

Review

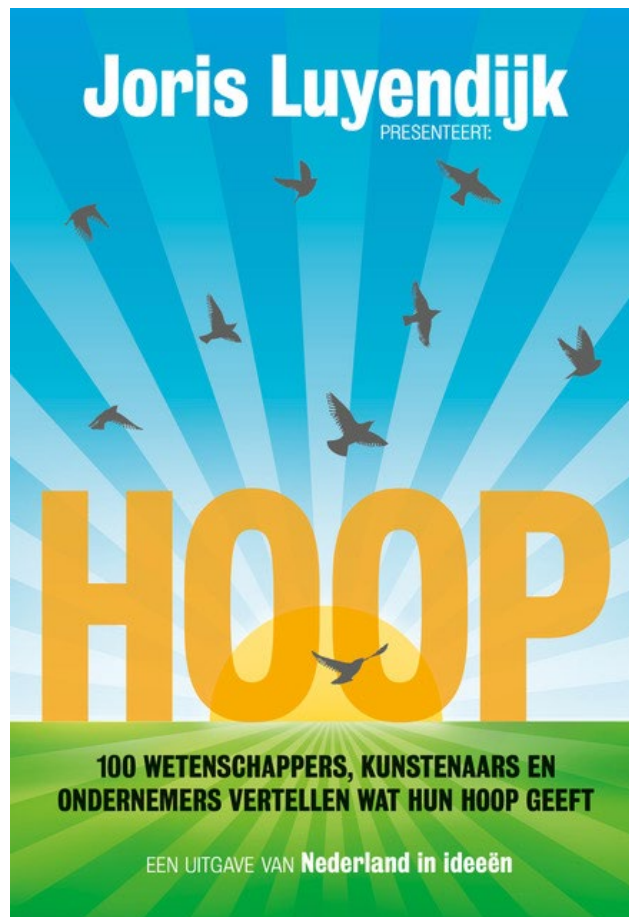
**Mark Geels and Tim van Opijnen (eds):
*Hoop: 100 wetenschappers, kunstenaars en ondernemers
vertellen wat hun hoop geeft: Joris Luyendijk presenteert***

[Serie Nederland in ideeën, 5]

Amsterdam: Maven Publishing, 2019. 287 p.

ISBN 978 94 9249 364 4

Reviewed by Marte Rinck de Boer



Hoop ('Hope') is the fifth publication in the series *Nederland in ideeën* ('The Netherlands in ideas'), published annually – in Dutch only – since 2014. Mark Geels and Tim van Opijnen, natural scientists and the publication's initiators/editors, invite a so-called curator to provide a striking question to be answered by around 100 mainly Dutch scholars, artists, entrepreneurs, and opinion makers – 50% to 60% of them regularly contribute to the series. This formula results in an exhibition of narratives disclosing a variety of ideas.

Joris Luyendijk, a renowned Dutch journalist, bestselling author, anthropologist, and public speaker is the 2019 publication's curator. He asks: "What keeps you hopeful?" or "What gives you hope? Which specific step, milestone or happening in your field of expertise do you see as sign of forthcoming improvements of the world at hand?" (17).¹

In the introduction to the book, he explains the need for his focus on hope with reference to societal developments since the 1990s. Idealism declined, and healthy skepticism was replaced by nihilism and cynicism resulting in lack of trust in institutions and space for manipulation. Hope, so he argues, could function as a counterforce to global cynicism; hope as a conscious belief that things will be fine, will be all right; hope as "*buitenboord motor*" ('outboard motor') for movement needed in times of "*windstilte*" ('the doldrums') (16). Luyendijk does not conceptualize hope within existing discourses on hope in theology, philosophy, sociology, or psychology. He uses the concept pragmatically to present positive human action – signs of hope. The collected answers are clustered (unfortunately without clarifying rationale and in several cases raising questions) in 13 categories: activism, architecture, art, attitude to life, climate, education, entrepreneurship, health, human being, innovation, life lessons, music, nature, parenthood, politics, and privacy.

The reader is treated to an exhibition of *petits récits* (Lyotard 1984, 60) of hope; in fact, one hundred *petit récits* visualize personal perceptions of hope across the spectrum of natural sciences; artificial intelligence and information technology; (cognitive, neuro, experimental) psychology; economy; ecology; liberal arts and humanities, (art) history, literary and media studies; philosophy, sociology; anthropology; architecture; culture; and entrepreneurship. In this sense, the crossing borders collection partly embodies practices of what one of the contributors, the composer Merlijn Twaalfhoven (52), perceives as a sign of hope, namely giving the floor to inquisitive storytellers, to people with an artist's gaze who can "observe and listen" and interrogate the rich beauty of the world and have others take part of it; to those "who can ask the questions [...] to share the richness of the world with others." Likewise, the architects Thomas Rau and

¹ All English translations from the original Dutch text in *Hoop* in this review are by the reviewer.

