

observant

INDEPENDENT WEEKLY MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 45 / NOVEMBER 14, 2024

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editorial

“You look good for your age”

Editor WD and I went to meet a new colleague in town. He told us a bit about himself, and then it was our turn. At one point, I mentioned my age – I’ll be 65 next month – and he gave me a surprised look. “Oh, I never would have guessed. I thought you were younger. You look good for your age, seem energetic and clearly still enjoy your work.” Very kind of him, you might think. And until recently, that’s exactly what I thought when people commented positively on my age. Or rather, when they told me I didn’t fit the negative stereotypes often associated with those over 60: resistant to change, counting down the days to retirement, digitally challenged, physically and cognitively less able.

But after interviewing Aagje Swinnen, professor of Aging Studies, I see things a bit differently. Age discrimination is deeply ingrained in our society, she explained to me (see pages 6-7). It thrives in a world where youth is seen as the norm and successful ageing means not ageing at all. Few people are aware of this, even at Maastricht University, says Swinnen; we’ve internalised it. To challenge this, a playful campaign was launched in which students and staff wear T-shirts bearing stereotypes that don’t match their age. For example, someone in their fifties might wear a shirt that says, “I’m young and innovative” while a young tutor might wear one saying, “I am old and blocking your promotion”. The goal is to spark conversations in tutorials or during coffee breaks, with the aim of contributing to a more age-friendly university.

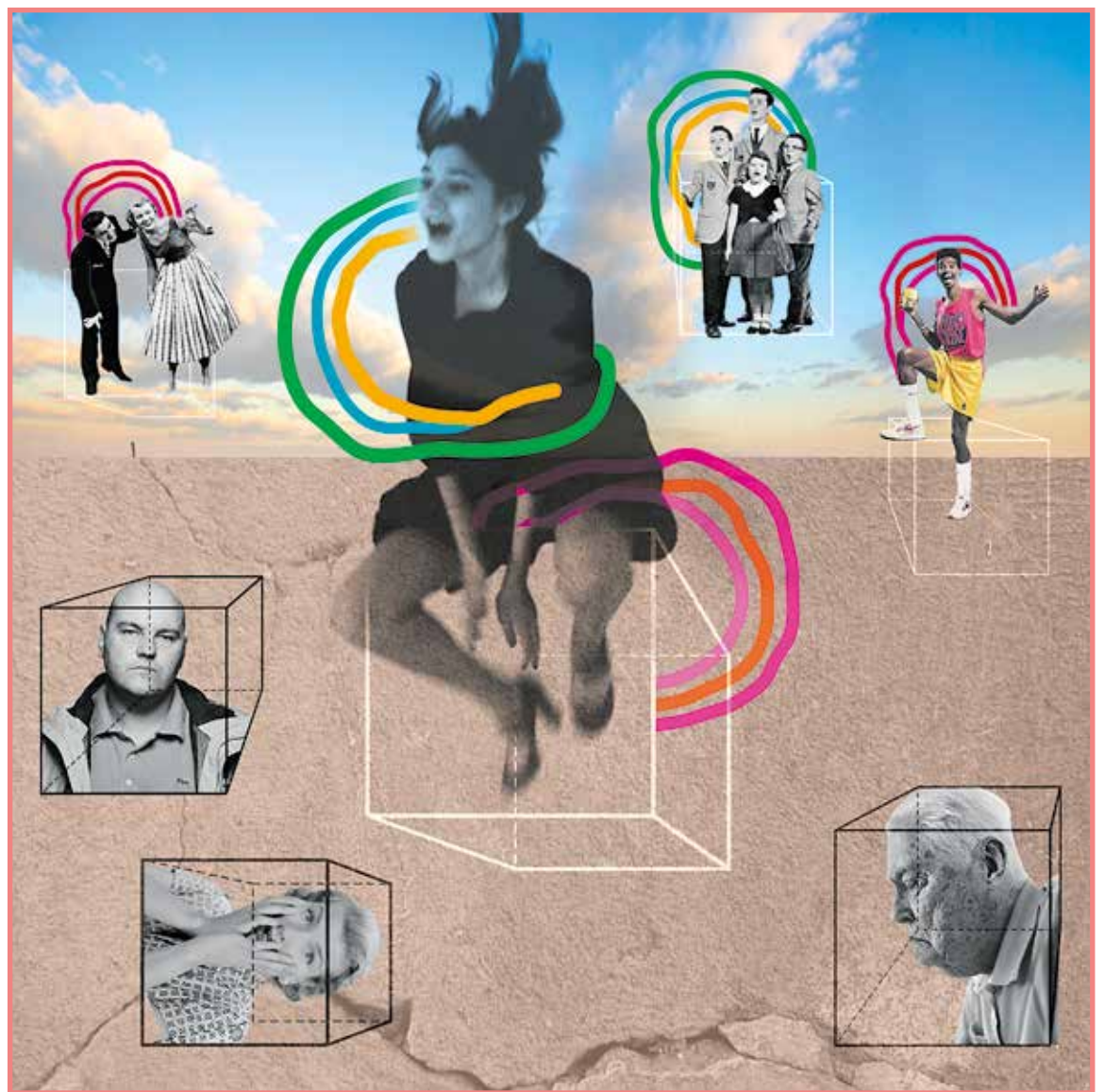
Some time ago, we invited a retiring researcher for a farewell interview. He’s known to our editorial team as an interesting thinker with a broad and critical view of the university and society. But he declined, as he felt he wouldn’t be able to speak openly. Any criticism, he believed, would almost certainly be seen as the ramblings of a grumpy old man who had failed to keep up with the times. At his faculty, he no longer felt free to be himself. I consider myself lucky that the culture here at *Observant*, in our team of both younger and older colleagues, is very different. I must admit, though, that I do fit some of the stereotypes about older people. I often rely on my younger, tech-savvy colleagues to help me when I run into issues with my computer or mobile phone. They’ll look at the screen, click a few buttons, and there you go – problem solved. Thank you, boys and girls.

