

POST BOX FOR THE OPEN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER 1 JUNE 2014

Het Nieuwe Instituut launches the online and interactive **Post Box for the Open Society**, an invitation to the international community of architects, designers, thinkers and researchers to submit ideas and designs for an open society. The Post Box is part of the Dutch entry to the Biennale di Architettura in Venice, entitled **Open: A Bakema Celebration**. It presents a critical reflection on the work and research of Jaap Bakema (1914–1981), in particular his ideas for the open society.

From the submissions to the Post Box a monthly newsletter will be compiled by Het Nieuwe Instituut. This is the first issue with the basic information, the Open Call for submissions and a first essay by the Belgian cultural philosopher, activist and writer Lieven de Caeter in a series of reflections on the subject of the open society.

Visit the Post Box at open.jaapbakemastudycentre.nl

OPEN: SOCIETY

Bakema's ambition was to build toward a democratic, egalitarian and inclusive society. He believed that architecture should accommodate the emancipation of the masses while allowing for the self-realization of the individual citizen. Bakema and his office Van den Broek en Bakema built under the conditions of the post-war welfare state. The roles of the state and the market, the architect and the individual citizen were very different then. Today, these roles are shifting once again. Therefore, Het Nieuwe Instituut wants to address the question of the open society anew: What could be the relevance of Jaap Bakema's lofty idealism for contemporary practice? And how do we envisage and imagine the open society today?

OPEN: POST BOX

Bakema belonged to the core of the post-war avant-gardes in architecture: both **CIAM** and its successor **Team 10**. When the famous CIAM organisation of modern architects was dissolved in 1959, Bakema launched a Post Box – the Post Box for the Development of the Habitat – to promote the international exchange of information and to stimulate dialogue about the open society.

Bakema received contributions from all over the world, including letters from architects such as Kenzo Tange, Hans Hollein, Yona Friedman, Fumihiko Maki and Oskar Hansen. He published the material in a newsletter that appeared eighteen times between September 1959 and July 1971.

During the Venice Biennale, Het Nieuwe Instituut moderates the **Post Box for the Open Society**, along the lines of the historical Post Box and in homage to Bakema.

The Post Box for the Open Society aims to set up a dialogue between architects, planners, designers, architectural historians, universities, academies and social designers. Everybody is invited to become a participant: to upload proposals, to discuss the various submissions, or simply to browse the live archive of the Post Box.

OPEN: CALL

There are four basic categories for submissions: public space, housing, critique and inspiration. Starting on June 1, participants can upload ideas and designs.

For more information check: open.jaapbakemastudycentre.nl

During the Biennale, **ArchiNed** (www.archined.nl) is taking the discussion about the open society out of the Dutch pavilion and into the world of today on the World Wide Web. In six articles designers and academics will critically reflect on the idea of the open society. Readers are expressly invited to take part in this debate.

NOW: ARCHINED

The first contribution 'The Open Society and its emergencies: Theses on Urbanity in the Age of Disaster' comes from the Belgian cultural philosopher, activist and writer Lieven de Caeter, who posits thirteen theses.

The Open Society and its emergencies: Theses on Urbanity in the Age of Disaster Lieven de Caeter

1. In the early seventies, soon after the blue planet was photographed from outer space, the logic of growth in a finite ecosystem was declared untenable. Our world was, according to the first report to the Club of Rome, on a trajectory of 'overshoot and collapse'. The fact that we know this for 40 years already has not changed our behaviour, not for one iota: we are stuck in the rat race of overproduction, the compulsion of overconsumption and the deadlock of hypermobility. Capitalism and technology keep speeding up. As we hit the limits of the ecosystem, we are caught in the inertia of acceleration.

2. Because there is no speed without protection, there are no networks without capsules. Because there are no flows without friction, there are no migrations without turbulence. Beside and beneath the Global City of Flows there is the G/Local City of Friction. Beside the hyper-architecture of hubs and hotspots there is the infra-architecture of slums and camps. Beneath the hyperreality of screens there is the infra-reality of screams. (Razor wire was invented to keep these worlds apart.)

3. The increasing 'urbanisation' of mankind could well result in a 'de-urbanisation': a return to parochialism, to the clan, to nationalism, sectarianism and fundamentalism. Globalisation has resulted in a massive rise in identity politics. It becomes increasingly clear that the 'global village' also produces a 'parochial globe'. Global parochialism might be our future: hypercapitalism meets neotribalism. It might be the fourth age of the city: after the (pre-industrial) traditional city, the (industrial) modern metropolis and the (postindustrial) network city: the (neo-medieval) global *mega-village*.

