

observant

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Photo: Joey Roberts

Police end occupation university building, protesters arrested

Pro-Palestinian protesters occupied Oxfordlaan 55, which houses the fMRI scanning facility Scannexus, last Thursday 2 April. The Executive Board ordered the demonstrators to leave twice, with which they did not comply. Shortly after five o'clock, a police arrest team entered the building, arresting twenty protesters.

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Hungarian elections

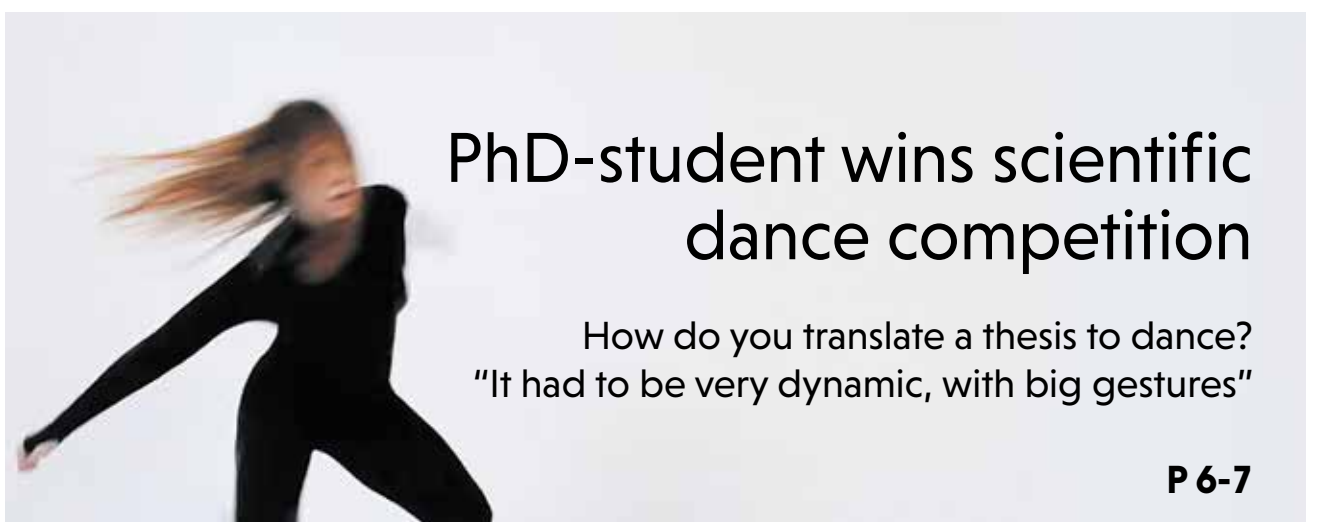
"I hope we can set a good example this time by showing that it's possible for a country to move away from an authoritarian, far-right government"

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PhD-student wins scientific dance competition

How do you translate a thesis to dance? "It had to be very dynamic, with big gestures"

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editorial

What are you doing here?

Could I just explain why I was there? “You’ve been hanging around here all morning,” said the police officer last Thursday morning, 2 April. After showing him my press card from the *Nederlandse Vereniging van Journalisten* (the Dutch Association of Journalists) and the announcement that university newspaper *Observant* was reporting on the occupation of Oxfordlaan 55 by pro-Palestinian protesters, I was dismissed with a brief nod. It all stuck in my craw a little. Of course, I understand *his* position, someone who is not immediately identifiable as a journalist, who has been observing an ‘unsafe’ area for three hours, occasionally pulling out a notebook, typing on their phone, making calls and taking pictures, is suspicious.

In the course of the morning, *De Limburger* showed up with a camera with a logo. Fellow journalists from Orange Media wore special jackets or body warmers, also with a logo. And who was I with? That wasn’t clear to anyone.