Riki Janssen

Every week, the editor-in-chief writes about what has been happening at the *Observant* office



series everything you want to know about sex



Collage: Simone Golob

“There’s still a widespread misconception that everyone is straight, binary, cisgender and monogamous”

You’ve recently realised that you’re queer. Although your friends and family seem accepting of the LGBTQIA+ community, you still feel nervous about opening up to them. How do you go about this? UM sexologist Marieke Dewitte offers some advice.

There is still a widespread misconception that everyone is “straight, binary, cisgender and monogamous”, says Dewitte, who consulted Kai Jonas, professor of Applied Social Psychology with a focus on LGBTQIA+ diversity and health, for this instalment. “Especially with the shift to the right in society, you increasingly hear comments like, ‘It’s just a trend’ or ‘They just want attention.’ Some political parties are even proposing anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation. Meanwhile, there’s still a lack of proper media representation – many TV shows and films continue to stereotype men who have sex with men, for example.”

All of which is to say: it’s completely understandable if you feel nervous about telling people that you don’t fit into one of the boxes mentioned above. “But it’s also brave, authentic and important. It’s good for people to see how diverse society really is and to realise that they, too, know people who identify as queer.”

If you’re about to take this step, try to prepare yourself, says Dewitte. “What reactions might you get? What questions might people have? It’s helpful to first have a clear understanding of what it means to you to be, say, non-binary or bisexual.” When the time comes, try not to worry too much. “In your mind, it can grow into a much bigger problem than it actually is. You don’t need to have ready-made answers; just share your story, your experience, and how you feel about it. Share this with someone you trust, and if that goes well, you can build on that positive experience.” University can be a good envi-

ronment for that. “People don’t know your ‘old’ identity, so you have less to explain.” Also, consider how you might handle a negative reaction. “Men tend to show less understanding, so maybe you could start by telling close female friends, to build positive experiences.”

Not many people will directly say that they have an issue with it, but they might show it more subtly. “For example, guys who used to greet each other with a kiss might stop doing so when they learn their friend is attracted to men.”

And if it’s your child or friend opening up to you? “Start by saying how brave it is for them to tell you. Thank them for trusting you with this. Acknowledge that they’ve likely had to overcome some obstacles to say it. And if you find yourself feeling taken aback because it’s not what you expected, just be honest and say so. Don’t say you’re fine with it if your body language says otherwise. Instead, show interest and openness. You could say something like, ‘I’m a bit surprised, but could you tell me more? I’d like to hear your story.’”

Cleo Freriks

Marieke Dewitte is a clinical psychologist and sexologist at Maastricht University. In this weekly series, she answers questions about sex from students. If you have a question, you can submit it anonymously, scan the code



news

UM contingent ready for demonstration on 14 November

Painting banners and cutting red squares



Photo: Joey Roberts

It's Friday afternoon and the attic room in Grote Gracht 86 smells like paint. Lecturers and students planning to join the demonstration against the cuts to higher education can paint their banners here. There are only a few takers, but that doesn't mean that people aren't interested in heading to Utrecht on Thursday – the group chat created especially for the event is buzzing with all the information being shared.

One white sheet reads 'Talenstudies kunnen niet worden weggeschoofed' [Language degrees can't just be *schoof*-ed aside], a play on the name of the current prime minister. Lies Wesseling, Professor of Cultural History, Gender and Diversity, paints the letters red. "That's the worst thing, I think, that some language degrees will just disappear, like what's happening in Leiden now." University newspaper *Mare* recently reported that as part of the cuts, the Leiden Executive Board has decided to merge a number of different language degrees. For example, Chinese, Japanese and Korean will now be merged into a single Bachelor's degree: Asia studies.

Wesseling is one of three members of staff who came together to make banners on Friday afternoon. At a table sits Ash-Avary Chrobak, a student of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sci-

ences, cutting out red felt squares, the symbol for 'WO in Actie', one of the organisers of the demonstration. "I hope that there are enough. I hear from a lot of students that they want to come. This is our community, too, and if carried out, these cuts will hit us all. We're fighting for our own opportunities."

Students would be immediately hit if the delay penalty is implemented, although *RTL Nieuws* reported recently that Minister of Education Eppo Bruins has his own doubts about that now. He is said to be contemplating raising the tuition fees instead (currently €2,530).

The news is immediately shared in the group chat of the Maastricht chapter of 'WO in Actie', specially created for the demonstration. Other messages in the chat: is there still room on one of the five coaches the faculties have arranged (no), how can students without free public transport get their train tickets reimbursed (become a member of one of the unions, UM will only reimburse tickets for employees), and will there be rest stops at the demonstration for people who are easily overstimulated but who do want to march (yes, the Janskerk, the Domkerk and the AOb education café). On Monday afternoon, the group chat has 378 members, how many will ultimately travel to Utrecht remains to be seen.

