

Less is more

(inaugural lecture - 22th of April – Earthday)

I lent this statement from Mies van der Rohe, the famous modernist architect. I believe that “less is more”.

Do you know what the best ecological advice is I have ever heard: abstain from action, no intervening, do not disturb, do not act. Me, the first Speaker of the Living advises you to do less. And I’ll tell you why.

Silent Spring is the title of a book, written by Rachel Carson. It is written in the early 60th in America, warning us for the excessive use of pesticides. She was one of the first to describe the effect of human acting on the ecosystem. Farmers killed at large scale the plaque insects, buzzing and zooming around the crops. Insects are food for the birds. So by killing the insects the birds became extinct too. And the country site fall quiet, silent spring: no buzzing and no singing any more. In the long run, she wrote, it will kill us too.

The captains of the chemical industry, only interested in their business case, tried to mute her. They would not have done that if they were a ZOOP and had a Speaker of the living to warn them. Had they been a Zoop, we would have had a more healthy earth, perhaps.

Your actions and acting influences the quality of life of the other than human beings. Compare is with a waterbed: you push here and it moves there. We are one interdependent living whole on the planet earth. Rachel Carson was speaking for the living when she wrote Silent Spring.

She also wrote the book in times that man thought nature was theirs. Nature serves mankind and is there to be exploited. Today people like Jair Bolsenaro, president of Brasil, still sees it as such. What do **you** think nature is? How do **you** look at the other than human creatures? Matthijs Schouten is a nature philosopher and one of my heroes. He says: *“What is urgently needed is that we grow in our understanding of the fact that we are not people **in** this world but **from** this world. That we are with the world and that the well-being of nature and the earth is interrelated with our own well-being. Only from that consciousness we will be able to create a sustainable future for the community of all life.”*

Though the majority of you, I may presume, do not think like Bolsenaro, most of you still think nature depends on us. We are part of nature and we have to take care of nature. The interrelatedness that Matthijs Schouten talks about goes further. It says that we humans are equal, have the same rights as the other living creatures. We are from this world and we are inter-beings.

Many of you want to be inter-being but do not act as such. Children are interbeings, we are all born as inter-beings but we unlearn it. Let me give an example. You know what I had to do when my little daughter had a mosquito in the room? Catch it in a glass and put it carefully outside. It can be food for birds she said. An inter-being acts within the ecological system, seeing the effect of one action, killing the mosquito, on the live of many others.

Talking about this read Eva Meijers book “Zee nu”. In this book nature takes over, because we neglected her. The sea is flooding the Netherlands due to climate change due to a global biodiversity crisis! Eva is an inter-being, writing about what the animals and humans will do. So we read about the flood in the perspective of people, dogs, seagulls, rabbits, mice, horses, flies, etcetera. She tells us for example that some fishes breaking out of fish tanks and ponds are happy to have more space, rabbits hop to higher grounds, like the Dutch do. Those staying, people as well as animals, adopt to the new circumstances.

This is a nightmare. I believe that we, designers can make a difference, that our drawing pen has power to prevent this apocalyps.

Bruno Latour, to mention another hero, says to us: Il faut les sensibiliser – you will have to raise awareness – je moet ze leren ervoor open te staan.

When I was a little kid I had a fish tank with little colourful fishes. I loved to observe the creatures able to live under water and floating freely through a fairy tail world. The quiet poetic underwater world. One day I wanted to raise the water temperature a little, so I turned on the button of the heating element. I turned too far and cooked my poor fishes. This was my moment of awareness.....

Today I do workshops with developers, urbanists and architects, named “looking through the eyes of the animal”. The animals are the clients of their projects. The nice discovery is that a lot of quality of live that we want is similar to what the animal wants: they want safety, food, and a reproduction space. We also prefer living in a save neighbourhood, with a supermarket around the corner and a good bedroom. So let’s make projects for all that lives!

Frank Bruggeman designed the first wild garden of the New Institute for all that lives. Some people came to sleep here and hang around. The wild garden attracted wild people. Let’s see how wild we can get this time, in the garden, the pont, the building facades, roofs, expositions. Knowing that nothing is naturally (vanzelfsprekend), it will be hard working and for many more than the humans.

The Speaker of the living of Het Nieuwe Instituut gives a voice to the moths in the archives, the wild plants in the garden, the ducks in the pont, the mice under the floors and the birds breeding on the roof. But what a Job! When you have to choose either for the mouse or the cat. Or in favour or against the moths in the collection. I need help from you all. From today on I hope you will take more consideration for them, even when I’m not here. And help me think ecological, act as an inter-being for those living in this institute.

The “Speaker of the living” is an ultimate challenge to follow what I preach. Thanks you Klaas, Aric and Josien and many others. I’m here to participate in this great challenge. I love it and will do my best to let the first Zoop of the world be a great success. Let’s see if we can get more biodiversity by not cleaning, cutting, weeding, sifting, acting!

Less is more!