TEMPORARILY IN STOCK

THE OEUVRE OF SALVAGE ARCHITECT MARCEL RAYMAEKERS AS A MIRROR OF DEMOLITION AND DISPOSAL PRACTICES IN POST-WAR BELGIUM

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Since the Second World War the construction sector has been increasingly characterized by the sustained availability of cheap, standardized building materials, industrially produced from raw materials extracted on an ever-larger scale.[1] Given the enormous environmental impact and social harm associated with this extractivist model, it is increasingly being called into question.[2] An alternative to this high consumption of raw materials and energy is the reuse of materials and components.[3] However, the 'Urban Mine' cannot be mined like a traditional mine. It consists of a wide variety of materials with diverse technical properties, which become available in an unpredictable and scattered way and in small quantities.[4] An architectural practice that focuses on the extensive reuse of elements will inevitably be characterized by a different notion of 'availability' than is common in the contemporary construction sector.

To better understand how such a practice functions

▲ 1. Fighter jet cockpit cupolas serve as skylights in the Kelchtermans House. The roof is clad with reclaimed roof tiles. (Photo Anja Hellebaut and Anthony De Meyere)

2. The projecting entrance to Huis Witters, clad with copper sheeting recovered from dismantled ships (Photo Jan Mees)

and the parameters that influence it, we examine a little-known case study in this article. The Belgian outsider architect Marcel Raymaekers (b. 1933) focused on salvaged (and other non-standardized) building elements as the starting point for his design practice and was responsible for the construction of dozens of new houses and a multitude of renovations and interior projects between 1962 and 2014, which were carried out almost exclusively with reclaimed elements. Raymaekers is not the only salvage architect in Belgium, but he is by far the most expressive.[5]

This article builds on an oral history research project by Rotor vzw/asbl and Ghent University, led by the authors.[6] Between March 2022 and January 2023, 45 interviews were conducted with Marcel Raymaekers himself, his clients, present and former employees, and family members. Photographs, plans and newspaper articles were collected from their private archives wherever possible.[7] In addition, Anja Hellebaut and Anthony De Meyere produced photographic reports on 25 projects. The information gathered through these channels has already been incorporated into a book that includes a biography and an overview of Raymaekers' oeuvre.[8] In the book, we took a closer look at his background and motivation, his ad hoc design and construction methods, and the role that employees played in his practice. However, these topics are beyond the scope of this article. In this piece we provide a chronological overview of the different types of materials and components Raymaekers worked, the actors who made his practice possible, the socio-economic context in which he operated, and the influence of all these parameters on his architecture.

But we begin by discussing a few points that are important for understanding Raymaekers' personality and practice. In the early 1950s, he settled in Belgian Limburg after dropping out of the Sint-Lucas architecture school in Brussels, in his own words out of boredom.[9] The real starting point of his practice did not come until 1962, after he discovered the principles of assemblage art during an art course at the Teacher Training College in Hasselt. Working with existing components and their specific characteristics generated more creativity in Raymaekers than starting from a blank sheet and using industrially produced materials with their generic characteristics.[10] In the process, he also developed a narrative of architectural-cultural impoverishment.[11] For Raymaekers, living had nothing to do with radical functionality, but was guided by sensory experiences that existing materials could evoke much better than their new equivalents. Reclaimed materials were therefore both a vehicle of creativity and an instrument of countercultural resistance to the aesthetics of post-war industrialized material and housing production.[12] In order to develop a practice based on this premise, Raymaekers found himself obliged to become a material collector and dealer in addition to being an architect. In 1972, he founded Queen of the South (QotS), his headquarters and a two-hectare salvage stock yard located between Genk and Hasselt. The roles of material dealer and architect were always closely intertwined. Until QotS went bankrupt in 2014, a design was free of cost with the purchase of a minimum quantity of elements.

SALVAGE YARDS AND INDUSTRIAL WASTE STREAMS

The first material Raymaekers experimented with was reclaimed metal sheeting sourced from shipbreaker Jef De Smedt, who had been operating in Antwerp since the late 1930s.[13] Initially, the sheeting was used for residential front doors or garage doors. But soon it

was being prominently featured as interior wall cladding or facade material (Witters House, fig. 2). Raymaekers also incorporated the steel into eccentric fireplaces, using portholes as windows. Ship timber was another recurring element. He obtained this mainly through Salembien, a private individual who acted as an intermediary between Belgian and Dutch shipbreakers and interested buyers. Ship timber planks reappeared as flooring, wall and ceiling cladding, or in furniture or staircases.

