

Plagiarism in Academic Research and Education

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‘STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS’

**Truthful citation is the social responsibility
of academics**

By Prof. Egbert Dommering¹

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1. By way of introduction

Orion and Cedalion

The title is a quote from a letter written by Isaac Newton to his colleague and fellow member of the London-based Royal Academy, Robert Hooke, on 5 February 1676: 'If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.' Newton was quoting (without attribution) Bernard de Chartres, a 12th-century French philosopher, who may not have come up with the saying himself, either. The first-known version is in Latin ('nanos gigantum humeris insidentes'), and can be found visualised in the stained glass windows of Chartres Cathedral, where the evangelists (depicted as dwarfs) sit on the shoulders of the Old Testament prophets, who are depicted as giants. This metaphor, in turn, was taken from Greek mythology, where the blind giant Orion was depicted with his manservant Cedalion seated on his shoulders, so that he could serve as Orion's eyes.

When Newton wrote the aforementioned letter, he was still on good terms with Hooke, but ten years later, when his book *Philosophiæ naturalis principia mathematica*, in which he first laid out his theory of gravity, was published, Hooke began to spread allegations that he had been the one to bring the idea up with Newton. So he was arguing that he, rather than Newton, had discovered gravity. This was not true, but at the same time, it was not entirely untrue, either. While Newton did not borrow his universal law of gravitation from Hooke, he did borrow his ideas on the basic structure of the rotations of celestial bodies, without which he could not have arrived at his universal law.² By that time, the relationship between the two men had soured to the point where they wouldn't give each other the time of day.

The principles of originality and truth

The Newton-Hooke case contains all the ingredients of the law of quotation. I distinguish in this law the *principle of originality* and the *principle of truth*.

By the *principle of originality* I mean the duty of a person who is using another person's work in his own creations to refer to the person from whose 'original' work he is borrowing, because that person deserves to be given credit. In other words, the principle relates to the question as to *who came up with what*. There are both copyright-related and collegial sides to this. The former is of a legal nature, while the second is of an ethical nature, and the norms do not have the same content, as I will show below. However, in both cases the norms are designed to protect the *authors*. The age of the work to which an author refers matters, as does the question as to whether the colleague is dead or alive. If a great deal of time has elapsed between the original work and the work that borrows from the original work, the rules are enforced less strictly.

By the *principle of truth* I mean the duty to provide a correct picture of the knowledge on which one's reasoning is based. This principle comes in two variants: an authoritarian one (the criterion of truth is derived from a secular or religious authority) and a rational one (truth is derived from rational argument founded in empirical observations). The former variant relates to religious or popular beliefs revealed by religion or the national consciousness or some other authority; these are 'truths of faith'.³ The latter variant is the scientific one, which protects the integrity of science in general and scientific works in particular. However, it also protects the interests of the people, which has the right to receive correct information on what is going on in science. In the public debate of recent decades, these two variants of the principle of truth have increasingly been at odds. I will return to this subject at the end of this article.

2 See Floris Cohen, *Isaac Newton en het ware weten*, Amsterdam: Bert Bakker 2010, p. 9 and pp. 192-193.

3 Cf. Egbert Dommering, *Het Verschil van Mening*, Amsterdam: Bert Bakker/Prometheus 2016, Chapter 7, 'Van geopenbaarde waarheid naar sceptische waarheid'. ('From revealed truths to sceptical truths').

Forgery and plagiarism

I should probably first shed some light on the concepts of 'forgery' and 'plagiarism', as people tend to get these mixed up. A forgery is the creation of a copy of the style and contents of the original work, so faithful that the copy could be presented as being from the hand of the author of the work that was copied. In other words, the forger assumes the identity of the author whose work is being forged. The famous case in point is the one about the Dutchman Han van Meegeren, who, just before the start of World War II, began to produce forgeries of the style of the works of the 17th-century Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer. He did such an outstanding job of it that he managed to convince Abraham Bredius, the prominent Dutch art expert specialising in 17th-century paintings, that the painting called 'Supper at Emmaus' was a real, previously unknown Vermeer. As a result, it was purchased by Rotterdam's Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum, which believed it had acquired a real Vermeer. After the war, Van Meegeren was found guilty of multiple forgeries by a Dutch court of law. 'Supper at Emmaus' is still part of the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum's collection, but is now on display there to commemorate the historical mistake. In other words, it is presented as a 'real' Van Meegeren.



