

# HHU *alumni*

The latest news for alumni of Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf

## About bees and genes

Social behaviour requires  
a large brain

PLANT RESEARCH

Tour with  
alumni guests

SUMMER PARTY

HHU – the perfect  
beach party location

ALUMNI PROFILES

Sports historian  
Dr Henry Wahlig

hhu.

# News from HHU



At Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, we have been making the most of the warm days of early summer to get outdoors: From page IV, you can read how alumni guests learned about the outstanding plant research being conducted at HHU inside the new research greenhouses, which are not open to the public, and outside in the Botanical Garden during a campus tour on 17 May 2023.

On 21 June, the HHU campus was transformed into a large beach for the summer beach party! Our alumni were also invited to return to the University, get active and enjoy tasty treats from food trucks and cold drinks. A team of DJs turned the beach area in front of the library into an open-air club (from page X).

In this issue, we present our alumnus Dr Henry Wahlig. The cultural manager and sports historian recently gave a lecture at HHU and in July, the *Haus der Universität* ("University House") is hosting an exhibition organised by him. From page XII, you can read all about his special field of research and his unusual workplace.

Kind regards,  
Stefanie Folke-Sabel

## Erasmus Staff Training

# Turkish colleague visits the Central Alumni Office

On 9 and 10 May, HHU Central Alumni Coordinator Stefanie Folke-Sabel had the opportunity to take part in an enriching exchange with an international colleague: Asli Kiper Sucug, Career Development Leader at Sabancı University in Istanbul, visited HHU as part of the Erasmus Staff Training programme. The Erasmus format enables employees from educational institutions to visit colleagues in similar functions abroad to learn about their way of working, ideas, projects and even problems.

This form of job shadowing enabled the colleagues to spend two working days together, including the guest in all appointments and activities. In addition to alumni activities at HHU, Ms Kiper Sucug was also interested in learning about fundraising, the Career Service, counselling formats at the Student Services Centre (SSC) and the Center for Entrepreneurship Düsseldorf (CEDUS). The host also learned a great deal during the meetings with the responsible colleagues! On 10 May, Ms Kiper Sucug visited the HHU Campus Fair with Dr Ilke Kaymak (Career Service) and Ms Folke-Sabel, where she had the chance to learn about the wide range of career opportunities for students and graduates on offer at HHU.

### Creative exchange of ideas

Ms Folke-Sabel was very impressed by the opportunities for getting alumni on board as financial supporters and career mentors at the private Sabancı University in Istanbul, as described by her Turkish colleague. There is also e.g. a well-established system where alumni assist students in finding internship places, both in Turkey and abroad. The alumni have also established strong structures in various cities and hold meet-ups. In Düsseldorf, Ms Kiper Sucug was particularly impressed by the Campus Fair and

PHOTO HHU/IVO MAYR



Two days of intensive networking. Asli Kiper Sucug from Istanbul visits Stefanie Folke-Sabel at the Central Alumni Office.

the services offered by CEDUS aimed at encouraging and empowering students to start their own companies.

The colleagues naturally also spent an evening by the river Rhine and in the old town in Düsseldorf. A return visit to Istanbul is already planned to enable them to deepen their exchange.



Alumni campus tour

# The latest news from the field of plant research at HHU

...followed by a picnic  
in the Botanical Garden

At the latest with the establishment of CEPLAS (Cluster of Excellence on Plant Sciences) in 2018, a specialist field has emerged at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf (HHU) in which scientists from various disciplines including biology, chemistry and physics are working together to decode the molecular mechanisms of plants and in particular crop plants.

**C**rop plants are plants that are grown for food or for their materials. As resources such as water and agricultural land are becoming increasingly scarce, it is important to use them in a sustainable manner. This is the only way to ensure sufficient plant product supplies in the future. So the research is concentrating on the development of technologies and methods to increase the efficiency of the plants themselves and minimise the use of resources. The objective of CEPLAS is to drive plant research forward to solve challenges such as climate change and food security. The collaboration between researchers from different fields enables an interdisciplinary approach to solving these complex issues.

## Plant research: The topic sounds complicated – and it is!

With the aim of enabling alumni to share in special developments at their alma mater, the HHU Alumni Network chose plant research as the topic of this year's summer campus tour on 17 May 2023. The tour naturally included an opportunity to visit the research greenhouses not open to the public. Protective clothing is a must there and, with only limited space, the number of participants was restricted to 40. The size of the group may have been limited, but its members were highly diverse, including alumni from all specialist fields and faculties ranging from recent graduates to a biologist who has already been retired for a number of years.

Our guide, Professor Dr Peter Westhoff, botanist and long-term head of the Botanical Garden who was recently awarded emeritus status, shared his vast knowledge in an easy-to-understand and entertaining way.

## The aim is to get plants fit to cope with environmental changes

Professor Westhoff explained that producing enough food for the constantly growing world population in the future will be a huge challenge. Global climate change will have a drastic impact on the cultivation of our food crops in many regions around the world and the calls to significantly reduce the use of fertiliser and crop protection agents in agriculture are likely to result in reduced yields. He took half the guests on a walk to the new research area in the Botanical Garden. The collaboration between the Botanical Garden and CEPLAS enables HHU researchers to continue their laboratory work in a natural environment and gather new findings about plants. Taking the plants in the research area as an example, Professor Westhoff explained what ideas and tools plant scientists and breeders can contribute to solving these issues. He described the domestication of certain useful plants for food as an interesting genetic phenomenon and as a process, which began approx. 10,000 – 15,000 years ago and has spread throughout the world.

The remaining 20 guests followed our second speaker, Dr Christian Weber, to the research greenhouses on the roof of the new state-of-the-art biosciences building.



Professor Westhoff welcomes the alumni guests to the Botanical Garden (top) and takes them to the outdoor research area (bottom).

PHOTOS HHU//JOCHEN MÜLLER

This building was opened in January 2020 and is the largest new-build project at Heinrich Heine University with around 22,000m<sup>2</sup> of usable floor space for research and teaching. In addition to the greenhouses, the plant cultivation facilities at HHU also include special climatic chambers, in which plants can be grown under precisely defined temperature, humidity, light and soil conditions.

## What does a plant cultivation manager do?

The first thing the guests had to do on arrival was to put on lab coats and listen to the safety briefing for the S1 safety level area. Alongside the team of gardeners, Dr Wever

is responsible for the challenging planning, organisation and running of the experimental plant breeding facility at Heinrich Heine University. This includes monitoring the growing conditions and controlling pests/diseases, as well as managing the chambers and areas in the greenhouses and allocating them to researchers.

In short: He ensures that the plants are healthy and that they develop in line with the expectations of researchers. Dr Wever's alumni guests were surprised by how specifically soils can be mixed in a special room, how different watering schedules need to be for the various plants and how complex the disposal of genetically modified plants can be.

After 45 minutes, the groups swapped over so that all the visitors could visit both locations.

Following the guided tours, the guests and speakers met up again in the glass orangery at the Botanical Garden,





The research greenhouses on the building roofs can be seen from afar.

where there was plenty of space as the plants had already been moved outside. A buffet and drinks were ready and waiting for the guests, so that they could enjoy a picnic together, get to know each other and ask the speakers questions. For example, the alumni had the opportunity to learn that Dr Wever is also a passionate plant breeder and

they are among the first plants to appear in the garden, heralding the start of the new garden year. He is involved in a rare varieties nursery, which offers selected and rare plants and seeds for gardening fans. You can view their website (German only) here: [www.staudenfan.de](http://www.staudenfan.de)

It was a warm spring day outside and the large roller doors were wide open. The event ended at 8 p.m. and further campus tours are planned.

## Management and conservation of natural ecosystems as an objective

collector outside the University. Of the many species he is interested in, snowdrops are a particular favourite as they come in a surprisingly wide range of varieties: from pure white, to yellow, double and even almost entirely green flowers. Dr Wever particularly likes the early bloomers as



Is there anything you would particularly like to see on a tour or what topic would be of interest to you? Please send your suggestions to the Central Alumni Office at [alumni@hhu.de](mailto:alumni@hhu.de)



Dr Christian Wever (left) with his group in the greenhouse (top).

The soils for the plants in the greenhouses are mixed in this room (bottom).



PHOTOS HHU / JOCHEN MÜLLER





PHOTO HHU/JOCHEN MÜLLER

The guided tour ended with a picnic in the orangery for all participants.

## Lectures and presentation on plant research in the “Citizens’ University” (*Bürgeruniversität*) programme

**Peter Westhoff** is an Emeritus Professor, but still regularly gives lectures and seminars on plant biology. His lectures include topics such as plant physiology, molecular biology, genetics and the domestication of crop plants. In addition to students, the module is also open to anyone interested in the topic with a basic level of biology knowledge within the framework of the “Citizens’ University” programme. Those who do not possess such basic knowledge or anyone who needs to refresh their knowledge can take a special tutorial, which is offered as an online event. The lecture, which forms part of this teaching module,

is thus also suitable for anyone interested in the topic and is offered within the framework of the “Citizens’ University” programme.