I was in a nice spot on the other side of the road and I had a clear view of all the goings-on at Oxfordlaan 55: blocking off the street, more police vehicles arriving, a command vehicle from the fire brigade, brief discussions between various members of the emergency services, attempts at mediation, and the arrival of (presumably) a police negotiator. He parked his brand new Mercedes behind the police cordon, opened the back of the car and put on something presumably related to the next phase of police action (read: a bullet-proof vest). One employee from the nearby hospital started talking to me out of nowhere, nothing that needed writing down, but it felt strange that in that moment, my job as a journalist was not clear to him. That happens occasionally, even when you’re clearly clutching a notebook. We attend lectures, debates, protests and meetings, and then write an article about them. And of course, if we want to ask people questions or quote them, we always, always introduce ourselves as journalists, that makes complete sense to me. Often we’ve notified the organisation of our attendance. And yet, despite the fact that we adhere to the journalistic codes, I think that even more transparency could increase the trustworthiness of our work. So bring on those PRESS caps, special pens, branded phone cases and notebooks, maybe even a bodywarmer with a logo? Or should we stick to a simple lanyard with our homemade ‘PRESS/*Observant*’ card? We’ll think about it. My NVJ press card is due for renewal soon, it’s on my calendar in big letters. If I hadn’t been able to show it last Thursday, things might have ended up very differently for this editor.

Wendy Degens

The editor-in-chief gives a look behind the scenes at the editorial office



series the times they are (not) a changin’

Stoned at the wheel, at the expense of the US government



The Volvo, operated by a stoned driver and with a camera on top, on the empty A76 Photo: Nelis Tutkey

1989–1994

Is it safe to drive after smoking a joint? In the late 1980s, there was still very little research on the subject. The US government decided to approach a research institute in Maastricht that had experience in testing the effects of drugs and alcohol on drivers.

The result was that, in the summer of 1990, the A76 motorway near Heerlen became the setting for what this newspaper at the time called “a fairy tale”, one that “24 lucky recreational cannabis users could never have imagined, not even in their wildest stoned dreams”. After first being allowed to smoke a joint at the expense of the US government, they were asked to drive “a comfortable Volvo” down a motorway blocked off by the police. On top of that, they were paid a few hundred guilders. All they had to do in return was try to drive as straight as possible.

The US Department of Transportation was very interested in the results, as the effects of marijuana on driving performance had never been properly studied. At the same time, studies showed that cannabis use was common among young people in the US: reportedly, twenty-five per cent smoked weed monthly. Prosecutors didn’t have a leg to stand on in cases involving drivers who had caused accidents under the influence of marijuana. In the US, however, sky-high insurance premiums – driven by fears of sky-high claims if anything went wrong – stood in the way of experimental studies. Dutch insurers, it seems, were less concerned, because in 1989 the US government commissioned the Maastricht Institute for Drugs, Safety and Behaviour (now the Experimental Psychopharmacology Unit), which already had several years of experience in testing the effects of drugs and alcohol on driving performance.

Nothing was left to chance. No fewer than three Dutch ministries were involved: Foreign Affairs (to liaise with the Americans), Transport and Water Management (to secure a stretch of motorway) and Justice (for an “opium permit”). Mexican marijuana, grown at the University of Mississippi, was shipped to Maastricht in a sealed container. Most participants thought it was “good stuff”, though some complained that the joints were “a bit dry”, research leader Hindrik Robbe told *Observant*.

Under the influence of various doses, participants made repeated runs along the empty A76 motorway. A camera mounted on the roof of the Volvo recorded every steering

movement and was connected to a massive computer in the back seat, which also logged data such as speed. A driving instructor in the passenger seat was able to intervene at any moment using dual controls.

The fact that a 22-kilometre stretch of motorway was closed on 24 separate evenings attracted considerable attention. Institute director James O’Hanlon received dozens of enquiries a day “from all sorts of people” from the Netherlands and abroad, he told *Observant* in September 1990. “It’s very hard to keep quiet.” In the end, he didn’t: when the analysis was still far from complete, he gave a preliminary presentation on the TV programme *Veronica’s Nieuwslijn*. Several newspapers subsequently reported that smoking weed had “no significant effect on driving performance” – an interpretation O’Hanlon later described as “outright misleading”.

