# RADICAL POST-MODERNISM AND CONTENT

CHARLES

# JENCKS

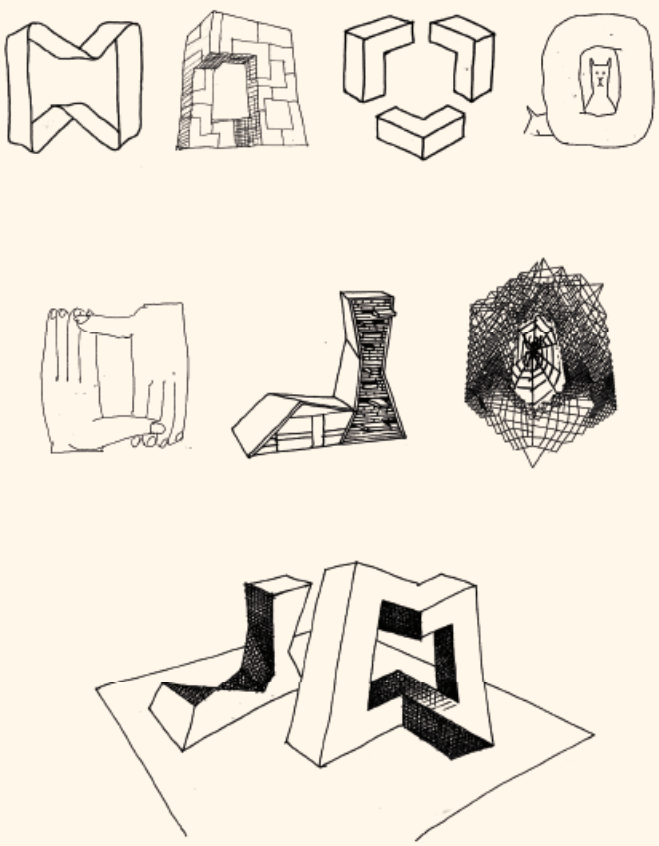
**AND**

REM

# KOOLHAAS

DEBATE THE ISSUE

The following debate took place on 28 December 2009 between **Charles Jencks** and **Rem Koolhaas**, and was transcribed and edited by Eva Branscome. Jencks and Koolhaas have exchanged ideas since the late 1960s. Jencks was the one to insist that Koolhaas come to the 1980 Venice Biennale, originally entitled 'Post-Modernism'. (Paolo Portoghesi invited Jencks to collaborate with him on this first Biennale before it expanded into historicism.) In January 2002, Jencks was also a judge of the competition for the CCTV Building, the headquarters for China Central Television in Beijing, discussed below. Jencks and Koolhaas continue to thrive on their discussions and disagreements. Although they have very different commitments to the issue of 'content', their varying positions help to clarify what is meant here by 'radical'.



**Metaphors underlying the CCTV Building and its details**
*previous page*: Among them are a Möbius strip, Chinese puzzle, moon gate, dog and doughnut, hands interlocking (one of the architect's drawings), a chest of drawers, spider's web of structure and optical paradox. Drawings by Madelon Vriesendorp.

**Rem Koolhaas, Elia Zenghelis and Zaha Hadid, Competition Project for the Dutch Parliament, The Hague, 1978**
*below*: This ancient area of the city is transformed with what Koolhaas called 'an agglomeration of different historical styles'. The three architects fashioned this eclectic collage with a groundscraper, a glazed grid in white, a building on its side and several traditional and Constructivist accents. Like a Cubist collage, the watercolour brings out the opposition of different voices and contrasting historical types.

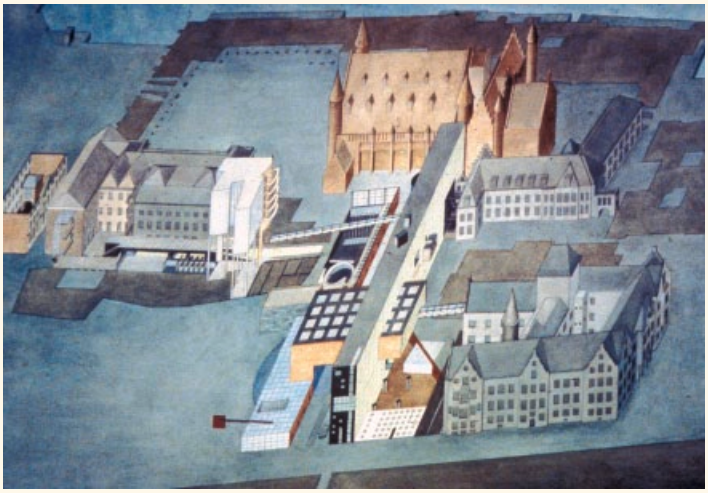
## THE 1980 VENICE BIENNALE: REVIVING SURREALISM