CF

More student housing – but it's expensive

Since this summer, Maastricht has added over eight hundred student housing units to its stock, including the latest addition: one hundred studio flats on Limburglaan, near Kennedybrug. However, a University Council committee has raised questions about affordability – and the answer is disappointing.

The fully furnished studio flats in the former office building at Limburglaan 5 will cost over €1000 per month, including utilities, according to Maurice Evers, head of Maastricht Housing. His update on the housing situation in Maastricht drew sighs from committee members. "This isn't what we want, either. In our discussions with the municipality, we requested base rents of €450." However, he explains, the municipality's hands are somewhat tied. "The building was purchased by a developer who agreed to keep affordability in mind, but when they sell it, they're free to set whatever price they want." In addition to affordability, the committee is concerned about housing quality. "That's why we want the municipality to push forward with student housing on the Health Campus in Randwyck. We need more quality housing."

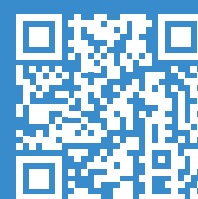
The good news is that the wider Maastricht area currently has enough student housing to meet demand. Maastricht Housing had anticipated an increase of nearly one thousand students at UM, but preliminary figures indicate only about five hundred. While there will always be individual students who struggle to find suitable accommodation, Evers foresees no major issues now or in the near future.

It seems the campaign warning prospective students about the tight housing market – "Don't come to Maastricht if you haven't found housing" – has had the intended effect. "Perhaps the message was a bit too strong, given the drop in new bachelor's students. But we had agreed with the Universities of the Netherlands (UNL) to all deliver that message."

The committee also wanted to know what to expect for the next academic year. "It's hard to predict. It depends on the government's plans and how they will affect our programmes. I expect we'll have a clearer picture by January at the earliest."

Wendy Degens

Check out
the latest news
on



column



When Waiting Becomes Wasting

“

Upon receiving my high school diploma in 2022, I was gifted a small bottle of champagne; 375 millilitres of sparkling, celebratory wine to toast my achievement.

To many, it might seem like a pricey gift, but to me, it was priceless. I saw beyond the fancy bottle. Popping the cork would commemorate years of hard work, wonderful memories, and the end of a profound chapter in my life. As such, I was determined to only open my champagne at the right occasion- the perfect moment.

Initially, I wanted to wait until I had completed my first semester at university. Surely, that would be the right occasion. However, post-semester, I decided I wanted to wait until I had passed my first year. Once I'd accomplished that first year, I considered waiting until my second. Needless to say, after the second year, I decided that I might as well wait until I'd received my bachelor's degree. *That* would definitely be the right occasion. Unfortunately, there's a bitter reality behind saving things for the 'right occasion'. Christmas 2022, I was gifted 'designer pasta'. I waited too long to eat it, and it expired. My birthday 2023, I was gifted a luxury face mask. I waited too long to use it, and it expired.

A non-vintage champagne typically lasts around three to four years. Consequently, my graduation champagne hasn't expired yet- but it inevitably will at some point.

The point is, you can't hold on to something that isn't made to last. Consumable gifts are meant to be consumed fairly quickly. Memories, on the other hand, last forever. There is no right occasion to indulge in a present. On the contrary, a present has the power to transform a mundane affair into an extraordinary one. In the end, it's not about waiting for the perfect moment, but taking the moment and making it perfect.

So, Mom and Dad, if you're reading this, please put that bottle in the fridge- because the next time I'm home, we're making the moment perfect.

”

Robin van Wasen,
derdejaars student aan
het University College Maastricht

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



/ Ellen Bastiaens
(Hengelo, Overijssel,
1967)

/ Director of EDLAB,
Maastricht University
Centre for Teaching &
Learning

/ Relationship status:
married to Theo, one
daughter, Isabelle (22)

/ Lives in Eyselshoven

Photo: Joey Roberts

“
I hope to have completed
fashion school
by the time I retire
”

What can people find out about you online?

[Laughs] I'm not very active online. I suppose it just doesn't interest me much. I try to use LinkedIn to promote my work at EDLAB, as its visibility matters to me. I'm also on Facebook because that's where our doggy daycare posts videos. We have a Cardigan Welsh corgi who goes once a week and has the time of his life there. I love watching the dogs run around and play together, or just mill about. That's about it for my social media presence. I think I've got an Instagram account, but I don't use it much. It just isn't really my thing.

What's the hardest part of your role?

Phew. Having too many ideas and not enough time. Talking with people always sparks new ideas and makes me think about what else we could do. Thankfully, I have people on my team who rein me in and tell me, "That's enough for now." I asked them to do that, because my mind never stops. I'm a huge optimist; the glass is always half full for me. I see opportunities everywhere. My husband calls me a ray of sunshine. When I was working on my PhD years ago, people said I was so cheer-

ful, and it's true, both literally and figuratively. I bring that attitude of optimism into my work, which helps drive things forward. It's always wonderful to see that I've managed to bring people together on projects, which can be daunting to get off the ground. But pacing my energy, that's the hardest part.

I was a horrible teenager. Oh no, not at all. I was very quiet and reserved, never any trouble. I don't think my mother would say I was difficult, if I asked her now. I suppose I was a bit of an outsider in secondary school, though. Don't ask me why, but I was part of a group of four girls, sometimes five, all still figuring out our own style. We were just a bit different from everyone else. Not in a negative way, and it didn't bother us, but looking back, I realise we always kept to our own little group.

