



Utrecht University

Utrecht
University Fund

Illuster

March 2019

Largest bequest ever

University inherits from alumna

Being Rector in the post-truth era

Interview with Henk Kummeling

FAKE NEWS

What is true?

José van Dijck and the facts
about fake news



FOREWORD

Don't be alarmist about fake news

In the run-up to the Dutch provincial council elections and the European Parliamentary elections, the Dutch government has launched an online awareness campaign about fake news and disinformation. These phenomena can be harmful to democracy, as they undermine people's confidence in politics and the media. Thankfully, research has shown that, so far, fake news has had only a relatively limited impact in the Netherlands. Its reach is largely restricted to groups of devotees seeking to reinforce their own views and prejudices. According to the Dutch Media Authority, people in the Netherlands still consult multiple news sources, and there is a varied media landscape.

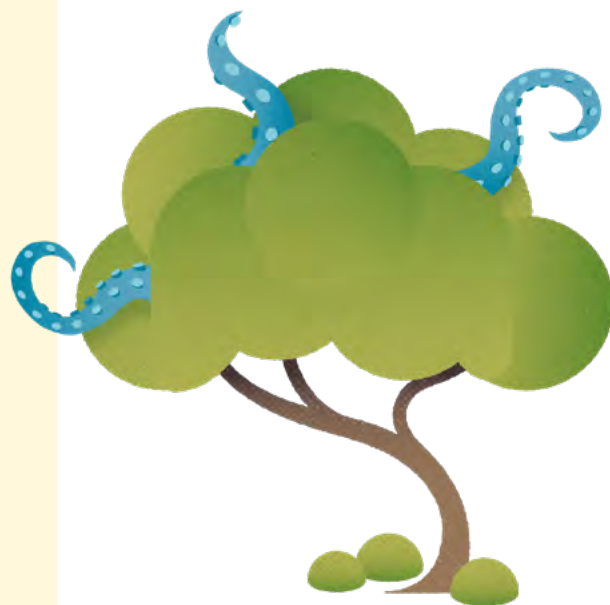
A public campaign to raise awareness about fake news among the Dutch population could, potentially, end up making the problem bigger than it is now. It is precisely because the current situation is relatively good that there's a significant risk that a campaign of this sort might end up undermining public confidence in the media — and, by extension, in the democratic constitutional state. A public campaign could even end up leading to greater distrust of the media. So what should we do instead? As the chair of the EU High-Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation, last year I published a report that outlined a range of potential measures. These included fact-checking by the media, increasing transparency on social media, making sure they allow readers to also hear opposing viewpoints at times and identify their news sources, ensuring transparency on the part of the government, which must also play its part in fostering a varied media landscape, and, above all, making citizens themselves more media-savvy. This action plan is now actually being rolled out across Europe, including social media platforms.



Utrecht University works with students, researchers, alumni, partners in the public sphere, the government and the business community to find sustainable solutions for the major challenges we face today, and in the future. This edition of Illuster is all about one of these challenges: fake news. I hope you enjoy reading!

Dr Madeleine de Cock Buning, LLM

Professor of Media and Communication Law,
Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance



28 Are children capable of recognising fake news?

An empirical study on media literacy among schoolchildren

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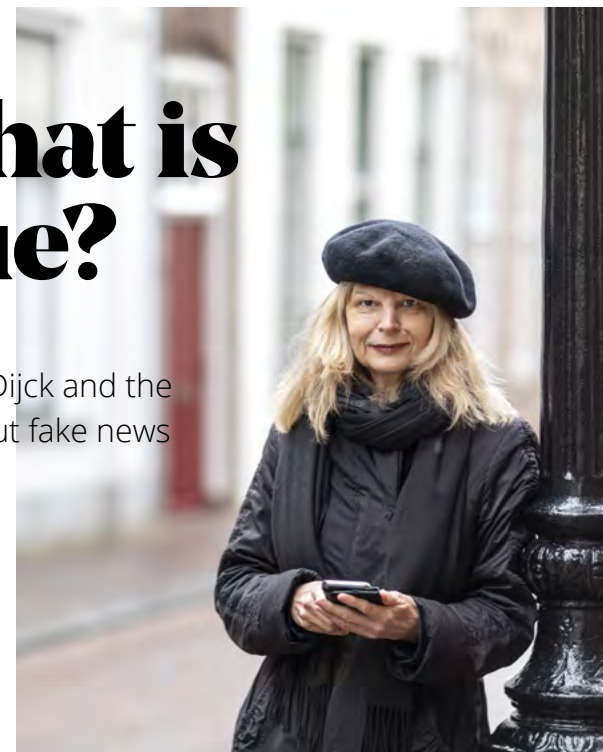
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Inhoud

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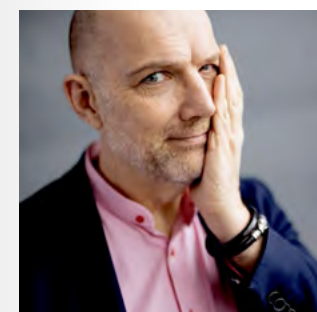
José van Dijck and the facts about fake news



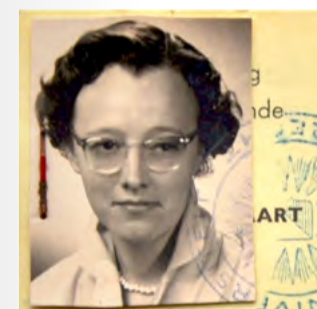
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Henk Kummeling
Rector Magnificus of Utrecht University



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ALTERNATIVE FACTS

Triumphant lie

Faced with the clearly disappointing turnout at his inauguration, President Trump responded by sending 'alternative facts' out into the world. He was by no means the first world leader to create his own reality. Saskia Stevens, Assistant Professor at the Department of Ancient History and Classical Civilization, specialises in the history and archaeology of the Roman Period. She unmasks Emperor Augustus, who notionally defeated the Parthians after two failed attempts by his contemporaries. 'He presented this as a military achievement and had these coins minted, portraying his success in battle. However, this is an example of alternative facts in Antiquity — other sources reveal that it was not a military triumph at all but one achieved by diplomatic means.'

Want to know more? Watch Saskia Stevens talk about her research on YouTube: bit.ly/saskiastevens.

Short



GET INVOLVED

Contribute to research into early modern letter writing

The EU-funded SKILLNET (Sharing Knowledge in Learned and Literary Networks) project, headed up by Dr Dirk van Miert (Humanities), is exploring the ideal of knowledge-sharing that existed within the international scholarly community in Europe between 1500 and 1800 (referred to as the 'Republic of Letters'). The objective is to find out who was corresponding with whom, where they were writing from, and on which date. But the project team needs help! Anyone can sign up to type up information from letters from the scanned books in which this correspondence was published. Want to get involved? Check skillnet.nl/cemrol for more information.

