Stadtschmerz: Stories of Loss and Guilt in Times of Gentrification

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Abstract

This essay detects a genre of non-fiction, which it coins as *Stadtschmerz*. In this genre, middle class residents who experience alienation due to gentrification turn this experience into stories of loss and guilt (for being the target group of gentrification). This essay explores four canonical texts of Stadtschmerz from the mid-19th century to the present; the authors explore the gentrifying city as *flâneurs* and report on their findings in a feuilleton. As such, the essay shows through expressing Stadtschmerz the middle-class attempts to cope with the making of the middle-class city. In this way, Stadtschmerz neutralizes the positionality of the writer and his readership within processes of gentrification. Furthermore, it offers readers voyeurism into the lives of the displaced lower classes. Lastly, Stadtschmerz processes middle-class anxiety amid gentrification. A deconstructive analysis of Stadtschmerz tells us that the experience of gentrification is above all a hot topic for the middle-class itself.

Introduction

> *"The story started with love. A love that blossomed in a sky-scraper during this weekend, when we saw a perfect city, on days of perfect light." (van Veelen 2022, 11).*

In his 2022 bestseller *Rotterdam, Een ode aan inefficiëntie* [translation: *'Rotterdam, a tribute to inefficiency'*] journalist and writer Arjen van Veelen recounts how he fell in love with his hometown of Rotterdam after having been away for decades. Early morning, while the sun light beamed into the AirBnB rental on the 25th floor of a luxurious skyscraper, he and his wife slept the sleep of the innocents, he writes. The windows of the all-glass apartment offered a view of the stunning skyline of Rotterdam (the Netherlands), of a new city. During that weekend, they noticed that Rotterdam had become hip (13). They were amazed by the sight of new skyscrapers, museums, theaters, food halls, walking promenades, clubs and cruise ships (15). Soon after, they bought a double ground floor apartment with a garden in a former working-class inner-city neighborhood (21-22).

Van Veelen decided that his next book would cover a successful city: the rich and poor, progressive and conservative, people of all colors living together. He decided to become a *flâneur* like the poet Charles Baudelaire, who wandered the streets of 19th-century Paris (26) and published his observations of city life as feuilletons in daily or weekly newspapers, as van Veelen would do as well. While strolling, he wanted to observe how the city was changed since his year of birth in 1980 (26). Somewhere along the way, however, his view of Rotterdam lost its gloss. Now, five years later, he writes that if he would go back to that morning in the glass apartment, he could not wake them up without telling them what he had seen saw these past years (16):

> *"My gaze would now search between the towers for the facades of the working-class neighborhood that was still there at the time but has now disappeared. I would hear the sound of windows being smashed, the roar of police helicopters. I would tell those two that their window offered a great view of the latest migration stream: An internal migration, in which the less fortunate residents move out of the gates, to make way for well-off people with rolling suitcases – people like myself now" (van Veelen, 16).*

The story ends with feelings of loss and guilt. Feelings grown out of the experience of gentrification – in this essay defined as *"the transformation of working-class or vacant areas of central cities into middle-class and/or commercial areas"* (Hochstenbach & Verlaan 2022, 439).

I argue that this type of story belongs to a genre that I coin as *Stadtschmerz*: *middle class residents who due to processes of gentrification experience alienation from the city they live in and turn their experience into stories of loss and guilt.* On the one hand, these writers envision a break from the urban past through expressions of sorrow for a lost city, most often accompanied by appeals to a nostalgic urban past, including a previous raw and rough city culture, before the city became safer, cleaner and more efficient. Recent research has dubbed this latter urban development as the rise of the "*smooth city"* (Boer 2023), which severely limits the potential for urban experiment, democracy and emancipation. On the other hand, these writers feel discomfort, even sometimes guilt, for their own position within these processes as they are the target group for gentrification urban strategies[1]. The city is being transformed to their 'authentic' taste (Zukin 2009), meaning broad sidewalks, green squares, coffee bars, bistro's, museums, theaters, luxurious lofts, and so on. To serve their middle-class taste, lower classes are displaced. The experience of alienation stems from this ambiguity of Stadtschmerz; one consumes gentrification, and simultaneously one feels loss and guilt over gentrification . However, new expanding research emphasizes that displacement means more than an event of economic exclusion; it entails also the experience or understanding of *"loss of place"* (Shaw & Hagemans 2015), *"un-homing"* (Elliot-Cooper, Hubbard & Lees 2020), *"slow violence"* (Kern 2022) and *"symbolic displacement"* (Atkinson 2015) over a longer period of time. Within this broader definition of displacement, the Stadtschmerz experience of alienation is studied.

This essay explores four canonical texts of Stadtschmerz, arranged chronologically from Baudelaire's mid-19th century Paris to van Veelen's Rotterdam, in which the authors explore the gentrifying city as *flâneurs*. Writing on Baudelaire, philosopher Walter Benjamin described the flâneur as an urban spectator *"who traversed the city absently, as it were, lost in thought or worry."* (Benjamin 2023, 69). The absentmindedness of the flâneur generated the joy of watching city life go by while participating in it. From this strolling position, the revealing presentation of the big city stems, like in Baudelaire's *Spleen de Paris* (1869). The gaze of the flâneur, according to Benjamin, was the gaze of an alienated man, who wandered on the margins of the bourgeois class, as well as of the growing destitution of the modern industrial city (Baudelaire 1869, 170). In reference to Benjamin,

“[...] This type of story belongs to a genre that I coin as Stadtschmerz: middle class residents who due to processes of gentrification experience alienation from the city they live in and turn their experience into stories of loss and guilt.”

Matthew Beaumont argues in *The Walker, on Finding and Losing Yourself in the Modern City* (2020) that the pavement position of the flâneur is most favorable in the attempt to understand the contradictions of modern metropolitan life. He characterizes the experience of the various walkers he examines, from Edgar Allen Poe to Virgina Woolf, in terms of *"not belonging"* (Beaumont 2020, 19). The walker's absentmindedness is one of *"concentration in distraction"*, he writes (8). Or as Van Veelen puts it: *"the mission [was] to withdraw from all the rushing efficiency and in this way to tread on the soul"* (van Veelen 2022, 26).

Yet, we should not fetishize this popular urban figure. All examined authors here possess the privilege of money, time, and social entitlement to stroll the streets and to publish their findings. Beaumont rightly points (Beaumont 2020, 16) to Lauren Elkin who argued in *The Flâneuse, Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* that *"if we tunnel back, we find there always was a flâneuse passing Baudelaire in the street"* (Elkin 2016, 11). Nevertheless, Beaumont refers (Beaumont 2020,16) to Erika Diane Rappaport who noted that for a bourgeois lady the freedom to wander alone through the city streets was extremely limited, not in the least by social conventions (Rappaport 2000, 7). Moreover, all studied middle-class male flâneurs express Stadtschmerz from a *white* male perspective, while we know people of color wandered the streets of European cities for ages, as Mark Ponte showed for mid-17th century Amsterdam (Ponte 2018). Van Veelen struggles explicitly with his whiteness. When in a documentary the writer Malique Mohamud calls out the *"rich white liberals"* who *"colonize"* the city through gentrification, Van Veelen gets upset (Van Veelen 2022, 57). He defends himself by claiming he comes from a poor socio-economic background: *"In the time of the East India Company, my ancestors [fishermen] were half-slaves"* (66). He sees himself as a class migrant (16), yet, he also has to acknowledge that certain gentrification policies in Rotterdam are racist (49) and wonders if he has *"status anxiety"* (60). Eventually he concludes that *"money rules the city"* (70) and points the finger at highly educated people, people like himself, according to whose wishes the city is gentrified (68-69).