The word 'forgery' is also used in research for the falsification of study results and methods. Falsification includes a large variety of infractions, ranging from data manipulation in empirical research to made-up stories about studies that were never conducted. This is reprehensible from a scientific point of view, but does not have anything to do with plagiarism.⁴

⁴ In the humanities, there is such a thing as a 'pastiche', in which people copy subject matter and style in order to denounce a particular phenomenon or person represented by that subject matter or style. Such exercises in criticism will be discussed below, when I touch on the Sokal case.

Plagiarism

The term 'plagiarism' as used in the title of this collection wrongly puts the emphasis on the principle of originality, even though academic source citation also (and mostly) revolves around the principle of truth. Plagiarism in the narrow sense of the word is largely informed by copyright law, since it generally revolves around the copying of other people's writings in one's own work without acknowledging the source. Academic plagiarism includes the same, but I will interpret it more broadly here, since in my view in science violations of the principle of truth are more serious.

The structure of this article

These observations are structured as follows. First, I will discuss the cultural environment in which the (re)use of works created by others takes place. I will do so because, in my opinion, cultural norms are absolutely vital to an understanding of this subject. For 'cultural borrowings', my examples will be a famous and classical case from the visual arts (*Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* by the French painter Édouard Manet) and a more recent case, involving the painter Marlène Dumas, who copied photos in her famous paintings.

With respect to 'scientific borrowings', the Heertje/Hollebrand case will serve as a good example.⁵ I will then delve into the principle of truth in relation to academic source citation. I will discuss the famous pastiche (see note 4) that was the *fake* scientific article that the physicist Alan Sokal managed to get published by a prominent social sciences journal in 1996. It was quite the scandal at the time. However, the case did have some interesting citation aspects, as well. After this I will touch on the various practices with regard to source citation in the different scientific disciplines.

I will end this article with the reflection that the principle of truth, to which researchers adhere in general, but particularly with regard to source citation, has become more meaningful in the public debate again (like the situation was in the 1930s), in this age of *Post-Truth*, as part of the social responsibility of academics. Lastly, I will check my analysis against the Dutch Code of Conduct for Academic Integrity 2018 and make several recommendations as to how things might be improved.

2. Examples taken from culture and science

Visual arts: an old case and a more recent case

Manet

Let me start off with a famous example from the history of the visual arts: *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, an 1863 painting by the French painter Édouard Manet. The main subject of this painting of a naked woman and two dressed men seated under the trees on a lawn is based on a painting from the 16th century that is known as 'Le Concert champêtre'. More exactly, it is a combination of an etching made by the Italian artist

5 The examples with which I will present you were chosen from my own personal experience. Visual arts: I have followed the visual arts scene for years, in my capacity as a collector and critic: www.egbertdommering.nl. I will refer to this blog (where I have also discussed the issue of borrowings and plagiarism a few times) several times below (for the relevant images, as well). I am familiar with the Heertje/Hollebrand case (Supreme Court of the Netherlands, 5 January 1979, *Nederlandse Jurisprudentie (Dutch Law Reports) 1979, nr 339, with commentary by L. Wichers Hoeth*) because I was one of the attorneys assigned to the case when Heertje appealed to a higher court and the case went through the Court of Cassation.

Raimondi in the 15th century and a painting based on it, 'Le Concert champêtre' from 1509, which is displayed at the Louvre, and which used to be attributed to Gorgione, but is now attributed to Titian.

