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BELGIUM IN NUMBERS

EDITORIAL

WELCOME TO NODE INTERNATIONAL BELGIUM!

The third edition of our journey through Europe leads us to Belgium which not only is the administrative centre of our Union but also a very interesting country in linguistic terms, as French, Flemish and to a smaller extent German is spoken there. This is a challenge and an opportunity for the local media scene, as our interviews with MTV Belgium's CEO Michel Dupont and Lorenz Bogaert, CEO of the Ghent-based internet community Netlog show.

Our "local guide" this time is Alex Deforce, editor and DJ from Brussels, who gives us some insight from town to town in Belgium.

We also had a chat with dEUS, one of the most prominent bands of the

country, about their music, cooperation in Belgium's music scene and the country's advantages in terms of transport connection. Furthermore, Sulgi Lie explains us why the filmic view that the Dardenne brothers have on their own country belongs to the most distinguished ones to be found in European cinema. And finally: some facts on Belgium you might have expected – or not.

We wish you an interesting read!
Ji-Hun Kim and Jan-Peter Wulf

As always: Enquiries, ideas, criticism and more are very welcome!

Please contact us at:
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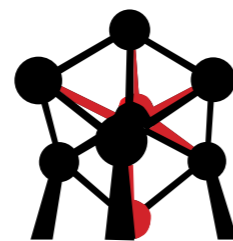
FROM TOWN TO TOWN

BELGIAN CITIES – AND THEIR PECULIARITIES

Alex Deforce, freelance journalist and illustrator, worked for magazines such as Shook Magazine in the UK and The Word Magazine in Belgium. Currently, he is building On-Point TV and is one half of the dj duo vic&lloyd. He was so kind to give us some insight on Belgium in general and its biggest cities in particular – and to list some notable initiatives below. Here we go!

Without any doubt the hub of Europe, Belgium is a small country, with a small eleven million inhabitants divided over three communities (six million Flemish, speaking Dutch, four million Walloons, speaking dutch, and about half a million German-speaking Belgians.) Charles De Gaulle may well have been right when he called Belgium ‘a country invented by the British to annoy the French’. When Harry Pearson wrote his book ‘A tall man in a low land: Some time among the Belgians’ he nailed the culture by describing Belgians as ‘Northern English, with a dash of Latin... kind of Mediterranean sensuality in a Yorkshire climate - sex in

duffel coats.’ That all sounds very nice of course, but there are some differences to be spot throughout the cities in the country. To make things easier to define, we should focus on the big five: Brussels, Antwerp, Liège, Ghent and Leuven. Plus a little side-story which illustrates Belgium’s anecdotal history: the place called Louvain-La-Neuve. It is hard to say which places are pushing boundaries the most, though in Belgium it seems like every one of the big five claims the title approximately every four to five years. With Ghent and Antwerp sharing the crown respectively during the first and second half of the nineties, it seems like currently Brussels and Liège are battling over the title.



BRUSSELS
Capital city, and to many of Belgians the only metropole in the country - although plenty of ‘Antwerpinians’



might argue to death about that. To understand Brussels is to understand its absurd character first. The city is bilingual in its very essence, with a huge French speaking community and a smaller Dutch speaking community. But with the immense presence of European institutions of all kinds, you'll hear just about any language taking a Brussels tram or bus. This has led to a city divided by cultures and politics, and thus also reunited by it, as anybody living in Brussels will acknowledge, the Brussels mentality is dipped in a healthy dose of 'die-m'enfoutisme' (I-couldn't-care-less-ness). This is not to say that Brussels scenes would be lacking character. Overall the Brussels spirit is one of independence, living in Brussels is not living in Flanders and not living in Wallonie. Though the city has plenty of universities and schools and a vast number of students living in the city, it doesn't hold a strong reputation as an attractive city one goes for studies. Overall, the Flemish prefer Ghent and Leuven and the Wallonians prefer Louvain-La-Neuve and Liège.

Over the past years, Brussels has jumped into attention with a wide range of grass-roots initiatives putting the city on the map. Whether it goes from urban farming actions like planting sun flower seeds in the streets, to street art exhibitions and collaborative cultural events, Brussels is reinventing itself.



