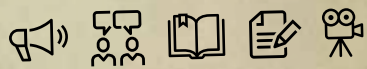


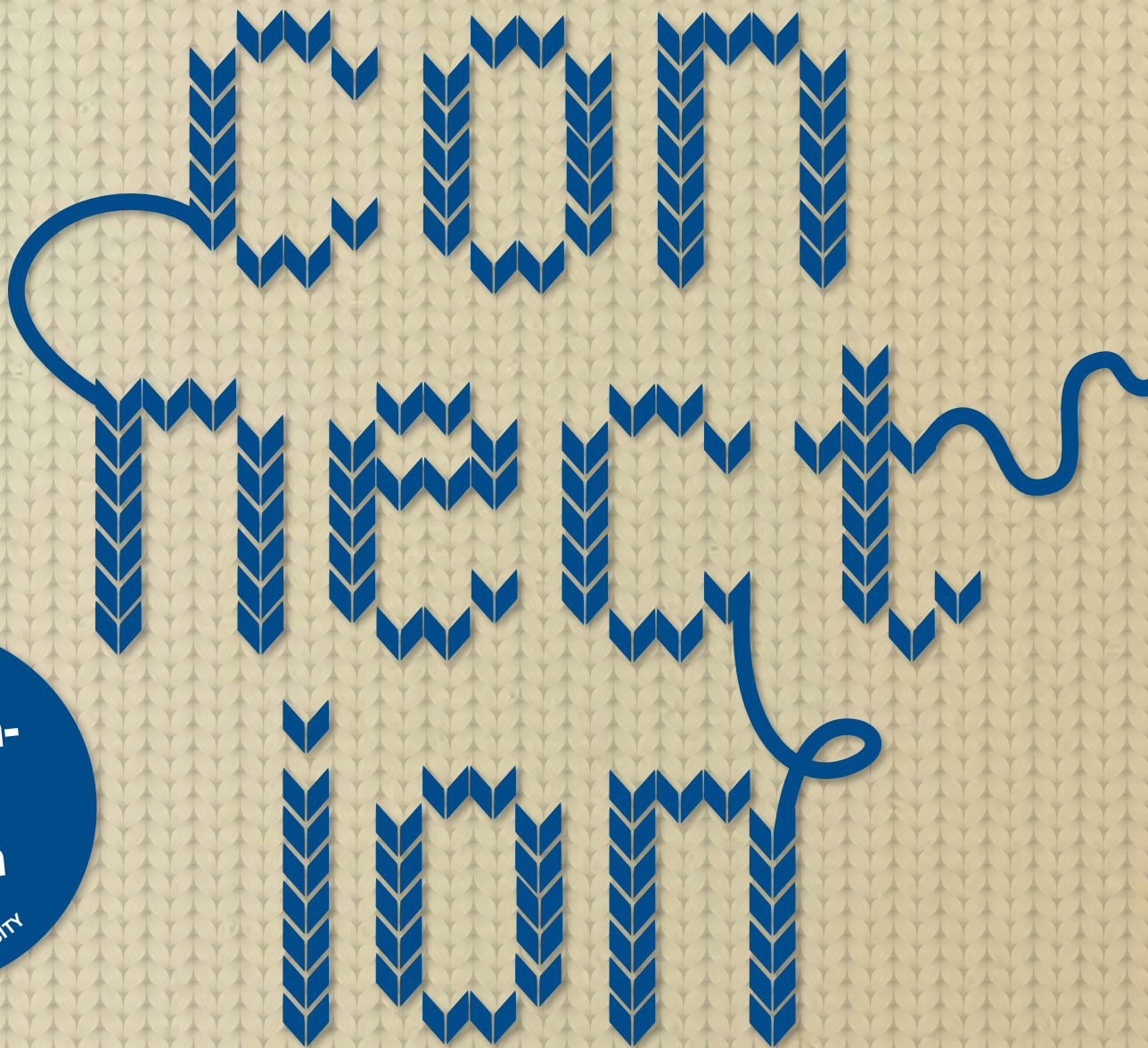
Radboud

MAGAZINE #66



NEWS • INTERVIEWS • BOOKS •
COLUMNS • CULTURE

DECEMBER 2020



A PUBLICATION OF

**An extra-
warm
winter
edition**

RADBOUD UNIVERSITY

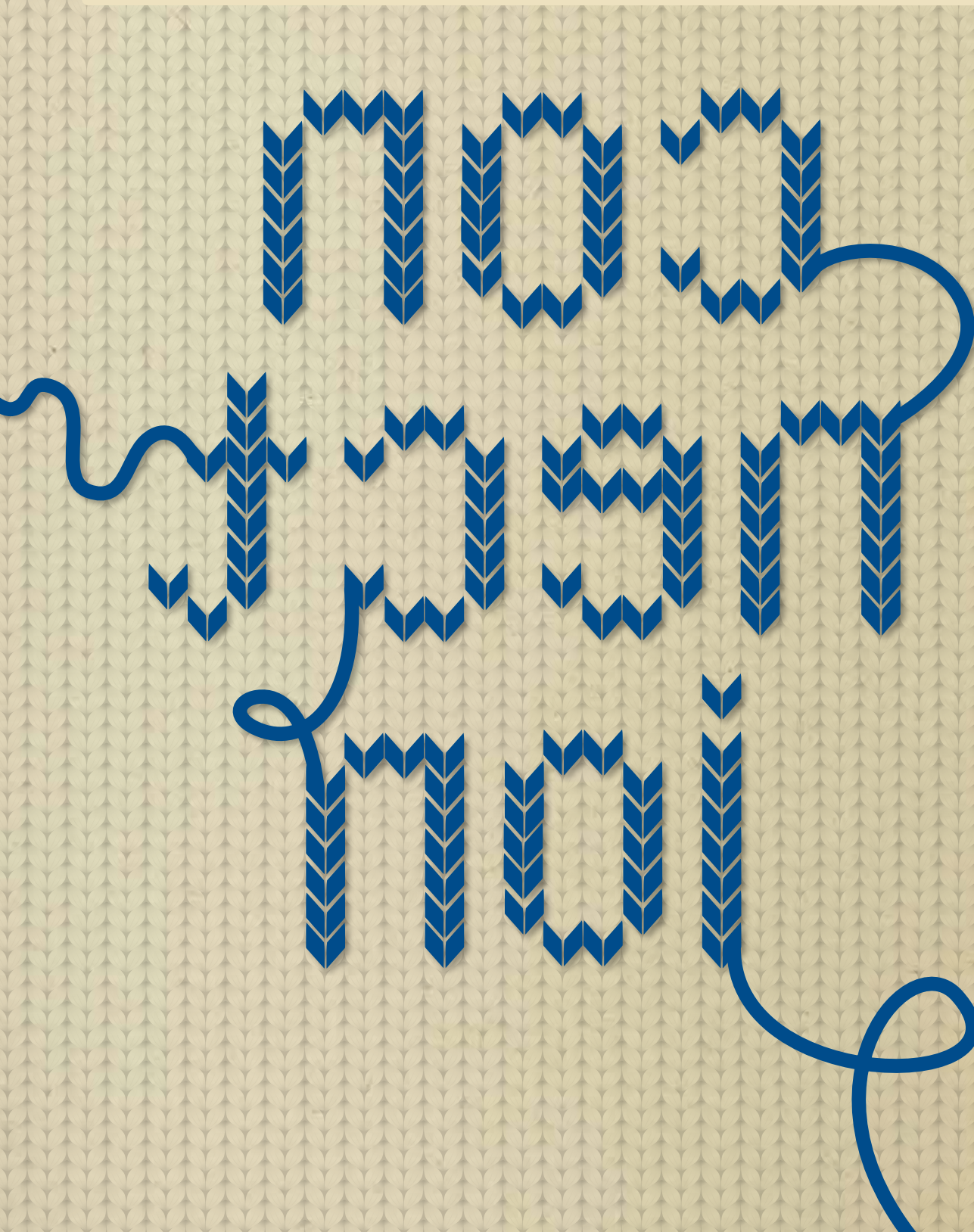
EDITORIAL "People are incurably social." This remark is from the mayor of Nijmegen, Hubert Bruls. In this issue of *Radboud Magazine*, he talks about the lessons that he has learned from the coronavirus crisis. The most important thing is always to keep the public in mind. "True frustration develops in society when you can't see, taste and smell one another."

This special interview issue of *Radboud Magazine* is about connection. How do we keep from losing contact with one

another? Psychologist Gijs Jansen, an alumnus of Radboud University, says it helps to tell friends, family or colleagues how dreadful it all is. "You can't talk crooked things into becoming straight." Stop fighting, he says, and accept that these are complicated times.

Lotte Jensen, professor of Dutch literature and cultural history, views songs about disaster and other texts as the ultimate connectors. She believes that stories can bring us closer together.

The editorial team of *Radboud Magazine* supports this last statement wholeheartedly. We hope that the stories on the next 55 pages will provide a moment in which students, employees and alumni of the university can come together again. This December, there will be no holiday drinks or parties, but we hope that the inspiring interviews filling this magazine, which we are sending to you because of the special circumstances, will provide you with much-needed warmth at home.

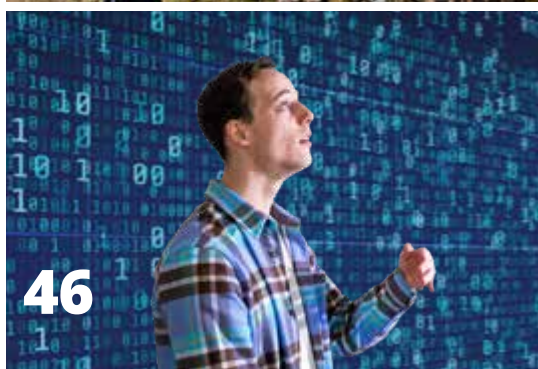


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SIX WAYS TO KEEP IN TOUCH DURING THE PANDEMIC



Colophon
Radboud Magazine

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short news

TEXT PAUL VAN DEN BROEK

'LITERATURE IS IMPORTANT. IT ENRICHES YOUR LIFE AND YOUR LANGUAGE. AND IT GIVES INSIGHT: ONLY BOOKS ALLOW YOU TO TRULY LOOK INSIDE ANOTHER PERSON'S MIND.'

FOR 20 WEEKS, UNTIL THE ELECTIONS IN MARCH, PRIME MINISTER MARK RUTTE WILL BE SENT A BOOK BY A GROUP OF DUTCH LANGUAGE SCHOLARS TO REMIND HIM OF THE CONSOLATION AND RICHNESS OF LITERATURE, ESPECIALLY IN TIMES OF CRISIS. PROFESSOR OF DUTCH AND ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION MARC VAN OOSTENDORP IS THE INITIATOR. *TROUW*, 13 NOVEMBER.

RADBOD UNIVERSITY

Wall paintings bring history to life



PHOTOGRAPHY: DICK VAN AALST

In mid-November, the Holland Casino on the Waal quay will see the unveiling of a metres-high painting of the Byzantine princess Theophanu. This artwork is a component of Waal Paintings, an art project of Radboud University that will place large-scale wall paintings to bring the city's history to life at 15 locations over the next three years. The designs come from the Canon of Nijmegen's History, compiled by historians at Radboud University, covering the period from Roman times to the squatters' riots in Piersonstraat during the 1980s. Theophanu lived at the end of the 10th century in the Valkhof in Nijmegen, from there she ruled over a large portion of western Europe as regent for her three-year-old son Otto III. He later built the Nicholas Chapel in the Valkhof in her honour (on the left in the photograph).

ALUMNI

Higher Education for the Elderly ceases operations

After nearly 30 years, HOVO (Higher Education for the Elderly) will close its doors in January 2021. The organisation has been having trouble staying afloat for several years, especially after VAT rates went up in 2016. This made their prices rise by 21%. HOVO director Marianne Koolen says, "About 3,000 people used to take our courses ever year, but after 2016 that dropped to about 2,300." HOVO had to fend for itself, without subsidy, because the money that the

government earmarks for universities is meant for standard education, not extra activities like HOVO. The coronavirus crisis was the last straw: courses were cancelled and the participants who had already paid got their money back. There's still some hope for the HOVO students: negotiations are in progress to offer similar courses at the Radboud Academy (RA), which was founded this spring as an overarching programme for all post-academic education. "Maybe the RA will eventually be able to include courses for private students as part of their offerings," says Koolen.

RADBOD UNIVERSITY

Not one guest at the university's birthday celebration

The yearly 'Dies', or the University's birthday commemoration on 15 October, was celebrated in St. Stephen's Church as usual, but not a single guest came this year. Several hundred people watched the celebration at home or elsewhere via a live stream. "At first, we were still supposed to allow 30 guests, but after the cabinet's new measures came into effect, we had to call people to cancel the invitation," says spokesman Martijn Gerritsen. The two recipients of honorary degrees were also conspicuous by their absence. They listened to the eulogy on screen and expressed their thanks in the same way. Incidentally, the heightened coronavirus measures have no effect on the permitted group size in the lecture spaces that the university has rented in the Municipal Theatre and the De Vereeniging concert hall. While the maximum audience for theatre audiences outside the lockdown is thirty, the same space is allowed to admit 300 students, thanks to the exceptions being made for education.



PHOTOGRAPHY: DICK VAN AALST

STUDENTS

The number of students continues to grow

In October, universities always make an official count of student numbers. This year, the educa-



IN THE MEDIA DOCTORAL CANDIDATE GEERT VERHEIJEN

'It's great when your research finds a place in the world'

tional institutions counted a total of 328,000, double the number there were in 2000. In Nijmegen, virtually every department has grown, except for medical sciences, whose size is regulated by law and has stayed about the same. The largest growth in an absolute sense is in social sciences, with 494 more students. In relative terms, philosophy, theology and religious studies have grown the most (17%). More than half of the total growth is caused by students who would have ordinarily had to leave the university after failing to receive a binding recommendation on continuation of studies (Dutch: BSA); because of the coronavirus, this group of 650 students has been granted a delay. The number of foreign students has remained more or less stable at about 2,400. It is true that the number of them who are studying in Nijmegen for the first time has shrunk significantly (774). According to the university, this is a result of the pandemic.

It's evident that youngsters like computer games. But parents' worries about this are often unjustified. This is what the behavioural psychologist Geert Verheijen concludes in his doctoral research, which was eagerly pounced on by media like NRC, de Volkskrant and RTL Nieuws. 'I'm actually surprised by all the attention.'

"I'm pleasantly surprised that my research is being so widely noticed. It feels good when your research really produces something. People are reacting to it from everywhere. 'Hey, was that you in the paper!?' There are also people who want to be sent a copy of my dissertation. You spend years out of sight doing this work, so it's good to notice that it's finding a place in the world. The coronavirus crisis also creates more attention for my research. People are spending a lot more time playing video games these days. Maybe people are less concerned right now about limiting the amount of time they let their children play. So they have a very positive response to the conclusions of my

research. I conclude that, in contrast to what you might think, that gaming doesn't automatically lead to isolation, and that for youngsters, certainly if they don't play alone, it strengthens the bonds of friendship. The worries that people have about this aren't justified. However, none of this has anything to do with game addiction. My research is not about that. So I can't deny that players may become addicted—my research can't take away those concerns. When the media asked me about this, I referred them to other research. I was struck by the fact that big newspapers like the NRC and the *Volkskrant* wrote such long articles about my research, and left room for the fine points. I had to make sure not to overwhelm the media with too many details. At a certain point, the story you're telling gets too complex, while journalists want you to get to the point. That meant that the difference between causation and correlation got lost quickly. Fortunately, I did always have the chance to look at the articles before publication, so that the biggest misconceptions could be corrected."



RESEARCH

Closer to the black hole and God

From his first glance at the stars to the photograph of a black hole. This is the journey described by Heino Falcke, an astronomer and a believer in God, in his book *Light in the Darkness*, which has been published in twelve languages. This professor of astrophysics achieved worldwide fame earlier this year with the first photograph of a black hole: he was one of the project supervisors. "The presentation of that photo was a decisive moment in my life," Falcke declares. This time he wanted



to write a book not for experts, but for interested laymen. In the book, which Falcke wrote together with a journalist, he makes a journey through the universe and explains the theory of relativity. "People

have been looking at the stars for millennia. This has created, marked, and altered our culture and our view of the world. I want the readers to reflect a bit on God, the world and the universe."