Do you ever pray? I grew up Catholic, got married in the Catholic Church, and our daughter was baptised and confirmed. But I feel like an atheist nowadays. I feel connected to my memories rather than to the church or religion. It was

my dad's birthday recently – he passed away almost nine years ago – and on days like that, I think about him a lot. The last time I cried was when he died. It was sad, but it felt right. He'd been ill for some time. I hold on to those happy memories; they're my way of shaping my faith. We live next to a natural burial ground, and I'd like to be buried there, surrounded by nature, with deer roaming around and birds flying overhead. We sometimes walk the dog there. I feel very peaceful there, just revelling in the sight of a bird perched on a branch... My husband is more religious; for him, burial is more closely tied to a traditional cemetery.

What would you like to pass on to your daughter?

Trust in yourself and your abilities. Be honest, and make the most of what you've got. My daughter is 22 now and studying Medicine here at UM. It was a well-considered choice; she's wanted to be a doctor since she was twelve. We encouraged her to look at other universities too, and she did, but her mind was pretty much made up. She's caring, has a great sense of humour, is creative and is very good at balancing work and life. At one point, she even banned us from talking about work at the dinner table. My husband and I both have backgrounds in educational sciences, so it came up often. Eventually, she'd had enough. Now she's the one sharing her experiences while we listen.

In ten years... I'll be nearing retirement and hopefully spending a lot of time on my hobby, sewing clothes. I started as a child, buying scraps of fabric from the fabric shop to make doll clothes with a friend. Around fifteen, I wanted to start sewing for myself. My aunt Truus, who was a seamstress, helped me. When I moved to Limburg, I earned four fashion school certificates. Now, I can sew anything I want. I'm currently working on a jacket, and I made this blouse I'm wearing. By 67, I hope to have completed the course at fashion school so I can start teaching. I'm good – not perfect – at sewing, but the teaching side, helping others learn, is what I enjoy most. That's where my background in educational sciences comes in again.

Deborah Blekkenhorst

Weekly personal interview with
a student or employee

Lecturer Josje Weusten pens first novel

“Little by little, your characters become their own person, even have their own ideas”

From destroyed reputations to deadly riots: in *Fake Fish*, senior lecturer Josje Weusten's debut novel (released 14 November), the ramifications of fake news are enormous. In this thrilling dystopian tale, set in Maastricht, she uses her characters to explore ideas about cancel culture and fake news.

In present-day Maastricht, a lecturer at the fictional Faculty of Film Studies suffers serious damage to his reputation after a damning video of him is leaked. Is he who people thought he was? Is the reaction justified? What is the truth? All questions Weusten's characters struggle with in the first half of *Fake Fish*.

Perspectives

“I still don't know what the right answer is,” says Weusten. That was also not her intention. “I wanted to present all the different points of view, I very deliberately chose a plurality of perspectives. I hope this novel offers an insight into other people's points of view, and that afterwards, people can be more understanding towards people who hold different opinions.” She let herself be led by her characters. “How do they react to a situation, what are their motives? They had to be real people, flaws and all, not black and white. In the beginning, you put too much of yourself into them, but little by little, they become their own person. Sometimes they even have their own ideas. During one writing exercise, I started a discussion with one of my characters. ‘Why are you doing this, aren't you a feminist?’ I asked her. ‘No, I'm not, you made that up,’ she said.” She laughs. “It sounds a little schizophrenic, but at the time I really did wonder where it was coming from.”