LEUVEN

Being the home to many students and home to the Stella Artois beer got

Leuven nicknamed as 'capital of beer'. The city's university is the oldest in the Low Countries and is highly acclaimed throughout Europe for the quality of its studies. Next to that, the city is internationally known for its nightlife, which consists mainly out of a vibrant bar scene, vibrating to the pulse of the student hearts that is, with peacetime during the week and almost dying out during the Summer months and during periods of exams. The Old Market of Leuven is known as 'the longest bar in Europe' because all of the bars are practically chained to each other. The best night to go out is Thursday.



LOUVAIN-LA NEUVE

The result of a political revolt in 1968, Louvain-La-

Neuve rightfully earns its name, which is French for 'New-Leuven'. When Dutch-speaking students revolted against the French-spoken courses at the Leuven university, the country's communities staggered. After numerous political games were played, the authorities and university officials didn't find no other solution than to build a second university town, a couple of kilometers further away. Belgium is bilingual, but a French and a Dutch university in one and the same city can only be found in Brussels, in Leuven it appeared to be an impossible concept. Until this day Louvain-La-Neuve remains an artificial city in its very essence. The city houses only a small number of true inhabitants, the rest are students, who only stay for the

time of their studies. With its lack of old buildings, the city has a post-modern vibe to it, and during summertime a slight spooktown vibe runs through it.



ANTWERP

The second biggest city in the country is referenced to by its

original inhabitants as 'the city', which sums up the vibe through-out town quite well: Antwerp is self-confident. Youngsters in the city will sport outfits you'll only see months later popping up in other cities. With the Schelde river dividing the city in its left and right riversides, the left bank represents the more residential style while the historic centre, the bars and the hip boutiques are on the right bank. Because of the river, Antwerp now is the eighth largest container port in the world, heavily competing with Rotterdam.



LIÈGE

Known as the grimmest of Belgiums bigger cities, Liège is underes-

timated as a thriving cultural force on the Belgian scenes. Because of its industrial past - which was located mostly on the out-skirts of the city - the city got a bad name and is currently reidentifying itself. Some people have tipped Liège even as the new Bilbao, as they hope the opening of the new train station designed by Spanish architect Calatrava will attract more prestigious architecture and design project to the city. The inner-

city is renowned for its drug problems and got the city the nickname of Toxity (les tox, is the French slang for drug addicts). This being said, the city is a charm, breathing nothing but authenticity and has a vast reputation when it comes to antique markets and the car-free shopping streets. Much like Brussels, Liège people are stubborn and independent, but in their case with a history of social politics. Walk into a Liège bar and you'll notice the overwhelming openness of the local people, whether they're fifty or twenty years old. In the sixties and seventies Liège was breathing jazz, and though it still does to a certain extend, it is now quickly building a reputation as a bastion of electronic music. From more commercial genres like techno and house (Liège was home to various editions of the City Parade festival) to experimental genres like dustup and synthesizer-based broken-beat-like hiphop.



GHENT

Without any doubt the student city of Flanders - and perhaps Belgium -

Ghent is proud of its clean and green image, which attracts families as well as students. It is said that Ghent is so attractive to the youngsters from the west province of Flanders, that there are actually none left on that side (as Ghent is the heart of the east province). This seems pretty close to reality. The city has been breathing a refreshing wind throughout youth culture and music scenes which seems to attract the masses. The city's biggest moment of

GHENT IS SO ATTRACTIVE TO THE YOUNGSTERS FROM THE WEST PROVINCE OF FLANDERS, THAT THERE ARE ACTUALLY NONE LEFT ON THAT SIDE.

the year is it's annual Gentse Feesten city festival, which is amongst the biggest in the world. During this ten-day festival the city welcomes over two million visitors, making it the third biggest city festival in Europe, one preceded by the Fallas in Valencia and Oktoberfest in Munich. A wide selection of festivities is presented under the embrace of the Gentse Feesten, from comedy to street theater to various mini festivals such as Ten Days Off (electronic music), Gent Jazz Festival (formerly Blue Note Festival), Polé Polé (world music) and Boomtown (alternative music).

NOTABLE INITIATIVES:

ON-POINT - the pulse of inner-city life in Belgium, by means of video interviews with local and unknown visual and music artists, blogposts, events and podcasts. www.on-point.be

THE WORD - independent, free magazine covering neighborhood life and global style. Strongly stylized bi-monthly edition that's gained a passionate following since it's launch in 2008. www.thewordmagazine.be

LAIID-BACK - an online community making offline moves, defining and inspiring the future of radio (it's iPhone application being a strong inspiration for bbc's iPlayer) More than an online radio station, Laid Back is a multi medium fueling urban communities of the future. www.laid-back.be

POSTRMAGAZINE - a counter-culture magazine in the form of a poster.