The Mexican marijuana was “good stuff”, most participants thought

The research team learnt from the mistake. The next series of experiments – in which participants were “let loose” in normal traffic, first on the motorway and later even in urban settings – were conducted far more discreetly. They didn’t even run advertisements for volunteers for fear of publicity. If they had, as Robbe put it in 1994 after publication of the research results, “you could have a journalist pull up beside you at any moment”.

The findings showed that marijuana is far from harmless: the more participants had smoked, the more they swerved across the road. The combination with alcohol was “particularly dangerous”. “Someone who smokes a strong joint and drinks two beers performs as poorly as someone who has had ten beers.”

No accidents occurred during the experiments, however. The driving instructor only had to intervene twice, which Robbe attributed to drivers slipping into a dreamlike state during the monotonous drive. On one occasion, the driver had already forgotten a previous warning about a screwdriver on the road; on another, the driver missed a massive road sign entirely.

Dennis Vaendel

Maastricht University was founded fifty years ago. In this anniversary series, we delve into our own archives to rediscover memorable, funny, relevant and curious news stories from the past

There are “signs” they entered Scannexus

Activists arrested after occupation; Public Prosecution Service to investigate

Twenty pro-Palestinian protesters who occupied the university premises at Oxfordlaan 55 on Thursday, 2 April, have been arrested on suspicion of unlawful entry. One is also suspected of intimidation. They have all been released pending investigation by the Public Prosecution Service.

The protesters must vacate the premises: that was the only thing that mattered to the Executive Board on Thursday, 2 April. At about eight o'clock in the morning, twenty activists from the group Maastricht4Palestine occupied the building on Oxfordlaan in Randwyck. According to spokesperson Koen Augustijn, only a few employees were on the premises at the time, including the receptionist. They were requested to leave the building by the protesters, who wore face coverings to avoid being recognised.

Among the occupants of the building at Oxfordlaan 55 are the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience, businesses from Brightlands and Scannexus. Coffee bar Banditos is also located on the ground floor. From the outset, there were major concerns regarding the dangerous situation because of the scanners at Scannexus, a 3T, 7T and 9.4T. The T stands for Tesla, which measures the power of the magnetic fields produced by a scanner. The stronger the scanner, the more detailed the images produced.

A scanner facility can be dangerous for people who don't know what they're doing, the Executive Board said last week. There are coolants such as helium, but crucially, the scanners have powerful magnetic fields. Anybody who approaches one with metal tools, a fire extinguisher or a metal (belt) buckle, will notice the intense pull the magnet has on the metal object. With possible consequences not just for the person, but also the machines. The scanners are always on. If a metal object 'sticks' to the machine, they have to be turned

off, which affects the quality, according to insiders. Worst case scenario, this means expensive repairs.

Incidentally, the protesters posted a message on their Instagram account on Thursday morning, saying they were aware of the risks posed by the scanners and that they “had conducted thorough research into the occupied facilities and were trained in MRI safety”. Nevertheless, the Safety Region, including Maastricht's mayor Wim Hillenaar, declared a GRIP 1, a procedure for high-risk incidents requiring cooperation between the emer-

gency services. Consequently, there was a significant police and fire brigade presence.

It is unclear whether the activists actually got anywhere near the scanners. Anyone entering Oxfordlaan 55 cannot simply walk straight in. Enquiries with a number of UM staff members reveal that there are several doors there, at least one of which requires an access pass. According to rector Jan Smits, there are “signs” the activists entered the Scannexus annex. There was “almost no damage” to the

To be continued on page 8

“Terminate lease agreement with Israeli billionaire”, protestors demanded – which contract are they referring to?