For more information, please send an e-mail to: [pge@hhu.de](mailto:pge@hhu.de).

**Dr Christian Wever** is giving a presentation on the topic of “**Plant Hunting and Garden Culture in the USA**” (German only) at the Citizens’ University on **8 August 2023**. Anyone who thinks that everything has already been discovered and tried out in the garden in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is greatly mistaken. There is always something new to discover

and reveal for the future of our gardens. Whether entirely new or not yet cultivated species or new local forms: There is still much hidden beauty to discover in the natural world, as demonstrated in this presentation looking at the USA, which would seem well researched at first glance. The audience will gain tips on what we can copy from nature for cultivating our gardens.

### Venue:

**Seminar room in the administration building (29.01) at the Botanical Garden  
6 – 7.30 p.m.**

Learning, working and partying together

# An evening on the HHU beach

The campus was wreathed in bunting, leading the way to the beach. Even the inflatable palm trees were bigger than last year: On 21 June 2023, Heinrich Heine University celebrated the longest day of the year with a laid-back summer party. “Even better than 2022 – and that was already good” was a frequently heard statement. Students, lecturers, researchers, alumni and employees enjoyed the warm evening, the time together, the music and what the food trucks had to offer. Some of our alumni also came with guests.

During the days before the event, trucks brought 80 tonnes of sand and extensive equipment to create the beach for the campus party. And once again, thousands of people who study, work and research together at HHU showed that they can also party together, too.

The party atmosphere could already be felt at the university kiosk near the bridge and continued all the way down to the plaza in front of the Juridicum, which had been transformed into a laid-back beer garden with benches and parasols. Here, the mobile band “The Speedos” – smartly dressed with braces – entertained the guests with their special brand of music.

The volleyball and badminton courts were busy throughout the afternoon and evening, while many visitors had also prepared to spend the evening outdoors this year: Making themselves comfortable on blankets they had brought with them, they watched the sports matches, picnicked and chilled. Happy groups also gathered

around the surf simulator to see who could keep their balance the longest. The Family Support Centre took care of the youngest guests, while older children enjoyed soap bubbles and coloured pens.

## More than 80 tonnes of sand on the beach

On the campus, the green space, sandy islands and deckchairs invited people to chill for a while, before Nils König and his DJ team got everyone dancing away in the sand with hands outstretched towards the evening sky. HHU alumni were also invited and – by contrast with the previous year when the format was launched – many took up the invitation and joined the party with friends or partners. “We had a wonderful evening,” said alumnus guest Michael V.



PHOTO JOCHEN MÜLLER

The dancefloor on the “beach” was full.

He is already looking forward to the next summer beach party. In the future, the plan is to hold the party every other year, alternating with the Night of Science, which is scheduled for 2024. Alumni will of course be invited again! These events are planned and organised by the team from the Events, Marketing and Fundraising Unit.

## A sandy beach was created at HHU

Refugees and their language buddies, who are collaborating in various projects and intensive German courses at HHU with the aim of studying at a later date, also enjoyed the campus atmosphere. They spontaneously decided to end their summer get-together at the beach party, which took on a magical atmosphere in the evening thanks to all the strings of colourful lights that had been installed.

Several – in some cases impressive – vintage food trucks served traditional German *Currywurst* (sausage with curry sauce), wraps and veggie doner kebabs. And the queue for the frozen yoghurt was at least as long as for the cocktail bar.

“A university isn’t just about research and teaching – partying together under palm trees is also part of the experience.”

Professor Anja Steinbeck — President

“A university isn’t just about research and teaching – partying together under palm trees is also part of the experience. I enjoyed seeing so many happy faces,” said University President, Professor Dr Anja Steinbeck, who once again initiated the summer beach party. The event ended at 11 p.m. – far too early for those enjoying themselves, but just in time for those who had to clear everything away as summer storms broke early the next morning.



## Faculty of Arts and Humanities

# Cultural manager and sports historian Dr Henry Wahlig works at the German Football Museum

### What made you decide to study at HHU?

**DR HENRY WAHLIG** After completing my apprenticeship as a media designer for digital and print media, I spent the summer of 2002 in Canada and completed a kind of guest semester in history there. I realised straightaway how much I enjoyed the subject. Even though I was born in Canada (my parents are both German, but worked in Canada), I realised that I wanted to live and study “at home” in Germany in the long term.

So I looked at various universities in my home region of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) and HHU ultimately offered the best overall package. This was primarily due to the option of studying information science – which I was really interested in – as a minor subject and the new bachelor’s and master’s study programmes, which had only just been implemented at the time and promised flexible opportunities for me.

### Alone at home in peace and quiet or in a group: How did you prefer to study?

**HW** I preferred to study alone, either in my hall of residence (Campus South) or very often in the main library – that brings back good memories.

### What do you have particularly fond memories of from your time at HHU? Do you have an anecdote for us?

**HW** I could tell you a lot of stories, but I think I would like to pick out one person who means a lot to me and who is in focus again at HHU at the moment as he unfortunately died recently. Rudolf Hiestand was already Emeritus Professor for medieval history back then, but still held lectures and seminars.

To be honest, I always saw my focus on modern history and thought beforehand that I would just have to “survive” the Middle Ages somehow. However, he provided so much knowledge and opened up entirely new worlds for me in these seminars, which I will never forget! I have rarely

ever met such an educated and knowledgeable person. He was very demanding and expected a lot of us – so I was all the more pleased with my performance in his seminars.

### Do you still have contact with the university today?

**HW** Unfortunately, I have very little contact with fellow students these days. As I no longer live in Düsseldorf, we have drifted apart, which is normal I suppose. However, I am delighted that I have now been invited back to HHU to



PHOTO PRIVATE

## Dr Henry Wahlig

Dr Henry Wahlig was born in London/Canada on 18 June 1980. He studied history (M.A.) and information science (as a minor subject at bachelor’s level) at HHU from 2002 – 2008. He then worked as a research associate at Leibniz University Hanover from 2008 – 2015, also gaining his PhD during that time. Dr Wahlig has been head of the cultural programme at the German Football Museum in Dortmund since 2015. He is married to Susanne Wahlig and lives in Bochum. Alongside many other hobbies, he has a strong interest in sport – both in an academic capacity and as an active participant, here particularly swimming.



The German President and 160 ambassadors recently visited the German Football Museum. Dr Wahlig (centre) in front of the model of a stadium.

give two presentations as a result of my position at the German Football Museum. I have already completed one as a guest speaker at the Institute of Jewish Studies. And I have to admit that it was very unusual to find myself standing on the other side, as it were, in a lecture theatre I knew well. In my mind's eye, I saw myself in the audience and thought about how I could make this topic interesting for me...

**Which content or knowledge from your studies is most important to your profession today?**

HW My studies laid many valuable foundations for my life. Aside from content aspects, which obviously remain relevant as I still work with history in my job, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight more fundamental working habits. During my studies and also later while doing my PhD, I learned how to develop concrete questions from an endless number of potential ideas and topics, and thus bring structure to my work and my life as a whole. And I would say that that is an invaluable skill.

**You have been head of the cultural and event programme at the German Football Museum in Dortmund since 2015. What formats do you offer and which audiences are these formats aimed at?**

HW Our museum is the only institution in Germany with its own "match schedule" for topics relating to football culture, i.e. alongside the permanent exhibition, we also look at

topics from football history in the accompanying programme. The topics are diverse, ranging from historical anniversaries commemorating e.g. persecuted Jewish footballers, to entertainment formats such as football quizzes and comedy. I also prepare content for and organise a large number of panel discussions on socio-political topics relating to football.

Generally speaking, I now get to prepare topics, which have accompanied me throughout my undergraduate and doctoral studies and which I take a private interest in, for a broad audience to enjoy. I very much appreciate having had the opportunity to leave the purely academic ivory tower and play a role at the heart of society. Although conversely, I have to be honest and admit that I sometimes still miss my university days when I had the time to gain a much deeper insight into individual topics. Things move at a much faster pace now – on average, I have an event every week and can therefore only focus on selective points for the majority of topics.

**Is football also an important part of your private life?**

HW Of course – otherwise I would surely be the wrong person for the job. I am a passionate fan of the club VfL Bochum, where I incidentally had a part-time PR job throughout my studies. We set up the website and later on, I also wrote for the stadium programme. However, apart from Bochum games, it is not like I have to watch

every match on TV. What interests me most is “football” as a social phenomenon and the fact that it is perhaps the last remaining aspect of our current mass culture that can still bring everyone together regardless of whether they are young or old, male or female, rich or poor. Hopefully we will get to experience this in Germany again next year during the European Championships. A great deal is in flux here at the moment and football needs to take care to ensure that this positive force is not drowned under a wave of excessive commercialism. However, through my job, I find myself in the fortunate position of being able to help preserve this social force and advance our society.

