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Jaap Bakema and the open society

Dirk van den Heuvel (ed.)
M. Christine Boyer
Dick van Gameren
Carola Hein
Jorrit Sipkes
Arnold Reijndorp

interviews with:
Brita Bakema
Herman Hertzberger
Carel Weeber
Frans Hooykaas
John Habraken
Izak Salomons

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Architecture and democracy – contestations in and of the open society

Dirk van den Heuvel

In many ways the work and ideas of Jaap Bakema epitomize the best of the architecture of the post-war Dutch welfare state: it is utterly unapologetic about its modernity as well as its drive to be universal and egalitarian. Bakema firmly positioned his office and its production at the heart of the Dutch welfare state system. Not only did he, together with his office partner Jo van den Broek, succeed in developing a systemized approach towards housing and planning, integrated design, construction, and advanced typological research, he also presented the construction of the Dutch welfare state as the opportunity par excellence to recast Dutch society as a forward-looking, humane, modern and rationalist welfare state society within the new global reality of the Cold War.

The monumental schemes for complete new towns and for regional planning are demonstrations of an unremitting determination to overcome the economic misery of the pre-war era and the utter chaos of the Second World War by way of a combination of positivist rationalism and the logic of efficient production employed for the benefit of all.

The gigantic city extension and regional planning projects in particular testify to an ambition that entailed nothing less than a reconceptualization of the Dutch landscape and the national identity. Architecture and planning should and would help bring about a socially just redistribution of wealth and access to power, knowledge and culture. At the same time, Bakema’s work could not escape the paradoxes of mass-produced housing and construction, which are characteristic of a late-capitalist economy. A perfect balance between universal technocracy and individual freedom was often hard to maintain. Yet, at the core this was Bakema’s conviction: that architecture and planning should be at the service of a new, democratic society, including its social structure and institutions.

In the architectural history of the twentieth century there are only a few occasions when architecture and democracy were explicitly brought together by architects. The best remembered of these is also the most recent: that moment in the 1970s when an economic and political crisis forced the Dutch government to invite architects to look for new ways of building cities through users’ participation, advocacy planning and urban renewal.1 Another well-known, yet more individual and very different position, dates back to before the Second World War and comes from Frank Lloyd Wright. He famously advocated an ‘organic’ architecture as the expression of a democratic society such as the United States, or its idealized version, which Wright dubbed ‘Usonia’. His Broadacre City proposal, which celebrated mass automobility, suburban development and the freestanding house, was in his view the supreme embodiment of a prosperous democracy, and what he regarded as true capitalism, built on a productive relationship between planning and the land.2 Jaap Bakema’s ideas concerning democracy and architecture stemmed from quite a different background, even though he concluded, in a similar vein to Wright, that architecture and planning should accommodate individual life chances and national political and societal interests without losing sight of his personal experience of the Second World War, among others as a prisoner in a German camp in France, and to the emotional debates among Dutch architects, both during and after the German occupation, about how to rebuild the country and its damaged cities. Notions of inclusiveness, contestation and personal engagement were part and parcel of his idea of a democracy. Government, industry and citizens all had to fulfil their particular responsibilities in terms of contributing to the democratic process. He believed that, as an expert in spatial design and material construction, the architect had a special obligation within the whole process of planning and building. It was up to Bakema and to communicate through his architecture the social relationships of a modern society. In his view it was up to the architect to enable citizens, users and inhabitants to shape their ways of life as they themselves preferred, as well as to stimulate cultural values and what Bakema called “spiritual growth”. This paradoxical, somewhat contradictory assignment for architects – to be at the service of a client while also being their mentor – is at the heart of Bakema’s beliefs and runs like a continuous thread through his career from his early years as a young architect participating in CIAM to becoming an established architect and teacher, and thereafter when contested by new generations of students and by vocal citizens who claimed their right in the political process of decision-making.

War and liberation

It was around the moment of the liberation in May 1945 that Bakema started to argue explicitly for connecting architecture with the cause of democracy. Interestingly enough, he did so first outside the immediate architectural debate. He joined the editorial board of the Dutch Resistance periodical De Vrije Kunstenaar (The Free Artist) to produce a special Groningen edition.3 Around the same time, he also joined the board of the Comité voor Actieve Democratie (Committee for Active Democracy), which campaigned for general elections in the confused period immediately after the war.4 The left-wing and progressive character of the committee was also evidenced by its uncommonly frank plea for a democratic solution to the crisis in the Dutch East Indies where a war of independence had broken out. As well as testifying to Bakema’s active involvement in political campaigning for the reinstatement of democracy, these activities also reveal Bakema’s association with the informal networks of the Dutch Resistance, so-called Engelandvaarders, connections that would also work to advance his future career.5 After Liberation many members of this network remained politically active in pursuit of their ideals; Bakema, too, stated that while war was over, the battle for ‘real freedom’ continued, a battle against what he later called ‘red bureaucracy’ that according to him had been complicit in the emergence of fascism in the 1920s and 30s.6