RESEARCH

Energy-saving data storage one step closer

The growing traffic on the internet is steadily increasing the worldwide need for data storage. "If we keep going at this rate, we'll need about two trillion hard discs in 2040," according to Roeland Nolte, professor of molecular

nanotechnology at Radboud University. "We'll never have enough silicon to make that many hard discs. Data centres today already use more energy than Great Britain does in a year." New, energy-saving methods of data storage are thus urgently needed. "The technology you develop now can only be implemented in 10 or 20 years' time. So we have to start working on this now." Radboud researchers have gone down a new path by recording information on a chain of molecules. If this works, it may be possible in future to write all the world's data on one car tyre, according to the researchers' predictions.



**'Accept that
life sucks
sometimes'**



Perle
Jansen

As a teenager, reading one book turned his life completely upside down. Now he has become a successful author of self-help books. The psychologist and Radboud alumnus Gijs Jansen teaches that negative emotions are permitted. The trick is knowing how to live with them.

TEXT ANNEMARIE HAVERKAMP | PHOTOGRAPHY ERIK VAN 'T HULLENAAR

“Everything sucks at the moment, but just look where we’re walking right now. It’s so fucking beautiful here.” Gijs Jansen is standing in the middle of a forest path. He looks up to the sunlight peeking through the trees. He demonstratively breathes in the fragrance of autumn. “Wonderful.” This – contemplating the beauty of a corner of the forest, or perhaps just one tree – is what can help us in times of crisis. And as a psychologist, Jansen finds nothing pretentious about this idea. “We know that people experience happiness through direct experiences in the present.” The last thing you’ll hear him say is that things aren’t so bad right now. He too is spending more time indoors and misses physical contact. “I would have liked to shake your hand.” Jansen calls the coronavirus crisis “probably the most intense period any of us will ever experience.” But it’s still a good idea now and then to take a look at the good things we have: the sun, the woods, and don’t forget his cheerful golden retriever, who is off leash and frolicking about ahead of us. Gijs Jansen has a private practice as a psychologist and writes self-help books. With 13 books and 75,000 copies sold, he can rightfully call himself a best-selling author. Remarkably, he already knew as a

boy of 15 exactly what he wanted to do with his life. ‘I headed straight for my goal.’ The 15-year old he is referring to was not exactly the most popular kid in the class. He was socially awkward and bullied. “Why? Well, I was a jerk, I think. Some kids have ‘bully me’ written on their foreheads. I was one of them.” Jansen was crossed eyed, which didn’t help either. “At a certain point, I had them fixed. That did help.” He met his first girlfriend, and soon after that he started university in Nijmegen, where he had the time of his life and more than made up for his missed youth. But wait a minute, let’s do a flashback for a moment. There were troubles for that unhappy boy of 15. He had two parents with psychiatric problems. The village in the Achterhoek where he grew up was anything but a safe, cosy nest. One day, he went off on his own to a youth campsite in France to figure out what he was going to do with himself. On this trip, he took with him a book by the American psychotherapist Wayne Dyer. That book, which his parents had at home (it might have been his grandfather’s) was a game-changer. “I found recognition, connection, love. I learned that I was allowed to be vulnerable and that I was allowed to find things difficult. From a book!” Jansen calls to his dog, who has been going crazy for the last couple of weeks.

The psychologist has no idea what caused the change: the dog was always so well-behaved. Now Finn simply ignores his owner sometimes and goes off into the woods on his own. “Maybe it’s a kind of delayed puberty,” muses Jansen, who specialises in people, after all. “I had trouble with that myself.” After a few loud calls, the white dog merrily leaps into view again among the leaves.

‘PURE MAGIC’

As for Wayne Dyer, according to Gijs Jansen, the way that man affected him was “pure magic”. “It was if he knew me, as if he was sitting next to me on the sofa and saying, ‘We’re going to do this or that.’” In France, the budding psychologist decided that he wanted to write self-help books of his own later in life. “Wayne Dyer was a major influence in my life. Wouldn’t it be great if I could have that kind of influence

“COME ON, IS IT REALLY SO LIKELY THAT THE PRESENTATION WILL FAIL?”

on the lives of others? Think of a cyclist who’s biking next to somebody else and puts his hand on their back to propel them forwards a bit. That sort of thing. There’s something humble about being able to do things like that for people. It’s not about getting credit for it.” Naturally, Jansen decided to study psychology. At first, he followed the Rogerian school: you can’t take clients seriously enough. Everything they feel and say is of great value, and cognitive behavioural therapy is a logical tool to help them. But in his second year, he was taught by Hubert



de Meij, who claimed that emotions are illusions and that it was better not to listen too much to what was inside your head. Jansen reacted indignantly to this disruptive theory, and after the lecture he came storming into the professor's office.

"I started a discussion with him that I lost on every count. De Meij gave me the only book that existed then on the subject of a new technique, acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). After reading it, I was convinced."

He recognised a great deal of himself in that theory, which holds that negative thoughts are simply part of life and that you don't need to change yourself. In his student days, Jansen was afraid to stand and address a group. He was taught that he had to try to defuse that fear by thinking positive thoughts like "Come on, is it really so likely that the presentation will fail?" That strategy had the opposite effect; it only scared him even more. The relaxation

exercises that traditional psychology dictated nearly made him start hyperventilating. The attitudes underpinning ACT, which was brand new at the time, were very different. This line of thought reasoned as follows: fear is part of life, and the best thing you can do is to deal with it.

"That thought was very liberating. I was allowed to be who I was, fear and all. I'm still scared to death before I have to go speak to an audience, even though that's my job now. I still get panic attacks every time. But I've developed a love-hate relationship with my fear. I'm almost afraid to lose it. It's precisely that fear that puts you on edge so that you want to succeed. In ACT we say, "Your worth lies in your fear, and your fear in your worth." My wife and I tell one another the same thing at home, that it's good to be afraid. She's a behavioural therapist and has to give a webinar this afternoon for a hundred people. She's been going around for a week

BIOGRAPHY

Born

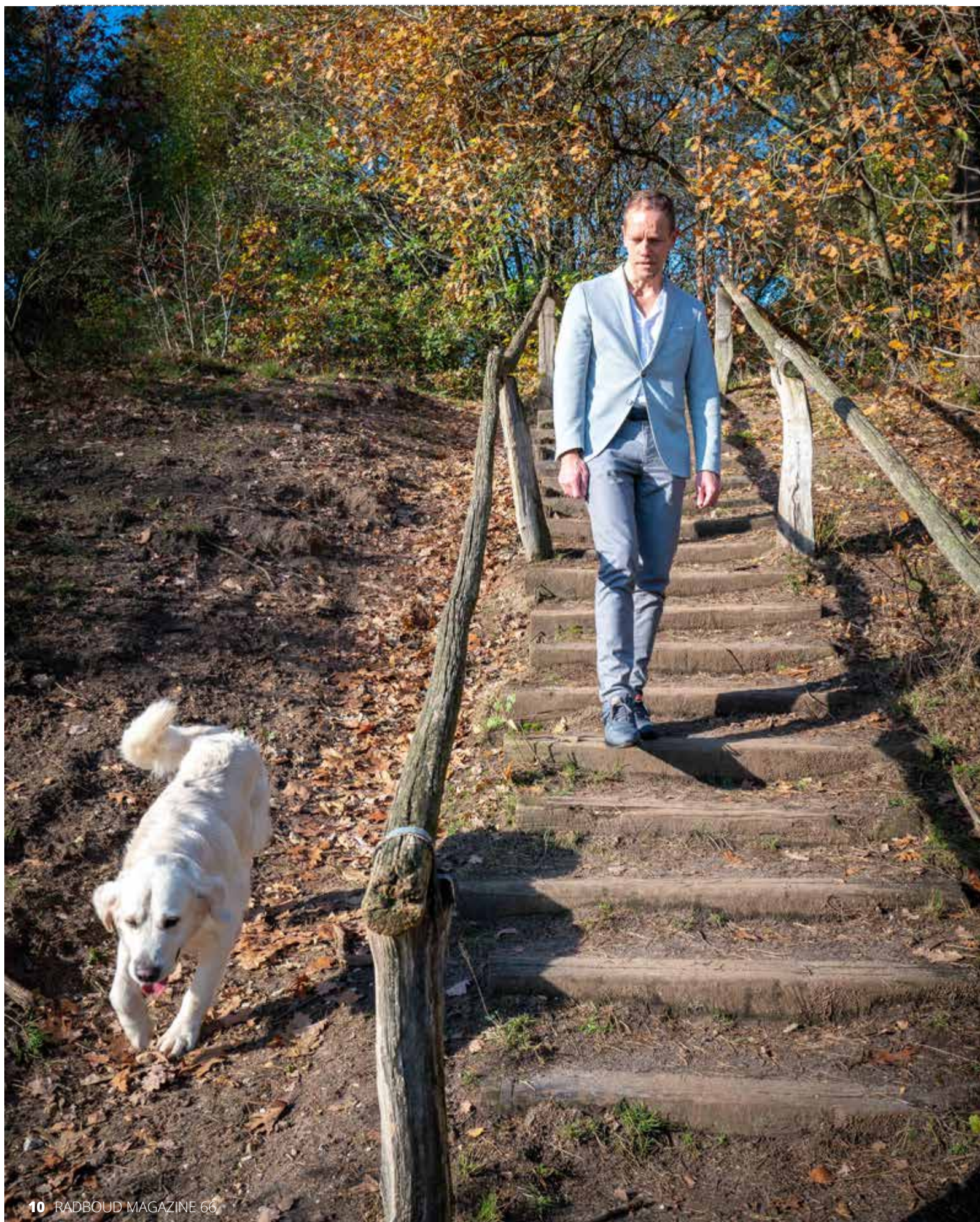
Doetinchem, 1978.

Education Psychology at Radboud University (1998-2003).

Career Working with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy since 2014 as coach, CEO and since 2020 as director of studies.

Other activities

Author of ten self-help books such as *Denk wat je wilt, doe wat je droomt (Think What You Like, Do What You Dream)* and *Laat los (Let Go): Mindfulness for the Road*.



now shaking like a chihuahua at the North Pole. If she were to shrug her shoulders about it, that would mean that she doesn't find an event like this important. One essential concept of ACT comes from the psychologist Steven Hayes, who says, 'It's okay that it's not okay.'

In recent years, Gijs Jansen has made a significant contribution to the development of acceptance and commitment therapy in the Netherlands and the rest of Europe. He has written various books on the subject and is now training new therapists and coaches. Education was always his passion. After completing his studies, he stayed on at the university as a teacher, until the dean pointed out to him that it was time to finish his doctorate. He didn't want to. In his own words, he didn't want to narrow his field of vision. He didn't want to become lost in strictly defined research, performed in a little room at the university. So, he went his own way.

STOP LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS

In the woods of Berg en Dal, Jansen descends the wooden staircase to 'the pit'. A group of people down there are exercising; their voices are echoing against the slope. It's so warm that it seems like spring, and the birds are chirping away. Jansen takes it all in.

How can the teachings of ACT support people during the current coronavirus crisis? According to this psychologist, they have to stop thinking in terms of a solution, simply because there is no solution. "It's all right to sink into thinking 'shit' for a little while. People can feel powerless and helpless. Acknowledge that that's how things are. You can't talk crooked things into becoming straight. We're programmed to always jump back into solution mode.

I often work with people who want me to teach them how to fight harder against things that happen to them. But maybe it's precisely the fighting that's the problem. During this coronavirus crisis, we can't make things more pleasant than they really are."

The same goes for people who are seriously ill. Very often, both they and the people around them are preoccupied with trying to find a way to escape the uncertainty. But Jansen says, "The uncertainty that you feel with cancer is something you can't do anything about. If you're a patient, do you want to keep fretting until you've found some false sense of security, or can you just let the uncertainty happen?" If you choose the latter strategy, then you have enough space to see other things, to hold still for just a moment. And then we come out at the point where we are now: you can stop moving for a moment to look at the gorgeous autumn light, or at a mushroom. Jansen himself has had cancer twice, he writes about it in his books. As a student he had throat cancer, with a 50% chance of recovery. Onlookers were constantly suggesting solutions to him. For example, there was the man without the least understanding of Jansen's situation who told him he should use cannabis oil. "I do understand, but to me it felt like that man didn't want to have to bear my pain, even though that pain was simply there. It sounds ironic, passive, as if you don't give a damn, but the opposite is true: the moment that you express what you'd rather

**"BUDDHISTS SAY,
IF YOU EMBRACE
YOUR ENEMY,
HE CAN'T
STRIKE YOU"**

not think or feel or perceive, you grant the right of existence to the reality of that moment. It's a relief: pain and fear come towards you. If you push things out of your mind and tell yourself you mustn't feel them, things get more explosive. Buddhists



FF ERUIT/TIME OUT

Giving students an opportunity for a weekly gathering: that is the underlying idea of the 'FF eruit' initiative, which started in December. "We hear from virtually all the students we speak to that there are times when the walls of their room seem to be closing in on them", says Marieke Fernhout of the Student Chaplaincy, and one of the founders. As she knows, living in pandemic times where most contacts are digital makes lots of students break out in a sweat. "Students go cross-eyed from staring at laptop screens and phones and long for genuine physical meetings." As a result, the parlour of the Student Chaplaincy is open every Tuesday evening for people to get together, 12 students each time. The programme is varied: on some evenings people might mostly talk; on others there's a film, or participants dream up something of their own, like making masks, for example. Fernhout says, "Our intention is mostly to promote encounters and exchanges, and who knows what might come of them." Her fellow initiator Nicole Schubert cites her contacts with students as further confirmation of the urgency of holding the meetings. "A student from the HAN said she needs some nice social contact and above all, good conversation. 'I'm really getting sort of lonely,' she told me. I found that poignant. I'm pleased that we can offer students true togetherness again at these evening meetings."

/ PAUL VAN DEN BROEK

FF out/Time Out: Tuesday evenings from 6:30 to 8:30 pm, register for each individual Tuesday evening via the link at www.ru.nl/studentenkerk. The meetings will continue for as long as the pandemic lasts, and may continue afterwards. All students of the University and the HAN are welcome.



CULTURE TIP

***Mr. Nobody*, a film from 2009 directed by Jaco van Dornael, is now available on Netflix.**

“This film combines scientific and philosophical insights in a visual spectacle of questions and answers. The focus is on the (often coincidental) life choices we make and all of their consequences. What is the good path to follow? The right path? A film that makes you think about time and transiency, where true love fills your heart like a soft undercurrent.”

say, ‘If you embrace your enemy, he can’t strike you.’ That’s a beautiful saying. You can’t keep going into the dead end of constant struggle. There are other strategies.” ACT teaches people new skills for dealing with adversity. In his self-help books, Jansen speaks to the reader directly. He often writes, “Now you might think...” And sure enough, at that moment the reader is thinking exactly what Jansen expects them to. In that way, he says, he makes a connection with the unknown. It’s not magic. But it is a question of science, and of really knowing what makes people tick. “To a great extent, we’re all the same. We all breathe the same oxygen and can share our blood with one another. I know that you too are uncertain every now and then. I don’t have to know the reason why to be able to feel it. Your issues

are different from mine, but both of us find our bond with our parents important. Everyone wants to be unique to a degree, but we aren’t all that special. In the end, we all live in the same sort of houses, and on Sundays we all go to IKEA or to the woods. ‘Connection lies in recognition’, I always say.”

You don’t have to be a psychologist to benefit from these ideas. Jansen says that this also works for ordinary people relating to one another. During crises in particular, it can be a relief to vent a bit with family and friends about how dreadful everything is, just talking about it without immediately suggesting thirty solutions again. This can also be done at an institution like a university. Tell the students once again that it must be very frustrating for them to be a student in these times. What was supposed to be the best time of your life has turned into a period of confinement. “When all is said and done, there’s only one true solution and we don’t have it yet: a vaccine.” Jansen calls his dog again because the photographer from Radboud Magazine has arrived. “Finn! Pictures!” The dog immediately stands straight up on his hind legs. He’s used to it because this is a golden retriever with his own Instagram account. As we walk towards the deepest point of the pit, Jansen mentions that he could imagine returning to the university at some point. He’s still in contact with the lecturers he knew back then. In the meantime, his own business is humming. “We do a lot of online courses, which is very handy just now.” Last year he published his first novel, *Watching the Party*. Literature is another ambition he cherishes. Gijs Jansen is in a bit of a hurry with life. If you can do something today, don’t put it off till tomorrow. It’s because of his two bouts of cancer. According to the doctors it’s not a question of whether it will recur, but when. “That made me grasp what was really important: love, and doing what you really want to do. When they’re suffering, people often feel how urgent it is to hold on to life with all your might.” ■



READERS' OFFER

Jeroen Dera and Charlotte Van den Broeck: **woorden temmen**.
Publisher: grange fontaine, 2020,
www.grafon.info. Readers of Radboud
Magazine get a €5,- discount (€ 19,55
instead of € 24,55, free shipping). Order the
book before 31 January 2021 by sending
an email to contact@grafon.info
(mentioning 'Radboud
Magazine').