Manet combined those two scenes in one painting and added a contemporary twist. In a small clearing in a forest sits a naked woman who has just taken off her clothes, which are lying on the ground in front of her. She is turned away from the two men by her side and looks straight at the viewer. Lying in front of her, propped up on an elbow, is a man dressed as a student from the period, wearing a student's cap, who is clearly lecturing his companions. To the woman's side is a man who is staring absent-mindedly into the distance. Neither the woman nor the seated man is facing the man who therefore is orating into the air. In the background we can see a nymph-like woman, dressed, who is bathing in a pond. The message of the painting is aimed at the contemporaries: it is Monet's attack on the morals of his colleagues and clients in the Paris of the time. Manet broke the rules about how to paint nudes and what a painting was supposed to depict. As a result, his painting caused quite a stir. The writer Émile Zola, who defended Manet in his essays on art, called it his first genuinely original painting. He showed a nude woman while conversing with two dressed men in a wood, as a comment on the Louvre's collection, which is full of paintings of naked nymphs and men dressed in wide velvet trousers.⁶ In other words, Manet used the famous original as a weapon of irony. He basically undressed the naked woman twice: first in the mythological visual tradition of naked goddesses and demi-goddesses, and then 'for real' (which is why her clothes are lying on the ground in front of her). To Zola, the painting thus constituted the opening of a closed cultural tradition of depicting people. He phrased it as follows in his collection of essays on art from that time, entitled *Le bon combat*:

'There are so many societies, so many different works, and yet societies change all the time. However, those who lack power do not wish to broaden the perspective; they have drawn up a list of works that have already been produced and have thus acquired a relative truth, which they are turning into an absolute truth. Do not create. Just imitate! And that is why I hate these mindlessly cheerful people, the artists and critics who seek to turn yesterday's truth into today's in a bizarre manner. They do not understand that we are walking forward and that the landscapes change. I hate them.'⁷

6 Émile Zola, *Le bon combat*, Paris: Hermann 1974, 'Une nouvelle manière en peinture: Édouard Manet', p. 77 et seq.

7 Work quoted in note 6, 'Mes haines', p. 35: 'Autant des sociétés, autant d'oeuvres diverses, et les sociétés se transforment éternellement. Mais les impuissants ne veulent pas agrandir le cadre; ils ont dressé la liste des oeuvres déjà produites, et ont ainsi obtenu un vérité relative dont ils font un vérité absolue. Ne créez pas, imitez. Et voilà pourquoi je hais les gens bêtement gais, les artistes et les critiques qui veulent sottement faire de la vérité d'hier la vérité d'aujourd'hui. Ils ne comprennent pas que nous marchons et que les paysages changent. Je les hais.'



This case is a great example of a conflict between the rational and authoritarian variants of the principle of truth. Or, as the previously quoted Zola put it: 'And that is why I hate these mindlessly cheerful people, the artists and critics who seek to turn yesterday's truth into today's in a bizarre manner.'

Le déjeuner became an iconic painting that was used as a point of reference by modern visual artists. Picasso painted a great many paintings 'after Manet', but between August 1959 and July 1962, he turned *Le déjeuner* into quite a project, which resulted in 27 paintings, 400 drawings and also some linocuts and scale models, each in a slightly different style.⁸ In these works, the man who is lecturing while half-lying on his back gradually changes into a priest of sorts, wearing a little church hat, and he assumes an increasingly central position in the image, *seated*. Many others followed in Picasso's footsteps, including the Canadian artist Jeff Wall, whose photographs often depict historical situations in seemingly commonplace scenes of daily life: in this case, several poor vagrants on a small lawn next to a viaduct, who 'completely accidentally' assume the positions of the characters depicted in *Le déjeuner*.⁹

Le déjeuner is thus also an example of study objects for art historians, for whom studying derivations as a cultural phenomenon is an important discipline.