The details of Bakema’s involvement in these networks cannot be fully retraced since much of the history of the Resistance is unknown precisely because its work was carried out in secrecy.7 Two stories from the Bakema family history serve at least to illustrate the affinity of both Jaap and Sia Bakema with these circles. The first concerns Bakema’s attempt to flee to Great Britain and his successive, temporary imprisonment when this action failed, the second is Sia’s concealment of Jewish refugees during the Nazi occupation. At that time, the Bakemas and their first-born daughter Brita, lived in Rotterdam in the Bergkoldeflat, a modernist gallery-access apartment slab designed by Willem van Tijen together with the office of Brinkman and Van der Vlugt, hardly a secure kind of wartime hiding-place. Yet Sia temporarily took in two girls and a violinplayer, who were in transit to a safer place.8

We know more about Bakema’s attempted flight to Great Britain. In March 1943 he tried to travel from Rotterdam to Great Britain via Spain in order to avoid being sent to Germany as a labourer. This was the Engelandvaarders escape route. Together with Jan Rietveld, also an architect and son of De Stijl architect Gerrit, he managed to get as far as the French-Spanish border in the Pyrenees where the pair was captured and subsequently imprisoned in

1 A new working field for architects who was also pioneered by Team 10 members, most notably by Ado van Syld, Ralph Erskine and Gianscarpa De Carlo.

2 The ideological contestation at stake here might be obvious. Yet, this is how Wright would present his case. See Frank Lloyd Wright, An Organic Architecture: The Architecture of Democracy. London: Lund Humphries, re-issue of 1945 with a preface by Andrew Saint; in particular the third lecture by Wright on pp 43-43. In Europe, the Italian architect and historian Bruno Zevi appropriated and developed Wright’s ideas for an organic architecture as we the way forward for a post-war landscape. Zevi, Verso un’architettura organica; Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1945; English translation, Towards an Organic Architecture, London: Faber & Faber; 1950.

3 Herman van Bergeijk retraced Frank Lloyd Wright’s legacy in the Netherlands, and even though he didn’t touch on the issue of democracy, he did note that Wright had stated (already in 1910) that “each man has a peculiar, inalienable right to live in his own house in his own way”, which comes close to Bakema’s propositions. See Herman van Bergeijk (ed.), Americanisme et Work, Frank Lloyd Wright et Nederlands, Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010, 2006, pp. 10-11.


5 See announcement in De Vrije Kunstenaar, no. 12, 1945, p. 4.

6 Engelandvaarders or ‘England sailors’ were Dutchmies who fled to Britain during World War Two to join the Allied forces in their fight against Nazi Germany, usually in relation to Resistance work. The chairman of the committee for Actual Democracy, for example, was Gerrit van Heuven Godfrid, who played a leading role in the Resistance newspaper Het Parool. Unlike Bakema, he did manage to escape to England where he briefly served as Minister for Justice in the Dutch government in London. After the war he became the first UN High Commissioner for the Refugees.


8 In surviving histories (especially conversations with Brita Bakema, Frans Hopkoek and Piet Vollaard) a couple of names recurred in relation to the experiences of the Louwers, a family who hid Jews during the war: a member of the Knokploeg Rotterdam Zuid, and Ernst Grossman (Dolf Hedrick), a future professor of building economics is also mentioned. People like Willem van Tijen and Cees van den Laar supported a network of modern architects throughout the war. The names of other people known to have been active in the Resistance that also pop up in Bakema’s name, are filmmaker Louis van Dijk, photographer Violette Cornelius, David Keuning photographer Violette Cornelius. David Keuning recently published a study on architects during the Second World War, but it focused on the collaborations with the German occupier. Beukema en de Nieuwe Orde on beheersing van Nederlands architectuur 1940-1945. Nijmegen: Van Hoev, 2017.

9 From conversations with Brita Bakema, the violin player was Max Pols, who was eventually killed while fleeing to Switzerland.

Van den Broek and Bakema, Liessenworden Biljarder en Leksemerend, 1919-72

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During his flight and subsequent imprisonment Bakema kept a diary. In it we find some of the 29-year-old architect’s innermost feelings, including lyrical descriptions of nature and a yearning to be back with his wife and baby daughter in Rotterdam. There are also a few reflections on society in general and visions for the future post-war political structure, ranging from outright socialism, in which everyone would be obliged to spend a few hours per day on collective labour duties, to more humanist, liberal notions of culture and politics. Descriptions of daily life in the camp and its barracks paint a picture of a micro-society, in which the prisoners had to negotiate their internal affairs. For instance, it was sometimes possible to send food packages to individual prisoners, which — when it happened — led to debates about whether or not to redistribute the food among fellow prisoners. From these personal notes an image emerges of a young Bakema who could not sit still and wait until war was over, someone who remained positive against all odds, always looking for an opportunity to improve a miserable situation no matter how gloomy the outlook.