BOOK, SWEAT AND TEARS

Literary scholar and teacher's trainer **Jeroen Dera** has a passion for poetry. With his anthology *woorden temmen* [taming words], he hopes to communicate that love to others, in particular to young people.

TEXT BEA ROS | PHOTOGRAPHY DUNCAN DE FEY

You chose the poems along with the poet Charlotte Van den Broeck. How did you come to agree on the theme of 'body'? "We were talking together about what poetry meant for us. It turned out that we both became acquainted with poetry in a rather physical way. In high school, the poem 'Vera Janacopoulos' by Jan Engelman had a physical effect on me. I felt tension in my belly when I read it."

'Ambrosia, what flows over me / Your skull is like the cool moon.' [own translation, ed]. **That's not an easy poem for a high-school kid.** "No, certainly not. But that's just what's good about it. Because whenever people talk about poetry and young people, they always say that it has to be accessible and recognisable. But artistic experiences are not at all about understanding, they're about being moved. I didn't understand a word of it, but I had never read anything so beautiful. So I wanted to know more about that text."

About what it meant? "No, I didn't care about that at all. The way Dutch literature is taught makes us think that everything has to have an answer. In our book, we ask mostly questions that have no good answer. Next to every poem, we placed little text boxes that say 'read', 'think', 'do' and 'write'. These challenge the reader to explore the poem in their own way."

Have you found a new favourite by now? "I still find it hard to abandon Vera, even today. But one text that I find very engaging is '6:10, Utrecht Station' by Liesbeth Lagemaat. The text is quite unruly but moves me incredibly because of the metaphors and the staccato phrasing. For me, the poem is about a social outcast. The poem arouses lots of negative commentary. Many people say they don't understand it at all, but if you talk about it with them, then the poem unfolds itself and you see the people becoming more open too. That's exactly what we want to happen, that readers will connect with a text."



‘Art is not paracetamol’

Art can offer consolation or provide a distraction. But it is more than that. Ann Demeester is firmly opposed to a functional view of art. Art is intended to expand the mind, according to the director of the Frans Hals Museum, who is also a professor by special appointment at Radboud University. ‘A well-balanced society is not only functional. We are not only bodies but souls as well.’

TEXT INGE MUTSAERS | PHOTOGRAPHY MONA VAN DEN BERG



'Being a museum director during the coronavirus crisis is like walking on the mudflats. You keep trying to look at what's ahead of you, but everything is uncertain. We see the other side, we know that we're not going to drown, but we don't know what we'll encounter along the way, where we might sink through the mud." Ann Demeester (45), director of the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem, lives up to the word meester (master) enclosed in her name. She paints masterful images with words. At the beginning of November, when the interview took place, the museum was closed because of the additional pandemic measures. Demeester tries to keep her spirits up as she "walks over the mudflats". She relates that the first lockdown in the spring came as a shock. The museum stood there like a gloomy haunted house. The second time, she and her team were ready: the closure didn't come as a surprise. All the same, she is troubled that policy seems to be constantly changing. "The doors are open, then they're not. We constantly have to change gears. For many people, it's utterly exhausting." Still, this Flemish museum director doesn't seem to be too downcast. She is prepared for the possibility that the virus will not just disappear, and that the museum may well remain closed for longer than the originally announced two weeks. "You just have to move along with it, like dancing seaweed. When you're providing leadership during a crisis, you can't have a rigid personality."

ART AS CONNECTOR

We've agreed on a Monday morning Zoom interview. "Today is my meeting day, so it's hard to be that poetic then," she apologises at the beginning of the interview. Still, she doesn't have to think that long about any of the questions. In sentences packed with imagery, she talks at high speed about how she found herself in the art world by chance, and about her ambitions as a professor by special appointment and the role of art in society.

BIOGRAPHY

Born Bruges, Belgium, 1975.
Education German philology at the University of Ghent and Cultural Studies at Catholic University Louvain.
Career Director art centre W139 in Amsterdam (2003-2006); director art centre De Appel in Amsterdam (2006-2014); director Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem (2014-present). As of April this year, she is professor by special appointment of art and culture at Radboud University (Anton van Duinkerken chair).
Other activities Published extensively on current developments in the fields of art and society. Co-editor of the of volume *The Trans-historical Museum: Mapping the Field* (Valiz, 2018). Regular guest speaker for television programmes like *Buitenhof*, *Nu te zien* and *Mondo*.

Besides being the director of the Frans Hals Museum, Demeester has been professor by special appointment of art and culture at Radboud University since April 2020. She holds the Anton van Duinkerken chair, named for the poet, essayist and literary historian who worked from 1953 till 1968 as a professor for the university in Nijmegen. In essence, her teaching assignment is about connection. Demeester wants to forge a link between the university, as an institute of knowledge, and the museum as a platform for art. By means of lectures, symposia and seminars, she hopes to bring students into contact with the museum world. Demeester believes that museum practice involves a great deal of thinking by doing. However, most reflection at the university is done at the meta-level. She believes that the two worlds can learn a great deal from one another in what she terms the interchange between "daily reality" and "abstraction". With her appearances on TV programmes like *Buitenhof* and *Mondo* and film clips on YouTube, she tries to demonstrate that the two worlds are not mutually exclusive. "You can be theoretical and pragmatic, you can support artists to produce their output and still reflect critically on their work." In her capacity as a professor by special appointment, she also hopes to find new insights into the relationship between ancient, modern and contemporary art. Demeester is an enthusiastic advocate of so-called "transhistorical exhibition practices". This refers to combining artworks and ideas from different eras and geographical or cultural zones. "You can do this in all sorts of ways. You can put 17th-century Dutch paintings alongside contemporary conceptual works, or present Christian religious articles from the middle ages in combination with old-Icelandic poetry. Or modern Iranian kilims next to Khmer sculptures from 9th- to 13th-century Cambodia." As the director explains, museums have traditionally been a product of 19th-century perceptions about art history. Art history

classifies artworks according to style and period, and works representing a specific movement or time period often hang side by side in museums. "This has caused a sort of artistic apartheid to develop. Artworks are separated from one another with sharp boundaries in a sort of hierarchy. While the field of art history often emphasised separation, the transhistorical approach is about blending. It draws parallels between objects and stories that

you might not associate with one another at first glance, and thus gives rise to new, sometimes surprising perspectives." In her own Frans Hals Museum, she often hangs artworks from different periods and movements across from each other, or side by side. "It's a bit of a cliché, but every artwork is a conversation partner. They initiate a wordless dialogue with one another if you arrange them close together in a room." The Frans Hals Museum owns



RUSSIAN LANGUAGE FRIENDS

Luuk Winkelmolen met Pavel Stotcko in 2018. A few months earlier, Pavel had come to live in Nijmegen with his husband Evgenii Voitsekhevsky. They were the first married gay couple in Russia, but they had to flee Moscow after a stream of intimidation and threats. Luuk, who was a Master's student at Radboud University at the time, spoke their language and became a language friend of Pavel and Evgenii. "After a few WhatsApp messages, we went strolling and I showed them some of the nicest places in Nijmegen, like the city island Veur-Lent", explains Luuk. Since then, they're been meeting regularly. Pavel says, "We talk a lot about politics, but also about Russian culture, which Luuk understands well. I also help him with Russian conversation. Luuk is one of the first friends I made in Nijmegen and he has helped me and Evgenii right from the start to feel more comfortable in a foreign country."

In recent months, they're been in contact less. Not just because of the coronavirus, but because Pavel, who now speaks fluent Dutch, is very busy as a medical student at Radboud University. "It's too bad, even though we do still find moments when we can meet up," says Pavel. Despite the close friendship with Luuk, which Pavel believes is permanent, he sometimes feels lonely in the Netherlands. "I'm open to new contacts. For example, I can help people to learn Russian, even if I'm busy." Luuk hopes that he'll at least be able to invite Pavel to dinner or to visit his parents. Pavel says, "Or maybe just to meet up spontaneously, which is much more fun than always having to plan like you have to nowadays." / STIJN ZUNNEBERG

You can become a language friend at Radboud in'to Languages. See www.ru.nl/radboudintolanguages/vm/word-ij-taalmaatje/.

no less than 18,000 “conversational partners”: paintings by the ‘house artist’ Frans Hals and many other old masters from the 16th and 17th centuries, but modern and contemporary works as well. For example, Demeester explains that she has combined 17th-century food still lifes by Willem Claesz Heda with contemporary photographs by the Dutch artist Anne de Vries. The Haarlem-school still lifes depict products that had been imported from all corners of the world to the city on the Spaarne river: porcelain from China, spices from the Indonesian archipelago and carpets from Persia. “It’s a display case of the riches of the day. But at the same time, the still lifes are a document of the Dutch drive for expansion, of an entrepreneurial and conquering people. If the republic had not been a colonial and trade power, these paintings would have looked totally different. Then they would have shown only apples, cheese and beer, no pepper or salt, wine, Chinese porcelain or Persian rugs.” Demeester explains that the contemporary still life by Anne de Vries is also dependent on a global network of trade. The work – a digital photograph of an avocado, an apple and a lemon against a background of text – depicts the very process used to create it. The text describes the hardware and software that was needed to create the print of this photograph. A glance at the list tells us that companies from Japan, India, the United States, Germany and the Netherlands have all contributed, either directly or indirectly, to the creation of the print. “An entire journey around the world was needed to make this simple still life possible.”

‘ARTISTIC BASTARD DAUGHTER’

On hearing the enthusiasm—the obsession, really—with which Demeester spins her literary tales of the background and meaning of artworks, you begin to feel that she must have been exposed to art when she was still in the cradle. Nothing could be further from the truth. Demeester (1975), who was born in Bruges and grew up in De Haan and Oostende (West



Flanders), does not come from an academic family. Both her parents were tax officials, and art and culture played no significant role in her upbringing.

As she tells it, that personal backstory strengthens her conviction that art, in contrast to what many people think, is not an elitist field. “Art does not have to be part of your DNA or your background. It’s not only for a certain type of people. It’s something that anyone can discover.” According to Demeester, education and coincidence set her on her artistic path. A colleague of her mother was an amateur actor. As a gift, he gave her a subscription to *De Witte Raaf* (*The White Raven*), a magazine on visual art in the Netherlands and Flanders. She also recalls that during a vacation in southern France that her stepfather was tired of her ‘whining’. She was in a sort of new wave period and hated the beach. Consequently, she wanted her skin to stay pale and wouldn’t sunbathe. “He just dumped me in the Matisse Museum.” That museum in Nice is full of the work of its namesake. It thrilled her;

yet, her parents advised her not to study art history. A practical education seemed more sensible to them. Eventually, that turned out to be German philology (language and culture) at the University of Ghent. After completing her degree, she chose journalism and became a literary editor for the Flemish newspapers *De Morgen* and *De Tijd*. Quite soon, she was writing about the visual arts. Shortly afterwards, she was discovered by Jan Hoet, the famous curator and director of the S.M.A.K museum in Ghent. In an interview for the Belgian news magazine *Knack*, she referred to him as his “artistic bastard daughter”. He shaped her, as Demeester herself says. Under his supervision – “a sort of paramilitary training” – she oversaw various exhibitions in Belgium and Germany. Later, Demeester relocated to the Netherlands, where she became the director of two Amsterdam art centres, W139 and De Appel. Since 2014, she has been at the helm of the Frans Hals Museum.

What was it in art that attracted you so much? “I think it’s the opportunity to explore parallel worlds. Art reveals the



different layers of reality. From my time as a literary editor, I remember an interview with the writer Jeanette Winterson in 2000 for what was then still called *De Financieel-Economische Tijd*. Winterson drew a parallel between reality and working at a computer, when you often have multiple windows open at once. You only work in one of those windows, but behind them lie many other frames, unexploited opportunities. The dominant frame of daily realities is dictated by assumptions, fixed opinions and prejudices. Art offers us the possibility of temporarily closing that frame and entering another world. In this way, art shows that reality is layered; it's not just one thing." To underscore that layering, Demeester's associative brain unleashes a flow of analogies. Art as kaleidoscope ("You look at yourself, but see something different every time"), or art as x-rays ("With x-rays you can see multiple layers of one painting. Art does the same thing with how you view reality").

"MY INTENTION IS THAT FRANS HALS SHOULD BE A PLACE WHERE YOU TEMPORARILY ENTER INTO AN INSIDE WORLD IN ORDER TO LEARN TO COMMUNICATE BETTER WITH THE TUMULTUOUS OUTSIDE WORLD"

Does that mean that art leads to a better grasp of reality?

"No, that doesn't intrinsically mean that you understand it better or have more insight into reality. Art is often something rather strange, and you don't always see right away what it truly is. You can perceive it as a threat, or it can exercise fascination.

This is how art trains us to deal with things that can't

be understood at the first encounter. That can be another person, another culture or a 'new' reality, like the Covid pandemic. Art strengthens your mental flexibility, your spiritual suppleness."

"My intention is that Frans Hals should be a place where you temporarily enter into an inside world in order to learn to communicate better with the tumultuous

outside world. It has to be an oasis where it is enjoyable to look at art, but also a means for emancipation, where the public learns to read images and deal with things that are not immediately understandable, within art and in reality."

Aren't museums primarily places where people seek consolation and diversion?

"During this coronavirus crisis, the museum does indeed offer a chance of brief escape from the current situation, where everything is touched by the pandemic. Now art offers primarily beauty, consolation and escapism. A museum is now like that little cottage on the moors where you can think to yourself, 'Just let the world rage outside.'

Still, if art were to fulfil only that escapist function, that would be a huge loss. Art can offer so much more. Before the crisis, museums were a place of contemplation for art, but also societal centres that had a role to play in socio-political discussions of matters like inequality or how human beings should deal with the environment. While museums were once places of rest and contemplation, they are now also sports clubs for the mind: centres for curiosity and expanding the mind. I understand the need for escapism, for a chance to catch our breath, but in a little while the doors to reality will have to be opened again!"

Sports clubs for the mind? Is art going to make our society healthier and more peaceful?

"Don't expect miracles. Art is not paracetamol or aspirin. It doesn't offer any ready-made solutions for societal problems. In other words, if an artist makes an activist work about the issue of Palestine, that doesn't change the situation in the Middle East." Nonetheless, Demeester feels that that type of work is important because it provides a new perspective. "It encourages a different train of thought than when you look at a news report or a documentary."

It sounds as if artists are very important. But they're still not on the list of essential occupations, are they?

She replies matter-of-factly, "That's right. And many artists are in rough financial straits as a result. On the other hand, health-care workers are on the list, but you can hardly say that their working conditions have improved as a result. Many artists also get nothing more than a bit of sympathy. There are lots of support



mechanisms for institutions, but individual artists have extremely limited prospects." Demeester doesn't seem like the type of person who gets angry easily. She makes a friendly, controlled impression. But her tone becomes more forceful when she starts to discuss Dutch scepticism towards art and culture. "The idea has circulated here for a long time that art is a sort of luxurious afterthought, non-edible caviar. In Belgium, France, Germany and Great Britain, things are different. There, people

realise that art is a component of our inner civilisation. I don't know why the Dutch are so sceptical. Of course, I'm no sociologist, but still I think that the centuries-old mercantile mindset must play a part. If it doesn't turn an immediate profit, it's irrelevant."

But it doesn't make the coronavirus crisis go away, as an artist friend of mine recently remarked. "That's true, but art isn't meant to function on a purely utilitarian level. Visual art is not created to eradicate some particular evil. The same goes for music, literature, film, graffiti, urban dance and religion. But society cannot be constructed on a purely functional basis. Not everything revolves around our need to eat and drink, be healthy and have a home. We are not only bodies but souls as well. You have to stimulate that idea, or we'll become completely numbed in the end.