At the end of January, Maastricht University signed an agreement to rent a property on Paul-Henri Spaaklaan in Randwyck with, as reported by various property websites, Aroundtown. According to Maastricht-based Pro-Palestinian (student) organisations that company is partly owned by the Israeli billionaire Yakir Gabay. By doing business with him, “UM is contributing to the colonisation of Gaza”, they wrote on social media.

De Volkskrant, which published an article about Gabay and his close ties to US President Trump, reports that the Israeli businessman and property developer holds 15 per cent of Aroundtown's shares and is also a member of the advisory board. He also sits on the so-called Gaza Executive Board. This board, appointed by the Americans, is responsible for what is being described as

the reconstruction of the devastated region.

However, pro-Palestinian organisations argue that the plan is a sham, a way of colonising Gaza and undermining the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. UM, they say, is complicit by “renting Gabay's property for many millions”. Last month, a student speaking on behalf of several organisations demanded during the University Council's speakers corner that the lease be terminated immediately.

That will not happen, UM spokesperson Koen Augustijn stated two weeks ago. According to him, the arrangement with Aroundtown is more nuanced and indirect than suggested; the company is involved in managing the leased property through other entities. The Executive Board therefore sees no reason, nor any legal grounds, to dissolve the contract. **DB**



What academia takes

“

Recently, I gave a lecture about body image to a group of master students. At the end, I also shared my “journey” to academia. One student cautiously asked whether I worked nights and weekends, because they heard “that's just the way it is” in academia. I told them firmly that I almost *never* work nights and weekends. I told them that I nearly died from an eating disorder that took root when I worked nonstop for my medical studies, and that experience taught me that there was *no job* that was worth sacrificing my health for. Yes, I love my work and I am deeply passionate about my topic. But, I also really love *other* things and people, too. Later that week, one of the students emailed to thank me on behalf of the group for being open about my experiences and setting a positive example. That felt good to hear and, at the same time, I felt disappointed that these young people had already been taught that being a researcher means sacrificing other important parts of life. I also thought about all the talented young people who might make excellent researchers, but who would be scared away by toxic ideas about “what it takes”.

I am usually able to firmly state my opinion on maintaining well-being. Yet, recently I had an experience that showed me I still have work to do. Namely, I reconnected with a friend who left academia to work in the business sector. I was expressing doubt about an upcoming project, and he proceeded to list many of my talents. As he went on, I felt increasingly uncomfortable and overwhelmed. It felt like he was talking about a different person because how could all of those positive things be *ME*?

It is scary to speak honestly about the ways we are resisting unhealthy standards in academia and how we might be struggling. It's a voice that even comes up now, writing this column (e.g., “Who cares what YOU have to say?”). But, if anything is going to change, we *need* to keep speaking up. And importantly, we need to remember that these challenges are not a sign that there's something “wrong” with us, but a product of the system we are swimming in and how it can teach us to adopt unhealthy ideas and practices as “normal,” when they *shouldn't* be.

”

Jessica Allewa, assistant professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience



The arrest team is about to go inside Photo: Joey Roberts

series sing, fight, cry, pray, laugh, work and admire

Ferenc Laczó
(Budapest, Hungary, 1982)

\ Assistant professor
of European History at
the Faculty of Arts
and Social Sciences

\ Relationship status:
married to Vera;
they have a son (10)
and a daughter (1)

\ Lives in:
Leiden



Photo: Joey Roberts

“ Will I ever move back to Hungary? That’s a real dilemma ”

Earliest childhood memory? Until I was seven, Hungary was a communist country under Soviet influence. I can still picture the large red star on top of the parliament building. We’d see it when we drove through Budapest in our Trabant, crossing the Danube towards the city centre. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the star was suddenly gone. My mother told me we had become a democracy. It was only a year later, during the first elections, that I began to grasp what that meant. Billboards with political slogans along the roads were something completely new and felt bizarre. People on our street even displayed in their windows who they had voted for. Things are very different in present-day Hungary.