In the first issue of the Groningen edition of De Vrije Kunstenaar, published a few weeks after the liberation, Bakema continued to explore how to collectively organize and plan for immediate amelioration in the post-war situation. In his contribution, ‘Architectuur – Gemeenschap’ (Architecture – Community), Bakema argued for an open and transparent procedure for the planning and rebuilding of the central square in Groningen, the Grote Markt, which had been heavily damaged during the street battles of April 1945, which he had witnessed himself. Bakema called on architects to work together in a study circle, and on the local government to organize an information campaign, including an exhibition, to raise public awareness. In arguing the case for the much-needed new city extensions in Groningen, Bakema stated that successful planning depended on the involvement of the future inhabitants from the beginning. Two other key factors mentioned by Bakema were control of landownership and the need to accommodate a variety of household types in neighbourhoods to achieve a city full of diversity. In a nutshell, these were elements and issues that recurred throughout Bakema’s practice and way of working early on.

In a follow-up article in De Vrije Kunstenaar on the politics of reconstruction — ‘De Wederopbouw, de Jongere Architecten en Nieuwe Architectuur’ (The Reconstruction, the Younger Architects and New Architecture) — Bakema reiterated his plea to open the decision-making process to include modern architects like himself. He complained that “the word Democracy [was] not yet understood” within the building and planning disciplines. His disappointment had its roots in the early war years, when architects from different backgrounds and institutional positions had held collective meetings, the so-called Doorn seminars, in which Bakema had actively participated. These seminars were intended to overcome the pre-war dissent between ‘traditional’ and modernist factions, and modernists and traditionalists in particular, and to discuss the future of reconstruction once the war was over.13 This attempt at a new collective project was colloquially labelled ‘shake-hands architecture’, or the ‘marriage between concrete and brick’. Leading figures in these debates were Van Tijen, for whom Bakema briefly worked, on behalf of the modern architects and Marinus Grapré Molère as the leading voice of the Catholic-inspired, traditionalist architects and planners of the so-called Delft School, named after their dominant presence at the Delft University. Yet despite that early collaborative intention, now war was over it appeared to Bakema and other modern architects that the traditionalists, who also held most of the senior planning and government positions, were unwilling to share work with their Nieuwe Zakelijkheid (Dutch functionalist) counterparts. Significantly, Grapré Molère was also the supervisor for the reconstruction project in Bakema’s own city of Groningen.14

With modernists like Cor van Eesteren as director of the town planning department in Amsterdam, and Cornelis van Tras in charge of the Rotterdam department of reconstruction, it could be argued that the actual state of affairs was more nuanced, however; the polemics quickly developed into a new polarization of the Dutch architectural community and the post-war political and social arrangement of society and how it was to be translated into the realms of architecture and planning was one of the most divisive issues, especially given that Grapré Molère responded vehemently to the criticism of the Delft School approach. Clearly offended by such criticism, Grapré Molère took up his pen in the Catholic journal Katholiek Bouwblad to denounce functionalism and modern architecture in the most unambiguous terms, not so much in relation to democracy, but more as an exponent of materialist humanism.15

Bakema duly replied to Grapré Molère in Forum,16 a newly established journal put out by the Amsterdam architects’ society, Architectura et Amicitia. Forum had initially been intended as a means of bridging the gulf between traditionalists and modernists, but this idea had already seemed to be a lost cause by then. It was also the subject one of the first reproaches Bakema put to Grapré Molère: why had he resorted to the Katholiek Bouwblad instead of the new, collaborative platform of Forum. Of greater note beyond the personal disagreement, however, is the fact that Bakema was advancing a very specific definition of democracy. Democracy was not just about expressing a new universal and organic harmony, even though Bakema occasionally used the term organic at that time, nor was democracy about the will of the people or the ‘common man’; at this particular moment in the polemical exchanges, Bakema defined democracy as the overall political framework or “maatschappijvorm” (social arrangement) within which diversity and difference should be accepted and accommodated. According to Bakema, in a proper democratic society both “Catholic dogmatists” and “humanitarian life artists” should be allowed to define their own way of life and give expression to this. After this statement, Bakema went on to explain his position as a humanist and as an architect and why it was necessary to move beyond the boundaries of national identities and religious beliefs and to allow a new freedom. In his view architecture and city planning, as extensions of human existence, were first and foremost relational. It was the architect’s duty to help to make people aware of this in order to enable them to make their own life choices.

**Post-war CIAM 1947-1959**

The idea of an inclusive and socially fair democracy was also what Bakema subsequently brought to the post-war CIAM meetings, all of which he attended. For the reunion conference held in Bridgewater in 1947 he prepared a statement on behalf of a ‘group of young Dutch architects’ affiliated with Dutch CIAM, which put the ‘democratic attitude of life’ front and centre. This attitude was defined firstly by social justice, in terms of individual opportunity for a “full” life, secondly by freedom, as an awareness communicated through spatial configuration, and thirdly by collaboration, articulated through the CIAM scheme.23 To bring democracy as a central concern for architecture and planning in such an explicit way to CIAM was wholly new, even though CIAM’s...