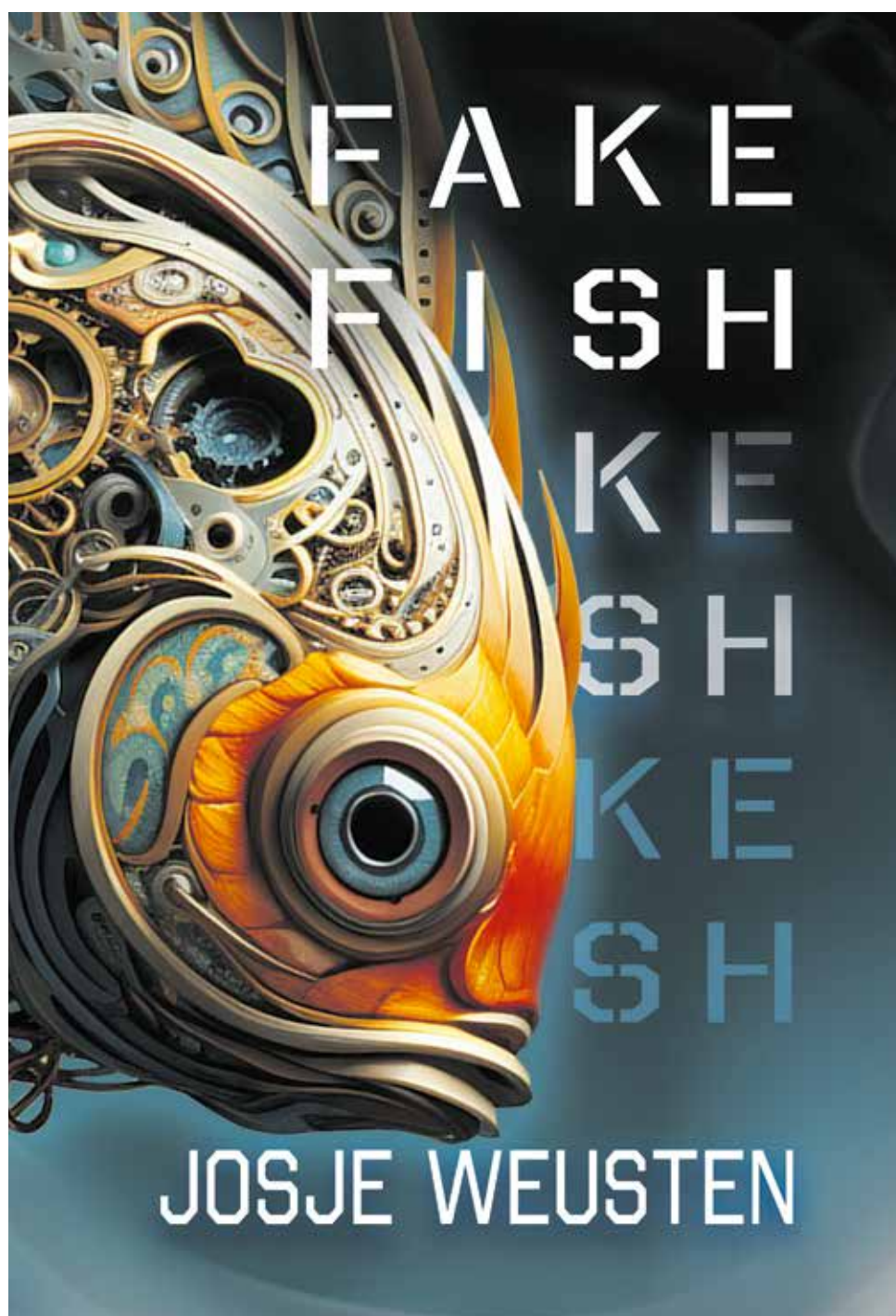
What is real?

The question of what is real or not plays out on an increasingly larger scale throughout the book. The second half is set twenty years into the future, in a dystopian world where the authorities are trying to wrestle back control of reality and ban all forms of fiction.

The result is a Maastricht that is at the same time so familiar and yet totally alien. And for readers who know the city, that is precisely what makes the story even more oppressive. All the street art has been removed or replaced with hyper-realistic images. Singing is no longer allowed – lyrics fire up the imagination too much, the radio only plays instrumental music. There are cameras everywhere and all phones now have a special, compulsory tracking programme installed. “I followed the advice I give to my own Creative Writing students: write what you know, but feel free to let your imagination go nuts,” says Weusten. “I wanted to give my day-to-day environment a twist and at the same time, write about a heavy topic in a style that grips you from the beginning. In the style of Dutch author Renate Dorrestein, Canadian Margaret Atwood and Japanese-British Kazuo Ishiguro, for example.” And indeed, Weusten's novel is a real page-turner, albeit one that sticks in the mind once you've finished.

Inspiration

She drew inspiration from movies, music and even real-life events she experienced. “There are two important moments.



The first was when a student walked into my lesson, stating: ‘I'm not going to read this author's work, because they said objectionable things.’ This turned out not even to be true. We managed to have a good discussion about it, but that's not always possible.”

The second was during the pandemic. “I lost a friend, because she was completely taken in by various conspiracy theories. We could no longer understand each other, so we completely lost touch – such a shame.”

In English

Fake Fish was published in English – the language Weusten wrote the novel in – by a British publisher. Why didn't she write it in Dutch, her mother tongue? “I didn't set out to write a novel at all. I wanted to improve my creative English, so I applied and was accepted to the Faber Academy (a renowned creative writing school in London, ed.). I had to submit the first 20 thousand words ahead of time. And of course, I've

been teaching in English for nearly twenty years, I've written a couple of short stories in English. It's what my creativity is used to by now. I did try rewriting the first chapter in Dutch, but it felt very unnatural.”

Will there ever be a Dutch translation? “I hope so, although I'm not sure I'll do it myself. I'm trying my hand at my first literary translation – an anthology of stories written by FASoS colleagues – to see how I do. It's much more creative work than I thought, you really have to think carefully.” Besides, she's working on her second novel and a series of semi-autobiographical stories, also in English.

Cleo Freriks

Fake Fish | Josje Weusten | English | Sparsile Books | ISBN 9781914399602 | €16.99

Playful T-shirt campaign launched to spark dialogue about ageism

“I am old and standing in young people’s way”

Young people are flexible and always open to innovation, while older people are set in their ways and resistant to change. Truth or myth? Aagje Swinnen, professor of Aging Studies, is one of the initiators of a playful T-shirt campaign at Maastricht University, aiming to show that ageism – age discrimination – is woven into the very fabric of our society. “We’re not here to lecture, but to start a dialogue.”

Text: Riki Janssen **Illustration:** Bas van der Schot

It’s late September. Thirteen first-year European Studies students have barely settled into their seats when their tutor, Greta Carlevaro, pulls on a salmon-pink T-shirt over her clothes. The slogan on

the shirt reads, “I am old and blocking your promotion.” The classroom stays silent; none of the students react, despite the obvious mismatch between the slogan and their tutor’s young age.