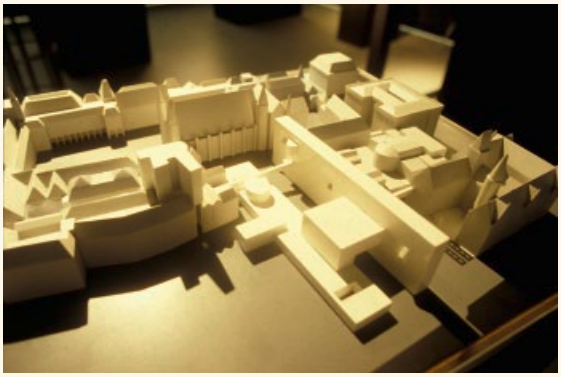
**Charles Jencks:** With the recent move back to Post-Modernism, that is, back to the future of the past, I want to focus on the radical part of the equation: on content, narrative and communication. This was the kind of Post-Modernism that you and I were interested in. When you came to the Venice Biennale in 1980, you produced a facade that was slightly a Modernist revival, but how would you position it?

**Rem Koolhaas:** I was uncomfortable with the notion of this street, 'Strada Novissima' and the title 'The Presence of the Past', and I was working with Stefano de Martino on that. Even the obligation to design a facade was difficult – but you were the one that always told me that I could do facades, so …

**CJ:** And you believed that?

**RK:** Yeah, I believed that – it's an impossibility around which I had to construct my whole career. Nevertheless, the interior of our space showed a very serious effort to deal with 'the presence of the past' because it featured the Hague Parliament, and that scheme was about opening up a medieval fortress to a democratic process and doing it in a very demonstrative and aesthetic way. There was a breach in the walls of the fortress and in that breach stepped several architectural elements and courtyards. It was the first time that we were actually involved in preservation, which has now become one of our dominant themes. So it may be one of those cases where I thought I didn't belong, but in the end belonged much more than I thought.





**CJ:** Your project was a kind of 'subversion from within', one of the general 1970s definitions of Post-Modernism, that is, reusing the system in a way that isn't its usual purpose. In that sense you're breaching the walls, you're using preservation to send a different message from Prince Charles, are you?

**RK:** It was a kind of serious preoccupation with the past in any case. The message could have been about opening up and perforating the wall, probably very naïve, but we called it our 'new sobriety'.

**CJ:** 'New Sobriety', because you were going against the other Post-Modernists in the Biennale?

**RK:** Yes, but in retrospect I think that I did not go against anything. And so in retrospect I have a much more modest …

**CJ:** You're retrospectively being modest?

**RK:** No, I'm being more inclusive, or being more sceptical of being independent of other things that were obviously going on. And also in retrospect I've benefited enormously from all the things I was supposedly against.

**CJ** [laughs]**:** You're in your Late-Mellow Period, but your new sobriety was a kind of Neo-Miesian and Ungers' Minimalism.

**RK:** I was definitely seduced by their kind of virtuosity. Maybe you could construct an argument that our whole work is a kind of desperate standoff between the generic and virtuosity. Virtuosity that has no place inside the generic and that has to find a place.

**CJ:** Your facades are a cross between boxes and icons.

**RK:** Yeah they hide virtuosity sometimes, or sometimes they're not boxes at all. There's one more thing about the Biennale facade. There was a neon sign that emerged at right angles to the facade and of course in one direction it said OMA, but in the other direction it said AMO – so there was already a kind of awareness.