Explicitly political statements were not appreciated in CIAM. Eric Mumford has pointed out how CIAM transformed itself in 1934 into an organization of specialists in response to tensions within CIAM itself, among others between André Lurçat and Le Corbusier. Lurçat favoured a communist revolutionary approach to advance the cause of the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, while simultaneously Le Corbusier’s human habitat in Aix-en-Provence (1935) and Deventer (1934) are based upon an oppositional blocs representing very different ideologies. Such ideological incompatibility not only hampered relations among CIAM members, especially those from the socialist countries in Eastern Europe, but also existed at the highest level of the CIAM council, the governing body of the architects’ organization. This came to the fore most poignantly at the second post-war CIAM congress in Bergamo in 1949, where the Polish architect and urban planner Helena Syrkus, one of CIAM’s vice-presidents, stated that it was false to believe that politics were not involved in the issues at stake, and that the pre-war statements on the Functional City doctrine in the Athens Charter should instead be considered in a political way. She tried to make a case against the post-war planning model based on the Stakelaar’s proposal of social realism as the future for architecture and planning in general, and for the reconstruction of Warsaw in particular, even though back home she and her husband Szymon were treated with distrust due to their international connections and pre-war avant-gardist practice.

After Bridgewater, Bakema too, refrained from overly political statements about an explicitly democratic programme, even though he had initially stated that he was interested to hear what “other young architects from other countries” had to say about “the extent to which in their country the democratic ideals can find expression in new architecture and town planning”. Instead, at the Bergamo conference and the conference in Hoddesdon in 1951, he presented the designs for the Pendrecht district in Rotterdam as illustrations of his view on the issues at stake. These plans were also a pozitie, but it was possible because CIAM had abandoned the concept of national representation as a basis for its organization, and all national groups had been dismantled by the time CIAM convened for the last time in Otterlo. CIAM members spoke now as individuals, not national representatives. This reconnection between politics and architecture was also evidenced by the presence of the Dutch State Secretary for the Arts, Ynso Scholten, who spoke at the opening of the conference about the various responsibilities of the architect as a technician.
sociologist and artist. Scholten stressed the importance of experimentation in addressing the housing question and the urbanization of the countryside. He also noted that on these matters international exchange was crucial, while once again emphasizing that the participants spoke on their own behalf not as “representatives of any geographical, national, social, religious, political, or other group.”

Bakema’s explanation of the Kennemerland project touched several times on the topic of democracy, firstly in terms of the common man’s entitlement to the fulfillment of basic needs such as decent housing, and secondly to “live more freely” as a “right to a personal way of life.”

He viewed the new mass-production, production and basic-scale planning as a risk, since they were geared to the production of monotonous environments, whereas in his view a multitude of types was needed for a democratic society. He criticized the construction industry for following the production logic of a “push-button” system in automated factories with, as an undesirable by-product, new class divisions. The division of labour and how this might relate to the production of the built environment and its spatial and aesthetic development were also democratic concerns in Bakema’s view. Underneath it all lay a strong collectivist belief. While the assumption was that the land was publicly owned or at least made available through government intervention, the need to develop new forms of capital and technology and their distribution was balanced by a “publicly directed economy,” which was to be “subservient to the development of an open society.”

Cold War and global exchanges

Otterlo 1959 also marked the introduction of the topic of the open society in Team 10’s discourse, and very likely in Bakema’s thinking as well, where it formed one of the constitutive elements of his theory of the interrelations between society and architecture. It was Bakema’s Team 10 friends Alison and Peter Smithson who deployed the term open society most explicitly. They used it specifically in relation to the city of Berlin in the context of the international competition to create Berlin competition of 1958-58, organized by the then mayor of Berlin, Willy Brandt, against the backdrop of polarizing debates on the looming division of the occupied German capital. All too no avail as it turned out, since the Soviets started constructing the Berlin Wall in August 1961. Within this Cold War context, the Smithsons compared Berlin as the “outlawed city” and its war excellence, characterized by a new kind of mobility that was also a new freedom. This new mobility was both a physical phenomenon in terms of car mobility, which had a fundamental impact on the principles of post-war city planning, and social in terms of a new post-war egalitarian society.

For Bakema, Berlin and its precarious political situation was a familiar context. Like the Smithsons, Bakema and his office participated in the Hauptstadt Berlin competition. He was also involved in the Interbau international building exhibition of 1957 that showcased projects of national and international modern architects in the Hansaviertel district and was conceived as the counterpart of the socialist realist project for the Stalinallee in East Berlin. Another contribution by Bakema to the Berlin debates on planning and architecture was the “exhibition ‘Volkspower Stadt’ (From Doorstep to City) as part of the larger ‘Unsere Nachbarn Bauen’ (Our Neighbours are Building) show at the Akademie der Künste. Bakema curated the exhibition to which he brought a selection of the latest developments in Dutch modern architecture, including work by his own office, Aldo van Eyck, Jan Kuypers and Hein Salomonson. In the accompanying essay, Bakema once again stressed the need for “architecture by planning” and “planning by architecture” to arrive at cities in which each citizen had a “right to his own approach to life”, and to “shape his own corner of the larger structure of society.”