I understand that money can't be invested in art during crisis times. At the same time, though, I can wonder what will happen if you take it all away. Then you lose the awareness of your past and become nothing but a physical machine that is focussed on survival." Fiercely she says, "Aren't we allowed to expect something more of life? I'm not religious, but I'm glad that churches, synagogues and mosques exist, and that people can add layers of meaning to their lives. There's more to it than purely physical and monetary things. And this is not a question of ideology or education. Maybe that hostile attitude is linked with the current focus on people's own identity and exclusion of 'the other'. In Europe, we're living in a period where we're moving towards a clear (national) identity: who are we? what are we not? who or what is part of us and what isn't? To come back to the transhistorical approach to art exhibits, these are directly opposed to that movement, because transhistoricism stands for plurality. There is not one canonic History with a capital H, but many histories, many stories about the past. They deserve to be heard in various ways."



CULTURE TIP

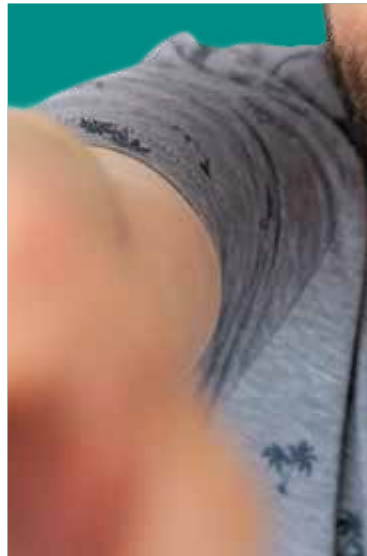
***Out of Darkness, Shining Light* (Dutch translation: *Atlas Contact*, 2020), a novel by Petina Gappah.**

"A novel about David Livingstone's last voyage. For 20 years, the Zimbabwean author thought about writing a novel about the Scottish physician and missionary who went in search of the mythical source of the Nile. It was not so much about the life of the European, but about what happened after his death and how it was viewed by his African expedition members. A fascinating fictional documentary in which historical facts are combined with the hitherto unknown perspective of the African entourage of the white explorer."

Can art help to connect people more?

"I don't know whether it will finally connect people, but the transhistorical approach does invite the viewer to see new connections, to look further than just 'understanding'. People often perceive a museum as a kind of escape room; they feel as if they have to crack a code, find the right solution, unveil the mystery. But to me, the point of it is the experience, not in the sense of spectacle and sensation, but in being open to subjectivity, irrationality and mystery. While looking at the artworks, you're not decoding something, you're communicating with them, and hopefully with other people as well."

At the time of writing, the museum has reopened. But Demeester is still walking the mudflats. She doesn't believe that Covid-19 will allow itself to be restrained so easily. Besides, policy for managing the pandemic is unpredictable and often subject to multiple interpretations. She says crossly, "The policies sometimes seem like an artwork, and we have to figure out what they mean." ■



PHOTOGRAPHY: BERT BEELLEN

Hermit

When I was a third-year student, I once biked away from the university together with a girl whom I liked. She asked me which direction I was heading in. I named a couple of streets without saying that I was going to bike completely out of the city. "Then we can bike together," she said happily. As we biked, she asked me where I lived exactly. "All the way on the west side of Nijmegen." That wasn't a complete lie. Nevertheless, I was relieved when she said that she was going to turn left at the next intersection.

In my day you didn't score many points if you still lived at home. So nothing would ever develop between that girl and

myself. I had the feeling that it took centuries before I dared to move to student digs. Every evening I joined my parents at dinner and ate with the finely crafted cutlery that I had received for my First Communion. Then I asked myself what I was doing there, why I didn't enthusiastically dive into student life. I was hidden away in the countryside. While I watched my parents eat, I thought about all the things my fellow students were experiencing at that moment.

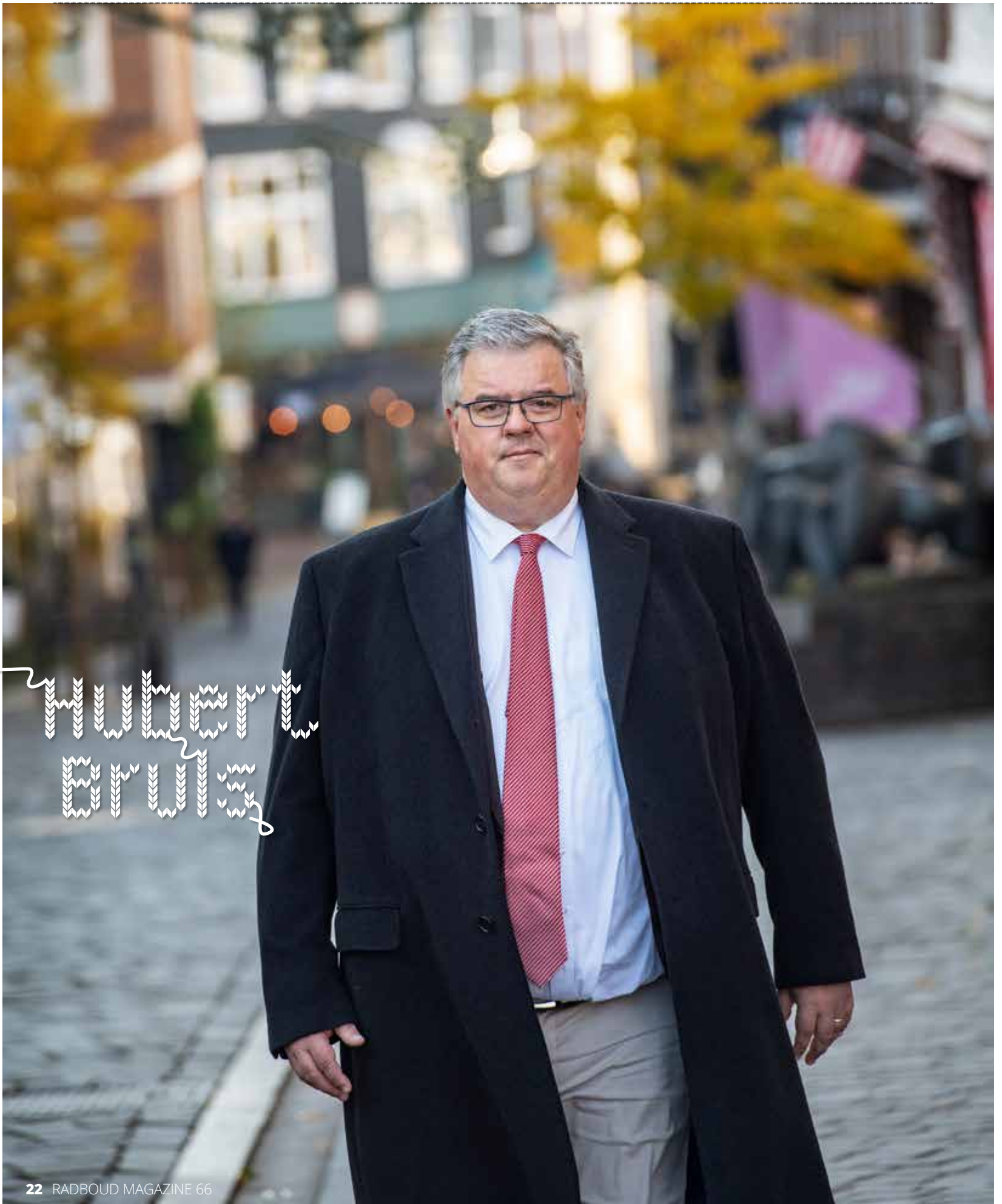
When I finally moved to a room in Van Welderenstraat, I was faced with a new challenge. How did I get outside? I tended to spend all day in my 15m²-room while listening to the sounds from the street. Motorcycles, junkies, shoppers.

One day in the kitchen I chanced to hear that a housemate called me 'the hermit'. My younger me has a lot in common with the present generation of students. The number of students living at home has increased greatly because financial aid has disappeared. Students who do live in rooms have to stay inside because of corona. They are as much of a hermit as I once was. But there's a big difference. Today's students are forced to isolate, I did it to myself.

Things worked out well for my later me, if I do say so myself. I made up for my missed student life in the last months of my study and the first years of my working life. That might be a comfort for the present generation; your student days are the time of your life, but you can always start them a bit later. Another comfort is that, unlike me, you're all in the same situation together. One day you'll be able to drink to that, in an overcrowded café.

column

WILLEM CLAASSEN IS A WRITER AND A WRITING COACH. HE STUDIED HISTORY (2003-2008) AT RADBOD UNIVERSITY



Hubert
Bruins

'People are incurably social'

According to Hubert Bruls, stopping by to give a bouquet to a couple to mark their 65th wedding anniversary is one of the most rewarding privileges for a mayor. This year, Nijmegen's fatherly mayor abruptly found himself faced with the most severe test of his governmental career as a member of the national coronavirus crisis team. Can he keep things together at the national level too? 'The pandemic is showing us who the real leaders are and who just cops out.'

TEXT PAUL VAN DEN BROEK | PHOTOGRAPHY BERT BEELEN

A thankless, unpaid chore: that's what it's like to be chairman of the Security Council, according to the mayors who ought to know. Every three years, this task is entrusted to one of the 25 mayors who are responsible for regional security. Hubert Bruls took on this chore in 2016 and was reappointed after three years. An obvious choice: Bruls's first three years went very well, according to his fellow mayors on the council. In normal times, the job of chair rolls along peacefully: four meetings a year and a cup of coffee now and then with the Minister of Justice. "Then came the virus and everything changed", remarks Bruls, 54, looking back in his office on the greatest shock in his 30-year career in government. As

chair of the Security Council, he is the main contact person for Minister of Justice Grapperhaus. He now goes to congratulate a couple on their diamond anniversary in Lindenholt one day; the next day he sits down to table with Rutte or Van Dissel.

Your favourable notices in Nijmegen are now being echoed in the national media. Have you surprised yourself in this new role? "I was accustomed to taking strict measures now and then, closing a pub because of drug problems or restricting people's freedom of action. In legal terms, the Security Council's actions are the same, but it is surprising what a prominent role I have to fulfil now as chair. Of course I wasn't prepared for that, certainly not for the nature of the measures and the lengthy duration of the crisis. We've had to proceed with care for eight whole months now. But, as for my ability to lead a crisis team, which is something I also do on a regional scale, I never doubted that for a moment."

Your colleague from Tilburg in the Security Council is full of praise for your approach. 'Sometimes there's hilarity, at other times, it's very controlled', said Theo Weterings in the *Algemeen Dagblad* this summer. What's your secret? "I had done this before and it's working again: if a crisis heats up, then Hubert Bruls gets very calm. If things stay calm for a while, then I start to get nervous. Whether my approach really works is for other people to decide. To my surprise, I've discovered that I'm still in fairly decent shape after eight months, despite the constant stress. We can't pretend that everything has gone well. I think that after the first wave, after the summer, we all let ourselves be soothed to sleep. Then we relaxed the strict measures too much."

Your work hours have been doubled for months now. What keeps you going? When you began your post as mayor, the local press wrote about your lack of ideals. Does your ambition take precedence over your convictions? “With all due respect, anyone who would write that has not asked the right questions. I don’t recognise myself in that portrayal. I’m driven by a belief in unity: people as a society are much more important to me than individual persons. What drives me is strengthening the collective: doing things together, and doing them better. I was raised this way by my father, who was very actively involved in associations and organisations in Nuth. The government is there to strengthen those values. Not as an administrative body that decides everything for you, but providing stimulus and creating some order. That’s also my priority in this coronavirus period. Many people still think that this is the government’s crisis. No, this virus belongs to seventeen and a half million people. It is our crisis and we have to take steps together to overcome it.”

Are you enjoying being in the national spotlight? D66 representative Rob Jetten knows you well from his years in Nijmegen as a local council member, and says becoming a minister is your secret ambition. “I have never focussed on a career in national politics. You know that I was a member of the House of Representatives for three years and I never regretted leaving it behind to become a mayor. What I’m doing now is the best thing I have ever done. The

“WHAT DRIVES ME IS
STRENGTHENING THE COLLECTIVE: DOING THINGS TOGETHER, AND DOING THEM BETTER”

press always likes to speculate about what chairpersons are going to do next. It’s logical that I won’t occupy this post for the next fifteen years, but becoming a minister? Look, as a mayor you’re highly concerned with security policies, even more than people suppose, but unlike a minister I can do so many other wonderful things besides that. I maintain contacts with the economic partners of the city, the university, the

Radboud university medical center, and then I can go play bingo in a nursing home. That variety is like oxygen to me. True, I’ll have withdrawal symptoms from all the attention once the pandemic is over, but fortunately I’ll have more time again for other things. Right now I can’t make as much of my position as mayor as in normal times.”

PUBLIC SCOLD

Hubert Bruls comes over as exceedingly jovial. He is exuberant in his character and physique, and famous for his yearly immersions in Nijmegen’s carnival, wearing outfits that betray his Limburg origins. But he doesn’t touch alcohol and his radar is always on alert, in the street or in the pub. “The little grey cells never turn off”, he says, quoting Hercule Poirot, a character from Agatha Christie’s detective novels. “You don’t have to make friends as a mayor. I have to keep my hands free so that I can step in, no matter who it



concerns. Enough administrators have stumbled because of the coteries they've gathered around them." Bruls studiously avoids preferred treatment: the pub owner who poured him a soft drink during Carnival can expect to be scolded for violating the coronavirus measures. Not only that, Bruls had enough nerve to close three student pubs in Nijmegen because of infection risk even before the lockdown. And recently he issued a vigorous public reprimand to shopkeepers who tried to lure in customers with enormous sales. He still gets angry about it. "Your neighbour is in danger of going bankrupt and can't sleep at night, and you're offering huge Christmas discounts. Restaurants and pubs are not even allowed to be open. Stop these tricks. What happened to solidarity?"

Has the coronavirus taught you anything new about the city, either in a negative or a positive sense? "It disappoints me that, even during this

BIOGRAPHY

Born Nuth, 1966.

Education Political Sciences at Radboud University (1984-1992).

Career Civil servants' union Novon/ Abvakabo, city council member and alderman in Nijmegen (1998-2002); member of the House of Representatives for the CDA (2002-2005); mayor of Venlo (2005-2012); mayor of Nijmegen (2012-present); chair of the Regional Security Council, the association of 25 chairpersons of the 25 security areas (2016-present).

second wave, people find it so easy to ignore how serious the coronavirus is. Recently I had to argue again with a movie theatre operator about the directive not to sell food and drinks during the showing. The man wanted an exception for popcorn; he thought that was something you just had to have when you went to the movies. The hospitals are filling up, infections are rising, and then this guy gets upset about popcorn! Then I think, 'Just be grateful that you can still stay open.' That can be hard sometimes: you're always trying to protect people, and then you get criticised because you declare protective measures."

Have you been happily surprised by any reactions in the city? "It is really good that the sense of cheer in Nijmegen has been preserved over all these months. Of course some people have felt downcast, but in general I found people level-headed and reasonably calm. It's also good that the university did everything they could to enable in-person learning by renting out theatres. My daughter is in her first year at Utrecht, where everything is digital. That's worthless, now she comes home every weekend."

What initiative touched you the most? "The best thing is when people try to do something for themselves, despite all the misery. As an official, I can't make the people happy; they have to do that themselves. One nice case at the start of the crisis was a lady who started to make cards. You could put the cards in your window to show either the text 'I'm doing okay on' one side or 'I'm not doing okay' on the other. Then a neighbour might respond to it. I also had a good conversation with representatives of student groups. That group has been hit hard, and that really touches me. They had a plan to organise an introduction for all first-year students in the city anyway, as soon as that became possible. Well, that gets my full support."

Some say that people show their true nature at times like this. Have any colleagues disappointed you? "In a crisis like this, you can definitely see who the true crisis managers are and who are not. On boards, in organisations, in politics: everywhere you look there are some people who clearly shoulder their responsibilities, and others who just say what people want to hear and then cop out. In that sense, a crisis is purifying. And no, I'm not going to name names."





CULTURAL TIP

***De Thibaults*, two-part novel by the French Nobel Prize winner Roger Martin du Gard (1930s, published in the Netherlands by Meulenhoff, 2014 and 2015).**

“The novel relates the life history of two brothers from the end of the 19th century to the end of World War I. These hundreds of pages are about father-son relationships, French bourgeois culture, love, politics and the enormous impact of World War I. The descriptions of the tensions and fears of the main characters during the mobilisation that took place in the first weekend of August 1914 are incomparable.”