On 24 May there will be an introductory meeting (in Dutch) especially for alumni. For more information, visit bit.ly/alumniagenda.



EXPERIMENT

A week without lying

How can you detect lies? UU researcher Ronald Poppe (Sciences) and UU alumna Sophie van der Zee (researcher at the Erasmus School of Economics in Rotterdam) have developed a special sensor suit which can predict, in up to 82% of cases, whether someone is telling the truth. Currently their research is mainly focused on detecting changes in behaviour during examinations in order to pick up on critical moments. That can be lies, but it can also be withholding information; for example, last summer, the research was used in the BBC documentary A Week Without Lying — The Honesty Experiment. The conclusion was that never lying is virtually impossible.



SUSTAINABILITY

No more plastic bottles

From February 2019, plastic water bottles have disappeared from the vending machines on campus and been replaced by reusable plastic bottles for tap water. UU is doing this as part of its commitment to reducing its plastic waste and carbon emissions.

QUOTED

'Now that children have smartphones and the media is everywhere, all the time, we have to change our approach to protection.'



Tiffany van Stormbroek

UU alumna and Director of NICAM (the Netherlands Institute for the Classification of Audio-Visual Media)/Kijkwijzer, is making a case for implementing a content rating system on YouTube in NRC Handelsblad

CARTOON

Argibald



PRIZE

Hester den Ruijter receives the Agnites Vrolik Award

On Thursday 31 January, Associate Professor Hester den Ruijter (Experimental Cardiology, UMC Utrecht) received the second Agnites Vrolik Award for her research into cardiovascular disease among women. This prize is awarded by the Utrecht University Fund to a talented researcher affiliated with Utrecht University whose work contributes to addressing current societal issues. From the jury statement: 'This research project puts the broader research topic of gender on the map, incorporates patient participation and utilises new research methods in doing so.'

For more information about the award ceremony and the winning research project, see uu.nl/agnitesvrolik.



ANNIVERSARY

50 years of Ublad

In September, it will have been 50 years ago that Utrecht University got its first independent magazine: Utrechtse Universitaire Reflexen, later renamed Ublad. To celebrate this anniversary, DUB (the digital successor of Ublad) will be publishing a special theme issue on 50 years of student life in the city. This theme publication is most definitely also intended for alumni. It will look back over the developments that have taken place in areas such as housing, nightlife and activism. However, some additional funding is required for the publication to become a reality. Can you help?

Visit steun.uu.nl to contribute to this anniversary edition of Ublad and receive a copy.



DOCTORAL THESIS DEFENCE

Fake news during the First World War

The First World War is known as the first media war of the 20th century. Yet little was known about the way film was used as a medium for news and propaganda in the neutral countries. Last December, Klaas de Zwaan (Media and Performance Studies) obtained his doctorate with a thesis on the reception of the depiction of the First World War in Dutch cinemas. He discovered that propaganda films received great interest and mixed reactions, and that the press at the time would double-check their veracity.

UTRECHT 1636

Organisation of loyal donors

At the Agnites Vrolik dinner (see page 7), the Utrecht University Fund also introduced the new Utrecht 1636 network — an organisation of loyal and engaged donors. Members of Utrecht 1636 contribute to the academic and personal development of students at Utrecht University. They can also choose to specifically assign their contribution to one of the named funds. Membership starts at €500 per year for a minimum period of five years.

Want to join? Check uu.nl/utrecht1636.

Utrecht University is proud of its graduates, and alumni are a vital part of its academic community. But where do they all end up? In this section, Illuster presents some major appointments from the last six months.


 **Robert-Jan Smits**
Master's degree in History (1982) has been appointed President of the Executive Board of Eindhoven University of Technology. Previously he was Director-General for Research and Innovation at the European Commission, where his achievements included playing a key role in developing and implementing the major Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. In the past six months, he has been serving as the European Commission's Open Access Envoy.

 **Anneke van Dijk**
Master's degrees in Andragogical Sciences (1986) and Dutch Law (1989) has been appointed Director-General of Migration at the Ministry of Justice and Security. Previously she was Director of Legislation and Legal Affairs at the Ministry.

 **Beatrice de Graaf**
Master's degree in History (1995) and PhD in Art History (2004) was named the most influential woman in education and academia in 2018 by Opzij magazine.

 **Bert van Meurs**
Master's degree in Physics (1985) has been appointed to the Executive Committee of Philips.

 **Christa Wiertz-Wezenbeek**
Master's degree in Dutch Law (1987) is the new President of Amsterdam District Court (Rechtbank Amsterdam). She looks back on a long career in law — until recently she was President of the East Brabant District Court (Rechtbank Oost-Brabant).

 **Cécile Schobben**
Master's degree in Dutch Law (1992) has been appointed Managing Director of the law firm Dirkzwager legal & tax.

 **Peter de Haan**
Master's degree in History (1984) has been appointed Director of the Museon science and culture museum in The Hague. He is not only an alumnus — he has also worked for Utrecht University as director of the Utrecht University Museum and the Centre for Science Communication and Culture. As Director of the Peace of Utrecht Foundation (Stichting Vrede van Utrecht) he helped put Utrecht on the map, both nationally and internationally, as a hub of knowledge and culture.

 **Saskia Legein**
Master's degree in Literature & Culture Studies (1997) has been appointed Head of Communications of the De Balie cultural centre in Amsterdam.

 **Maayke-Aimée Damen**
Sustainable Development (2012) was featured on MIT's prestigious 'Innovators Under 35' list, an annual list of the 35 leading European innovators under the age of 35. The previous edition of Illuster (see uu.nl/illuster) featured an interview with Maayke on page 14.

 **Bart Brouwers**
Master's degree in History (1988) has been appointed to the Supervisory Board of the NOS public broadcaster. He is Professor of Journalism at the University of Groningen and member of the Supervisory Board of the Better Journalism Foundation (Stichting Betere Journalistiek).

Want to be 'famous' too?
Email us your new position at alumni@uu.nl. Who knows? You may end up being featured in the next edition of Illuster, or be named Alumnus of the Month (posted monthly on Facebook). Follow us on Facebook at [facebook.com/AlumniUniversiteitUtrecht](https://www.facebook.com/AlumniUniversiteitUtrecht).



