

You just downloaded the first official written document released on KEO in 1997, on the occasion of the first public KEO exhibition at the UNESCO headquarter in Paris, in May 1997.

This text stays entirely topical with the exceptions of two dates which have to be updated :

- the launching of the satellite KEO planned in 2010/11 and not any more in 2001.
- The launching of the communication campaign started in 2001 and not in 1999.

KEO

the Archeological Bird of the Future

KEO is a satellite that will be launched into space in 2001 for a long journey orbiting Planet Earth, returning, safe and sound, in some 50,000 years.

It will then act as our messenger to our distant descendants, delivering to them, intact, our common offering : a "Fresco of Messages", made up of all the messages that each of us, inhabitants of today's Earth, wishes to pass on to the future.

1999 will see the launch of an international information campaign, inviting everyone of us to feed KEO with our thoughts, our hopes and our dreams, as a picture of ourselves to send to our distant descendants.

Through the impetus of Jean-Marc Philippe, artist and project conceptor, companies, institutions and student engineers specialized in space technologies are already working voluntarily on the construction of this satellite, combining their know-how to enable it to safely cross the centuries and millenniums.

When space/time is hailing us

By sending a message to the future inhabitants of Earth through space and time, KEO invites us to join in an unusual moment of reflection on both our history and our destiny.

2,5 million years ago, Man made his first tools. 500,000 years ago, he domesticated fire. 100,000 years ago, he started burying his dead. 50,000 years ago, he created art. Later came the writing, the religions, the laws and philosophy. More recently, we saw the advent of the printing press, the industrial evolution and the expansion of international trade. And now we see a disconcerting acceleration of our development, communication at the speed of light, control of nuclear energy, conquest of space and most recently genetic manipulation.

In 50, 000 years, what will Life be like? Will Man still inhabit Earth? Will he be endowed with new senses? What will everyday life look like? Which course will History take ? What will be the successes? The defeats? Will there be harmony between living beings? ...

It's an unusual invitation to imagine our own future, to dream what life could be like... Free your mind ... rational thinking will be of little help.

The human kaleidoscope reveals itself

By offering each of us an equal space for free expression (four typewritten uncensored pages), this project hopes to become a common endeavour for us which will result in a collective work, a kaleidoscope through which our differences and personal richness will appear.

We are all invited to leave a message for the generations to come : a message to share our aspirations, our reason for living, to express our doubts and our beliefs.

Through the different responses to this same question - what do you wish to pass on to the distant inheritants of Earth in 50,000 years?- and the information each author will be asked to give about himself (first and last name (optional), date of birth and nationality, issuing country, type of employment, pursuits or hobbies, and other, possibly ethnic groups, religious beliefs, political affiliations, ...), the "Fresco of Messages" might allow us to perceive through new eyes our common values and our deep aspirations. It will allow us to give a voice to the divergences and commonalties between cultures, between generations and between relatives.

This "Fresco of Messages" - where the words from the chief of an African village, a winner of the Nobel Price for Economics, a child from the favelas or a child from our well-to-do countries, a nun or a politician will be placed side by side - could give rise to a new awareness of one another. All the messages for KEO, the Archeological Bird of the Future will be disseminated to the

media and made universally available for access on the Internet. Additionally the messages will be distributed in school systems and all manner of educational media. By sharing our thoughts, our concerns and our questions for the world of the future, we might be able to bring the world of today closer together.

Creating the archeology of tomorrow

Preserved in space from all possible cataclysms on Earth of human or cosmic origin and preserved within our satellite from the aggressiveness of space environment (see technical description), our "Fresco of messages" will resist the erosion of time and arrive intact in the hands of Earth's inhabitants in 50,000 years.

Our words will then enable the world of today to be revived in the world of tomorrow.

In complement to our messages, we will also send a more factual image of today by creating a contemporary "Library of Alexandria" that will give a rational description of us and our time by describing our level of development, our body of knowledge, customs and beliefs, the state of our planet and today's living species as we currently understand it.