What lessons as an administrator can you take with you from the crisis? “I already knew that human contact is essential, and that has been confirmed. People are incurably social. Look at the limits to working at home, look at the schoolkids who say they want to go to school. I never thought I’d hear them say that. The lesson of the crisis is that you can’t wait to take measures until that crisis is over: if there’s a disaster, the relief efforts have to start the day after. So we continue to subsidise the theatres, and we’re easy about renting out the athletic fields. We’ve already created a new policy for when the crisis is over, to monitor whether people are still on board, and how we can facilitate that. I realise more than ever now that true frustration develops in society when you can’t see, taste and smell one another.”

HOME FRONT

In October you handed over control of the Security Council to the vice-chair for two weeks. Were you overtired? “Of course I’ve been travelling a lot and just kept plugging away in the summer too, except for one week. The phone kept ringing at the weekends and in the evenings. My wife saw me on TV one night and said, ‘You’re exhausted!’ Those two weeks of holiday in October were a good decision. A long crisis can trick you into thinking that you have to keep going at any cost. But it’s precisely then that you have to step aside sometimes. I’m glad that there are people in my circle who will say that to me.”

In numerous interviews you’ve talked about how lonely it is in the upper levels of government. Does the coronavirus crisis make you even lonelier?

“Not so much. I’ve actually had far more national discussions, and locally I also try to have as many physical consultations as possible, with the municipal secretary, aldermen, civil servants. My experience has also helped me. After talking with the police chief for two minutes, I know where things stand. I have to, otherwise I wouldn’t be able to keep doing this. I benefit greatly from being older, and being experienced in seeing what is going well and what isn’t.”

In an interview before the crisis, you sang the praises of your home front, and of your wife in particular. ‘You have to have that, or you won’t make it’, you said. Did your home front keep sustaining you, even after 120-hour work weeks for months on end?

“You shouldn’t exaggerate, it wasn’t that many hours. And in these months in particular I’ve made a point of taking time to calmly give everything its proper place, instead of constantly grinding it out. Every Friday and Saturday evening I’m home watching a film or a series with my wife. And the period when I was away every weeknight has been behind me for some time now. My home base has always been there, and my wife has grown along with my career for over twenty years now. I can share everything with her, also in these months.”

A TOPIC FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS TO CHEW ON

A knock at the door: the interview is over, and the regional Security Council is waiting. But Mayor Bruls still wants to express his admiration for Radboud professor Ira Helsloot. This professor of security administration gave a fresh impulse in the spring to the coronavirus debate by putting the crisis in a broader light. At the talk show table, he posited that the coronavirus is not only a problem for health and hospitals, but also a societal issue, in addition to a topic for psychologists to chew on. He wondered aloud whether the number of coronavirus victims measures up to the economic and mental damage to all people in the Netherlands. Helsloot feels that, especially at the start of the crisis, too few people paid attention to this approach. “You need experts like Helsloot”, says Bruls. “I’ve valued him for years because he keeps administrators like us on our toes. He is right that we must keep an eye on all aspects of the crisis.”

But that is exactly what didn’t happen: the infections and full hospitals set the tone for the policy. “That was less true in the second wave than in the first. We kept sports clubs and saunas open so that people could relax. But I would say to Helsloot that he of



all people is neglecting the psychological point of view. It was the public who asked for protective measures and was concerned about the hospital admissions and overburdened health-care personnel. As an administrator, you can't ignore this. You can't explain that more people will die as a result of less strict measures. But in the long term, Helsloot is right. If the crisis lasts much longer, we'll have to broaden our outlook to include economic and psychological nuances. For example, a restaurant where things are well set up should have different regulations to a pub where everyone sits elbow-to-elbow."

Is there still any hope that pubs will be able to open before Carnival? "I really don't know, but the number of Carnival activities will be limited. I say to all Carnival-goers: it's a bitter pill, but we'll get over it. When you're complaining about the evenings of dancing that you missed, show some compassion for people who lost their job or their company. We'll make up for the dance nights next year." ■

"I SAY TO ALL
CARNIVAL-
GOERS: **IT'S A
BITTER PILL,
BUT WE'LL
GET OVER IT**"



BECOME A BUDDY

In the International Office's buddy programme, Radboud students help classmates from abroad to find their way around the campus and the city. This sometimes produces contacts that last far beyond the years of study. Take Fabiola Diender, who volunteered in 2016 as the buddy of two exchange students of Spanish language and culture: Inés and Laura, both from Segovia. The three walked through Nijmegen together, celebrated Liberation Day and visited the town where Fabiola's parents live. When Fabiola was studying the next year in Seville, they got together again, and now she lives where Inés does, in Madrid. "My mother is Spanish, so I was already familiar with Spain and Spanish culture, and now I really enjoy having a friend here who can show me around," says Fabiola. "During this pandemic, it's especially nice to know people already." Inés adds, "You can still go to a café in Spain, so we often meet for a coffee or a beer. And we just watched the Netherlands-Spain game together."

The two use WhatsApp or Instagram to keep in touch with Laura, who lives in La Rioja and cannot receive visitors because of a regional lockdown. Inés says, "Even though we're quite different, we can discuss everything with one another. We laugh, but if someone is having a problem, we're there for them." According to Fabiola, 'our main similarity' is a passion for sweets. "I used to take them to cafes in Nijmegen, and thanks to Inés I now know where to go for the best cakes in Madrid." After the pandemic, Fabiola, Inés and Laura plan to meet up again very soon. "Maybe we'll all go to Nijmegen again." / STIJN ZUNNEBERG

Do you want to be a buddy too, or are you a foreign student, doctoral student or university employee looking for a buddy? Send an email to the International Office's Radboud Buddy Box: ris@io.ru.nl.



Lotte
Jensen

Every disaster finds its echoes in stories, paintings and songs, whether it is the St Elizabeth flood of 1421 or the coronavirus crisis of 2020. As part of her research project 'Dealing with Disasters', Lotte Jensen, professor of Dutch literary and cultural history, searches for patterns in the cultural portrayal of disasters. She finds vulgar gestures, but also consolation, heroism and especially, the strength that unites.

TEXT BEA ROS | PHOTOGRAPHY DICK VAN AALST

**'Stories are
the ultimate
connectors'**

“The Water Wolf!” With obvious pleasure, Lotte Jensen unveils Nijmegen’s newest artwork, a huge statue of a wolf. We’re standing in the bay window of the De Bastei museum, which floats on glass above the ground with an expansive view of the Waal River. The river is flowing demurely within its banks, but as every inhabitant of low-lying areas knows, that can change very quickly, because the water wolf is always lying in wait. The metaphor of the water wolf was thought up by the engineer Leeghwater and imprinted on our cultural memory by Vondel. In his poem ‘To the Lion of Holland’ (1641), Vondel called on the Dutch authorities to carry out Leeghwater’s plan and drain the Haarlemmermeer. “O Lion of the land, awaken us against the cruel Water Wolf.” “The idea that we have to bring the wolf to its knees and that we Dutchmen are capable of this is deeply rooted in our stories of the battle against the water. The water wolf appears time and time again in stories, images, and poems. And now here it is in a revitalised version on the shores of the Waal.”

WATER CONQUERORS

Jensen is fascinated by the cultural portrayal of crises. She previously did research on how cultural items such as paintings, poems and stories created a Dutch identity, a feeling of ‘us’, in times of war and peace. “In wartime, there’s always a feeling of us and them, a discourse in which the things that characterise us are the antithesis of the enemy, like the Catholic Spaniards against the Protestant Dutch. A logical next step was to investigate whether those images and that ‘us’ feeling are also activated at the moment that people experience a natural disaster.” As a vulnerable delta, the Netherlands has always had to struggle with water damage and floods. Both the battle against the water and our reputation as conquerors of water are deeply rooted in our cultural memory. “It has become a unifying narrative that we draw on in periods of

crisis and suffering: we went through hard times together, but we survived them. *Luctor et emergo*: I struggle and I emerge.”

Do you see that happening in the coronavirus crisis as well? “Yes, the reports that I see on the pandemic contain a striking number of water metaphors, like ‘a tsunami of patients’ and ‘the dyke reinforcements against Covid-19 aren’t working’. One new report on the coronavirus was very striking: Maurice de Hond kept talking about the holes in the dyke and the fact that Hans Brinker, the figure from the legend who stuck his finger in the dyke, is missing now.”

Why is this happening? “It makes the battle against this invisible enemy, a virus, more tangible. Also, you create the illusion that we will win the battle, as long as we get the dyke reinforcements working and can figure out how to turn back the wave of patients. We use this language to get a handle on the crisis by comparing it to a struggle that we’re familiar with. Those interpretations of disasters in old cultural sources are extremely interesting because they have resonance up until this day.”

Like now with Covid-19? “Yes, but also in the way we talk about future disasters, like climate change. In that debate, you can also detect motifs whose roots are centuries old.” Jensen picks up the brochure that her research group has put together in collaboration with the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management. What stories can you tell about rising sea levels? Cultural history offers a number of variants. “There’s the apocalyptic variant: beware, soon all of us will be hopelessly lost. Or maybe reassuring technological stories: we really can get the better of that water wolf. A third variant is reawakening the sense of sin. Not in a religious sense anymore, but a secular version: your actions have an influence on global warming, so don’t use your car so often and stop flying.”

Which variant do you prefer? “I would choose a fourth variant: the ecological one, in which humankind doesn’t do battle with nature, but lives alongside it and makes room for it. That might seem like a contemporary idea, but it has ancient roots too, as in Spinoza’s vision of nature. And you find it in Marsman’s famous poem ‘*Herinnering aan Holland*’ [memory of Holland].”

SONGS OF DISASTER

Among the first cultural expressions following natural disasters are songs. In the song database of the Meertens Institute, Jensen discovered more than a hundred of them. In the past, preachers wrote them very often, but street singers did as well. For example, Jensen found a song about the Spanish flu by one Dorus Stoffel from Rijssen. Besides, many famous Dutch writers from Vondel to Beets have put pen to paper for a song commemorating a disaster. This is happening now as well. Our poet laureate, Tsead Bruinja, wrote a coronavirus poem, although it hasn’t been set to music and is not being heard on the street as in years gone by. In Ahoy, emptied of an audience, Snelle and Davina Michelle recorded a coronavirus version of the well-known song *15 miljoen mensen* [15 million



Listen to the disaster songs

Thanks to a crowdfunding by the Radboud Fund a new CD with a selection of disaster songs will be released in the Spring of 2021. The songs were discovered by Lotte Jensen and will be performed by music company Camerata Trajectina. The oldest disaster the songs deal with is the St. Elizabeth’s flood of 1421, the newest is Covid-19. Especially for this CD Dutch poet Ester Naomi Perquin wrote a text about the corona crisis. CDs can be ordered via www.camerata-trajectina.nl.

“THE REPORTS THAT I
SEE ON THE PANDEMIC
CONTAIN A STRIKING
NUMBER OF WATER
METAPHORS, LIKE
**A TSUNAMI OF
PATIENTS**”

**BIOGRAPHY**

Born Hillerød, Denmark, 1972.

Education Dutch and philosophy at Utrecht University.

Career Doctorate (2001) from the University of Amsterdam for research on women's magazines and journalists in the 18th and 19th centuries. Then lecturer of historical literature in Amsterdam, Utrecht and Nijmegen (2007). Since 2017, professor of Dutch literary and cultural history at Radboud University. Received a Vidi grant in 2011 for 'Proud to be Dutch' and a Vici grant in 2017 for the research project 'Dealing with Disasters'.

Books *De verheerlijking van het verleden [The Glorification of the Past]* (Vantilt, 2008, 2nd printing 2016); *Vieren van vrede: Het ontstaan van de Nederlandse identiteit, 1648-1815 [Celebrating Peace: The Rise of Dutch Identity, 1648-1815]* (Vantilt, 2016); *Wij tegen het water [Us Against the Water]* (Vantilt, 2018); *Napoleons nalatenschap [Napoleon's Legacy]* (Ed.) (De Bezige Bij, 2020).

Other activities Member of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences (KNAW) (as of 2020) and jury member for the P.C. Hooft prize (2020).

people], which was re-dubbed *17 miljoen mensen [17 million people]*. It contained lines like “now thousands of students in springtime are sitting in their rooms” and “strangely enough, it unites us”. “That song meant a lot to many students.”

Are those songs about recognition?

“Yes, and they used to function as a way to spread the news. People used to sing about a disaster for an illiterate audience. Sometimes the songs are very detailed. In a song about the flood of 1825, you get an

exact report of how many people and cattle drowned in each village. It's like a sung newspaper story, except that people are also mourning and grieving and that there's always a moral lesson at the end. What I find touching is that the moral of that story is always, 'Stand by one another, help each other in times of need'.”

So there isn't a religious moral? “Of course that's there too. Repent of your sins, so that God won't punish us any longer. But there's also very often a call to donate



1 The Saint Elizabeth's Flood occurred in 1421. More than three centuries later, an artist depicted the flooding of the Zuid-Hollandse Waard. The etching (collection Rijksmuseum) has been attributed to Simon Fokke and is dated somewhere between 1747 and 1759.

2 On 25 June 1766 there was a severe fire in Hilversum. Jacobus Buys (1724-1801) depicted this years later in a drawing with pen and brush (collection Rijksmuseum).

3 In 1562 Pieter Bruegel the Elder painted *The Triumph of Death* (collection Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). The scenes in the oil painting portray a sort of Danse Macabre that beholders should consider as a warning for the Last Judgment Day: improve your life while you still can.

4 *La peste di firenze dal boccaccio descritta*. An etching by Luigi Sabatelli (1772- 1850). Inspired by the *Decamerone* by the Italian poet and scholar Giovanni Boccaccio, a collection of tales recounted while fleeing the plague epidemic in Florence.



“THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES, THERE HAS BEEN AN **OVERWHELMING NUMBER OF AID PROGRAMMES AND MONEY COLLECTIONS**”

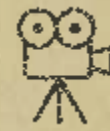


and to stick together. Charity, *caritas*, is also a principal motif in many paintings. Solidarity and togetherness are central themes in the cultural portrayal of disasters.”

That reminds one of the book *Humankind: A Hopeful History* by Rutger Bregman. He asserts that disasters bring out the best in people. “Bregman summarises what researchers have shown, namely that people are more inclined to help one another during disasters than at other times. Our historical sources reflect that too. Throughout the centuries, there has been an overwhelming number of aid programmes and money collections. There were also benefit occasions, like the one in Amsterdam in 1881. The profits went to the victims of the flood in Nieuwkuijk, Brabant. For that occasion, they even wrote a flood version of the Dutch national anthem. That is my favourite song. It’s about King Willem III, who is portrayed as if he were Triton, the Greek god who leads his water soldiers: ‘True to the Waterland’. I find it hilarious, but at the time it was meant in deadly earnest.”

RESILIENCE

As Jensen stated during the opening lecture of the school year, art and culture play an important role in coming to terms with disasters. “Culture offers us a framework for interpreting things. And more than that, it offers resilience.” One image that she finds especially powerful is the phoenix: the bird that rises from its ashes. “After the firework disaster in Enschede, in the Roombeek neighbourhood that was destroyed and rebuilt, they founded a house of stories. It contains a meditation centre with a phoenix statue. And after World War II, a postage stamp appeared with a phoenix on it. That perfectly illustrates the power of our imagination: looking for metaphors that express our feelings, in all possible ways.” Another frequently reappearing motif is that of people being miraculously rescued. “You can find those stories now in today’s media,



VIEWING TIP

The Netflix documentary *A Life on Our Planet* by David Attenborough.

“This film shows how magnificent nature is and how important it is for us to care for it together, so that future generations can also enjoy it. But for that to happen, we have to take action now. It’s the ecological variant combined with a dash of guilt for sin.”

and we like to read them. People who have been hospitalised three times, but still pulled through. The image that you often come across in the old sources is a child in its cradle that tossed about at sea for days and still survived.”

Is that the symbol of hope? “Exactly. And the same goes for the role models: heroes who rush to the aid of others and get a royal decoration for it. In the 19th century, they had cholera medals.”

Should we create a coronavirus medal?

“No, I don’t think I’d recommend that.. Although, we have created health-care heroes, that’s the same mechanism. We like to see exceptional bravery and courage. I still remember being moved to tears by the youth news programme after the fire in Volendam. There was a boy who had lost his father, a firefighter. That touches you deeply: the man is a real hero; he risked his life for others. This type of story goes further than hope and resilience; its function is to inspire empathy so that you can identify with what happened. Then you’re more likely to declare your solidarity with people in other places. These stories are the ultimate connectors.”