Independently launched last year, POSTR now goes towards its fourth edition. Every edition covers one theme, with the articles printed on one side of a A0-sized poster and the flipside branded by one full page advertisement. www.postrmagazine.com

54KOLAKTIV - an undefined number of friends and supporters organizing events and parties, most notably last autumn in the royal parc facing the palace. The new generation of dj's and other artists. www.54kolaktiv.com

MAC FLY - a collective of uprising artists in both musical and visual fields, mostly reunited around a small Ghent-based shop and community. www.macflyisthenewblack.com

EIGEN MAKELIJ RECORDS - Antwerp-based independent record label, putting out records in the local dialect and organizing the Illcity series of parties, which bridge the gap between the Dutch and Belgian scenes. www.eigenmakelij.be

CITYWURL RECORDS - Brussel-based independent record label, putting out everything from soulful house to deep electronics and futuristic funk. Listed on BBC's Best of 2008 list by Benji B.

WEPLAYHOUSE RECORDINGS - Ghent-based record label founded by DJ Red D, digging deep in the electronic heritage of music, strongly linked to Chicago and Detroit. www.weplayhouserecordings.com



WE KEEP ON REINVENTING OURSELVES

MICHAEL DUPONT, CEO OF MTV NETWORKS BELGIUM

Belgium is a small country, split into three linguistic regions – French, Flemish, and German. How do these linguistic gaps affect the MTV programming?

DUPONT: We aim to offer a different programming to all Belgian viewers, meaning we have a personalized feed in both main languages. The majority of the content for both MTV and Nickelodeon is the same, but the scheduling is adapted to clients needs. One of the key elements to guarantee a further growth is to create the same flexibility on the French feed, as we have on the Flemish today. MTV Networks position is unique since we are the only media group offering the same brands and products in both regions. That's a true strength since most of the clients buy campaigns on a national level.

You have a Flemish channel, TMF Vlaanderen, which is very popular, with a notoriety of more than 95% amongst young people. Can you tell us why there is such

an affinity towards local music? Something other countries could learn from?

DUPONT: The biggest strength of TMF is its local relevance, and its focus on music. Being present with TMF on all major festivals and climaxing on the TMF awards resulted in a great interactivity with our audience. With the biggest chat and forum in Belgium, TMF is always judged in a direct way. The feedback we get is immediate and a real treasure for any marketer if handled in the right way. Our most important advice is to listen to your audience, and try to reinvent yourself on a continuous basis.

What is the specific character of Belgium's pop culture?

DUPONT: Belgium is the most central country in Europe, and has always been very progressive in its music taste. So it is fair to say that we have a lot of influence of all kinds of music. The dance/techno scene has always been present and the many rock festivals (some say there is a

rock festival in every village during the summer) color our music taste. Both Flemish and French people are progressive and like the alternative scene a lot.

Please tell us a specialty of MTV Belgium.

DUPONT: Belgium is not the biggest ad market, and there is a lot of competition on all demos. In order to create margin, MTV Networks has chosen long ago to be very brand oriented, and managed to add B2C revs on the already existing B2B. Without any doubt the most successful case is MTV mobile. Since its launch in 2003, almost one Belgian kid out of two has been using one of our mobile products. MTV mobile is a cooperation with a Telco, where the consumer is offered a youth oriented price plan, which is promoted and marketed by MTV and sold by the operator. This success story is now being exported to countries inside and outside Europe.

Most MTV offices are in the capital city or in a big city at least. You're based outside Antwerp, in a small place called Lint. How come?

DUPONT: We have direct access to the biggest studio park in Belgium, next to a TV studio and it's a green place, and we believe in a green future!

What will MTV Belgium and its channels look like in 2014?

DUPONT: If we remain faithful in our beliefs, meaning being relevant to youth and brand oriented, our channels will be stronger than ever. Of course the world will be different, more fragmented, with

more choices meaning our consumer will become increasingly smart. One thing is certain: we will have to keep reinventing ourselves.

Who have been the most influential people of Belgium's music scene?

DUPONT: Technotronic, Soeur Sourire (The "Singing Nun" who sang "Dominique"), Soulwax, TMF and Studio Brussel (radio station).

And who are right now the most influential people in the media?