**You have researched the importance of sport in the day-to-day lives of Jews during the period of persecution and published a great deal about the role of Jewish footballers and clubs. How did you come across this topic?**

HW I “discovered” this topic towards the end of my studies in Düsseldorf. Football has always fascinated me as a topic of historical research as all the major conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are reflected in it as though under a magnifying glass and the subject is close to my heart. At the same time, I was studying the Nazi era in detail.

I was incredibly surprised to learn that at that point in time (around 2007), virtually no research had been conducted into the immense influence Jewish people had on football in Germany. So I took the initiative and wrote an initial short piece on the topic. I was lucky enough that my subsequent doctoral supervisor read it. That is how I ended up at the university in Hanover and became part of the first major research project on the history of Jews in German sport. It has now become a “topic for life” so to speak and runs like a thread not only through my work at the Football Museum, but also through further presentations and exhibitions I am lucky enough to be involved in.

**How visible are Jews in elite sport outside Israeli teams? Do you know any prominent sportspeople who are Jewish?**

HW I have a story “fresh off the press” for you there: This summer, Makkabi Berlin became the first ever Jewish sports club in German history to qualify for the first main round of the German League Cup (“DFB-Pokal”). The draw was held at the Football Museum and shown live on the state TV channel ZDF a few weeks ago. Naturally, I organised lots of tickets for my Makkabi friends.

I am sure that, before that day, many people in Germany were unaware of the fact that Jewish sports clubs exist in the country and that they are so successful. And this is where we come full circle for me: I can give umpteen

# “My studies laid many valuable foundations for my life.”

Dr Henry Wahlig — cultural manager

presentations, but my current work has given me an opportunity to get this knowledge into the heart of society and thus raise awareness and help change people’s minds a bit.

**How did your current presentation and exhibition collaboration with HHU come about?**

HW Within the framework of my position at the German Football Museum, we created an exhibition looking at the life stories of Jewish footballers who were successful and yet still experienced persecution. This exhibition will be on show at the *Haus der Universität* (“University House”) from 10 July 2023. When I heard that my alma mater had submitted an inquiry, I did not hesitate for a moment and said that I would go there myself.

**Together with other supporters, your entire family is also involved in a charitable foundation...**

HW A further facet of my life is my illness, hereditary spastic paraplegia (HSP). It is a rare and currently incurable neurodegenerative disease, which makes me increasingly reliant on a wheelchair. During my time at HHU, I could still frequently manage without it. Nevertheless, I found people at HHU to be very cooperative and supportive, and I never felt excluded.

My father established a foundation, through which we want to advance research on and find a cure for this challenging condition, which affects around 4,000–5,000 people in Germany. We hold frequent funding campaigns to support the foundation and welcome all assistance.



You can find more information on HSP, therapies and the current status of research at [www.hsp-info.de](http://www.hsp-info.de)



# Practical journalism day

## Alumni report on a diverse professional field

On Saturday, 17 June 2023, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities cast a spotlight on journalism: Around 100 students had the opportunity to gain fascinating insights into a diverse professional field at the “practical journalism day” event. Five graduates from the faculty, who now work for well-known media companies, answered questions from participants such as “What characterises good journalism?”, “Do I have to study journalism to work as a journalist?” or “What skills should I possess?”

The participants were extremely interested in what the alumni panel had to say.



# “We need alumni who can offer participants an insight into day-to-day life as a journalist and provide examples of different routes into the profession.”

The event organising team

Students of humanities, cultural studies and social sciences are familiar with the question: “So what can you do with a degree like that?” In order to solve this (apparent) mystery – at least as far as the field of journalism is concerned – and highlight the many (journalistic) perspectives available, it was clear to the team organising the event that: “We need alumni who can offer participants an insight into day-to-day life as a journalist and provide examples of different routes into the profession.”

Tobias Wienke is one such alumnus: As the “games man” for the radio station 1LIVE, he reports on music and gaming for all radio stations operated by the broadcasting company WDR. He also acts as station editor and recording manager at streaming events such as the Wacken Open Air and Lollapalooza festivals. Even though money is not particularly important to him, “being paid to play video games and go to concerts is really convenient,” Wienke says with a grin. In his position, the former German studies and history student benefits from the research skills and ability to distil complex matters into brief summaries that he learned during his studies.

## Alumni report on routes into journalism

Alumnus Maximilian Rieger also works in radio. He studied social sciences at Heinrich Heine University (HHU) and worked for the university radio station in parallel, holding various positions including editor-in-chief. After gaining his degree, he completed an apprenticeship at the renowned Henri Nannen School of Journalism. He now works as an editor and presenter for the broadcasting company *Deutschlandfunk* as a member of the sports

editorial staff, focusing on the politics of sport and sustainability. He finds the idea that sports journalists are always in stadiums a cliché: “I don’t think I’ve ever been in a stadium.” He benefits from his degree in particular when it comes to evaluating studies. The ability to assess the quality of a study or survey helps him produce professional journalistic work in this data-driven world.

Daniela Partenzi, freelance reporter at WDR, spoke about a further development in journalism. The American and Media Studies graduate has experienced how the requirements have changed over time with regard to the skills that journalists need to have. To enable use across multiple media, she now has to supply text, images and videos, and send out the results much more quickly than in the past as the material can and must be published much more quickly as a result of digitalisation.

Sema Kouschkerian confirms this change in expectations with regard to the speed at which the business moves. She studied German studies, romance languages & literatures and pedagogics, and now works as a freelance writer for the *Rheinische Post* media group and as the deputy head of the General Studies/KUBUS department at the HHU Student Academy. In the latter role, she primarily works in research management and as a lecturer for journalism and media studies. For Kouschkerian, the greatest advantage of working as a freelance writer is the freedom it brings. It enables her to decide largely independently what topics to cover, as direct commissions are rare. This in turn enables her to pursue other (professional) interests.

Johanna Rüdiger, former student of political science, media studies and social sciences, is a perfect example of how journalism works in a much more user-oriented way now than just a few years ago. As Head of Social Media Strategy in the Culture & Documentaries department at the German state-owned international broadcaster *Deutsche Welle* (DW), she helps ensure that good journalism also

reaches young people. Her TikTok channel currently has an impressive 200,000 followers. Rüdiger sees the ability to interact with followers and establish communities as the main advantage of digital media. “Social media help people gain journalistic experience – everyone can be their own publisher and showcase their talents.”

## Expert panel discussion, media safari & Instagram challenge

In addition to the alumni panel, three other programme points awaited the participants. In an expert panel discussion, Professor Dr Christiane Eilders, communication and media studies expert from the Department of Social Sciences, and Marie Kirschstein, representative of the NRW Association of the German Federation of Journalists (*Deutscher Journalistenverband NRW*), discussed the value of journalism. Students then had the opportunity to try things out for themselves in a media safari. The university radio station simulated work with a mixing desk, while the *Medienlabor* team from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities demonstrated how virtual production works. Students had the opportunity to stand in front of a green screen and have a go at presenting with an autocue. The NRW Association of the German Federation of Journalists also had a stand, where they provided information on the training courses they offer for journalists, among other things. Last but not least, there was an Instagram challenge in store for participants, aimed at highlighting the use of social media in journalism.

The event at the *Haus der Universität* (“University House”) was part of a collaboration between the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the NRW Association of the German Federation of Journalists and the Association of Düsseldorf Journalists e.V. The intention is to hold the practical day again next year – did you study at the Faculty



PHOTO RP/ALEXANDER SCHNEIDER

The event was hosted by Stanley Vitte, Chair of the Association of Düsseldorf Journalists (*Verein Düsseldorfer Journalisten e.V. – VDJ*), university coordinator for the NRW Association of the German Federation of Journalists and HHU social sciences alumnus.

of Arts and Humanities and would you like to be involved? Then please contact the Office of the Dean of Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities ([studiendekanat.phil@hhu.de](mailto:studiendekanat.phil@hhu.de)).

### → MORE INFORMATION

(External websites only available in German)

#### Practical journalism day

Instagram channel: [@journalismus\\_hhu](https://www.instagram.com/@journalismus_hhu)

You can find the full Journalism module, which includes seminars as well as the “practical day”, in the [electronic course catalogue](#).

#### NRW Association of the German Federation of Journalists

[Association of Düsseldorf Journalists e.V.](#)

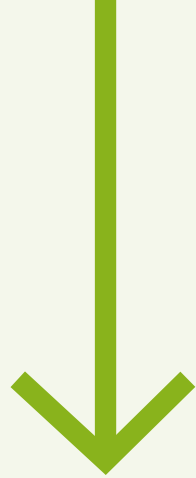
“Social media help people gain journalistic experience – everyone can be their own publisher and showcase their talents.”