FAKE NEWS

Rector in the post-truth era

Interview

For a long time, science had a halo of reliability. If a scientist said something, they tended to be believed. Nowadays that is no longer the case — at least not as a matter of course. Many people seem quick to dismiss science as ‘just an opinion’ or even ‘fake news’. How should the academic community deal with this? We talked to Henk Kummeling, who six months ago became Utrecht University’s 334th Rector Magnificus.

image Ed van Rijswijk

‘**T**he position of rector — where you’re heading up a group of highly intelligent and individualistic people — has always represented an exciting challenge,’ says Kummeling. ‘But in this day and age it’s even more challenging. We’re looking for truth, but we don’t hold a monopoly over it. Confidence in institutions like academia is under pressure. That has to do with the increasing mediatisation of society, and the fact that the political sphere has increasingly begun to use scientific research to justify policy measures. This has resulted in an volatile mixture, with the result that science is dismissed as “just an opinion”, and for every opinion you can find a so-called expert to back it up.’

What does that mean for the academic community? ‘First of all, we have to make sure we don’t put out any hazy information. Around the start of the year, I read a story in Dutch daily de Volkskrant about false scientific claims in 2018 — for example

the claim that particulate matter is detrimental to brain development, which had been incorrectly presented as fact.’

But knowledge can change and evolve over time, can’t it? ‘Of course. We can make mistakes. Experimenting, doubting, reconsidering and adjusting previous assumptions — that’s all part of the process. In fact, it’s what enables progress in the first place. But complete transparency and integrity at all times is an essential prerequisite. We cannot allow academics to present things as more certain than they are, or exaggerate or manipulate data to get ahead professionally or placate funding bodies. That’s not only harmful to their own careers — it also damages the authority of the institution they’re affiliated with. We have to be honest when we’re not sure about something. This will also boost our credibility when we state that there are facts about which a broad international consensus exists, based on repeated experiments and open debate.’

Do you often see academics being overconfident? ‘Yes, certainly in the media. A journalist will turn to the academic community in search of an expert take on the news, a controversial opinion or research data that makes for a compelling headline. We’re all too happy to oblige — in part out of a genuine desire to descend from our ivory tower and have an impact on society. But often things end up going wrong. In that case, we shouldn’t strike out blindly, in a Pavlovian response, claiming the media are breathing down our necks. We’re spending lots of time trying to figure out how best to measure quality in research and teaching, but we haven’t yet focused enough on establishing quality criteria for appearances in the media. ►►

» What choices do we make? And when is it better for academics to keep their mouths shut because they don't have the required expertise about the issue at hand?

Can you give an example? 'I'm not going to name any names. But everyone can think of an example where you're forced to admit that "actually, so-and-so really doesn't know enough to weigh in on that particular issue".'

So how should academics handle these types of situations? 'Academics need to be aware that they can only speak with authority if they stay within the confines of their own profession. They shouldn't allow themselves to be tempted into making all sorts of statements about things that go beyond the field they're truly knowledgeable about. I see a lot of professors punching above their weight and straying way past their remit on the grounds that "I'm an intellectual". That's all very well and good, but what you're actually expressing then, is just an opinion. It's important to monitor those boundaries.'

Should well-known professors such as Beatrice de Graaf and Coen Teulings stop writing columns in the papers if they don't



'We need to be honest when we're not sure about something.'

restrict themselves to speaking only about their academic discipline? 'No, I'm not saying that. But you need to be aware of which hat you're wearing, so to speak. There are no hard and fast boundaries. But the further you drift away from your own area of expertise, the more important it is to explicitly say that you are not speaking with the authority of your position as a professor or representing the views of the institute you're affiliated with. And if you do pull rank and invoke your professorial title, I expect you to respect the academic boundaries, even if you're not speaking about your own discipline. That's one of the things that we need to discuss — and that we will be discussing at Utrecht University. How do you present yourself in the media, and in what capacity? When I was still Chairman of the Dutch Electoral Council, I was regularly invited to appear on late-night talk shows. I made a conscious decision to decline those offers. I would have been expected to weigh in on subjects that I know nothing about, or that I do have an opinion about — like the lyrics of Jan Smit — but where my views are completely irrelevant. So what can I really contribute there? I don't want to make a public appearance if the authority of academia is going to be undermined by the choice of outlet alone.'

But don't we want scientists to contribute relevant insights and information to the public debate — including in late-night talk shows? 'I think you need to think very carefully about whether it's the right context for your message. If you end up

sitting next to an expert sharing their analysis of the Eurovision Song Contest, the academic agenda won't necessarily be served by that.'

Academics who share information about their field of expertise in a serious setting are still sometimes not believed. What is your take on that? 'We have to take a critical look at what we consider sound science and what we're willing to get behind — and then we have to present a united front in going to bat for it. It cannot be that if 99% of scientists worldwide are in agreement about something, the views of one outlier are considered just as relevant.'

The academic community is one thing. But what if the climate on social media is completely different? Or what if a president is elected in the US who staunchly claims the 1% is right and bases his policy on that?

Laughing: 'Of course, someone like that could never get elected...! But in all seriousness — I think it's a good thing that the academic community — including in the US — is increasingly presenting a united front in order to make it clear that there's a problem, and looking for new ways to communicate that message to the public and the political sphere. One of the most important questions in the whole debate surrounding 'open science' is: what is our relevance to society? How do we present ourselves, and do we live up to our institutional role? Every culture needs a foundation in mutually accepted facts and tested, proven reality.'

The academic community as guardian of the facts? 'Yes. If we don't serve as custodians of shared facts, then who does? But that's not a role you can claim — you

need to be appreciated as such. Of course there are also other institutions that verify and safeguard the facts, such as journalism and the courts. But it's the academic world that — with its combination of hard work, measurements and observation — has come to play the role of guardian of the mutually accepted facts going all the way back to the Enlightenment. Along with

producing critical thinkers and developing new knowledge, it's our raison d'être. We have to serve as a guiding light, supplying the tools that help society establish the shared foundation of facts that is crucial for a culture to be able to function.

'We're looking for truth, but we don't have a monopoly on it.'

'Figuring out how best to fulfil this role effectively in the post-truth era of social media and fake news takes some working out. Several UU academics, Appy Sluijs among them, wrote fascinating articles about this topic in 2018. Appy says that in public debate, we can't win the discussion with arguments alone in the way we've been used to doing. He says we have to be more creative with the means of communication at our disposal now that scientific consensus is no longer necessarily the clincher for everyone. Building interactive websites, making movies, forming new alliances... It's one of the major challenges of 2019, one that we'll be working hard to rise to.' «



Same degree ...