DUPONT: Duco Sickinge (CEO and Managing Director of Telenet, the Flemish cable operator), Christian Van Thillo (CEO of the media company Aurex-De Persgroep), Daniel Weeckers (Director of pay-TV channel BeTV)

Belgium according to you in five words.

DUPONT: Flexible, diplomacy, central, bon vivant, complicated.

Belgium's mentality is...

DUPONT: ...serve and enjoy.

MTV is still a big deal in our country because...

DUPONT: ...we have the strongest content in our respective demos and a great team making sure people are served 24/7.

The most interesting city of Belgium at the moment is...

DUPONT: ...Antwerp.

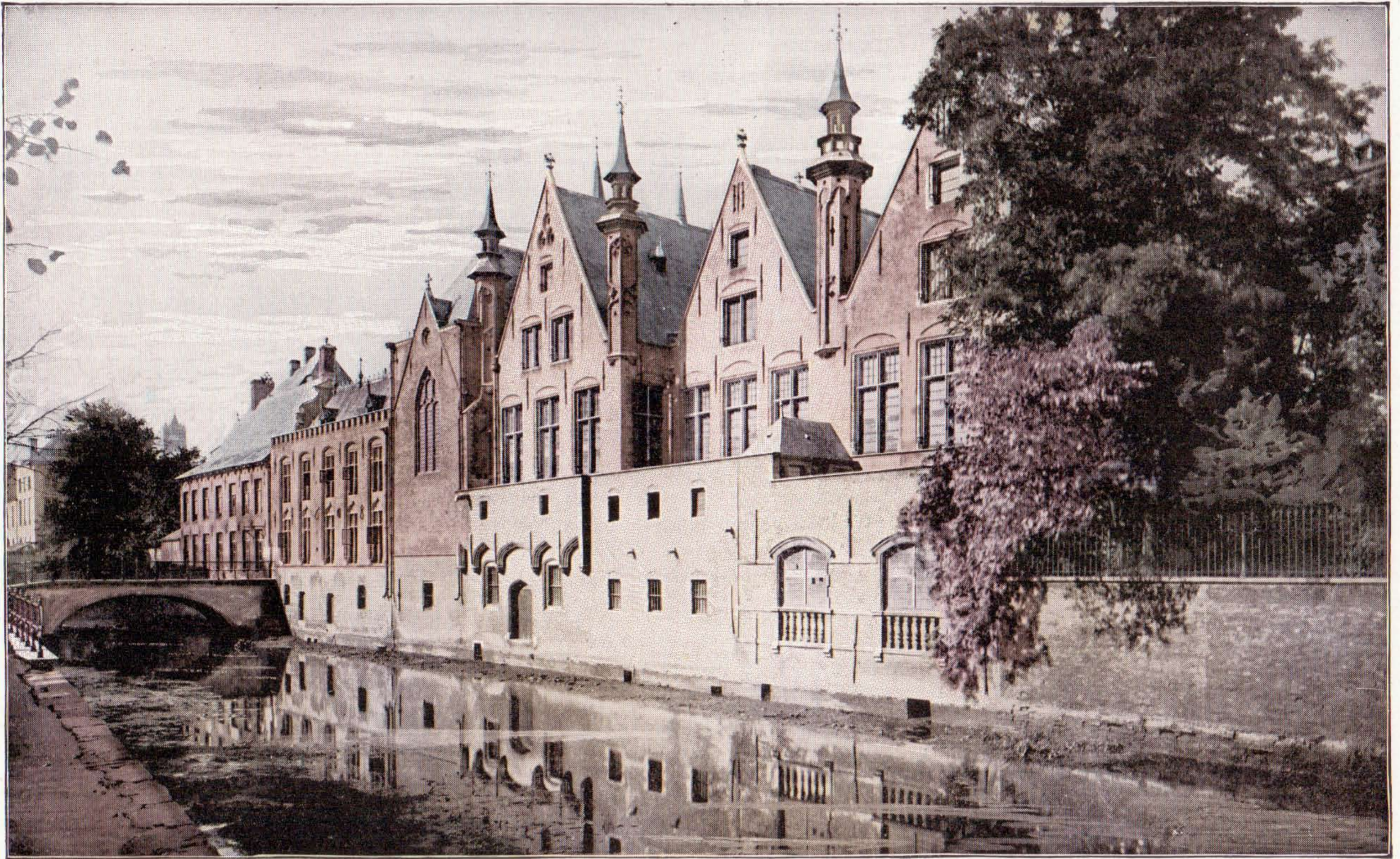
Anyone working with MTV Belgium should be...

