

# VOX

2020  
IN LETTERS

Anything happen this year?



ENGLISH EDITION

RADBOUD UNIVERSITY INDEPENDENT MAGAZINE  
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# VOX

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## 2020 in letters

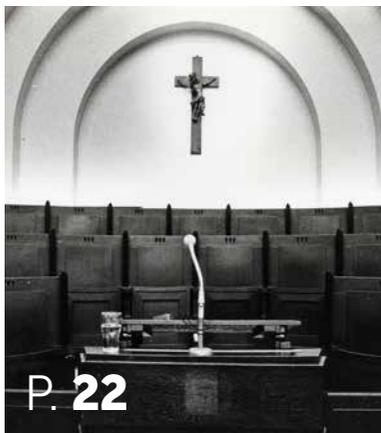
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FRONT AND BACK COVER ART:  
JEROEN MURRÉ

# EDITORIAL

## DEAR READER,

2020 was the year of new love, moving house, diploma award ceremonies and scientific discoveries. Behind unknown front doors children were being born, while at the neighbour's house someone was working on their first novel, and three houses down the street someone else was celebrating a new job.

2020 will go down in world history as the year of a certain pandemic, but on a personal level, so much more has happened. Think of the professor who after years of faithful service quietly clears out his desk because he's reached retirement age.

At times it seemed as if these private highlights were completely overshadowed by the big world news. At the tail end of this very strange year what we wanted as a Vox team was to move in the opposite direction. So we sent out an e-mail asking Radboud University students and staff members: What was your 2020 moment? And of course we also went in search of our own overlooked personal triumphs.

We usually simply distribute our magazine around Campus, but with so few people on Campus these days, we decided to deliver this Vox edition right to your doorstep. The heart-warming letters you sent us deserve the widest reach possible.

If you'd rather read about the consequences of the virus whose name begins with 'c' (we've done our best to avoid naming it in this edition) or other pandemic news, don't hesitate to visit our website. In the meantime we'll be leafing through to page 6 to read about how a Spanish PhD student found love and brought her cat to the Netherlands this year.

Annemarie Haverkamp  
Editor in chief Vox

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# IN THE NEWS 2020

DAY-TO-DAY NEWS:  
[VOXWEB.NL/](http://VOXWEB.NL/)  
INTERNATIONAL



## Virus

On 6 March it was announced that a Radboud University staff member had contracted a new virus from China, which had reached Nijmegen via the Italian ski slopes. A day later a student was found to be infected as well and on Friday 13 March all Radboud University lectures and examinations were cancelled. These days the C word gets more than 500 hits on [voxweb.nl](http://voxweb.nl), reason enough not to mention it in the remainder of this magazine edition.

## Bats

At the end of the summer holiday staff members, including the *Vox* editors, who worked at the Thomas van Aquinostraat 1, discovered that they were sharing their building with a colony of bats. Luckily expert bat catcher Eric Jansen came to the rescue, quickly capturing 15 night flutterers and releasing them elsewhere. According to Jansen, these were pipistrelles, the most common type of bat in the Netherlands. "I think they were looking for a place to spend the winter. One of them probably flew in through the window. They're very social animals, so if one of them calls the other ones follow." It may also have been the case that the colony was already in the building but was disturbed by the construction work.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

## Catholic

After nearly 100 years Radboud University can no longer call itself a Catholic university. The Dutch bishops stripped the University of its 'Catholic' title following a long-drawn-out conflict with the supervisory body of the University and hospital: the Stichting Katholieke Universiteit (SKU). For the past five years the bishops had refused to appoint candidates for the SKU, and in June the SKU board finally took the case to court. The court ruled in favour of the Board, in response to which the bishops pulled out (See page 22 for a reconstruction of how the bishops stripped Radboud University of its Catholic title).



## Maria Montessori

The new building of the Faculty of Social Sciences is ready. Due to a delay in delivery, the Faculty staff will only be able to move into the building in January, at the same time as the Grand Café in the bridge connecting the north and south buildings is due to open. The coming months will be put to good use: moving desks, connecting computers, and attaching stickers and name plates (See also page 42).

Willem Halfman



PHOTO: RADBOUD UNIVERSITY

## Inappropriate behaviour

For the past months, Professor Paul Bakker has not been allowed anywhere near the Faculty of Philosophy and has lost his candidacy as Dean (he was the intended successor of Christoph Lüthy). An investigation conducted in June by the Executive Board into social interaction at the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies revealed that Bakker had been guilty of 'inappropriate behaviour'. A follow-up investigation by consultancy agency Berenschot at this faculty resulted in reports by 29 staff members and students concerning intimidation and inappropriate conduct. The Faculty is now working hard on creating a cultural shift.

## Cashing in

Fourteen Veni grants, nine Vidi grants and as the cherry on the cake two large European consortium grants: with more than €20 million of newly secured funding – some of which is to be shared with other institutions – Radboud University researchers have done remarkably well this November. The most impressive performance came from the Huygens Building; Professor of NMR Spectroscopy Arno Kentgens and science sociologist Willem Halfman each won an ERC Synergy Grant: a prestigious grant of up to €14 million for international collaboration projects.

## Car-free

By 2026 the Erasmuslaan and Heyendaalseweg will be closed to through traffic. But even before that, car use around the Campus should be reduced by 20%. These are some of the ambitions expressed by Radboud University, Radboud university medical center and the municipality. The most striking measure announced is that in a few years' time, cars driving from the city to Campus over the Heyendaalseweg won't be able to go further than the Huygens Building. On the Erasmuslaan, cars will only be allowed on the stretch between Sint-Annastraat and the Grotius Building so they can access the parking garage. The rest of the street will be reserved for cyclists, buses and the emergency services.

## Maastricht

Radboud University and Maastricht University plan to intensify their collaboration. Plans include a joint Master's programme in Biotechnology in Venlo, and the Radboud Teachers Academy offering its services in Maastricht. The underlying reason is the shared commitment of the Executive Boards of the two universities to put the East and South East of the Netherlands on the map. "This will help us compete with collaborative projects between universities in the Randstad region," says Rector Han van Krieken.

## Dear Vox...

Did anything else happen this year? As Vox editors we invited you all - Radboud University students and staff members - to share with us your 2020 highs (or lows). We really enjoyed hearing about your new pets, first jobs, new babies and perfect macarons. The letters we've received have been included in this Vox edition.



### SUDDENLY I COULD AFFORD TOP BRANDS

2020 began on 1 January with dropping a box of eggs on the floor, a breakfast of badly burnt buns, and severe pneumonia. This fact notwithstanding, 2020 turned out to be a good year. After an enthusiastic motivating speech from my housemates, I decided to apply for the 'grown-up job' that had come my way, I moved to a studio at the other end of the country where I live on my own for the first time, and I obtained my Master's diploma.

Now that the winds of change have died down somewhat,

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I FIND MYSELF  
REFLECTING  
ON THE  
ODDNESS  
OF PEAK  
EXPERIENCES  
-----

I find myself reflecting on the oddness of peak experiences. It's true that I can now afford top brands in the supermarket and that I get official letters with my full name on them, but other than that I don't feel any different from how I felt on that January morning, wiping egg yolks off my kitchen floor.

Without all the highs over this past year, I might not have learned to swear as I cycled through Amsterdam, or had a car that fits a surprising number of IKEA boxes, and I might not have known how merciless the Randstad wind can be. But would have been able for a little longer to watch the sun set on the Waal beach, drink beer at De Hemel, and eat fried snacks at Café Faber. Which just goes to show that peak moments are simply the things you enjoy most, whether it's eating cheese spring rolls or being awarded your Master's diploma.

MIGNON VAN VORSELIEN, GENERAL LINGUISTICS GRADUATE

### THE OTHER SIDE OF 2020

Everybody talks about what an awful year 2020 has been, and in some aspects, they're right. However, I've also gotten to see a different part of this year. This is the first year I have spent with my partner, and it is by far the most fulfilling, special and connecting relationship I have ever had. **This is also the first year in his family, which is composed by the sweetest and most welcoming people I have ever met.** This year, my cat could come to the Netherlands, and has provided us with incredible company (and a non-stop provision of meows in any Zoom meeting we've had). This year, I've gotten to see a more humane side of my colleagues and has made me appreciate my friends and family even more. This year, my parents have gotten into so many adventures, the greatest of them all including moving to a different house right next to the beach in Andalusia, where I can visit them with a view to the sea as soon as it's allowed. This is also the year in which my therapist said I was ready to leave her, because I learned how to take care of myself. It's the year when I started reading again, and gaming, and D&Ding, and listening to music, and just enjoying life after having not such a good previous year. This is the year when I grew as a person more than any time in my life, when I got the best relationships, love, and laughs, when I reconnected with so many friends. I don't care what others say, even if they have a point. This is the year.

LAURA CLARET FERNÁNDEZ, PHD CANDIDATE AT MICROBIOLOGY (FROM SPAIN)

## REMARKABLE ROOF RENOVATION

A good deed seldom goes unpunished. This was the motto of my father, with whom I watched the weekly German police series Derrick as a child. Most of the episodes – and I know them all – had two main characters: a charismatic criminal and a loser whose life progressively slides into a nightmare after one well-intentioned and seemingly innocent act. On May 7th, a group of Irish men showed up at my door and offered to clean my roof. **My guilt about the poor state of my roof, the fact that I had come through the pandemic unharmed whilst many struggled, and my criticism of the academic management and audit culture of distrust, made me decide to grant them the job.** After they had done the

cleaning, the foreman, called John, explained that the dirt, now removed, had acted as a protective layer, and would have to be replaced with a superior “K-41 coating”. I had to pay cash, but was given a proper invoice with a company name and URL. Unfortunately, the coating didn’t adhere properly because the roof tiles were claimed to be porous, and had to be replaced. Payment in cash only. When I returned from the bank, numerous roof tiles had already been removed, revealing that the wood underneath was wet and rotten. New wood had to be ordered and scaffolding had to be rented, to be paid for in advance and in cash.

Any reader of this story of course realises right from the start that I was being swindled, but I only understood this when, after three days, one of John’s helpers allegedly fell through the roof and broke his hip, an accident for which I was held liable and asked in no mean terms to immediately produce €15,000 for the operation, in cash. It was only then that I thought of calling the police, much the poorer and left with a largely ruined roof, instead of a renovated one. The birds had flown, the company and website proved to be fake. A good deed seldom goes unpunished!

KLAAS LANDSMAN, PROFESSOR OF MATHEMATICAL PHYSICS

## I’M NOW OFFICIALLY AN ENTREPRENEUR

Ever since I was 15 I’ve worked as a web designer and developer. It started out small, but over the years my client circle has grown. In early 2020

I officially registered my company. I’m quite introverted, so actively recruiting clients never felt natural to me. This year I really had to push myself to network, for example via LinkedIn.

I also offered active aftercare for projects and tried to maintain professional and personal contacts with my clients. In some cases this led to short assignments – a listening ear and a helping hand can really make a difference.

The quality of my relationship with my client matters more to me than a quick invoice, and this mentality has brought me a lot. For example the luxury of being able to choose my projects and explore new areas, like consultancy and design. I never dreamed of becoming an entrepreneur, but it’s a perfect match: the flexibility and diversity of owning my own business, combined with my Law studies. Do I intend to remain an entrepreneur? I don’t know. Maybe I’ll end up working at a law firm in IT. But until then, this suits me perfectly.

MICHAEL DE BORST, LAW STUDENT AND OWNER OF PRJCT. DESIGN

THE QUALITY OF MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY CLIENT MATTERS MORE TO ME THAN A QUICK INVOICE

## THE YEAR OF BLUF AND BOEF

2020 was the year of moving house. Never before did I pack so many boxes, move so much furniture, clean and drive so much back and forth. Everyone in our family succumbed to the house-moving virus. From Haarlem to Den Bosch, from Hilversum to Nederhorst den Berg, from Oirschot to Spoorndonk and from Rotterdam to Moergestel: we and our daughters all moved to a new place.

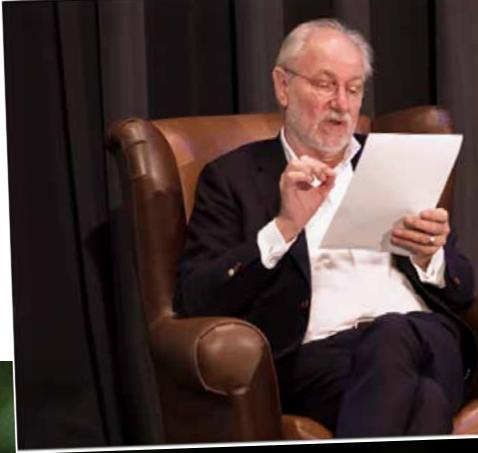
Moving house means tidying up, sorting through things, keeping some, giving some away and unfortunately also throwing some away. It takes you on a trip down memory lane. Photo albums with pictures of my now deceased parents, holidays, our children when they were little, my own youth, and that of my husband. I even stumbled across my First Communion dress, carefully wrapped in yellowing plastic. **The card table at which my grandparents fanatically played cards – it could get pretty rough at times – has been given a place of honour in the living room of our new home.**

Sadly, our beloved Saint Bernard Bluf passed away on 3 June, just before the move. This robbed us of much of the joy of moving. It was really unexpected and we were incredibly sad. Not much later we welcomed our new four-footed friend Boef and we heard that next year we’ll once again become the proud grandparents to two brand-new granddaughters.

I’m sure 2021 will turn out to be yet another remarkable year.

WILMA DE KONING, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD





# THE MESSAGE THE MESSAGE IT'S ALL ABOUT THE MESSAGE

Being invited to give the Sustainable Throne Speech was a great honour for 'Sustainability Prof' Jan Jonker. His plea for a circular economy also marked the end of his career as professor. The social gathering that should have followed could only take place in his imagination.

Text: Annemarie Haverkamp Photography: Rolf Hensel

17 minutes, 2200 words and approximately 4500 viewers: "The Sustainable Throne Speech is usually held in the former House of Representatives," he explains.

"However, the Binnenhof is currently being renovated so we thought we would relocate to the Ridderzaal. That would have been pretty special, considering my connection with The Hague. But in the end we ended up in a gloomy room in Nieuwspoorst."

The sustainability professor laughs ironically on the other end of the line. What a way to end a career! The Sustainable Throne Speech also happened to be his farewell speech. Who was there? "I was allowed to bring five guests: my wife, two daughters and son-in-law." The family also sneaked in Jonker's grandchild, aged 3, who sat quietly as their grandpa addressed the audience from his digital throne.

"There were no drinks afterwards or anything." Jonker laughs. Restaurants were still open though, so he took his

family out for dinner at Garoeda, the famous Indonesian restaurant in The Hague. "An interesting ending." Incidentally the restaurant has now gone bankrupt.