First and foremost, this essay shows that through expressing Stadtschmerz the middle class attempts to cope with the making of the middle-class city. It demonstrates that feelings of loss and guilt are mediated through feuilletons of flânerie by and for the middle class. In this way, Stadtschmerz neutralizes the positionality of the writer and his readership within processes of gentrification. Secondly, it offers its readers unregulated voyeurism into the lives of those whose houses are torn down and

cannot consume the luxurious gastronomy and other products of the gentrifying city. Thirdly, Stadtschmerz processes middle-class anxiety amid gentrification, i.e. the fear of falling and of being deemed inauthentic. A deconstructive analysis of Stadtschmerz tells us that the experience of gentrification is above all a hot topic for the middle-class itself.

In the second section, poet Charles Baudelaire's experience of the state ordered destruction and rebuilding of mid-19th-century Paris will be scrutinized. The following section will investigate the observations of Dutch journalist and writer Marie Joseph Brusse who, in 1910s Rotterdam, reports on the demolition of a notorious Red Light maritime district, which was replaced by a newly built boulevard, a grand post office and a prominent city hall. The fourth section will delve into the memory of journalist and poet Jean d'Osta of bygone Brussels before the so-called 'Brussellisation' took hold of the city in its 1950s modernist urban planning scheme. In the fifth section we will arrive at Arjen van Veelen. But before we move to the primary sources, we first need to turn our attention to the concept of *Stadtschmerz* itself.

The Concept of Stadtschmerz

The concept of Stadtschmerz stems from the German term *Weltschmerz*, which literally means *'world-pain'*. Reportedly coined by the German author Jean Paul Richter in his pessimistic novel Selina (Richter, 1829), Weltschmerz *"signifies a mood of weariness or sadness about life arising from the acute awareness of evil and suffering"* (Breisser 2016, 1). From the early 18th-century use of the term for the mood of the Romantic poet, it became a public state of mind over the century, associated with melancholy and pessimism that arose from discontent with the contrast between physical reality and one's mental world, with the inadequacy of the world at large (Brittanica 2024). A variant of Weltschmerz is *'spleen'* – a term derived from the English word for the organ that at that time was linked to secreting 'bile' associated to melancholy. It denotes the *'suffering of the time'*, as famously cultivated by Baudelaire. Stadtschmerz refers to the suffering of the time, of the pain of the world around the us, but then specifically the suffering of the city due to processes of gentrification that causes feeling of loss and guilt, and the need for a story to process these, such as the famous French poet's *Le Spleen de Paris*.

The conceptualization of the Stadtschmerz feeling of loss builds on the theory of urban nostalgia, most notably, on the contemporary literature analysis by Tamar Katz. Expanding on the interpretation of nostalgia as the product of modernization (Boym 2001) – a longing for the time before

modern industrial capitalism, a pastoral yearning for stable, rural society – Katz argues that while nostalgia in the city is similarly accompanied by a rhetoric of loss and longing for authenticity, it is not based on a construct of consensus by a homogenous group. Instead, urban nostalgia is characterized by conflict through *"imagining lost communities as arenas of visible class and ethnic tensions"*, which has come to signify authenticity in the late twentieth century city, *"even when it is recast as a more palatable version of benign conflict"* (Katz 2010, 814; 810-815). As in the academic literature on the flaneur, also here, the social tensions of the modern city take center stage. The study of Stadtschmerz adds two layers to this understanding. First, its looks at the positionality of the examined authors within these tensions, which sheds light on the external as well as the internal struggles or ambiguities within city life. Whereas nostalgia could be seen as "history without guilt" (Kammen 1993, 688), the concept of Stadtschmerz rather understands the mobilization of history as a way to mediate middle class guilt. Secondly, while Katz briefly mentions gentrification as one of the drivers behind this late 20th-century upsurge of urban nostalgia (Katz 2010, 813), Stadtschmerz focuses explicitly on gentrification processes to historicize urban nostalgia, which brings another understanding of what loss and a longing authenticity signifies within this rhetoric.

Indeed, research shows how positions within gentrification are being legitimized by the mobilization of authenticity, or to be more specific, the idea of a loss of authenticity. Japonica Brown-Saracino shows that gentrifiers are often attracted to the historicity of space (Brown-Saracino 2009) or, to turn it around, marketeers, real estate agencies, and governments market authenticity for the sale of gentrification. Sharon Zukin demonstrates how protesters mobilize authenticity against gentrification processes, as long-time residents claim a position of seniority over newcomers (Zukin 2009). Stadtschmerz adds another position to this research; it focuses on middle-class residents who are not directly affected by, nor play a primary active role in gentrification, yet do *feel* alienated as the city is being remade for them.

Whereas urban sociologists and social geographers like Brown-Saracino and Zukin deal with the mobilization of history within gentrification, historians are slow to tackle the subject. Historian Suleiman Osman stresses the importance of historical research on gentrification, since gentrification is *"a phenomenon uniquely invested in history"* (Osman 2016, 216).[2] Osman, therefore, encourages scholars *"to examine the 'time' of gentrification with the same impressive depth that they have its 'space'"* (Osman 2016). The concept of Stadtschmerz aims to answer this call by

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shifting focus to history within gentrification; to the mobilization of history by residents; to the long history of Stadtschmerz, from 19th-century Paris up to present-day Rotterdam; and to the theory of history, especially the construct of historical time. It is based on the conviction that time is of as much importance as space when it comes to the lived experience of gentrification.

Stadtschmerz stipulates that a loss of physical space implies a loss of time. We could explain these intricate feelings of loss through the theory of modern historical time by historian Reinhart Koselleck. Due to the radical transformations of everyday life at the end of the eighteenth century – not in the least brought forth by the French Revolution – Europeans no longer could expect, Kosseleck argued, to live a life like their parents before them. Epitomized by the modern idea of progress, an unbridgeable gap was felt between, what he called, *"space of experience"* and *"horizon of expectation"* (Koselleck 1985, 269, 271). The future was no longer bound to the past, or so it felt. Furthermore, progress became a prerequisite for people to distinguish them as a class or group to catch up, overtake others, or to maintain a frontrunner position. "*Since then there has existed and does exist the consciousness of living in a transitional period that graduates the difference between experience and expectation in distinct temporal phases.*" (282). If we extrapolate Koselleck's theory of the modern advent of historical time to gentrification, we may ask ourselves how time is affected exactly amid the lived experience of gentrification, and perhaps more importantly: By whom? Who is understood to keep up with (the progression of) time amid processes of gentrification? Who is falling behind the times? For some of our white male middle-class writers of Stadtschmerz, the answer to these questions legitimizes the demolition of working-class neighborhoods and, in doing so, soften their feelings of class guilt.