DUPONT: ...flexible and dynamic.

Thank you!

WWW.MTVNETWORKS.BE

OUR MOST
IMPORTANT ADVICE
IS TO LISTEN TO
YOUR AUDIENCE



HISTORIC HOUSES, BRUGES.

SOCIAL NETWORKS WILL COME CLOSER TO TELEVISION – AND VICE VERSA

AN INTERVIEW WITH NETLOG'S CEO LORENZ BOGAERT



Based in Ghent, Netlog is an online platform where users can keep in touch with and extend their social network. It is specifically targeted at the European youth, currently available in 20 languages. By now, Netlog already has more than 58 million members throughout the continent. We've had the opportunity to talk to Netlog's CEO Lorenz Bogaert about the community, Belgium, Europe, the media – and what to put on top of your Belgian fries.

Lorenz, why should I sign up to Netlog?

LORENZ: Because you're young, because you want to make friends and because you want to do this by building an übercool internet profile or by playing online games with other people. You will be joining a community of almost 60 million young Europeans, so you'll definitely find your peers on Netlog.

Your community is number one in quite a few European countries. How is your country-related strategy?

LORENZ: As a European company,

based in a multilingual country, we have invested a lot of time in localization technology. The whole site can be translated within a couple of days and each new feature can be translated within 24 hours. We only work with native speakers who are familiar with local sensitivities. Netlog also makes sure members are shown people sharing the same age, city and interests. Most members think the site is built and managed in their own country, in many cases even in their own city.

You consider yourself a pan-European portal, too. How do you help users overcome linguistic, cultural and other borders?

LORENZ: First of all, we help our members find people who speak their language, share their culture and interests. To overcome the linguistic issue, we focus on visual communication like games. We believe games are the best path to cross lingual communication. Netlog also detects the language of blog messages and comments and brings this

content to the people who speak the language. We are very prudent with the so-called "language poisoning" and are thus avoiding many different languages being shown on the same page. And finally, our community team is there to help people.

Please tell us how and when you decided to set up a community.

LORENZ: As early as 1990, I started a bulletin board system. I was 14 years old and passionate about online communications. The internet didn't exist yet and for every simultaneous visitor I wanted to welcome, I needed a separate computer and telephone line. After a couple of years I had six lines and I was happy with the thousands of members I had back then. In the mid-90s, the internet emerged and I stopped my bbs, went to law school and started a small company to offer internet services to SMEs. In 2000 I met Toon (Coppens), the co-founder of Netlog, who had developed a great site offering people to build an online web profile in only 60

seconds, with photo, blog and many more. As more and more people started building profiles, we needed to find a business model and a plan to scale from a profile site of a couple of thousands to a massive community site with millions of members. We started using micropayments by premium SMS to pay the bills, together with targeted advertising. In the early days, we only served Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium. In 2004 we went full-time and internationalized by launching a separate community in each language. Hard times as we were bootstrapping and not paying ourselves salaries, but fun times as we were growing faster than we had ever imagined! After an investment round of 5 million euro in 2007, we started merging all sites to the Netlog brand and optimized our localization technology and business model.

You've integrated Joost not too long ago. Do you think that music television, or, to be more general, television will mainly be happening in social networks soon?

WE BELIEVE GAMES ARE THE BEST PATH TO CROSS LINGUAL COMMUNICATION...

LORENZ: Television has always been a social event, people like to comment and share feedback, be it in a pub or online. Many members have created group pages about TV shows and more and more television stations have opened official pages for their shows. The speed of broadband internet connections is expected to increase exponentially in the very near future and so does convergence of internet and digital television. So we could say television will come closer to social networks, but social networks will also come closer to television.

In that case: What about "peercasting" – like television for my friends? Is that something we will see and watch soon?

LORENZ: This is already happening: we have quite a few members who mainly communicate through video posts. It's amazing to see how many fans they have! But live broadcasts are difficult to moderate, and this can be pretty dangerous. We prefer to keep our hands off, even if in terms of technology it's quite simple to set up.

What is special about the media and online scene in Belgium?

LORENZ: Because of the complex structure of the Belgian state with different languages and the rather small population speaking those languages, you can't afford to focus solely on home market, but have to keep your eyes open for international expansion, from the very first entrepreneurial steps.