VULNERABILITY

At the same time, Jensen points out one major caveat: you can become too obsessed with resilience and recovery. She sees this



THINK ALONG WITH AEGEE

'Border-crossing fun' is the slogan of the European Students' Association AEGEE. The coronavirus crisis has not weakened its ambition of bringing people together: recurring activities like drinks and the pub quiz have been taking place online for months now, and the conferences are going on as well. In December, the theme of *Climate Emergency* attracted over 100 students from 30 countries, who exchanged ideas about a sustainable future in dozens of workshops and lectures. Ilse Driessen, chairperson of AEGEE Nijmegen, enumerates the advantages of the pandemic period. "Participants don't have to come by train or buy plane tickets, which removes one of the barriers to their participation." Normally, 50 students would come to an AEGEE conference, but in December there were twice as many. Because of the coronavirus, the association has developed an app to increase AEGEE's accessibility even further. The next conference will take place in March. Its theme, *Mental Health*, is perfectly tailored to today's zeitgeist. Driessen notices that quite a few students, mostly in their first year, are becoming less motivated to study because of the lack of personal contact. "If people won't even take that step online, they may get very lonely." She feels that becoming a member of AEGEE can provide double benefits: you contribute to its activities and you meet new people. "We can see new friendships being formed online."

/ PAUL VAN DEN BROEK

For more information on AEGEE or to register for one of the activities, send an email to: board@aegee-nijmegen.nl.

happen in her environment, in science too. "With disaster studies, a newly fashionable area, there are two buzzwords: resilience and vulnerability. In fact, the whole aim of this field is to minimise vulnerability and maximise resilience. But you also have to consider the wounds that society suffers, the damage that's been done, and how to commemorate it."

And we find that in cultural media?

"Yes, and they do it wonderfully. They create a space for grief, contemplation and help make sense of fear and uncertainty. The disaster songs mourn at length for lost lives. There are very dramatic songs about the plague in which the death count rises. And in a song about the Amsterdam theatre fire of 1772, all 18 victims are mentioned and emotions like pain, sorrow and grief are explored."

Do you miss those emotions now, in our coping with the coronavirus? "Yes, and I especially miss the attention for how culture can do something about it. All we talk about is how to recover economically as fast as possible, but the idea of psychological resilience is nowhere in sight, even though that's exactly what we need so badly. I can get quite angry about how culture is

constantly shoved aside as being irrelevant and was very grumpy that our cultural institutions had to close again this autumn. Culture is not for decoration or amusement, it's what keeps people going and supplies them with energy and meaning in their lives."

Jensen would also like us to learn from history. "You also see in crises from the past that things got harder the longer they lasted. Then riots and protests against the authorities broke out. Look at the cholera epidemic of 1848-49, when the authorities wanted to shut down fairs and restaurants. The historical awareness of the people who are currently in charge of the coronavirus crisis is extremely low. Otherwise they would have known that you can only push people so far. Of course, behaviour experts could have told them the same thing, but involving historians in the discussion would be a good idea."

What would you advise as a member of the national crisis team? "I would reopen all museums, theatres, movie theatres and libraries and keep them that way. I would provide opportunities for people to use the refuge of culture as a source of perspective, hope and resilience." ■





READERS' OFFER

Wout Waanders, **Parkplan**.
De Harmonie. Would you like a free
copy? Send an email with your
address to secretariaatdmc@ru.nl.
The first 20 applicants will
receive a book.



**BOOK,
SWEAT
AND TEARS**

This fall, former student of Dutch and Nijmegen city poet **Wout Waanders** published his debut collection, *Parkplan* [Park map]. The volume is designed like a classic Falk city map and can be read as if it were a walk through an amusement park.

TEXT BEA ROS | PHOTOGRAPHY DUNCAN DE FEY

Where did you get this idea? “As a child, I always took maps of amusement parks at the National Tourism Office. At one point, I started to draw my own amusement park. The challenge was to constantly think up something new. I try to achieve the enthralling quality of park attractions in my poems as well: a pleasurable world that you can lose yourself in and always find something new.”

It sounds like you have a large supply of poems.

“I just write a great deal. I have a sort of register where I note down for each poem where it was written and what its quality is: worthless, possibly all right, or worthwhile. In January, I give a grade for the whole year so I can see per month how good my production has been. And if I have a commission or need to put together a collection, then I have a look at my supply, re-read everything and often rewrite something.”

How does a poem take shape, from a theme or from the language? “From the language. Very often, there’s one line that I’ll elaborate on. Usually, that isn’t the first line. In fact, that line sometimes doesn’t even end up in the poem. Occasionally, I’ll open two books and choose a phrase from each that I then try to combine. I just sit down someplace and start writing, at an outside table, in a café or in a library.”

So you prefer to be where other people are? “Yes, I hate the standard idea that writers are people on the fringes of society. I want to report on things from the inside. The best place to write in would be a table in the middle of a disco. I look for opportunities like that as the city poet too. For example, I hold meeting hours in the library and in neighbourhood centres for people who have writer’s block.”

You want to feel connected to the city and its residents? “Yes, very much. I get irritated by poems that exclude the reader, texts that refer to all sorts of things that you can’t understand unless you’re highly educated. I want to write poems that draw the reader in by using very clear, open language. I want to create an impression of someone who tells people things, captivates the readers and transports them to another world.”



Research has shown that, for many students, the long period of corona has created social problems. The Radboud Student Fund is supporting two initiatives that work in a unique way towards a solution: Perplex and Frisse Gedachtes [Fresh Thoughts]

'Do something useful'

PERPLEX

Coffee, eating and profound conversations

Every student who is looking for real contact and conviviality is welcome at Perplex, a meeting place in the centre of Nijmegen, where they also happen to cook for you or set coffee from freshly ground beans. "We keep it somewhere in the middle between a café and a student association," says Willem van Leeuwen, one of the team members at Perplex. "You can belong here completely without any obligations." Perplex is organised for and by students. Everyone is welcome to join one of the activities, such as the 'DinsdagDiners' or the study café. Many of the students come alone without knowing anyone else before-

hand in search of real contact and depth. "Perplex is all about meeting and interacting," says team leader Philinde van Selm. "The staff cook, are the hosts and make sure that conversation is being held. How do we do that? For example, we have 'broaching moments' in which we ask a question. Like, who is your example and why? Or what is your dream? We take part in the discussion as well and try to add depth."

NEW INITIATIVES

As a result of the open nature of the evenings, new initiatives sometimes arise. "We had a group of international students who needed Dutch lessons. That became the course 'Dutch Basics en Bakkie' [Dutch

Basics and a Coffee]", says Willem. "Or when we painted the flat of a girl who is chronically ill," Philinde adds. "She had just moved, had a small network and no one to help her. With a small group of regular guests, we helped her renovate her flat. That was very special and encouraging for her."

FRISSE GEDACHTES

Talking anonymously about your problems

"It was in the news once again," says student Sam Suidman (22). "That students are having an increasingly hard time. Because of loneliness, stress. Especially during the corona crisis." After a football game, he and his friends Sem van der Linden and Thomas Klein Goldewijk (both also 22) talked about students' problems. They wanted to do something, something useful. "While talking, the idea arose to bring two groups together," Sam says. "On the one hand psychology students and on the other hand students who are lonely, feel very stressed or are just having a hard time for whatever reason. We wanted to join them together via a platform so that students could talk about their problems anonymously."

IMMEDIATELY ENTHUSIASTIC

In order to see if such an idea already existed or if it was needed, the friends talked with all sorts of people. Sam: "Student advisors, students, student dean André Bartels, the municipality of Nijmegen. Everyone was immediately enthusiastic. The municipality gave us some money to build the first pilot version



EMMA DOUMA, WILLEM VAN LEEUWEN AND PHILINDE VAN SELM. / PHOTOGRAPHY: GERARD VERSCHOOTEN



SAM SUIDMAN, SEM VAN DER LINDEN AND THOMAS
KLEIN GOLDERINK. / PHOTOGRAPHY: REIN WIERINGA

of the platform.” Then things started happening very fast. The idea was picked up by various large media channels, after which students and buddies started registering. “But other organisations, like the Trimbos Institute, also contacted us. And other universities to see if we could start up something similar elsewhere.” By now about 35 students have come into contact with a buddy via the platform, and dozens of students have registered to be a buddy.

More information? Go to www.frissegedachtes.nl and www.perplexnijmegen.nl.

The **Radboud Fund** is a joint initiative of Radboud University and Radboud university medical center.

For **more information** about the Radboud Fund go to www.radboudfonds.nl or email us at fondsenwerving@ru.nl.

Would you like to **donate** and make projects for and by students possible? Donate at IBAN: NL84 ABNA 0248 690 655. Or contact us for a tailor-made donation.

Alumna Henrice Altink bequeaths the Inspire Fund

‘What if I could help people with this?’

Learning. Gaining knowledge. Continuing to develop yourself. That is what her life is about, that is who she is. Alumna Henrice Altink felt that her legacy should relate precisely to this. Via her Inspire Fund, students from developing countries can apply for a scholarship to acquire new knowledge and then inspire others.

“The reason to think about my legacy was actually a sad one,” says Henrice Altink. “My sister died suddenly without a testament. And then a friend became terminally ill. I started to think: what do I want?” At that time she was involved in a campaign for the alumni of the University of York, where she now works. “We asked alumni to stay connected. If they wanted to do something for the university in order to mean something for someone else.” That prompted her to start thinking herself. “Of course, I could leave everything to my family. But what if I could help people?”

GIVING OPPORTUNITIES

Altink is now the co-director of a centre for international development studies at the University of York. “In my position I receive numerous requests from students from developing countries who are involved in tremendous projects. Research on climate change, for example the increasing drought in Africa. Or microfinancing or the inequality between men and women. There are so few scholarships for these students, often because they have to compete with students who

have studied at distinguished universities. But these studies are being done together with small, local communities. With my Inspire Fund I want to give students the opportunity to do research and inspire others in turn.”

How does it feel now that her legacy has become definitive? “It’s a difficult process to enter into. But I’m bequeathing something, something that I stand for, that is part of me. And I’m very satisfied about that. Yes, it brings peace of mind.”





The university is no longer Catholic. What now?

On 15 November, the Bishops' Conference of the Netherlands officially revoked the designation of 'Catholic' for the Catholic University Foundation (SKU), which is the legal supervisory body for the University and Radboud Medical Centre. Reactions and consequences in nine questions and answers.

1 What influence did the bishops have on the boards of the university and Radboud Medical Centre?

The bishops had to agree with the appointment of all SKU members. In recent years, the bishops blocked a number of appointments, because they felt those candidates were not Catholic enough. Earlier this year, the Foundation requested the Enterprise Division of the Court of Appeals to limit the bishops' influence. The Foundation's idea was to grant the bishops one seat each in both boards. As of January, both the Medical Centre and the university would then have their own separate supervisor. The court agreed with the SKU. The discussion of the case brought other irritations of the bishops to light, especially the way in which Catholicism was represented on campus. Since no further concessions between the various parties were anticipated, the bishops revoked the designation of 'Catholic'. As a result, they no longer have a say in appointing the foundation's board members.

2 What were the reactions to this decision?

Radboud University and the Medical Centre are very disappointed that it has come to this. The bishops have also expressed regret over the decision, but see no alternative.

3 How are employees and students reacting?

In general, rather resignedly. The bishop's decision will not significantly change most people's daily activities. Research by the university has shown that only a third of the employees and students consider themselves Catholic. Still, there are worries about the disappearance of the designation 'Catholic'. Some people fear that this will dilute the reputation of the university and the Medical Centre. According to university historian Jan Brabers, it appears that the bishops cannot bear the defeat that the court's verdict represents. 'It is sad that these bonds are now being severed by an organisation that was present at the birth of our university', said Brabers on the university news platform Voxweb.

4 Is the bishops' role at the university and the medical centre completely a thing of a past?

Despite the disappointment, the parties are still in dialogue to ensure meticulous execution of the ensuing steps. Additionally, the bishops wish to prolong the contacts with Catholic institutes and the university's student chaplaincy. Whether the name of the SKU should be changed is a topic of discussion.

5 Will Radboud University now become a national university?

No. Its legal status as a 'special' university will not change. However, it remains open how 'special' is to be interpreted. The Executive Board will organise a wide-ranging dialogue on this subject with employees and students, which will be completed by the 100th anniversary of the university in 2023. The Board attaches great importance to this dialogue because of the remarkable traditions of the university, whose founding was the crowning achievement of the Catholic emancipation movement at the beginning of the 20th century. The Board finds that tradition too valuable to be simply discarded.

6 What further consequences does the bishops' decision have?

There are no financial consequences: the university and the medical centre received no subsidy from the Church. What will change is that Radboud University no longer has to satisfy the requirements of the Apostolic Constitution Ex Corde Ecclesiae, a statement of the 'institutional loyalty' the university is expected to display to the Christian message, as well as certain expectations of Catholic and non-Catholic members of the university community. However, this has never been a source of much debate.

7 Will there be consequences for any departments of the university?

Nothing will change in the theology department. It focusses on scientific approaches to a variety of theological questions which are not necessarily related to training for a position in the Church. The revocation of the university's

designation as 'Catholic' does not necessarily have consequences for the position of the Department of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies. In Europe, the majority of theological departments, Catholic or otherwise, are housed in non-Catholic universities, as is the case in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Nor does the bishops' decision have consequences for the Catholic Documentation Centre. The Student Chaplaincy will continue to function as an ecumenical students' church. The chapel was already being used for both Catholic and Protestant services, and it also contains a meditation and prayer space for Moslem students. The so-called categorical parish operating within the Student Chaplaincy falls under the aegis of the diocese of 's-Hertogenbosch.

8 What will happen with symbols and rituals?

One important expression of Catholicity at Radboud University is the prayer that opens academic occasions, such as graduation ceremonies. The dialogue mentioned above will consider whether to continue this custom. The emblem, and its motto 'In Dei Nomine Felicitur' (Let us proceed happily in God's name), will also be discussed then.

9 Isn't the bishops' decision distressing, coming so close to the 100th anniversary celebrations of the university?

Parting after a long association is always painful, so disappointment on both sides is inevitable. At the same time, the university is proud of its past and hopes that the coming negotiations will affirm the special status of the university, with a significant role for social engagement, emancipation, diversity and sustainability. ■

Thomas Quartier

Does a monk have answers to all life's questions? On the contrary, says the Benedictine monk Thomas Quartier, who is also a professor at Radboud University. He talks about living the cloistered life, finding the cloister in yourself and how we can reconnect with one another in the midst of the coronavirus crisis. 'You transcend irritations by preserving the ritual form together.'

TEXT SUSANNE GEUZE | PHOTOGRAPHY BERT BEELEN

Whoever thinks that a monk is a quiet, withdrawn figure will be surprised by encountering Thomas Quartier.

Fair enough, with his dark habit and close-cropped hair, Quartier (48) is unmistakably a cleric. But his easy way with words and energy are not exactly what you would expect from a restrained Benedictine. "It's nice for my brothers when I'm away for a day in Nijmegen," he remarks cheerfully. "Then they can get a bit of rest at home!"

In any case, Quartier is hardly a typical monk. Under normal circumstances, without the coronavirus crisis, he gives about 80 public lectures per year. Her travels

extensively; as a professor of liturgical sciences at Radboud University, the Catholic University of Louvain and the papal Sant'Anselmo University in Rome. He also works as a researcher for the Titus Brandsma Institute. In addition to scientific articles, Quartier publishes books in which he describes his personal experiences and insights. This spring saw the appearance of his latest work,

Life Songs, for which he examined his own musical history and talked with his old idols, from Boudewijn de Groot and Stef Bos to the metal band Sunn O))). His office is adorned with a poster of Bruce Springsteen, another hero of his.

The fact that someone like Quartier chose a cloistered life came as something of a surprise, even to himself. In his own words, he was initially "wedded to science". After degrees in theology and philosophy, he went on to doctoral research, and from there to a position as lecturer at Radboud University. Besides that, he could often be found in the pub until the wee hours. "I was always the last to leave and drank a lot. It was pretty excessive and boisterous."

What makes a researcher decide to enter a monastery?

"For me, it was preceded by a personal and a scientific crisis. My career was roaring ahead. Then I realised something. I could keep doing this until I'm 67 without being bored for a second. But wait a minute: who am I actually? In addition, I was searching within my role as a theologian. I wondered what it was that set me apart from my colleagues in social sciences. You could call this process a midlife crisis. I prefer to speak of it as a vocation."

As an academic, Quartier does research on rituals. In 2010, that fascination led him to St Willibrord Abbey in Doetinchem. "I thought, where can I find an all-encompassing ritual laboratory, a place where people's daily task is to make a ritual of their lives? That's what brought me to the monastery."