Hanneke van Eijken (38)

Degree: European Law **Work:** Assistant Professor at UU, senior advisor on EU law at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2018 and poet

As a student, European Law seemed incredibly boring to me, but when I took a course on it I became interested in the subject. I was fascinated by the idea of lawsuits involving whole countries. My work at the Ministry was very practical in nature. Sometimes I'd answer up to twenty questions in one day, and I got to experience the negotiation process in Brussels up close. I was able to call on that experience in my teaching at the University. Europe is relevant to all of us. As academics, it's part of our role to convey the importance of Europe-wide alliances. That's why, on 18 May 2019, I will be organising Festival Europa in Tivoli-Vredenburg, where we'll be combining cultural events with lectures. I've been interested in poetry since the age of eleven. I'm currently working on my third collection. Writing poetry allows me to clear my head. I get inspiration everywhere. In one of my poems I use the word 'grasland', Dutch for grassland or meadow. I read that word in a verdict and loved the sound of it.

Paula van de Geest (34)

Degree: International Law **Work:** Owner of Paula van de Geest Horse Behaviour & Well-Being, Senior Marketing and Communications Officer at the Dutch Federation of Equestrian Centres (FNRS)

After completing my degree, I did a lot of travelling and had lot of different jobs. I'm so happy to have found the thing I like doing most. Animals have always been important in my life. I was one of those girls whose room was full of posters of horses. I did my Master's in Utrecht because I could take a course on 'Animals and Law' here. In my thesis I examined the sustainability of an import ban on seal products. After graduating, I worked for the Dutch House of Representatives, where I learned the ins and outs of communications. Now I spend three days a week working for the Dutch Federation of Equestrian Centres in addition to running my own company. I teach equestrians more about horse behaviour. I hope to expand to coaching people using horses — I'm currently completing a training course for that. Although it's not really a part of my job anymore, my law degree does help me in my work. I use my ability to present persuasive arguments to create awareness surrounding horse well-being. My degree also helps me as a business owner — dealing with contracts and taxes comes relatively easily to me.

... different career

text Mirjam Streefkerk
image Ivar Pel



George Parker

1985

Starts working with people with disabilities.

1986

Obtains his Master's in Educational Science.

1987

Teaches himself programming and becomes developer, and later on sales manager, at Raet.



1993

Becomes trainer and project manager at Horizon Training & Development before going on to work there as a consultant.

1999

Becomes self-employed as a magician, trainer and writer.



2014

Founds TheCreationGame®.



Fascinated by reality

He studied Educational Science and went on to work with disabled people and as a developer and consultant. For almost twenty years now, he has been self-employed as an illusionist, speaker and writer. The question of what is and is not true plays an important role in his career.

George Parker (58) is holding a five-euro note in his outstretched hands. He folds the note up until it is very small. When he unfolds it again, all of a sudden it's a ten-euro note. He recently did this trick at a conference held by the police. 'I used it to explain the concept of transformation.' According to Parker, magic is about a lot more than just entertainment. 'I use illusions to add creative energy to profound, complicated concepts, so they become more tangible and easier for people to grasp.'

He first became aware of magic's ability to affect people in this way when, at the age of five, he watched his father make a burning cigarette disappear into his closed hand. 'My stomach exploded with butterflies,' he recalls, his eyes gleaming. 'That's when my fascination with reality began, although of course at the time I wasn't consciously aware of it yet.'

Life as a laboratory

Parker decided to study Educational Science to learn about how the mind develops. His studies inspired him to treat his life as a laboratory. 'Every day I do research on life. The experiences I seek out have an effect on my mind and my body. If it's a good experience, I'm physically and mentally in balance. If I find myself feeling off-kilter, I have to change tack and do something else.'

Parker did a huge amount of experimenting in his own lab. The practical side of his degree interested him most. That's why, in 1985, he began working with people with disabilities. He started to develop problems with his back, grew fascinated with the Commodore 64 and became a developer. After going through a rather unhappy period he changed course once again: he became a trainer and later, a consultant.

Parker: 'I got even more interested in our perception of reality, and wanted to become a magician. I took classes from Jeff McBride, training at the very highest level, and for a time performed at the Magic Castle in Hollywood — the absolute pinnacle of achievement in our field. Until I started to get bored there too. I'd reached my goal, and it was time for me to move on again.'

Life as a creation game

Now Parker wants to help other people and inspire them to pursue the future they want. He does this via shows, inspiration sessions and individual coaching and support under the auspices of his company TheCreationGame®.

'Reality is largely something we make up ourselves.'

What Parker experienced at the age of five became the basic theme of his entire career. 'That fascination with how our perception creates reality is at the core of what I do.' Parker wants to show people that they are in charge of their own destinies: 'My problems with my back, and the boredom I felt in Hollywood, were the roadblocks that motivated me to change my life's direction. A burnout can be a warning sign in much the same way — it means that the dynamic between you and your workplace is no longer right for you, and that you need to go and do something else. People often forget that that's an option.' «



Everybody lies

Parker served as magic advisor for the children's theatre show De Jokke-brokker ('Liar Liar'). His role included designing the illusions and teaching actors how to perform them. Previous productions similarly foregrounded the concepts of truths and lies. 'Everybody lies,' Parker says. 'Take ticking the box to confirm you've read the terms and conditions when you sign up for something online, for example. The fact that everyone lies is something I find very interesting.'

Are you interested in sharing your experiences to inspire the next generation?
Email alumni@uu.nl.

text
Mirjam Streefkerk
image
Robin Alysha Clemens

Made possible

University receives bequest from alumna

text Joost Dankers

Last year, Utrecht University received the largest bequest in its history. Johanna Alida van Leerzem left her entire estate, with a net worth of €1.2 million, to her alma mater. The bequest will be managed by the Utrecht University Fund. Ms van Leerzem's generous contribution is facilitating clinical scientific research by young scientists in the field of internal medicine. But who was she?

Johanna Alida (Annie) van Leerzem was born on 25 January 1933 in Rotterdam, the only child of Jacob van Leerzem and his wife four years his junior, Petronella Naaktgeboren, whom he had married in 1930. It was the height of the Great Depression in the Netherlands. Annie's father worked as a marine engineer on sea-going vessels. Although he spent a lot of time away from home, it meant the family was reasonably well off. Yet this period of economic malaise and war had a formative impact on Annie, one which continued to reverberate throughout her life. As a little girl,

she must have been able to see the terrible bombing of Rotterdam by the German Luftwaffe in 1940 from the family's upstairs apartment on the Polderlaan in South Rotterdam. The Dutch famine of 1944–45, during which her father worked as an inspector for the State Coal Agency (Rijkskolenbureau), must also have made a huge impression on her. She remained frugal her entire life, even after she'd completed her studies and could have afforded to live a little more comfortably.

