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Cultural journals in the Dutch language region (Netherlands and Flanders)

An inventory made for the Eurozine network

Miriam Rasch, miriam@networkcultures.org
February 2018

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1. Introduction

What follows is a case report on the field of cultural journals in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium). The two regions have been taken together, since they share the Dutch language and because many of the journals discussed have reach in both countries. Next to that, cooperation between the two countries is happening more and more and is stimulated through e.g. funding institutions and growing networks.

The report is set up as follows. First the context of the cultural field in which the journals operate will be described shortly; then the criteria for selection of the journals are explained. An overview of the appropriate 'cultural journals' is put forward and the respective audiences are described (albeit concisely). And finally this leads to an advice about the journals that seem most interesting from the perspective of the Eurozine network, including some editorial contact details.

Full disclosure should be given: I am an editor with the platform for essayists De Nieuwe Garde that is mentioned further on, and have collaborated or still collaborate professionally with some of the titles included here, among others rekto:verso and Ons Erfdeel (Flanders), and De Nederlandse Boekengids and De Gids (Netherlands). Obviously this means there is a chance for bias, however, as the field in the Dutch region is so small, it would be difficult to avoid any bias. I've tried my best to provide a neutral overview. The advice is based on all the information gathered and on my personal outlook on the journals and the possibilities for a fruitful connection between them and Eurozine. Of course, I will be happy to elaborate or explain in case something is unclear or incomplete!

Miriam Rasch
Rotterdam, the Netherlands
February 2018

2. Context

Probably all over Europe the last decade has been quite harsh on both the journalistic field and the cultural sector. For cultural journals this means they have suffered doubly: first as a consequence of a generally declining readership that can be seen also with newspapers and other print media and which is usually blamed on the rise of digital media, and second as a consequence of budget cuts in the arts and cultural sector. At least in the Netherlands and Flanders these developments have had severe effects, as publishing in the cultural sector has to a high degree been dependent on government funding, ever since post-WWII cultural politics made national funding in the arts a standard.

Netherlands

Especially in the Netherlands, under the successive cabinets of prime minister Mark Rutte starting in 2010, the cuts in government funding for the cultural sector have been very harsh, decimating the field within a very short period of time (1-2 years), and leaving the remaining players to readjust and reinvent themselves fundamentally. Of course this was done as a part of general austerity

politics following the financial crisis of 2008. Nevertheless, the cultural policies carried out under for example liberal minister Halbe Zijlstra also had a symbolic power, and have thus been detrimental.

Since then, some of those measurements have been relieved or taken back. An example is the obligation that was imposed on the Dutch Literature Fund to stop funding literary magazines, which meant the immediate end for not a few of them. Now the Fund is allowed to fund magazines again which has led to a renewed blossoming of the field. For the Literary Fund the support of magazines is seen as a way to stimulate writers. In a similar way but with a different outcome, the important cultural and arts funds mostly follow the logic that the remaining budgets should be spent in favour of artists directly, which means that publications *about* arts and culture miss out. That means almost all arts and cultural journals in the Netherlands have disappeared.

The magazines remaining are either mainstream weeklies and monthlies that can survive by subscriptions and advertisements, but which have less and less space for cultural or critical journalism. Or they are more specifically literary magazines that get by with the help of funding. Online some new cultural journalistic initiatives in the broad sense can be found, but they are mostly run by volunteers.

Flanders

Belgium has a bit of a different context. Many magazines in Belgium stem from so-called 'community life', so they are magazines of local clubs and societies (from hobby's to sports to political parties). Few of these have grown into national (or Flanders / Wallonia) media, some of them still exist in their own niche, many of them have recently disappeared. Another characteristic of the Belgian print media landscape is that many of the cultural journals fall within the category of 'heritage' (this might be connected to the origin of many magazines in local community life, but also has to do with the existence of an important government fund for heritage – in Belgium too funding is important for survival).

Of course the Belgian journals have also suffered from the decline in readership and from the financial crisis. But the cuts in the cultural sector have been less severe – although that seems to be optimistically put given recent trends. Since 2014 also in Belgium budget cuts for the culture sector have increased. This has led to a growing protest movement called 'Hart boven Hard' (heart above hard), initiated by the culture sector (more specifically, with ties to cultural journal *rekto:verso*) but addressing and advocating many other social and welfare issues as well.

All in all, Flemish cultural journals can still apply for funding and there are separate funds for literary and culture / heritage publications. In Belgium therefore there are a lot of niche publications, quite some cultural journals, next to a few literary magazines. Concluding, while Flanders has a population count of 6.5 million and the Netherlands of 17 million, this difference is not reflected in the amount of journals, nor in their print runs as will become clear.