Also in terms of media, we have different media groups in the North and the South.

If you were at MTV, you would...

LORENZ: ...I would prepare myself and my audience for convergence; by being omnipresent on web communities, on the mobile phone, on television, on digital television, on events. But mainly by understanding many of these channels will sooner or later become one and the same.

What are Netlog's plans for 2010?

LORENZ: For Netlog.com we're launching a total makeover of the site, with a look and feel which is even more appealing, but also focussing on what really matters most to our members: Profiles, People, Playing and Partying. We're also investing a lot in online social gaming. We even announced a new platform for this, with a new brand name: Gatcha! will be our social gaming service for web and mobile. This is not limited to Netlog, but also available on Facebook, MySpace, Hi5 and hopefully MTV sites, too. We're developing a unique ranking and leveling system. Gatcha! will offer hundreds of cool casual games, but each game played will help the user increase his overall game level as well as a balanced high score.

Final question: Which mayonnaise do you recommend along with chips?

LORENZ: Go for a mix of mayonnaise and carbonade (French) or stoofvlees (Dutch) sauce when you're in Belgium, which is some kind of beef and onion stew.

Lorenz, thank you very much!

WWW.NETLOG.COM



NETLOG™

WE HAVE QUITE A FEW MEMBERS WHO MAINLY COMMUNICATE THROUGH VIDEO POSTS.





IT'S LIKE AN INCEST

AN INTERVIEW WITH dEUS



3. von links Stéphane Misseghers, daneben Tom Barman

dEUS are one of the most important rock bands from Belgium. With their groundbreaking albums "In A Bar, Under The Sea", "Worst Case Scenario" or "The Ideal Crash", they gave Indie Rock Music a new, intelligent, mature twist in the Nineties, when the genre was suffering from a post-grunge vacuum. They inspired not only many musicians but also earned deep admiration from music critics all over the world.

We spoke with singer and bandleader Tom Barman and drummer Stéphane Misseghers about Belgian pop culture, the specifics of Belgian artist networks and why Antwerpen for them is the best strategic home base.

You recorded your last album "The Vantage Point" in your own studio. Is it the

first studio you built?

TOM: Yes, of course. It is in Antwerpen and is called Vantage Point, like the record. We are really happy with that. It has a good sound and a good vibe.

STÉPHANE: We are not as rich as the Beastie Boys. They could build a completely new studio for every record they made.

Stéphane, before you joined dEUS in 2003, you played in other famous Belgian bands, like Soulwax and Vive la fête. What can you say about the networks in your country? Seems like the different musicians are very well connected.

STÉPHANE: Before I started with dEUS, I was more a live and studio musician. But Belgium is not a big country. It's inevitable to get in touch with other musicians.

TOM: But it seems to be a typical Belgian thing. Everybody is doing it with everybody. It's like an incest. There can be good sides and there can be bad sides about that. I don't want to overestimate the corporate thing. But if anybody asks me to play with him on stage, I cannot neglect. For me it's fun, it's communicative to be on stage, to drink a beer afterwards and have a good conversation with other artists. I don't see a reason not to do that. But in the Netherlands for instance, from what I've experienced, there is no exchange between the bands like we have in our country. That's strange, but maybe the incest is really typical for Belgium. (laughs)

Have you ever thought of leaving the country?

TOM: Good question, sometimes I did.

What about you, Stéphane?

STÉPHANE: Sure I did, but for you, Tom, it might be easier. You are the songwriter and I am the musician. You can continue your work from every place in the world. If I left, I would have to look for a whole new scene and would have to start at zero again.

TOM: But to be honest, there is no reason to leave the country. You see, we are two hours away from Amsterdam, one and a half hours from Paris. It's just a one-hour flight to London, one and a half to Berlin and 17 hours to Melbourne. That is also the reason why we named our studio vantage point. We mean it literally. It's a good strategic base, and even though Belgium is not Rock'n'Roll mecca, it is culturally still very inspiring!

How would you describe your develop-

AND EVEN THOUGH BELGIUM IS NOT ROCK'N'ROLL MECCA, IT IS CULTURALLY STILL VERY INSPIRING!

INTERNATIONAL
IS THE ONLY WAY
TO WORK FOR US.

ment und experience playing live during the last years?