At the same time, Raymaekers worked with river stones known as *maaskeien* or 'Meuse/Maas boulders'. Unearthed during sand and gravel extraction in the riverbed of the Middle Meuse/Maas in Limburg, the boulders were economically worthless and were simply piled up as waste next to the quarries. Raymaekers used them mainly for garden and other external walls. But in the Nijsen House, they served as the anchor point for the entire design: the fireplace and chimney were integrated into a two-storey sculpture that also served as a central structural element (fig. 3).

Raymaekers' modus operandi in the first decade of his career was that of a hunter-gatherer. He was forever driving around the country in search of interesting materials. A typical product of these intensive hunting expeditions were the 23 Lockheed T-33 fighter jet turrets used in the Kelchtermans House (fig. 1). Raymaekers found them in a scrapyard in West Flanders, on the other side of the country. A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, as the Belgian army had only 39 of these jet fighters, which ceased production in 1959.[14] Raymaekers' other finds were in keeping with Belgium's economic development in the 1960s. The residual waste flow of *maaskeien* was a consequence of the increasing sand and gravel extraction along the Maas, linked to the breakthrough of concrete as a versatile building material with applications in residential and infrastructure construction.[15] The scrap metal at Jef De Smedt was available because of a phenomenon that was already emerging in the 1960s and a contributor to the crisis of the 1970s. An overproduction of steel and metal products in Europe in response to rising global competition, resulted in fluctuating prices.[16] Since De Smedt's largest customer was the steel and metal processing industry, he was forced to speculate more and more during the 1960s

3. The Nijsen House. The central, double-height maaskeien sculpture has just been completed. The rest of the house will be built around it (Photo Familie Nijsen)

4. The recovered arches, window frames and porticos in the Moffroid House came from the Anglican Church in Spa (Marcel Raymaekers archive)

by hoarding scrap on his site until he could get a good price for it. These industrial waste streams were an important early source of materials for Raymaekers.

THE DEMOLITION SITES OF MODERNIZATION

Reclaimed building materials were also already present in his projects in the 1960s. Interior and exterior facades were constructed from reclaimed brick, sometimes with white stone accents suggestive of historical brick and sandstone architecture. Floors and roofs were supported by reclaimed oak joists. Roofs were covered with reclaimed tiles. These materials were so widely available at the time that Raymaekers did not need to waste time sourcing them himself. Instead he tasked his clients to negotiate their purchase and transport directly with local demolition contractors. In addition to their pre-war charm, they also had the advantage of often being cheaper than their new equivalents.[17]

Raymaekers himself provided his clients with more unusual elements. Reclaimed oak beams inspired bold design gestures with their enormous dimensions. The floating living space of the Nijsen House was supported by just two beams used as columns. In the Kelchtermans House, they formed the ribs of a pyramid-shaped house. The structure of Queen of the South was formed around a pair of beams used as columns, which were visible over two floors. Other types of wooden beams, such as pitch pine, were also used, but were more commonly processed into planks for staircases, for example. At the end of the 1960s, Raymaekers also started using elements of sculpted natural stone. A first batch of porticos, windows and arches came entirely from the neo-Gothic Anglican church in Spa and were used in QotS and the Moffroid House (figs. 4, 5), among others. A subsequent series of elements came from a mansion on Avenue Brugmann in Brussels, from which Raymaekers used the bluestone plinth, window frames and two bay windows in various projects.

A look at economic trends in the 1960s quickly reveals the origins of this diverse range of materials. Investments in buildings and infrastructure carried out in the name of modernization meant that obsolete buildings were rapidly demolished and replaced.[18] The area of land used for agriculture shrank, while the sec-

5. The Anglican Church in Spa, completed in 1877, demolished in 1966 (Ghent University Library)

tor [as a whole] mechanized and scaled up.[19] Several builders mentioned small, local farms as the source of their bricks and roof tiles.[20] The large oak beams came from ancestral farmsteads. Pitch pine beams came from obsolete production infrastructure, such as factories in the port of Antwerp,[21] or the drying sheds in the Boom region, which were demolished following the collapse of the ceramics industry.[22] The oak beams for QotS came from Fort 1 in Antwerp, which had to make way for the straightening of the Turnhoutsebaan and the construction of the Wijnegem shopping centre as part of major infrastructure works in 1959.[23] Raymaekers also obtained materials from inner-city modernization operations, as evidenced by the mansion on Avenue Brugmann in Brussels.

During the 1960s, Raymaekers began to develop a system. Unlike with ship steel and *maaskeien*, it was not always necessary for him to track down potential sources (in this case demolition sites) himself and be present there. Various intermediaries organized a structured supply of materials by stockpiling them or contacting Raymaekers directly from their yards. In addition to the aforementioned Salembien, Raymaekers was a regular customer of a Yugoslav demolition contractor (name unknown); Scheerlinck, a demolition contractor based in Roosdaal with a large and diverse stock of materials; Spinois, a Brussels-based salvage wholesaler who stored materials dismantled by various Brussels demolition contractors in his Molenbeek yard; and a string of small antique dealers in the Sablon (the Brussels antique district).