**CJ:** You hadn't foreseen inventing the 1998 AMO, the interest in content?

**RK:** No, but I was aware that it meant 'I love' in Italian or in Latin.

**CJ:** '*Amo, amas, amat*', the first words one learns in Latin 101.

**RK:** Yeah. So that was at least a game.

**CJ:** The neon sign, the whiteness, the sail, the cantilever and the pin – all of those tropes were within the International Style crossed with Surrealism, and the 1950s biomorphic.

**RK:** Exactly.

**CJ:** So you were reviving the recent past, the presence of the past for you was Surrealism.

**RK:** Yeah, and Wallace Harrison the kind of corporate decadence that also was very close to Surrealism – his UN building, it's full of surreal moments.

**CJ:** Very hard-headed Surrealism.

**OMA, Casa da Musica, Porto, 2002–5**
Views, plans and analyses of some metaphors found by critics and the public. Drawings by Madelon Vriesendorp.

**RK:** And also very strange effects.

**CJ:** Open for you as a European to see; but for Americans, like me, impossible, because we see the corporate grin of idiocy.

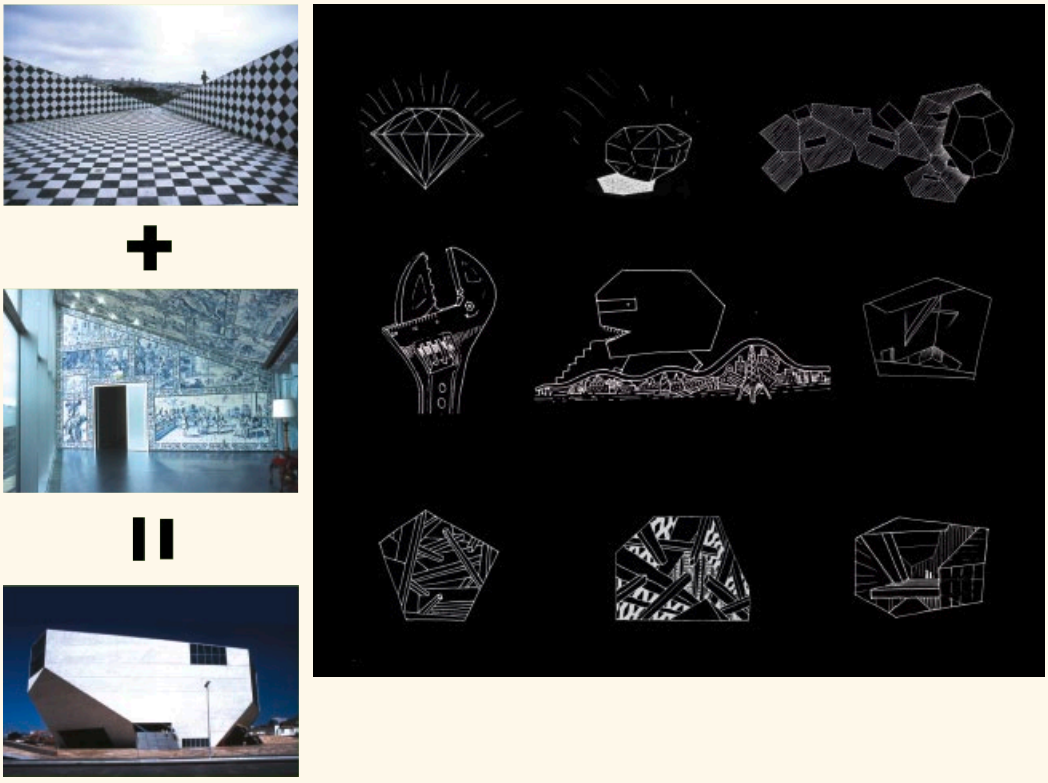
**RK:** Yet Harrison was completely obsessed by Europe – he worked with Le Corbusier and Léger. I organised a show at the Institute (IAUS, New York) on Harrison in 1979, a year before the Venice Biennale.

**CJ:** And you wrote *Delirious New York* in 1978, which you can read as a kind of Post-Modern psychoanalysis of New York.