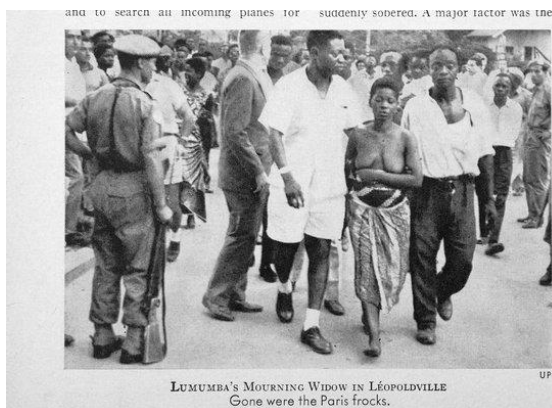
Marlene Dumas

In 2014, the well-known South African painter Marlene Dumas, who works in the Netherlands, was honoured with her first major retrospective exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. At one point, a public debate arose due to one of her most iconic paintings, which depicts the widow of the

8 Marie-Laure Bernadac, 'Variations Manet *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*', in: *Picasso et les Maîtres*, catalogue of successive expositions in France and the United Kingdom, Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux 2008, p. 230 et seq.

9 To see the image, check out <https://emilyhavernblog.wordpress.com/2016/02/09/task-1-jeff-wall-and-edouard-manet/> (retrieved in January 2021).

assassinated Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba and was 'literally' based on a news photo taken at the time.¹⁰



LUMUMBA'S MOURNING WIDOW IN LÉOPOLDVILLE
Gone were the Paris frocks.

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Critics said that copying photos in paintings does not constitute high art.¹¹ Patrice Lumumba was an important Congolese politician and fighter for freedom. His wife was photographed briefly after the announcement that he had been assassinated. In the Democratic Republic of Congo of the time, widows were expected to mourn publicly by cutting off their hair and go into the streets with bared breasts. That moment was captured by a photographer. It's a moving scene, whose subject and composition Dumas copied exactly, although she did 'crop' some of the surroundings that can be seen in the photo to place a greater dramatic emphasis on the grieving widow. There are several major differences with the *Déjeuner* case here. Lumumba was absolutely a public figure, and his assassination was a big moment in the history of Africa, but the press photographer who took the photo was not (yet) famous. The photo did not (yet) have iconic status, such as the famous photo by Robert Capa of a Republican soldier being shot in the Spanish Civil War. There was no well-informed audience that was familiar with the photo. A shared cultural frame of reference between the painting and the photo was lacking. With *Le Concert champêtre*, back in Manet's day, those frames of reference were in place, and the conflict was mainly about those frames of reference themselves. If you refer to something that does not have a shared cultural frame of reference between your audience, the referee and the person being referred to, the question as to whether an explicit 'citation' should be added becomes all the more powerful. In Dumas's case, it was about her relationship to the group of important photographers that was on the rise in Africa and South Africa at the time (many of whom would later become famous), who minded the fact that the by-now world famous painter did not give them, the authors of her sources of inspiration, any *credit*. This was the frame of reference that the people attending the exhibition were lacking.

In this case both the principle of truth and the principle of originality came into play, but because the case was close to the present and it was about the use of identical expression, the principle of originality featured more prominently here.

Academic borrowings

Heertje versus Hollebrand and Stassen

10 I wrote a blog post about it, which I am using for inspiration in this article. <http://www.egbertdommering.nl/?p=619> (Dumas). Images can be found there, too. For a related but different case that I cannot discuss here because of restrictions in the length of this article: <http://www.egbertdommering.nl/?p=683> (Tuymans).

11 De Volkskrant 9, 10, 11 and 19 September 2014, contributions by Sander van Walsum, Joost Zwagerman, Maarten Doorman and Rutger Ponzen.

In the 1970s, a textbook written by a Professor of Economics at the University of Amsterdam, Arnold Heertje, entitled *De kern van de economie* (The core of the economy), was a very popular introduction to economics, used at many secondary schools. Economics was becoming a popular subject at schools, so other people wanted a slice of the pie, as well. These other people were the economists Hollebrand and Stassen, who published a book entitled *Economie voor het voortgezet onderwijs* (Economics for secondary school pupils) during this period. Heertje felt that this book plagiarised his own book, and instituted proceedings because of this book, which made it all the way to the Supreme Court of the Netherlands.¹² His argument was founded on copyright law, but he chose a hard-to-prove ground, stating that the structure of his book was completely original, featuring a new ‘model-based approach’, and that he had presented Keynes’s major theory (which stipulates that there is a correlation between government spending and prosperity) in a completely novel way. For instance, he argued that he had found a completely new derivation of Keynes’s multiplier formula, but that he had made a mistake in this that Hollebrand and Stassen had copied.