I’m nervous about the Hungarian elections. Actually, I’m mostly hopeful. When Orbán came to power in 2010, I already told friends that he would likely stay for at least 15 to 20 years. This is the first time it looks like he and his party Fidesz can no longer keep the opposition at bay. But that’s scary too – there are fears that they will manipulate the election results or refuse to relinquish power if they lose. At the same time, you notice that people are less afraid to voice criticism of the government. A great deal of damage has been done to institutions, to the free press, to the arts and cultural life. People are exhausted, and they can see that the government is unable to solve their problems. I hope Hungary can set a good example this time by showing that it’s possible for a country to move away from an authoritarian, far-right government.

Unforgettable sports moment. In 2002, I watched the Davis Cup final between Russia and France on television. It was funny, as I knew quite a few of the players well from having played against them myself. I was a national

junior tennis champion. My parents hoped I would go pro rather than go into academia, even though they were both academics themselves. My father completed a PhD in economics, and my mother worked at a prestigious research institute. Even so, they never earned much money. They hoped I would be able to make it as a pro player. I had good technique, but I lacked power, and I suffered an injury when I was about sixteen. I became interested in books and philosophy. To my own surprise, I got a scholarship to study at University College Utrecht, which my parents could never have afforded. That was when they came to accept my academic path.

This is how I let off steam. I still exercise a lot. I try to run every day for thirty minutes to an hour, preferably in the middle of the day so I can return to work with a clear head. It’s necessary. We’re constantly “switched on”, getting emails and messages all day long, and teaching is very intensive. You need a moment to get back to basics. I don’t jog at a leisurely pace, either; I like to push myself hard. Despite my age, I’m faster than ever.

Favourite band? When I was a teenager, it was The Cure. They were hugely popular in Hungary at the time. Their dark, melancholic music fitted the economically difficult years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They’re still around; they’re playing at Rock Werchter this summer. I bought tickets out of nostalgia.

History has always fascinated me. Growing up in Hungary, nearly everyone carried some kind of trauma – from the First World War, the Second World War, the Soviet era... from persecution to murdered family members. But no one talked about it. Even my grandfathers didn’t. One had

survived a Soviet labour camp and the other had been forced to surrender his farmland to the communists. It deeply shaped their lives. I wanted to break those taboos by talking and writing about them. I think that explains my fascination with contemporary history.

The hardest thing about parenting is... how quickly children change. Just when you think you’ve got them figured out, they’re different again the next year. I struggled with that with my son. The first few years were very intense anyway. My wife and I both have busy jobs and we had no grandparents nearby to help out. That’s also why we waited so long before having our second child, but we felt like it was now or never. Fortunately, I now have a better idea of what to expect. At the same time, my son is slowly becoming a teenager. The world is so different now; because of the internet, he already knows more at the age of ten than I did at the age of fifteen. I enjoy doing things together to get him out of his room. I’m quite a flexible and liberal parent, perhaps sometimes too much so. It’s a good thing my wife is stricter.

Big dream? If I was very rich, I’d open a bookshop in Brussels. A kind of European version of Politics and Prose in Washington, D.C., where I went all the time during the year I spent there as a research fellow. It hosts daily book talks and brings people together to exchange ideas. It’s important to have such places close to centres of power, where you can connect critical intellectual discussions to politics.

My future is in... That’s a real dilemma. Will I ever move back to Hungary? Definitely not as long as Orbán is in power. It’s difficult to know how dangerous that would be. There has been a public campaign against me. At the same time, I want to offer a voice of opposition. I currently do so from a distance. I’m fairly well known in Hungary; my books sell well there and I regularly appear in independent media outlets. But if you truly want to make a difference, you need to live there. But I also don’t want to leave behind my life here – I have a nice house, my children are growing up here. I’ve always thought I might move to Italy one day; I feel I would fit in very well with the culture there. I’m in my forties now, and I will have to make a decision at some point.