**RK:** Completely. Anyway, *Delirious New York* is definitely not an argument for Modernity.

## THE ICONIC BUILDING AND RADICAL POST-MODERNISM

**CJ:** It is an argument for scriptwriting, and for your finding a secret narrative behind New York. Yet, given your Miesian love of the box and the newly sober, you have approached the genre of the iconic building through the back door. The Casa da Musica in Porto is definitely an icon for the city and won the competition because it was seen in metaphorical terms as 'a diamond that fell from the sky'. At least that's how the press saw it, as a kind of geological mineral. My argument in *The Iconic Building: The Power of Enigma*, is that such natural and cosmic content is the sometimes hidden code for the recent tradition going back to Ronchamp.



**RK:** That brings up an interesting historical point. It's a serious mistake to look at just the last 15 years as the emergence of the iconic. You have to look at the whole postwar period, Saarinen's TWA Terminal and Ronchamp, or any amount of other such buildings. You could even instance Mies' National Gallery in Berlin, really much more indebted to that tradition than Minimalism. I am really horrified how 'iconic' has now become an entirely negative tag.

**CJ:** But only within the architectural profession, of puritans and Minimalists. Among the public, when it's done well, it's still extremely popular and that is why communication is so important to this issue on *Radical Post-Modernism*. A building has to be content-driven to be radical today, and that content must be public and significant.

**RK:** In communication the iconic image is unbelievably important. Now we have a curious moment where we're working on a Hong Kong project with a very large team of several cultural personalities. One of them, Hans Ulrich Obrist, is a curator of the Serpentine Gallery. Even they know our project has to be iconic – it's like a nightmare.

**CJ:** You're damned if you do, and you're damned if you don't.

**RK:** We all know the evil aura of the word. I prefer to read 'iconic' simply as 'opposed to Second World War architecture'.

**CJ:** Again – the presence of the recent past.

**RK:** Yes, and outside the West – for instance, if you look at Russian architecture of the 1970s and 80s – in Tashkent. It was in the same kind of tradition as the Germans and Americans at the time.

**CJ:** The same bloodline. Porto, I've analysed, with Madelon's drawings, as the interaction of multiple metaphors. Not only 'the diamond that fell from the sky', the 'wrench' and 'pacman', but as 'the route building with Piranesian space'. These mixed metaphors heighten perception as one winds up the spatial route to the top, the culmination – the 'dangerous optical illusion', the Bridget Riley connecting us to the overall view of the city. One of its wonderful merits is the dramatic contrast of the route, a series of dark forbidding spaces followed by cuts of brilliant light that reveal a glimpse of Porto. Then, at the top, is this suicidal roof deck with its diagonal grid that appears to leap over the wall (the glass fence is invisible). The paranoia of such optical tricks combines with the slightly sinister overtones of the pacman (the kind of instrument that would eat up the city). Like some of Norman Foster's more bizarre mechanistic icons, the overall image of the building is like a piece of white engineering, a blown-up hairdryer, or a computer accessory. It's sinister in some respects, stern and forbidding in a way that Portuguese cathedrals are cold on the outside and hot on the inside.

**RK:** Can I add a few adjectives? In my view of an iconic reading, it is both strong and weak, and in that sense it has a lot in common with our CCTV building. This is also, from certain angles, really impressive, and from other angles completely and deliberately unimpressive. That explains their oscillating relationship with the context, which it sometimes consumes and to which it sometimes gives. So I would not emphasise only the coldness or the hardness.

**CJ:** But would you agree that it is cold, tough, urban, severe, Calvinist?

**RK:** No.

**CJ:** OK, I'm wrong, but I love it partly because it has this Portuguese severity. The Portuguese can be very tough, black and white. After all, it's the land of Álvaro Siza and Paula Rego.

**RK:** Of course it was really interesting to assume a Portuguese identity. But I would not call it a Protestant – if anything, it is more a Catholic building.

**CJ:** And also Catholic, or multiple-coded on the inside, with three different kinds of Portuguese tiles. So, it's a Radical Post-Modern building in the sense that it communicates on many levels, and to many different kinds of people. Its interior theatres, while severely geometric, are also sensuously decorative and with funny touches and details. As an iconic, mixed metaphor it is like the CCTV building which used Chinese icons in an enigmatic way; it relates to Chinese puzzles, the Chinese moon gate, the Chinese emphasis on bracket construction, the spider's web of structure The government client wanted an icon, and they explicitly asked for one. The other 11 competitors, however, gave us just one more skyscraper in an area that will have 300 and, the jury that I was on, took your point that the 301st skyscraper would not be an icon. So you understood perfectly what they needed, a kind of 'anti-skyscraper'. But this brings up the question: who is the audience for which it is iconic – with whom do you want to communicate?