These are hard arguments to use with regard to copyright, because one of the sacrosanct principles of copyright law is that copyright does not protect ideas (these can be used by anyone), only expressions (the way in which ideas are expressed). The Court found that the original approach to the subject matter was not protected by copyright, and that the number of supposed similarities in phrasing was too small. The Supreme Court upheld this ruling.¹³ What is interesting about this judgement is mostly the consideration that the originality of an academic piece of writing is largely determined by the place this work holds among other pieces of academic writing. In a nutshell: ‘the state of the art’ is an important factor by which originality is judged, and this falls outside the scope of copyright. Therefore, similarities on a formal level are less important.¹⁴

There is no doubt that the plagiarism lawsuit instituted by Heertje and his publisher was largely motivated by money, as *De kern van de economie* was very successful at the country’s secondary schools and had gone through many editions. However, for Heertje, there was another, probably more important interest: the ethical interest, in that the original approach he had taken as a scientist was not being acknowledged and shown to the general public. He had developed a whole new approach how to teach economics in secondary schools and was not getting any credit for it.

Heertje instituted the proceedings on the grounds of the principle of originality, but the judges rejected his argument on the grounds of the principle of truth. Clearly, it was not about expression but rather about the ‘state of the art’.

Conclusion of this section

Both culture and science form a historical building with which the residents have a critical relationship. It’s about the ‘state of the culture’ or the ‘state of the art’, in which their contemporaries play a novel role.

12 To learn where you can find the Supreme Court’s ruling on the case, see note 5.

13 Copyright law therefore tends to purely formal protection. If Heertje had focused more on these formal aspects in his claim (detailed comparisons of the phrasing of sentences, identical words, order, conscious variations to distinguish themselves from the original), his procedure might have been more successful. Now he stated that ‘parts of the work, including new, original phrases and observations, were copied without any source citation, sometimes verbatim’. Because of this statement, when Heertje appealed to a higher court, the Court contacted three economists and asked them how original this was. The experts, who were not particularly favourably disposed to Heertje, had, after a very extensive search, found some similar approaches in professional literature, although they did admit that there were some striking similarities on the detail level, meaning it seemed likely that the authors had consulted Heertje’s book while drafting their own book.

14 As a result, this decision is considered in professional literature an example of an academic piece of writing having a ‘less personal character’ and therefore being less eligible for copyright protection. Spoor-Verkade-Visser, *Auteursrecht*, Deventer: Wolters Kluwer Nederland 2019, p. 187. It really depends. From a copyright perspective, the opening line of J.H. Huizinga’s *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen* (‘The waning of the Middle Ages’) is a gem: ‘*To the World when it was half a thousand years younger, the outline of things seemed more clearly marked to us*’ (translation 1924), (‘Toen de wereld vijf eeuwen jonger was, hadden alle levensverschijnselen veel scherper uiterlijke vormen dan nu’)

This is where the two variants of the principle of truth clash. It's about ideas for which copyright is not the organising principle, only an aid in specific cases.

In the Manet case it is about the reception or rejection of cultural forms. Although it is about principles of form that in principle are governed by copyright law (see Peter Blok's contribution), this does not play a role, due to the time limits (copyright expires seventy years after the author's death). Rather it is a debate about the correct way to reflect or mirror social reality: a clash between the authoritarian variant and the rational variant of truth.

In the Dumas case, copyright *was* at stake: this case was about giving *credit* to her contemporaries, the photographers. For Dumas it was a question about the truth: how to translate a historical event into an iconic painted image by means of photography.

In the Heertje case, we saw how the principle of originality (to be enforced through a copyright lawsuit) failed. But as with Hooke, it was about receiving his colleagues' acknowledgement that he had taken a new step in the presentation of the theory of economics.

3. Citation as part of academic ethics: the principle of truth

The importance of the principle of truth: the Sokal case

It is my proposition that in proper academic source citation, it is mainly the principle of truth that comes into play. Quoting others correctly may be regarded as a vital way to check whether an academic has reported truthfully. For a demonstration of this idea, let's look at a famous case of an academic pastiche¹⁵ from the 1990s, in which a representative of the exact sciences denounced the *fake science* of his day.