At the end of class, Carlevaro draws attention to the T-shirt. Had the students noticed it? Yes, they had. “Are you trying to provoke us?” one asks. “Is this about older people’s prejudice against young

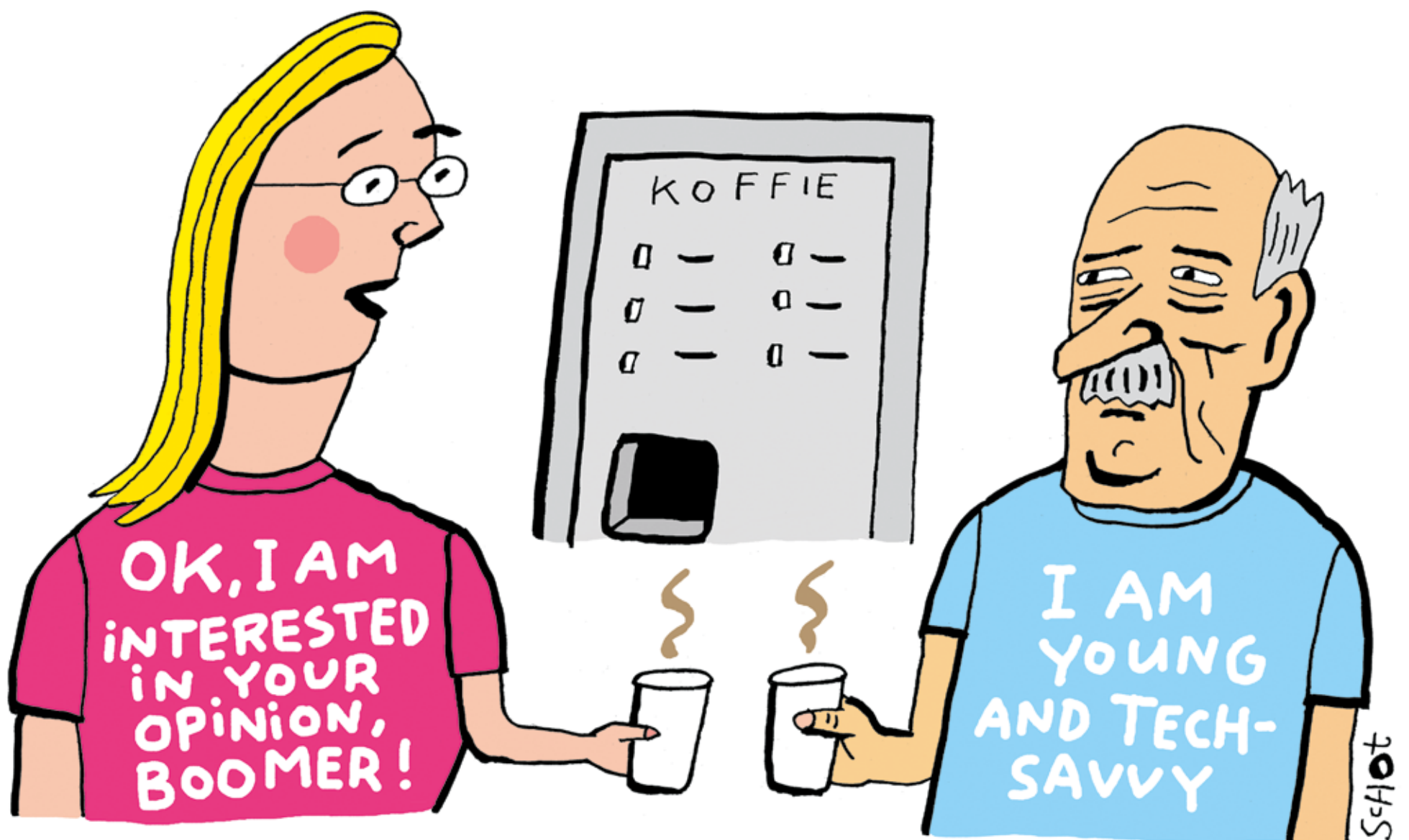
people, like how they don’t treat young people as their equals because they’re more experienced?” “Or is it a call for more young people at UM?” Carlevaro, intent on getting her students to recognise ageism, changes tack. “Imagine the shirt said, ‘I am a woman and I am blocking your career. How would you respond?’ That’s sexist, the students immediately say; it’s discrimination. “And if I changed ‘woman’ to ‘Black?’” the tutor asks. The answer comes without hesitation: “Provocative and racist.” She presses on. “How about, ‘I am old and afraid of computers?’” The students laugh. “OK”, says Carlevaro, “and ‘I am a woman and afraid of computers?’” More laughter, but then: “The first is a joke; the second is an offensive joke.” “So it’s less offensive if it’s about age?” the tutor asks.

Young and innovative

Age discrimination is deeply ingrained in our society, explains Aagje Swinnen, professor of Aging Studies. Few people are aware of this, even at Maastricht University. “We’ve internalised it. That’s why this campaign makes it visible by putting stereotypes on T-shirts.” The slogans include “I am old and waiting to retire”, “I am old and afraid of computers” and “I am young and innovative”. Over the coming weeks, students and staff – campaign ambassadors – will wear these T-shirts for two days. A key feature is the “visual contradiction” between the ambassador’s age and the slogan on the shirt, explains Swinnen. Picture someone in their sixties wearing a shirt that says, “I’m young and tech-savvy.” The project aims to spark conversations about ageism, “age-based stereotypes, discriminatory practices and institutional policies; how we think and feel about ourselves and others based on age”. Not just with students in tutorials, but also with colleagues during coffee breaks, for example. “We’re not here to lecture”, says Swinnen, “but to encourage reflection and work towards a more age-friendly university together.”