But back to serious matters: Jonker's Throne Speech has been downloaded more than one thousand times and the text has elicited thousands of comments. So what's it all about? The message, the message – it's all about the message.

For the past decade, Jonker has focused all his energy on telling the world that we need a fundamentally different approach to sustainability.

It's wonderful, he says, all these government campaigns encouraging people to water their houseplants with rainwater. These kinds of actions are very appealing and "should definitely continue," but what we need is a *total* transition. The economy must be fundamentally reorganised, and for this we need to appeal to the people in charge. It is these people, the professionals, whom Jonker tries to

NAME: JAN JONKER

2020 MOMENT: SUSTAINABLE THRONE SPEECH, 1 SEPTEMBER

LOCATION: NIEUWSPOORT, THE HAGUE



'THE **ECONOMY**  
MUST BE  
FUNDAMENTALLY  
REORGANISED'



## 'I DON'T WANT TO TURN INTO AN ACADEMIC HEINTJE DAVIDS'

engage. "I don't target the masses, but try to go a step further and address professional groups directly." For example: the white goods industry devotes a lot of energy to recycling. "But fridges are still made in the same way as 30 years ago. What we need is fridges that can be assembled and disassembled in eight easy steps."

To achieve this we need to talk not to BCC or Electro World, but to legislators and designers. And while we're on the subject of kitchens: coffee machines are partly made of plastic. If we really want to create a circular economy (where raw materials are reused), we should make it legally compulsory to use mostly recyclable plastics.

### Step by step

In his Sustainable Throne Speech, Jonker formulates a seven-step plan to achieve a circular economy. One of these involves creating a new tax system that taxes not labour, but the use of raw materials, emissions and pollution. Whenever possible, Jonker tries to enter into dialogue with policy makers in The Hague and in Europe. "I felt proud when I recognised a few sentences in the text of the European Green Deal as mine. It's only a few sentences, but they're there."

Sometimes he gets tired of hearing himself repeat the same thing over and over. "But I see it as my duty to keep telling this story. Change happens incrementally, one small step at a time."

Radboud University has frequently sought his advice on matters of sustainability. "Over the past decade the University has really embraced the theme, which is great to see. For years I've argued that every study programme curriculum should include at least one course on sustainability, a suggestion that now appears in the new strategic plan as one of the University's ambitions. I'm really pleased about that."

### Empty schedule

After defending his PhD thesis in Nijmegen in 1987, Jan Jonker spent some time teaching research methodology. In 1993 he heard the word 'sustainability' for the first time and was immediately struck by its significance. He was appointed Associate Professor, and only became Professor in 2008. "I really wanted to be active out in society. And I was able to do just that."

As Professor of Sustainable Entrepreneurship (and later Professor at the Université de Toulouse and the Free University of Brussels-VUB) Jonker has written 35 books and 250 articles. He has appeared on every conceivable podium and is the recipient of the Duurzaam Lintje (Sustainability Ribbon) award and a royal distinction. In 2018 he gave 110 lectures, averaging almost two a week. At the start of 2020 he had sixty lectures planned in his calendar. "They were all cancelled within the space of a week in March." He laughs out loud again: "And there I was, with an empty calendar. It was a sobering experience I can tell you."

At first he found the crisis not only frightening and sad, but hopeful too. Look at how easily we can change our behaviour! Look at how fast the government responds when disaster strikes! And since we're in transition anyway, why not use this opportunity to create and maintain a circular society? But as the year nears its end, Jonker is not so optimistic.

"Ministers Wiebes and Hoekstra could have said: 'We'll help the economy get back on its feet, but for every euro we spend 10 cents will go towards energy transition, CO<sub>2</sub> reduction and biodiversity. We'll use this opportunity to build a new society!' It would have been a fantastic opportunity! But it didn't happen. On the contrary, billions went towards saving the polluting aviation industry. In the spring, some political parties were still saying everything should be greener from now onwards. But no one says things like that anymore now."

Jonker's career as a professor has come to an end. He's 66 and thinks it's a good time to retire. "I don't want to turn into an academic Heintje Davids," he says, referring to the singer who made comeback after comeback. But people still know where to find him, he says. He continues to offer advice from the side-lines, at the moment unfortunately only from his desk in the Achterhoek. "Since March, I've spent a total of 20 minutes at the Faculty, when I went there to empty my office. A rather strange end to an academic career." He roars with laughter again. ★

## THE SEQUEL TO ALICE

I've been fascinated by the story behind Lewis Carroll's books *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and what Alice Found There* since I was in secondary school. When I first came to Nijmegen in 1997 to study and gained access to the internet, I created an entire website about it: [alice-in-wonderland.net](http://alice-in-wonderland.net). **Twenty-three years later I worked at the University, the site still existed, and it was time for**

**the next step: writing my own sequel to the story.**

I'm not only familiar with Carroll's style, but also with his hidden meanings, jokes and references, all of which I included in the sequel.

I started writing in February and completed the story in four months. It took me just an hour to find a publisher, and then I started looking for an illustrator. In another four months, all 42 illustra-

tions had been completed, and the publishing process could begin.

I hope the book will be published this year, but if not, I'll be able to share my big 2020 news with the world in early 2021.

LENNY DE ROOY, ONLINE MARKETING AND CONVERSION EXPERT

## PREGNANT, JUST LIKE MY THESIS SUPERVISOR

Finding out that you're pregnant while still a student is not ideal, especially if you're in the midst of writing your thesis and trying to complete four courses for your Bachelor's programme in Psychology. Having said that, my pregnancy was still incredibly welcome.

So I decided to make the best of it and proceed with my studies as best I could. I was only a few weeks pregnant when live meetings and lectures at the University were replaced by online sessions. The advantage of digital learning is that others are less likely to notice when you suddenly feel nauseous and have to make a run for the toilet. Another advantage is that attending lectures costs less energy without the 90-minute commute to Campus.

After a few weeks, I thought it would be wise to inform my thesis supervisor of the situation. Her response to my e-mail was more positive than I had dared hope. Not only did she think along about possible practical solutions, but she also told me she was pregnant too! How strange and lovely to expect a child at the same time as your thesis supervisor! The other lecturers I informed were equally understanding and helpful, which I really appreciated. The current state of affairs? I've now completed my thesis and my boyfriend and I are expecting our baby in December.

KIM VAN DER KLOET, PSYCHOLOGY STUDENT

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FINDING OUT THAT  
YOU'RE PREGNANT  
WHILE STILL A  
STUDENT IS NOT IDEAL  
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## A WEEK TO REMEMBER

### Monday

He is dead. His wish has been fulfilled. He was only 74 years old, not very old yet, but over the past years, his life had lost all meaning. He didn't want to carry on. He didn't want any more treatments. He collapsed, refused medical care, and stopped eating and drinking. A few days later, as I sat holding his hand, he slipped away.

### Thursday

She is alive. Her wish was not fulfilled. 20 may be very young, but she's repeatedly said that she doesn't want to carry on living. She can't do it anymore. She doesn't want any more therapy. She kneels, puts her head down on the rails, and waits. A few minutes later I snatch her from the track and bring her back to life.

### Sunday

I experience. My wish is being fulfilled. 54 may be over the hill, but I've never been so satisfied with my life. Never have I felt so happy. This is a feeling I want to cherish. I go for a walk, look out over the sea and experience pure joy. A moment later my children run ahead of me, sweeping me along in their love of life.

PETRA VAN WERSCH, STRATEGIC RELATIONS ADVISOR



NAME: MIKE FOPPEN

2020 MOMENT: ROAD RECORD, 19 JULY

LOCATION: GOFFERTPARK

# BIZARRE RACE IN A DESERTED GOFFERTPARK

Running records are usually broken under the gaze of crowds of cheering spectators. The Nijmegen student Mike Foppen had his moment of glory this summer in a deserted Goffertpark. The race was kept secret to discourage spectators.

Text: Vince Decates Photography: Bert Beelen



Mike Foppen

**N**ot many runners can boast of holding a Dutch title. Fewer still boast two. And only one of them shares one of his two records to the hundredth of a second with one of his great role models. Mike Foppen, Master's student of Work, Organisation and Health at Radboud University, happens to be that person.

Last July in the Nijmegen Goffertpark, he smashed the Dutch 5 km road record that had stood for 23 years. With a time of 13 minutes and 31 seconds, Foppen was a whole 15 seconds faster than Kamiel Maase, one of the most successful Dutch runners of all time, who covered the same distance in 13:46 in 1997.

Less than a month later, Foppen broke another Dutch record. In the Monaco Diamond League, an international race known as the runners' Champions League, Foppen achieved a record time of 13:13:06 for 5000 metres on a track. The exact Dutch record, to the hundredth of a second, held since 2002 by none other than Kamiel Maase.

"It was really crazy," Foppen remembers with a grin. "You expect one of the two to be one hundredth of a second slower, but no. We actually share the record now. An improvement and a match of Kamiel's records, that's something to be really proud of. He's such a big name in the Dutch running world."

Twenty-three-year-old Foppen, who alongside his running career also studies part-time, has really broken through into the major league this past year. Not only did he run a great race at the Diamond League and break two Dutch records, he also won two medals in the Dutch Championships in September: Gold in the 5000 metres and bronze in the 1500 metres.

## On his bike

"I was in good shape this year," concludes Foppen modestly. "I was lucky to be able to train on the streets, which meant I could keep running even during the lockdown in spring. During the training sessions, I almost broke the Dutch record a few times. I had to wait for an official race to show the outside world what I was capable of."



That moment came on 19 July, when he broke the 5 km record in a convincing manner. “This was also the most bizarre race I’ve ever run.” The race, which took place in the Gofferpark, was kept secret by the organisation, to avoid large groups of spectators.

That Sunday morning there was only a handful of Dutch and international top runners doing warm-up exercises in a watery sun in a deserted Goffertpark. “It was so strange! I live just around the corner. My alarm went off at 7 a.m., I grabbed a bite to eat and got on my bike. I put my bike up against a tree and ran some laps to warm up. This isn’t how I usually prepare for a race.”

To make it even more absurd: the course wasn’t marked out and the runners didn’t wear race numbers. Apart from the start and finish lines, there was nothing to suggest that this was an international running race. “So we ran the risk of people walking across the track. Someone actually had to cycle in front of us to direct people away from the course. Luckily it was early, so the park was pretty empty, except for some people walking their dog. They didn’t know what had hit them. They stared at us in amazement as we ran past them at full speed.”

## ‘THEY STARED AT US IN AMAZEMENT AS WE RAN PAST THEM AT FULL SPEED’

### Olympics

After such a perfect year, Foppen hopes to maintain his great form in 2021. “Despite my personal growth and racing results I have yet to qualify for the Olympics because the World Athletics Association put the qualification on hold due to the pandemic. It’s a bit of a blemish on my 2020; I know I would have made it. But if I manage to keep in shape, I’ll qualify in the next round.”

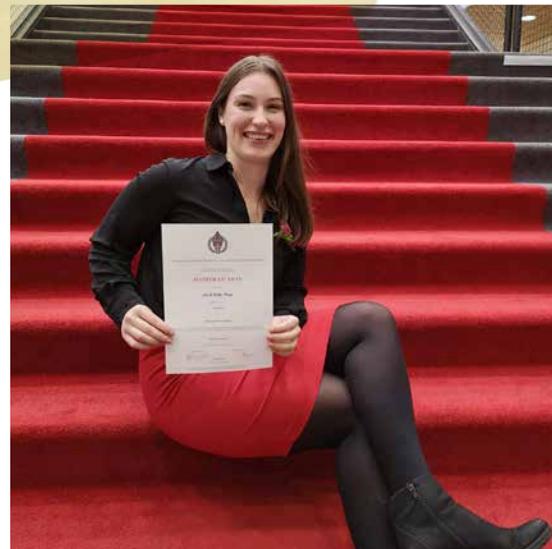
“And my expectations for the Olympics? I don’t want to presume too much. If I qualify and am allowed to take part, that would be a great achievement in itself. I need to focus on qualifying first.” ★

# THEIR BIG DAY

- but not how they had imagined it

A student scrapbook is not complete without the classical photo-with-diploma. Even in the strange year 2020 most students received their university diploma in person – be it at the University or elsewhere. As for the party, that may come later, perhaps.

Text: Mirte van Rooijen



**BREGJE VAN DE WEIJER (24)**  
**MASTER'S IN COMMUNICATION  
AND INFLUENCING**

Pick up your diploma at the helpdesk or have a proper ceremony? Bregje van de Weijer wasn't sure what to do. She completed her thesis in May, but it took several months before her Master's diploma was ready to be picked up. In the meantime she'd found a job in Amsterdam. And with pandemic measures being tightened, attending the ceremony was fast becoming less attractive. "At first we weren't allowed to invite any guests; some time later you couldn't even have a cup of coffee afterwards." But she still decided to go for a ceremony: "I had to travel to the University anyway to pick up my diploma. So I figured a small ceremony was better than nothing." The big day finally dawned, in October. "The ceremony was exactly as I had expected: not very personal. But the lecturers did their best." Her friends and family followed the proceedings via a livestream. They were waiting for her outside with a glass of prosecco. "We also had time for the standard photo on the red and black staircase of the Aula, because let's face it, you haven't really graduated until you've got this photo."

**SANDER VAN DER GOES (22)**  
**BACHELOR'S IN SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY  
& POLITICAL SCIENCE**

"A diploma award ceremony is an opportunity to celebrate the progress you've made in your life. In four years' time you make the best friends ever and you learn so much, so it's really important to make time for closure," says Sander van der Goes. 25 September was his big day. It wasn't the day he'd dreamed of though: "My supervisor wasn't even allowed to shake my hand."

Van der Goes understands that the ceremony had to be small, but he's upset that no guests were allowed. "My parents were watching it from their car in the parking garage, my girlfriend from her home."

Luckily he'll get a second chance in a few years' time. "I've decided to take a gap year to join the Board of DWARS, the youth section of GroenLinks. After that I plan to enrol in the Master's programme in Social Geography. Hopefully, I'll be able to graduate with a proper ceremony second time round."



**TED VAN AANHOLT (24)**  
**MASTER'S IN PHILOSOPHY & SCIENCE**

"During the ceremony I handed my camera to my father," says Ted van Anholt. "But I forgot to explain to him how it works so the photographs are not as great as I'd hoped." Luckily, the location was beautiful. Van Anholt's diploma award ceremony took place at the Stadsschouwburg. "It was supposed to be at the chapel of the Berchmanianum, but we weren't allowed to have any guests there. After an angry e-mail exchange, we were allowed to use the Schouwburg and invite guests." Van Anholt actually hoped to have his thesis ready in February, but in the end it took until June. In the meantime he learnt how to work productively from home and contracted glandular fever. Still, there was a silver lining: he was interviewed by *Trouw* about his thesis topic, the almost forgotten 'diabolical doctor' Blasius van Parma (1350-1416). "The article remained on the shelf for months because the newspaper had no room for it. In June, just as I completed my thesis, they decided to publish it after all."