The representative in question was Alan Sokal, who in 1996 submitted an article entitled 'Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity' to the prominent social sciences journal *Social Text*.¹⁶ Following peer review, the journal's editorial board published the article in the journal's 1996 spring/summer issue. The article was 100% made up of pseudo-scholarly nonsense, written by the author to denounce the fallacies (and particularly comparisons with natural science, such as the theory of relativity) that had become de rigueur in the social sciences. He took on the representatives of post-modern movements (people such as Lacan, Kristeva, Feyerabend, Kuhn, Baudrillard, Deleuze and Virilio) as well as an important predecessor of the aforementioned people, the French philosopher Henri Bergson.¹⁷ The fact that this pastiche proved so successful was a major blow to the academic community.¹⁸

One major reason why this deceitful pastiche was so successful was because of the quotations and the bibliography. In the footnotes, references were consistently cited as follows: 'Kuhn (1970), Feyerabend (1975), Latour (1987), Aronowitz (1988b), Bloor (1991)'. This is an interesting example of the authoritarian variant of the principle of truth, which we must keep in mind while navigating the next section, about academic source citation in actual practice.

15 See note 4.

16 Social Text (socialtextjournal.org).

17 Alan Sokal, Jean Bricmont, *Impostures intellectuelles, Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob 1997; Alan Sokal, Beyond the Hoax, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008 (this also contains the original English version of the article).*

18 See, i.a., Steven Weinberg, *Facing Up, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2001, Chapters 12, 13, 17 and 18.*

The principle of truth as a public interest

Properly citing sources in academic writing is not only vital to academic integrity, but also serves a democratic public interest, by which I mean intellectuals' (academics') duty to defend rational truth in the public debate. Once again, we find ourselves in times where this is a topical subject. More than ever before, democracy depends on science, but as a result, scientific experts have become tools that can be used by politicians, which may cause them to lose their status as representatives of the truth.¹⁹ The same thing happened in the pre-fascist era of the 1930s. One classic from that era was *La Trahison des clercs* (1927) by the French writer Julien Benda.²⁰ This was preceded by – again – Émile Zola, who took a stand in the Dreyfus affair.²¹ In his open letter on the subject, which was followed by other publications, he discussed intellectuals' responsibility to society – to defend the truth in the public debate. From the large body of 'Post-Truth' literature of our own time, I will select a work that is very to the point: Lee McIntyre *Post-Truth*. McIntyre does a good job of summarising the problem of the decreasing role played by scientific arguments in the political debate of our time:

'Thus Post-Truth amounts to a form of ideological supremacy, whereby its practitioners are trying to compel someone to believe in something whether there is good evidence of it or not. And this is a recipe for political domination.'²²

What this means is that academics must make a habit of taking their gloves off when discussing untruths in the public debate:

'In an era of Post-Truth, we must challenge each and every attempt to obfuscate a factual matter and challenge falsehoods before they are allowed to fester.'²³

One might echo Dreyfus-era Zola (see note 21) in stating that it is time for the truth to go on a protest march: 'La vérité en marche', as Zola put it.

But perhaps the reader will ask, what does all this have to do with citing others? Anyone who follows the public debate about the coronavirus or climate change will have noticed that Post-Truth truth deniers not only deny or twist facts, but systematically *misquote* (possibly deliberately so) scientific advisory committees or scientists who publish scientific facts and opinions in reports and recommendations. It is obvious that misquoting is a way to deny the truth. In other words, proper source citation has been given the function of telling the truth, which exceeds the moral prestige of the people who engage in research.²⁴

But that means that these scientists themselves must be the first to cite their sources properly. This is a vital instrument (e.g. in peer review sessions) by which the academic quality of a publication is judged. This quality check is also necessary for the public debate, because scientists' reliability will be judged partly on that ground.²⁵

So let us take a look at how sources are cited in practice in academia.

