

# Overclaiming

By Professor Jan Willem de Graaf

Professor of Brain and Technology, Saxion University of Applied Sciences, Deventer, Netherlands

**M**any of the cognitive processes that are part of our daily functioning do not only relate to our brain body, but also (and often especially) to the tools and devices that we use every day. Not only we "use" devices such as household appliances, transportation, kitchen, sanitary and multimedia equipment. In fact we "incorporate" these tools into our entire organic and cognitive functioning. So our cognition is not "brainbound", but "organism bound" cognition. Andy Clark (philosopher and AI scientist at Oxford) speaks of the hypothesis of extended cognition (HEC), in which cognition science is the science of embodied, embedded and situated cognitive processes.

As a result, we learn how to make devices so much part of our functioning that we actually consider them as part of ourselves. A number of interesting psychological phenomena are the result of this. One is the illusion of knowledge. People think that they understand a device that is part of their functioning, even if they only understand it at the procedural (automatic) level. That is, as an incorporated part of their action repertoire (how to work with it). When asked, often we don't even understand seemingly simple devices, such as an office chair.

This also applies, for example, to understanding the mechanism of a shower faucet and even more strongly to understanding complicated concepts such as electricity and politics. According to research, many people conceive electrical light as just a light switch and a bulb in a socket. However, research shows that people think they have appropriate knowledge of those devices and concepts. Psychologists call this phenomenon "overclaiming". The less knowledge we have of a device that nevertheless forms part of our daily functioning, the more we overclaim. For social constructions (policy matters, rules and procedures), things are often even more complicated. At work, for example, I regularly experience that I have a negative opinion about a management decision. However, if I think it over more profoundly, I understand why the decision was made. From my position in the workplace, I simply cannot oversee what "my" CEO and board have to anticipate ...

***"It is precisely populists who derive their popularity and power from consciously or unconsciously inciting their followers to make statements that are the result of overclaiming. So in fact they talk about things they do not know about."***

In this way we arrive at a well-known Dutch proverb by way of a detour: "Everybody is an expert". It is precisely populists who derive their popularity and power from consciously or unconsciously inciting their followers to make statements that are the result of overclaiming. So in fact they talk about things they do not know about. On the social media, for example, I read whole treatises about the fact that the transition from gas to windmill energy is much more expensive than the politicians expected and that we should protest. But the transition is not about finding a cheaper alternative, it is about avoiding a climate crisis because

the use of fossil fuels as a mass product contributes to CO<sub>2</sub>. It is probably inevitable that it will hurt in the wallet. But because our daily functioning is heavily dependent on incorporating all devices into our cognitive schemata (the world as we know it), we stick to our overclaimed expertise of the world as we know it today! We still look like those frogs in that cauldron in which the water is brought to a boil ....

PS. The frogs seem to jump out anyway!