Right after the war ended, her parents enrolled Annie in the prestigious Gymnasium Erasmianum secondary school. She was a talented, diligent student with a knack for the sciences. Because she chose to focus on STEM subjects, she was in a small class with four boys and just one other girl. Exactly six years later Annie sat her final exams, in the summer of 1951. We don't know her exact reasons for enrolling in a Medicine degree programme. Since at the time the University of Rotterdam had no Faculty of Medicine yet, she had no choice but

to leave her hometown. And so she began her studies at Utrecht University's Faculty of Medicine, which in those days was closely intertwined with the Stads- en Academisch Ziekenhuis (City and University Hospital), as it was still called at the time. Her father was now working as Chief Engineer on the Holland America Line and spent a lot of time at sea. During the first year of her studies, she and her mother lived with relatives in Utrecht city centre. Not long after that, the family moved to the Bilderdijklaan in Bilthoven.

Her parents spared no expense putting their daughter through university. As well as paying the 325-guilder tuition fee and the 10-guilder enrolment fee, they also paid for her books, a dissection kit and an expensive microscope that cost 750 guilders, along with the matching 110-guilder mechanical stage. Annie went about her studies very conscientiously, attending all her practicals and lectures. She filled dozens of notebooks with class notes and made hundreds of sketches of cells, joints, organs and other body parts. In 1959 she qualified as a general practitioner at what was then still referred to as the Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, or State University of Utrecht.

Although Annie remained interested in medicine throughout her life and continued to be on the list of registered medical practitioners, she never went on to practice her profession: the responsibility of looking after her ailing parents took up all of her attention. They died in quick succession in the late 1990s, when she was already in her sixties. She remained unmarried until her death on 25 January 2018 and led a sober, fairly solitary life. With her bequest, she was ultimately able to make a significant contribution to the field of study that was so close to her heart. ◀

Bequeathing an endowment to science

In this rapidly changing society, private donations to scientific research and education are becoming more and more important. Have you ever thought about leaving your estate — or part of your estate — to the University as a way to contribute to a better future and the pioneering research that is needed to bring this future about? Every contribution, big or small, is very welcome. The Utrecht University Fund is happy to help you explore the options. For more information, contact Robbert Jan Feunekes: r.j.feunekes@uu.nl.

The University Day on Saturday 30 March will feature an information session about leaving bequests to the University (in Dutch). Sign up at uu.nl/udag



GOOD CAUSE

The Van Leerzem Fund for scientific research

A named fund has been established to hold Annie van Leerzem's bequest. The resources in the Van Leerzem Family Fund will be used for patient-oriented scientific research and fundamental research conducted by the Internal Medicine and Dermatology division of University Medical Center Utrecht.

Professor Carlo Gaillard, UU alumnus, internist-nephrologist and chair of this division: 'The fund enables us to stimulate original clinical scientific research by promising young researchers over longer periods of time. It's an important source of support in addition to the existing funding streams. And the fact that this contribution comes from a UU alumna makes it all the more special.'

In addition to the Van Leerzem Family Fund, the Utrecht University Fund also manages another twenty named funds. More information: uu.nl/organisatie/alumni/goed-besteeld/fondsen-op-naam

Idealist with a sharp pen



Kauthar Bouchallikht studied Public Administration and Organisational Science (2013) and Public Management (Master's degree, 2016) and now works as a freelancer for clients such as De Correspondent, the Dutch online journalistic platform, and NGO De Goede Zaak, as well as chairing the Dutch Green Muslims Foundation (Stichting Groene Moslims).

Bouchallikht (24) found some time in her unpredictable work schedule to tell Illuster how she came to have such a varied career. Driven by idealism, as a freelancer she combines a sharp pen with a critical perspective on society.

Was it easy for you to decide what to study?

'I didn't know what kind of career I wanted yet, but I was keen to understand what's going on in society and why. The prospectus for the Public Administration and Organisational Science degree said that the programme involves taking a critical look at the interplay between institutions and society, so it seemed like a perfect fit.'

Do you find working life to be very different from being a student?

'Looked at one way it isn't really, because as a freelancer I'm still dealing with projects and deadlines much of the time. But I'm no longer part of a group of people who are doing the same thing that I am, and I no longer have as a clear an idea of what I'll be doing for the next three years.'

Who do you work for? 'My clients include De Correspondent online journalistic platform and the Narrative Journalism Foundation (Stichting Verhalende Journalistiek). I'm chair of the Dutch Green Muslims Foundation (Stichting Groene Moslims), campaigner for NGO De Goede Zaak and I'm part of the Dutch Journalism

Fund's think tank. I also regularly organise workshops and lectures about subjects such as ethical consumption and storytelling in environmental activism.'

Where does your idealism stem from? 'I think it's got to do with my Muslim background. I feel it's important to live by my principles, take personal responsibility and make the best possible contribution to the world. In my everyday life, but certainly also in my work.'

How do you think confidence in journalism can be bolstered in this age of fake news?

'The journalism industry is faced with the challenge of engaging in some critical self-reflection and taking a conscious look at the stories it tells and the way they are framed. On the other hand, it's also important that news consumers navigate the media in a conscious way themselves. That includes fake news — knowing when and when not to accept something as true.'

What's next?

'I'm just going to keep going! I try to make the most out of the assignments I have until something new comes across my path or until I start knocking on some new doors. That's the freelancer's life in a nutshell. For freelancers, "what's next?" is always a pertinent question.' «

A longer version of this interview will appear on DUB, the independent news site for Utrecht University. On dub.uu.nl you can read all the current news and background articles centred on the academic community in Utrecht.

text Inge Oosterhoff
image Robin Alysha Clemens



'For freelancers, "what's next?" is always a pertinent question.'

Facts about fake news

What is true?

'Fake news!' the 45th President of the United States constantly cries — especially when the media report something that doesn't suit him. What's the story there? Do facts no longer exist, or do they no longer matter? What role do social media play in the apparent fall from grace of serious news reporting? University professor and alumna **José van Dijck** on the issues.

text Armand Heijnen *image* Ed van Rijswijk

'Facebook is the biggest distributor of news in the world.'





‘Especially in the context of populism, confirmation bias plays a strong role.’

We meet in a stunning building on Achter de Dom, where the University’s distinguished professors have been given a space of their own. ‘In 1987 I left for the US to do my PhD in Literature. But it turned out that the university had a very good Communications department. That was still a fairly new discipline in the Netherlands at the time, and one that I became increasingly interested in,’ says José van Dijck, looking back on her career trajectory from being a student of Dutch and General and Comparative Literature at Utrecht University to becoming Professor of Media and Digital Society at the same institution. Her personal journey mirrors the shift that has taken place within the humanities, where subjects such as communication, media and information (including digital media) — with their significant social implications — have become an increasingly important area of study. ‘Fake news’ is one such example of a topic that has huge relevance for society.

