

Dear Supervisory Board of the Netherlands Architecture Institute,

It was precisely six years ago this week that your Board appointed me as director of the NAI. From where I'm standing, the years seem to have passed in the wink of an eye, although apparently I am the longest-presiding director of the NAI since the institute's foundation. Looking back over the achievements of recent years, I can only say that one person, actually a few people, can accomplish a great deal in 2100 days. The purpose of this letter is to offer a public report and, by way of conclusion, request the Board to discharge me as director-board member as of 31 December 2012. As the merger with Premisela and Virtueel Platform approaches, the NAI will also cease to be an autonomous legal entity in the next few weeks, also ending my role as board member with ultimate accountability for the NAI.

To mark the coming merger, on 11 November we organised an event that we called NAI The Legacy. Now that the institute will shortly be re-invented as part of a larger entity, there is every reason to draw up an exhaustive inventory of the heritage the NAI brings with it. We should remember that the NAI not only existed for 25 years, (and an additional 75 years prior to that), it is also one of the nation's largest museums, charged by the state with managing the national architecture archive. On top of that, it has become a global brand. The NAI has played a vital role in securing international recognition for the power of Dutch architecture – a reputation that it enhances every day.

What impresses me most is the fact that this success was able to flourish despite wide-spread criticism from parts of the professional community, concerning the location in Rotterdam, the choice of programmes, the winner of the competition to design the new building, his final design, the appointment and choices of various directors.

In spite of all this commotion, and possibly as the cause of this commotion, the NAI continued to grow to an international phenomenon. The NAI staked its claim as an institution that served as an example world-wide. With a programme that is committed to defining the agenda for the debate on architecture, and for the profession. As a safe haven for the best practices in the history of the discipline. I feel privileged to have been able to lead this remarkable institute for the past six years.

I happen to consider my term as productive. In 2007, after intensive consultations with staff and stakeholders, we produced a policy plan for 2009-2012 entitled "Op het snijvlak van opgave en ontwerp". Essentially, the plan intended to position the NAI as a link between social questions and the power of architecture, to enhance public appreciation of the discipline, and reach broader audiences. The symbol of this endeavour was expressed in the policy plan: the renovation, the introduction of the innovative social agenda Architecture of Consequence and the launch of a smartphone app. All efforts to position the NAI at the heart of society and involve people of all ages in architecture.

2008 was focused on raising the funds required for this plan. To start with, you expressed faith in the direction set out by the plan. Then, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science granted the NAI a far larger subsidy, after the positive judgement of the Arts Council; the Ministry of Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment also increased its funding. And in the meantime, the NAI concluded a number of long-term partnerships, and the Municipality of Rotterdam awarded the NAI a renovation grant. The founding of the DutchDFA (co-initiated by the NAI) also considerably strengthened the NAI's international role. All in all, we went all out in pursuit of the course towards a "New NAI Now".

This policy period is now drawing to a close. "New NAI Now" is here – a solid presence. By now, the newness has worn off a little as its reputation is gaining strength. The NAI Museum for Architecture is one of Rotterdam's must-sees, attracting around 50 per cent more visitors than the long-term average. With the NAI Education section now in the very heart of the building, we are able to reach a large number of children and youth. The NAI Collection has been expanded with wonderful acquisitions and is more visible than ever thanks to permanent exhibitions, a brand new Collection catalogue, a mobile app and mass digitalisation. With its innovative agenda Architecture of Consequence,

Thinktank NAI generates a stream of ideas about the role of architecture in solving social issues, with its weekly debates programme and a research studio of its own. The NAI is an active user of social media; with Facebook, Twitter and Flickr and its own websites, the NAI is cultivating an irrepressible digital presence. Now, more than ever, NAI International is an international benchmark for what an architecture institute can achieve in the world. The NAI's operational running and governance is in order. And, last but not least, the NAI is made by a team of dedicated staff that is proud to have the opportunity to work for a unique cultural institution.