According to the report on the Otterlo meeting, it was Ernesto Rogers’ presentation of his Torre Velasca project that elicited a discussion of the idea of the open society in relation to ‘closed’ versus ‘open’ aesthetics. Peter Smithson led the opposition, stating his view that an open aesthetic – unlike the closed one of Rogers’ project – embraced challenges of ‘open society’. He critiqued Rogers’ project-thinking and concluded quite critically, that Rogers’ project was “resisting contemporary life”, in that it did not communicate its modern aspects, such as its parking garage, but rather evoked the image of a medieval village, which he, Bakema, associated with closed societies. Historical association and continuity as generators of architectural form as pursued by Rogers were polemically pitted against the notions of growth and change by Smithson and Bakema in their quest for a “moral model”, in which “the possibility of a liberation towards an open society” would find its proper expression.

The theme of closed versus open aesthetics was taken up again by the Polish architectural duo, Oskar and Zofia Hansen, in their discussion of Open Form. Bakema knew the Hansens from his participation in the international jury for the Auschwitz monument in 1957. The Hansen’s proposal, made together with Jerzy Jamuszkiewicz, Julian Pankowski and Zofia’s brother Wladyslaw, was the workshop or design seminar so as to enable the Old Continent to find echoes not only of Henri Bergson, but also of Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict.

Societal issues and the idea of an open society also formed the natural context of Bakema’s teaching, especially abroad. The teaching climate in the world was like a travelling salesman in ideas. Given the fact that he was also the director of one of the bigger architecture firms in Western Europe and a full professor in Delft, the list of teaching posts and guest professorships, predominantly in the United States and Europe, is simply bewildering. His preferred format was the workshop and the design seminar so as to enable an intense study and exchange in a relatively short period of time. Studio topics usually concerned an urgent local
It was hard to identify a rigorous academic method behind Bakema's teachings other than continuous dialogue, collaborative work and workshop-based design studios. If his exhaustive talks were improvised multimedia events, the workshops were geared to both analysis and synthesis of the group work, and Bakema did not hesitate to join in and summarize the work with his own impromptu sketches. While the focus was on the urban, it was not on the morphological or typological. Bakema's diagrammatic sketches focused on the organization of flows and spaces, their scale, context and interrelationship. The results of workshops in one place would become part of his lectures and teachings elsewhere, thus setting up a kind of global feedback loop between the various institutes he frequented.

53 Bakema archive, Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam; under 'gastcolleges' there is an overview of teaching posts and lectures.

54 Ibid.


57 Ibid.


59 Aldo van Eyck authored the final version and presentation of the C&L project on behalf of the Dutch government in 1955, see also Struver, 1999, pp. 230-237.

60 Bakema, Ven stoel tot stad, p. 15.


62 The Prix de la Critique was established by AICA, the international organization of art critics founded in 1950 in a reaction to the repression of art and art criticism under fascism, and as such aligned with Unesco as a non-governmental organization. The Dutch section was chaired by Hans Jaffé (the celebrated De Stijl artist historian, but also Jewish Resistance fighter and Engineer-in-Command) while Gerardus Konink (former director of the Gemeenschapsschool in The Hague and prisoner-of-war) was honorary chairman. The director of the Kröller Müller museum, Jan Bakema, hosted the Otterlo conference. Doelman (Rotterdam) was treasurer. The committee that advised AICA was formed of Prof. van Hulsten, w.v. Dr Bram Hammacher, the director of the Kröller Müller museum, and Prof. van den Broek, Bakema, Wim Builinga, Rein Blomstra and J.J. Vrijendag. Together they represented the various museums in post-war Dutch architecture that was to be conciliated in the 1970s.


64 The archives of the Van den Broek and Bakema partnership and of Jaap Bakema are held at Het Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam, contain various extensive sets of notes by Bakema on the project. The particular set consists of three pages only, archive codes BAK.E.314-15 to 16.


66 Ibid., pp. 17-23.

67 Ibid.


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Van den Broek and Bakema exhibition

Building for an open society: Rotterdam 1962

68 All these notes are on p. 1 of the three-page set: BAKE_d25-145.

69 For an overview of the firm’s history and its changing organizational setting see Jan-Paul Baas, Een telefooncel op de Lijnbaan. De inleiding van de architectuurboek, Rotterdam: Uitgeverij SUN, 1995.

70 As becomes clear from the original photo series of the exhibition in the collections of the office of BroekBakema, Rotterdam.

