Dear all,

There is nothing I would have liked more than to be here with you tonight. Unfortunately, my body is not playing along. I would have soooo loved sharing with you why I love computer science. So let me at least share a little bit of that in this text.

I like to compare work in ICT with that of architects: where architects shape our physical world through the buildings they create, people working in ICT shape our virtual world with software. And as computer scientists working in academia it gets even better: we get to shape the world of software itself. For me, it doesn't get any better than this.

I would have loved sharing with you how the values of depth, delight and connection guide my work. That, contrary to what one may think, one can achieve great depth by striving for simplicity. When I talk to people about my research on norm compliance in socially adaptive software there's always someone who says: but isn't that really simple?! Well, the truth of the matter is that at present we don't even have a characterization of what are classes of "simple" problems in this field. And then there's always someone who says: but isn't that extremely complex?! Now here's where it becomes even more interesting. While the first sentence of my PhD thesis read: "simplicity is my holy grail", during my years at TU Delft I have come to believe we can really start making a difference in people's lives when we expose simple ideas to the messy world out there. In my experience, the resulting friction can spark ideas that go above and beyond their original starting point. This gives them a sense of "wholeness" and depth that is otherwise difficult to obtain.

Delight is about beauty. A beautiful theory, beautiful code, a beautiful idea. Being ill, I could finally watch a DVD about the architect Norman Foster. He says: "Architecture is something that moves the spirit, you can't measure it but you know it's there, it moves you." In my work, I look for what moves me. It can be a sudden insight after struggling with a proof for days (and even suddenly realizing it still has a mistake and going back in to fix it...), it can be stumbling on a line of work that connects to my own in a way that it feels like the author "gets" me, or the insight of a PhD student or colleague that I could not have come up with myself.

Which brings me to connection. Connection is about people. In my research it is reflected in my vision of creating software that supports people in their daily lives in a way that respects them as human beings, which I summarize as "Technology for Humanity". It is also about connecting areas of research. I do research in the intersection of theoretical computer science, artificial intelligence, and human-machine interaction. For me, inspiration comes from being challenged to think in new ways, trying to connect parts that do not seem to fit at first sight. Connection is also about diversity, a topic close to my heart. I had almost studied a stereotypically female subject (I wanted to become a vet...), and to this day I'm grateful that I wasn't admitted and chose computer science instead. As a field we have a long way to go when it comes to leveraging diversity. It's a course with many obstacles, but I am convinced that efforts along this path will pay off in the end.

I would like to thank the members of the jury, KHMW, IPN and NWO for awarding me the Dutch ICT Prize 2014, and TU Delft, the faculty of EEMCS, NIRICT, SIKS, NWO, SHINE, COMMIT/, and all other friends in the academic world for your support and inspiration. This would not have been possible without you.

I would like to close on the following note. One of the things of being ill is that you have way too much time to think. This time my thinking led me to a motto: "lead with the heart, follow with the mind". For me, this means that it always has to start with a sparkle, and the rest will follow. I hope in this way I have been able to pass on some of that sparkle to you. And perhaps even inspired a few of you to pass on your sparkle to others too, showing the world what a beautiful field ICT is.

With love,
Birna