In the first decade of his career, Raymaekers drew on three different material flows. *maaskeien* and ship steel were available thanks to industrial extraction and production processes. In addition, the demolition of buildings led to the availability of materials such as bricks, roof tiles, cobblestones and so on, which were still regularly recovered at the time. These materials were traditional and standardized, reclaimed and processed in bulk, and newly produced equivalents were also available. On the other hand, many high-quality, unique building components became available, which were finely crafted and ornamented, such as natural stone bay windows, or for which no new equivalent existed, such as large oak beams.

QUEEN OF THE SOUTH: FOCUS ON A SINGLE MATERIAL STREAM

Raymaekers founded Queen of the South in 1972, one year before the start of the oil crisis that marked the end of the *Trente Glorieuses*.[24] As a result, the socio-economic playing field in which Raymaekers operated started to change. Sky-high inflation led to rising labour costs which, combined with increasing competition from low-wage countries, caused industrial employment in Belgium to fall by a fifth between 1974 and 1979. This marked the definitive transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economy.[25] One of the casualties was the shipbreaking industry. All but one Belgian shipbreaking company had to close its doors in the 1970s.[26] De Smedt ceased trading in 1975,[27] and Salembien's activity too came to a standstill. Ship materials disappeared from Raymaekers' oeuvre. The last time he used ship materials was in QotS itself. The company took its name from the ship whose starboard paddle box fascia adorns the facade (fig. 6).

When building his headquarters, (local) architectural antiques definitely prevailed. In the interior, Raymaekers integrated porticos and arches from the Anglican church in Spa, lion statues from a castle estate in Bomal and the Ottignies train station, a bay window from the mansion on Avenue Brugmann, along with other blue stone window surrounds.[28] The fence around the Queen contained columns from a bridge over the Elbe. The interior featured wooden panelling from church interiors, an enormous chandelier from a Brussels hotel, marble floors, and so on.[29] (fig. 7). The building was clearly conceived as a calling card and persuasion machine for the power of his

6. Facade of Queen of the South with top left the starboard paddle box fascia from the ship of the same name (Photo Anja Hellebaut and Anthony De Meyere)

7. Interior of the Queen of the South restaurant (Photo Anja Hellebaut and Anthony De Meyere)

architecture, complete with restaurant and starred chefs. From then on, he focused exclusively on buying and selling architectural antiques, which were supplied to him through his network of demolition contractors and wholesalers. The combination of their exclusivity (which Raymaekers emphasized) and their ready availability made it possible to achieve generous margins.

QotS was open every day but Tuesday, when Raymaekers visited the stocks and demolition sites of his aforementioned contacts. Hunting and gathering non-architectural waste was no longer part of his business model.

A WELL-OILED MACHINE, NEW SOURCES OF MATERIAL

Once established, Queen of the South quickly made a name for itself. Raymaekers advertised extensively in domestic and foreign magazines and was well known in the demolition world because, according to himself, he always offered the highest price for architectural antiques.[30] An important new contact in the early years of QotS was the Liège-based demolition contractor Leunen, which quickly became Raymaekers' most important source of supply. It was quite a cosy setup as Leunen dined weekly at the QotS together with the relevant Liège councillors. The modernist demolition and modernization frenzy of the 1960s continued longer in Liège than elsewhere. In response to the crisis of 1973, the socialist city council decided to invest even more in public works to alleviate the effects of the economic depression. For example, demolition around the central Place Saint-Lambert started in 1975, while major infrastructure works continued throughout the 1970s.[31] Liège buildings demolished in the 1970s and 1980s, elements of which ended up at QotS, included a castle on Boulevard de la Sauvenière, the Saint-Léonard Prison, several smaller churches, and the Church of St. François de Sales.[32]

At the same time, Raymaekers' supply from Brussels came to a partial standstill After Spinois' death in 1975, his successors were unable to maintain his wholesale salvage business on the same scale. A new source of supply for Raymaekers in the 1970s were other dealers specializing in architectural antiques who had their own network of suppliers. Two important contacts were Vanhaelemeesch and Antiek Delaere, family businesses located in West Flanders.[33] Through the latter, for example, he was able to acquire elements from Gustave Eiffel's Swiss summer house, which was demolished in 1978.[34] Raymaekers integrated the staircase and balustrade into House D. (figs. 8 & 9).