71 Jaap Bakema, notes for Osaka, p. 1, BAKE_d24-145.

72 Ibid., p. 2; original Dutch: “met veel mensen moeten we wat meer werken op een klein stuk grond, de dichter, wees meeningen, de godsdiensten”.

73 Ibid., p. 2.

74 Jaap Bakema, notes for Osaka, p. 1, BAKE_d24-145.


77 Newman, 1941, pp. 21-22.

78 Jaap Bakema as quoted by Alison Smithson, in Team 10 Primer, 1964, p. 2.

79 Joop Hardy wrote very little but was highly influential as a teacher. A selection of his texts, Amsterdam: Boom, 1995.


in 1964. Speaking about the post-1945 avant-garde, Hardy claimed it was the opposite of an open society. It consisted of ‘almost closed communities juxtaposed to an ‘open society’ which absorbs everything that submits, adapts, socializes’. Speaking of the arts, Hardy also posited that the ‘open museum that admits every manifestation, attracts every event and, in doing so, neutralizes, invalidates [the avant-garde].’

It just goes to show that consensus-building and pragmatism as hinted at by Bakema were not a matter of course, not even among his own peers of Dutch Forum and Team 10. How to (re)organize the planning system in the Netherlands and to facilitate democratic control was a subject of fierce debate, which led to highly radical and innovative propositions that touched on the very definition of the architectural discipline. In the Netherlands one of the first proponents of the empowerment of inhabitants as the starting point for a fundamental rethink of architecture and planning, and of the structure of the building industry was, of course, John Habraken, who published his groundbreaking book De dragers en de mensen in 1961. Other radical positions in the Dutch debates that sought to translate new democratic ideals into architecture as a critique of functionalist planning were represented by Frank van Klinger and Constant Nieuwenhuyys. Van Klinger developed a spatial theory of friction to overcome functional segregation for his various experimental projects for cultural centres, while the artist Constant famously worked on his fictional and utopian project of New Babylon from 1956 to 1974.

Bakema seemed to embrace the competition and the challenging of his propositions. To him, contestation and critique were part of the discursive game, completely in line with a Popperian understanding of what an open society stands for. A comparison of the design production of those years reveals quite a few parallels. Bakema’s diagram of future urbanization and the interweaving of public and private functions, for example, is reminiscent of Constant’s project. Both men assumed that land should be fully collectivized in order to maximize modernization and freedom, a socialist ideal that was shattered in 1977 when the centre-left coalition government led by the socialist-democrat Joop den Uyl founded on a new law that would give the government to acquire agricultural land cheaply for the construction of new housing projects.

Bakema’s acceptance of a competition of ideas was also exemplified by his notes for the Osaka pavilion. He aimed to include what he called ‘protest schemes’, design proposals reflecting alternative approaches to architecture and planning by other designers. He listed Constant’s New Babylon, Aldo van Eyck’s Orphanage building in Amsterdam and Piet Blom (without specifying a project), together with various ‘student schemes’. He included two of his own projects as well, the Auditorium building for Delft University and Pampus, the monumental scheme for the extension of Amsterdam. The inclusion of the latter as an example of ‘protest’ is quite remarkable, since proposals for megastuctures had come under fierce scrutiny from local pressure groups and the news media, and Bakema too, had experienced a rejection of his approach to planning, forcing him to drastically review his own assumptions.

**Denouncement**
Perhaps the so-called Cityplan, developed in the late 1960s for the restructuring of the centre of Eindhoven, is the most characteristic example of the demise of Bakema’s approach. Bakema had tailored the urban development scheme to meet all sorts of possible demands in terms of multi-functionality and mixed-use, future change and adaptability. The megastucture-like project was a response to the need to accommodate large-scale programmes for the booming downtown of the multinational Philips company. Even though the architectural language was radically modern, the specific urban configuration of the project engaged in a dialogue with the existing historical fabric to create a continuous series of new public spaces. But it was all too naively, for the project triggered angry protests from vocal action groups, environmentalists, concerned citizens and a critical media, while politicians and governors also expressed their doubts. In Eindhoven it transpired that Bakema’s ideas of an open society and how to translate them into an urban architecture were rejected at the very moment when the open society seemed to become fully institutionalized.

**Building on earlier projects for megastuctures developed by his office, such as the one for the Hauptstadt Berlin, the Tel Aviv-Jaffa competitions and the Pampus extension plan for Amsterdam, Bakema had proposed a so-called ‘spine-wall’ building for Eindhoven. The project was some 400 metres long and reminiscent of the earlier ‘core-wall’ concept. It was to house a variety of functions – shops, offices and flats – and can be read as a variation of the support and infill concept of John Habraken, who himself never came up with a design proposal to illustrate his groundbreaking 1961 idea. In one of the many newspaper articles devoted to the project, Bakema explained the idea of support and infill as an approach that allowed people to ‘tinker’ or ‘fiddle’ with their own apartment in order to adjust it to their own ideas and wishes.**

