

Dear Master of Logic students,

I gladly welcome you to the ILLC on behalf of the former MoL director Maria Aloni, the incoming MoL director Paul Dekker, and our permanent manager Tanja Kassenaar.

The Institute for Logic, Language and Computation brings together many fields, and we could easily extend the list of what we do to Philosophy, Cognitive Science and AI. This broad combination is not haphazard, it came about in a natural way through a long history. We are currently preparing a public booklet on how the ILLC emerged in Amsterdam that will be available in the coming academic year. Think of it as an academic crossroads offering a broad vista of the Sciences, Humanities, and Behavioral Sciences.

In joining us, you join that history, but you are also going to help us write its future. A first thing, though, is to find your place. I myself spent quite some time traveling as a student of physics, mathematics, and philosophy, with logic as a thread running across it all. But eventually, I created my space, and I have kept moving ever since, also to linguistics, computer science, and cognitive science. You, too, can create your space in your time at the ILLC, and if you wish, keep moving in your subsequent life.

While at the ILLC, you have the chance of taking many excellent courses strengthening and expanding your interests. I would recommend taking a few topics outside of your comfort zone. I myself have profited a lot from courses that did not seem to have any relevance to me at the time (an example was automata theory), but that turned out crucial to later research. When writing your MoL thesis, you will also experience the easy apprenticeship in our research community, where joint papers with other students and professors are quite common.

People may ask you why you go to the ILLC, since it seems a pretty abstract methodological interest. You may even look 'scattered' to some people, since you do not choose an established monodiscipline. I can assure you however that, once you are with us, you will no longer look scattered: you will look normal, and you will feel that you and your fellow students are a natural kind.

But you can be scattered in other ways. Motives in life are mixed. I have no illusion that it is only pure detached intellectual curiosity in the ILLC that pushes you here. You may also be drawn to the city of Amsterdam and what it stands for, you may even (who knows) love the Dutch, or, having read about rising ocean levels, you may like to live dangerously behind our fragile dikes. Mixed motives are fine. You can have all those thrills here.

But of course, all this may sound sadly pre-Corona. Our current life has several dimensions reduced. Take communication, one of our big research topics. The ILLC claims to study the dynamics of information exchange, and indeed many of us do. But as cognitive scientists tell us, in real communication, this informational 'transfer'

needs to take place in a setting of 'resonance' by agents who meet, and resonate in physical and emotional ways. Zoom, like we see today, offers much less of that. True, it does offer new information channels that open class meetings lack, such as sending private chats to the speaker telling him to speed up, or shut up. But still, something is lacking.

At this point, I can only offer a metaphor. There is this nice American movie "Pleasantville" (not a great movie, please draw no inferences about my cultural diet) where life initially takes place in black and white, but slowly, as the story unfolds, colors start appearing one by one, in one situation after another, until life shows the full richness of dimensions that we know. It is my belief that this will happen to us in these Corona times, and that the colors will come on one by one as you stay with us at the ILLC. I wish you, and all of us, their quick return.

Johan van Benthem

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