Abandoned

In March 2018, then-rector Rianne Letschert signed the Ten Principles of an Age-Friendly University, making UM the first continental European institution to join the Age-Friendly University (UFA) Global Network. Age-friendly universities aim to be sensitive to the needs of older and retired employees and promote intergenerational collaboration, encouraging students and staff of all ages to appreciate the value of each life stage. However, it’s unclear how much progress UM has made towards these well-intended goals. Take Swinnen’s 2019 study “Care is what you miss from the organisation”, exploring the experiences of nearly and newly retired academic staff at UM. The findings were startling. Participants in the study said they felt abandoned by the university – particularly on their first day of retirement, when they found their email account terminated, their UM card deactivated and even their list of academic publications removed from the university website. One participant described it as “an administrative death”. Alumni, by contrast, do get to keep their university email accounts. Several participants also complained about arbitrary treatment: some retirees were given warm send-offs and remained involved in their departments, while others slipped quietly into retirement.



Inquiries reveal that retired employees can apply for a new UM card to retain access to the university library. The situation is different for email accounts: under current UM policy, employee accounts – including email – are still deactivated immediately upon retirement. Exceptions are made for those who continue to work for UM, such as PhD supervisors. Whether this will change in the near future remains unclear. According to policy advisor Manon Duchateau, the university is currently working on an “offboarding policy”. She explains that the People & Development department (formerly HR) previously focused on onboarding – recruiting and selecting new employees. This focus has been broadened to include those leaving UM, whether due to retirement or to pursue work elsewhere: offboarding. However, this policy is still in its early stages and will take time to develop.

Duchateau is currently identifying “areas for improvement” that, with input from a working group, should lead to concrete actions. The first changes are expected by spring 2025, including a “warm send-off for anyone who is leaving, acknowledging and honouring their contributions to UM”. Employees approaching retirement will also receive better information and guidance, “not at the last minute, but up to several years in advance.” To implement this initiative, UM now has six

certified pension ambassadors working alongside People & Organisation Advisors or POAs (formerly HR advisors). Duchateau anticipates that the working group will also look into the options for allowing retired employees to keep their email accounts.

Worried

One conclusion of Swinnen’s 2019 study was the need for a change in UM’s “institutional retirement culture” to better support nearly and newly retired academic staff members. That’s where the current study comes in. Recruiting enough ambassadors for the anti-ageism campaign wasn’t easy. Some established UM researchers were hesitant, or initially agreed enthusiastically only to back out later. Swinnen can only speculate on their reasons: “I suspect some were worried that the provocative slogans on their T-shirts might be taken as criticism of the university – that’s not the aim of the project at all. Others might have worried about being labelled as ‘woke’.”

The campaign’s 25 ambassadors are tasked with documenting the conversations sparked by their T-shirts. Their notes will be analysed by Swinnen and her team, consisting of Iya Malafei, Greta Carlevaro, Sara De Vuyst and Emma Hizette. “I expect we’ll have collected all data by the end of 2024. We aim to complete the study by mid-2025.”

Old and wise

Ageism thrives in a world where youth is seen as the norm – just look at advertising – and people in their fifties and sixties are flattered to be told, “You look great for your age.” This comes with all kinds of stereotypes, explains Swinnen, which are either too negative or too positive. “They’re based on unproven assumptions about careers, ambitions, productivity, technology, experience, mentality and cognitive abilities. Youth is equated with creativity, open-mindedness, adaptability, productivity and tech-savviness; being older is equated with being resistant to change, out of touch with social and technological progress, and mentally and physically less able. The only positive stereotype about age is that it comes with wisdom – and that’s not always true either.” Moreover, such stereotypes treat entire age groups as monoliths, as if all twenty-somethings, fifty-somethings or eighty-somethings are the same. “We forget that there’s great diversity within each age group. And the category of ‘older people’ is the most diverse of all.”

OK boomer

What is her first impression, based on the notes they have already received? “People are even less aware of age discrimination than we thought. They don’t recognise it; even when it’s explained to them, they don’t see why saying ‘You still

look young’ to a person in their sixties is problematic. But comments like these take youth as the norm and imply that successful ageing means not ageing at all. If you’re no longer youthful, you’re no longer relevant. Take the phrase, ‘OK boomer’ – it reduces you to someone not worth listening to, someone stuffy and old-fashioned.

“And we all reach that point eventually, as youth is a ‘moveable marker’. You start out in the privileged position of being young, but age inevitably catches up with you. We need to treat people as individuals, not put them into categories like ‘old’ and ‘young’ or ‘boomer’ and ‘Gen Z’. Age is just one factor among many that make up who you are at a given moment in time.”