Johanna Rüdiger — Head of Social Media Strategy at broadcaster *Deutsche Welle*



# Career Service

During your studies, you're part of the HHU network and able to benefit from the mutual exchange, diverse offers and individual support on offer. All these opportunities are still available to you after you graduate!



## ALUMNI BENEFIT – MEET POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS

As a cooperation partner of the Central Alumni Office, the HHU Career Service cordially invites you to participate in selected events even after you've graduated. Get to know companies, network with employers and pose your questions directly to the right contacts. The Career Service events give you the opportunity to actively advance your career.

As places are limited, the Career Service asks that you register in advance via the HIS-LSF online course catalogue (for alumni who are master's/doctoral students) or by mailing [careerservice@hhu.de](mailto:careerservice@hhu.de). Be sure to indicate that you're a member of the HHU Alumni Network. You can find the full event programme offered by the Career Service [here](#). We look forward to welcoming you to events soon!

## RECONNECT WITH YOUR ALMA MATER STELLENWERK JOB PORTAL AND OFFERS FOR EMPLOYERS

Do you have vacancies at your company that you would like to fill at short notice? Then we invite you to use our "Stellenwerk Düsseldorf" job portal! Irrespective of whether you're looking for flexible temporary staff, qualified assistants, working students, interns, volunteers or trainees, you can reach qualified young talents directly as the portal is primarily aimed at students and graduates.

**Career events:** Is your company running events to recruit staff and young talents? Then advertise them quickly and easily here! You can find more information [here](#).

**A special highlight:** You're able to place private ads for free!

You can find everything you need to know [here](#).

## RECONNECT WITH YOUR ALMA MATER CAREER SERVICE – ALUMNI REPORT ON THEIR EXPERIENCES

You've made it: As an alumnus/alumna, you've successfully managed the transition to working life! Now it's time to take a look back at your studies and the transition from theory to practice. Do you sometimes think of all those who supported you along this path? Or would you have liked more opportunities to prepare for your future career? Then seize this opportunity today and support HHU students by sharing your practical experience. How was the transition from university to working life for you? Do you have any tips for recent graduates?

The Career Service cordially invites alumni to return to HHU – their alma mater – and report on their experiences. Get in touch today! We would be pleased to advise you about [opportunities](#) that may be of interest to you.



## RECONNECT WITH YOUR ALMA MATER CAREER SERVICE – BECOME A SPEAKER

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[HHU Düsseldorf Career Service](https://www.linkedin.com/company/hhu-duesseldorf-career-service)

# Career Service event programme

## Careers for students and graduates of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities



Thursday, 19 October 2023, 12.30 – 2 p.m.  
Building 22.01, basement floor 2B

## secida AG



Thursday, 26 October 2023, 12.30 – 2 p.m.  
Building 22.01, basement floor 2B

## EU Careers Ambassador Düsseldorf



Thursday, 2 November 2023, 12.30 – 2 p.m.  
Building 22.01, basement floor 2B

## Federal Criminal Police Office (Bundeskriminalamt – BKA) – doing the right thing



Thursday, 9 November 2023, 12.30 – 2 p.m.  
Building 22.01, basement floor 2B

## CGI – move into IT consulting



Thursday, 16 November 2023, 12.30 – 2 p.m.  
Building 22.01, basement floor 2B

## Work at the Foreign Office



Thursday, 23 November 2023, 12.30 – 2 p.m.  
Building 22.01, basement floor 2B

## PwC Germany: “Sustainable is the new profitable – sustainability topics for a sustainable corporate strategy”



Thursday, 30 November 2023, 12.30 – 2 p.m.  
Building 22.01, basement floor 2B



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INFORMATION AND  
OFFERS ON OUR WEBSITE  
UNDER [CAREER](#)



PHOTO CHRISTOPH KAWAN

The social behaviour of the honeybee can be found in its DNA. At the Institute of Evolutionary Genetics, Professor Dr Martin Beye is conducting research into this behaviour.

## Faculties

### FACULTY OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES

- 04 Music videos as a form of self-empowerment

### FACULTY OF BUSINESS

#### ADMINISTRATION AND ECONOMICS

- 08 Ordering way too much

## Title

- 12 About bees and genes

Social behaviour requires a large brain

## Faculties

### FACULTY OF LAW

- 22 A major storm or just a storm in a teacup?  
Political scandals

### FACULTY OF MEDICINE

- 26 Retinal artery occlusion: Time is Retina



PHOTO PICTURE-ALLIANCE/ DPA – MARTIN ATHENSTÄDT

The Düsseldorf Party Research Institute (PRUF) addresses the phenomenon of political scandals and their influence on democracy.

## Legal notice

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# Editorial



PHOTO IVO MAYR

Dear Reader,

There is something special about bees. Not only because they always seem so extremely hard-working, but also because they display an incredible community spirit. And because they also happen to produce a fabled food: honey. Consequently, it can come as no surprise that bees enjoy an excellent reputation overall in our culture.

Bees are also a subject of attention and interest in research, in particular at Heinrich Heine University. A team from the field of evolutionary genetics headed by Professor Beye is investigating the extent to which the highly coordinated community in which bees live is based on their genes. It is in fact the case that bees inherit the majority of their behaviour, rather than having to learn it. Bees have what can be referred to as a “social brain”, which aids the communication and coordination, without which life in such a large and complex community would not be possible. Switching off individual genes is reflected in corresponding behaviour of the bees. This research not only gives us the opportunity to learn a great deal about bees but also about the interrelationships between genes, behavioural patterns and neural structures.

In addition to bee research, this Magazine also looks at other topics at HHU: For example, the phenomenon of retinal artery occlusion, which can result in a severe loss of vision if left untreated. A research group at HHU is working hard to find a medication-based therapy. A further – completely different – research topic comes from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities: music videos. Far more than just the visualisation of songs, they reveal insights into current perceptions of society and politics. These perceptions are also reflected in political scandals or how certain incidents are “scandalised” – a research topic not only but also of interest to our Faculty of Law. Finally, an article looks at the flood of returns in the online shopping sector. Researchers at HHU have developed measures to stem this tide.

This and all the other research projects mentioned show how relevant scientific findings are to our real lives.

I wish you an enjoyable read!

Kind regards,

Professor Dr Stefan Marschall

Vice President for International Relations and Science Communication

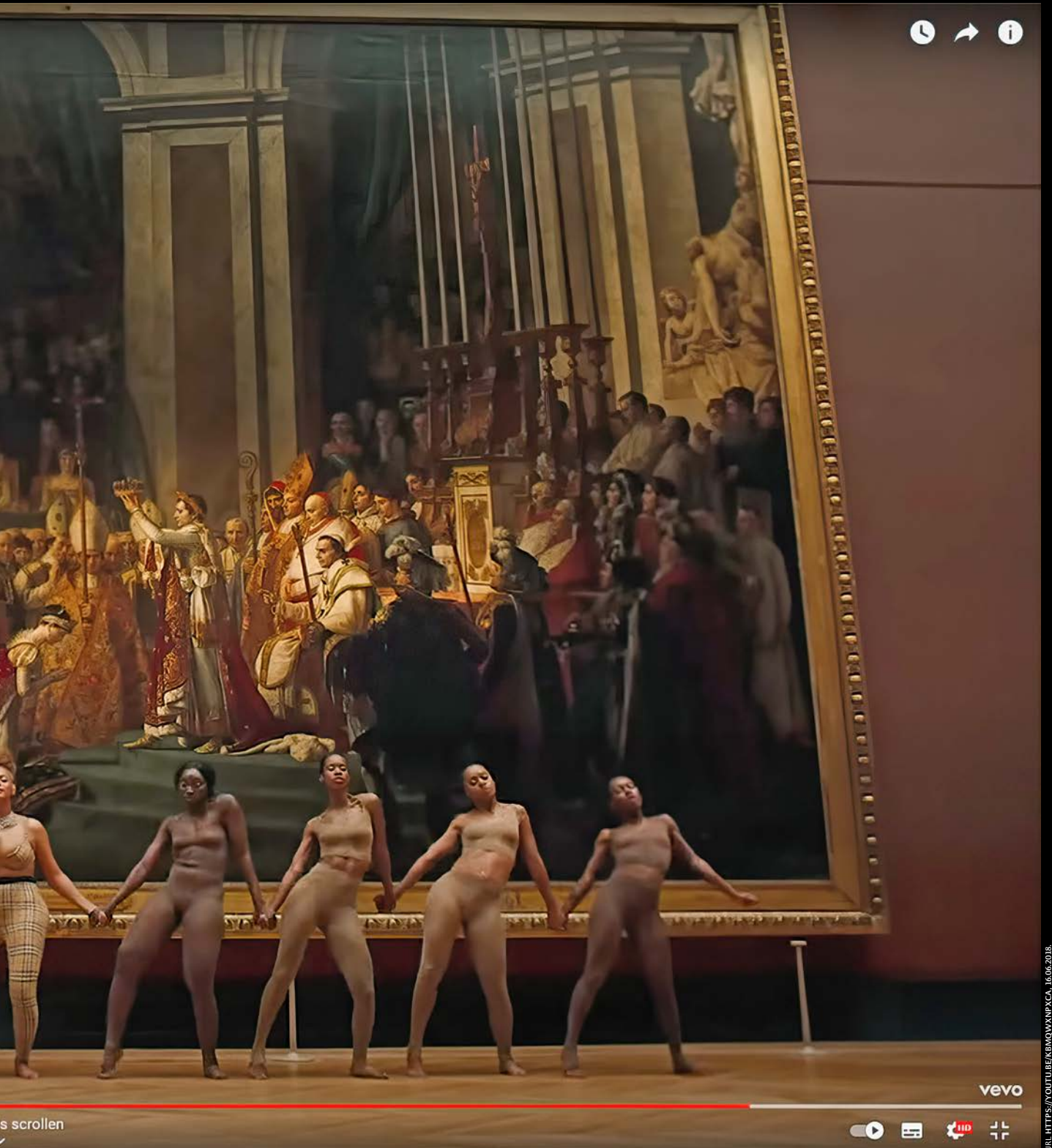
“We are so rich, we can afford it.”

