

## Putting out the fire (Part 2)

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**I**n the 70s, when I was a teenager, pop music was extremely popular. One of the biggest attractions was the myth that was spread over hit bands and pop stars. Because 'serious' journalism hardly played a role - there were a few tabloid magazines and there was no internet - the stories were collective myths to which we all contributed. This was often even more important than the music itself. In other words, our youthful imagination was limitless and in my generation that led regularly to the founding of our own bands or to other (artistic) activities. We loved our dreams, and the bands that fed these dreams. One of those bands was Queen.

A few weeks ago, a day after the premiere, my wife and I decided to go to the film *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Of course we had read the rather negative reviews in our "quality" newspapers. However, despite an age difference of more than ten years between my wife and me, our admiration for Queen stands for a bond that had greatly fuelled our youthful imagination. We were very early at the cinema and knew that the film would play on the biggest screen but almost all tickets were already sold out. An hour later, when we sat in our seats it became clear that the cinema hall filled up with an audience literally from teens to 80 years old. Like snow in the sun, all negative reviews disappeared from our minds when the movie started: the film was compelling and fantastic! For a moment we were the children we once were, with our own dreams and imagination. When the film was over, everyone stood and applauded (something I seldom experience in the cinema). What a bad movie?

Something special is going on here: the first journalistic reaction to the film itself is fake news. The "real" news is that a film has been made that appeals to and moves several generations. Like many other films, the film is freely based on a true story. It is not a documentary, but top entertainment. Yet this issue made me think. Nowadays the "facts" and thus the "truth" seems inescapable: there are cameras everywhere and every movement, statement or (public) performance of a "celebrity" is filmed and posted somewhere. Therefore there's hardly any room for imagination, let alone for myths. The problem lies in confusing facts with truth. Newton, for example, would never have come to his deep knowledge if he had not looked past the facts, like many earlier great minds (Aristotle and many others). There are never enough facts, if you look harder there are always other facts. Modern information and communication technology (ICT) has made the world seemingly transparent, and that's why especially in this time "fake news" has become such a big theme.

The reason is that we are all people, including journalists and reviewers. People are narrative creatures, we all have our myths and through myths we are connected to each other. It's an illusion that facts can replace stories, although facts always have a place in information and knowledge/stories. It's an hierarchy: data (facts), information, knowledge, wisdom. At the level of knowledge and even more at the level of wisdom, facts no longer play a direct role. And despite cameras on every street corner, eavesdropping devices and smart search algorithms that analyse the many digital crumbs that we leave behind on the internet, there are always many more facts that remain invisible. The risk of ICT is that it kills the imagination, that it creates a false reality of facts. People need stories, they respond from knowledge, not from data, which is always limited. The hunger for more and more sensors, cameras and data to understand something of our world is again a form of .... Putting out the fire with gasoline! Our hunger for knowledge is being satisfied by the elimination of our imagination, resulting in an even greater need for knowledge. That our collective stories can also be wrong, show the reviews in the "quality papers" with regard to *Bohemian Rhapsody*, right? After the premiere one paper concluded: "worthless". It's now a fact that few people share these prior opinions of reviewers: the film attracts a record number of visitors in the Netherlands alone. The reviews seem to have been fake news themselves!