-5b1478b466a8/media/2e6c1fff-23f5-5b06-e757-9ed4f2fe55d7?mode=detail&view=horizontal&q=HEU008508778&rows=1&page=1>

- ⁶⁰ The 'Last Post' is played by buglers as a tribute to the fallen soldiers of the Great War every evening at 8 p.m. under the arches of the Menin Gate in Ypres.
- ⁶¹ Shanken, *Everyday Life of Memorials*, 39.
- ⁶² Hoteit, 'War against architecture'.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

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