3. Criteria

The criteria used to decide which of the publications will be counted as cultural journal have been taken from reports on the state of (cultural) journalism, criteria used by funds and other overviews of existing journals.

- *Content*: the content of a publication falls in the category of culture / politics / literature / arts and the publication as a whole is dedicated to such themes. It offers reflection and critique through original content and does not just present interviews or marketing content. On the other hand, it is not a specialised professional or academic publication either. Heritage is left out of the overview.
- *Organisation*: the publication is led by an editing team and publishes a diverse range of authors and articles. The publication appears periodically (more than twice a year) and has some substance.
- *Formats*: the publication appears on paper and has a distribution that is not just local. Some interesting online magazines will be pointed out too.
- *Audience / publics*: the publication addresses not a wide audience per se, but a general audience in the sense that it isn't limited to academia or a certain profession.

Publications that meet these criteria will be regarded in what follows as 'cultural journals'.

4. Categories and titles

The publications that apply can be put in different categories, as can be seen in the overview below. 'Culture' here means that the journal publishes articles about different disciplines and societal trends in general (in contrast to magazines about literary and other arts); these journals mostly come out bimonthly or less. By weeklies and monthlies are meant periodicals that also cover news stories and opinion, which in the case of these titles is done from a pronounced cultural perspective.

	Culture	Visual arts / architecture / film / theatre	Literature	Weekly/monthly	Popular science (both NL & BE)	Online
Netherlands	Boekman De Nederlandse Boekengids Krisis Simulacrum (students)	Archined De Filmkrant Kunstlicht Metropolis M See All This Theatermaker Tubelight	Awater De Gids De Parelduiker Extaze Hard Gras Hollands Maandblad Liter Revisor Terras Tirade	Elsevier (weekly) De Groene Amsterdammer (weekly) HP/De Tijd (monthly) The Optimist (quarterly) Opzij (monthly) Vrij Nederland (monthly) 360 magazine (biweekly) (BE & NL)	EOS Filosofie Magazine Historisch Nieuwsblad	De Fusie (students) De optimist Hard//hoofd
Flanders	De Witte Raaf Gonzo Circus Ons Erfdeel Rekto:verso Streven	A+ Architecture Etcetera Faro Filmmagie Hart Oogst	Deus Ex Machina DWB Gierik & NVT Kluger Hans nY Poëziekrant	Humo (weekly) Knack (weekly) MO magazine (quarterly) Tertio (weekly)	Maarten New Scientist Psychologie Magazine Quest	

Overview of 'cultural journals' in the Netherlands and Flanders.

Next to the magazines in the overview, two networks of journals are worth mentioning:

- [Folio](#) is a Flemish network of 32 cultural, literary and heritage journals that has the goal to share visibility, knowledge, experience and lobbying power.
- [De Nieuwe Garde](#) is a network of around 30 magazines operating in both the Netherlands and Flanders, aimed at the publication and support of essays and essayists.

5. Audience

It's difficult to say something in detail about audiences of the publications in the overview. Not all journals provide public information on their readership and print runs. And naturally there are great differences between the different categories.

- Generally speaking, the literary and arts magazines have low print runs (200-1000 copies) targeted as they are to very niche audiences. There are larger publications in the arts for example, but they are mostly human interest and PR oriented, so not included here.
- The weeklies / monthlies run between 15,000 and around 100,000. Some journals have more specific target audiences (Opzij: women, Tertio: catholics) while others have a more general image (Knack), which is then of course reflected in the numbers (the Flemish weekly Knack has some of the highest numbers in this selection).
- The journals in the Culture category are somewhere in between, running from 3,000 to 15,000. Some of the titles are distributed freely among cultural institutions and the likes and therefore have a high print run (rekto:verso, De Witte Raaf, both at around 15,000).
- The ones named under 'Popular science' run somewhere between 11,000 (Filosofie Magazine) and 40,000 (EOS), with a large publication like Quest (focused on natural sciences, so on the very outskirts of what might be called a cultural journal) running 155,000 print copies.

6. Advice

The journals below have been selected out of the above overview firstly because of their relevance in cultural media landscape in the Netherlands and Flanders, and secondly for their presumed compatibility with the Eurozine mission and network. The Flemish journals offer a more obvious connection, while in the Netherlands the journals are generally more niche and/or more precarious. The selection is aimed at a diverse presentation of different types of journals. They are ordered according to relevance.

The Netherlands:

[De Nederlandse Boekengids](#) (dNBg): Even though dNBg is a relatively new title on the scene (established in 2015) I consider them a very welcome addition. Positioning themselves as 'The Dutch Review of Books' they publish lengthy and in-depth essays on recent publications, always tapping into on-going (national and international) debates in society, politics and culture. Writers and editors

can be both established intellectuals and new and upcoming essayists and researchers. Quite academic at times, but targeted at a general audience interested in intellectual debates and not limited to a certain ideological frame. The editing team is actively seeking collaborations nationally and internationally (like with other 'XXX Review of Books'). 5-6 editions a year, print run of about 3,000. Editor in chief: Merlijn Olon.