◄ 8. The balustrade and staircase from House D. came from Gustave Eiffel's villa in Switzerland (Photo Anja Hellebaut and Anthony De Meyere)

▲ 9. Interior of Villa Claire, Gustave Eiffel's summer house in Switzerland, demolished 1978 (Musée d'Orsay, RMN-Grand Palais/Alexis Brandt)

10. Raymaekers' apartment on the first floor of Queen of the South (Photo Anja Hellebaut and Anthony De Meyere)

Raymaekers' intense focus on architectural antiques in the 1970s and 1980s led to an architecture that, for all its exuberance, became more homogeneous. Facades consisted of brickwork with bluestone or sandstone porticos, window surrounds, and corbels. The interiors featured marble floors, natural stone mantelpieces and columns, wooden panelling or natural stone bas-reliefs, wooden or marble balustrades, wooden or cast iron (spiral) staircases, oak doors and stained glass domes. Interior walls were plastered, complemented with plaster mouldings and antique or plaster replicas of statues. This range of materials is best illustrated by the interior of his own apartment, which he built on top of QotS in 1979 (fig. 10).

In addition to the antique building materials purchased from Raymaekers, reclaimed bricks and roof tiles continued to appear in many projects as facade and roof materials. Clients were still responsible for purchasing these themselves. Second-hand bricks for load-bearing walls were replaced by new ceramic

masonry units, while experimental support structures made from old oak beams disappeared. One observation we make in the book is that Raymaekers' architecture was made possible not only by his suppliers but also by the many skilled contractors trained in the pre-war Limburg tradition. These individuals, who were active on his construction sites in the early years, had no problem with verbal communication, flexible thinking and visually assessing the qualities of materials. But their way of working began to come under pressure due to increased regulation and mechanization and rising labour costs in the post-war construction sector.[35]

FRENCH CASTLES, NEGLECTED HERITAGE AND WEALTHY CLIENTS

In 1980, Raymaekers already foresaw a decline in the supply of high-quality architectural antiques. He was quoted in an American newspaper as saying: 'This is a time of harvesting. These are the fat years that will have to carry me through the lean ones that are coming.'[36] The supply of materials from Scheerlinck and Leunen began to dwindle. Around 1980, Raymaekers got to know demolition contractor Vander Elst. Founded in 1966, the company had largely shifted its focus to France in the 1970s.[37] There, Vander Elst was interested in one type of property: the chateaux of the impoverished bourgeoisie and nobility who could no longer afford the maintenance costs or wanted to sell the land. A 1979 article in *Le Monde* described how Vander Elst was dismantling a 19th-century castle in Anjou and how so many other similar French castles unfortunate enough to lack heritage protection were suffering the same fate.[38] The French 'castle surplus' became an important source for Raymaekers.[39] A similar dynamic of impoverished castle owners was also at play in Belgium. A 1980 BRT television report showed Raymaekers, probably together with Vander Elst, at work on a demolition site in Remouchamps in Wallonia.[40] Several builders have also mentioned that their marble and parquet floors, doors, stairs, balustrades, panelling and even an entire tower came from these sources.

The decline in available architectural antiques was due to a combination of factors. Hourly wages continued to rise during the crisis of the 1970s and into the 1980s, outpacing the wage index.[41] The demolition sector became mechanized.[42] Labour-intensive recovery became more expensive. Raymaekers had to pay more for his elements, which came from an increasingly limited supply. In addition, a functioning heritage protection system finally got off the ground in Belgium.[43] Two source buildings from the 1980s were the home of Art Nouveau architect Jos Bascourt in Antwerp from 1904, and the Saint-François de Sales church by Joris Helleputte in Liège from 1889. The Bascourt house was acquired by the Sint-Vincentius hospital in Antwerp in 1975. After ten years of neglect, it was demolished in 1986 to make way for the expansion of their parking lot.[44] The Saint-François de Sales church was damaged in the 1983 Liège earthquake and was demolished in 1988 due to the risk of collapse. In both cases, the Koninklijke Commissie voor Monumenten en Landschappen (Royal Commission for Monuments and Landscapes) considered protecting them but decided against it owing to the high renovation costs.[45] As

11. The ribs of the dome above the Alders swimming pool came from the Saint-François de Sales church (Photo Anja Hellebaut and Anthony De Meyere)

12. The Saint-François de Sales church in Liège designed by architect Joris Helleputte, completed in 1894, demolished in 1988 (CC BY 4.0 KIK-IRPA, Brussels, negative B178258)

these projects demonstrate, the demolition of valuable pre-war buildings still took place, but not as recklessly as in previous decades. In both cases, budgetary force majeure was invoked – whether or not initiated by the owners themselves. Elements from the Bascourt facade were rearranged by Raymaekers in a new facade for the Valentijn Flower Shop. The steel columns and trusses and the natural stone columns and arches were integrated by Raymaekers in various projects, the standout being the roof of the Alders swimming pool (fig. 11,12).