Following a sense of loss of authenticity and loss of time, Stadtschmerz implies a loss of memory. Gentrification includes a process of urban amnesia. Contemporary redevelopment of industrial districts and buildings, for example, are more often than not aimed at another class that labored in those spaces, Wallace and Wright argue (Wallace & Wright 2017, 45). While the working class and minority historical experience of the postindustrial city is celebrated, sanitized and marginalized, *"[t]he idealized bourgeois urban figure who can move smoothly through, between and beyond the palimpsest of urban space is fetishized, emblematic of an amnesia city, which seeks to forget the foundational legacies of empire and industry, – slavery, environmental contamination, exploitation and industrial disease."* (45). The mobilization of industrial nostalgia within gentrification processes

provides the middle classes with a sense of connection to civic heritage, a sense of authenticity (47). The flâneur of Stadtschmerz is the mediator of such memory loss and longing for authenticity through its (hi)stories of loss and guilt.

Gentrification, moreover, affects the collective memory. Certain buildings, streets, squares hold meaning for a whole community. Historian Pierre Nora calls such 'sites of memory' or *lieux de mémoire*. Sites that tell a (hi)story and, accordingly, represent the community's identity. This function could be extended to a personal level, as, for instance, for Van Veelen. On when learning that his grandfather had a shop around the corner from where he just bought a house, he feels more at home than initially in the city that changed so drastically since he had moved away as an adolescent. This brings us to the question: When a certain space as a mnemonic device is demolished, what happens to that memory, and, consequently to one's identity, that is, sense of self? How to commemorate time without space?

The transformation of urban space, thus, may similarly affect the experience of time; when space is demolished, time is on the loose and in its slipstream, we find authenticity and memory. The question arises then, how to cope with these feelings of loss of time amid gentrification processes? For the answer we turn to Paul Ricoeur's philosophy of history in *Time and Narrative*; we must order all diverse experiences, from events to feelings, and integrating the relevant characters in a story with a beginning, middle and end. The technique of *"emplotment"*, he called this (Ricoeur 1984, 21). In doing so, time is caught in a clear and comprehensible story, understandable for the narrator but also, through using cultural scripts, for the listener or reader. For Ricoeur, historical time was narrated time.

The authors on Stadtschmerz, I argue, all used their writings in this fashion: to grasp the experienced loss of space and time due to gentrification processes they wrote (a) history. It functions on three levels: (1) to order the chaos of demolition, (2) to remember who they once were or would like to have been, and (3), perhaps more importantly, to claim a position in the present and for the future. To write on Stadtschmerz is to cope with the middle-class intricate experiences of loss and guilt.

In particular, feeling guilty of gentrification as one consumes it, is a driving force of the morality behind Stadtschmerz. According to Maurizio Lazzarato, a morality of guilt governs modern-day men. In *'The Making of the Indebted Man'*, Lazzarato shows how the debtor-creditor relationship shapes neoliberal society at every level. It is, he argues, a product of power relations between owners of capital and non-owners of capital. No distinction, therefore, exists between workers and the unemployed,

consumers and producers, working and non-working populations, retirees and welfare recipients. *"Everyone is a 'debtor' accountable to and guilty before capital"* (Lazzarato 2012, 7). This economy of debt is internalized – much like the original sin – by a 'morality of guilt' (164). He theoretically traces this idea back to Friedrich Nietzsche's '*On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings'*, who showed that the central concept of Morality, *Schuld* [translation: *'guilt'*], originated from the very concrete notion of *Schulden* [translation: *'debts'*]. The making of the indebted man is optimized, Lazzarato writes, when individuals have to pay off their debt not in actual money, but rather in conduct, attitudes, ways of behaving (104). So, media, business leaders and politicians did not find, according to Lazzarato, the causes for the financial crisis of 2008 in fiscal and monetary policies but in the excessive demands of the governed (especially the Southern Europeans) and in the corruption of the elites (8-9). In the context of gentrification, this morality of guilt is often explicitly felt not so much by the policy maker or the real estate entrepreneur per se, but by the so-called gentrifier, the one who buys that overpriced house in a working-class district and sips his oat cappuccino in that specialty coffee bar that replaced a former neighborhood café. Stadtschmerz offers the gentrifier a way to pay off his debt.

If we view Stadtschmerz through Lazzarato's lens of the making of the indebted man and through Koselleck's lens of the modern birth of historical time, we could argue that to honor one's debt and keep up with time is a perquisite to live in a gentrified city. For those 'aspiring class' mobilization (Currid-Halkett 2017), one way to secure one's position is through lifestyle, or, to say it in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, to distinguish oneself through cultural capital (Bourdieu1984, 152). Bourdieu identified three levels of taste: (1) *highbrow* (e.g. intellectual), (2) *lowbrow* (e.g. popular) and (3) *middlebrow* culture. The middlebrow culture, practiced by the petty bourgeois *"embraces aspects of both high and low culture but does not feel as at ease with high culture as the dominant class"* (220). The process of distinction arises from showing tastes usually in opposition to others. Part of a 'good taste' (152) is a disdain for a bad taste, or ironically judging one's own consumption. As Van Veelen does, when he tries to defend going to his favorite restaurant that was criticized as classic gentrification (Van Veelen, 2022, 57), since it was the only predominantly white-serving new bar in his superdiverse neighborhood. *"We mixed quite nicely, so please give me my hipster beer with shades of grapefruit"* (58). He reckons later on that his feelings of discomfort, of wanting to defend his particular gastronomic consumption, probably arises from his middles class status anxiety (60). Out of the fear of falling and of being deemed inauthentic, the middles class distinguishes themselves

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to stay ahead by constant maneuvers between highbrow and lowbrow culture, expressions of disdain for certain tastes and ironic reflections on their own display of taste. This practice is central to Stadtschmerz, wherein the discomfort and struggles of middlebrow taste is meandered.

The examined feuilleton flânerie targets predominantly the middle (and high) class. Van Veelen's writings on Rotterdam were published, firstly, on the journalistic platform *De Correspondent*, whose own reader survey concluded that its reaches only a limited part of the population, namely *"highly educated and progressive"* (Rosen 2017), and, secondly, in *NRC* (called *NRC Handelsblad* until 2022). In the 1910s, Brusse wrote his feuilleton *Onder de menschen* [translation: *'Among the people'*] for the predecessor of *NRC,* that was the bourgeois liberal *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* (*NRC*). D'Osta's feuilleton was titled Notre *Bruxelles oublié* [translation: *'Our forgotten Brussels'*] and published in the French-speaking Belgium *Le Soir*, which profiles itself as a progressive quality newspaper (D'Osta 1977, 47). Baudelaire wrote arguably one of the first feuilleton flânerie of Stadtschmerz. His prose poems of Paris' spleen first appeared separately in *La Presse* in 1862, followed by a further six, titled *Le Spleen de Paris*, in *Le Figaro* magazine two years later.