Dennis Vaendel

Weekly personal interview with a student or employee

Most students rent from private landlords or commercial providers

“TOO EXPENSIVE”: why Maastricht’s housing associations are building few student rooms

Around 2010, Maastricht’s housing associations set themselves the goal of providing 30 per cent of all student housing in the city. Why was this target never reached? And could a dedicated student housing association make a difference?

While Maastricht may not be facing a full-blown student housing crisis, the situation is far from ideal. Students frequently complain about high rents and substandard accommodation. So why aren’t the city’s housing associations building more? As they have to meet certain rules, they could be expected to provide decent, affordable housing.

The vast majority of students in Maastricht currently rent from private landlords and commercial providers. Together, they account for more than 80 per cent of the city’s nearly 20,000 student rooms and studios. Maastricht’s housing associations – Maasvallei, Servatius, Woonpunt and Wonen Limburg – account for fewer than 3,000 units, or roughly 17 per cent of the market. According to Maurice Evers of Maastricht Housing, who presented these figures to the University Council’s Operations Committee last month, maintaining that share will require an additional 280 units in the coming years. Raising it to 20 per cent would mean building 1,100 new units, according to Evers’s calculations.

“No real need”

Even that would still fall well short of the 30 per cent target once aimed for. In fact, housing associations in Maastricht have never achieved that share of the market. Spokespeople for Woonpunt, Maasvallei and Servatius told *Observant* that the target was never a binding agreement with the municipality. As Hafid Bendaoud of Servatius explains, it was more of an aspiration, dating back to a time when the university was growing rapidly and demand for student housing was increasing year by year. Now that student numbers have stabilised – remaining roughly the same this academic year – “there is no real need to start large-scale new student housing developments”, says Bendaoud. It is true that students looking for a room this academic year were generally able to find one by October, Evers previously told *Observant*.

At the same time, housing associations face a difficult financial balancing act. As Stefanie Borghstijn of Maasvallei explains, rents for student housing need to remain affordable, which means relatively low rental income, “while construction and investment costs have risen”. Maasvallei has already scrapped plans for 250 student studios in Randwyck, which were due to be completed by 2024. Servatius did not take part in the development project for financial reasons, says Bendaoud: “Too expensive.” Ambitions for the next few years remain modest: Woonpunt has no new student housing projects planned, Maasvallei is building studios “that may also be suitable for students”



Photo: Shutterstock

and Servatius hopes to deliver 150 new student rooms by early 2029 at the latest.

Student housing association

The situation has led both the University Council and Maastricht’s municipal council to ask whether a dedicated student housing association should be established. The local party M:OED even included the idea in its manifesto. Unlike other Dutch student cities, Maastricht has never had one. Could that help increase the supply of affordable student

Now that student numbers have stabilised “there is no real need”

housing? The city’s existing housing associations are sceptical. They point out that they already work closely together and question whether a new organisation would be viable. As Borghstijn puts it, “The core issue remains the financial feasibility of affordable new-build housing. A specialised organisation does not automatically solve that underlying problem.”

Peter Doorackers

Local Consultative Body: plea for extra travel compensation for employees in lower salary scales

Who pays for the increasing costs of commuting by car?

“With these rising fuel costs, shouldn’t we be doing something for the people in lower salary scales?” The subject was raised during last week’s meeting of the Local Consultative Body. The vice president of the Executive Board promised to look into it together with the LCB.

“I’m thinking of concierges and receptionists who do not have the ‘luxury’ of working from home and who need their cars. It’s not like in the Randstad, public transport is often not an option in South Limburg. These people are being hit hard by the rising fuel costs. We need them, I can’t open a building without a receptionist.” The question was posed by Roy van Kessel,

building manager of the Faculty of Science and Engineering and FNV member for the Local Consultative Body, in which the unions meet with the Executive Board. He travels about 1280 km a month to and from work, receives a seven-cent travel compensation, until recently, paid about 1500 euros a year out of his own pocket, and is set to pay another 250 euros on top because of the current fuel prices. Although he was quick to clarify: “You don’t have to feel sorry for me.”