Raymaekers managed to maintain his stock levels by finding new supply lines. However, he did start looking for increasingly wealthy customers. In the 1990s, 80 per cent of the items went to wealthy buyers abroad, mainly in Germany and the Netherlands.[46] Raymaekers never designed a new construction project outside Belgium but instead developed a new revenue model by sending construction kits full of architectural antiques to hotels, restaurants and corporate lobbies. In Belgium, he also managed to appeal to the nouveaux riches on several occasions.[47] For example, the Mols House was built for the famous road construction contractor family in 2000. The Peeters House, for a family of antique dealers, was Raymaekers' largest construction project. Elements from several French castles, rare Balegem natural stone, a natural stone staircase and balustrades from a Parisian mansion and stained glass windows were combined in the facade (fig. 13). In the interior, he used dozens of types of marble floors and columns, a staircase, chandeliers, decorative fireplaces, doors, an entirely marble bathroom and a solid cast-iron portico that required its own foundation. The construction process took all of ten years, from 2000 to 2010.

However, Raymaekers never closed the door on middle-class clients. For less affluent clients, he encouraged self-building and a long construction period in order to reduce and spread the costs. The construction of the Boncher House ran from 1978 to 1984, that of the Philippaerts House from 1986 to 1995, and that of the G&B House, which started in 2013, is still ongoing. The Boncher and Philippaerts families also reclaimed materials themselves from an obsolete slaughterhouse in Tienen (fig. 14) and a dilapidated barn in Kinrooi. In both cases, they were interested in the roof tiles and bricks, materials that had been very cheap to find at demolition sites in previous decades, but which became scarcer and more expensive from the 1980s onwards.

During the 1990s, Raymaekers' last three major materials suppliers – Scheerlinck, Leunen and Vander

13. Facade of the Peeters House. Balegem natural stone combined with fragments from dismantled castles (Marcel Raymaekers archive)

14. Dismantling of the former slaughterhouse in Tienen by the Boncher family to reclaim bricks and roof tiles (Photo Familie Boncher)

Elst – ceased their activities. Vander Elst and Leunen were taken over, but the new managers were unable to provide Raymaekers with the same flow of materials. In order to continue finding materials, Raymaekers expanded the Queen's hunting grounds even further to Italy, Russia and even India. From the stocks of demolition contractors he visited, he shipped the most interesting elements to Genk. But ensuring a stable supply of materials ultimately proved too difficult and too expensive, as did selling his materials. Customers drifted away after 2000.[48] Although the income from a few projects, such as the Peeters House, kept QotS going for a while after the year 2000,[49] a dwindling clientele eventually forced Raymaekers' company into bankruptcy in 2014.

CONCLUSION: DYNAMIC FLOW MANAGEMENT

A chronological overview of the components Raymaekers worked with shows that his company and architectural practice were deeply dependent on various chance factors. In the first phase of Raymaekers' career, from 1962 to 1972, his projects directly mirrored material flows or the unique lots that he encountered as a hunter-gatherer. His practice in those years was entirely supply-driven. It was up to Raymaekers to convince his clients of the architectural added value of the elements he knew were available at a given moment. The existence of a network of demolition contractors and wholesalers in building materials, which he systematically managed to work his way into, prompted him to focus entirely on architectural antiques from the moment Queen of the South was founded. Raymaekers consolidated his role as a designer-salesman and left the actual search for and reclamation of materials to this network.

It is striking that his practice remained highly dependent on the individual actors in that network, and that the disappearance of, for example, Salembien and Spinois in the 1970s had an appreciable impact on Raymaekers' range of materials. Interestingly, all the players in this system operated within a limited territory (Spinois in Brussels, Leunen in Liège) and/or specialized in niche sources such as chateaux (Vander Elst). This made Raymaekers' reuse ecosystem[50] radically different in nature from industrial supply chains, which pursued economic optimization through scalability based on the extraction of natural resources, and cover an almost unlimited territory.

The Raymaekers case clearly shows that a circular construction economy is bound to function differently

from its extractivist equivalent. It depends on locally embedded recovery practices, reverse supply chains (from demolition site to storage), centralization by intermediaries and a second commodification cycle with its own unique logic.