Since 1836, the feuilleton had become a popular urban genre sold on the streets in the new mass circulation dailies, like *La Presse.* It targeted a more general audience, not in the least the upcoming bourgeois. Just like nowadays, it implied a steadier income for authors than simply publishing a book. One could write shorter fictional works specifically for serial publications and the bulk of the material could always be published later (Gubbins 2023,135), like all examined authors did with their feuilletons. The feuilleton was usually published on loose sheets or the paper's first or center page, cornered off with a heavy black line, wherein the author reflected on city culture from an outsider's view (Berman 147). 'Physiologies' took a central place in the genre; the investigation of a diverse range of urban types, from the dandy to the street vendor. These particular feuilletons, Benjamin claimed, gave people a friendly picture of one another amidst the social tensions of the gentrified city, and, therefore, often a view of one's fellow man so remote from experience (Benjamin 37-39) . Baudelaire's poetic prose of Paris, however, was no pictorial folklore (Benjamin 170). Baudelaire stood on the margins of the bourgeois class and the great city looking in. As he dwells in the fault lines of gentrification, he is not only an observer but a participant and reporter, that is a flâneur on Stadtschmerz. From this position all examined writers here recounted of the rapidly shifting

environment caused by gentrification to which he and his fellow citizens were exposed.

Le Spleen de Paris (1869) by Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867)

Mid-19th-century Paris is a city in turmoil. The liberal and socialist revolutions of 1848 were mercilessly crushed by governmental troops, followed in 1851 by a coup d'état of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte who afterwards proclaimed himself Napoleon III and installed the conservative Second French Empire. Napoleon III commissioned the prefect of the Seine, Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, to renovate Paris. The renovation entailed a grand-scale demolition of medieval inner-city neighborhoods and their crowded narrow streets. These had to make way for broad boulevards flanked by imposing buildings, for vast squares and parks, fountains and monuments amongst other prestigious bourgeois urban planning. To put it differently: the lower classes had to make way for the middle and higher classes to flaunt their riches on the broad pavements of the boulevards and the terraces of the new cafes under a lush of trees and the novel streetlamps. Benjamin even argued that the broad boulevards had to prevent street barricades – erected during earlier civil rebellions and revolution – and move troops swiftly through the inner-city, from the barracks to the working-class neighborhoods. He called it *"Hausmann's efficiency"* and *"Hausmannisation"*, and according to him, contemporaries dubbed it *L'embellissement stratégique* [translation: *'strategic beautification'*] (Benjamin 174, 175). In this essay, we view it, in line with Neil Smith, as early processes of gentrification, as the making of bourgeois Paris (Smith 33). [3]

This the background against which the poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867 wrote *Le Spleen de Paris*. Posthumously published in 1869 but written between 1859 and 1867, it is a collection of fifty poetic prosaic stories of his encounters and experiences while strolling through Hausmannized Paris. In the book, we observe Stadtschmerz; a sense of alienation due to the radical transformation Paris underwent, which Benjamin claims was felt by most Parisians at that time: "*They felt no longer at home in (...) the inhumane character of the great city"* (Benjamin 174). However, Baudelaire mediated these feelings of loss – and, as we later will see, of guilt – by writing about Stadtschmerz.

In the preface to *Le Spleen de Paris* Baudelaire states that he ideally aims to describe *"our more abstract modern life"* (Baudelaire, 1869, ix) through prose poetry. He copied this technique from *Gaspard de la Nuit* by poet Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841), who wrote about the *"the old days, so strangely pittoresque"* (x). Baudelaire explains *"it was, above all, out of*

my exploration of huge cities, out of the medley of their innumerable interrelations, that this haunting ideal was born" (x). Marshall Berman argues Baudelaire needed a new language to describe the rise of the modern city or modern city life. He calls him a first modernist (Berman 148, 132-133). This essay rather views the use of the embellished technique as a way to soften the spleen he felt while walking through gentrifying Paris.

This is not to say that modernity is no fitting context to understand *Le Spleen de Paris.* The modern advent of historical time is fundamental to the analysis of Stadtschmerz and is a recurring theme in *Le Spleen de Paris*. The transformed city signifies the modern experience, so distant from the old days, as he tells us in the preface. Besides an experienced rupture in time, another part of this theme is the modern idea of progress. In the prose poem *'The Generous Gambler'* the idea of progress is linked to a new crowded boulevard, understood as the symbol of gentrifying Paris under Hausmann. Here, he meets the devil and follows him to a luxurious subterranean bar, where *they "talked of the universe, of its creation and of its final destruction; of the big idea of the century, that is, the idea of progress and perfectibility, and in general of all forms of human infatuation"* (Baudelaire 1869, 61). The devil reveals that he fervently supports the enlightened scientific development and its inherent idea of progress because it makes mankind believe that he does not exist and that they are indebted to constantly optimize themselves into perfection. It makes up for a perfect playing field in the market for souls. In similar vein, mankind's new obsession *'progress'* took hold of the city. It is arguably one of the core values of gentrification, the idea that a city must optimize itself to keep up with the times through constant redevelopment of the city. Gentrification is therefore often seen as a natural and inevitable process, – a claim Leslie Kern convincingly debunks in her recent *Gentrification is Inevitable and Other Lies* (2016).

In *Le Spleen de Paris* gentrifying Paris is illustrated through the intersection of newly lit places and the 'shady retreats' to which poets and philosophers are attracted, such as public parks visited *"by disappointed ambitions, frustrated inventors, abortive glories, and broken hearts, by all those tumultuous and secret souls still agitated by the last rumblings of the storm, who withdraw as far as possible from the insolent eyes of the gay and the idle."* (Baudelaire 1869, 22). We already learned from the devil that it was Enlightenment that brought mankind this new obsession of progress. We could turn this easily around to claim that backward people cannot keep pace with the progress of the gentrifying city, and, thus, they live in its shadows. Notably, almost nowhere in his stories, we will find an explicit

description of a demolished building or street, rather he put his focus on people, on the interrelations in the modern city. No ruins of buildings, yet mentions are found of ruined people, who cannot keep up with progressive time of gentrification. Like in *'The Old Clown'*, who Baudelaire pitied: *"bent, decrepit, the ruin of a man (...) mute and motionless"* (26), for whom the world no longer cared to come.

Besides the rise of modern historical time, and its intrinsic idea of progress and imagery of ruined faces, another recurring element in writings of Stadtschmerz is the sheer visible gap between the rich and poor in the gentrifying city. In *'The Poor Child's Toy'* a rich boy ignores his own new, magnificent toy and, instead, looks through the iron gate of his immense garden to the toy of a poor child – *"pitifully black and grimy, one of those urchin-pariahs"* (35). He held in his hands a living rat locked in a small chest. Although they are equally captivated by this particular toy, they are divided by class. *"Through the symbolic bars separating two worlds: highroad and mansion"* (36), the class divisions are in plain sight. Like in the public park where Baudelaire watched an orchestra play amid a crowd of bourgeois people:

> *"Here nothing that is not rich and happy; (...) nothing except that rabble over there leaning on the outside enclosure, catching a snatch of music gratis at the wind's pleasure, and gazing at the sparkling splendor within. The reflection of the joys of the rich in the eyes of the poor is always a curious sight" (Baudelaire, 36).*

It is in the eyes of the other, one sees one's riches and the other one's poverty or *vice versa*. And it is gentrification that brought them to see each other more closely and clearly than before, when the poor were sealed off in the old medieval slums. Now, through the modern avenues, the long street vistas, the modern city lights, they are brought out into the open and into the light (Berman 153).

