

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, family, friends, Mecanoos, ladies and gentlemen

What a feast that you all have come. I'm humbled to receive an award for the work I do with so much joy and passion. A lifetime achievement award invites one to look back. Three decades of Mecanoo have resulted in beautiful works. The variety of projects, in places all over the world, is an endless source of inspiration. As well as the one thousand Mecanoos which have contributed to this over the last thirty years.

To receive a lifetime achievement award is a great honour. But it is also a task. I had set a goal that the book, which I have worked on for two years, should be finished today. And with thanks to the team: People Place Purpose is finished now. It looks good, it fits comfortably in the hand, it has the size of a handy sturdy cookbook.

The English journalist Herbert Wright wrote a wonderful introduction. Herbert writes not only about People Place Purpose, but also about Bees, Berries and Banyan. Herbert you did a great job! You should all read his essay.

The history of three decades of Mecanoo is depicted in a timeline with images, events and sources of inspiration. As well as the names of the one thousand Mecanoos who contributed to it.

The ten statements are included in the book. I formulated these in 2000 as a basic philosophy of the office and every Mecanoo should know them. The book also has the answers to the two most frequently asked questions! 1. Where does the name Mecanoo come from? 2. What is the meaning of the diver?

You have just listened to my tutor. Max Risselada taught me what architecture is, how to analyze and how to observe. About Adolph Loos and Le Corbusier, about Raumplan versus Plan Libre. Because of Max, I visited the office of the designers Charles and Ray Eames in Los Angeles in 1978. Since then I visited Ray Eames regularly at her home in Santa Monica. She showed me how technical, human and playful aspects can be interwoven into one design solution. They were designers without dogma.

As curator of the Dutch entry to the São Paulo Architecture Biennale in 2000, Max placed the work of Aldo van Eyck, Herman Hertzberger and Mecanoo in the Dutch humanist tradition. I cherish the memory of beautiful, long days in the Oscar Niemeyer Pavilion in Ibirapuera Park in São Paulo.

What a wonderful experiment it has been to ask the Rotterdam dance company Conny Janssen Danst to contribute to this day. Conny, what a great gift that we have been able to do this together.

Without a good client there is no good architecture. Architecture is not an autonomous art. Together with the client and with their confidence, we have been able to realize our national and international work.

About clients: I am pleased that Tony Marx, President of the New York Public Library, is here today. He represents the interplay between architect and client. For him, New York is the city that has grown and become great because of its immigrants. A city that is based on Dutch values like the idea that 'you are free to think what you want to think, to believe what you want to believe and to be who you are' as recorded in the First Free State Assembly in 1572 in Dordrecht. For him, the New York Public Library should convey these values, and they are also part of the design brief.

To me, a library is without any doubt the most public building of a city - the NYPL is a prime example of this. The library lives in the hearts of all New Yorkers. The library was the place where immigrants felt welcome and secure, where they could develop themselves by learning the language and reading books.

"But Francine, libraries aren't necessary anymore." This is often being said by politicians and governors, who are probably looking to justify budget cuts or the closure of our libraries. There are many more

misunderstandings. A lot of people think that libraries are about books. They remember the traditional library of their youth. But nowadays, much has changed.

I would like to take everybody to the Delft University of Technology Library which opened in 1998. It was the time when computers and the internet were on the rise. The leading thought at that time was that when people around the world, would be connected to each other, even from the smallest student room, libraries would not be necessary anymore.

Along with the librarian, we thought differently. We dreamed of a space that was prepared for predictable and unpredictable change in the future. A building of glass and grass and a large cone: the beauty of a mathematical form. We created a warm, memorable interior, with a Mecanoo blue wall. A building to sit in and sit on. It became the icon of the university: sustainable, international, a place for meetings, inspiration and knowledge exchange.

Now, almost twenty years later, the library of the TU is still very much alive and constantly responding to the changing needs of society: open 365 days a year, from 8am until midnight and during exam periods even up to 2am. The TU Delft Library is busier than we could have ever dreamed.

A library is not restricted to scientists and students. No, the library is not only "public" but is mainly for the public. You can experience this at the Library of Birmingham which was opened by Nobel Prize winner Malala Yousafzai on September 3, 2013 with the words "I truly believe the only way we can create global peace is through educating not only our minds, but our hearts and our souls."

It is moving to see how this library is being used and appreciated. All colors, ages and beliefs sit harmoniously together. A People's Palace, where you can obtain knowledge, skills and ideas, in order to participate in a society where cultural diversity is a given and knowledge an important condition in life.

What can a library mean for the one in five Europeans that lack the basic skills to read and write? What can it mean for this task that Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands has committed her Reading & Writing Foundation? Can the library contribute to closing the ever growing gap between high- and low-skilled, and the increasing differences between population groups? And how relevant is the question what a library can do for the immigrants that come to Europe or for the international students in The Netherlands, which are an essential part of the global knowledge economy?

What a wonderful gift the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds has given me. A patronage with a beautiful starting capital. I name it the [Eye Opener Fund](#)

The fund will support innovative, creative projects that aim to stimulate the cultural, economic and social importance of libraries.

With Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands I have had inspiring conversations. Based on the idea that the missions of the Reading & Writing Foundation and the Eye Opener Fund can reinforce each other, we have decided to collaborate.

Today, I receive a great honour for which I am grateful. For all of you, I have a copy of the book People Place Purpose. And now I want you to meet my symphony orchestra Mecanoo. Architecture is not a solitary act. You do this together with a team. A big applause for the Mecanoos.

[Francine Houben](#)

Amsterdam, 30 November 2015

Prins Bernard Cultuurfonds Prize 2015