Throughout the 1970s, the network of demolition contractors and wholesalers proved to be sufficiently large and stable for Raymaekers to easily absorb disruptions, but the fact that, from the 1980s onwards, materials increasingly had to be sourced from France, and after 2000 from all over the world, is indicative of an evolution that his company underwent. Owing to the architecture of Queen of the South and the successful marketing of his company as a niche supplier of architectural antiques, Raymaekers' practice became increasingly demand-driven. He became entangled in the commodification logic that he himself had set up. When, from the 1980s onwards, supply struggled to keep up with demand, Raymaekers had no option but to cast his net wider. At the same time, higher hourly wages and the growing gap between the price of new and reclaimed materials meant that Raymaekers had to increasingly play the exclusivity card in order to appeal to wealthy customers. Paradoxically, the relative scarcity of architectural antiques and the increasingly difficult socio-economic context gave rise to the Peeters House, the most extravagant project in Raymaekers' oeuvre.

When demand also began to decline after 2000, this heralded the end of Queen of the South. Its business model was entirely linked to a specific phase in the modernization and urbanization process that had been curtailed by heritage protection, cultural shifts and the decline of the ideology of progress: that of the unbridled demolition and replacement of pre-war buildings. Raymaekers' case thus shows that a sustainable calibration of the connection between supply and demand in second-hand materials will (of necessity) always be dynamic.

NOTES

1 K. Somer and R. Stenvert (eds.), *Bouwmaterialen 1940 – 1990:* Rotterdam 2024.

2 K. Moe, *Unless: The Seagram Building Construction Ecology,* New York 2020. J. Hutton, *Reciprocal Landscapes: Stories in Material Movement,* New York 2020.

3 M. Ghyoot et al., *Déconstruction et réemploi: comment faire circuler les éléments de construction,* Lausanne 2018.

4 A. Vande Capelle and M. Garcia Cortes, 'Urban Mine Inc.', in: F. Heisel and D. Hebel (eds.), *Urban Mining und kreislaufgerechtes Bauen: Die Stadt als Rohstofflager,* Stuttgart 2021, 79–89.

5 Post-war salvage architects are largely overlooked in Belgian architectural historiography. A few cases, such as Frank Delaere, came to light during Rotor's Opalis project, which mapped the contemporary network of reuse traders (see opalis.eu). Another example is Raymond Rombouts, whose work has been documented in: W. Pauwels, *Hommage Raymond Rombouts,* Lausanne 2003; and in a recent student thesis: F. De Meester, *De Belgische naoorlogse hergebruiksector: De samenwerking Rik Storms - Raymond Rombouts,* Ghent 2025.

6 The research and publication project was made possible with the support of a project grant from the Department of Culture, Youth & Media of the Flemish Government, and the Special Research Fund of Ghent University, Starting Grant from Lionel Devlieger as associate professor. Two student theses were instrumental in its launch: P. Matthijnssens, *Mijn Bunker, mijn bunker, mijn burcht, mijn bordeel: Onderzoek naar een genuanceerde lezing van de praktijk van Marcel Raymaekers,* Ghent 2021; and: R. Van der Mynsbrugge, *Een catalogus van fragmenten: Het gebruik van historische bouwrelicten in het architecturale oeuvre van Marcel Raymaekers*, Ghent 2023.

7 The newspaper articles appeared in the popular press between 1973 and 2006. The collected archival material of photos, plans and articles has been scanned and archived by the Flemish Architecture Institute (VAi) and can be consulted on request.

8 A. Vande Capelle et al., *Ad hoc baroque: Marcel Raymaekers' Salvage Architecture in Postwar Belgium,* Brussels 2023.

9 Interview with M. Raymaekers by A. Vande Capelle and S. Colon, Genk, March 17, 2022.

10 Raymaekers repeatedly expressed his disapproval of drawing boards and the associated design methodology to journalists. He is quoted as saying: 'To me, a drawing board is a torture device.' in: 'Ik ben kleuter gebleven, spelend met mijn blokkendoos', *Week/uit:* weekly supplement to the daily newspaper *Cobouw,* April 24, 1981. Translation by the authors.

11 See, for example: 'But a one-sided geometric design language leads to dead architecture, to inhumanity. Characteristic of the post-war period is the constant concern for functionality and mechanisation. This has inevitably led to the "impoverishment" of architecture. The use of old materials and fragments (yes, even neo-styles) compensates for this disadvantage in my opinion. That is why I work with it, yes, I live with it.' In: 'Wohnen wie Ludwig XIV', *Top of the tops,* n.d. Translation by the authors.

12 Regarding the interaction between aesthetics and industrial production in the Belgian post-war construction world, see: E. De Vos, *Hoe zouden we graag wonen? Woonvertogen in Vlaanderen tijdens de jaren zestig en zeventig.* Leuven/Louvain 2012.