**RK:** Definitely not architects, but to some extent the clients, and of course more than anything the public at large.

**CJ:** Who would that be?

**RK:** In Porto both the users and the people who are outside the building. One of the virtues in Porto is that you can be a participant without even being inside.

**CJ:** Certainly, as I found, taxi drivers in both Porto and in Beijing love your buildings and have it on their mobile phones. They could take you to them quickly and give you the usual gossip about them. I heard about the campaign against you in China, partly driven by jealous architects and others, who have wilfully interpreted your building as pornographic, as a 'pants building'. That is a mad, paranoiac metaphor really, because try as most Westerners do they cannot decode the pants.

**RK:** It is mad.

**CJ:** It is crazy, but a truth of all icons is that they have to be attacked by iconoclasts. Do you want to speak to that critique?

**RK:** It was unfortunate that we contributed to it by publishing the rejected covers of our AMO magazine in *Content* itself. *Content* was a 'bookazine' in which we tried to talk about architecture as if it were a light-hearted subject. So we did these suggestive cartoons and did a lot to eliminate the heavy seriousness of usual architecture. But I've been able to rectify the misunderstanding in China.

**CJ:** Well, an icon will be a lightning rod for people who don't agree with you. How could it be otherwise? Yet, like Le Corbusier, you sometimes publish negative reviews of your own work along with the presentation, a virtually unique practice for the iconic architect. This is to admit the very deep truth that, if you do like something, you also reserve the right for other people to hate it, the truth of taste and emotion as being essential freedoms and essential preconditions for architectural meaning.

**OMA, Ole Scheren and Cecil Balmond, CCTV Building, Beijing, 2002–9**
The structural diagrid expands, contracts and disappears depending on the forces; the social 'loop building' is on one reading a groundscraper that has been partially tilted upwards.

**RK:** I had to go on TV in China about this porno issue, and one of our strongest counterarguments was the discovery of an anonymous poem. It was written by a steel worker, on one of the beams – an incredibly moving poem about his pride in building. It answered the pants metaphor quite effectively.

**CJ:** When I climbed out on the top of CCTV, I was so moved by it as a piece of steel construction. The architecture is built all the way through, whereas in America probably they would have cheated on the top, not have put in real steel. This obsession illustrates your AA Thesis, 'Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture', the excessive dedication to the craft, the Miesian love of the I-beam and dark Miesian skin. Yet you also play the structural truth game with PM irony. For instance, where you don't need the beams coming down the skin near the ground, you just subtract them, you dissolve the diagrid, – beautiful!

**RK:** I'm very proud of that.

**CJ:** And credit for that goes to your engineer?

**RK:** Credit for that goes to the collaboration between Cecil Balmond and me.




**Rem Koolhaas, Seattle Public Library, Seattle, 2003**
Section showing the differences between more stable functions such as the auditorium, and changing functions.

### THE GENERATIVE SECTION AND THE ROUTE BUILDING

**CJ:** The organisational diagram and the routes through a building are two motives you share with Le Corbusier (*le promenade architectural*). Your Seattle Library, the Dutch Embassy in Berlin, Porto and CCTV are all route buildings – what about these motives?

**RK:** I'm a little embarrassed because it seems kind of a default to have to give these justifications. But, in certain cases such as the Dutch Embassy, there were strong arguments that a route needed to be the driving force. The diplomats needed an accessible conversation piece for visitors, and that is how it works to perfection; they are convinced the route makes their work easier.

**CJ:** As they saunter up and take people through, they converse easily about the changing scenes?

**RK:** They converse about the sheer difference of encounters with recent history, displayed on the walls. For instance, the convenient 12-minute inspections of communism, of capitalism and Catholicism, and of Nazism. The whole pictorial panorama is unfolded on the route. It's partly a coincidence that these are four route buildings, but that has everything to do with their public nature. One of the great ironies of my building versus my writing is that I've theorised all about a kind of architecture that I've rarely done myself.