Returning to her alma mater as a professor after almost thirty years has turned out to be a surprising experience. ‘After graduating in Utrecht, I did my doctorate at the University of California, San Diego, before coming back to the Netherlands to teach and do research. I was appointed to Utrecht University in early 2017. I found it surprising how, after such a long time, I’d still run into people that I know from my student

days on a regular basis. I like that — it feels like coming home.’

But what’s the story with fake news? Isn’t news produced by serious journalists rather than by Facebook; journalists who, as a rule, pride themselves on getting as close to the truth as possible? Isn’t Facebook just a social network where regular people can get things off their chest and engage in innocent chitchat?

Van Dijck: ‘It’s true that Facebook does not produce its own news like newspapers or TV channels, but it is a distributor of news. What Facebook does is bring together users, content and advertisers. And there are many people who consume news via this platform — in the US, nearly 40 per cent of news consumers get their information on current events from their Facebook newsfeed. That makes Facebook the largest distributor of news in the world — yet for a long time one that didn’t consider itself responsible for filtering fake news or hate speech. Following a significant societal and political backlash, they have started hiring editors that are supposed to eliminate misinformation. But Facebook also has a commercial interest — getting as many clicks and hence ad views as possible.’

According to Van Dijck, it is mainly older people who believe that news is exclusively produced by serious journalists. ‘They’re used to going straight to the source — to



José van Dijck studied Dutch and General and Comparative Literature in Utrecht and obtained her PhD at the University of California, San Diego with a thesis on scientific communication. In 2001 she became Professor of Media Studies at the University of Amsterdam. Between 2015 and 2018 she was president of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. On 1 January 2017 she became a professor at Utrecht University, where she does research on the digital society, social media and media technologies. Her most recent book, *The Platform Society* (2018), co-authored with Thomas Poell and Martijn de Waal, explores the battle for public values in an online world.

the outlet that published the news in the first place. That outlet already tells you a lot about how seriously to take the news. Readers know that NRC Handelsblad is a different kind of newspaper than De Telegraaf. That context is often lacking on the internet, making it difficult to establish the reliability and objectivity of information. We call this phenomenon “context collapse”. If news, gossip and rumours are all offered alongside each other, consumers no longer know what to believe and what not to believe out of that hotchpotch,’ Van Dijck says.

Is there anything we can do about that? Is it possible to add context to the information on Facebook and other digital media so that readers are better equipped to judge the reliability? Van Dijck is pessimistic: ‘People are definitely trying to do this. All sorts of initiatives are underway to make sources more transparent, check facts and expose fake news. Right now it’s not clear who is responsible for disinformation. At the EU Level, the High Level Expert Group on Fake News and Disinformation (headed up by UU professor Madeleine de Cock Buning, see page 27) has looked into this question, but many private individuals were afraid that the state would end up deciding what is and is not allowed on the internet, which gets awfully close to censorship. But you also don’t want to give commercial players complete freedom in this area. Letting citizens’ organisations do the filtering is definitely an option, but is that really going

to be enough? Safeguarding the quality of news is harder than it seems at first glance — it’s a shared responsibility and one that we have to figure out how to deal with in the changed media landscape.’ According to Van Dijck, there’s also a significant portion of the population that doesn’t care whether or not something is fake news. ‘Traditional media regularly conduct fact checks. But many citizens aren’t interested in the facts; they’re mainly looking for confirmation of their own views or prejudices. “Confirmation bias” is what we call that. That attitude is especially prevalent in the context of populism. It doesn’t really matter whether it’s fake or not — we’re calling it fake because it doesn’t jive with our idea of the truth. And by calling something fake, at the same time you’re implying that what you’re saying is not fake. So when Trump goes on about how the New York Times, CNN and all the other mainstream media can’t be trusted, he’s also saying that he can be trusted.’

‘We have to teach our children that expertise and information are not the same thing.’

‘The worst thing about that is that it undermines people’s confidence in institutions,’ Van Dijck continues. ‘Journalism can no longer be trusted, the judiciary can no longer be trusted, and science, too, is “just an opinion”. I think the only thing we can do is continue to strengthen the institutional checks and balances through transparency, peer reviews, issuing corrections, judicial ►



» review, ensuring both sides are heard and so on. Open institutions are the bedrock of our society. I'm very glad that this is one of Utrecht University's four strategic research themes.'

There's plenty of research to be done in this area. But what about the role of education? You once said media literacy should form a core part of university education. 'Of course the internet offers a wealth of information, but it's not always easy to navigate. A lot of the time people will do some googling and then believe that their knowledge is on a par with that of actual scientists,' Van Dijck fears. 'They think they know better than doctors whether vaccines are

necessary, or whether or not the polar caps are melting as a result of carbon emissions. We need to teach our children and students that information is not the same thing as expertise.'

'Information can be easily

found on Google, but expertise requires that you are able to assess that information, filter out non-sense, and distinguish between facts and options. Media literacy is an important issue. Children shouldn't just learn how to search for information online and use sources in a critical way — they also need to learn to judge and assess them. And of course they need to know the potential impact of social media on behaviour, for example when it leads to addiction or bullying. Educational institutions definitely have a role to play there.'

This is borne out, Van Dijck says, by the shift that has taken place

in the humanities and by her own career trajectory. 'When I started studying Dutch at Utrecht University, there were 300 first-year students in the programme. About half of them ended up working in communications or for the media. That's where the jobs were, but there were still very few degree programmes in that field at the time. They do exist now, and the popularity of language degrees is waning as a result — the number of first-year Dutch Language and Culture students is only a fraction of the 300 there were back then.'

Van Dijck considers it self-evident that social media is a hugely important topic for academics. 'We have more and more platforms at our disposal that control our entire lives. Notionally, we no longer need to read the paper to stay informed about current affairs, we no longer need schools to acquire knowledge, we no longer need travel agencies to book flights, and so on, and so forth. From Airbnb to Uber, from Nextdoor to Facebook — a growing share of social interaction and economic transactions take place directly through these kinds of platforms. This is what my most recent book is about. The public's perception of those platforms is overwhelmingly positive. People feel they lead to less overhead and less government interference; nowadays we can take care of everything ourselves on our laptops or smartphones. But what people fail to realise is the impact of these platforms on the public interest. The Big Five — Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon

'A growing share of social interaction takes place via online platforms.'

and Microsoft, collectively known by the acronym GAFAM — provide virtually all the infrastructure for these platforms and by doing so are organising our entire society. That means those companies have tremendous power over our society. Yet they are all based in the US and their business practices reflect American values. Take their approach to government intervention, for example — privacy laws barely exist in the US. In Europe, on the other hand, we feel the need to see our public values reflected in these platforms; we are less averse to

government regulation. We want guarantees for the accessibility of news, for safety, data privacy, a fair playing field and trustworthiness. Various measures have already been implemented to this end, such as the General Data Protection Regulation and the fines imposed on Google for violating antitrust law. But it's very tricky to safeguard public values effectively in a society that is characterised by these kinds of online platforms. Both the public sphere and the academic community have quite a challenge on their hands.'