[De Gids](#): De Gids was a member of Eurozine in the past, I believe. The oldest literary magazine in the Netherlands, but with a pronounced interest in experimentation. Since a couple of years they follow a purely literary focus, although they work with themes relating to contemporary issues (landscape pollution, identity etc.). Their audience is thus quite specifically based in the literary scene, comprised of both younger and older generations. But as they share distribution with the weekly De Groene Amsterdammer they have a print run of 20,000 and thus reach a wide range of the left-intellectual audience. 6 editions a year. Editor in chief: Edzard Mik.

[360 magazine](#): A magazine that brings translations of articles from different high-quality international publications, and some original content. Obviously, this makes them very networked all around the world. They have been around since 2011 and have been published by different larger news media companies, but always seem to struggle a bit to survive. Aimed at an audience that is cosmopolitan, well-to-do and has interests in economy, politics, culture and science. Bi-weekly, print run of 10,000. Editor in chief: Katrien Gottlieb.

[Maarten!](#): Maybe an odd one out; it is like the glossy of the well-known Dutch historian, retired professor and TV-personality Maarten van Rossem (hence the name), which brings opinion and analysis of current topics in society. Not afraid to take a critical stance, and always adopting a historical perspective which brings in nuance and an original take. It has been published by the large media company Veen Media since 2008, 4 editions a year. Editors in chief: Maarten van Rossem and Annemarie Lavèn.

[Krisis](#): A more academic title, 'an open-access and peer-reviewed journal for contemporary philosophy', but very topical, investigating current debates. They publish both in Dutch and English. Editorial members and writers are mostly from academia, but with an explicit interest in joining the public debate. However it has been an online only journal since 10 years (already). And on their website they link to Eurozine – maybe there is an existing connection somewhere? Contact person: Tivadar Vervoort.

Flanders:

[rekto:verso](#): The most obvious match with the Eurozine network, I think. A stable and well-known journal that writes about (popular) culture, social developments, critique and the arts since 2003. The rekto:verso team, specifically the editor in chief, is also at the basis of many external events and other networks, such as both Folio and De Nieuwe Garde. The magazine, which is subsidized and also gets financed through a system of 'friends of...' and (cultural)

ads, is spread freely across Belgium and the Netherlands in a print run of 15,000. Editor in chief: Wouter Hillaert.

[De Witte Raaf](#): Journal in the format of a newspaper, more specifically focused on arts and culture, which has been around since the 80s. Long and critical articles connect recent artistic exhibitions, happening and developments to wider societal issues, with the goal to fuel the public debate. Targeted at an audience interested in the arts, also professionally. 6 editions a year, distributed freely in a print run of 14,000. Editor in chief: Dirk Pültau.

[Ons Erfdeel](#): Another older and well-known journal that covers all things cultural and societal already since 1957. Next to publishing this journal they have the more diplomatic goal of making the language and culture of 'the low countries' known internationally and to that end publish a yearbook and platform in English aimed at everyone studying or researching the Dutch language region. While they have a bit of an old-fashioned image, they are open to experiment and renewal. Independently published, 4 times a year, print run of 8,000. Editor in chief: Luc Devoldere.

[Streven](#): A journal dedicated to the essayistic form and reflections on culture, society, philosophy, etc., inspired by the Christian tradition, though not very obviously so. Rooted in a long history of predecessors in the journal landscape. Not the most visible player on the scene, but consistently delivering high quality. Print run unknown, published bi-monthly. Editor in chief: Herman Simissen.

[DW/B/nY](#): To name just two of the most interesting literary magazines in Belgium, DW/B being a bit more traditional; nY very experimental and on the forefront of new forms, debates, and issues of the (international) literary scene. DW/B (editor in chief: Hugo Bousset) has 4-5 editions a year; nY (contact person: Koen Sels) comes out 4 times a year since 2009 (as a result of the fusion of two older journals). Print runs unknown (educated guess: between 600-1200).

[Mo Magazine](#): A magazine with a focus on international news, maybe more a news outlet than a cultural journal per se. But it has a big reach and is actively seeking new ways of publishing, reaching audiences and using digital technology, so they are an interesting organisation to keep an eye on. They share distribution with the popular Belgian weekly Knack, putting them on a print run of 95,000. Editor in chief: Gie Goris.

7. Sources used

Report on Flemish journals by the Antwerp Business School
Websites of Folio and De Nieuwe Garde
Websites of the diverse funding bodies
Websites of the diverse journals
Mediabookers.nl (print runs)