**IRIS VAN DEN BROEK (26)**  
**MASTER'S IN COMMERCIAL  
COMMUNICATION**

Iris van den Broek's diploma award ceremony didn't take place in the Aula or at the Berchmanianum, but in the Van der Valk Hotel in Lent. "We rented a small space, and one of our lecturers even used some of their research money so we could have a livestream," says Van den Broek. She is thinking of maybe organising a party later on, but for now she's got her hands full with her new job as online marketer for an advertising agency.





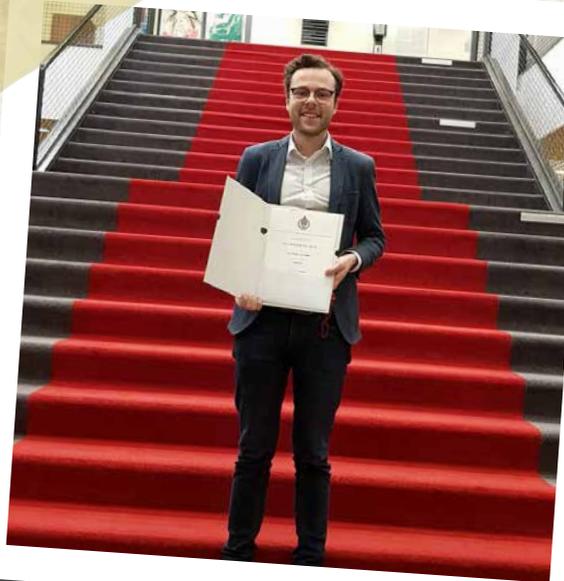
### **JORDY BROEKMEULEN (27)** **MASTER'S IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

For his thesis Jordy Broekmeulen had to travel to the European Parliament in Brussels. He was there in March, only a week before lockdown. "I managed to interview some people in a café." After that all interviews had to take place online, which was very efficient of course, but all this working from home also had its disadvantages: "Writing a thesis is lonely work. And since everyone else was also working from home, I did miss the opportunity to brainstorm with other people now and then." Broekmeulen was therefore particularly pleased that his diploma award ceremony in October could go ahead at the chapel of the Berchmanianum. "It was really nice to see my classmates again." His family attended online. "The restaurants were still open, so we went out to celebrate afterwards." These days Broekmeulen has a job on the side and devotes much of his time to job applications. "Unfortunately, all interviews are conducted via Zoom. Good thing I got to practice it during my graduation."

### **STIJN VAN NULAND (23)** **BACHELOR'S IN HISTORY**

Every cloud has a silver lining. This is certainly true as far as Stijn van Nuland is concerned. In November he was awarded his Bachelor's diploma. Family and friends attended the ceremony via a livestream. "As a result, my grand-parents could also attend. I don't think it would have happened if they'd had to come all the way to Nijmegen."

In the meantime Van Nuland started on a Master's programme in Journalism at the University of Groningen. "The last months of my Bachelor's I was lucky not to have to follow any lectures anymore. I could plan my own time and focus on my thesis." As a historian, he found it highly inconvenient that all the archives were locked. "I needed recordings from an old 3FM radio programme which I would normally have looked for in Hilversum. In the end, thanks to some hobbyists I was able to get much more material than I would have been able to find in the archives." Months later Van Nuland could graduate after all and he even had his photo taken on the red and black staircase of the Aula.



## DRIFTING ICE IN SAINT PETERSBURG

In 2020 I saw drift ice for the first time, and it was a very emotional experience. Together with Professor of Political Philosophy Evert van der Zweerde and six students of the Radboud Honours Academy, I spent the month of January in Saint Petersburg, the former capital of the Russian Tsardom and one of the world's most beautiful cities. Historians like me sometimes experience what Johan Huizinga called a 'historical sensation': an experience of palpable direct contact with history. Saint Petersburg is replete with places that evoke such sensations.

We were there around 27 January, the day on which the formerly named Leningrad commemorates its liberation from a nearly 900-day siege in 1944. We visited museums, attended commemorative events and a concert, visited schools, sang along to Russian songs and talked with survivors of the blockade, the siege that cost an estimated 1.5 to 2 million lives. It was only a few degrees below zero, much too warm for the time of year. The winter of 2019-2020 turned out to be the warmest winter in Russian history, yet another symptom of

advancing climate change. Ice in Russia usually only drifts in spring, but it was already happening in January, on the Neva, the broad river that splits Saint Petersburg in two. With tears in my eyes (from the cold) I watched this natural phenomenon, so utterly mysterious to humanities experts like myself, and yet linked to so many historical events. **I witnessed a frozen movement, as if time both stood still and moved.** I will remember 2020 as the year of drifting ice.

LENNERT SAVENIJE, HISTORIAN

## I WAS CAPTAIN KIRK

Sometimes my desk looks like something straight out of *Star Trek*. I have a huge monitor for all the Zoom faces, a smaller one for documents, and a telephone for colleagues who want to chat with me during meetings. I'm in command of three dashboards, with the Erasmus Building as the Enterprise and me as Captain Kirk in the German-synchronised version, the one I know best. We're on our way to *ein Planet genannt Erde* in the hope that there is still life there.

"So eine Unverschämtheit,"

I hear myself exclaim while on mute when another member of the crew fails to understand what a brave decision the episode's heroine is about to take.

I have no choice but to sacrifice myself for humanity and drift to the other end of the Milky Way in a lonely capsule ...

"Don't forget to mention the student mentors!" grumbles one of my screens, and I'm abruptly brought back to reality. "The student mentors!" I say. "They are crucial for bonding in the first year!" Just in time I materialise back into the meeting.

Phew. Sometimes it's good to have Scotty to beam you up.

I hope you also get a chance to visit higher realms from time to time. It refreshes the mind and is completely harmless. *Glaub ich.*

MARGOT VAN MULKEN, DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF ARTS

## THE HOLY GRAIL: STERRENBOSCH

Since early 2020 I've been responding to room vacancies at the SSH& Sterrenbosch Complex. What I was hoping for was one of those amazing studios in 'Starwood'. With the upcoming lottery system of the student housing association, my chances would diminish greatly and I felt time was running out. I sometimes ended up second, third, fourth, or eighth on the list, but never first. Every week I compared the available rooms in great detail and always made sure I responded on time. I spent Tuesday afternoons obsessively refreshing the results page. The last week before the launch of the lottery system dawned and I gathered my courage for yet another attempt. And then ... ping! I got an e-mail saying 'Congratulations on your new room!' Huh? Perplexed I gave my fans an update and called SSH&. And there I got confirmation: the e-mail was real, enjoy your new room! Yes! What an emotional roller coaster, but whoa! Maybe the people who ended up first and second for this studio were also first on the list for another room, which is how I, being number three on the list, got it. It's been a few months now, but I'm still really enjoying my new dream home.

MARINA BOOL, MEDICAL BIOLOGY STUDENT



# FROM AN OBSCURE JAIL IN DAMASCUS ...

Omar Najem couldn't believe his luck when he opened his own dental practice in Nijmegen earlier this year. After years of uncertainty, the Syrian refugee dentist can finally do what he loves best: help other people.

**Text:** Vince Decates **Photography:** Getty Images, Bert Beelen



**NAME: OMAR NAJEM**

**2020 MOMENT: TAKING OVER A DENTAL PRACTICE, 1 APRIL**

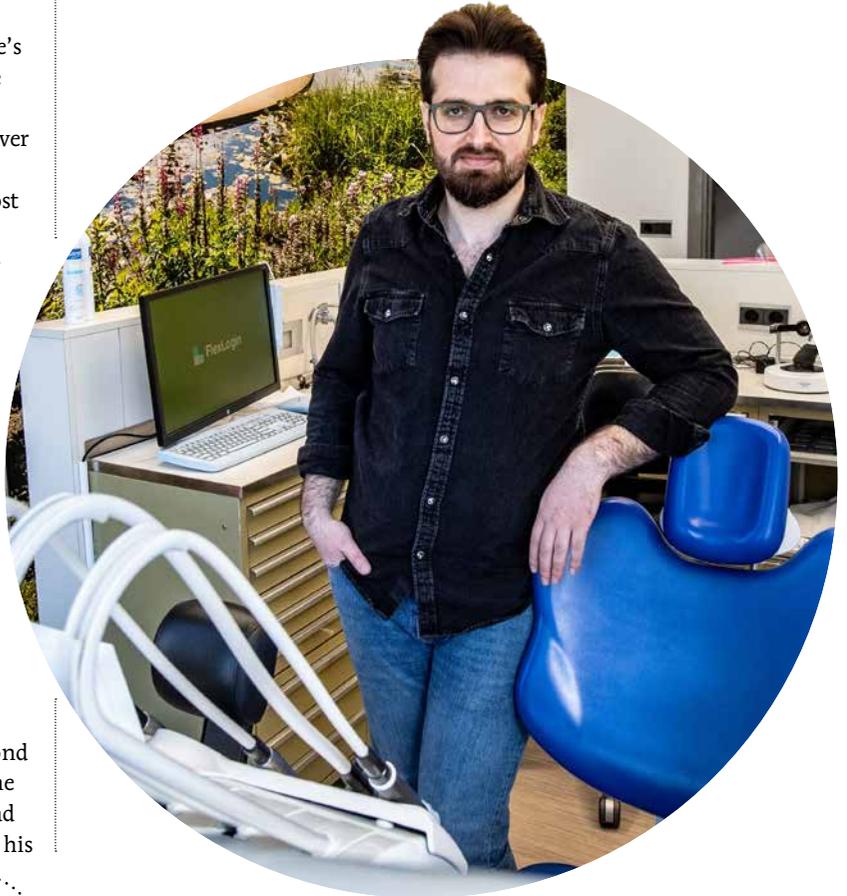
**LOCATION: PRINS HENDRIKSTRAAT, NIJMEGEN**

**E**nthusiastically Omar Najem (36) leads us through his dental practice on the Prins Hendrikstraat, in Nijmegen-Oost. “This is the waiting room, that’s the surgery, and here’s the X-ray room.” He’s delighted with everything in the elegant building, including the staff room. The practice has been Najem’s since 1 April. He took over from the late dentist Joost van Vlijmen. “It was a real honour,” says Najem. “And also a bit scary because Joost wasn’t just any dentist.” Radboud University alumnus Van Vlijmen ran the practice for 40 years. In the summer of 2019 he still appeared in alumnus magazine *Radboud Magazine* and talked about his experiences on the Mongolian steppe, where he went every year to help nomad families with their dental problems. At the end of that year, he died suddenly, aged 65.

#### **Bombing**

Helping other people, that’s what it was all about for Van Vlijmen. And for Najem. It’s what he was doing in his home country before the war, and after the uncertainty of the past years living as a refugee, he’s keen to continue doing this in the Netherlands. Following a few good talks with Van Vlijmen’s heirs, he got the green light and Practice Najem became a fact.

For the Syrian, this is a dream come true. The second time that this dream has come true, in fact. Before the war broke out in his homeland in 2012, he already had his own practice in a suburb of Damascus. Alongside his



Omar Najem

# TO YOUR OWN DENTAL PRACTICE IN NIJMEGEN-OOST

Practice at the  
Prins Hendrikstraat

practice, he also worked as an oral surgeon in the city hospital. But he lost all of this at the end of the first year of the war.

“My home and practice were destroyed in a bombing raid,” explains Najem. “My family fled, some to Yemen, others to Turkey. I didn’t want to leave, I wanted to stay and help people.”

Despite Najem’s commitment and perseverance, his situation grew increasingly hopeless. He hit rock bottom when the police arrested him out of the blue on the street in the spring of 2013. “I was suspected of helping an enemy of the state, they said. It turned out to be a 14-year-old boy whose broken jaw I had operated on a few days earlier.” He pauses and sighs. “A 14-year-old boy, an enemy of the state...”

### Fake passport

And so the dentist ended up in an obscure jail in Damascus, where he remained for months without any form of trial. “I can assure you the prisons there are very different from those in the Netherlands. My cell was filthy and had no windows. The only thing I could hear where bombs exploding and gun fighting. I couldn’t sleep at all.”

After his family paid a handsome ransom Najem was finally released. He decided to flee to a safer place. He had no plans and no documents. “I simply had to get as far away from the war as possible. But I couldn’t go anywhere: my passport had been taken off me in jail. I decided to go north and cross the Turkish border. To get there I had to swim across a river in the middle of the night.”

In Turkey Najem contacted his relatives who had fled there earlier and through them arranged to get the documents he needed to fly to the Netherlands. Not official documents, mind you: Najem had to pay €8000 for a fake passport. “You hear a lot of nasty stories about human traffickers extorting money from refugees and abandoning them to their fate. But to be honest I wasn’t afraid. I was more afraid of the war.”

Najem ended up in an asylum centre in Drachten, where he decided to make a new start. “I discovered that I was suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSS) because of my time in prison. I kept hearing the sounds of the war. But I wanted to make a fresh start. I decided I wanted to start helping people again here in the Netherlands.”

Najem got better, in part thanks to sessions with a psychologist. He could once again focus on the future. “I read that the dentistry programme in Nijmegen had a good reputation, so I came here. I followed a Dutch language course at Radboud in’to Languages. I couldn’t find



## 'I WAS SUSPECTED OF HELPING AN ENEMY OF THE STATE'

work at first, so I worked on volunteer projects, to get to know the city and learn the language.”

“What I really wanted was to work as an oral surgeon, but my Syrian diploma wasn’t valid here. Through an institute in Amsterdam, I obtained the diplomas needed to register as a dentist. Soon afterwards I started working in dental practices in Culemborg and Tiel. Unfortunately I couldn’t become an oral surgeon: that would have required five years of medical study.”

Last April, he finally got his own practice. “I had to get used to it. Here in the Netherlands there are lots of rules, and everything has to be written down and recorded.” He laughs. “In Syria, you just start drilling straight away.”

“People here also have more medical knowledge. They respond critically to what I tell them, or they ask for more details about a suggested procedure. Don’t get me wrong: this is a good thing! It can only benefit quality of care.”

For Najem, 2020 was a dream year. With thanks to Van Vlijmen, who helped his dream come true even from beyond the grave. ★

### THE BABY AND THE BRAINCHILD

We had imagined our daughter's party slightly differently. On 13 March, her second birthday, we prepared for the visitors who would come the next day. We baked a huge cake. As we went to bed, Elin said: "Tomorrow grand-pa grand-ma." Little did we know that they would be knocking on our door a few hours later. Later that night my wife's waters broke and at 7 a.m. Elin got a belated birthday gift: her little sister Ninthe. Ask me about 2020 and my first thought is her baby scent. The harsh poetry critic in my head retorts that it's a terrible cliché, but as a father I couldn't care less about such things.