# Music videos as a form of



# self-empowerment

The Carters: "Apushit"  
(Official Video)



s scrollen

vevo

URL: <https://youtube.com/watch?v=K8M9QWXPXCA>, 16.06.2018.



BY VICTORIA MEINSCHÄFER

In the 1980s, music videos were primarily a promotional tool: Musicians illustrated their songs with colourful moving images to increase sales figures. However, music videos have since moved on a long way from this means to an end and the videos now being produced by Beyoncé, Janelle Monáe and – on the German market – Deichkind are complex, elaborately staged critiques of society and politics, which often utilise the Western canon of art and moving images to get their messages across. Dr Kathrin Dreckmann (Department of Media and Culture Studies) is a leading expert in the field and has been researching this topic for many years.

**A** “Apeshit” by Beyoncé and Jay-Z is a video that reflects on cultural theory and which – Dreckmann is convinced – cannot have been created without good knowledge of European art history and the media and cultural studies research of recent decades. “The way in which Beyoncé and Jay-Z dance and pose in front of artwork in the Louvre shows that not only the location but also each and every piece of artwork was selected specifically.”

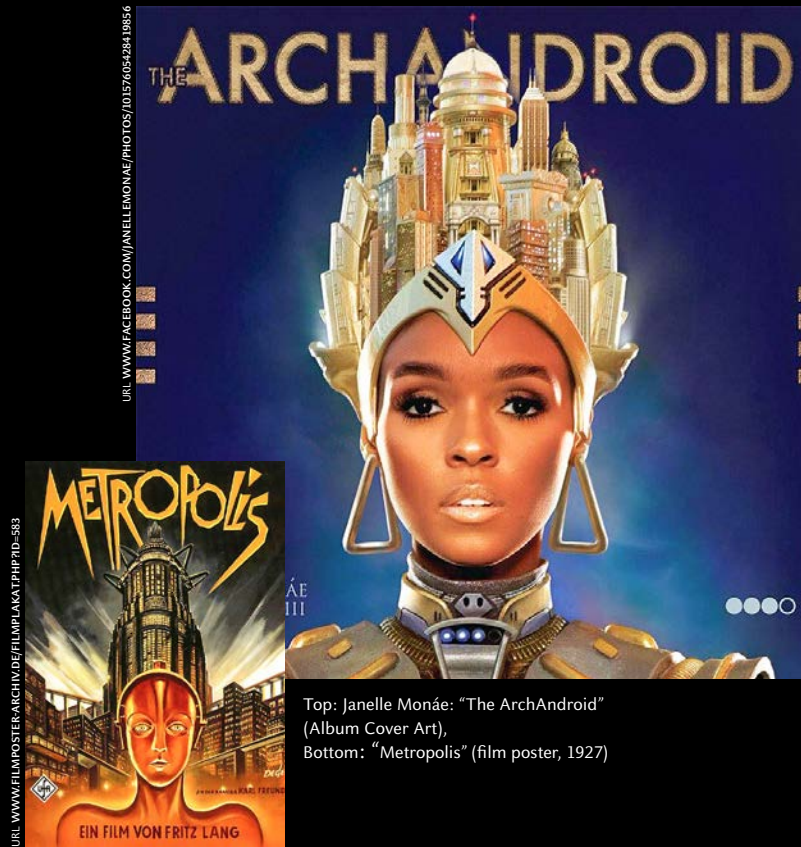
The setting is a striking choice as the Louvre is the most important and well-known site of European artistic and remembrance culture. “The collection itself is remarkable – and the ostentatious architecture that houses Europe’s pictorial memory is no less so,” says Dreckmann. Beyoncé, who refers to herself as Queen B, showcased herself there as a new black queen, utilising the painting “The Coronation of Napoleon” by Jacques-Louis David. “This painting stands for royal self-empowerment more than virtually any other and was created to symbolically legitimise Napoleon as the French ruler,” says the media and culture studies expert. The video repeatedly shows Beyoncé and Jay-Z in front of this painting and “also places them in a self-empowerment fantasy displaying no less pomp. The two singers appropriate the painting to present themselves as a truly royal couple.”

Black, female and queer self-empowerment are arguably the most important themes of the music videos.

Conventional social and moral convictions have been depicted, confirmed and relayed in European art over the last 500 years. Museums such as the Louvre are of course key locations for cultural memory due to their reputation as the “most important museum” and because priceless works of art are stored and displayed there. Yet, it is clear from the obviously good knowledge of the mythological scenes shown that the videos do more than just use the location for the sake of it. In their song “Apeshit”, Beyoncé and Jay-Z sing “we made it” and that they are thankful for their fame. “However, it is not only about their own fame, but rather

## Art, fame and power

about positioning themselves as black artists,” explains Dreckmann. At the beginning of the video, a black Icarus – a winged man – is shown as excluded, crouching in front of the entrance to the Louvre. The next scene takes place in the *Galerie d’Apollon*, the prestigious structure built at the order of Louis XIV, and shows the painting “Apollo Slays Python” by Delacroix. Displaying this particular painting in the video transfers the connection between art, fame and power to Beyoncé and Jay-Z and is intended to show a rise to prominence, an ability, a talent that exists and is used and at the same time appropriately showcased.



“The way in which Beyoncé and Jay-Z dance and pose in front of artwork in the Louvre shows that not only the location but also each and every piece of artwork was selected specifically.”

Dr Kathrin Dreckmann — media and culture studies expert

Following the early success of music videos as a promotional tool, they have only gained prominence again since the 2010s. Dreckmann believes this is attributable among other things to changes in mobile Internet usage behaviour and the rise of YouTube. She has also noted that students have also once again become increasingly interested in music videos since streaming platforms such as Spotify or Apple Music have started showing them. “They all share a hybrid clip aesthetic. The artists draw from all genres and forms, cite films as well as images and early video art, and play synaesthetically between sound and moving image.” In addition to European artwork, contemporary videos also often reference early film history. For example, artist Janelle Monáe works with references to the film *Metropolis*, directed by Fritz Lang, while Lil Nas X refers to the film “Call Me By Your Name” in his video “Montero”. What was a critique of the repression of gay sexuality at the time of its publication is now in turn exposed as an instrument of repression when it is made clear that it refers solely to white gay representation.

“Obviously, those who do not know this will not understand the reference,” says Dreckmann, “but that does not mean it should not be taken seriously.” After all, people

will not necessarily understand the Schopenhauer links when they read the novel “*Buddenbrooks*” by Thomas Mann for the first time. Whether the intellectual input for the videos comes from the artists themselves is unclear, however. The directors and choreographers are known, but they change and do not comment on the videos and their messages. It is also interesting to note that, with their videos, the artists are also acknowledging the canon they are permanently criticising – a canon that actually excludes them, confronting this exclusion through empowerment and deconstruction.

Participation is also achieved here through immense wealth – the artists demonstrate that they can buy participation with the money they have. “We are so rich, we can afford it,” is an important statement. It goes beyond the fact that they can rent the Louvre for the video shoot: Clothing, jewellery, hair and make-up all emphasise the vast amounts of money available.