4. In the age of disaster scarcity will be our share. Scarcity of space has begun. In the overcrowded, dualised city anarchy is close to the surface. Will we witness an *implosion of the polis*? A relapse into a State of Nature, a war of all against all? A state of war between haves and have-nots, between clans, sects, tribes? In short, a *latent glocal civil war*? It is might well become the case. In any case, 'civil war engineering' is from now on part of Empire.

5. Urbanity in the sense of civility will be most precious in the new global village. It is on this globalised civility that we have to bet. We need 'exercises in globalisation': gearing up for sharing in light of spatial and other scarcities, learning to rejoice in diversity and otherness beyond identity politics.

6. The new global urbanity should be based on the commons, on what we have in common. Common means: what is shared; sharing is 'commoning'. The common is neither public nor private, neither political nor economic. The common belongs to everybody and to nobody – like air and language. No particular commons without community – the universal commons (nature and culture), however, are commons without (or beyond) community.

7. Modernity opened up with the enclosure of the commons. Capitalism began with the 'original appropriation' (as Marx called it): the stealing of the commons and the criminalisation of the expropriated poor. Original appropriation, however, is not only the primordial act of capitalism but it is

also ongoing. The privatisation of seeds is allegorical for this continuous expropriation of the common. Therefore, the struggle for the (universal) commons will be the most important struggle of the 21st century.

8. If the commons (both the planet and the virtual world of knowledge-sharing) can be saved, it will not be with dreams of a post-historical utopia (the stateless commune of the multitude, the classless society, the peaceful association of new altruistic humans, after the great *Aufhebung*: the abolition of state, property and family), but with real politics. The world has to be saved in *this* history, not in some dreamt-of after-history.

9. Common space is not necessarily a political space. The 'polis' is always something other than the community: a regulation above and between communities. We have to reinvent the idea of the commons. The classic dichotomy between private and public has obscured it. As has the recent economisation of everything. To approach the common we have to start from its oblivion, its abolition, its forsakenness.

10. The spatial common is temporary, more a moment than a space (a moment of space), more a use than a property. The beauty of the common is its sheer potentiality. It becomes 'actual' in every practice of sharing, in every act of disclosure. 'Open society' today is first of all an open source society. We open up society when we disclose the creative commons of knowledge. We disclose the common every time we act and reclaim the streets, every time we discover the uncommon in the arts. Against the enclosures of the commons — 'disclosures of the uncommon': *Heterotopia forever!* [From *Proverbs of Resistance*: 'Never play without acting, never act without playing'].

11. The urban commons as project (in a squat, interstitial space, urban void, or terrain vague) is something else than the common as process (the decision-making on how to act on these spaces). The unity of form and content (project and process, what and how) is the beauty of many actions under the sign of the commons (self-organised urban gardening for instance). They are maybe the embryos of a coming democracy. (But how to make these germs jump scales?)

12. Scale is one of the big problems of the commons: direct democracy, self-organisation and bottom-up 'practices of commoning' are ill-equipped for the larger scales. The problem of globalisation is the globalisation of problems. The planetary scale is the right scale. From now on we are planetarians (whether we like it or not).

13. In the age of disaster we need 'cosmopolitics' on a global scale and 'cosmo-politeness' on a local scale. To paraphrase Corbusier's famous slogan ('Architecture ou révolution'): 'URBANITY OR CIVIL WAR!'

'The Open Society and its emergencies: Theses on Urbanity in the Age of Disaster' can be re-read here: <http://bit.ly/1goHnRA> and here: <http://www.archined.nl/en/forum/2014/eng/the-open-society-and-its-emergencies-theses-on-urbanity-in-the-age-of-disaster>

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The **Post Box for the Open Society** and **Open: A Bakema Celebration** both originated as a collaboration between Het Nieuwe Instituut, TU Delft and their shared research initiative the Jaap Bakema Study Centre. Dutch website ArchiNed is project partner for the Post Box.



The newsletter is distributed by Het Nieuwe Instituut. Editors: Dirk van den Heuvel and Katia Truijen.

For subscriptions, more info and questions, please visit the website: open.jaapbakemastudycentre.nl

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