2020 was also the birth year of a brainchild of mine that has withstood the test of poetical criticism: together with Flemish poet Charlotte Van den Broeck, I co-authored *Woorden temmen: van kop tot teen (Taming Words: From Head to Toe)* in which we comment in an accessible way on 30 poems, each linked to a body part, and challenge the reader to enter into creative dialogue with the poems. It's the best book I've written so far. Recently I even received an e-mail from a boy (16) who was given the book by his Dutch teacher and became so enamoured of poetry he now wants to devote his final paper to one of 'our' poets. Ultimately, this is what I do it for: as a literary scholar I try to appeal not only to my peers, but also to all the readers who don't know they're readers yet. Readers like our Ninthe (I hope) – she's already literally devouring our book!

JEROEN DERA, LECTURER IN DUTCH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

### MOMENT OF HAPPINESS ON THE SHORES OF THE RHINE

In late July I was visiting Basel, where I grew up, when my school friend John invited me to join his introduction workshop in solfeggio, composing and improvisation. I strolled across the bridge over the Rhine and entered a large dark room, filled with children with instruments, shy teenagers and older gentlemen.

My friend projected a drawing by Russian architect Viktor Hartmann, *The Great Gate of Kiev*. What do you see? He asked us. Is it a church? A triumphal arch? One boy thought it looked like a castle. The Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky, who responded to Hartmann's artworks in a suite entitled *Pictures at an exhibition*, recognised both nationalistic and church elements in this drawing of a monument, John explained. In the city gate piece you can hear marching music, but also ringing bells and church scales. Mussorgsky's spirited compositions pleased everyone. But was what we just heard really Mussorgsky? No, it turned out to be Maurice Ravel! Mussorgsky wrote his suite for the piano. Should a Frenchman be allowed to orchestrate such an essentially Russian piece? Of course not, said many Russians. What did we think? John lets us hear rivalling orchestrations by various Russians.

Who had understood Mussorgsky best? Young and old voted for Ravel. Finally, John projected onto the screen the charming mobile collages of Wassily Kandinsky, who produced them in 1928 for a performance of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an exhibition* at the Bauhaus.

As I listened, I slipped into a forgotten memory: John and I as schoolboys on the shores of the Rhine, talking about a theatre play I wanted to write about a pillar saint slowly going mad, with John's music for the ever louder screams of the saint and the choir of mocking bystanders. We never did

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AS I LISTENED,  
I SLIPPED INTO  
A FORGOTTEN  
MEMORY  
-----

write that play. But a blissful feeling stole over me, that perhaps we may do so yet, once we are both freed of our daily duties, as two giggling old men on the shores of the Rhine.

CHRISTOPH LÜTHY, DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES



# THE SPLIT BETWEEN CHURCH AND UNIVERSITY

A RECONSTRUCTION

Bishops on the balcony of  
the main building of the  
university situated at  
the Keizer Karelplein when  
it opened in 1923



**NAME: BISHOPS' CONFERENCE**  
**2020-MOMENT: STRIPPING OF**  
**CATHOLIC TITLE**  
**LOCATION: UTRECHT**



Since 16 November 2020 Radboud University can no longer call itself 'Catholic'. After 97 years the Bishops' Conference of the Netherlands rescinded the Catholic designation of Radboud University and Radboud university medical center. The reason is a long-drawn-out conflict about the Catholicism of members of the SKU (Stichting Katholieke Universiteit) Board. How could things get so far? A reconstruction.

**Text:** Ken Lambeets **Images:** Catholic Documentation Centre, Nijmegen

## BACKGROUND

**R**ome, 2 April 2005. In his private apartment on St Peter's Square Pope John Paul II draws his last breath. This marks the end of a pontificate that lasted more than a quarter of a century. Hundreds of thousands of believers make their way to Rome to attend the popular pope's funeral. After a one-and-a-half-day conclave, Joseph Ratzinger is chosen as his successor. He takes the name of Benedict XVI.

Closer to home, important developments are also afoot in the Catholic world. With increasingly fewer people interested in training to become pastoral workers, teachers of religion or priests, the Dutch bishops wish to merge the three Catholic theological faculties (Tilburg, Utrecht and Nijmegen) into one.

### No ecclesiastical degrees

In the autumn of 2005 Radboud University steps out of the negotiations. "The bishops wanted to locate the theological faculty in Utrecht – far too far from the Nijmegen campus," says Jef Van de Riet, who at the time had just left Tilburg University to become Secretary of the Executive Board of Radboud University. One of his tasks was to promote contact with the Catholic Church.

The bishops are not pleased with Nijmegen's withdrawal. In December 2006 Radboud University administrators receive a letter from the Vatican informing them that until further notice the theological faculty is no longer allowed to issue ecclesiastical degrees. As of 2007, anyone who wishes to occupy an official position within the Roman Catholic Church must obtain a degree from the Faculty of Catholic Theology in Utrecht or Tilburg. The Faculty's first Grand Chancellor is Archbishop Wim Eijk who, as we will see, plays an important role in this story.

According to Van de Riet, the failed merger considerably cooled the relationship between the Executive Board and the Dutch bishops. "It was an important step in sowing the seeds of the later conflict between the Bishops' Conference and the SKU (Stichting Katholieke Universiteit) administrators."

### Working visit

The ties between the University, Radboud university medical center and the bishops do not deteriorate dramatically in the years following the failed merger. When Cardinal Adrianus Simonis retires in 2007, Ad van Luyn succeeds

him as President of the Bishops' Conference of the Netherlands. As a Radboud University alumnus, Van Luyn is committed to the tradition of an annual working visit of the Bishops' Conference to Nijmegen. On these occasions the clergymen are given a tour of the Campus, followed by a joint lunch. On the agenda are talks with the SKU Board, the Executive Board and the Executive Board of Radboud university medical center concerning the University's identity, and sometimes a visit to Radboud university medical center.

These visits come to an abrupt end when Wim Eijk is appointed Archbishop of Utrecht in 2008 and goes on to act as President of the Bishops' Conference from 2011 to 2016. "From that time onwards appointments were often cancelled or postponed," says Van de Riet.

Another contact point with the bishops also disappears shortly afterwards. In his role as Bishop of 's-Hertogenbosch and local bishop, Antoon Hurkmans plays an important role in acting as a bridge between the Bishops' Conference and Radboud University. When he is forced to step down due to fatigue and other physical symptoms, he asks priest and Professor Antoine Bodar to take over and maintain contacts with the higher education institutions and student chaplaincy. "Bodar took his duties in this respect seriously, but he was

## WHAT NEXT?

What will happen to the identity of Radboud University now that it has lost its 'Catholic' designation? Does this mean the end of the prayer at academic ceremonies? Will the cross disappear from the University's logo? Concerning these and other questions, the Executive Board would like to have some input from the rest of the Campus. "This process will take until 2023," said Wilma de Koning on 16 November during an online meeting of Radboud Reflects. This time is needed, says the Vice President, to create the space for an extensive campus-wide dialogue, as was done in the past regarding the University's new strategy and the leadership memorandum. This means the University will be able to present its new identity on the occasion of its centenary.

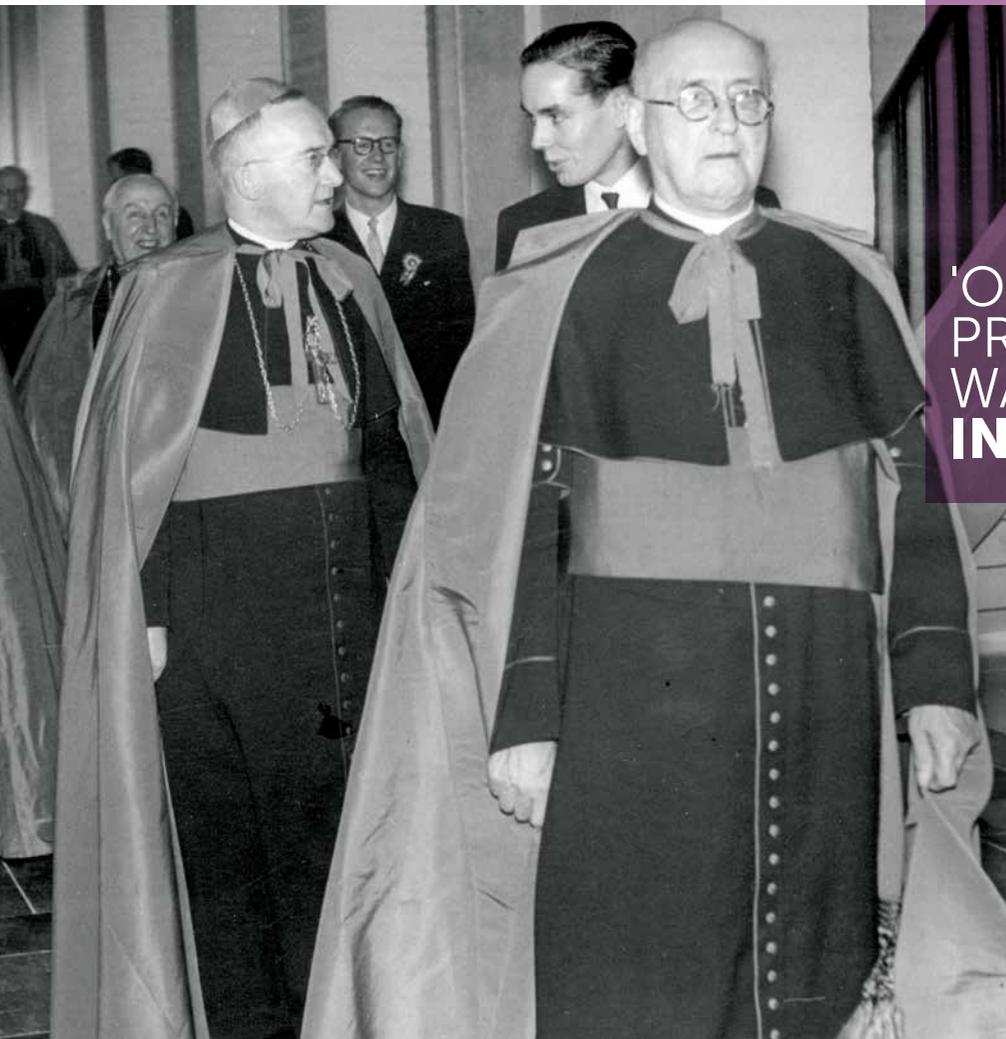


often abroad and wasn't a member of the Bishops' Conference," says Van de Riet. "As a result, many places where the bishops and the University could meet informally disappeared. The situation improved with the appointment of Gerard de Korte, but in hindsight this came too late."

### Not married in church

Let's go back for a moment to Pope John Paul II. On 15 August 1990 he had issued the *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, an apostolic constitution (legislative document) with guidelines concerning the criteria a Catholic university had to meet according to the Vatican. According to this document, research at a Catholic university should include a theological perspective and students should be trained to become good Christians.

In 2009, nearly 20 years after the publication of this apostolic constitution, the Bishops' Conference articulates in a report what this meant for a Catholic university in the Netherlands. And it meant a lot. For example, the majority of the university's Executive Board must consist of Roman Catholics who play an active role in the Church community and are committed to embodying the practical implications of their university's Catholic identity. A Catholic university must also endeavour to



## 'OUR PROBLEM WAS NOT IN ROME'

Opening Preclinic  
in 1955

appoint Roman Catholics to the majority of vacancies for academic and supporting staff.

Five years later, the new policy elaborated by the Dutch bishops forms an obstacle for Radboud University: on 1 November 2014, Tini Hooymans' second term as member of the SKU Board responsible for Education & Research comes to an end. To ensure a smooth succession, the SKU Board already have a successor lined up: Geert ten Dam, then President of the University of Amsterdam. Some eyebrows are raised among SKU Board members when the bishops request more information about the candidate, including her religious denomination, marital status and baptism certificate. A few weeks later the bishops reject the candidate's nomination. 'The candidate has an impressive CV,' they say in their letter. 'However, upon inquiry it has come to the bishops' attention that she was not married in church. It goes without saying that this is a pre-condition for the bishops to accept such an appointment.'

The bishops' rejection causes indignation among SKU Board members. In June 2015 an interview follows between the SKU and the Bishops' Conference and a month later between Geert ten Dam and Jos Punt, Bishop of Haarlem-Amsterdam. It is a constructive talk, but the bishops stand by their position.

"Her remarkable qualities and expertise are clearly beyond doubt as far as the bishops are concerned," says the letter that follows. "However, the interview with the local bishop revealed that the bishops' objection to her appointment as member of your board, namely the fact that Ms Ten Dam was not married in church, can unfortunately not be remedied."

### Appointed as advisor

The SKU Board decides to try a different approach. On 30 August 2016 they put forward former Rector of the University of Amsterdam Dymph van den Boom for the vacancy. But the bishops once again refuse to appoint the candidate, this time because 'she does not identify as religious' and 'would not make a strong contribution as far as Catholicism is concerned'.

In the following months a number of dialogues take place between the two parties, but their positions remain widely divergent. The SKU proposes in future appointing only one of its board members to promote ecclesiastical interests. This person alone would bear the burden of the strict ecclesiastical criteria set by the Bishops' Conference. The bishops reject this proposal outright and put forward their own list of candidate board members, all of whom are rejected by the SKU Board on the

grounds that their own candidates are more suitable. Since the bishops continue to refuse to appoint Dymph van den Boom, the SKU Board appoints her as advisor for Education & Research. Van den Boom is not an official member of the SKU Board, but she has the same duties as regular board members.

### Interview in Rome

With the dialogue with the Dutch bishops running into the same deadlock time and again, in the summer of 2017 an SKU delegation visits Rome to submit the case to the Congregation for Catholic Education, the Vatican's Ministry of Education. In the Palazzo della Congregazione, which borders on St Peter's Square, President Loek Hermans, Secretary Berthe Maat, Vice President of the Executive Board Wilma de Koning and Jef van de Riet are warmly welcomed by Cardinal Giuseppe Versaldi and Father Friedrich Bechina. "Rome was of the opinion that Radboud University formed an important link in the global network of Catholic universities," says Van de Riet.

During the two-hour interview, the Nijmegen delegation is given ample opportunity to share their side of the story. "We explained that it was important to us that our Executive Board members were first and foremost good administrators," says Wilma de Koning. "And

## BACKGROUND

that it was nearly impossible to find such candidates who also happened to be good Catholics in line with the criteria of the Bishops' Conference."

The Cardinal and Father listen carefully and seem to show understanding for the university administrators' position. They say it is quite common for such problems to arise within an ecclesiastical province and offer an example from South America. "Our problem was not in Rome; we really felt heard there," says De Koning.