TOM: I think, we still would not like to play at big stadiums, but we can handle bigger venues better than before. But we are very mutable. One night, we play in Barcelona in front of 900 people and the other night, we are in Amsterdam, performing for 4,000 people. That is always a challenge, to handle all those circumstances. But we like it. It keeps us fluctuating.

You have been on stage for more than 15 years. Are there any other differences amid the different countries?

TOM: Sure. In Germany for instance, our audience is very adult. Many of them know our music since our first record. In Portugal, France or Ireland, the audience is very young, which still surprises us. The UK was always a difficult area: The music scene there is more ephemeral than in any other country. But during summertime, when we play at the big festivals, we still have the chance to get in touch with younger people who watch us performing for the first time

and become fans. This makes us glad, but maybe there are also many hipsters who might say: Look, they are old, aren't they from the Nineties?! That's pop. You are already a grandpa at the age of 37 (laughs)!

How would you describe the relationship between the Flemish and the Walloon community?

STÉPHANE: Sometimes it's really difficult. Generally, the people want to keep the country together, but sometimes the conflicts are really harsh.

TOM: It is a little bit like a marriage. After a long period, many people perceive the relationship just as a marriage of convenience. Some people would prefer a divorce, others want to keep on doing it at any cost. But I don't think the country will split up. Sometimes it is embarrassing. I mean, Brussels is the centre of the European Union, and with all these internal discussions and fights, we are not the best role model for a united european continent...

Thank you for the interview!

THAT'S POP.
YOU ARE ALREADY
A GRANDPA AT
THE AGE OF 37.



© Steve Gullick

DEUS.BE

FILMING THE NO MAN'S LAND OF BELGIUM

L'ENFANT AND THE POLITICAL CINEMA OF THE DARDENNE BROTHERS
BY **SULGIE LIE**

Contemporary political cinema is unthinkable without the Belgian brothers Jean-Pierre & Luc Dardenne. From film to film they lower themselves into the dirty grounds of contemporary economic reality, a reality most films try to neglect. After the golden palm winner "Rosetta" (1999) and "Le fils" (2002), the Dardenne's 2005 film "L'enfant" marks the consequent continuation of a work whose aesthetic-ethical radicality seems to be unique in world cinema today. As their films did before, "L'enfant" returns to the industrial no man's land of Belgium, to the city of Seraing which was also the location of their previous films. No city could be less glamorous than the industrial ugliness of Seraing. In all Dardenne films, the city appears as a succession of "non-places": poor camping-sites, closed factories, noisy highways, dirty backyards.

But this insistence on a location does not mean that the Dardenne brothers are some kind of ethnographers of the Belgian suburbs: the reality of Seraing is nothing other than the global reality of late capitalist economy. So, "L'enfant" asks again the question of the (im)possibility of solidarity under the circumstances of capitalist exclusion. While the previous films of the Dardenne's obsessively circled around mother-daughter-relations

like in "Rosetta", or around father-son-conflicts like in "La promesse" or "Le fils", "L'enfant" is in a way their first film about love.

THERE IS NO MORALITY

With the lacony that is typical of the Dardenne's, they give us following minimalist synopsis of the plot: "Bruno, twenty. Sonia, eighteen. They live off Sonia's benefit and the thefts committed by Bruno and the kids in his gang. Sonia has just given birth to Jimmy, their child. How can Bruno become a father, being so carefree and living as he does for the present, solely concerned about the money from his deals?"

Bruno, played with great presence by Jérémie Renier in continuation of his role in "La promesse", is a little criminal all-valuator: he does not want to work, because, as he knows very well, "only fuckers work". But in his own micro-economy, he has achieved a certain kind of profession. Always with his mobile phone, Bruno is a sub-proletarian business man who transforms everything into money which falls into his hands: video cameras, clothes, mopeds. It is consistent therefore that Bruno does not even hesitate to sell his own, nine-days-old child, to illegal adoption. In the materialist perspective of the Dardennes, there is



THE REALITY OF SERAING IS NOTHING OTHER THAN THE GLOBAL REALITY OF LATE CAPITALIST ECONOMY.

no morality prior to exchange equivalence; on the contrary, they consider the erosion of morality as a given fact under totally economized relations. The cruelty of selling his own child is a normal act for Bruno who cannot make a difference between humans and things. As his girlfriend collapses, when he tells her about the child, Bruno just says: "We can make another one." A commodity is nothing which cannot be replaced by another one.