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- 19 Mark. B. Brown, *Science in Democracy*, Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press 2009, p. 12.
- 20 The book dates from 1927, but was translated into Dutch in 2018 and published as *Het verraad van de intellectuelen*, Amsterdam: AUP Uitgeverij 2018.
- 21 Collected by the author and published as *La vérité en marche*, republished with other articles by Vincent Duclert (ed.), Paris: Éditions Tallandier (Texto) 2019.
- 22 *Post-Truth*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press (Essential Knowledge Series) 2018, p. 13.
- 23 Work quoted in note 22, pp. 156-157.
- 24 Obviously, a great deal more can be said on this subject, because information on the truth costs much more than lies and the public's attention for lies is considerably greater than its attention for truth. However, all that would exceed the scope of this article. R.A. Posner (*Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 2003) has some interesting things to say on this subject in Chapter 4, 'Prediction and Influence'.
- 25 In the public debate, science is 'a set of devices for demonstrating the quality of the inputs into the production of credence symbolic goods', as Posner (work quoted in note 24, p. 49) convincingly demonstrates.

The academic practice of source citation

I have not conducted a thorough investigation of citation practices, which may moreover differ from one country to the next, but I do have an *impression* of what they are like. All I can do here is formulate a few concise hypotheses.

We must distinguish between ‘footnotes’ and references. Although the latter generally (but not necessarily) take the form of the former, footnotes serve a broader purpose, namely to grant the author the opportunity to share some opinions in the margins of his piece of writing. Anthony Grafton wrote a wonderful history of this subject, which starts with the sarcastic footnotes used in Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* ‘to amuse his friends and enrage his enemies’.²⁶

In the exact sciences (including medicine), references to the historical ‘building’ tend to be quite generic, and very detailed references to one’s contemporaries and predecessors seem optional. Citation here is mostly about providing a faithful reflection of one’s own empirical study, which is to say, the *data*. It is about the ‘state of the art’, with names serving as historical reference points. My hypothesis is that citation does not play much of a role in and of itself here. Because so many works have multiple authors, the principle of originality is less important here.

In cultural-historical sciences and in the humanities, references to sources and quotations in studies of a more specialist nature tend to be highly detailed.²⁷ Generally, citations are about referring to historical primary and secondary sources and quoting from authentic writings. However, the situation is quite different in historical studies of a more general nature, where some authors will include notes (although their purpose is not always clear), while other authors will include decent bibliographies for each individual chapter or era, while yet other authors will only add an extensive list of relevant titles.²⁸ In other words, the authoritarian variant of the principle of truth appears to be encroaching, because statements made in the writing must be believed by the general public on the basis of the writer’s authority.²⁹

Read the two studies on Europe in the twentieth century written by the English historian Ian Kershaw for the *Penguin History of Europe*³⁰, and you won’t know *what* you are reading: statements copied from other books, primary historical sources, the writer’s own observations, or his opinion? No, it’s the leading historian Kershaw speaking!

So my hypothesis is that in the historical sciences, the principle of truth is the guiding principle, but it is only visibly used in highly detailed studies, and in larger studies – particularly those written for the general public – may turn into the authoritarian variant.

In legal studies, scholars use many citations, in accordance with copyright rules, i.e. the principle of originality. Since this is normative science, reference is made not only to historical sources, but also to authoritative sources. My hypothesis is that, to the extent that the principle of truth is applied, the authoritarian variant is dominant. Often this amounts to mutual ego-stroking in what has been called ‘*les sociétés d’admiration mutuelle*’.³¹ Generally, people publish in their own language, although (following in

26 *The Footnote: A Curious History*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Harvard University Press 1997, p. 1. This study also contains a great deal of material on historians’ citation practices.

27 Allow me to use Gaila Jehoel’s study, which I happened to come across, as an example: *Het culturele netwerk van Jan van Scorel, schilder, kanunnik, ondernemer & kosmopoliet*, (*‘The cultural network of Jan van Scorel, painter, canon, entrepreneur and cosmopolite’*) Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren 2020. This study has over 1500 notes spread across approximately 300 pages.