This brings us to the last element of Stadtschmerz we should discern in *Le Spleen de Paris*, namely the embarrassment and guilt of riches that could emerge from interlocking with the eyes of the other, as in *'The Eyes of the Poor'*. Here he sits down with his lover *"in front of a new cafe forming the corner of a new boulevard still littered with rubbish but already displayed proudly its unfinished splendors"* and modern gas light – the modern transition from oil to gas lamps – *"burned with all the ardor of a début"* (Baudelaire 1869, 52). Yet, across the streets he looks into the eyes of a family in rags,

a father of about forty *"with a tired face and greying beard, holding a small boy by the hand and carrying on his arm another little thing, still too weak to walk"*. With absolute admiration they look to the new café.

> *"The eyes of the father said: 'How beautiful it is! How beautiful it is! All the gold of the poor world must have found its way onto those walls.' The eyes of the little boy: 'How beautiful it is! How beautiful it is! But it is a house where only people who are not like us can go.' As for the baby, he was much too fascinated to express anything but joy – utterly stupid and profound." (53).*

Not only does Baudelaire feel touched, he also feels a little ashamed of his luxurious consumption on the brightly lit terrace of the new café. Yet his lover thinks differently: *"Those people are insufferable with their great saucer eyes. Can't you tell the proprietor to send them away?"* (53). This is the reason, he tells her, he hates her today. In the end, it is the boulevard that forces them to deal with their class privilege, which crushes the joy of their romantic rendezvous (Berman 154) . Or as Benjamin states: *"As spleen he shatters the ideal (...) through the ambiguity which is peculiar to the social relations and events of this epoch."* (Benjamin 171) . This essay rather argues the ideal is shattered through his middlebrow taste. He is a consumer on that terrace, not only of fine wine and food, not of the Hausmannian renovation itself. It is in his liking that these boulevards, cafes, street lanterns, terraces, broad pavements are erected. It is his place to shine. To realize this, means that the ideal of his romantic rendezvous is shattered. Love is lost and feelings of loss and guilts take over.

We should not, however, misunderstand these feelings of Stadtschmerz for being anti-modernist or against gentrification. Or that he, as Benjamin thought of Parisians at that time, did not feel at home in Hausmannian Paris. Rather, it seems he truly loves to stroll the Parisian streets. As he writes in the Epilogue: *"Happy of heart I climbed the hill / To contemplate the town in its enormity, / Brothel and hospital, prison, purgatory, hell / (...) Infamous City, I adore you! Courtesans / And bandits, you offer me such joys / The common herd can never understand."* (Baudelaire 1869,108). It appears he needs the ruins of Paris to live for his art. The city is as a muse to him*: "Away, academic muse! I'll have nothing to do with that pedantic old prude. No, I invoke the friendly, lively muse of cities."* (104). Pain and pleasure, ruins and riches collide constantly in the city; within this ambiguity that spirals his spleen, he not so much makes himself at home, as Berman

thought (Berman 45). It seems he constantly tries to make himself at home in the gentrifying city. This constant struggle of mediating a sense of loss and guilt represents the core experience of the writers on Stadtschmerz.

The Life and Death of the Zandstraat Red Light District (1912; 1917) by M.J. Brusse

As a flaneur, journalist M.J. Brusse (1873 - 1941) reported on the demolition of the Zandstraat neighborhood in Rotterdam (the Netherlands) in the 1910s. First published between 1910-1911 in a feuilleton in the liberal newspaper *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* (*NRC*), the fourteen stories were collected in a publication issued by the publishing company of the Brusse family in 1912, the year the demolition began. It was titled: *Het rosse leven en sterven van de Zandstraat – De Rotterdamsche 'Polder' gesloopt* [translation: *'The life and death of the Zandstraat Red Light District – The Rotterdam 'Polder' demolished'* MBK]. While people generally referred to the area as the 'Polder' – i.e., rural space encircled by dykes – it was by no means a rural landscape. This area was infamous for its dance houses, (night) bars, and illegal brothels. It amassed a multitude of people working in its informal economy and visiting it places of amusement, sea farers amongst many others. Historically, the Zandstraat was a neighborhood for migrants of all sorts, including a Jewish community that, as Brusse writes, *"was separate from the Polder vices and customs"* (Brusse, 1917, 68). Housing conditions were notoriously bad, as journalist Louis Schotting and socialist municipal councilor Hendrik Spiekman wrote in *Arm Rotterdam: Hoe het woont! Hoe het leeft!* [translation: *'Poor Rotterdam: How It Is Housed and How It Lives!'*]. They viewed the Zandstraat as the center of poverty, pollution and fornication. The majority of the 170 homes they visited consisted of one room, usually housing entire families in unsanitary spaces. Its overpopulation can be understood within the context of the expansive population growth Rotterdam experienced in the late 19th century, not in the least due to the construction of the ship canal Nieuwe Waterweg in 1869. The city transformed from a merchant town to an industrialized port city, and in its slip stream radical urban planning took hold of the city (Van der Laar 2004). In 1909, the city government decided to demolish the Zandstraat neighborhood and erect in its place a prestigious city hall and a grand boulevard, fitting to the rising bourgeoisie of Rotterdam. The inhabitants had to make way, while no alternative housing was offered. A total of 700 homes and 150 business premises were demolished, resulting in the displacement of 2,400 official residents, – the exact was most probably higher ('Zandstraatbuurt').

Brusse was a well-known journalist, famous for his investigative journalism (novel to the Dutch media at that time) and his reports based on his personal observations that carried with them a great sympathy for people who lived on the margins of society. Since 1903 he wrote the feuilleton *Onder de menschen* [translation: *'Among the people'*], in which he also wrote about the Zandstraat. His book on its demolition became a bestseller, especially after the public-friendly second edition of 1917 accompanied by drawings of acclaimed Dutch artist Kees van Dongen. It reads like a physiology, describing typical residents like sex workers, seafaring customers, petty criminals, factory girls, pimps, police officers. Yet, similarly to Baudelaire, it entailed no idealistic folklore. First and foremost, he wrote about the ambiguities of pleasure and poverty in the Zandstraat Red Light district.

The experience of a rupture in time by gentrification, a key feature of Stadtschmerz, is omnipresent in *Het rosse leven*. In the first chapter 'Zandstraat memory' we read Brusse viewed the Zandstraat in earlier times as *"the most spirited and authentic neighborhood of the city"* (Brusse 1917, 4). It was *"an old love of his, especially because of her fierce temperament, and the generous genuineness that greeted you everywhere you went, when, tired of the boring pretense around it, you sank down the dike into the Polder and knew where you were at"* (3). After the demolition, there is only *"nostalgia"* left among the people, Rotterdammers and foreign seafarers alike; the neighborhood lies *"in ruins with all their soggy memories"* (3). However, Brusse already witnessed earlier decline of the neighborhood with the coming of the 'cold gaslight'. Much like Baudelaire, he uses modern light as an allegory: *"the bar owners and the madams [of sex workers] did not grant each other another evening in the new light"* (5-6). The modern light dispels the charm of the neighborhood: *"The atmosphere was gone, the buzz was gone, and in that sober pale light above dance halls, pubs and little bars [knipjes] you immediately saw how meagerly sad it all actually looked there, and how poignant the faces were"* (6).