## Adapting canonised content

The music videos perform a central operation within the iconic cultural memory site that is the Louvre by adapting and recasting canonized content. In the process, something like a pop-cultural re-evaluation also emerges. Millions of fans make the pilgrimage to the Louvre – not to view the art displayed there but rather to see where the music video was shot. Beyond this striking individual case, Dreckmann states that this also gives rise to the project of a redefinition of central aesthetic categories as developed and discussed since Benjamin, Adorno and Vernallis. Accordingly, music videos are more than just illustrated music – they are in fact art themselves.

→ **More Than Illustrated Music: Aesthetics of Hybrid Media between Pop, Art and Video.**  
 Edited by Kathrin Dreckmann and Elfi Vomberg.  
 London: Bloomsbury 2023.

Lil Nas X: “Montero” (Call Me By Your Name) (Official Video)



URL: <https://youtube.com/watch?v=6SWMTBVB3K>, 26.03.2021.

# Ordering way

Tackling the flood of returns  
in online retailing

ANGE LEIDENSCHAFT



baechli-bergsport.ch

ěkujeme  
Vaši objednávku

free to be



↑  
Open here!

↑  
Open here!



# too much





BY CAROLIN GRAPE

The good news: Return rates can be reduced. The Institute for Consumer Studies (*Institut für Verbraucherwissenschaften – IfV*) has developed and trialled easy-to-implement, effective measures aimed at changing order behaviour in collaboration with the online retailer OTTO.

**T**hat new pair of trousers is too tight, the colour of that blouse does not match your skin tone at all and, to be on the safe side, it is best to order three different sizes of that pair of shoes to make sure you get a pair that fits properly. So you put the articles back in the box, stick the free returns label on it and put the parcel back in the post. Germany is the “European Champion” when it comes to ordering – and returning – products: In 2021, 1.3 billion articles bought online in this country were returned. That is three times as many as before the pandemic – in 2018, the number of returned items lay between 480 and 490 million. Not without reason: Germans order a comparatively large amount of goods on account, companies offer return periods that are, on average, generous and free returns have become more or less standard here. While this is of course positive for consumers, it is a huge problem for businesses and the environment.

Returns are one of the biggest challenges facing the online shopping sector – in three respects. Vita Zimmermann-Janssen and her colleague Freya Blickwedel, both from the Chair of Business Administration, esp. Marketing headed by Professor Dr Peter Kenning, explain: “According to scientific studies, every returned parcel costs the sector approx. seven euros. In addition to shipping, this figure also includes costs for reconditioning the goods (such as cleaning



and repairs to returned items of clothing). Contrary to the principle that those who incur costs should be the ones to pay for them, these additional costs are simply shared between all customers on a pro rata basis where necessary. In addition to these economic and social sustainability consequences, returns also impact the climate and environment through additional transports and the consumption of further resources as a consequence of packaging waste. All the extra transports generate significant greenhouse gases equivalent to around 800,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year, which in turn corresponds to the emissions caused by roughly 5.3 billion kilometres of car travel.”

### Consumption of further resources

Beyond making return shipping and handling processes more sustainable, the biggest lever for solving the problem is to reduce the actual number of returns. “Our primary objective was to develop measures that can be implemented quickly and help prevent the customer from wanting to return goods in the first place. In our RESOLVE research project, we are focusing on consumer behaviour – both before and at the time of ordering/buying,” says Vita Zimmermann-Janssen.

According to her, clothing and shoes account for 85% of returns in Germany. “So we selected the online clothing shopping sector in Germany for our study and established

“According to scientific studies, every returned parcel costs the sector approx. seven euros.”

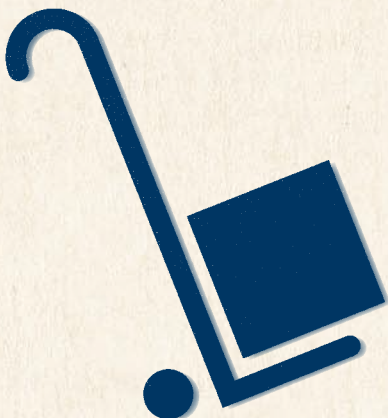
Vita Zimmermann-Janssen — e-business expert



a collaboration with the company OTTO, one of the largest online retailers in the country. An article-related return rate of around 35% puts them right on the front line when it comes to the issue of returns.”

## Major field trial with practical partner OTTO

Freya Blickwedel explains the next steps: “We scrutinised how a typical online order process works in detail. First of all, we conducted a pre-evaluation of the various types of measures and possible touchpoints between the person ordering and the online shopping platforms. Two concrete options emerged. They were initially tested in the laboratory and optimised until they appeared to be capable of influencing behaviour without resulting in any negative side effects (e.g. with regard to retailer image or intentions to switch to a different shop). Finally, we tested the measures in the field with the team from OTTO. They made a section of their online shop available as a test environment and additionally enabled us to conduct a survey of their customers.”



The results of the trials show: An informative message explaining the negative consequences of returns (personal time/effort involved, ecological impact and the risk of rising prices) is an effective tool for raising awareness. Short and to the point, and displayed relatively early on in the buying process, among other things it encourages customers to reflect on their own behaviour – and had a positive effect in the field trial: The share of selective orders (e.g. orders involving articles in multiple sizes) decreased by more than 2% following the display of a “returns message” on the shopping cart page. That may not sound like much in the first instance, but with return costs per article of around five euros and 1,000,000 orders, it can already bring a cost saving of approx. EUR100,000. At the same



time, economic key indicators (e.g. click rate, sales, number of orders) remained at a constant level. A short “returns message” evidently does not result in any negative consequences for the online shopping trade.

## Incentives provide motivation

Alternatively, companies can also offer incentives to reduce returns through their bonus programmes: Buyers can be rewarded with bonus points when they choose their orders more carefully and no longer return articles. By contrast, points can be deducted for any returns that do not involve guarantee issues. Contrary to the concern expressed at the start of the project that negative incentives such as the deduction of points could lead to economic disadvantages (e.g. customer exodus, damage to image and loss of trust), the study shows that more than 20% of those surveyed are in principle willing to participate in a bonus programme that not only rewards fewer returns, but also sanctions high numbers of returns.

Good news for the online shopping industry, where competitive pressure is extremely high. In the debate surrounding sustainable returns management and consumer behaviour, the Institute for Consumer Studies has made an important initial contribution with its research into reducing returns.

→ [www.verbraucherwissenschaften.de](http://www.verbraucherwissenschaften.de)





Social behaviour requires a large brain

# About bees





and genes



BY ARNE CLAUSSEN

The honeybee *Apis mellifera* is a highly social animal. Its complex social behaviour can be found at its very core, so to speak – in the nucleus of its cells, in its DNA. At the Institute of Evolutionary Genetics, bee researcher Professor Dr Martin Beye and his team are examining how the behaviour essential for the functioning of the insect state is encoded in the genome of the creatures and how it is reflected in its nervous system.

**I** “I grew up with bees and they have always fascinated me,” says Professor Beye in response to the question as to why he chose to specialise in bee research. “I wanted to know how the insects work together, how the colony as a whole forms a functioning unit in which each and every creature knows and performs its own specific task.” Beye has turned his early fascination into a profession: At the Institute of Evolutionary Genetics, he and his team are researching the genetics of bees, in particular the honeybee.

Each individual bee can be compared with a cell in an organism, the beehive, says Beye: “In biology, we call this ‘eusociality’, which is seen as a pinnacle of evolution:

The individual organisms form a highly coordinated community by working together successfully.” An important characteristic of eusocial creatures: Some of the individuals give up reproduction, while a “reproductive caste” develops – the queen – and there is a division of labour between reproduction and brood care. This behaviour can also be found in ants and termites, and examples of social species can even be found in the world of mammals, namely naked mole rats. In such colonies, this collectively optimises reproduction: Only the queen reproduces, but she does so on a continuous basis and highly effectively as she is relieved of other duties.

Professor Beye’s research team at HHU are interested in how this cooperation is encoded in the genes.







“In biology, we call this ‘eusociality’, which is seen as a pinnacle of evolution: The individual organisms form a highly coordinated community by working together successfully.”

Professor Martin Beye — biologist





“Bees inherit the majority of their behaviour patterns, meaning that they do not need to learn them.”

Professor Martin Beye — biologist







There are several bee colonies at the Institute. Researchers use them to examine the extent to which genes influence the behaviour of bees.

“Bees inherit the majority of their behaviour patterns, meaning that they do not need to learn them,” says Beye. This applies to all behaviours the worker bees need in the course of their – in summer just six-week-long – lives, during which they perform a wide variety of functions: from brood care and nest building to defence of the hive and gathering nectar and pollen outside it.

## Inherited choreography

“These inherited behaviours even include the choreography of the waggle dances via which the bees communicate, including local ‘dialects’, where the dances vary from region to region.” Forager bees use these dances to share information with other bees such as the location of good food sources or the best sites for a new hive.