Sabine Oberhuber (225) “see that the time is ripe for a new way to observe the surrounding world” which “is the most hopeful message.” And harpist Lavinia Meijer concludes that “perhaps it is not intended to hold hope but just to pass it on” (218).

It is the beauty of this exhibition that one can stroll through and hang out with these little narrated fragments of human action, and that one can compare and contrast the exhibited ideas that touch the mind and the heart. It creates encounters with a variety of visions and impressions, with hope and concerns, with unquestioned love and critique. Any reception is contextualized. Some stories might feel comfortable as they mirror and confirm our own hopes. For instance, José van Dijck (a professor of media studies at the University of Utrecht) sees *The New York Times* as a beacon of hope in times of fake news and marginalization of quality journalism. Hans Schnitzler, a philosopher, addresses the “*Bildung Academie*” founded by students from the *Vrije Universiteit* and *Universiteit van Amsterdam* to enhance *Bildung* (‘pedagogical growth’) across educational institutions. Other texts function as eyeopeners. Hilde Geurts (a professor of clinical neuropsychology and an autism researcher at the University of Utrecht) pleads for mutual understanding and cooperation among persons with autism, their loved ones, social workers, and scholars, to avoid one-sidedness and instead provide a multicoloured picture of autism. And author Alfred Birney criticizes the biased investigations into the Dutch decolonization after World War Two and the hopeful bridging activities of young scholars and documentary makers joined in *Histori Bersema* (‘shared history’). Of course, there are texts that require interrogation, like those that celebrate technological innovation for health care (such as expressed by health care specialist Marleen Hendriks) and relating to economic progress (articulated by columnist Marianne Zwagerman). Along the way, the broad scope of the exhibition, in combination with some shallowness in the line of argumentation across several narratives becomes a bit too much to keep the reader’s attention.

The book informs and gives insight into human activities that can be considered hopeful. Nonetheless, it invites critical engagement with one’s own experiences of hope and might stimulate altering one’s view on and understanding of the world and enriching those views. In this sense, the book can be considered a hopeful experiment as reflected in the writing of art historian Gerdien Verschoor (156) on the use of paper instead of electronic notebooks by exhibition visitors: “By writing down what you think, from your words new words will grow; from your thoughts, new thoughts, from the images you see, new images. The paper notebook is the *pars pro toto* of slow creativity; that will conquer the world – our hope for the future.”

It is questionable, however, whether the book moves beyond the individual level and could be of added value for political, economic, and societal problems. Unfortunately, the curator Luyendijk does not contribute an interpretive reflection on the value and impact of his exhibition for Dutch society – his anthropological voice is not heard. My main point of critique, prompted and informed by a feeling of discomfort about the book, stems from the fact that the contributors represent an elitist and exclusive social stratum within Dutch society that is mainly located in the Randstad, a geographical area comprised of the four largest cities in the Netherlands from where high(er) educated and successful people are often heard across various Dutch media. I can only assume the target audience will also be found in that same social stratum. No doubt they will recognize and reinforce the expressed hope. As such, the thinking that is expressed in *Hoop* represents only that which is considered important to a specific group of people based on their shared worldview. Yet, no author speaks as an authentic, isolated individual: thoughts and ideas are rooted in viewpoints of specific social groups and in turn affect action in the social context (Mannheim 1936). It is debatable, however, whether the presented viewpoints reflect the thoughts and concerns of those less privileged in Dutch society, the ones who face the complex political, economic, and societal problems day by day. If they were to read the book, would they recognize the presented ideas as signs of hope? Mannheim (1936) decisively warned us about disguised ideology in hopeful and utopian thinking; a focus on change could actually be a reinforcement for existing oppressive conditions. If hope is to be a path to counteract (an inclination toward) cynicism in society, it is essential to understand and thus include everybody's perception of hope for the future.

References

- Lyotard, Jean-François. 1984/1979. *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Mannheim, Karl. 1936. *Ideology and utopia: An introduction to the sociology of knowledge*. Translated by Louis Wirth and Edward Shils. Orlando: Harvest Book.

About the reviewer

Marte Rinck de Boer is a research lecturer and Confidential Counsellor Academic Integrity for the Bachelor and Master Program of the Hotel Management School at NHL Stenden University of Applied Science in Leeuwarden (Netherlands). She obtained her Ph.D. at the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht (Netherlands) in 2015. Her research interests include employee happiness in the workplace, utopian thought, and educational innovation. In her doctoral thesis, titled

Impulse to find out: An encounter with innovating teachers, utopia and ideology, she applied anthropological participant observation in a Dutch secondary school to study a Dutch school innovation movement in the first decade of the 21st century.