Likewise, the idea of progress is prevalent in Brusse's book. We can understand the gentrification of the Zandstraat as part of a bigger urban development, which Brusse called the *"modernizing and so swiftly progressing city"* (8) in the following chapter titled '*The Amputation*'. It is the making of modern middle-class Rotterdam: *"The seat of the daily administration, the Council, the municipal offices, posts and telegraphy, with all their activity, bring a completely different life to it"* (17). With a flair for the dramatic, he calls the demolition an amputation. However, *"[f]ar too many of the diseased organs are cut away for the organism to survive"* (16), since the streets that remain, will be flanked by busy roads filled with traffic,

the music license will be withdrawn, and the buildings that are going to be demolished will be soon left vacant. In other words: The Zandstraat will die. For Brusse, it seems the end of era: *"What a memory of centuries will be taken from the living history of old Rotterdam by the demolition of those two miserable housing blocks!"*. Feelings of loss of time and space are drenched over every page of this work on Stadtschmerz.

In order for time to be caught in a story, the story needs, after the beginning, a middle section to lead the reader to the – here expected demolition – end; or, as Ricoeur explains: *"The temporal aspect characterized by the integration, culmination and closure owing to which the story receives a particular configuration."* (Ricoeur 1984, 22). He begins with his sweet memories of the neighborhood, infused with a language, which we may call 'colonial' in line with what Neil Smith referred to as *"the imagery of wilderness and frontier"* (Smith 1996, preface). Frontier imagery implies the claim that the middle class civilizes land and people, and, in this manner, it is often used to justify gentrification. At first sight, Brusse views the Zandstraat festivities as 'primitive' (Brusse1917, 6) and those working in the informal economy of prostitution and crime almost as *noble savages*: *"So purely sincere in their feeling of sin, so melting in the sweet passion of one's own depravity"* (7). They lived a backward life *"according to their own manners and customs in the heart of our modernizing and so swiftly progressing city"* (8). Brusse compares the residents with *"inlanders"* (14), a *"foreign tribe"*, and the Zandstraat with a *"overseas hamlet, of which the citizens of Rotterdam and of the entire country probably know less than about the lifestyle of the man-eaters in New Guinea, for example, which they can find in the ethnographic manuals"* (13). As an explorer in the colonies, he therefore "*went on new research trips, day and night*". (13). No curiosities or rare specimen did he bring back, instead, his 'loot' was of great importance for the general welfare. His self-proclaimed 'ethnography' and 'ancient urban' investigation (13) would show *"the terrifying slum-maze"* (14) of the Zandstraatbuurt. Much like Danish-American journalist Jacob Riis did in *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Amongst the Tenements of New York* (1890) and Christian social reformer William Booth in *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890). But perhaps more importantly to the reader, it would demonstrate the consequences of the forced distribution of residents over the city for the 'safety and salvation' (Brusse 1917, 14) of Rotterdam. Here, we see no sympathy for the residents, but, first and foremost, for his 'own' people, his fellow bourgeois townsmen. The residents of the Zandstraat are understood – much like the people who live in the colonies in those

days – as backward living people, who cannot keep up with the time in the gentrifying city.

The culmination of Brusse's story begins when he takes a look *"under the surface of the swamp"* (31) that is the Zandstraat. Through a local 'guide' (32), a police detective, he sees beyond the outsiders' gaze and is granted a look inside. The chief constable of police appointed him the guide; he supported Brusse's investigation since he thought that knowing the 'psychology' (30) of the Zandstraat population could prevent crime and prostitution. Brusse also got support from the director of the building police and a doctor of venereal disease, who agreed *"distorted representations can be corrected, and above all it can serve as a warning"* (30). From the moment he takes a look inside, we will find the ambiguity of loss and guilt, the intersections of pain and pleasure, that characterize Stadtschmerz writings. *"I immediately started to see everything differently than when I had just wandered around in the past with eager painter's eyes and a mild sensitivity to the moods of the situation"* (32).

The following chapters deal with the poor fate of 'girls' who were tricked into prostitution by lover boys (Ch. V 39-46), with the petty crime of runaway boys looking for means to simply survive (Ch. VI 47-57), with the dodgy café 'Lindeboom' turned into a hunting scene when Brusse walks in with his guide, and with the evils of the souteneur, the only type for whom Brusse feels little empathy (Ch. VII 58-66). These midsection chapters could be understood as a Baudelarian physiology of the shadowy urban types, but contrary to Baudelaire, Brusse somewhat moralizes the actions of certain types.

Brusse furthers his gaze into the mentalities of the Zandstraatbuurt in the next six chapters that recount a calm Sunday night, on which he met the infamous pub owner, informal brothel-madam and sex worker, Toos. The story of Toos – Brusse sometimes calls her Toosje – is saddening to read. The father of her three children, her (unofficial) husband, who is serving a sentence, lured her into sex work at the age of fourteen when her mother suddenly died and she could not live any longer at home with her alcoholic and abusive father. Her current lover – also a criminal and her souteneur – just got arrested. In the back of the shady bar, Brusse witnesses a child of four in a shakedown bed. Childcare took the child away from Toos, but feeling extremely sad over the arrest of her partner, she went to get her. Whereas the child, Toos tells Brusse, was born in prison, and therefore, properly taken care of, she *"made sure the other two died quickly"* (94). Toos is full of contradictions: the love and care she shows for one child, while she, with seeming nonchalance, states she killed the others; or the love she

feels for the man who forces her to work in prostitution. Why is Toos such an ambiguously moral person? With exceeding empathy, Brusse explains to his gentlemen reader and, simultaneously, points his finger partly to them:

> *"Is it any wonder – you wonder – that such girls become the way they are? When the world from outside the Polder often reveals itself to her in a confidential manner as cruel and monstrous, as doggish as Toosje roughly spoke of, – especially among those so-called gentlemen, who also follow her stealthily and search for her in the dark, poverty-stricken streets in front of her, their depraved debaucheries and their diseased perversions? – When her moral conscience, her natural tenderness is mercilessly chewed, abused and blunted (...)?" (Brusse, 104).*

Contrary to Baudelaire, Brusse reports of no explicit personal shame or guilt. His Stadtschmerz, instead, is infused with great empathy for the lower classes, who try to make something from the little they got. He tries to transport his empathy to the bourgeois readers of the *NRC*, most of them came from the mercantile elite of Rotterdam. Where you are born, determines the opportunities you get in life. In fact, already from the beginning of the book, Brusse targets his readers' class privilege including the women: *"How many of the women, who now often despise her so much, would have risen to that higher level if they had grown up in the same miserable conditions as most prostitutes?"* (4). He even calls out the role gentlemen play in publicly denouncing sex workers, yet frequently visiting them (5). Brusse, moreover, attempts to uncover the deceit of the higher classes in the role they play within gentrification. Like Baudelaire, he questions who is more civilized:

> *"Because were they really so much worse, so much meaner, there in the Zandstraat, where they openly and faithfully peddled their indecency, than in the other, 'neat' neighborhoods of the city?" (3-4).*

In light of this, we should read the first chapters, in which Brusse exoticizes the Zandstraat population who had to make way for progress. His old friend, the artist, Kees Van Dongen called him an *"aristocratic socialist"* (qtd. from Baptiste 2022, 1312) for this reason. Historian Vincent Baptiste instead thought that Brusse wanted *"to express the pure and authentic character*

of people who lived on the margins of society" (Baptiste 2022, 1312). This essay argues that he rather used the entertaining colonial trope to lure in the reader, before he revealed what was under the surface of the swamp: the shattering ambiguities of Stadtschmerz, of which the reader was to some extent even guilty.