Jan-Tjitte Meindersma, vice president of the Executive Board, was sympathetic to the request. The difficulty is, how do you tackle the problem? And can you even tackle the problem? A contribution from the decentralised terms of employment

funds, for example – intended for extras on top of the CLA, such as a Christmas gift; the Executive Board usually determines those together with the LCB – is always intended for all employees, not a specific group.

LCB member Carijn Beumer (Aob) had another objection. Is a fuel cost compensation a good idea at all? After all, it means UM subsidising the fossil fuel industry. “Is it not possible to provide the compensation in a different way?”

Meindersma promised to investigate the options together with the LCB.

Riki Janssen

UM PhD candidate wins science dance contest

"YOU'RE A MOLECULE



YOU NEED TO JUMP. PUT ON YOUR TRAINERS"

How do you translate brainwaves, molecules and organs into dance? The key, says UM PhD candidate Kate Kondrateva, is not to make it too static. She turned her dissertation on MRI imaging into a dynamic performance for *Science* magazine's Dance Your PhD contest – and won.

"It was gruelling, though."

Creating a dance about your research is not as easy as it may sound, says Kondrateva. She certainly had no idea how hard it would be when she first learnt about Dance Your PhD. "I'd just started taking dance lessons and was in the middle of writing my dissertation when someone I knew put the two together. They sent me a link, and I just thought, 'Wow. I want to compete in this. And win it.'"

The dance contest was founded in 2008 by John Bohannon, who worked at *Science* at the time. His idea was to challenge PhD candidates to interpret their often complex research in dance and movement – and film it – to bring science to a wider audience. "I immediately looked up previous winners and the rules", says Kondrateva, who recalls entries of "Eurovision-level" quality – in other words, highly polished performances. "But I wasn't going to let that put me off." Having already spent some hours on the dance floor in her spare time made the decision to take the plunge a bit easier. Other aspects – such as appearing on camera – did not faze her in the slightest. "I used to blog, so I know how to tell a story on screen."

PARING IT DOWN

She teamed up with a choreographer friend, recruited someone to film the project and secured a recording studio. All she needed was a plan – and the willingness to leave out large parts of her research to keep the dance easy to follow. Her PhD research focuses on why MRI data can vary between scanners, and how brain volumes

Text: Deborah Blekkenhorst Photos: Stills from Kondratevas dance video

Help from AI

Dance Your PhD entries are divided into biology, physics, chemistry and social science. A new AI category was introduced this year. Kondrateva entered in this category, in which the use of AI to create the video is permitted. She used AI to compose the music, ChatGPT to write a shot-by-shot script and a video generator to create visual effects such as lighting and colour. “It didn’t necessarily make things easier – I still had to do everything myself in the end. Blood, sweat and tears are human, after all.” Kondrateva hopes to defend her PhD in Maastricht this summer.



measured at different times with different scanners can be reliably compared. “I had to leave out 80 per cent of my research just to make the remaining 20 per cent understandable.”

But even that proved a challenge. “The first time I walked into the studio with my pared-down dissertation and explained to the choreographer what the dance would be about, she looked at me like I was mad”, recalls Kondrateva. “I started explaining convolution – a mathematical operation – and how I thought we could portray it. You’ve got a matrix of numbers that you flip and multiply, like this.” She makes angular arm movements, miming squares with her hands. “I wanted a relatively literal translation, but the choreographer immediately said, ‘Kate, that’s not dance.’”

SWEATING IN TRAINERS

That was when the panic first set in, and Kondrateva was pushed to

put much more of herself into the performance. “It had to be more fluid, using my whole body, not just my hands. Dance is about emotion – it needed much more of that.”