In the first few years he came only as a guest, to replenish his energy: he calls it a "spiritual petrol station". Later he became an oblate, an affiliate of the order outside the cloister walls. Eventually, he was spending more time within the abbey than outside.

"I WAS ALWAYS THE LAST TO LEAVE AND DRANK A LOT. IT WAS PRETTY EXCESSIVE AND BOISTEROUS"



**'Communal
living is
very difficult'**

“Maybe this is my lifestyle, I thought, and science is my trade. Then, I have to enter the order.”

Isn't being a scientist a lifestyle? “Not per se. Being an intellectual is a *type* of work that provides extra value within a lifestyle. People are married, have a family, or live in other groups. Look, I've been a monk since I was 40, I know what it's like not to live as a monk. But a marriage simply never came my way because science assumed such an important position in my life. So, I thought I had to find a lifestyle that strengthens me as an intellectual, rather than contradicts it, something that can guide me as a scientist and whose core lies in spirituality. Now that sounds very obvious. Of course, things didn't go so easily.”

It's quite a leap to go from being a partying thirtysomething to becoming a cloistered monk. “Well, the partying was already starting to subside, actually. As you know, I was a fairly unbuttoned type. But after some time has passed, you start to notice that the partying is taking on absurd proportions. I remember standing in a café as a student and thinking, ‘Who are those pathetic old types standing at the bar?’ At a certain moment, you notice that it's you who's standing at that bar.”

Nowadays religion and science are often seen as opposite extremes. How do you unite the two in your work? “Examining something as an intellectual and feeling existential commitment – faith, meaning – don't necessarily contradict one another. Many universities currently highly value engagement. When I was attending university in the nineties, things were different, at least in the religious sense. I now walk on campus wearing a habit, something a professor at that time wouldn't have dreamt of. I know that one lecturer once asked about our personal commitment to the themes that we were studying. He wanted to go into depth on them. But we students weren't having any of it! ‘Just give us the exam’, we said, ‘we're not in a church here.’ When I was a young lecturer and took part in the liturgy, a colleague said to me, ‘You shouldn't do that.’”

Because you were operating as a scientist in religious situations, where you should only be an observer. “Exactly, that's it. If I went to a Mass on a faculty day, this country was too small. ‘That's not allowed’, people said. And I started to see it that way too. In 2007, I received my doctorate for research on people attending funerals. Entirely quantitative, with SPSS and conceptual models, the whole thing. At a conference I was questioned about that dissertation

like this: ‘but where are the dead bodies in your book?’ And I could only give one answer: ‘there aren't any. Because that's not what it was about.’”

Gradually, something began to shift inside him. Was that distanced way of doing research actually the best way? It was the American religious scholar Ronald Grimes, who was a professor in Nijmegen at the time, who helped Quartier to change direction. “He said, ‘Once you get your degree, you can leave those statistics behind.’ ‘How can you say that?’, I thought. Only later did I realize that my dissertation is only one side of the coin, namely the perspective of an outsider. But when you're a theologian, you have to commit yourself. Grimes says about this, ‘Ritual is the



act of stepping in – to be. Theory is stepping out – to know.’ You need both of these.”

Can you explain that? “Here’s an example. Why do people light a candle for the dead? Very often, these are people who don’t believe in God. Okay, but then you have to wonder, why are you lighting that candle? When you ask someone like that, ‘Do you think your Grandma is getting a better chance in Heaven because you’re lighting that candle?’, their reaction is, ‘Are you crazy, of course not!’ But—and I’ve observed this in countless interviews for my research—if you then say, ‘Oh, you’re doing it for yourself to feel good or commemorate something,’ then they say, ‘That’s not it



FEELING ALLRIGHT

In mid-November, the Student Chaplaincy and the International Office launched the first meeting of the Zoom project ‘Feeling All Right’. This is aimed at both international and Dutch students who are looking for contacts and tips about student life during the pandemic.

“Getting to know each other and supporting one another” is how student pastor John Hacking summarises the aim of the sessions. As long as the pandemic lasts, and probably still longer, a monthly meeting will be organised, each with a different theme. At the first session, 19 students showed up, along with two pastors, two student psychologists, and employees of the International Office of Radboud University and HAN University of Applied Sciences. Hacking says, “After a session, students can continue their contact either together or in smaller groups. Addresses and telephone numbers are exchanged.”

At the first session, Hacking was particularly moved by the stories of certain international students. “Imagine coming from Romania and having to start your studies here. Everything here is different from how things are at home. And it’s very hard to figure out online how your study programme works.” At the November session, a student from Belarus came by. She had been ill with the coronavirus for two weeks and had no family to fall back on. “But it seemed as if the crisis had only made her stronger. It’s also good if students take part to tell each other how they manage to keep going.” / PAUL VAN DEN BROEK

Do you want to attend a Zoom session of Feeling Allright (for students of Radboud University and the HAN)? Send an email to john.hacking@studentenkerk.ru.nl. This address is also open to employees of the University and the HAN. For them, there is no Zoom session, but a personal conversation.





either.' You see? There's that grey area between 'are you crazy' and 'that's not it either.' It's that twilight zone that fascinates me."

Because it shows that a ritual like this contains meaning and you're curious to know what the meaning is? "Exactly. What is it to act meaningfully?

To grasp that, you have to experience it. Otherwise, you'll always glide over what you're trying to investigate. By the way, I do still believe in the observer role, I still work with questionnaires. But this can never be the whole story."

COMMUNITY LIFE

When he entered the monastery, Quartier specifically resolved not to write about being a monk. "I thought, Thomas, do something entirely for yourself for a change, and not for science." But he soon came to realise that his life in the abbey and his work as an academic actually complemented one another. "If I interview a monk, that is a different conversation than if you, as an outsider, were to have the same conversation, because I'm an interested party." He decided that he would publish about monastic life after all, and did that in a remarkably personal way.

In an interview with the Catholic Broadcasting Organisation, you said that life in the abbey annoys you every day. What did you mean by that? "It has to do with two things. First, the daily schedule: it's still hard to deal with. I still have a battle with my duvet every morning at six o'clock. Second, community life is terribly hard. At the university it can be hard to work with people too. But then you go home, and you think, well, okay whatever. In the abbey you're always together, and with people you didn't choose to be with yourself."

It sounds complicated. "It is very complicated, of course. There are daily irritations. You transcend them by preserving the ritual form together. I can get annoyed at one of my brothers, but I'll still have to sing the same psalms with him. And afterwards, I'll sit down to dinner with him. Sometimes you think then, 'It's a good thing we eat in silence.'"

Silence is indispensable for a monk. How do you combine that isolation with your many activities as a professor, speaker and writer? "By keeping watch over my diary like a lion. I usually work outside the abbey two days a week and prefer to make no plans before 11 in the morning. The mornings in the abbey are very important to me. I want to be able to begin my

day there in silence. You know, if you have no structure, there can be no anti-structure either. In exactly the same way, my existence as a scientist and my existence as a monk need each other. As a monk, I definitely think that one way or another... a method of venting is the wrong word, but if you have no reflexive and experimental side, monastic life can become very confining. For me, the experimental side is science. Some of my brothers are musicians or bookbinders—that's great too. The point is that you channel the creativity that is released by the structure."

But if the structure becomes an end in itself, is it empty? "Yes. Rigid, suffocating, empty, hollow. Then its meaning is lost. But it doesn't work to live without structure either. I already said that I'm quite unbuttoned, I like to play with boundaries. That can only happen when you have a boundary."

Does the scientist in you also need your monastic side? "Certainly. If I hadn't discovered the monastery, I would not be a theologian today, because I would not have been able to keep the distinctions of theology clear. It has to do with the commitment that I was talking about before. Besides, for my whole life, I've been more of a searcher than someone who knows everything for sure. People sometimes think that a monk has mostly answers. But it's a practice, a form that can accommodate all sorts of content. I chose to search."

Can you be a sort of monk without living in a cloister? "Of course. It's valuable for everyone to walk the path that leads to within. Not 'living in the cloister,' but 'the cloister in your life.' At times, something that you think will fulfil all your desires turns out to be exactly what hampers you. So, distancing yourself from those things gives you freedom."

How do you do that: finding the cloister in yourself? "It begins with very ordinary things, like creating daily structure. You can see how important that is now, during the pandemic."

What is your experience of the coronavirus crisis? "It's easy for me to talk because the daily rhythm of the abbey just goes on. Besides, I choose isolation, while other people may be quite afraid of it. But if things

"THE MORNINGS IN THE ABBEY ARE VERY IMPORTANT TO ME. I WANT TO BE ABLE TO BEGIN MY DAY THERE IN SILENCE"

BIOGRAPHY

Born Kranenburg, Germany, 1972.
Education Philosophy and theology, Radboud University.
Career Lecturer of liturgical and ritual studies at Radboud University (since 1999), since April 2020, professor of liturgical sciences in Nijmegen. Also active at Catholic University Louvain as special professor of liturgical and monastic spirituality, and as guest professor at the Benedictine University of Sant'Anselmo in Rome.
Other Published numerous books including *Germ Cells: From Cloister to World* (2016); *Holy Rage: Being a Monk, a Radical Choice* (2018); *Commandments of Love: Feelings in the Cloister of your Life* (2019); and *Open End to your Desires: Praying with a Modern-Day Monk* (2020). Lives in the Keizersberg Abbey, Louvain.

happen to you that you didn't ask for, you can still imbue them with meaning. A lot of people in the Netherlands try to live as if the lockdown doesn't exist. Instead of fighting against the situation, we could try to embrace it. Yes, then you have to confront yourself and that may be an unpleasant surprise. But you have to do your best and work with it."

PERFORMING TYPE

This autumn Quartier took another notable step: he moved from Doetinchem to the Keizersberg Abbey in Louvain. This is unusual because monks generally spend the rest of their lives in the abbey where they joined their order. "It had to do with the needs of the order. They needed support in Louvain. And I noticed quite soon that the abbey was a better fit for me." he declares. "That's one of the achievements of the modern era: it's good to put people in the place that is right for them, where they can make a contribution. Not the old fashioned way, where you enter the abbey and the door slams shut forever."

Even though his reading public highly praises his individuality, Quartier's personal, no-nonsense style does come in for some criticism. "Of course, my way of doing things doesn't attract only friends. Some colleagues are critical. 'There he goes again', they say. But I'm a performing type. Is that not allowed? Just let me be the odd man out..."

Why do you seek out the stage, what do you want to achieve? "Above all, I want to help people to pay attention to themselves. But I'm also a political type. Look at refugee policy. My viewpoint on this is radical: I don't believe in borders. I still can't fathom how someone can have the right to say to someone else: you can't be here. I do understand that a political scientist would say that it's not that simple. Still, I feel that I can make my naive voice heard from my field. More than that, I have to."

A sensitive political question has been going on in Nijmegen in recent months. In October, the bishops of the Netherlands decided that Radboud University can no longer be 'Catholic'.

What does it mean to you as a professor of theology to continue working towards the Catholic identity of Radboud University? "Not all the people who work here are Catholic, and there's no need for them to be. But we all have this shared accreditation that creates unity and coherence. Of course, that hasn't suddenly changed. What does concern me is that the dialogue that is coming will be very chaotic, and that it may get very noncommittal. I would say, 'Don't throw everything



CULTURE TIP

Think about your own life songs

"Music transports you to the essence of life, from your emotions and desires to meaning and balance. During the Christmas vacation, try to find out what songs you associate with turning points in your life. What were the periods when your life underwent a significant change? And what music were you listening to then? I could say, 'Listen to the entire oeuvre of Bob Dylan.' And I would certainly recommend it, but that was the music of my youth. I'd find it much more interesting for you to ask yourself the question of what numbers fit your own experiences. What kind of resonances would they stir up?"

overboard.' The departure of a tradition, in this case the Catholic tradition, can still create a structure for a creative vision of the future that brings all sorts of viewpoints with it. As a theologian, you can devote yourself to this end and so be of service to the university."

The coronavirus is causing tensions between various factions in society. How can we all reunite a little during the Christmas season? "The pandemic exposes every societal problem we have. But you know, all those people shouting that no one is happy anymore, I can sometimes get a little sick of it. I see lots of solidarity springing up as well. There are students who are helping and supporting one another, which is something I noticed much less before the crisis. Here again, being unable to do certain things may help you to experience more closeness than when you're constantly hugging people who you don't really like that much."

What can we do to promote this solidarity and connectedness? "First, converse with yourself. Turn inwards. Try to achieve balance—maybe more than you had before the pandemic—and project that into your surroundings. People often say to me, 'When I read your books, the monastery sounds like a pit of vipers, full of conflicts and human weaknesses.' That's true, yet we still try to sound that idealistic tone by making an example of our rituals and communal living. So keep trying, even if you never entirely achieve the ideal." ■



BOOK, SWEAT AND TEARS

Her novel *The Eighth Day* (Dutch: *De achtste dag*) received enthusiastic reviews, as well as two prizes for the best first novel: the Bronze Owl and the Anton Wachter Prize. **Annemarie Haverkamp**, editor-in-chief of university magazine *Vox*, looks back on the process of writing the book.

TEXT BEA ROS | PHOTOGRAPHY DUNCAN DE FEY

You wrote the book in a former counting station belonging to the Ministry of Infrastructure. The classic attic room wasn't good enough? "No, not at all. There I'm much too preoccupied with the house and with work. The advantage of this spot is that I go to a parallel world, my own universe."

Was that setting already in your mind or did it take shape here? "The latter. My story is about Egbert, a man who becomes terminally ill and starts to wonder what will happen to his handicapped son. This landscape fits perfectly with the atmosphere I was looking for. The happy result of this is that you only have to walk out the door to come across something that you can use in your book."

Where did you get the idea to divide the story into seven days? "That took shape gradually. Egbert's problem is too big for his head, so I wanted to give him time to think, and some distraction. I thought it would be effective symbolism to have him make a staircase, building his own path into heaven. I asked my father, who is a carpenter, whether you can build a whole staircase in one week. He said, 'Yes, as long as you keep at it.' Writing goes quickly once all the elements have come together. But before you get there... I've just started a new book. And I really couldn't tell you about how the writing process will go. It's a very intuitive process of just starting and having faith that something will come of it."

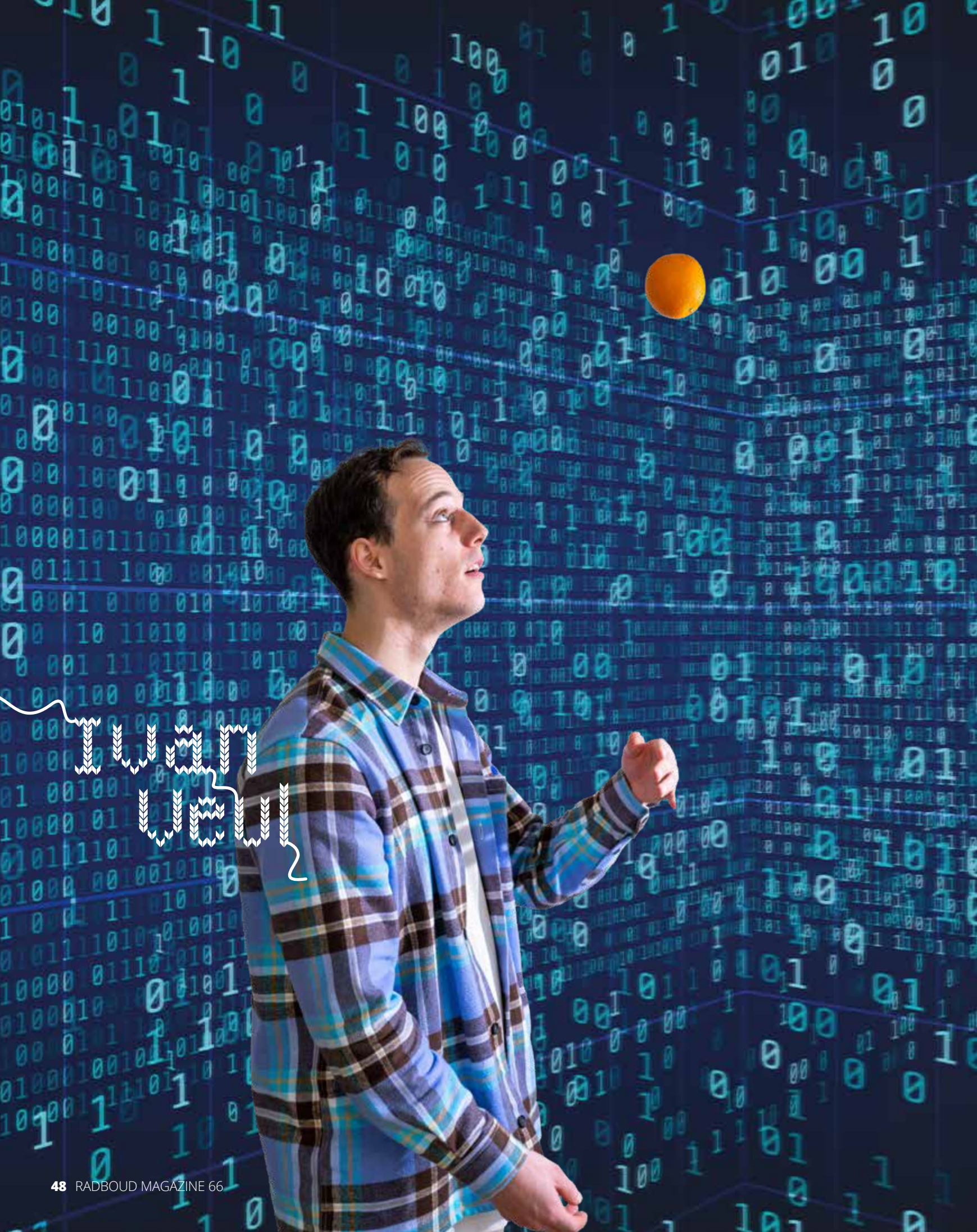
Did your confidence grow because of the praise for your first book? "Absolutely. And also from discovering that there isn't only one good way to write a book."