13 Louis De Smedt founded the company in 1925, but it was not until his son Jef De Smedt took over that important ships were dismantled. See: C. Vander Straeten, Foto van de Maand: September 2017 (Scheepssloperij De Smedt)' at: www.heemkundezb.be/index.php/publicaties/37-portretjes/193-foto-van-de-maand-september-2017-scheepssloperij-de-smedt (accessed June 11, 2025).

14 'Lockheed T-33 T-Bird' at: aviations-militaires.net/v3/kb/aircraft/show/1307/lockheed-t-33-t-bird (accessed June 11, 2025).

15 S. Van de Voorde, *Bouwen in beton in België (1890-1975): Samenspel van kennis, experiment en innovatie,* Ghent 2011.

16 'Memorandum on the general objectives of the Community's iron and steel industry for the years 1975 to 1980', *Official Journal of the European Communities,* 14 (1971) C 96. And: R. Vandeputte, *Economische Geschiedenis van België 1944-1984,* Tielt 1985.

17 Interview with M. Raymaekers by A. Vande Capelle and S. Colon, Genk, September 22, 2022.

18 Vandeputte 1985 (note 16).

19 M. De Keyzer, T. Soens, and C. Verbruggen (eds.), *Mens en natuur. Een geschiedenis,* Ghent 2024. And:

Vandeputte 1985 (note 16).

20 For example, general practitioner M. Kelchtermans collected roof tiles from patients whose farms were demolished for land parcelling or modernization. Interview with M. Kelchtermans by A. Vande Capelle and S. Colon, Heusden, 29 March 2022.

21 Interview with H. Nijsen by A. Vande Capelle and S. Colon, Houthalen-Helchteren, April 26, 2022.

22 Interview with M. Raymaekers by A. Vande Capelle and S. Colon, Genk, May 18, 2022.

23 Raymaekers found the beams after they had been stored for more than ten years at the demolition contractor's site and used them for the load-bearing structure of the Queen of the South. Van der Mynsbrugge 2023 (note 6), 27.

24 The period of unprecedented rapid economic growth that began in 1946 and ended with the oil crisis. See: J. Fourastié, *Les trente glorieuses: ou la révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975,* Paris 1979.

25 S. Kristof and E. Buyst. *Het gestolde land: Een economische geschiedenis van België (The Solidified Land: An Economic History of Belgium),* Kalmthout 2016.

26 Alfred Nijkerk, 'Shipbreaking Thrives Again in Belgium', *Recycling International,* (2007) 7, 36-37.

27 Vander Straeten 2017 (note 13).

28 Van der Mynsbrugge 2023 (note 6), 206.

29 Raymaekers 2022 (note 22)

30 Raymaekers 2022 (note 22).

31 Architectural historians have pointed to the indelible and unfortunate mark that Jean Lejeune, historian, university professor, alderman for public works, and undaunted modernist, left on the urban fabric of Liège. The exceptional length of his term as alderman (1959-1976) partly explains why the demolition mentality lingered longer in Liège than elsewhere. See, among others: L. Gardier, *La rénovation urbaine à Liège sous l'échevinat de Jean Lejeune 1959-1976 : Le cas du quartier Hors-Château – Féronstrée,* Liège 2018.

32 Raymaekers 2022 (note 22).

33 Raymaekers 2022 (note 22). See also: interview with J. Vanhaelemeesch by A. Vande Capelle, Oostkamp, March 14, 2025; interview with F. Delaere by A. Vande Capelle, Kuurne, May 11, 2025. The supply streams of both traders are the subject of further research.

34 Delaere 2025 (note 33).

35 Vande Capelle et al., 2023 (note 8), Chapter 4. This observation is based entirely on information obtained through oral history. The trend towards specialization and professionalization is described in: J. Dobbels, *Building a profession: A history of general contractors in Belgium (1870-1970),* Brussels 2022.

36 R. Wielaard, 'Architect Recycles Castle Treasures', *The Arizona Republic,* 1980.

37 F. André, 'Châteaux à vendre', *Le Monde,* August 11, 1979.

38 André 1979 (note 37).

39 Raymaekers 2022 (note 22).

40 'Kastelen voor morgen', *Terloops,* BRT, July 12, 1980.

41 Vandeputte 1985 (note 16).

42 On the history of the mechanization of the demolition sector in the American context, but extrapolatable to Europe, see: F. Ammon, *Bulldozer: Demolition and Clearance of the Postwar Landscape,* New Haven, London 2016.

43 H. Stynen, 'Paradise Lost? De verloren eer van de monumentenzorg in België' in: E. Buyst (ed.), *De beschikbare ruimte: reflecties over bouwen,* Tielt 1990, 95-112.

