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Review of *Tussen Blok en Blad: 200 jaar studententijdschriften aan de faculteit Letteren en Wijsbegeerte*, exhibition at Ghent University, 6 October to 22 December 2017

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# Reviews

*Tussen Blok en Blad: 200 jaar studenttijdschriften aan de faculteit Letteren en Wijsbegeerte. Exhibition at Ghent University. 6 October to 22 December 2017*

Last year, Ghent University celebrated its two-hundredth anniversary, and as a part of the festivities Marysa Demoor, Professor of English Literature at Ghent University and a specialist in periodical studies, organised an exhibition entitled *Tussen Blok en Blad: 200 Jaar Studenttijdschriften aan de Faculteit Letteren en Wijsbegeerte*, on display from 6 October to 22 December 2017. The title of the exhibition roughly translates as ‘Between Block and Paper: 200 Years of Student Magazines at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy’. Block here refers to the printing blocks used in early magazine printing, indicating the focus of the exhibition: student magazines. It is also the title of the booklet accompanying the exhibition.



The exhibition was situated in the Arts and Philosophy Faculty Library, Ghent University. A first part consisted of a room, decorated with texts and images from student periodicals. On one wall, above the door, hung a quote from a

poem published in the student periodical *Germaniak*, written by the now celebrated Belgian author Tom Lanoye. The other walls were decorated with large paper banners depicting posters, covers, cartoons, and other images from student magazines. Additionally, the room was decorated with three benches and a coffee table, made out of real student magazines, and from corner to corner hung two long paper chains made from the (replicated) pages of old and new periodicals, displaying poems, photographs, drawings, texts, and so forth.



Another part of the exhibition consisted of six glass display cabinets, situated along the library corridor. These were arranged in chronological order, and gave an overview of student publications at Ghent University, from 1817 to the present day. On the side of each cabinet, the visitor was provided with some background

- 1 Patrick Collier, 'What is Modern Periodical Studies?', *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, 6.2 (2015), p. 93; see also Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, 'The Rise of Periodical Studies', *PMLA*, 121.2 (2006), 517–31.
- 2 Collier, pp. 530–31.

information about the university and its students at a given moment in history. The first cabinet commented on the fact that, initially, there were no female students at Ghent University, and that the majority of the students were not Catholic. It displayed several late nineteenth-century student magazines, and a photograph illustrating what student life looked like at that time. The next three cabinets paid attention to the First and Second World Wars and the interwar period, because all three periods had a considerable impact on the material published by students. In addition to the student magazines, these cases displayed several posters and political cartoons criticising the wars. The fifth cabinet was dedicated to the 1960s, which was described as a time filled with a desire for social change on many levels. This revolutionary attitude was exemplified by images of a raised fist depicted on the cover of various magazines on display. The next cabinet was dedicated to the 1980s and 1990s, a time when the technology available to students made a huge leap forward, and when student magazines began to put more emphasis on aesthetics and intellectualism. Finally, the historical overview created by these six display cabinets was completed by a seventh cabinet, on which was written 'DE KIOSK VAN DE 21<sup>ste</sup> EEUW' ['The Twenty-First-Century Newsstand']. In this newsstand, the issues of several present-day student publications were on display.



In another room of the library, there was an additional, larger display cabinet, containing periodicals from throughout the university's two-hundred-year existence. These periodicals were accompanied by various other objects, such as photographs, special headgear, typewriters, and printing blocks. A final part of the exhibition consisted of a series of videos, in which former and current contributors of student magazines were interviewed. The exhibition's combination of periodicals, other objects related to student life, and interviews gave the visitor an impression of different types of student publications and their evolution, but also a glance into the life of the students.

As mentioned above, *Tussen Blok en Blad* was accompanied by a booklet bearing the same title. This publication was edited by Demoor and contains eighteen different contributions focusing on student publications, written by members and students of the English Literature Department at Ghent University. In her introduction, Demoor writes about the reasons behind the exhibition, and about why we should study student magazines. According to Demoor, student magazines function as an environment in which students can test the waters and develop their talents (pp. 1–2); they are an outlet for students to vent their frustrations, and in contrast with professional journalists, students are often more explicit and idealistic in their writing (p. 1). Thus, these periodicals reveal a lot about the time in which they were written, and about what the life of students was like (p. 9). Nevertheless, because student magazines are often rather short-lived and the runs preserved in university archives are frequently incomplete, this is a very ephemeral type of publication and often inaccessible as an object of study (pp. 2–3).

This general introduction is followed by a number of contributions about student publications, ordered chronologically. The first four articles focus on student publications during the two world wars, linking them to the

trench journals of the First World War and the clandestine press of the Second World War. The contributions that follow concentrate on individual student magazines, and are a testimony to the striking diversity of the genre. They range from literary magazines inspired by fin-de-siècle aestheticism, such as *Parlando Furioso* and *Epiloog*, to LGBT-oriented magazines like *Verkeerd Geparkeerd* and the philosophical magazine *Van Stof tot Nadenken*. At the end of the booklet, the reader is presented with an overview of the student magazines which were (or still are) published at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy at Ghent University and which remain in the university archives.

As an exhibition, *Tussen Blok en Blad* was well-executed, giving a short overview of the history of student publications at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy at Ghent University. Using Dutch exclusively for both the exhibition and booklet naturally presents a limitation in reach. There is also

a certain bias in the contributions as they are written by people actively involved in the production of the student magazine they are writing about. At the same time, it is not necessary for the booklet to be entirely objective: as Demoor explicitly states in her introduction, this review of student magazines does not claim to provide an exhaustive overview (p. x). Thus the exhibition and the booklet serve as an appealing introduction to the wide range of student magazines published at Ghent University. In this regard, *Tussen Blok en Blad* is interesting for anyone fascinated by the history of the university or by student magazines in general. An additional advantage of *Tussen Blok en Blad* is that its summary of various magazines may help students or scholars working on student magazines in broadening or specifying their case selections.

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