28 See, for example, David van Reybrouck’s *Revolusi* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij 2020), which contains a 30 page bibliographical essay that constitutes an essential part of the work itself.

29 The historian René van Stipriaan commented: ‘In certain very well-researched fields such as WW II or Shakespeare studies, people have grown tired of referencing each other, because the professional literature is infinite; with general introductions, authors assume that not every statement needs to be accounted for, because a certain profession-specific *communis opinio* (or state of the art) is being presented; only if a writer deviates from this in an introduction will he or she have to account for that deviation.’

30 *To Hell and Back Europe 1914-1949 and Rollercoaster Europe 1950-2017*.

31 This expression was coined by the Leiden-based Arabist C. Snouck Hurgronje, see Jan Just Witkam in the

the footsteps of the social sciences) English-language multi-author publications are becoming increasingly common.

In the social sciences (including economics), the pattern tends to deviate from the norm. Not many authors use notes, but they will include in-text references (in brackets) to authors with the year of the relevant publication; the full titles can then be found at the end of the article or at the end of the book. These are the kinds of references Sokal used in his pastiche article.³² The reader never quite knows what the author is referring to: a theory, study results, a quotation hidden in the text or an ‘authority’? To make matters worse, multi-author publications are common, with dwarfs hitching a lift on the name of the giant named at the end of the list of authors. This does not exactly make things any clearer.

And what can I say about philosophy? Voltaire hated quoting, calling it ‘the hollow, sterile science of facts and data’, a poison that ruins major thoughts.³³ Nevertheless, professional philosophers’ practices are most in line with (cultural) historians’ practices .

At any rate, the conclusion would have to be that there are enough grounds to conduct some empirical research on citation practices. The study by Grafton quoted in note 26 shows that this may result in interesting insights.

But how does the Code relate to the Post-Truth era?

4. Dutch Code of Conduct for Academic Integrity 2018 and final conclusion

Proper citation as a form of social responsibility

Read the Code and you will notice that it does not have anything to say about the academic’s mission to bring truth to the social debate. The entire Code seems to be all about *internal* rules for the profession. In my opinion that is a missed opportunity in this Post-Truth era. Amidst the vast army of truth deniers, shouldn’t the Code of Conduct contain a mission statement of sorts, namely that academics have a duty of propagating the truths accepted in academia in society? After all, in the public debate, the representatives of the Post-Truth ‘movement’ ride roughshod over the principle of truth when quoting academic publications, in that they deliberately misquote studies, both with regard to the question as to *whether* something was stated and with regard to the question as to *what* was stated. For this reason, academics must have ‘a set of devices for demonstrating the quality of the inputs into the production’ of their research (see Posner, work quoted in note 24). They must be able to show and defend a faithful picture of the state of the art in science in their public appearances.

In this way, a study on the sub-problem of proper citation being an *academic interest* will prompt us to ask a more general question as to academics’ responsibility to the public in the Post-Truth era.

introduction to a book he translated: Mekka, Amsterdam/Antwerp: Uitgeverij Atlas 2007, p. 23.

32 In the work quoted in note 22, pp. 130-133 the author draws a link between post-modernism and the Post Truth era.

33 Quoted in Grafton, work quoted in note 26, p. 95.

Recommendations

I would like to conclude my article with three recommendations:

1. Conduct a study on citation practices in the various disciplines of science (and variations within these disciplines) in accordance with pre-formulated reference points. Being collegial should be one of the focus areas; people need to credit each other's achievements. Earlier I called this the principle of originality in citation. When it comes to ethics, I believe the principle of truth is more important. Academics must provide truthful acknowledgements, both with regard to the nature of the source or the identity of the author and with regard to the material being quoted.
2. Formulate minimum standards to be met in proper academic source citation and incorporate these into the Code of Conduct or an appendix to the Code. Allow me to loosely quote the historian Anthony Grafton:³⁴ citations must be complete, correct and honest.
3. Include a clear guideline in the Code of Conduct for Academic Integrity with regard to academics' public performances in the democratic public debate to provide an antidote to the Post-Truth epidemic that has been plaguing society for years now.

34 Grafton, work quoted in note 26, p. 197.