Martin Beye: “Even the early behaviour of newly hatched queens is inherited.” Several queens are always reared simultaneously. They develop from normally fertilised eggs, which are laid in special cells – the “queen cells”. The larvae in these “cells” receive special food and thus develop differently to the worker bees. When the first queen hatches, she emits a characteristic sound, which the other queens still in their cells answer. The hatched queen then goes to all the cells and kills her sisters.

“The actual ‘intelligence’ in the colony can be found in the worker bees – of which there may be tens of thousands – and they also take decisions about the future of the colony rather than the queen,” emphasises Anna Wagner, PhD student at the Institute: “The queen bee has no influence in the hive, her job is simply to lay eggs on a continuous basis – up to 2,000 per day. When the queen no longer does her job properly, the workers eject her and replace her with a new queen.”

## The queen has no influence at all

Male bees (drones) – which develop from unfertilised eggs – and how they are treated are also “pre-programmed”. Drones cannot find food for themselves and are dependent on being fed by the workers. Their function is to mate with the newly hatched queens in the various hives during mating flights. The successful drone then dies as it leaves its reproductive organs in the queen. The remaining drones are no longer fed after the mating season. They are driven out of the hive and then die – they play no further role in the future of the colony.





Controlling the complex social behaviour in a large community and the communication and coordination needed for this – by means of the so-called “social brain” – requires greater neural processing capacity. This is reflected in the anatomy of honeybees: Compared with other insects – including wild bees – they have a significantly more complex brain. This anatomic characteristic can also be found in other eusocial insects, which share the labour in their colonies and need to coordinate with each other. And it can also be observed in mammals: Brainpower has increased notably over the course of the evolution of modern humankind and its complex social structure.

## Social brain

But how are these behavioural patterns encoded in the genome of the bees? The bee researchers at HHU are using modern genetic methods such as the CRISPR/Cas genetic scissors to find out. PhD student Jana Seiler: “We can switch off individual genes in a targeted way and then see how the behaviour of the bees changes.”

The first weeks of May are a period of intense activity in the Institute laboratory and the hives, which are located in an enclosed area of the Botanical Garden. Seiler: “We prepare artificial combs for the queen to lay her eggs in. Student assistants then take these combs out of the hive and bring them to me in the laboratory, where I process every egg.”

During this period, the conditions in the laboratory are tropical: To ensure the survival of the egg cells, the room must be kept at a constant temperature of 30°C and 70% humidity. Seiler takes the eggs out of the combs, lays them under a microscope and injects the previously prepared CRISPR/Cas complex into each egg using an extremely sharp glass needle. “This is piecework – in three days a week, my colleagues and I process up to 3,500 eggs,” Seiler says.

The eggs prepared in this way, in which the complex makes the desired change to the genome, remain in the lab. After 72 hours, the larvae hatch and are raised in special vessels. Seiler: “Then we see how many injections were successful. Not all the eggs survive the intervention, but around 20% produce viable larvae.” After around ten days, the larvae pupate and adult bees emerge. Anna Wagner and her colleague Ann-Christin Langen then carry out the behavioural measurements on them.

First, the bees are placed in individual chambers. Langen: “We observe whether the juvenile bees demonstrate fundamental behavioural patterns, for example whether they move towards the light, like every bee should.” Precision hands-on work is then called for



Piecework: The CRISPR/Cas complex is injected into a bee egg using a glass needle. (top)

The queen has laid eggs on tiny plastic plugs, which are prepared for injection. (bottom)





again: A tiny piece of paper with a unique QR code is attached to the back of each juvenile bee. Surely there is a risk of being stung when doing that? Wagner: “These very young bees still have a soft sting, which cannot penetrate human skin. So the job is fiddly, but not dangerous.”

## In the experimental hive

Equipped with their code, the bees are transferred to the experimental hive, a large comb between transparent acrylic glass plates. Everything is recorded by a camera, which shoots four frames per second and produces such high-resolution images that the QR codes on the backs of the bees can be read out. Professor Beye: “We developed our ‘tracking tool’ in collaboration with the HHU Centre for Information and Media Technology (ZIM), the Chair of Databases and Information Systems and the Institute for the Mathematical Modelling of Biological Systems. It enables us to identify every single bee and observe its individual behaviour.” The evaluation software uses AI techniques to classify movement patterns of individual bees. “For example, we can identify whether a bee is involved in brood care,” explains Anna Wagner, “but also whether their behaviour differs from the typical patterns of a worker bee. When the software indicates signs of this, we examine the bee in question more closely.”





This enables the young researchers to assess whether and how changes to a gene affect the behaviour of the bee – and thus what behaviour is encoded in a gene that has been switched off. Interaction with other bees is also recorded, as it is possible to observe several hundred bees simultaneously with the tracking tool.

## Switching off genes

In addition to the laboratory premises, Professor Beye's working group also has a flight enclosure on the outskirts of the Botanical Garden, which is used to observe the collective behaviour of the bees. It is also where the hives belonging to the Institute are located.

At the Institute, the researchers then examine how the genetic and behavioural biology changes affect the neural connections in the brains of the bees. Alina Sturm is focusing on this field of research in her doctoral thesis: "We include fluorescence genes with the genetic changes to show us which areas of the brain have changed." This enables the researchers to establish how and where the social behaviour is specifically manifested in the neural structure: "These areas that control social behaviour appear green under the confocal fluorescence microscope."

Professor Beye has never regretted devoting his life as a researcher to bees: "We are constantly discovering new interrelationships between genes, behavioural patterns and the neural structures in which they are represented. New genetic techniques in particular have provided us with a toolbox that enables us to address and answer many more questions. My team and I are dedicated to tackling this task, supported by our many little helpers in the beehives."

### CONTACT

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**Institute of Evolutionary Genetics**  
**[martin.beye@uni-duesseldorf.de](mailto:martin.beye@uni-duesseldorf.de)**



The bees are fed and temporarily kept in small cages in the laboratory. (top)

Front row (from left): Tamao Nishizuka, Alina Sturm, Maryam Masrouri, Tabea Nüßer, Jana Seiler and Martin Beye; back row (from left): Marc von der Heiden, Ann-Christin Langen, Emma Zimmermann, Anna Wagner, Marion Müller-Borg and Pia Ulbricht. (bottom)

A tiny QR code is attached to each bee, which enables the specific behaviour of every single bee to be analysed via the tracking tool. (right)







“We include fluorescence genes with the genetic changes to show us which areas of the brain have changed.”

Alina Sturm — biologist





# A major storm or just a storm in a teacup?

## Political scandals



Amused FDP MP Hans-Joachim Otto (right) shows his parliamentary colleagues a report about the holiday of Defence Minister Scharping and his partner, Countess Pilati, in the magazine "Bunte" on 28 August 2001.



BY CAROLIN GRAPE

What do we know about political scandals? How do they work? And why does each country have its own particular triggers? The Düsseldorf Party Research Institute (PRUF) addressed this phenomenon at its annual conference.

**B**onus air miles, extramarital affairs, morally dubious business relationships, plagiarism in doctoral theses or parties during lockdown: Every legislative period has its own scandals. When things that otherwise have nothing to do with politics suddenly become political, MPs frequently bow to significant public pressure, which influences democratically elected decision-makers and demands resignations, dismissals or political concessions. The power of political scandals is feared. What triggers a scandal, how it develops and what consequences it has are all unpredictable.

The Düsseldorf Party Research Institute addressed this fascinating topic area at its 29th Party Research Symposium at the end of March under the title “Political Scandals and Political Power”. Co-Director Professor

Dr Sophie Schönberger explains: “We want to consider what influence scandals have on democracy in an interdisciplinary way because, unlike in the study of law, history, sociology, political science and media studies all address the topic intensively.”

## Influence on democracy

In a political scandal, the entire nation focuses its attention on a single person on the political stage who finds themselves in the spotlight as a consequence of some wrongdoing. This person has to respond and defend themselves. Both the government and the opposition also need to respond. And the media cover the story in minute detail



PHOTO PICTURE ALLIANCE/REUTERS – CARL RECINE

Human rights violations, contempt for the freedom of the press and corruption: Scandals and uproar preceded the 2022 Soccer World Cup.



PHOTO PICTURE-ALLIANCE/DPA – MARTIN ATHEUSSTÄDT



Philipp Jenninger (CDU) on the way to a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group before announcing his resignation. Theo Waigel, Deputy Chair of the parliamentary group, can be seen on the right. Jenninger's speech to the German Parliament on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Kristallnacht* on 10 November 1988 caused an uproar and led to his resignation as President of the Parliament a day later.