The book ends with New Year's Day of 1912. The day before residents masqueraded a funeral procession with ladies in black weeping on a car that drove through the Zandstraat neighborhood. At midnight, the fun was over, the music stopped and within ten minutes, Brusse reports, the streets were cleared by the police (129). The first of January was a day of doom. In front of the windows residents hanged an obituary, which Brusse reprinted in his feuilleton in the NRC: *"Today, after a long and joyful existence, the Zandstraat died"* (132).

Our Forgotten Brussels (1977) by Jean d'Osta

In *Notre Bruxelles oublié* [translated: *'Our forgotten Brussels'*], journalist and poet, Jean d'Osta recalled personal memories combined with memories of his family members of Brussels before the so-called 'Brusselisation', the modernization of the city in the post-war period, or *"the destruction of a city by profit-driven developers and architects"* (Doucet 2022, 106). And even before that period, Brussels experienced large scale urban planning that demolished parts of the city. In the second half the 19th century, inspired by Hausmann's Paris, Brussels set out to erect grand-sweeping vistas, grand boulevards, and Parisian apartment buildings. However, the bourgeoisie of Brussels did not take a great interest in the boulevards or the appartements, many remained living in the affluent suburbs. The building of the megalomanic *Palace of Justice* by architect Joseph Poelaert was considered the climax (Schaepdrijver 1993). At the beginning of the twentieth century another project demolished forty acres of urban space for the construction of a railway connection between Brussels northern and southern stations, straight to the heart of the city. All three urban renewals were deemed a failure by the wider public (Schaepdrijver 1993). Within this long-term historical context of gentrification d'Osta's stories of forgotten Brussels were edited and collected into a volume, published in 1977 under the same title as his feuilleton. Heavy feelings of Stadtschmerz drip from the pages of *Notre Bruxelles oublié*, as the editors write in the preface: *"Each [story] narrated with so much tenderness, poetry, color, so much smiling simplicity, that one can hardly read them without emotion"* (d'Osta 1977, 5).

The book begins with recollections from his childhood in Brussels, such as the memory of the music kiosk at square Brugmann (later called

Marlow), close to his house. The little promenades he took with his mother usually ended there to watch the concert. His mother rented a chair for herself and asked little Jean if he would prefer a chair or an ice cream. He always chose the ice cream and after eating it he would sit on the ground against the knees of his mother. It's a true lieux de memoir, heavily infused with what we may call a reversive Proustian experience of memory; a place recalling a taste and sounds. The kiosk closed, *"[r]ust and melancholy took hold of him"* (37). So, when he was a young teenager, he was allowed to take tram 11 to the kiosk at Schaerbeek. He takes the reader with him on the tram, shows her the difference between the first and second classes, the Sunday crowds going on an excursion, how he sits next to the driver feeling free. Like a Russian doll, d'Osta gives us memory within memory. Within his recollection of taking tram 11 through the city he describes a past memory culture of the Bruxellois, commemorating a soldier from the Great War when passing the place du Congrès: *"The workers a cap, the gentlemen a felt hat during winter, straw in the summer (panama or boater hat). I was entitled to a flat ribbon beret, or a soft, wide-brimmed straw hat, depending on the season"* (37). Here, he gives us an insight into the class society of Bruxelles and to which class he belongs, namely the bourgeoisie. He ends this tale with feelings of loss over the demolished kiosks, and this one in particular. *"But today, after so many years, I cannot see Marlow Square again without feeling nostalgic for its kiosk and its displays from another age. And I wait in vain for the sweet and cacophonous prelude of the violins being tuned"* (37).

Notre Bruxelles oublié, however, goes beyond sweet personal memories of a bygone era. A history of modernization is plotted throughout the text, for instance, the inventions of the telephone (105-110), radio (39-42), television (43-45); and not only happy histories of progress, but also of the pollution of earlier times (56-57). Almost as if to say, modernization also includes good works and Brussels dealt with the rest. Yet, we must say *almost*, since d'Osta criticizes the radical demolition of urban space too.

A fine example is the story of the demolition of the Marollen district in 1866, which was replaced with the Palace of Justice. It reminds us of the history of the Zandstraat area. The district likewise was an old medieval working-class neighborhood of slums with *"a very disreputable state for a long time (...) a sort of ghetto for filles publiques"* (124). Since the 16th century, it was celebrated as picturesque and authentic, and it was razed to the ground for the bourgeois state institutions. D'Osta, however, seems to be far removed from picturesque labels. *"Yes: Those who were going to be expelled from their old Marolle by the Rotten Architect were very poor people, who undoubtedly cared very little about the 'picturesque' aspects of*

their neighborhood, sacrificed to this majestic, colossal, overwhelming Justice". To speak of the loss of the authentic seems to be a privilege of the bourgeois, not for those residents who lived under conditions of sheer poverty. D'Osta was rather concerned with the loss of memory: *"This working-class district that Poelaert's grandiose work wiped off the map and which no one has remembered anymore"* (124). He refers to 'a last concrete memory', a letter in the possession of Mr. Jean Copin, the well-known pharmacist-folklorist to which one Joseph Nolot (or Nolet), 12, rue des Sabots, begs for help, in February 1848:

> *"We sleep on straw, without blankets. My wife has been ill for a long time. I had to leave work because of a feeling of trouble in my head. It's a little better now. I could find work again, but I don't have any boots. To buy bread for my children, I sold my only iron pot for cooking soup. But it's already spent. We are all in famine." (d'Osta 1977, 125).*

In one of the last stories, '*The pilgrimages of the Bas-Fondistes'*, we can observe how the demolition of place affects quite synchronically the experience of time. The term pilgrimage has a double meaning here, namely the procession to erect the Maypole. Secondly, it means a pilgrimage to the time before the demolition of the neighborhood in 1955. "*But we talked less about the day's celebration than about memories of gooien taaid that happy time when rue de Schaerbeek and rue Pachéco still existed, when we knew almost all the inhabitants (...) – that already distant time (before 1955!).*" (151). A rupture in time is felt through celebrating the ancient tradition of the planting of the 'Meyboom' at the same spot as always, yet its surroundings changed. It means that the past is closed off as is also attested by an outcry of one of the organizers: *Dân taaid komt nuut nemi wie* [translation: *'Those times will never come again'*] (151). Secondly, in the story of the Meyboom, time is experienced as fleeting, of going too fast, and, consequently, some people cannot catch up. Historical time of progression is running away. *Den taaid lupt te rap weg* [translation: *'Time flies too quickly'*] as the president of the organization says.

The outcries are accompanied by a photo of wreckages; La rue des Denrées and le Marché-du-Parc during the demolition of neighborhood Bas-Fonds in 1956, captioned as follows:*"An immense and deserted promenade now obstructs the panorama that we saw from the Place de Congrès (which was formerly called Place du Panaroma)."* (151). While d'Osta in other stories glosses over demolitions, here, he goes on explicitly criticizing gentrification.