### Transgender centre

Following the SKU's visit and an interview with the bishops, the Congregation puts forward a proposal for mediation. To ease the conflict, a temporary Committee of Good Offices was appointed. This Committee proposed a modified appointment procedure, in which potential candidates were jointly discussed by representatives of the Bishops' Conference and SKU representatives. Both parties accepted the proposal. The Committee consisted of two church officials representing the bishops, and two members of the SKU Board.

In the meantime, another development in Nijmegen was causing the bishops displeasure: the proposed opening of a transgender centre at Radboud university medical center. When the SKU announced the hospital's intention to open this centre, the bishops replied that such a step was "entirely unnecessary". A striking detail: within the Dutch Bishops' Conference, it is Cardinal Eijk who is responsible for medical and ethical questions.

In the years that follow all attempts to find a solution for SKU board vacancies via mediation fail. On 17 June 2019, the SKU Board put forward for the last time four candidates, including current President Wim van der Meeren, only to be turned down once again.

### Press release

By the spring of 2020, this rejection of candidate members of the Board has been going on for six years. It's a total impasse. The SKU Board only has six members, one too few according to its own statutes. The term of three members, including President Loek Hermans, must be prolonged for lack of a successor. The SKU Board is tired of the situation, and in the spring of 2020 they take the case to the Enterprise Chamber, a court that rules over Dutch corporate disputes.

All the members of the SKU Board attend the

# There was always tension between the bishops and the University

student  
in 1980



occupied theology  
building in 1980



The tension between the bishops and the University has been around for a very long time, says University Historian Jan Brabers. In a way since the Catholic University Nijmegen was first founded in 1923. "In the early 20th century some groups wanted to form a Catholic university. The bishops took the initiative by creating the St Radboud Foundation in 1905. As with many Catholic organisations, their motives were twofold: they also wanted to keep control of the University."

At the time the bishops themselves were not university graduates – they had only attended a seminary. "Science was something liberal, civil and hostile: the opposite of Catholicism," says Brabers.

This tension broke to the surface as soon as the University was founded in 1923. Jos Schrijnen, priest and formerly Professor in Utrecht, was appointed as the first Rector Magnificus. As a classicist who attached considerable importance to academic freedom, Schrijnen also wanted to appoint non-Catholic professors, for example for subjects like linguistics. He wanted to call the University the Keizer Kareluniversiteit (Charlemagne University), an internationally recognisable name linked to Nijmegen. But the bishops wouldn't allow it. Brabers: "Schrijnen thought the name 'Catholic University' was too oppressive."

In the period after the University's foundation, the bishops were responsible for the day-to-day management of the University, including the appointment of professors. Too ambitious professors were discouraged, including Willem Pompe, who was appointed Professor of Criminal Law in 1923 and had hopes of conducting research on criminal psychiatry and criminology. "The bishops found all this Freudian stuff too scary and refused to fund it. After five years, Pompe left for Utrecht, where he went on to become very famous for his ideas."

At the University, there was a feeling right from the start that it was important to keep the bishops at a distance. Brabers: "Professor of Literature Gerard Brom said once: 'We can't live without them, but we can't live with them', a view shared by many profes-

sors. The professors tried to keep the bishops out of the picture as much as possible. It was a difficult relationship, not in the least because the professors were convicted Catholics themselves."

Shortly after the Second World War the University went through a substantial growth spurt with the creation of two new faculties: Medicine and Physics. Around this time the bishops relinquished the day-to-day management of the University. "They saw that the University was perfectly capable of taking care of itself," says Brabers. "Priest and Professor Reinier Post was appointed first President of the Executive Board. He guided the University through this period of expansion in the 1950s."

'AT THE HOSPITAL TOO, WHEN ETHICAL ISSUES AROSE, PEOPLE LOOKED TO THE BISHOPS'



PHOTO: JAN VAN TEEFFELIEN

A change in the Higher Education Act in 1961 led to the creation of the Stichting Katholieke Universiteit (SKU), which took over the bishops' tasks regarding the University and hospital. The bishops officially still had the authority to oversee the appointment of professors, but they no longer did so in practice.

"The bishops fully embraced this transition. They had for a long time been aware of the fact that the University was growing and could manage perfectly well without them. The then Archbishop, Cardinal Bernard Alfrink, was a progressive open Catholic who had been Professor in Nijmegen himself. It was all very different from today's situation." According to Brabers, the bishops retained their moral authority for a long time. "At the hospital too, when ethical issues arose, people looked to the bishops."

De facto, the bishops had resigned from managing Catholic universities. In Nijmegen and Tilburg they retained the right to appoint members of the Supervisory Board, a task performed by the Minister of Education at other Dutch universities. This remained the case until July 2020, when the Bishops' Conference lost a court case against the SKU in the Enterprise Chamber and rescinded the University's Catholic designation, thus placing itself entirely outside the University and Radboud university medical center.

## BACKGROUND

court proceedings, while the bishops are represented by their lawyer and a church official. Once again, it becomes clear that the positions of the two parties are irreconcilable. The bishops' intractable stance causes so much irritation among SKU Board members that President Loek Hermans hints that Radboud University might consider becoming a National University.

On 21 July the Enterprise Chamber reaches its decision: the SKU is allowed, temporarily, to appoint its own members, without the bishops' approval. With this ruling, the Catholic Church loses much of its hold on the University. Shortly afterwards the SKU appoints four members who have been waiting in the side lines for a long time, including Dymph van den Boom and Wim van der Meeren. In the same week a decree from the Bishops' Conference lands in the SKU mailbox on the Geert Groteplein, announcing that the bishops are

rescinding the Catholic designation of the SKU.

Wilma de Koning still doesn't understand it. "There is something about this decision that doesn't make sense to me," she says. "At other Catholic institutions in the Netherlands it is enough if the bishops appoint one supervisor, but not in Nijmegen."

"Cardinal Eijk has very strict views on the Catholic faith and how it should be practiced. He's been heard saying that a single Catholic university in the Netherlands is enough. And that's what we have now." \*

'CARDINAL  
EIJK HAS **VERY**  
**STRICT VIEWS**  
ON THE  
CATHOLIC  
FAITH'

Aula at the Bijleveldsingel  
in 1980

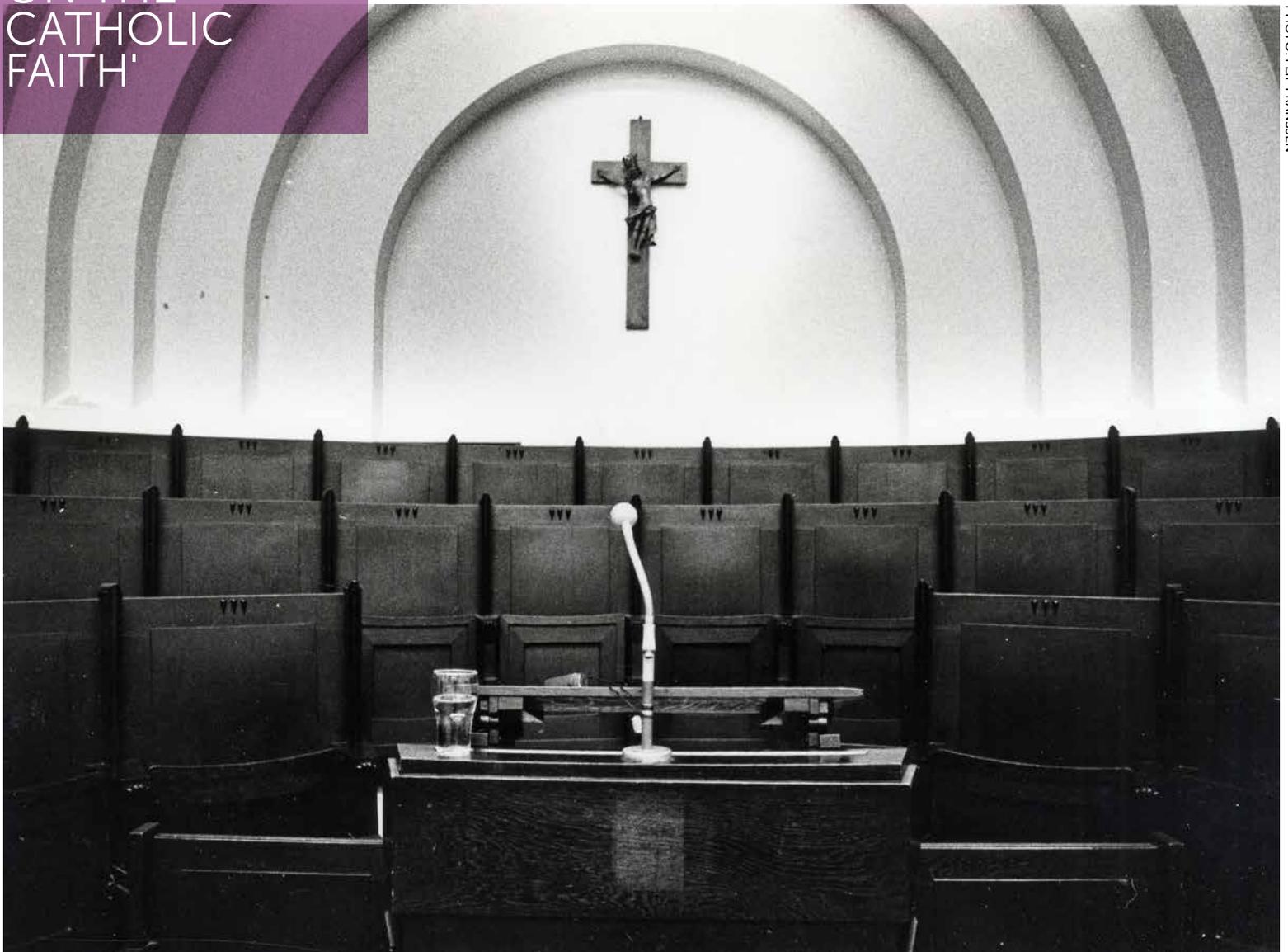


PHOTO: FLIP FRANSEN

## THE PERFECT MACARON

It was early April, and someone asked me: "Any new hobbies you plan on taking up during lockdown?" It may have been my inner perfectionist who promptly answered: "I want to make the perfect macaron."

I already had quite a supply of kitchen and baking utensils, so all I had to buy was a thermometer and a Microplane grater. At a local bookstore, #supportyourlocals, I bought the perfect baking book.

I was ready: baking macarons, Take 1. I went for vanilla, a 'simple' flavour without pretensions. Or so I thought. I opened my book and read: "Liquefy the egg whites." Huh, what? I didn't know you could make egg whites more

liquid than they already are. Apparently you can, and it only takes five to seven days.

A week later I was ready for Take 2. The kitchen quickly turned into a war zone. All surfaces were covered in ingredients, pans and mixing bowls, and I needed to call in some help from the troops. Whipping up egg whites with a hand mixer, while adding boiling hot sugar syrup and also keeping an eye on the temperature, is not actually possible on your own. After six hours of toil, it was done. The completed macarons could rest in the fridge for 24 hours. Yes, really, an entire day. Was it all worth it? Absolutely! My macarons smelled deliciously of vanilla,

they were crispy on the outside, chewy on the inside, and not too sweet. Perfect. I had achieved my goal. What now? Now the baking book is on the

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I DIDN'T KNOW YOU COULD  
MAKE EGG WHITES  
MORE LIQUID THAN THEY  
ALREADY ARE  
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shelf and I stick to baking projects that are at least as tasty, but cost just a tad less effort.

JOËL HENDRIX, PROJECT MANAGER

## COLLAGES OF A HELLISH PAST

On 14 October, NOS broadcast a documentary about Jules Schelvis, survivor of the Sobibor extermination camp. In 2015 he toured Europe with the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra to talk about his 72-hour journey to this gruesome death camp. Another survivor, Selma Engel-Wijnberg, says in the film: "After the war doesn't exist! The war is still going on." For survivors of this inhuman hell, time has stopped.

I've always been fascinated by the question of how people are capable of committing murder on such an industrial scale and why thousands of years of 'civilisation' don't seem to have brought us much further in this respect. **This year marked the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and I used this opportunity to paint a few collages.**

Auschwitz still exists. Sobibor was razed to the ground after the 1943 uprising. There were hardly any images of Sobibor until a photo album surfaced owned by Deputy Camp Commander Johan Niemann, who was one of the first to be killed in the camp uprising. The

photo album was published with comments in 2020. There are no photographs of the victims, only photographs the murderers took of themselves on various occasions, and photographs of the funeral after the Sobibor uprising in which many Nazis were killed.

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WHEN YOU FORGET YOUR PAST,  
YOU RUN THE RISK OF REPEATING IT  
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Time stood still. These photographs point to an unimaginable past, but also show that 'regular' people are capable of the most abject violence. When I see on TV the adherents of certain political groups, the weapons they carry, the language they speak, I know nothing has changed. When you forget your past, you run the risk of repeating it. To forget is exile, to remember salvation.

JOHN HACKING, STUDENT CHAPLAIN



NAME: LOTTE DIRCHS  
2020-MOMENT: FINALS  
MISS SUPER-MODEL  
NETHERLANDS, 8 NOVEMBER  
LOCATION: AMSTERDAM

Every morning, Lotte Dirchs (21) puts on her crown for a moment. The student of International Business Communication is the proud holder of the Miss Supermodel Netherlands 2020 title. 'I'm no longer afraid of what other people think of me.'

Text: Joep Dorna Photography: Instagram, Lotte Dirchs

PHOTO: JOHNNY TEN HAVE

'PEOPLE CAN HAVE  
SCARS ON THE INS

## May



"I've always been a fan of beauty contests. I love the pomp and splendour, and the women: strong personalities who really stand for something. I wanted to be like them, but for a long time I didn't dare to apply. I didn't have a very positive self-image, partly because I was bullied a lot as a child because of a scar on my face. And I was worried about people responding negatively: some people think beauty contestants aren't particularly intelligent. The doubt was driving me crazy. In the end I managed to flip a switch in my mind. I told myself: just see how far you get. On the last day of the registration period, I signed up."

## June



"In a preliminary round I was selected for the semi-finals. The jury members thought I was pretty, but could hardly remember anything about me afterwards. They said: 'You have to dare to be different. A Miss Supermodel has to be herself to stand out.' This was a wake-up call for me. From that moment onwards I tried in a creative way to show who I really was. For example, for the catwalk challenge I posed wearing a shirt on which I had written what my friends thought of me."



## 17 July



"I'm actually really proud of the fact that I dared to post this photo. For the advocacy challenge I had to show what message I stood for. I decided to make this something personal and talk about my scar. As a child I was bitten on the face by a dog, and I've got a scar on my cheek. Children used to call me 'dog' or say that I had a second mouth. Because I was bullied a lot, I had a very negative self-image. In that sense, it has really affected my life. Which is why I want to draw attention to people who have to live with scars."