We are young

Back to the classroom – the international classroom, which Swinnen hopes will one day become an intergenerational classroom. The conversation has taken various turns. One student’s father wanted to go back to university but was unable to attend daytime classes; in Italy, young people struggle to find jobs, while older generations call the shots. Wrapping up, Carlevaro tells her students, “You easily recognise issues of racism or sexism, but not age discrimination.” A pause follows. Then, one student voices the group’s thoughts: “We never talk about it. We are young – it’s not something we think about!”



background

Studio Europa and Maastricht University scrutinize US presidential election EU, NATO and Ukraine should brace themselves for president Trump

Who among them supports Donald Trump? The attendees at the Brandweerkantine on Capucijnestraat remain silent. The new US president cannot count on sympathy from the participants (students and researchers) at the event hosted by Studio Europa, Maastricht University, and the Karel de Grote Prize Foundation, last week. A panel of former US correspondents and scholars shed a light on what Trump's victory could mean for Europe: "We're not entirely cooked, but the situation is concerning."

For example, in terms of security. After all, Trump already reproached his European NATO allies during his first term as president for not spending enough on their militaries. While this has changed somewhat since then, Europe still can't manage without America's military support, several speakers emphasize. Will the US continue to provide that support, now that its attention seems to be focused primarily on China?

In theory, Trump's victory could bring European countries closer together and encourage them to manage their own security, panel members say. But the reality is challenging in the EU: political will is sometimes lacking, and right-wing populist leaders like Viktor Orbán (Hungary) and Robert Fico (Slovakia), who sympathize with Trump, are already frequently slowing down Brussels' efforts.

The American dream

Ukraine also faces bad news. "That country needs to fasten its seatbelts," says Bram Boxhoorn, associate professor at Webster University Leiden. "I fear the worst." Trump has said he wants to "bring peace there within a few days", but does not explain how. "Irresponsible," Boxhoorn judges - although he stresses that the president does not determine foreign



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policy alone: a Secretary of State is yet to be appointed.

The attendees clearly stand on one side of what moderator and UCM professor Roberta Haar calls the "diploma divide". Like many well-educated American city dwellers, they had hoped for Democrat Kamala Harris, while many working-class Americans in rural areas preferred Republican Trump. He, "a billionaire", somehow succeeds in presenting himself as a man of the people, according to Rotterdam professor Etienne Augé. Harris, on the other hand, is seen as elitist, even though she, a woman of color with a successful career, is "the

embodiment of the American dream".

The Divided States

The United States, several speakers observe, now more closely resembles the Divided States. American UCM student Josephine Gould can relate. She is from swing state Georgia, where Trump once again claimed victory, just as he did in 2016. Back then, she was "disappointed", now she says: "I am ashamed that we've let it happen again." The divide cuts straight through her family: "All my relatives are Trump supporters. At home, I have to be careful about what I say; politics is a taboo topic."

Is it all doom and gloom, then? "There is always hope," says Ralph Sina, former US correspondent for the German broadcaster ARD. Moderator Haar points to the governors of individual states, who hold significant power and can offer a counterbalance. "Perhaps we're being a little too grim," notes Sander Tordoir, chief economist at the Center for European Reform. "Trump promises more than he delivers." While he finds the situation concerning, "we're not completely cooked."

*Peter Doorakkers,
with contributions from Lena Reichel*

Agenda academic ceremonies Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

14-11, 13.00h Mélanie Nadège Winanda Monfrance	26-11, 10.00h Syed Muhammad Mueez Aizaz Double Doctorate Degree Maastricht University - RWTH Aachen University
14-11, 16.00h Eric Lambertus Maria Dumont	26-11, 13.00h Kiran Koelfat
15-11, 10.00h Benson Mutuku Muthama	26-11, 16.00h Jana Viktoria Nysten
15-11, 13.00h Mauro Cavarra Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University - Università degli Studi di Messina, Italy	28-11, 10.00h Tiantian Wang
15-11, 16.00h Laura Nießen	28-11, 13.00h Jennifer McDonald Double Doctorate Degree Maastricht University - Western Sydney University
18-11, 10.00h Maria Gabriella Fois	28-11, 16.00h Ahmad Malkawi
19-11, 10.00h Chiara Stival	29-11, 10.00h Olesia Nikulina
19-11, 13.00h Andrei Utina	29-11, 13.00h Merel Margaretha van der Thiel
19-11, 16.00h Rald Victor Maria Groven	29-11, 16.30h Dr. Maja Brkan inauguratie
20-11, 10.00h Lieke Maas	02-12, 10.00h Haidong Fang
20-11, 13.00h Erin Barry	02-12, 13.00h Lisanne Steijvers
20-11, 16.00h Benson Ku	02-12, 16.00h Constanta Rosca
21-11, 13.00h Koen Willem Frederik van der Laan	03-12, 10.00h Isabeau Vermeulen
21-11, 16.00h Maud Simone Hevink	03-12, 12.45h Lotte Meert, Double Doctorate Degree Maastricht University - University of Antwerp
22-11, 10.00h Wendy Nuis	03-12, 13.00h Romy Richter
22-11, 13.00h Rudolf Theodoor Tolsma	03-12, 16.00h Lars Mischa Marlie Vliex
22-11, 16.00h Xinxin Zhu double doctorale degree Maastricht university - Dongbei university of finance and economics	04-12, 10.00h Carolien Karin Maria de Jonge - Vermeulen
25-11, 10.00h Florencia Jaccoud	04-12, 13.00h Lydie Marie Odette Barbeau
25-11, 13.00h Aygül Zengin	04-12, 16.00h Max Guillaume Mentink
25-11, 16.00h Sinead Grealley	05-12, 10.00h Johanna Rutten
	05-12, 13.00h Vivian de Gier

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