DISCONNECTED BODIES

Bruno cannot understand the shock of his girlfriend, but when she is delivered to a hospital and calls the police, he tries to bring back the child. But an act of exchange is not so easy to reverse: Bruno gets the child back, but the illegal child buyers want 5000 Euro from Bruno for the failed deal. Sold is sold, and in the logic of exchange, there is no reversibility without a rest.

In two horrifying scenes, the Dardennes visualize the selling and rebuying of the child; two scenes in which Bruno seems to disappear in the darkness of the dirty interior spaces. The acts of exchange annihilate the human subject. From now on, the fall of Bruno begins with deterministic fatality and this fall is always a fall of the body in the physical cinema of the Dardennes. The childish vitality of the young couple at the beginning of the film turns into the agony of the body. Like in their masterpiece "Rosetta", the Dardennes show in "L'enfant" a body disconnected from all social relations.

IN MOTION LIKE ANIMALS

Thrown out from Sonia's apartment, homeless and hungry, Bruno desparately tries to regain the missing money through a series of thefts. In the cinema of the Dardennes, figures are in constant motion like animals in search for food. The survivalistic drive of Bruno makes him wander through the ugly streets of Seraing without ever getting to rest.

Again and again, Bruno is shown crossing streets and highways, surrounded by the noise of the cars: A homeless body in a periphery world. The handheld camera of the Dardennes is as close as possible to this body in motion. Like in their other films, there is no autonomy of the camera independent of the bodies of the actors. The realism of the Dardennes needs to pass through the body, and this body is also the body of the spectator whose ability for cognitive distance to the characters is subverted by the corporeal approach of the film.

In the most intense scene of the whole film, Bruno and his child companion Steve are chased on their moped after the robbery of a hand bag. They hide themselves in the ice cold water of a dirty river and suddenly Steve's legs become stiff. Only with the greatest physical effort, Bruno manages to draw Steve out of the water and takes him to an empty garage. Because of his frozen legs, Steve cries for pain and Bruno rubs his feet to give warmth to his body. Could there be a greater inhumanity than selling his own child? But when we see Bruno caring for the wounded Steve; two worn-out connected in pain, we

cannot help ourselves to feel empathy for those bodies in pain.

NO JUDGEMENTS

Unlike the social realism of the British school (Ken Loach, Mike Leigh), the physical realism of the Dardennes does not judge on their characters. The mimetic film aesthetic of the Dardennes is grounded in somatic empathy: At the moment, when the bodies are literally on the ground, all creatures are the same and in a sense, we, the spectators, also become these creatures. Like in "Rosetta", the muddy water in "L'enfant" figures almost like a metaphor for the gravity of the material world and it is as if the earth wants to incorporate these fallen bodies into the dirty depth.

But the unconditional materialism of the Dardenne Brothers knows no redemption through death. Redemption can only be wordly – or it is not. Every film of the Dardennes ends with the possibility of some kind of hope – this holds good for their latest film, "Le silence de Lorna", as well. And so, also "L'enfant" ends with Bruno's awakening: the awakening of humanity, which, for the Dardenne brothers, is always the awakening of solidarity. The fall and rise of Bruno, the amoral: In the heartbreaking closing scene, Bruno cries. But he cries not alone: He cries together with Sonia. Maybe there is the chance of love. And maybe there is the possibility of politics in the sense of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who once wrote that the modern political cinema lives through the unbearable.



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@ EARTH HOUR GLOBAL

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BELGIUM IN NUMBERS

10,6 MILION INHABITANTS

30,520 SQUARE KILOMETRES

349 INHABITANTS PER SQUARE KILOMETRE

400 DIFERENT KINDS OF BEERS ARE BREWED IN BELGIUM

60:40 IS THE PROPORTION BETWEEN THE FLEMISH AND THE WALLONS

1% OF POPULATION ARE PROTESTANTS

1% OF POPULATION WORKS IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

40.000 EU EMPLOYEES ARE LOCATED IN BRUSSELS

124 CITIES AND PLACES WORLWIDE ARE NAMED WATERLOO

22 KG OF CHOCOLATE PER YEAR ARE CONSUMED ON AVARAGE BY EVERY CITIZEN

90% OF GLOBAL DIAMONDS ARE DISTRIBUTED IN ANTWERP

50% OF HOUSEHOLDS HAVE AT LEAST ONE PET

#1 PERCENTAGE OF CASTLES PER SQUARE MILE IN THE WORLD

1466 THE FIRST RECORDED LOTTERY WAS SET UP