## 22 July



Lotte posted a photo on Instagram of the scarred side of her face. "Unconsciously, I was always showing my 'good' side on photos. When I became aware of what I was doing, I thought: this has to stop. I'm going to show my other side too."



## 1 August



"Two years ago I came out of the closet as bisexual. I've got a boyfriend now, but my bisexuality will always be part of who I am. So I think it's important to promote the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community. People often think the Dutch are very tolerant, but in practice this often isn't the case."



# IDE TOO'



**3 August**



"This was the day when I met the other candidates in real life for the first time. The idea that

beauty contests are dominated by hate and jealousy is completely wrong. Everyone is really supportive of each other. We laughed and cried together, and I'm still good friends with many of the contestants."

**15 September**



Instagram-message: 'I realised that the passed years I have been through a lot and that I finally feel that it's all over. That I can be myself truly and that I can define myself in other ways than the past.'



"This was the moment when all the pieces of the puzzle fell into place. I had moved in with my boyfriend Luuk, and I finally felt at home somewhere. It was a feeling I hadn't had for a long time, no matter how nice my roommates were. I could finally leave the past behind me." Lotte is silent for a moment. "I find it difficult to find the right words when talking about myself. I could never do it before. But I now realise it's important to be open towards the people who mean a lot to me. Otherwise how can they possibly understand me?"

**17 October**



"People have scars on the inside too. I find it difficult to talk about this, but I went

through a serious depression in early 2019. It was due to a combination of factors: not feeling at home anywhere, being bullied as a child, my doubts about my study choice ... During the worst of it I couldn't feel anything anymore, and I spent all my time alone in my room. This was when I met Luuk. He helped me to seek professional help and I slowly got better."



**8 November**



"The finals consisted of a pitch, a short interview and a photo-shoot, but the jury took the entire process into account. I could hardly believe it when I heard that I'd won the Miss Supermodel title. If you'd asked me at the start whether I thought I had a chance of winning, I would have said I won't even make it to the finals. This adventure has made me a lot stronger. The most important change is that I'm no longer afraid of what other people think of me."



**13 november**



"The day after the finals I was back in the lecture hall. I enjoy the contrast between the two worlds. As Miss Supermodel, I'm at the centre of attention, but as a student of International Business Communication, I'm just one student among many."

Lotte grins widely as she talks about her title. "I put my crown on every morning for a bit. It gives me power, a daily self-confidence boost. To me this title means that I have a platform through which I can help others. For example, I'd like to teach guest lessons and start a blog around my message *Your scars are beautiful*. In my year as Miss Supermodel I'll do my best to tell this story everywhere I go."



# Identity crisis

**I would never have thought that a single month could be so eventful and eventless at the same time.** While I've been rotating the same three jumpers for the past four weeks, the news cycle has been rotating as well. Around vaccine hopes, anti-mask demonstrations and the infamous election in the US. And after four years of his presidency, I finally found the one thing Donald Trump and I have in common: a certain refusal to leave the house. Amidst all this, Radboud University has entered an identity crisis. Well, one could say, at least they are going with the vibe of the general student body. But this identity crisis has nothing to do with graduating students entering a very difficult job market. Or with first-year students trying to cope with isolation. And, surprisingly, it also doesn't have anything to do with the recent sexual misconduct investigation in the Philosophy and Theology faculty. Since late October, Radboud University is no longer a Catholic university. And if this news came as a surprise, you aren't the only one. When I first read about Radboud's loss of its Catholic designation, I turned to my boyfriend and asked: wait, didn't we stop being Catholic in the 1990s? But my own ignorance aside, some people have actually called this a crisis of the university's identity. An identity that will now be the subject of open discussion until 2023. But what was the university's Catholic identity to begin with? I found an answer in the interview with the university's chaplain who summarised it as 'compassion, community, family.' This identity will supposedly 'fade' over the next few years with the

threat that 'we'll be carrying out hard science here – there'll be no heart in it anymore.'

It is worth pointing out that neither university financing, the existence of the chaplaincy nor the Catholic institutes and studies will be endangered.

This discussion surrounding the crisis of identity

is about identity only. Will Radboud lose its heart? Will we be less compassionate? Should we change our name and logo? Give me a break.

Compassion, community, and family have as much to do with Catholicism as with any other religious and non-religious affiliation. When I left the Lutheran church at the age of eighteen, no one said to me 'So, Miss Leise, you can leave your soul on your way out.' And I can assure you that my non-religious identity hasn't made me immoral or less sincere in the work I do.

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**I finally found the one thing Donald Trump and I have in common: a certain refusal to leave the house**

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The mere suggestion that we are in an identity crisis because we have lost our Catholic affiliation upsets me, as it suggests that some things – compassion, community, and family – are reserved for a Catholic university. And call me naive, but I always thought that these characteristics were simply reserved for a decent one. Just as science with a heart is not a question of religion, but of humanity.



**ANTONIA LEISE** IS A STUDENT OF COMPARATIVE EUROPEAN HISTORY FROM GERMANY  
She writes blogs about university life on Voxweb.nl

Pim van Zanen



# THE OLD VIBE WAS STRAIGHT AWAY

Pim van Zanen, Director of Marketing & Communications, dusted down his guitar and started playing again this year. After 25 years, he and his old band Celestial Season threw themselves once again into doom metal. The result was a new album.

Text: Annemarie Haverkamp

NAME: PIM VAN ZANEN

2020 MOMENT: ALBUM RELEASE, 27 OCTOBER

LOCATION: NIJMEGEN



**'A** fantastic highlight in these crazy times,' is how metal magazine *Aardschok* described the new album *The Secret*

*Teachings by the Dutch band Celestial Season (November 2020).* The reviewer continues: 'Even before hearing the new album, I felt slightly euphoric looking at the line-up of familiar faces from those early years, including Pim van Zanen on the guitar (yes!)...'

This is who this story is about: Pim van Zanen. Radboud University staff members may know him as the marketing man behind the 'You have a part to play!' campaign. You may have seen him rushing through the Berchmanianum in his immaculate white shirt on his way to his 34<sup>th</sup> meeting of the day. But Van Zanen is leading a double life: in the evening he goes wild on his guitar and fills his living-room with dark doom metal.

#### Lowlands

His love for hard rock predates his love for marketing. While still a Communication Sciences student, Van Zanen joined the band Celestial Season. The band was quite popular: as the Dutch variant on iconic doom metal bands like My Dying Bride and Paradise Lost, the musicians played at various festivals in the 1990s, including Lowlands. Their album *Solar Lovers* sold 30,000 copies worldwide. Fans sporting a Celestial Season T-shirt could pop up anywhere in the world, from a metro station in Russia to a deserted village in the Peruvian countryside.

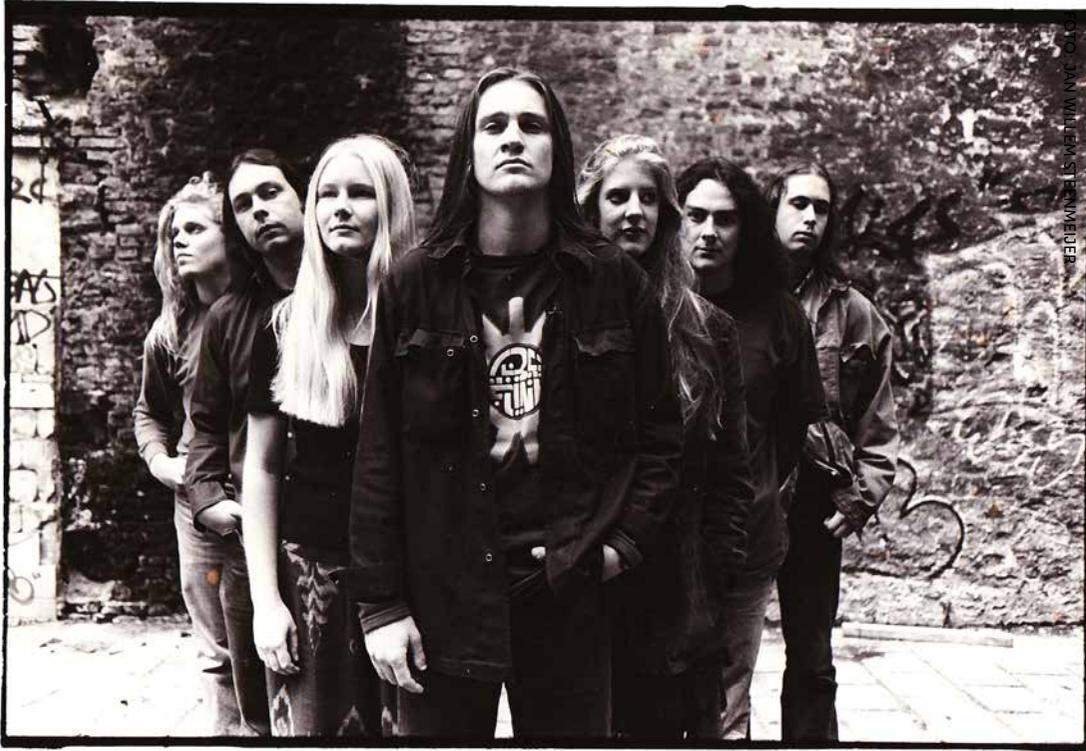
Following two doom albums, the Nijmegen band switched to stoner rock. The screaming singer was replaced by a pretty boy with a slightly more accessible sound and the gothic violin and cello slowly faded out of the new sound. This shift was not to everyone's liking. Some fans lost interest in the mainstream rock and cherished the two original albums like their own children. In 2002, the band ceased to exist. The chemistry was gone and the band members were busy with jobs, relationships and having children.

Until late October of the turbulent year 2020, when a new album by the 'old' Celestial Season made its appearance. Complete with grunting singer and melancholy string instruments. To what do we owe this resurrection?

"It was the drummer's idea", says Director of Marketing Pim van Zanen at the end of a

PHOTO: MIKE REDMAN

→ The band in the nineties



## 'MUSIC IS SUCH A GREAT WAY TO WORK THROUGH YOUR **EMOTIONS**'

long working day at the University. “He thought it would be fun to get the band back together after 25 years.”

What is remarkable, says Van Zanen, is that everyone immediately said ‘yes’, including the singer who had left at the time in a bit of a huff. And equally remarkably, the old vibe was there straight away. “Apparently, you can simply pick up where you left off, even after such a long time,” says Van Zanen. “I always clicked really well musically with the violinist, and I felt this again straight away. It really felt like old times to play together again.”

### Heart-warming

Because of the 1.5 metre rules – who’d ever heard of such a thing 25 years ago – the band members couldn’t meet at the studio to record their new album. As a result, Van Zanen had to play some of his guitar riffs at home. Not that you can tell from listening to the album. At the time of writing this, Spotify counts 40,000 streams.

Van Zanen finds the fans’ reactions heart-warming. People from all over the world write to let the band know how they’ve missed Dutch metal. “Some say they had tears in their eyes while listening. We also released the new album as a boxset, together with our two earlier doom albums, under the name *The Doom Era*. It sold out in no time.”

Will the album be followed by a tour? It’s not clear yet, says the 45-year old guitarist. If you want to perform on stage these days, you have to put together a really slick show. And this requires at least six months of intense rehearsals. It’s unclear whether the musicians have time for it and whether the pandemic will allow it. He laughs: “Also, we’re all 25 years older. We’d have to think carefully about maybe creating a light show, so the audience doesn’t have to stare at a bunch of mostly old men.”

For Van Zanen the new album represents in any case a rediscovery of his first love. He had almost forgotten how freeing it was to

play guitar. “Music is such a great way to work through your emotions. When you play all your worries disappear. Music adds an extra dimension to life.”

After all these years, he once again dares to call himself not only a marketing director but also a musician. “I find it enriching.” ★



**The Secret Teachings**  
Celestial Season (2020)

## MY FIRST NOVEL

In 2007 I published my first popular science book (*Het slimme onbewuste, The Smart Unconscious*), which ignited an old ambition. As a student, I couldn't decide between a scientific career and becoming a writer. I went on to write some popular science books, but my unconscious had its own plans. I wanted to write a traditional travelogue and then gather courage to work on a real novel. In 2019 I published *Wegwee (Wanderlust)*, about a 14-month journey

I took through 14 Asian countries. After that I finally dared to start working on a novel, but just as I was getting ready two new novels were published: *Otmars zonen (Otmars Sons)* by Peter Buwalda and *Grand Hotel Europa (Grand Hotel Europe)* by Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer. I was completely intimidated by these great novels and in danger of postponing my plans yet again, when I heard my deceased mother whisper in my ear about starting small.

I overcame my doubts and decided to try for the opposite: a small novel.

So I wrote *Bart*, a short novel about puberty, infatuation and growing up in the countryside in the 1980s. There were many great moments in the process of writing this book, but the best by far was the moment when I actually held the first copy in my hands.

Ap Dijksterhuis, Professor of Psychology

## COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

Can you feel blessed at times of crisis? I've wondered about this a lot. The birth of a healthy daughter earlier this year brought great happiness to our home. And professionally too, I had every reason to celebrate: my PhD thesis, *Macht der gewoonte. Regels en rituelen in de Tweede Kamer na 1945 (Power of Habit. Rules and Rituals in the House of Representatives after 1945)* won the Dirk Jacob Veegens Prize 2020. In my research I analyse the 'organisational culture' of the Dutch House of Representatives in the post-war period and I highlight how this has affected the functioning of our parliamentary democracy.

After a long and sometimes treacherous PhD track, winning this prize moves me personally. It also felt, especially in this extraordinary year, as recognition of the importance of research with a social-communication value. **The Veegens Prize is awarded to research that 'uses a historical perspective to contribute to a deeper insight into developments that are relevant to modern-day Netherlands.'** This relevance is suddenly very apparent. Especially as in the month when the jury reached its decision, our parliament was effectively disabled and had to watch from the sidelines as the government struggled to combat the pandemic with emergency measures.

On 25 September I was invited during a celebration in the Binnenhof to retell the story of how the House of Representatives returned to their duties after the Second World War, exactly 75 years ago. This immediately evoked a comparison between the patchy democratic

ESPECIALLY AS IN THE MONTH WHEN THE JURY REACHED ITS DECISION, OUR PARLIAMENT WAS EFFECTIVELY DISABLED

control in the first months after the liberation and the situation in the first weeks after the outbreak of the pandemic. The past clearly offered the audience the opportunity, if only for a moment, to see the difficult news in a broader perspective. The fact that I was invited to write a short book on this topic with my partner and colleague Alexander van Kessel only added to my personal feeling of satisfaction. And so in our home we were able to compensate somewhat for the painful lack of collaboration with colleagues. I can still hear my parents humming: Count your blessings; name them one by one!