Throughout 1969, Bakema and his office supported and co-developed a full-scale democratic process of citizen participation in Eindhoven, not unlike his vision for the reconstruction of post-war Groningen, with exhibitions and plenty of opportunity for public debate. A costly information and participation campaign, the proposal was organized at the Van Abbemuseum, where Jean Leering had been appointed director. A recent graduate from the Delft Faculty of Architecture, Leering was quite familiar with the field of planning and the work of Van den Broek and Bakema. From 19 September until 9 November 1969, half the museum space was made available for the many scale models, reproductions, slide shows and other visualizations. The first room immersed visitors in a 1:20 model that occupied the whole space. It showed the complex spatial elaboration of the heart of the plan. A second room gave insight into the principles of the plan with more models, photos and drawings of a multi-level city, a third room contained a classic overview model of the plan as proposed by the city, and a fourth room offered variations on the basic plan, with more explanations as to the overall planning principles, a slide show and a wall with newspaper clippings of the debates and various opinions. There was also a model that could be used in discussions to test different alternatives. The last room was devoted to a selection of work from the Van den Broek and Bakema office as an illustration of developments in modern architecture in the 1960s.

The accompanying catalogue included sheets for comments and even one page with an outline of the area in which citizens could draw their own alternative visions, a selection of which survive in the archive. As well as an extensive explanation by Bakema, the catalogue also contained several fiercely critical newspaper articles, including an alternative proposal from local architects. In addition, during the decision-making process a series of ‘teach-ins’ and ‘hearings’ was organized. Yet, the whole undertaking was undercut by local city government. In the midst of the public information and participation campaign, the proposal was approved by the city council on 23 June 1969 by a majority of 29 votes in favour and 7 against. The very flexibility of the scheme was one of the reasons why the city government received support from the elected council members, and why they still felt a participation process of citizens was useful. But the decision immediately backfired, since it proved to the critics that the campaign was not wholly sincere as a democratic process.
Ultimately, however, the scheme was cancelled, not due to the citizens’ protests, but because of all sorts of new uncertainties caused by, among others, the oil crisis and a newly elected city council in 1974. The minister for spatial planning decided that the proposal appeared to be unfeasible, precisely because it was too flexible, and hence its future development too unpredictable to receive its support, after which the whole scheme was abandoned.

**Between Japan and the Netherlands**

Why did Bakema feel that the megalstructure concept would fit his ideal of an open society? Especially given that some very successful housing districts were realized in parallel of the debates about the various large-scale projects such as Cityplan in Eindhoven and Pampus in Amsterdam. In Eindhoven, too, Bakema and his office designed a very popular scheme for an area just north of the inner city. Crucially, it was at the initiative of a few Philips engineers that the ‘t Hool housing estate came into being. They wanted to build their own houses and established a foundation that succeeded in realizing the district together with the Van den Broek and Bakema office, housing associations and the city. The project started around 1961 and was eventually built between 1968 and 1972. It largely followed the concept of the visual group designed to accommodate a wide variety of housing types, including in terms of ownership.

The megalstructure concept in Bakema’s work originated in the late CIAM debates and the exchanges between Team 10 members and the Japanese metallists, especially Kenzo Tange and Fumihiko Maki. The earliest example dates from 1953 and Bakema’s work within the Rotterdam CIAM chapter Opbouw: a sketch proposal for ‘mammoths’ for Alexanderpolder shows how the various housing blocks of the familiar visual group concept are linked together and built up into a massive ‘mammoth’-like building that rises up from the flat polder landscape and merges with the new motorway infrastructure at the point of its highest volume. Eleven such monumental structures make up the whole district and create a highly futuristic environment. Bakema’s work within the provincial and city officials and citizens was formed to develop an entirely new approach. A clear articulation in terms of spatial planning decided that the proposal appeared to be unfeasible, precisely because it was too flexible, and hence its future development too unpredictable to receive its support, after which the whole scheme was abandoned.
but rather emerged from the rules and parameters as set out at the beginning based on an analysis of the programme and needs.

The formal language of Bakema’s designs of the 1940s and 1950s, which synthesized notions from the De Stijl movement (continuous space, ascending dimensions), the objective rationalism of Dutch functionalism, brutalist, ‘concrete’ realist architecture as exemplified by projects like his modest construction office in Rotterdam, the Hansaviertel tower block in Berlin, and the church in Nagele, made way for a range of ‘impromptu responses’ to the internal logic of the assignment in question, its context and concomitant realization process.102 That the office only expanded further with branch offices and project architects, even ‘démocratisé’ itself into a new organization as the ‘Architects’ Community Van den Broek and Bakema’, is also part of this history.103 Without the resulting diversity of projects one can detect families of projects, associated with the various project architects, local contexts and the types of assignments.