Utrecht University is undertaking research across a range of different fields into facts, true and false information and the implications of the latter for society. Three researchers share their perspectives.

Be sure to also check out uu.nl/dossiers to read more about how researchers at Utrecht University are contributing to current societal issues and debates.



'Facebook is shifting its responsibility onto algorithms'

Philosophy — Jan Broersen
With a background in mathematics, logic and computer science, Professor Jan Broersen studies artificial intelligence from a philosophical perspective. He is sceptical about the use of algorithms to monitor the quality of news. 'I think what Facebook does, for example, is rather dangerous. They are partly shifting their responsibility for establishing whether something is fake news or not to algorithms. As yet, however, algorithms haven't shown themselves to be good at assessing the inherent quality of a text by analysing factors such as structure, consistency and the strength of the argument being presented. While it is possible to teach machines to become more effective at dealing with situations that demand a level of responsibility, ultimately moral responsibility always lies with people.'



'The algorithm's only job is to hold our attention for as long as possible.'

Media Studies — Dan Hassler Forest
'In my opinion, the biggest problem with a platform like Facebook isn't so much that it's impossible to distinguish real from fake,' says Dan Hassler Forest, Assistant Professor of Media Studies. 'What's much more important is that the content is being delivered by an algorithm whose only job is to hold your attention for as long as possible. After all, the revenue model is based on charging companies for access to visitor data. Because the algorithm constantly supplies you with data that fits with your profile, you end up seeing more and more things that you agree with and subjecting that content to a lesser level of scrutiny.'



'There is no one failsafe legal approach to dealing with disinformation.'

Law — Madeleine de Cock Buning
Professor Madeleine de Cock Buning specialises in Media and Communication Law: 'In the debate about fake news, as a legal professional you ask yourself the question: Do we really want to control the content on new media? The government shouldn't be the judge of what's true and what isn't, because that runs counter to freedom of speech. There is no one failsafe legal approach to dealing with disinformation. But the EU does have certain powers. Netflix, for example, is based in the Netherlands; Google is based in Ireland. These companies need to comply with the regulations that are applicable in those countries, and those regulations have been established at the EU level. Where protecting minors is concerned, for instance, the EU does have a degree of leverage over these platforms — it can exert pressure.'



Can children recognise fake news?

How awful! The Northwestern Pacific tree octopus is threatened with extinction! Primary-school pupils read this information on a website that researcher Eugène Loos shows them.

text **Hanneke Olivier**
illustration **Flow design**

They are very sad to learn that the animal is under threat. Only two pupils realise that it's a 'fake site' about a non-existent animal. What does this tell us about media literacy among children? Loos: 'There hasn't been a lot of solid, empirical research into fake news yet. But it's not a new phenomenon — it was also used during the Second World War, for example. The only difference is that nowadays, in the age of social media, it spreads very rapidly and anyone can put it out there. It's a problem that we don't really know how to address.'

In 2017, Loos repeated a study that had originally been done in the US a decade earlier. 'I was curious to see how time had changed things and what the situation is like in the Netherlands.' He went to visit a primary school and showed students in group 8 — their final year of primary education — the fake site about an octopus that lives in a tree. 'I asked them if they understood what it said and if they noticed anything in particular.



Eugène Loos (55) studied French Language and Culture at Utrecht University (1986), obtaining his PhD in 1997. He works as an Associate Professor in the Department of Public Administration and Organisational Science at Utrecht University's Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance. He is also affiliated with the University of Amsterdam, where he is professor by special appointment of Old and New Media in an Ageing Society, holding the chair endowed by ANBO (the Dutch association representing the interests of senior citizens).

'Octopuses don't live in trees!'

The outcome was virtually the same as it had been in the US. Of the 26 Dutch schoolchildren, only two girls suspected the site to be fake. One of them said she used 'common sense' — an octopus doesn't live in a tree. The other did an online search to see if the animal actually existed and if the species was under threat.

'The children were startled when they found out the site was fake. "How could we have fallen for that, when we've had media literacy training?" One of them said: "So when I'm sick and look for information online to find out what's wrong with me, I can't base my conclusion on just one website!" I liked the fact that they made the connection with health themselves and realised that false information can have harmful consequences.'

The researcher feels it's all too understandable that children 'fall for it'. 'An animal at risk pulls on people's emotions — you respond at a very primary level. We're all susceptible to that, myself included. And the impact of authority should also not be underestimated. I was visiting from a university and had been introduced by their teacher — both authorities in their eyes, which makes them unlikely to think "what they're showing me is nonsense".'

Loos emphasises that it was just one class, and that it's impossible to draw conclusions for the Netherlands as a whole on the basis of just one experiment. 'I want to do this in more schools, so that we can see if

the results are significant rather than just chance. The main goal is to find out how children — and possibly other demographics too — can best be trained to recognise fake news.

'I want to have several classes complete an existing media-literacy training course, show a number of other classes fake sites and have a third group make fake news themselves. After six months, I'll show them websites, including fake sites, to see which group is the most critical. That will tell us which approach is the most effective.'

'Facebook and Google need to be transparent about how they deal with fake news. But they're being too slow to take action — the fake news is already on there! The same applies to human fact-checkers and algorithms for digital detection. And besides, who gets to decide what's true and what's false? I think it's more important to teach people at a young age to have a degree of scepticism when it comes to the reliability of news.'

'Am I going to solve the problem of fake news? No — it's too complex. But I do think that, if we manage to get funding, we can get insight into which ways of combating it are effective.' «

No way I'd fall for that!

Would you 'fall for it'? Would your kids? Try it out at home: <http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus/>

WOOLLOOMOOLOO

Half a century of dancing

1970

Marten Otten (71), USC Senate 1969—1970: 'My predecessors first came up with the plan to open a bar/discotheque. They were popular in other cities and there wasn't a lot for students to do in Utrecht at the time. Seven students and a contractor from Amsterdam got the whole thing off the ground in just a few months. One guy from the project committee, an avid cricketer who had just come back from Australia, came up with the name 'Woolloomooloo' after a Sydney suburb. The idea was always to create a bar that wasn't restricted to the USC — anyone with a student ID was welcome. We were hoping to make 250 guilders a night, just like a similar bar in Leiden. But on the very first night, with DJ Lex Harding at the turntables, we made 1250 guilders! From there on out the Woo just got busier and more successful.'