CARLA HOETINK, POLITICAL HISTORIAN



# THESE RESEARCHERS A



If you follow the news, you might think science had only one goal this year: a coronavirus vaccine. Luckily, research on other topics has continued where possible.

In Nijmegen, researchers celebrated breakthroughs with electric cars, Ritalin, DNA and a miraculous sleeping pill.

**Text:** Stan van Pelt **Illustrations:** Roel Venderbosch

## Tesla's electric cars deserve their green reputation

Are electric cars really more environmentally friendly if you take into account their production and dismantling? The answer is 'yes', claims environmental scientist Florian Knobloch in the *Nature* study that crowned his PhD research.

Tesla is probably the best-known symbol of progress and environmental awareness. But is this reputation justified? Although driving a Tesla produces zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, its production cycle and the electricity that powers it are far from fossil-free. Steel production requires high temperatures and a lot of energy, a large portion of which comes from coal and gas power stations. So in what way is it environmentally friendly?

And yet, when you add it all up, electric cars really do score better than diesel or petrol engines in nearly all respects, at least when it comes to greenhouse gas emissions. Only the largest electric cars powered entirely by 'dirty' power sources (from coal power stations) perform less well than the smallest most energy-efficient petrol cars. This was the conclusion reached this spring by environmental researcher Florian Knobloch and his colleagues. It led to a publication in *Nature Sustainability*, in Knobloch's own words the "absolute crowning jewel" of his PhD dissertation, which he completed this year.

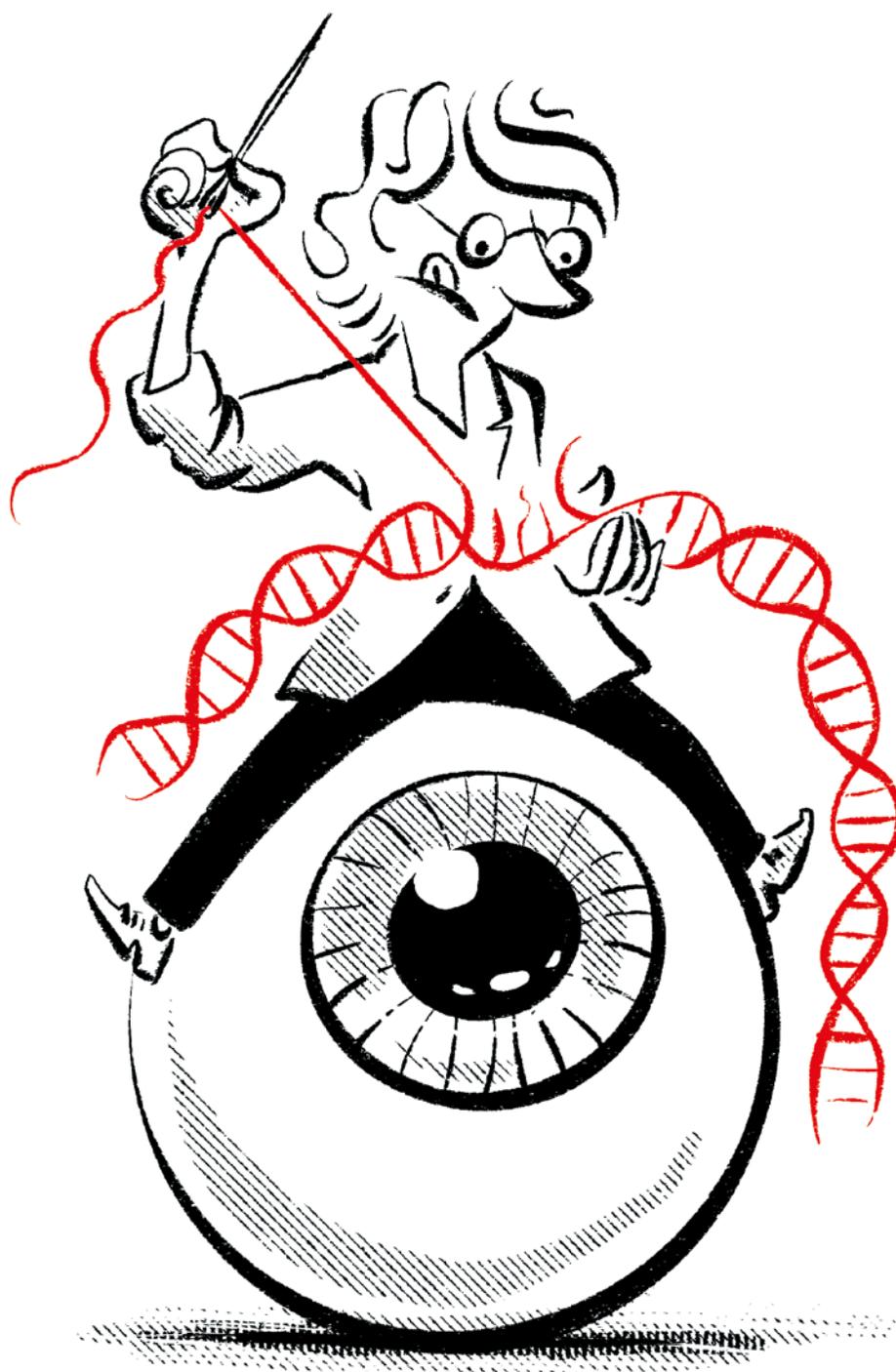
"A life-cycle analysis is actually the only way to compare products like cars fairly," explains

Knobloch. "The reason is that this kind of analysis includes all emissions in the calculation," from production to driving and finally dismantling. No such analysis had yet been performed on a global scale for electric cars. Knobloch and his colleagues were also the first to take into account three potential future scenarios for generating renewable power. These varied from very pessimistic (less than now) to largely CO<sub>2</sub>-free. According to the researchers' calculations, the Tesla car won even in the worst scenario.

Having said that, you can make transport much more efficient still, Knobloch notes soberly, "by not driving at all."

# RE NOT WORKING ON A VACCINE

## Blind because of a faulty DNA loop



Many members of a single Dutch family are slowly going blind. After 30 years, geneticists at Radboud university medical center discovered the cause: a genetic error that damages the retina.

At first you no longer see the stars at night, then you lose sight during the day, until finally you run the risk of becoming blind. This nightmare – known in medicine as *retinitis pigmentosa* – is affecting the members of one Dutch family. After 30 years, Radboud university medical center researchers finally discovered the reason: this family's DNA contains more than double the number of certain genes.

And this has serious consequences, conclude Radboud university medical center researcher Susanne Roosing and her PhD student Suzanne de Bruijn. DNA is the string of hereditary material containing approximately 20,000 genes in our cells. It is rolled up into two sets of 23 'balls of wool', the chromosomes. In family members suffering from retinitis pigmentosa this doubling causes the 17<sup>th</sup> DNA ball to roll up in a slightly different way. As a result, one of the double genes accidentally becomes activated in the retina cells, where it slowly damages the working of the light-sensitive cells that allow us to see.

In mid-March the discovery led to a publication that very nearly made it to the most prestigious of all medical journals. Geneticist Roosing: "At the time the editors were flooded with COVID-19 research. In their own words, they received so many submissions that they couldn't publish everything they wanted." In the end the study was published in the *American Journal of Human Genetics*, another highly renowned journal. Now that we know which gene is responsible, the Dutch family has hope once again – as do the other 22 families worldwide suffering from the same condition. The researchers can, for example, investigate the possibility of switching off the substance responsible for producing this gene, which may stop the eyesight loss. Furthermore, members of the Dutch family in question can use embryo selection to prevent the gene – and the eye disease – from being passed on to their children. The chances of inheriting it are currently 25% to 50%, depending on the disease subtype.

Pop a Ritalin pill to perform better during exam week? It works for some people; others don't notice a thing. Neuroscientists at the Donders Institute discovered why.

Professor Roshan Cools was recently visiting a secondary school with her son when she saw a strip of Ritalin tablets on the floor. "My first thought was: are there drug dealers here?" The pills, originally intended for people suffering from ADHD (mostly children), have become incredibly popular as 'smart drugs'. They allegedly help students perform better in tests and exams.

Researchers now understand better how methylphenidate (the active ingredient in Ritalin) can help improve performance, thanks to a publication by Cools' research group last March in the top journal *Science*. The drug doesn't make you temporarily smarter, as some think. Rather, it increases motivation, conclude Cools and her postdoc researcher Andrew Westbrook. "People are more willing to complete difficult tasks, even for a lower reward." A rather spectacular new insight, which unfortunately didn't get the attention it deserved in the midst of the coronavirus commotion, concludes the Professor of Cognitive Neuropsychiatry.

In the experiment Westbrook asked 50 test subjects to complete easy or difficult memory tasks. For the former they were offered a high reward (say €3), for the latter a lower reward (for example €1). The difficulty level and accompanying rewards varied throughout the experiment. The researchers found that after taking a Ritalin tablet test subjects were more likely to choose a difficult task, even for a lower reward.

Interestingly Ritalin was found to be most effective for test subjects with a naturally low dopamine level. Subjects who had a high level of this substance in their brains were naturally more inclined to choose difficult tasks for less money. This difference may explain why some smart drug users swear by Ritalin, while others hardly notice the effect, says Cools. "If your dopamine level is already high, Ritalin doesn't really add anything."

But even if you belong to the first group, you shouldn't buy drugs from schoolyard and campus dealers, says the Professor. "Like every drug, Ritalin also has side-effects – it can affect your heart and blood pressure, for example."

## Ritalin makes people more motivated, not smarter



## Sleeping pill wakes patient up after 8 years



Nijmegen and Amsterdam researchers made a miraculous discovery. With a sleeping pill they were able to 'awaken' a man who had not communicated with his environment for years. The story of 37-year-old nursing home patient Richard is reminiscent of the film *Awakenings* (1990). In this film renowned neurologist Oliver Sacks (played by Robin Williams) helps 'awaken' catatonic patients in a nursing home in the 1960s. The miracle drug that made this possible was L-dopa, a dopamine-like drug still used to treat Parkinson disease. Richard had also been unable to communicate with the outside world for many years, after nearly choking to death on a piece of meat and suffering a stroke due to lack of oxygen. "It's called *akinetic mutism*," explains Radboud university medical center geriatric expert Willemijn van Erp. "The consciousness of these patients is intact, but they are unable to initiate

movement or speak." She first met Richard in a nursing home in 2012, shortly after starting on her specialisation and PhD research. "He was in a wheelchair, was being fed by tube, and had to be helped with everything. He could hear us, but was unable to respond." The situation changed completely when Richard was experimentally administered the sleeping drug Zolpidem. Suddenly he could speak a little and even make a phone call. He was also able to move his arms and walk a short distance. Van Erp's colleagues from Amsterdam discovered what had happened with the help of brain scans. It turned out that Richard's brain was overactive and the drug solved this problem. Van Erp: "The sleeping drug created room for the kind of brain activity you need to speak and move." Is Zolpidem a miracle pill that will awaken people from their coma like the prince in

*Sleeping Beauty*? Unfortunately not, says Van Erp. Richard was a unique case, with a rare kind of brain damage. "But it does show how useful additional techniques, like brain scans, can be in re-examining patients with long-term brain damage. It allows us to better understand what went wrong and what kinds of treatments might be possible, also for people in a nursing home." Unlike in *Sleeping Beauty*, Richard's revival is unfortunately temporary. As his brain becomes used to the drugs, the effect diminishes over time. The same tragic fate awaited the patients in *Awakenings*. New treatment possibilities, such as deep brain stimulation, will hopefully lead to lasting improvement. This is what Van Erp and her colleagues hope to investigate in the years to come.

# HOW THE MARIA MONTESSORI BUILDING SHOT UP

(OR RATHER SPRAWLED SIDWAYS)



**NAME: EMIEL VOETEN, RICK VAN DEUTEKOM AND DENNIS EWALDS**  
**2020 MOMENT: COMPLETION OF THE MARIA MONTESSORI BUILDING,**  
**2 NOVEMBER**  
**LOCATION: RADBOUD UNIVERSITY CAMPUS**



The Campus may have seemed deserted these past months, but this was an illusion. Builders were in fact working incredibly hard to make the deadline for the delivery of the Maria Montessori Building, the new home of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

**Text:** Leoni Andriessen  
**Photography:** Erik van 't Hullenaar

**I**t's late October. On the horizon a watery sun illuminates the Maria Montessori Building, rising out of the ashes of the once so beloved – and so hated – Thomas van Aquinostraat. Head carpenter Emiel Voeten, surveyor and quality controller Rick van Deutekom and head of interior construction Dennis Ewalds walk over the grounds. There is almost nothing left to do: the building was officially delivered this week.

“I used to cycle past here on my way to school,” says Voeten pointing to the path that runs along the building site. It looks very different now, in part thanks to him. He previously worked on the renovation of the Berchmanianum; now he can add the Maria Montessori Building to his list of achievements. Among other things, his job involved placing the concrete ornaments that adorn the facade of the new Faculty of Social Sciences building.

Whereas Voeten was involved in the construction from the start, Van Deutekom joined in later. He was responsible for dimensioning, as well as checking the quality of the work. “Right now we’re finishing up the last details, like door stops. So nothing very exciting.”

The construction phase did bring its share of challenges. Van Deutekom points to Ewalds, who worked for the past seven months to complete the interior construction. Voeten glances at him with sympathy: “He had to correct all the mistakes of his predecessors,” he explains. Anyone who works on a construction project makes minor adjustments or

## CAMPUS

changes to the plan. It's Ewalds' job to align all these adjustments so everything looks perfect in the end. "Sometimes it's a question of a tenth of a millimetre," says Ewalds.