For you, writing means withdrawal. Does it have elements of connection too? "It does when the book is finished. You create a world that people can lose themselves in, and that can console them. My book is about an unconditional love, and I hope that readers will feel that."

And does writing connect you with anything? "With my feelings and thoughts. Very often, a day that's full of a thousand things that you have to do, can totally pass you by. If you write a whole day long, it's impossible to lose yourself."

READERS' OFFER

Annemarie Haverkamp,
De achtste dag (The Eighth Day).
Lebowski Publishers. Would you like
a free copy? Send an email with your
address to secretariaatdmc@ru.nl.
The first 20 applicants will
receive a book.



The public is defenceless against Google

Google knows all about us. The company possesses sensitive information about pretty much the world's entire population. At the moment, there is a steady stream of data scandals, and we don't trust the internet giant one bit. Doctoral candidate Ivan Veul investigates how Google and the average member of the public can come to an agreement about privacy. 'This is an opportunity for democracy.'

TEXT LYDIA VAN AERT | PHOTOGRAPHY ERIK VAN 'T HULLENAAR, GETTY IMAGES | IMAGE EDITING GLOED

“Don't fill in your full name,” warned the parents of Ivan Veul, 25, when he created his first email address. You never know. Veul thought that was fine because he didn't use the computer all that much, but that changed in high school. “I was a gamer. Because I was good at scientific subjects, I chose to study game technology.” His growing interest in the societal impact of the internet led him to the Master's programme in Science and Society in Nijmegen, and subsequently to his doctoral research. “My research is about the personal data that Google records about all of us. Because I know how the technology behind the name works, I can ask informed questions about how Google operates.”

Veul himself never thought that he would become a researcher. “I had no ambitions to go into science. What convinced me to do it was the relevance of the subject. I want to produce a dissertation that will not just end up in a library, but will contribute to society.”

What is the subject of your doctoral research?

“Google's revenue model is to offer personalised advertisements on the internet. To tailor advertisements to your personal preferences, the company collects as many personal data as it can while you use the Google search machine, Gmail, Google Maps and the telephone operating system Android: what you buy, what you like, where you are. It happens automatically, without your noticing a thing.

In the meantime, criticism is growing: why does Google collect all this data and what does the company do with it? With increasing frequency, the media is reporting both small and large data scandals involving the company. For example, the camera cars of Google Street View secretly records information from wireless networks. Some people are saying that Google's monopoly has to be broken up because the company has become too powerful. The question is whether that will solve everything. In my research, I take a step back to get an overview of the underlying problem."

What do you feel is the underlying problem is?
 "The market problem, 'Google has too much power', also encompasses our appeal to Google to deal with our data differently. However, this appeal is not being sufficiently heard by the company, nor by governments. How is it possible that Google's products don't meet our norms for such a crucial point as privacy? In this light, the data question about Google is a democratic problem, or to put it better, an opportunity for democracy. I define democracy as a form of administration that always systematically involves the people in the process of decision making, in companies and organisations as well."

Isn't it logical then to put Google under government regulation? In the end, a company is always primarily interested in striving for profit, while governments represent the common interest.
 "That solution is not as simple as it might seem. Google would then fall under the control of the U.S.

"SOME PEOPLE ARE SAYING THAT **GOOGLE'S MONOPOLY HAS TO BE BROKEN UP** BECAUSE THE COMPANY HAS BECOME TOO POWERFUL"

government because the company's head office is in the United States. But the regulations concerning data protection that are in force in the United States are not the same as the more progressive measures of European privacy legislation; in the Netherlands, this is the AVG. For us, this step would

not constitute any improvement. Another possibility would be to achieve worldwide consensus first, under the supervision of, for example, the United Nations – an option that Google itself is willing to consider. That's understandable because a worldwide compromise wouldn't result in strict legislation."

What rule do you foresee for the government?
 "There is no one government in this international debate, be it only because of the difference in regulations



CULTURE TIP FOR HOME

Taskmaster (series on YouTube)


"It's a panel show à la *Have I Got News for You*, where five British comedians each perform a task in their individual style, like 'eat as much of this watermelon as you can in one minute'. In the studio they watch the film and comment on each other's performance. It's hilarious."

between different countries. For example, during election times, Germany issued enormous fines to websites who refused to remove fake news. The Dutch government is more cautious in this area, paying considerable attention to freedom of speech, and would rather negotiate with internet companies. You can also see differences in the way that countries try to keep things working. For example, Denmark has even opened so-called 'tech embassies' in Silicon Valley and Beijing, to establish diplomatic contacts with the sector."

It's not only countries that are divided, members of the public are too. Online, they're sometimes in direct opposition. How can we give the public a voice, in situations where they have none?

"It's true that the internet both unites and polarises. When doing personal searches, you mostly find information that strengthens your beliefs, the so-called filter bubble. That brings us together with other like-minded people but intensifies the differences with others. Just as there are political parties for every standpoint, there are all sorts of organisations for special interests who work with issues related to data, like Bits of Freedom in the Netherlands. They convey the various opinions of the public to governments, media and internet companies."

Why not challenge Google's monopoly? Competition might force Google to deal more fairly with data. "New players on the advertisement market haven't got a chance; they couldn't possibly match the staggering amount of data on us that

A man with short brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a blue and white plaid shirt, is shown in profile from the chest up. He has his hand to his chin in a thoughtful pose, looking upwards and to the right. The background is a dark blue field filled with glowing white and light blue binary code (0s and 1s) and faint grid lines, suggesting a digital or data environment.

Google already has. We won't get there with normal market activity. But breaking Google into smaller components by force won't work. The market itself won't change, and the impulses for growth will continue unabated. Think of AT&T, the telephone mega-company that was split up in the eighties. Those separate companies quickly grew like wildfire and merged again partially with one another. Today, AT&T is one of the largest internet companies in America."

So the key lies in a more democratic Google? "That is my hypothesis. But don't think that Google isn't doing anything at all in that area. The company is in constant dialogue with societal organisations, governments and users on how to better organise its data collecting practices. In the meantime, various initiatives are trying to make problems with personal data a topic of discussion with Google and with policymakers. In my study, I map out the network of democratic processes related to Google by doing interviews with all the stakeholders. What do they think of the role of the public in the governance of the internet? What do they do with the issues raised by the public?"

FAKE NEWS

Veul's research put him on the trail of the public conversation platform We, the Internet, which hopes to entrench public commitment to organising the internet. This platform has the support of the U.N. and of Google itself, and gathers opinions in 77 countries on internet issues such as data collection and the dissemination of fake news. In collaboration with the Rathenau Institute, Veul organises the dialogue in the Netherlands, a task that earned a bonus for him: a much sought-after interview with a vice-president of Google. "It's incredibly difficult to get employees of Google to talk to you, certainly on the subject of data collection. Thanks to We the Internet, I finally managed it."

In early October, about one hundred Dutch people met online for a discussion. One of the questions was about data collection by Google and Facebook. The question was how to make this agree with our norms and values, and the participants were allowed to choose from four options. One, the companies had to collect less personal



STUDYING ABROAD

They had probably been in the same room once before in 2009, when a group of American biology students visited Radboud University. But it was not till a year later, when Anja Pen went to the United States as an exchange student, that she met her friend Nicole. Nicole showed Anja around, they went out together, and when Anja's programme was finished, she stayed at Nicole's dormitory for an extra month. Since then, they've used chat programmes like Skype and WhatsApp, and they get together regularly. Nicole visited Anja in the Netherlands, they went to the Oktoberfest in Munich together, and Anja was Nicole's bridesmaid and came to visit when her first child was born. "On the one hand, it's humour that seals our friendship", explains Anja. "It only takes one word for us to double over with laughter about something that happened years ago." "Besides that", says Nicole, "we always have time to listen to one another and give advice if it's needed." That can be on all sorts of topics: health, mental or otherwise, but recently about the American elections as well. Says Anja, "Nicole's husband is pro-Trump. Hearing about this is actually kind of refreshing since negative opinions of Donald Trump have the upper hand in the Netherlands." Nicole affirmed their close friendship by naming her second child Anja. "I felt extremely honoured and emotional about this," relates Anja. Because of the pandemic, Anja has yet to meet her namesake, but as soon as she can, Nicole will bring her family to the Netherlands. "It's my turn to make the trip, we had already agreed on that before. Then we're all going to the Efteling." / STIJN ZUNNEBERG

Study or internship abroad? The International Office can advise you, even during the pandemic: www.ru.nl/io/student/studie-stage-buitenland/.

data. Two, Google and Facebook have to offer us compensation, either financial or free services. Three, to enable competition, Google and Facebook will have to share at least a portion of their data with other advertisers. The fourth way is for users to have a say about the data that we release and what happens with it.

What was the outcome? "The majority of people in the Netherlands chose the last option: having more control ourselves of what happens to your data. Even after it's explained how complex it is to understand what companies do with the personal data, they stick to their opinion."

Is that the solution, giving control to the public? "Having control means that the responsibility always lies with the public. Then Google can always say, 'You just should have switched that option off.' And besides, the material is highly complex. It takes a lot of time and effort to become well-informed about it. Just try to read the privacy regulations of an online service all the way through and understand them before you click on 'Yes'. On top of that, there's the privacy paradox: we're all genuinely convinced that privacy is important, yet we don't act that way. After all, the consequences of our giving away our data are not directly visible when you're looking at what seems to be such a convenient or attractive website, so we click 'yes' on every cookie request."

Is that privacy paradox even more relevant during the coronavirus crisis? Services like Google Meets are more indispensable than ever, now that we're staying in contact with colleagues and loved ones online. Is the pandemic making the public even less critical? "Yes, the coronavirus measures do show that we simply

can't manage without Google anymore, but don't deceive yourself: that dependence existed already. I don't think these circumstances make us less critical. On the contrary, conspiracy theories about the coronavirus actually arouse more criticism of fake news."

Science suggests that data houses might be a solution to the problems of privacy. Just as we decide who to let in the front door, we choose online who has access to our data. Is that a good idea? "It seems that way, but there are still some problems with it. Like the physical side of the internet,

BIOGRAPHY

Born Uithoorn, 1995.

Education Bachelor's degree in game technology, Utrecht, cum laude (2013-2016); Descartes College (honours programme), Utrecht (2014-2016); Master's degree Data Science specialising in Science and Society, Nijmegen, cum laude (2016-2018).

Career Since April 2019, doctoral fellow at the Institute for Computing and Information Sciences (ICIS) and the Institute for Science in Society (ISIS), Nijmegen.

"GOOGLE SHOULD THINK NOT ONLY ABOUT PROFIT, BUT ALSO ABOUT ITS **SOCIETAL RESPONSIBILITIES**"

which we often don't stop to consider. All those online data houses have to be stored somewhere, and who has the infrastructure to do that? Those are the same mega-companies that are collecting data right now. This way, Google and their ilk will remain powerful players for the time being."

In what direction do you think the solution lies?

"Although my research is still ongoing, I think it would be good for Google to assume the responsibility for handling our data in the correct way. That would call for a reversal in the way we think about companies. It's fair to expect that a company with such far-reaching influence on our society should think not only about profit, but also about its societal responsibilities."

INCREDIBLE IMPACT

Veul muses on the solution of involving the public more actively in the decision making of internet companies. Take Google, for example. Their highest echelon, the board, now consists only of shareholders whose principal purpose is profit. Offering members of the public a place in it as well would create space for establishing societal aims. "This is something that the government could demand of Google."

For now, Google mostly does whatever it wants with our data. What is your personal assessment of that mighty company, whose value is currently estimated at one trillion dollars? "I feel ambivalent, like everyone else. On the one hand, I use their services a great deal, and on the other hand, I don't completely trust them. I've unticked the box for personalised advertising, but I've left Google Timeline operating, even though I know that supplies Google with information on the places that I visit. I can't escape the privacy paradox either."

Not even you? "No, and I find that conflict between 'good' and 'evil' quite intriguing, which also goes for the incredible impact that Google has on society. This makes the largest internet players into major actors on the world stage as well."

Nothing lasts forever. Could it be that these mega-companies don't have eternal life either?

"I wonder about that sometimes. Couldn't the economic bubble of data trade burst? The more data the better, says Google to its advertisers. But quality will win out over quantity in the end, and then what? The collapse of commerce in enormous quantities of data would pose an entirely new problem." ■



QUESTIONS OR SUGGESTIONS?

Would you like to share your views on Google's data policies with Ivan Veul, or do you have an idea that might enhance his research? Mail him at ivan.veul@ru.nl.



PLACES THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BRIDGE

Everyone agrees that the current location of the Waal Bridge was an act of providence. From time immemorial until the summer of 1936, all traffic crossed the river at the end of Grotestraat. Trade and commercial activity took place in the Benedenstad and especially along the Waal quay. The businessmen in the Benedenstad were convinced that the Waal Bridge should be built at the location where the ferry always docked and where they earned their money. Their plan involved a bridge between the Veerdam in Lent and the Lage Markt, after which the route would follow Ganzenheувel, Houtstraat and Ziekerstraat. At that time the bridge's current location – the 'Belvédère variant' – was indeed a bit strange: a bridge to a residential neighbourhood under construction that bordered the canal would successfully divert traffic from Nijmegen centre with its industry, banks and shops.

On the day of the ceremonial opening by Queen Wilhelmina, 16 June 1936, businessmen demonstrated by hanging black flags of mourning from their

premises. And to an extent they were right. The ongoing deterioration of the Benedenstad continued. After the war attention focused on the bombed city centre, and the Benedenstad fell into further decay. Sad. But the alternative plan was unthinkable: a busy motorway that would split the entire city centre.

Much has already been published about this sad side of the story of the Waal Bridge. Much less is known about another victim of the bridge's construction. Where now Traianusplein is located, was once a shady city park, Hunner Park. What is now called Hunner Park – with the well-known kiosk and the statue of Petrus Canisius – is just the small remnant of what it once was: it extended eastward across Traianusplein and continued towards Vrouwendal (where the Pays-Bas flat is now located). After the city walls had been demolished, this park was one of the parks that Pierre Livin ('Lieven') Rosseels (1843-1921), a landscape architect from Leuven, constructed in 1884. The Hunner Park was a paradise. What is now a busy

square filled with transit traffic was once a quiet corner of the city with only a few villas. A piece of the city wall (still extant) formed the décor. There were also lovely paths, thickets and trees as well as a phenomenal view of the Waal, the polder and beyond from the top of the moraine. Where the traffic lights on the Canisiussingel are now located was once the pièce de résistance: a fountain that, according to newspaper *De Gelderlander* of 1 April 1884 "may be called unique in our country because of its size and its high location above sea level". This magnificent fountain was frequently mentioned in newspaper articles about the lovely park. For half a century, well-to-do residents of Nijmegen strolled through this park. Nevertheless, its demolition caused very little protest. Were people in that circle too well brought-up to protest? Or too aware of the inevitable progress of modern time?

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