She spent hours in the studio, working with the choreographer and figuring out how to express concepts such as brainwaves, molecules and neural networks. Behind-the-scenes footage shows Kondrateva and the choreographer trying out movements in front of a mirror; moments later, she is on her knees with her back to the camera, arms outstretched, turning her whole body to the left. Sweat pours down her face. “Everything had to be very dynamic, with expansive gestures. Spinning movements represent magnetic fields, for example. Sitting on the floor and reaching upwards represents growth. And how do you portray organs such as the kidneys or liver in dance? I wanted to wear heels, but the choreographer wouldn’t let me. She said, ‘You’re a molecule – you need to jump. Put on your trainers.’”

The music was another headache. Kondrateva wanted to use AI to compose a track, but it was more difficult than she had expected. “It wasn’t until the last week before the deadline that I managed to put together something I was happy with.” And then there was clothing and make-up to sort out, along with the performance itself and the editing, complete with special effects like bright lights and text on screen. The end result? A nearly four-minute video about MRI scans, the brain, AI, diagnostics and the continued importance of doctors – with Kondrateva as its dynamic centre. “I worked on it for months, fitting it in around everything else. I was basically doing everything myself apart from the choreography. It was gruelling.” Even so, she would encourage others to take part in the contest. “If I’d known in advance what it would involve, I’d still have done it – just not on my own.”

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Anyone expecting this Dance Your PhD win (which comes with a \$750 cash prize) to open doors for Kondrateva may be disappointed. In fact, she hasn’t even told a lot of people about it, worried they might not understand. “I feel like they might not take the dance contest seriously and see it as just a bit of fun you’ve spent way too much time on. I might tell more people later.” She is definitely proud of what she has achieved: “It’s very healthy to look at your dissertation in a different way – to take a step back and see it as something enjoyable. It’s good for your brain.”

news

Unclear whether the protesters are students

Continued from page 3

MRI scanners, president Pamela Habibović told the 'Strategy' committee members of the university council on the morning of Wednesday, 8 April. The occupation was otherwise treated as confidential.

Police report

After the Executive Board had twice ordered the protesters vacate the building, UM reported the unlawful entry to the police and the riot police put an end to the occupation at around five o'clock. The building was cleared, activists were arrested and released the next day, pending investigation by the Public

Prosecution Service. Was there no attempt at mediation? Yes, confirmed rector Smits, initiated by UM employees, who after contacting the group, wanted to talk; however, they were unsuccessful. The priority was vacating the premises, acknowledged Smits. There was no substantive discussion of Maastricht4Palestine's demands. What are those demands? Amongst other things, that the termination of a lease agreement with Arountown, for a building on Paul-Henri Spaaklaan. They also feel that UM should be more transparent about any ties it forms with Israel.

"Absolutely unacceptable"

In June of last year, students occupied the Uni-

versity College Maastricht in the city centre on behalf of Maastricht4Palestine. Police ended that occupation the same day. Protesters were arrested and taken away by bus, before being released; they were never asked to identify themselves. Why were people identified this time and might now face prosecution? According to the administrative and communications adviser for Mayor Hillenaar, that was decided (by the local security triangle) because of the "risk of endangerment", referring to the dangerous situation.

It is unclear whether there are any UM students among the activists. And it is also uncertain whether that will become clear. Can the police or the Public Prosecution Ser-

vice pass on names to a university? Rector Smits couldn't answer that question.

In The Hague, where former UM-president Rianne Letschert is now Minister of Education, the situation in Maastricht was discussed during a committee meeting on Thursday afternoon. René Claassen of the Markuszower Group asked whether she had been in contact with the university; he described it as a matter causing "complete disruption". Letschert said she found it "absolutely unacceptable" for people to occupy the university, especially "in an environment with potential security implications".

Wendy Degens

THE ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY, FACULTIES, SERVICE CENTRES AND STUDENT ORGANISATIONS CAN BE FOUND ON WWW.OBSERVANTONLINE.NL

Agenda academic ceremonies

Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6



SCAN THE CODE

Friday 10 April

20.00 → 01.00

MUSEUM NACHT MAASTRICHT 2026

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After party 00.30 → 05.00