

The Microbiome of *The Newsletter*

Paul van der Velde

In May last year I was archivist in residence at IIAS when it was still located at Rapenburg 59. My task was to reduce the considerable amount of archival (paper) material to manageable proportions. The outcome constitutes 75 IIAS boxes which will now forever rest in Leiden University's archive.

When going through the boxes of *The Newsletter*, which started out as the IIAS Newsletter in 1993, I invited the present Chief Editor, Paramita Paul, to visit my 'office' in the attic of the Rapenburg building. She was pleasantly surprised to find a stock of old issues and did not hesitate to take it under her care. We only briefly broached the topic of this 100th edition, and she asked me to write a brief 'felicitation' and a forward-looking contribution.

In that context, it is impossible to ignore IT-related developments such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek. These will certainly influence both the contents and contributors of future editions of *The Newsletter*. When writing this I received a WhatsApp message from the IIAS founding director, Wim Stokhof, containing a photo (Fig. 1) with a one-word reflection:

"Intriguing." He was the visionary who, when confronted by a conservative board, did not hesitate to defend a substantial budget increase for this publication. It enabled us to reach, in no time, a considerable part of the community of Asia scholars worldwide, not only in print but also online.

Thirty-two years ago online and e-mail were seen by many as a threat. We as an editorial team didn't. On the contrary, it is part of the *The Newsletter's* microbiome to come to grips not only with Asian Studies, but also to grasp the tantalising array of new modes of expression IT-developments have to offer. These should fascinate instead of scare us. *The Newsletter* should stay true to its courageous microbiome!

Paul van der Velde
Founding Editor, 1993 – 1998



Fig. 1: Vesalius, Thom Puckey, bronze, 2007, Terneuzen. (Photo by Paul van der Velde, 2025). Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564) is considered as the founder of modern human anatomy.

Lights, Camera, Revolution...

Attribute or accolade somehow feels out of character. What drew me to *The Newsletter* as its editor, in a distant past, was its energy like that of an emerging rock band. It was unconventional, a little defiant even, while it did one amazing thing that I had not seen elsewhere: it connected academics with other academics far outside their own circles. How? With what I'd call punk rock articles, short and captivating. Drawing a diverse crowd in and hopefully drawing them closer together.

Awards and honours feel anathema to the disruptive rock and roll spirit of *The Newsletter*. The best thing I can say is that it looks and feels thoroughly different. Love it. Spins and revolutions, spirals and turns. The design is cheeky

yet again (nice work, Paul Oram). With it, I should mention the awesome illustrations and photographs as well. I am absolutely thrilled to see that the outlook is broadening to Asia's relationships with other continents such as Africa. *The Newsletter* is clearly looking forward, not backward. And much better than that, it keeps renewing and giving opportunities to scientists from across the globe to reach an audience of peers.

To all at *The Newsletter*, I hope you keep on rocking the boat, keep floating new ideas, and continue inviting and amplifying new voices, new authors to be heard far and wide across the academic community.

Maurice Sijm
Editor, 2002 – 2004

Appreciation, Then and Now

In May 2011, during my very first week as Editor of *The Newsletter*, I was approached by a researcher long associated with IIAS. He wondered if I was aware of how significant the job I had taken on really was. I was still finding my bearings, and the weight of his comment had quite an impact at the time. However, over the following 10 years, during which I had the honour of guiding *The Newsletter* to publication, I came to understand what he meant. I soon realised the unique position the publication had carved out for itself: non-peer reviewed, free to read, and offering an accessible-to-all style of writing. *The Newsletter* welcomes contributions from Asia scholars at any stage of their career or research – does not make them jump through a zillion reviewer hoops, or wait 18 months before publication – and then makes their knowledge available to any and all interested readers around the world.

I became acutely aware of the appreciation of the hundreds of contributors to the 31 issues I edited. They often shared with me what the publication meant to them, but I'd like to take a moment to share what it meant to me. I experienced immense satisfaction in helping authors bring their ideas to life on the page, creating clarity in what, at times, can be a murky process. I felt a deep sense of connection when reaching out to scholars around the globe and discovering what they were working on. And then, often after long periods of emailing back and forth, I also enjoyed the fantastic camaraderie when we would meet face-to-face at one of the Asia conferences each year. No small part in all of this was played by my wonderful colleagues; IIAS was truly a warm home for me for those 10 years. And a special thanks to our incredible graphic designer, Paul Oram. The man has the patience of a saint.

Now, under the guidance of my talented successors Paramita Paul and Benjamin Linder, *The Newsletter* is celebrating its 100th issue! I would like to congratulate everyone involved, both 'back then' and now, for this tremendous achievement. I hope the significance of this publication endures for many years to come.

Sonja Zweegers
Editor, 2011 – 2021

Fig. 1 (from left to right): the cover of previous issues #1, #27, #50, and #98