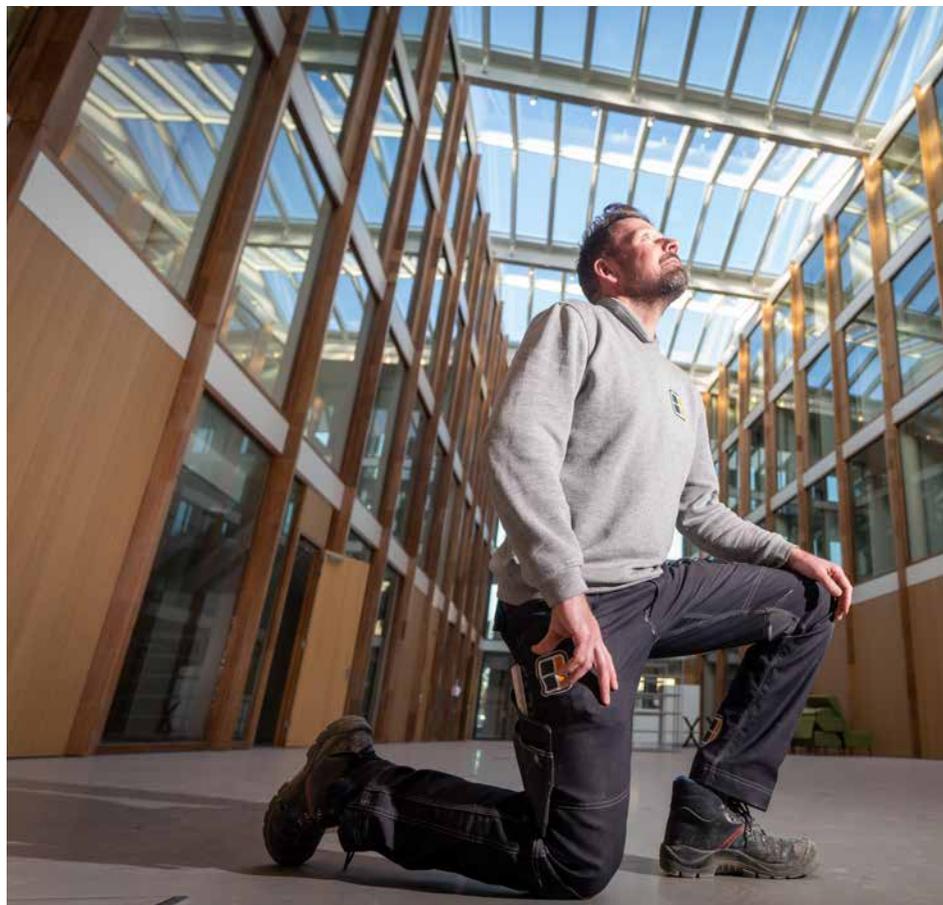
The men work with great precision. Van Deutekom wouldn't dream of making a mistake: "You want to deliver the project with the same degree of quality you'd want for your own home; we are real perfectionists." Voeten and Ewalds concur. "I can be busy for days with a small detail," says Ewalds. "I simply must find a solution. Other people don't even see these details, but for me that's not good enough." But what if there is no solution? "Then you have to let it go, which isn't always easy."

Either way, they are proud of the final result. "You can say we've really created something beautiful together," says Voeten. The men feel very involved. "Many solutions came to us early in the morning, before the work began." In other words, their work never stops. Voeten found the Montessori Building a great project to work on. The others agree.

Now that the building is complete, the three men don't know whether they will meet again. "We're all three already working on new projects," says Van Deutekom. His next project is in Wageningen, another university building. "I'll miss the people," says Voeten. "But not all of them!" he adds laughing. ★

### A MONTH'S DELAY

The pandemic slowed down the construction work. For example, some materials had to come from Italy at a time when Italy was the epicentre of the pandemic. In addition, builders were unable to do some of the work because they couldn't keep sufficient distance from one another. For example, head carpenter Emiel Voeten had to work closely with a colleague on an access platform to place the concrete elements. "At first we wore a shield, but I couldn't see what I was doing." So Voeten and his colleague took off their shields and simply stayed away from their other colleagues. "The final deadline remained unchanged," says Voeten. And with only a month's delay, the builders nearly made it.



### RICK VAN DEUTEKOM, SURVEYOR AND QUALITY CONTROLLER

"I'm responsible for dimensioning, which means I draw a kind of grid on the building, using chalk lines. I decide where to draw these lines based on the design drawings. We placed a number of stickers in the area surrounding the construction site, for example on the facade of the Spinoza Building. These stickers act as reference points for all our measurements. On every floor I had to re-measure everything, because if one of the walls is slightly skewed and you carry on building, without these measurements it will become more and more skewed as you progress. I like the fact that my work is important for the construction project. If my dimensioning is off, it means something's wrong. I like to stay in control, so there's a single person responsible. If something goes wrong, it's easier to find the error."

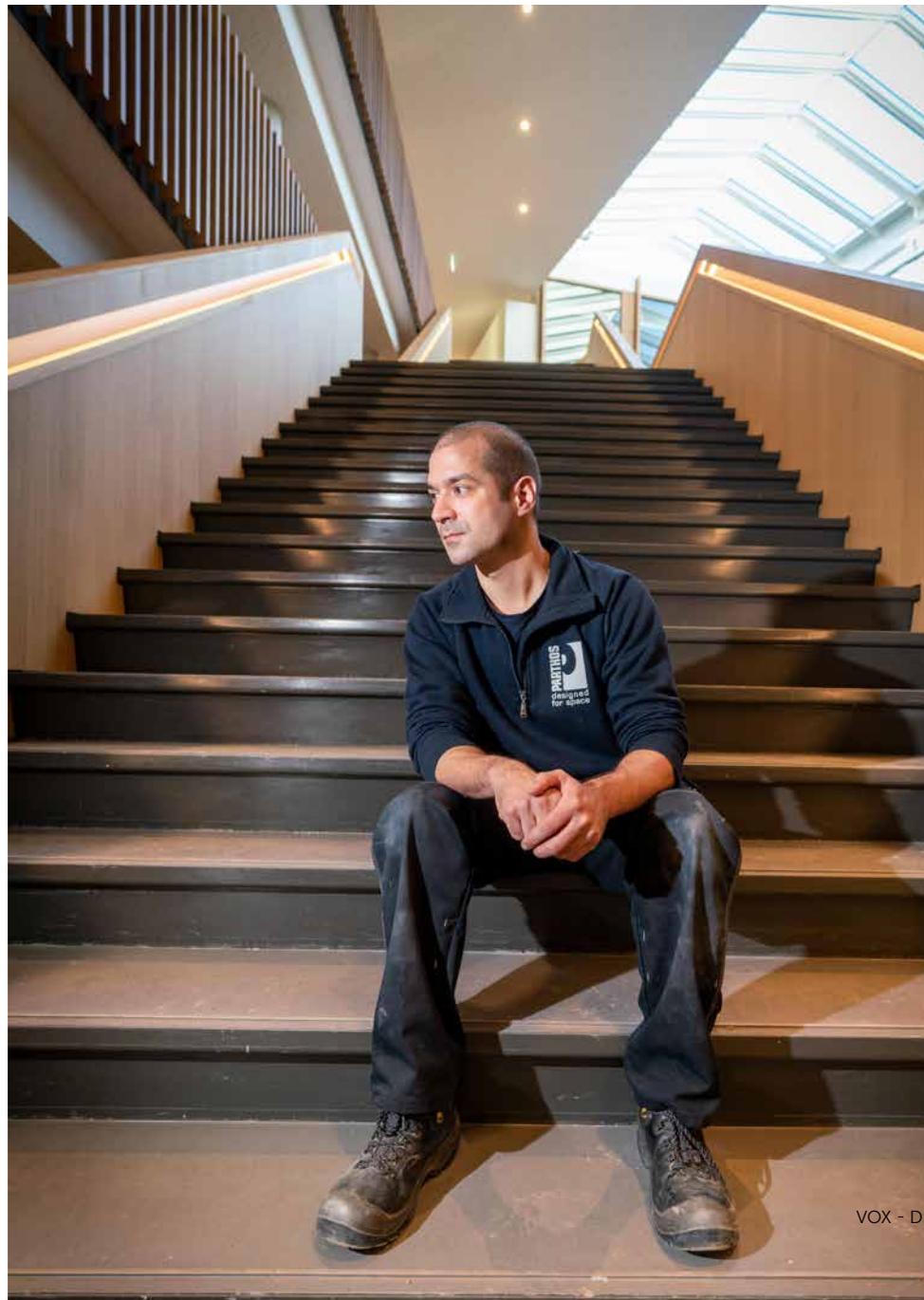


**EMIEL VOETEN, HEAD CARPENTER**

"I was responsible for placing the large concrete elements on the outside of the building. They're purely decorative, but had to fit together perfectly. The building consists of two parts, connected by a bridge. We first covered the buildings, and then the bridge. The crucial question was: will the elements fit together neatly? In theory they should have, but the practice proved to be more challenging. We got there in the end. The elements are clicked into these kinds of braces, with some room for movement, but this wasn't enough. So we had to adjust the braces. Luckily you can't see this at all from the outside. It was quite a puzzle!"

**DENNIS EWALDS, HEAD OF INTERIOR CONSTRUCTION**

"My job is to finish everything off: the walls, the front desks and the stairs. This is one of the staircases (see photograph, Eds.) we completed. It was a challenge, because stairs are never quite straight. So we have to 'make it straight'. I measure everything and pass on the measurements to my colleague, who builds the elements to size in his workshop. Everything has to fit perfectly, so measurements are important. The trick is to make sure everything is straight to start with. If you don't, the whole staircase will come out skewed. This kind of staircase takes three men two full weeks of work. It's a challenge, but I enjoy challenges like this in my work."



NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY STUDENT COUNCIL  
AND THE WORKS COUNCIL  
[www.numedezegenschap.nl/en](http://www.numedezegenschap.nl/en)

# POINT TAKEN!

## Make Radboud University a better place

'You have a part to play!' is a slogan we've been hearing a lot, and it only gets truer with time. Radboud University is as strong, valuable and capable as its staff and students.

The University is driven by people, but it also has a duty to support its people. This is why you have a part to play in representing the interests of these people, both students and staff.

Participational bodies are an important interlocutor for the Board, and our opinion is required on all kinds of matters. In the University Joint Assembly, the Works Council and University Student Council discuss the University's general policy lines with the Executive Board. We talk about things like the main lines of the University's budget, large-scale reorganisations and online proctoring.

At faculty level, in the Faculty Joint Assembly, the Representative Council and Faculty Student Council are in dialogue with the Faculty Board. They discuss matters such as faculty budgets, the professorship plan and the Education and Examination Regulations. In addition, Radboud Services, the Radboud Teachers Academy and DCCN have their own representative council, in which the staff and departmental boards discuss operational management.

Last, but certainly not least every degree programme has its own programme committee, through which lecturers and students take joint responsibility for the smooth running of the degree programme. This takes the form of advice to and collaboration with those responsible for running the programme. Important topics include course evaluations, the curriculum and the well-being of students and lecturers.

As you can see, we have participational bodies at every level, and all of them are crucial for the smooth

running of Radboud University. Thanks to participational bodies, the valuable input of students and staff is heard and the University can grow into a better place. Unfortunately, it's becoming increasingly difficult to find people who are willing to join these bodies. This is very understandable: work and study pressure and time constraints are increasingly felt among students and staff. In addition, many people fear that participational bodies are too far removed, that their input is not valuable, or that the administrators don't listen anyway. But this is precisely why you have a part to play. It is only through participation, through letting your voice be heard, that you can help improve things. You have a part to play, precisely because you don't have time to play your part. You have a part to play to improve things not only for yourself, but also for others. You have a part to play, especially in these difficult times. So put your qualms aside, talk to your participational body, and discover what we can do together to make our University even better.



PHOTO: MARJOLEIN VAN DIEJEN

### Get in touch! Contact us at:

University Student Council: [USR@ru.nl](mailto:USR@ru.nl)

Works Council: [OR@ru.nl](mailto:OR@ru.nl)

Joint University Participational Bodies: [mz@ru.nl](mailto:mz@ru.nl)

## TABOOS ISOLATE US MORE THAN STONE WALLS

If your PhD research deals with the influence of films on fear of death, it's hard not to mention the C-word. After all, we've all spent the past year locked up watching films and series to keep death numbers down. But maybe we should also talk about the D-word. Even without pandemic, war, forest fires and other natural disasters, we tend to avoid it despite it being something we all have to contend with at some point.

I guess it's a taboo.

And so my clear 2020 moment is that taboos isolate us more than stone walls. There is a taboo on talking about death, the fear that you may not be getting all

you should be out of life and that it may soon be too late to do so. A taboo on the fact that you lost someone a long time ago and you think you should be 'over it' by now. But also a taboo on loneliness, insecurity, and feeling frankly shitty. We're supposed to always be doing well. Let's make use of this opportunity to escape our invisible taboo houses. Let's share with others that we feel alone, are afraid of the dark, or fear that we're not doing enough. Let's ask them whether they feel that way too. The answer

LET'S SHARE WITH OTHERS THAT WE FEEL ALONE, ARE AFRAID OF THE DARK, OR FEAR THAT WE'RE NOT DOING ENOUGH

is probably yes. You're never the only one and if we all do our best, no one has to be alone either. We may be stuck behind our stone walls at the moment, but maybe we can break down the invisible walls that separate us. And then maybe we can watch a good movie together online.

CECILE COLLIN, PHD STUDENT

## DOING STUFF WITH THE SUN AND THE MOON

2020 is a year to be proud of! It started in January, with the launch of a podcast about my Chinese adventure to the moon. What began as a series of my clumsy vlogs was turned by Saar Slegers into a masterpiece that has been really helpful to me throughout the project. Listening to it now, I'm incredibly proud of the Radboud Radio Lab, ISISpace and ASTRON teams, who persevered with unrestrained enthusiasm where any normal person would long have stopped. I'm also proud of the fact that together with LESIA, the French Aerospace Laboratory, we joined the NASA/ESA Solar Orbiter mission. The Radio Lab 'is doing stuff' with the sun and the moon! We also succeeded in obtaining a mobile planetarium in Namibia, to bring to attention our plan for a new

telescope in that country (the Africa Millimetre Telescope, which will help us to continue to photograph black holes), and CNN did a nice item about it. **This year I also became a permanent guest at 3FM for all aerospace and astronomy news, and finally ESA has asked us to write a plan for a future radio observatory on the dark side of the moon!** And my other news, I've been a vegetarian for a year now, I continue to make frantic efforts to score a KOM on Strava, my father is healthy and well and celebrated his 79<sup>th</sup> birthday, my children are turning into beautiful head-strong teenagers, and my lovely wife... is still my lovely wife.

MARC KLEIN WOLT, DIRECTOR OF RADBOUD RADIO LAB

## COLOPHON

Vox is the independent magazine of the Radboud University.

**Editorial address:** Thomas van Aquinostraat 1, Postbus 9104, 6500 HE Nijmegen, Tel: 024-3612112, redactie@vox.ru.nl www.voxweb.nl / @voxnieuws

**Editors:** Leoni Andriessen, Annemarie Haverkamp (editor in chief), Ken Lambeets, Mathijs Noij, Stan van Pelt

**Proofreading:** Lydia van Aert

**Columnist:** Antonia Leise

**Contributors to this issue:** Vince Decates,

Joep Dorna, Arne Eichholtz, Mirte van Rooijen

**Photos:** Bert Beelen, Duncan de Fey, Flip Franssen, Rolf Hensel, Erik van 't Hullenaar, Mike Redman, Jan Willem Steenmeijer

**illustrations:** JeRoen Murré, Roel Venderbosch

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ADVERTISEMENT



Autoverhuur Nijmegen  
Nieuwe Dukenburgseweg 13, 6534 AD, Nijmegen  
Postbus 1130, 6501 BC Nijmegen  
Tel. 024-3817161