2019

Ludo Barge (22), current chair of the Woolloomooloo board: 'The best way to describe the Woo is a huge playground where almost everything is possible and allowed. It's great to be one of the team of four guys who are responsible for that. After nearly fifty years, the Woo is still a fixture of student life, but we do have to keep up with the times. You can't take years to complete your degree anymore, so students these days are inclined to go a little easier on the partying. That's why the board is making sure that we don't just draw in people from our own association, but reach the other students as well. If we can be there for everyone, the Woo will be around for years to come.'

Help put together the Woo anniversary book

Next year, the Woolloomooloo student discotheque will have been going for fifty years. An anniversary publication is coming out to celebrate this occasion. The editorial team is looking for your memories, stories and pictures. Send them to woolloo50@outlook.com.

text Lennaert Rooijakkers
image Collectie M.H. Otten



Tips



PLASTIC

Giant whale in the Catharijnesingel canal

Since January, there's been a giant whale made from five tonnes of plastic from the Pacific Ocean leaping up out of the water of Utrecht's Catharijnesingel canal, in front of TivoliVredenburg. Utrecht University's Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance has brought the art installation, called 'Skyscraper', to the city for a six-month period. The artwork aims to make a statement about the gigantic amount of plastic waste that pollutes rivers, seas and oceans all over the world.

For activities surrounding the whale, check uu.nl/walvis



MUSIC

UUnited

Utrecht University and the Parnassos Cultural Centre are proud to present the spectacular second edition of the UUnited Music Festival on Thursday 28 March 2019. At this festival, student musical ensembles join forces with other performers for unique performances that break through genre boundaries. For example, the Utrecht Student Orchestra will be playing alongside Dutch indie musician Spinvis, while the Kunstorkest — the only student baroque orchestra in the Netherlands — will be performing with TV chef Rudolph van Veen. The festival has been made possible with the support of the Utrecht University Fund.

Thursday 28 March 2019
Tickets via uu.nl/uunited

ANNIVERSARY

Dies Natalis

On Thursday 26 March 2019, Utrecht University will be celebrating its 383rd anniversary at the Dies Natalis — the university's annual Anniversary Day — in Utrecht's Dom Church. The



theme of this year's celebrations is 'Education for life'. The Alumnus of the Year will also be announced during this event. Last year it was Cathelijne Broers, Director of De Nieuwe Kerk and Hermitage Amsterdam, who was honoured with the title. During the course of the past year, she has acted as an ambassador for Utrecht University.

Are you eager to find out who's going to be Alumnus of the Year this time around? We will be announcing the winner on our Facebook page during the Dies Natalis: facebook.com/AlumniUU.

Message from ... China

Intellectual property is hot

text Sanne van de Grift

"My name is Reinout van Malenstein. I always wanted to be a lawyer. But I didn't want to work in criminal law, because I wouldn't want to have to defend someone I knew was guilty. From the very first time I encountered intellectual property law I was hugely inspired.'

'Following my Master's at Utrecht University, I completed two further degrees in order that I could play my part in the development and application of intellectual property law in China. I studied Chinese at Tsinghua University in Beijing, followed by a Master's in Chinese Law at Peking University. I then spent some time working for the European Commission, where I participated in negotiations with the Chinese government. Now I help international companies to protect their intellectual property in China.'

'The rest of the world is quick to accuse China of neglect when it comes to protecting intellectual property, but that's incorrect. Often it's the international companies themselves who haven't put the right arrangements in place. They will place their patents in a Chinese holding company because the Chinese tell them this is the only way of doing business. Protectionist legislation then results in those patents never leaving China again. My job is to convince businesses that

'China is wrongly being perceived as the bad guy.'

there's another option — retaining the patents in their own countries and instead issuing temporary licences to China.'

'Shanghai is a fantastic city to live in. There's a huge foodie culture — we go out to dinner with the whole office at the end of every week. Without alcohol, mind you — you don't drink with your coworkers in China. I do go out for drinks with other — Dutch and Chinese — UU alumni. Together we form a kind of outpost of the University, a community with expertise in a range of different academic disciplines. Looking back, I think Utrecht University offers an excellent education. You have to think for yourself and find your own answers, you get to engage in active debate with your professors and you learn to write about complicated subjects in an accessible way — something that still comes in handy for me every day.' «



Reinout van Malenstein completed Utrecht University's Master's in Private Law in 2007. He currently works as senior counsel at the HFG Law & Intellectual Property law firm in China and is National Vice-Chair of the IPR Working Group of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China.

Finding truth, or true love

I once wrote a song, based on a true story, about a man and a woman who had met hitchhiking right after the Second World War. They were instantly attracted to each other but then the woman got out of the car, and all the man was left knowing was that she lived somewhere in Groningen. Nowadays if you were in that kind of situation you'd make a movie that would go viral on social media, but back then there wasn't a whole lot you could do. The man, however, refused to give up hope — he spent several Sundays making his way to all the churches in Groningen until he'd found her. They ended up staying together for the rest of their lives.

I presented these lyrics to the late stand-up comedy legend Maarten van Roozendaal, who said, 'You've got it almost right — but you should make them your grandparents. That'll make the song three times as good.' 'But then it'll no longer be true,' I said. To which Maarten responded: 'It doesn't matter if it's true — the only thing that matters is my believing that it could have been true.'

An invaluable lesson in theatre-making-credibility is more important than factual accuracy. In the academic world, you can't get away with that sort of thing (although Diederik Stapel tried). You can't invent the truth. Except in mathematics, of course.

Because mathematics are true even if something doesn't exist or hasn't really occurred. A cube exists, conceptually — even though it doesn't literally exist anywhere on our planet. Everything that resembles a cube — dice, a box of chocolates — is essentially just an approximation.

But do we invent mathematics in the same way that a composer invents a melody? Or is mathematics already 'out there' somewhere, and do we only need to discover it? The natural world is like that. The drops in Archimedes' bathwater already contained atoms, even though we didn't figure out they existed until centuries later. All reality already exists — but what about truth, and mathematical truth? And where is the truth in the meantime, while we're still looking for it?

We used to look to the Bible for truth, but that no longer is a major draw — unless you're [Dutch Reformed Political Party leader] Kees van der Staaij, perhaps. But with a bit of luck a church could still be the place to find your one true love though — which is miracle enough.

Jan Beuving

Jan spent nine years at Utrecht University obtaining a Bachelor's in Mathematics (2008) and a Master's in History and Philosophy of Science (2009). He went on to be a stand-up comedian. For his tour schedule, see janbeuving.nl.