On 30 October 1962, a group of students staged a sit-in at the *Hauptwache* plaza in Frankfurt to protest against the arrest of editors of the *Spiegel* news magazine. The article “*Bedingt abwehrbereit*” (“partially ready to defend”) by Conrad Ahlers, published in *Spiegel* on 8 October 1962, led to searches of the magazine's editorial offices in Hamburg and Bonn, as well as the arrest of several people, including *Spiegel* publisher Rudolf Augstein and Editor-in-Chief Claus Jacobi, on suspicion of “treason”.



PHOTO PICTURE-ALLIANCE/DPA – GOETTER

and often with relish. Scandals thrive on emotion – the attention factor for those involved and the entertainment factor for the public. “Scandals are somehow fun and serve our desire for outrage,” says Sophie Schönberger.

## Dynamics of outrage

However, they also realise an important stabilising function for the political system as a whole: “They initiate democratic discourse about our ethical and moral standards, as well as our expectations with regard to community in general. They expose issues, facilitate reform and correction, and contribute to updating social norms,” the expert continues.

Yet, whether a situation becomes a full-blown scandal depends entirely on public opinion – the extent of the scandal is determined solely by public outrage, not by the wrongdoing itself. Democracy is a prerequisite for political scandal. Freely articulated public outrage about political wrongdoing will only trigger a scandal in a democracy as it takes a free press to expose the political scandal, the opposition to “fan the flames” and the public to get outraged about it. Political scandals are thus a visible result of democratic control in a constitutional state, which takes effect above all when politicians consciously and publicly break the law. In states where no-one is aware of abuses of power or corruption, or ignores them, there are no scandals – and if so, they are deliberately staged as a way of steering public outrage, for example in autocracies.

Political scandals not only play a major role in defining the image of individual politicians, but also in how society views politics and the state as a whole. They trigger collective outrage and shape opinions about the abuse of public office in a range of areas. Scandals about party donations, severance payments or air miles used for private purposes all suggest the corruption of politicians and their use of public funds for personal gain, reinforcing the image of the “lying political caste”.

## Cultural differences

Can scandals result in greater political apathy among the population? Do they have the potential to undermine liberal democracies? According to Sophie Schönberger, this risk does in fact exist – although only under two prerequisites: “One is when too much wrongdoing occurs. In this case, the problem is not the scandalisation itself, but rather a mechanism in the system. The other is when the tolerance threshold for the difficulties inherent in democracy is too low. Even if the system as a whole works well, every democracy is governed by people and people make mistakes.” Politicians who get caught up in scandals react very differently. What may be perceived as a major storm by some, is just a storm in a teacup for others. Some see their prompt resignation as the only way to limit the damage to themselves or their political office, like Minister for Family Affairs Anne Spiegel, who resigned following massive criticism of her holiday trip shortly after the flood in the Ahr region. Others, meanwhile, are prepared to ride out the storm in consensus with their party supporters, who they have rallied behind them: Issuing sweeping denials and only admitting to what has already been proven is a frequently used tactic, which was also employed by former Transport Minister Andreas Scheuer (CSU) during the toll scandal.

Scandals reveal a great deal about the standards that apply in a particular society. Experts differentiate between different categories, including corruption and enrichment, party financing, scandals involving the abuse of power, police scandals and moral scandals. What constitutes a political scandal and when resignation becomes a necessity varies in many countries: “Each country has its own scandal culture and triggers. The cases of Bill Clinton, Donald Trump and Anthony Weiner show that sex scandals are at the top of the list in the USA, while in France, François Fillon accepted suits as gifts and pretended to employ his wife – a perfect fit with the French political environment. By contrast, moral scandals are more of a rarity in this country as the majority of the German media and the law differentiate between private life and public office. The



PHOTO: PICTURE ALLIANCE/ASSOCIATED PRESS - MICHAEL SOHN

One of the first German politicians to cause a plagiarism scandal: Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg.

most common type of scandal in Germany, above all in recent times, has been plagiarised doctoral theses,” the researcher explains.

Law as a subject struggles with political scandals – “the human factor of politics”. According to Schönberger, the formalistic separation between office and incumbent does not seem to work here. And yet, the law fulfils various functions. It is both an object of political scandals and at the same time, the instrument for recording and dealing with them. It is not uncommon for scandals to result in legal proceedings – such as the Wulff affair or the mask affair involving Alfred Sauter and Georg Nüsslein – but they do not necessarily end in legal sanctions. In the majority of cases, the appraisal of scandals under (criminal) law is more of a follow-up, which takes up too much time compared with the attention span of the political public.

“They initiate democratic discourse about our ethical and moral standards, as well as our expectations with regard to the community in general.”

Professor Sophie Schönberger — legal expert



# Retinal artery occlusion: Time is Retina

Multi-centre study examines  
the effect of stroke medication

BY SUSANNE DOPHEIDE

Retinal artery occlusion is not a well-known eye condition. In the same way as the brain in the case of a stroke, the eye can also be affected by an acute blockage of the blood supply. It is characterised by a sudden, painless deterioration in vision within a few seconds. If left untreated, it results in a severe and permanent loss of vision in around 95% of cases, significantly impairing those affected.

Once you know how the condition occurs, it becomes clear that central retinal artery occlusion (CRAO) constitutes a medical emergency, which requires immediate treatment. It is caused when a clot blocks the blood vessels that supply the retina. This stops the supply of oxygen, causing the tissue to die off. The quicker the blood can flow freely again, the better the prognosis. So it is all the more important that people in general and non-specialist doctors in particular are also capable of recognising the situation as an emergency.

## Rare condition

Professor Dr Rainer Guthoff of the Department of Ophthalmology, who is participating in a study on the medication-based treatment of this condition together with Dr John-Ih Lee of the Department of Neurology, warns: “Anyone who notices a deterioration in their sight, which occurs within seconds, and a shadow right across one eye should immediately go to the nearest eye clinic or casualty department – in an ambulance if necessary, even if the shadow only lasts for a short time.” Affecting less than one person in 100,000, retinal artery occlusion is admittedly a rare condition. However, a verifiably effective therapy does not yet exist. A research team from the Tübingen University Hospital, the Hertie Institute for Clinical Brain Research and the Eye Clinic at the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf is now aiming to change that. Together, they are examining the extent to which medication can dissolve the blood clot and thus stop the retina being destroyed. The medical trial was recently launched in Tübingen and the recruitment of patients has begun – also via the Department of Ophthalmology and the Department of Neurology at Düsseldorf University Hospital.

Under the lead of Professor Dr Martin Spitzer from the Eye Clinic at the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf, the team conducting the trial is now working with 23 linked centres within the framework of the REVISION clinical trial to examine the extent to which the medication Alteplase can dissolve the blood clot and thus stop the retina being destroyed. This medication is used successfully within the framework of the lysis process in the case of ischaemic strokes, so it is logical to conclude that it may also help in the case of retinal artery occlusion. The study will now establish whether this is the case.

Around 400 patients across the country are to be treated within the framework of the medical trial, which has already begun at the Tübingen University Hospital. Düsseldorf University Hospital also began recruiting patients this year.

→ You can find more information on the study here: [www.revision-trial.de](http://www.revision-trial.de) (German only).

“Anyone who notices a deterioration in their sight, which occurs within seconds, and a shadow right across one eye should immediately go to the nearest eye clinic or casualty department.”

Professor Rainer Guthoff — ophthalmologist



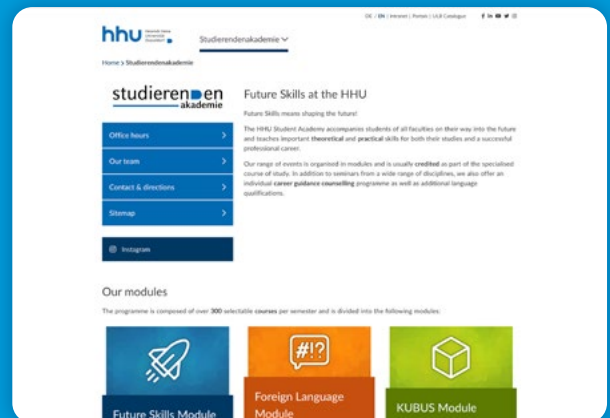
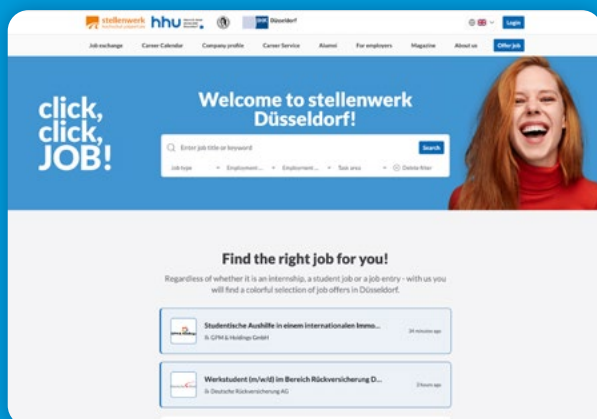
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