> *"Let us instead think about what 'they' did with the Market Square, the Park and the monumental double staircase of the Place du Congrès, from where we could admire the entire panorama of the lower town: 'they' did make up of five floors of car parks supporting an esplanade that is too high, which hides the panorama, and whose immense surface is so bare and desolate that no one ever walks there. It is therefore not without nostalgia that the Bas-Fondistes evoke the colorful animation of their old district"(D'Osta 1977, 153).*

Through writing a history about Stadtschmerz, D'Osta is able to confer feelings of loss of time amid gentrification processes. Feelings of shame or guilt we do not come across in the book. He is rather pointing the finger to 'they', i.e., those urban planners, politicians, and architects like Poelaert, who demolished his Brussels over and over again. By recounting a genealogy of demolitions, d'Osta seems not only to remember what he and Brussels once were, but he also protests against the wrecking balls of gentrification: *Lest we forget*.

Why do we tend to forget earlier waves of gentrification? Perhaps because the experienced rupture in time, brought forth by gentrification processes, creates a break from the past so vividly, then one only can think in terms of Then & Now, like d'Osta did, when he made the photo book *Bruxelles hier et aujourd'hui* on Brussels before the Brussellisation and afterwards (d'Osta). The past becomes a faraway land; we have to go there, to see it with our own eyes.

Rotterdam, an Ode to Efficiency (2022) by Arjen van Veelen

As his predecessor Brusse at *NRC*, van Veelen plots a story of awakening through book on Rotterdam. In the first two chapters, he recounts his amazement by the urban renewal of Rotterdam when he came back in 2017. Rotterdam suddenly had become hip, *"as if not only I, but also the city had become a class migrant, so that we suddenly fit together wonderfully"* (van Veelen 2022, 16). Together with his partner, pregnant with their first child, he bought a house in former working-class inner-city district. He decided to be *"like Baudelaire, an urban stroller who moved haphazardly and inconspicuously into the noise of the crowd"* (26). Like d'Osta, he attempted to write a history of urban change, similarly moved from personal childhood memories of a city which was changed. Yet, he felt that it was undoubtedly for the better. That Rotterdam – the poorest city of the Netherlands – was finally 'catching up'. In this, we witness again the idea of progress, of urban development as a process of improvement. Without progress, a city falls behind.

Van Veelen begins to explore gentrification. At first, he is rather positive. The radical transformation of the former Red-Light District of Rotterdam, Katendrecht, led by the city government and executed by social housing corporations and a real estate developer, already began in the late 2000s with the campaign *Kaap Jij De Kaap Aan?* [translation: *'Can You Handle The Kaap?'*]. At van Veelen's arrival the gentrification of Katendrecht was in its final stages. The apotheosis was the completion of *'The Box'*, reportedly the most expensive house of the Netherlands. It was a glass box of thousand square meters with ceilings of eleven meters and a total view of the Rotterdam skyline. The real estate developer of The Box told him that she saw herself as the representative of people who do not yet live in Rotterdam. *"There is always some hesitation to talk about the most luxurious market segment, but I also find it great to see that South-Rotterdam has apparently become so attractive that buyers are willing to pay large sums for a house next to a neighborhood that until recently was seen as second-rate"* (31). Van Veelen writes that he thought she had a point. He just bought a house himself on a street that was considered a no-go area by many twenty years ago. He was convinced that 'mixing' a working-class neighborhood with more affluent people would be better than segregation, that investments were better than disinvestments: *"The most expensive house in one of the poorest neighborhoods, why not?"* (32).

It reads like a rhetorical question, since the reader expects – through the emplotment – that Arjen van Veelen will soon uncover what lies beneath the gloss and glitter of gentrified Rotterdam. And so, he does in the next chapter called *'What the postman sees'* on the demolition of the district of Tweebosbuurt, which made headlines worldwide due to a report by the United Nations declaring it a violation of human rights (Rajagopal 2021).

The Tweebosbuurt is close to gentrified Katendrecht. Yet, here, it looked like he walked into *"a 19th century slum"*, with "*boarded up buildings. Rotting window frames. Children playing among the garbage on the street"* (35). He read in the newspaper that better, newer housing would be built and that the residents would be offered alternative housing; perhaps all for the best, he thought. At the hearing of the housing corporation against some 'refusal movers', van Veelen witnessed the enormous crowd of residents protesting against the demolition. There he met resident and postman, Ahmed Abdillahi who invited van Veelen to go with him around town, to show him the bigger picture, and hopefully to motivate him to write critical pieces about Rotterdam. Here the story begins, the story of awakening for van Veelen, of seeing what displacement does to people. Not from reading a newspaper, or from afar, but led by his guide *par excellence* (345).

“By recounting a genealogy of demolitions, d’Osta seems not only to remember what he and Brussels once were, but he also protests against the wrecking balls of gentrification: Lest we forget.”

Together they went into the working-class districts, inside the homes of residents of the Tweebosbuurt, who shared their stories of poverty, racism, discrimination, precarisation and displacement with him. Or about, as he quotes Abdillahi, the authorities *"not fighting poverty but fighting the poor"* (39). At the end of the chapter their bike ride comes to an end, at Katendrecht.

> *"Less than a hundred meters from the broken toilet, the hip world of Katendrecht shone, the terraces looked out over the skyline of the new city, the block tower of De Rotterdam shone in the sun. (...) Ahmed pointed to the terraces full of young people in a setting of post-industrial rawness. 'What do you think that does to me?' He asked rhetorically" (44).*

Here, we find important Stadtschmerz tropes: the fault lines in the gentrified city between the rich and poor, the local guide, who is needed for the middleclass observer as van Veelen and Brusse before him to see the entire picture of gentrification. Processes for which he was to blame. Because he is the target group, he is the gentrifier: *"This city was recreated for people like me"* (69).

Conclusion

All four examined authors wrote stories of loss and guilt in times of gentrification. *A loss of space signifies a loss of time*. The latter explained in terms of a rupture in time, the idea of progress, nostalgia, memory loss. Feelings of guilt over gentrification stem from a middle-class distinction of taste that is said to drive gentrification, from middle class anxiety. Their feuilleton flânerie enables these authors to expose, criticize but also soften the class divisions in the gentrifying city and their position within these. Most of all, this genre processes all of that for its middle-class readers. To read on Stadtschmerz is perhaps similar to serving a penance, after which one could carry on with the ambiguous position of a bourgeois citizen living in a city demolished and reconstructed for your type. Gentrification brings the need for stories to comfort the discomfort of the middle class.

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Endnotes

1 Boer is part of the round table conversation on gentrification in this AMJournal issue. Learn more about his insights on the theme in 'The Polylogue' on page 208.

2 For more on Osman's pivotal notions on history and gentrification, you can read the conversation guest editor Tim Verlaan has with the known scholar in 'The Dialogue' on page 8 of this AMJournal edition.

3 For more on the Haussmannization of Paris, and more specifically, the role of photographs and photographers, see the 'Visual Essay' by Sigi Samwel on page 76 of this AMJournal Edition.