Yet perhaps this is the ‘open society’ par excellence, the collection of processes of a continuous critique and revision, which ultimately cannot be fully controlled from a singular centre as exemplified by the figure of an author-architect. Bakema himself might have referred here to his favourite Henri Bergson quote: “d’abord je constate que je passe d’état en état”.104 However, this quote should not be understood as a harmonious way of being in the world. That would imply a superficial glossing-over of the real socio-political differences and disruptions that are at stake, and which can only be resolved or overcome through contestation and critique. Even though one might criticize Bakema for not explicitly elaborating such a philosophical foundation and justly complain that all too often such references to a discourse outside architecture amounted to a bypassing of the actual political differences at stake, he himself was acutely aware of the political rifts that governed the structure of his office, and of the changing atmosphere in schools of architecture.105

To be sure, Bakema himself never abandoned the project for an open society. It was in his view by definition unfinished. The concept of the megastructure or core-wall building, Bakema might have referred here to his favourite Henri Bergson quote: “d’abord je constate que je passe d’état en état”.104 However, this quote should not be understood as a harmonious way of being in the world. That would imply a superficial glossing-over of the real socio-political differences and disruptions that are at stake, and which can only be resolved or overcome through contestation and critique. Even though one might criticize Bakema for not explicitly elaborating such a philosophical foundation and justly complain that all too often such references to a discourse outside architecture amounted to a bypassing of the actual political differences at stake, he himself was acutely aware of the political rifts that governed the structure of his office, and of the changing atmosphere in schools of architecture.105

Bakema’s oeuvre were also clearly intended to provoke debate and contestation, Pampus famously so, while others were intended to regulate and accommodate the future development of the built environment, almost as an urban game built on the reciprocities between the users’ patterns and the spatial and material configurations.

One underlying motif in Bakema’s work that seems to have been overlooked is his continued interest in the notion of architecture in relation to that of the open society, was the way he integrated the landscape into all his planning. Maybe it is overlooked because Bakema – despite being an eloquent and prolific speaker and proponent – also understated many aspects of his thinking and his influence. Landscape was one such aspect, construction and technology two more. When Bakema’s work evolved from a clearly articulated, modernist vocabulary into a language based on process, landscape remained an important ingredient in the planning of the various projects. In the case of Tanthof, it even acquired a completely new role as the formative element of the plan, in terms for instance of the preservation of old polder structures and water management. The series of holiday resorts built for the Sporthuis Centrum company might also serve here as an example of landscaping as an integral part of the development of a language of emergent forms.

The concatenated clusters of bungalows were built for the comfort of the new middle classes and as such, left-wing critics criticized them for being too commercial, as an excess of consumer culture disrupting the natural environment. At the same time, the holiday villages fitted in with Bakema’s ambition to build for the greater number and for the emancipation of the masses and individual citizens, which included the development of a leisure culture. Unlike Bakema’s megastructure proposals, the holiday villages were immensely and enduringly popular. They were planned in such a way as to try to create a balance between the landscape and the new social realities. The houses were (and still are) extremely modest, constructed of bare concrete blocks and natural wood. The concrete block walls do not exceed the ground floor so as to enable small-scale construction by bricklayers rather than large-scale system building using cranes; above the concrete is an all-timber construction. Existing trees were spared, and the new settlements were integrated as much as possible with the landscape. The clustering of the houses was done in such a way as to ensure individual privacy and allow a direct relation with nature. Cars are left at the entrance; the holiday parks are developed as pedestrian zones.

The no-frills architecture fits the notion of a primitive hut, of course, very appropriate for a period of holiday, repose and recuperation. But above all, it is a kind of understated architecture that generously accommodates the ordinary and the everyday, and that invites – perhaps even demands – appropriation by the user. At the same time the architectural language is a return to Bakema’s early projects of the late 1940s, before he entered into partnership with Van den Broek, projects in which Bakema demonstrated the elements for the doorstep philosophy, which was to become so popular with his Team 10 friends.105 It shows – once again – how the notions of interrelation and reciprocity are at the heart of Bakema’s approach to architecture. These notions of interrelation and reciprocity, the (proto-)environmental understanding of architecture and planning, imply an unrelenting dynamic.

The interrelational understanding of architecture as part of a larger environment was already present in Bakema’s early ideas on architecture as testified by his description of Rietveld’s design for a weekend home for the Verrijn-Stuart family. In his essay ‘The Free Form’ published in 1941 at the beginning of the Second World War, Bakema spoke of the religious feelings aroused within him, of the force of a “God-nature” captured by Rietveld’s manifestation of architecture as a spatial art.106 Similar lyrical descriptions are to be found in his wartime diary, and later on when he talked about the “wonder” of human existence and a cosmological experience of “total space”. The notions of horizon, water, trees and an expanding landscape are always present in Bakema’s reconceptualizations of the Dutch landscape and its infrastructure. This is still the place where the project for a modern, open society might be situated indeed, despite the demise of the big projects for ‘total urbanization’ in the 1970s, and the megastructure concept in particular. At the intersection between architecture and planning, housing and politics, this is the assignment: how to inhabit the landscapes of growth and change now total urbanization is becoming a reality?
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