Beyond the "Fresco of Messages" and "the contemporary Library of Alexandria" which will be digitalized and stored on glass discs, KEO will also carry a few symbolic offerings that will be more lively and easily understandable :

- A view of today's Earth engraved on the satellite's internal spherical envelope so that it will be immediately visible to KEO's finders, announcing at once the immeasurable value of this strange object fallen from the sky. It will depict the contours of seas and continents that will have changed with climate alterations and geological shifts, and the current soil distribution, wilderness - forests, deserts, ice fields - and man-cultivated or -inhabited lands.
- At the core of the satellite, portraits of men, women, and children, representative of the various races at the dawn of the third millennium, which will tend to blend together with future generations.
- An artificial diamond will hold three precious gifts : a sample of sea water, a sample of the air we breathe, and some fertile soil, attesting to the present state of the key elements without which we would not exist.
- Finally a "clock" : astronomical data specifying the current speed of different radio pulsar, allowing them to calculate by comparison the date of the KEO's launch.

Technologies as poetry

Meant to stand the test of time, KEO is made possible by state-of-the-art technologies.

As a passive satellite, it will come back to its native soil responding to the pressure of solar radiation, the lunar and planetary attraction, the laws of ballistics and the slowing effect generated by Earth's atmosphere.

To insure a safe return to its payload, it needs an extremely resistant body. Its strong external envelope, made from several distinct shells, will protect it from the dangers of a long flight in space's hostile environment (cosmic rays, debris, meteorites, temperature variations, atomic oxygen, ...). Upon its return, its thermal and anti-shock shields, located internally, will keep it from all harm while crossing the dense atmospheric layers upon landing. Its buoyancy will keep it afloat in case of sea reception, allowing it join the coast following the currents.

In this strange and robust vessel, the Fresco of Messages and the contemporary Library of Alexandria will be preserved from the harmful effects of time, thanks to a highly resistant stocking process : engraving on titanium nitrate plated discs made out of toughened glass. To help our descendants, an explanation of how to read and decode them will be included in "easy-access" symbols.

Technologies are serving this project to make it technically possible, but they are also diverted from their usual purpose to add touches of poetry to the project.

- First of all, to offer wings to this satellite, transforming it into a Bird. Shape memory alloy* hinges will give the satellite's solar panels a wing-like movement, enabling KEO to fly and glide like a large migratory bird during its first ten years of flight. KEO will then pursue its journey gliding back to Earth, responding to the pressure of solar radiation, the laws of ballistics and the slowing effect generated by Earth's atmosphere.
- But also to allow it to announce its return through a large illumination in the sky. A few hours before landing, KEO will create a large visible stream of light in the sky resembling the northern lights, as its specially prepared thermal shield heats while crossing the dense layers of the atmosphere : a sort of artificial aurora borealis.

When people unite in a common vision, all things are possible

KEO is made possible by the will of men and women, who chose to combine their capabilities for the sake of this endeavour. It is therefore being realized exclusively through donations in kind and competence from companies, institutions and private individuals. Not requiring any financial support, this project preserves its full transparency, far from any commercial aim, and prevents itself from any criticism of a possible better use of the funds it would have required.

As of today, the satellite construction and the data engraving are guaranteed thanks to the generous and enthusiastic implication of companies, Aérospatiale, Digipress, Intespace, institutions, C.E.A. and engineer schools, Sup'Aéro and Ecoles des Mines.

It is now time to gather benevolent energies to insure a worldwide communication campaign and collection of messages : translation of the project into the appropriate cultural metaphors, elaboration of communication medium, identification of "spokespeople" who would endorse the project thereby prompting their compatriots to participate, involvement of institutional and informal media, federation of numerous structures enabling a large collection of messages (associations, churches, schools, universities, post offices, embassies, internet, ...).

After the technological challenge, this project now has to take up the challenge of giving to everyone an equal chance to participate in this collective endeavour, despite the differences in communication infrastructure and in level of illiteracy among the populations. In this respect, the BDDP Group has joined in to to conceive the necessary communication products and Babel@stal to create our website www.keo.org, which will open April 98. Discussions are underway with as diverse non-governmental organizations as the Unesco Clubs and Schools, International Education, the Federation of Rotary Clubs, International Business Network, the Vatican and the Muslim World League, so that each inhabitant hears of the project as least once.

Bottle to the sea intended for our distant descendants, at the crossing of the symbolic function and the current technological know-how, KEO, the Archeological Bird of the Future, means to create in his own manner an élan among the men and women of today.

From the overwhelming distance in time to which it projects us, it invites us to imagine a future for mankind, far from the constraints of the moment. At the light of this ideal, KEO compels us to reconsider our personal and collective choices and to reexamine the use we make of the exceptional capabilities our species is endowed with.

*If you want more information or if you would like to contribute to this project,
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