

To KNAW-LOWI  
<https://www.know.nl/en/topics/ethiek/landelijk-orgaan-wetenschappelijke-integriteit-lowi>  
Official Secretary LOWI, ///////////////  
P.O. Box 19121  
1000 GC Amsterdam

November 29 2013

Concerning: A case of a slanderous “book review”

Dear dr. //////////////,

The LOWI rules of April 15 2003 with point 5.2 require me to file a request within one year after a board ruling. Please find enclosed exhibits.

Exhibit 1 is a copy of a letter by drs. D.J. van den Berg, chairperson of the *College van Bestuur* of TU Delft, dated December 4 2012, on a case on scientific integrity, and the underlying report by the TU Delft scientific integrity committee on the case.

Exhibit 2, 3, 4, 5 are copies of my statement of July 7 2012 and its appendices about the case. Please note that my website has changed from *dataweb.nl* in 2012 to *thomascool.eu* in 2013 but that the remainder strings are the same.

The case concerns a slanderous “book review” by TU Delft scientific employee dr. dr. J.G. Spandaw (title with Habilitation). The “review” appeared in 2012 in the journal *Euclides* of the Dutch association of mathematics teachers NVvW. The original “review” can be found here: <http://thomascool.eu/Papers/Math/2012-02-Euclides-87-4-p168-170.pdf>. NVvW is not a scientific association and *Euclides* is not a scientific journal. However, my book *Conquest of the Plane* is a scientific book on the didactics of mathematics and dr. dr. J.G. Spandaw wrote as a scientist and trainer of mathematics teachers. He mentions the “review” on his list of publications. (Exhibit 6) The KNAW-LOWI path is applicable.

The letters and the original slanderous “book review” are all in Dutch but since you also support an English website it may indeed be a good idea to switch to English so that it will be easier to show the world how slander is done in Holland – and hopefully resolved.

What is wrong with the letter of December 4 2012 and the underlying report are the following key elements. Firstly, on procedure, that the committee did not invite me for discussion and did not request independent material experts. Secondly, on content, that the committee wrongly holds: (a) that a slanderous “book review” would not fall under the KNAW, VSNU and NWO rules on scientific integrity, (b) that what happens in this case is normal in science and that I would have ample means for answering. In my view the TU Delft committee is too rash on these points and too insensitive on integrity in science. Therefore I submit the case to you with the hope that you will ask the TU Delft board to reconsider the case and handle it with better procedure and more sensitivity to the integrity of science.

Handling this case has slowed down somewhat since I had a talk with Mr. Van den Berg on this on June 4 2013. Though the ruling of December 4 2012 had already been signed, I could show the March 15 2013 report by dr. ir. Christiaan Boudri, teacher at *Hogeschool van Arnhem en Nijmegen* and member of the board of NVvW (<https://www.nvww.nl/1038/over-nvww/bestuur>) but writing on a personal basis. (Exhibit 7 or the weblink at <http://thomascool.eu/Papers/COTP/2013-03-15-Boudri-over-COTP.pdf>) Mr. Boudri protests against that “book review” and calls for reading with an open mind. Mr. Van den Berg was willing to think this over, consult his advisors, and would be in contact again after the Summer. In August 2013 my suggestion of a workshop for the NVvW annual conference was accepted. It was executed on November 9 and got a fair reception, even with mild applause. See <https://www.nvww.nl/16820/jaarvergadering-2013-downloads>. On November 22 2013 I queried Mr. Van den Berg whether TU Delft would annul the December 4 2012 decision and redo the case, and I could inform him also about that workshop. Unfortunately he informed me (by telephone) that he did not.

In my talk with Mr. Van den Berg in June I could also inform him that I also was being banned. The TU Delft committee suggested that there was ample room to discuss arguments, but this is clearly false when you are being banned. The book review editors of *Euclides*, the main magazine for math teachers, have banned all my books since 2012. There are two new books of mine that have been hit by this ban: (1) *Een kind wil aardige maar geen gemene getallen* (2012) and (2) *De eenvoudige wiskunde van Jezus* (2012). In itself it is somewhat fortunate that they stop producing slanderous “reviews” of my books, but it something else that books are banned anyhow. These editors do not accept that I protest against slander. It would be preferable that they do not publish slander in the first place. I discuss the ban in enclosed report “*NVvW: een ernstig zieke vereniging*” (Exhibit 8). The last page has the banning statement, that I gave to Mr Van den Berg. Or see the link <http://thomascool.eu/Papers/AardigeGetallen/2012-06-Gedoe-bij-Euclides.html>.

Interestingly the regular editors (not the book review editors) later in 2012 accepted and published my interview with a fellow teacher on the topic of didactics, so the ban is not 100% against my person. It remains a serious malconduct that my books are being banned and that I cannot explain in the printed edition of the journal itself that the earlier “book review” is slanderous. The latter has been allowed on the website, but this has less circulation, and there has been no announcement in *Euclides* to point to that digital reply.

Also, the NVvW board refuses to repair the slander in *Euclides* and the new ban. Normally a board would try to enhance good manners in an association, but in this case the board gives all room to the editors to allow this slanderous “book review” of the TU Delft employee and they deny a word of protest (except for that digital back alley). A lawyer friend suggests that a legal action could well have success but I wonder whether this might have adverse effects, like a 100% ban. People might block you without saying so and then it becomes hard to prove.

Thus, the TU Delft committee wrongly states that we have a normal state in science here (I would hope). There is aggressive malconduct. Also, the TU Delft committee states in point 3.7 that there is no indication or proof that the “reviewer” acted consciously and willingly in slandering. This is silly. The “review” is proof itself. It is an orgy of slander. One cannot hold that this just happens by mistake. Besides, even if the slander had been unintentional, then it could have been corrected after my objection, but the “reviewer” has shown no willingness to do so.

There are ample indications that this hostile attitude is not uncommon in the world of mathematics. A mathematician wrote to me on March 7 2012: “Once you have irritated old-style mathematicians (...) they turn, of course, into crackpot interception mode. Start nit-picking, misunderstanding, finding real small errors, maybe some big ones, but certainly consistently misunderstanding what you are trying to say. We all get letters and papers from crackpots who are squaring the circle, proving that Bell's theorem is wrong, or solving the P=NP problem. (...) It's quite a sport to show in public to your mathematical friends that these crackpots are a public nuisance. (...) You drew attention to yourself, you got attention, and now several Delft mathematicians are thoroughly enjoying a little group-crackpot-ridiculization. But I could say (and in fact do) that one could say that you asked for this! Never mind. Remember Gandhi: first they ignore you, then they fight you, then you win.” I object that I “asked for it”. My book *Conquest of the Plane* also deals with the empirical science of didactics of mathematics, which differs from abstract mathematics itself. My impression is that the “reviewer” forgot about empirics and as a mathematician got into that “crackpot interception mode”. The slander needs to be corrected.

Kind regards,

drs Thomas Cool MSc  
Econometrician (Groningen 1982) and teacher of mathematics (Leiden 2008)

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Tel. /////

////////// <http://thomascool.eu>