In the [annex](#), I have included a list of the most important achievements of the last period.

I'm not going to beat about the bush. With me, you appointed a director who believes far more strongly in the long-term than in quick fixes. Part and parcel of this is a respect for tradition, careful financing and building partnerships that will ultimately nurture and produce the best ideas. This also encompasses realizing long-cherished ambitions such as an education pavilion, the public visibility of the collection including a collection catalogue, a professional vision that lends the institute public legitimacy, or bolstering the flagging spirits of the organisation. I am delighted with what we were able to realize over the past few years thanks to focus, ingenuity and persistence and, first and foremost, would like to express my gratitude to you for your enduring confidence in sharing my faith in the long term view. Your sense of accountability and commitment and altruistic supervision of the NAI are exemplary. I will also return to this in more depth on Friday in a public address; after all, the impending merger signals your departure, too.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my colleague, business director Peter Haasbroek who, since his appointment in 2009, demonstrated an unsurpassed appetite for getting things done, and with whom I was joint director. Without Peter, the NAI would not have achieved all that it has over the last few years. I am delighted that Peter has been appointed Operational Manager of The New Institute, giving him an opportunity to continue his proactive approach, building on the foundations he has laid these past years.

Finally I, personally, cannot separate my request to be discharged as director of the NAI from previous episodes in which I and the institute crossed paths, then once more parted ways. Our paths have been interlinked for some 25 years. In the mid-1990s, my nomination as editor-in-chief of the NAI magazine Archis, was blocked by the directors for two years. In 2000, in the wake of the dismissal of the entire Archis editorial board, after questions were asked in the Lower House, the move to privatize was given the go-ahead. Now I am leaving in the face of an imposed merger. But my feelings about these events are far from negative. Should I ever write my memoirs, the NAI will play a leading role. Not because of the hurdles that were constantly encountered but because of the clearly maintained admiration for one of the finest cultural institutes ever founded in the Netherlands. And in this instance, I am not leaving because I have had enough of the NAI. Nor because you have had enough of me. This period of collaboration has run its course because the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has come up with a new mandate: to support the creative industries. Given my solidarity with architecture and the institute dedicated to it, the new organization needs a different figurehead. And he has now been appointed: Guus Beumer.

His mission is far from easy. Not only because of the scale of The New Institute, the multiplicity of roles he must play, the interests he must serve and the issues he must address. All this can be encompassed in lucid choices that everyone will understand.

The challenge of the mission lies in the fact that no one has a clear vision of what the creative industries truly are. No one really understands what, precisely, the new mandate encompasses. The organisations that were recently established to offer clarification are sinking beneath the weight of jargon and lack of clear direction. Not to mention rivalry. What's more, the political mavericks that advocated the move so fervently have all since departed. With their scantily supported re-invention of flourishing institutions, they have been gambling with social and cultural capital. (Which was nothing new – they did the same within their own ranks when the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and

the Environment was disbanded and with it a long-standing and fundamental notion that the state has a role to play in spatial organisation). Despite this, I sincerely hope that this administrative haziness will offer this institute the freedom it needs to navigate its own course. A course with which the institute will again create its own reality – a reality shaped by its achievements. It can be a mission with Bauhaus potential: a creative bundling of powers that transcends disciplines and can nurture the development of new ones.

I am also delighted to see that, in addition to the vast existing cultural value that the NAI can transfer to The New Institute, a policy plan has been prepared that shares the vision and spirit of the last few years. “Creativity as Necessity” reaches far further than the restructuring of cultural disciplines into an industry. The document reaches back to the essence of motivated design creativity: the desire to make a difference where it counts most. Yes: where society meets design. Such a focus views the multifaceted nature of the disciplines as an asset, not a drawback. In such a mission, the staff’s abundance of talent and skills marks the first step towards the dawn of a new, and wonderful, day.

I wish the board of directors and the Supervisory Board of The New Institute wisdom, audacity and persistence. Assuredly, success will follow.

Ole Bouman