44 'Bouwmeesterswoning Joseph Bascourt tegen de vlakte', *Gazet van Antwerpen,* May 27, 1986.

45 Regarding Bascourt, see 'Bouwmeesterswoning Joseph Bascourt tegen de vlakte' 1986 (note 44). Regarding Hellepute, see the letter: 'Demande d'autorisation concernant les mesures conservatoires de protection des orgues de l'Eglise Saint-François de Sales à Liège suite aux dommages causés par le séisme du 8 novembre 1983.' by R. Guiaux and J. Debatty, October 25, 1985. Archives of the Commission royale des Monuments, Sites et Fouilles (CRMSF).

46 T. Kay, 'An Interview without Marcel Raymaekers', *Salvo News,* March *4,* 1993.

47 Vande Capelle e.a. 2023 (note 8). In the book, we observe how Raymaekers focuses specifically on families who owed their climb up the social ladder to the expansion of the post-war welfare state. His approach resonates most with families with 'new money', looking for an unprecedented architectural style to highlight their new status.

48 Interview with F. Lemmens by A. Vande Capelle and S. Colon, Brussels, December 10, 2022.

49 Interview with E. Raymaekers by A. Vande Capelle and S. Colon, Genk, January 17, 2023.

50 By analogy with the concept of 'industrial ecosystem'. See: T. Burström et al. 'Industrial Ecosystems: A Systematic Review, Framework and Research Agenda', *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 208 (2024): 123656.

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TEMPORARILY IN STOCK

THE OEUVRE OF REUSE ARCHITECT MARCEL RAYMAEKERS AS A REFLECTION OF DEMOLITION AND DISPOSAL PRACTICES IN POST-WAR BELGIUM

ARNE VANDE CAPELLE EN LIONEL DEVLIEGER

In order to gain insight into the specifics of circular architecture as a necessary alternative to contemporary extractive building practices, this article examines the work of Marcel Raymaekers. Between 1962 and 2014, the Belgian architect and trader developed a practice in the reuse of building materials. In the post-war context, in which the construction sector began to rely increasingly on cheap, standardised, industrially produced materials, Raymaekers made a radical choice for alternative elements. His aversion to mass-produced elements stemmed from aesthetic preferences. A preference for sensory experiences as a guideline for living, and a great affinity with Assemblage Art, in which a design process starts from existing materials. His way of working was thus characterised by a totally different notion of 'availability' than is common today.

Raymaekers started out as a hunter-gatherer, criss-crossing the country in search of material graveyards and demolition sites. For the first ten years, he worked extensively with materials from industrial waste streams, such as mesh stones (a residual product of sand and gravel extraction) and ship steel (recovered from obsolete ships for the steel processing industry). The immense demolition frenzy of 'Les Trente Glorieuses' also ensured the availability of materials such as bricks and roof tiles, which were recovered and processed in bulk. In addition, many high-quality, unique building components were released, which were finely crafted and ornamented and for which there was no longer any new equivalent on the materials market.

In 1972, he founded Queen of the South (QotS), his materials stock and headquarters in Genk. From then on, Raymaekers became a permanent trader-designer. His established network of demolition contractors and wholesalers was crucial in this regard. During his career, he developed close partnerships with players such as reuse wholesaler Spinois and demolition contractors Scheerlinck, Leunen and Vander Elst, each active in their own geographical area and building niche. Raymaekers' architecture became increasingly baroque, but also more homogeneous due to his focus on architectural antiques. QotS was set up as a veritable machine for convincing people of the power of these elements.

From the 1980s onwards, the supply of building antiques declined due to the mechanisation of the demolition sector, rising labour costs and the increasing clout of heritage protection. His supply chains came to a standstill. Raymaekers began importing more materials from abroad. His practice became increasingly exclusive, targeting wealthy clients, although he also continued to build for middle-class clients through self-build and long-term construction projects. Eventually, Raymaekers had to go as far as India to find building materials. After 2000, the influx of materials became too expensive and too difficult, and clients began to stay away. In 2014, QotS went bankrupt.

Raymaekers' work shows how circular architecture depends on locally anchored supply networks, which are difficult to scale up due to the nature of the urban mine, where a wide variety of materials are released unpredictably, scattered and in small quantities. His practice was also strongly linked to a specific phase in the urbanisation and modernisation process: the period of unbridled demolition of pre-war buildings. Raymaekers' identity as a designer-trader was so intertwined with this period that his business inevitably ceased to exist with the demise of the ideology of progress that had given rise to it. This case study shows that the sustainable matching of supply and demand in second-hand materials will always have to be dynamic.