**CJ:** Eh?

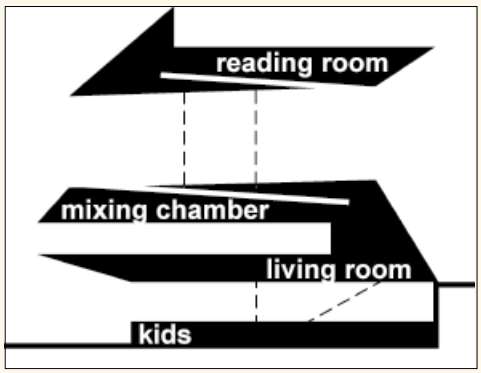
**RK:** Well, we have prepared for architecture in the age of modernisation, in the age of capitalism. But actually what we've done is traditional and classic public buildings. And so it's opened up a huge gap. Ironically part of my reputation as a cynic is based on the more theoretical side, but if you look at the built work it's so earnest it makes you cry how (un)cynical it is.

**CJ:** Exactly, but also the Seattle building is actually an icon and another mixed metaphor of the earth, of the mineral, of 'congested culture', of superposition. And its organisation is really radical, the generative section, and comes from a famous diagram: the Big Mac sandwich diagram.

**RK:** The cleverness is that it started with an analysis of those parts of the building that were going to be unstable programmatically and those parts that could be assumed to be relatively fixed all the time. That opposition developed two totally different architectures for the model. One is highly organised, and the other loose and casual. So between the slices of the sandwich is room to evolve and find alternate layers.

**CJ:** Rather Metabolist.

**RK:** Yes, of course I was stunned by how close some of the things were with the Japanese movement.

**Rem Koolhaas with AMO, Eneropa Project, April 2010**
The images show energy interdependency between regions optimising their specific ecological advantages. Note the new regional names and alliances, nations redivided up along lines suitable to each energy condition (Tidal States and Isles of Wind, Solaria for Spain/Italy, Geothermalia, Biomassburg).

## CONTENT: REBRANDING THE EU AND THE AMBIGUITY OF POWER

**CJ:** Returning to content, our interests have come together over things like Robert Venturi, and branding, especially your work on the E-Conology for the EU. When did you start the EU project?

**RK:** I remember because we presented the report on 12 September 2001.

**CJ** [laughs]: It must have disappeared.

**RK:** Yeah, and it was more interesting because some EU leaders were convinced that the Americans had created 9/11.

**CJ:** They had a conspiracy theory?

**RK:** Almost without exception, and we were all really taken aback. In any case, our EU thinking has gone through three phases. One was a deliberate investigation of the iconographic deficit, an attempt to try to find a language to explain it, to make the EU project more attractive. The second one was an exhibition on Europe that we did in 2004 or 2005 in Brussels, on the history of Europe, and the third one, which I'm doing now, as part of a group of 10 thinkers, tries to define the European Union in 2030. So I went from working on icons to working on shaping. The group includes Lech Walesa, and the former prime minister of Spain who led Spain from fascism into democracy. So it's a really interesting group leading to a Euro project we're making public in May.

What I'm focused on is their need to see the EU from outside Europe because it has been desperately introverted, over the past 10 years, and been oblivious of how it comes across and how it expects its exceptional complexities to be accommodated by the rest of the world. So I've collected a lot of evidence from outside Europe to introduce it here. For instance Kishore Mahbubani, the Singapore diplomat, who is an incredible critic of Europe. So I'm basically working with Europe's critics to try to filter some of their observations into the process. That is because I have a vast international experience which is kind of interesting.


**Rem Koolhaas/AMO, European Bar Code for the EU, 2002 and Charles Jencks, New EU Flag Design, 2007**
Jencks' flag design is based on the original 12 stars and the Koolhaas bar code.

**CJ:** The critical as part of the radical: you've begun to get a double view of the EU.

**RK:** Yeah. Really.

**CJ:** When you presented it in 2005 at the panoramic exhibition, was it a kind of double coding of tastes, one of the ideas and tactics of Post-Modernism?

**RK:** Yes, the exhibition showed a history of Europe in two ways. The outer ring of the panorama depicted the actual history of Europe, starting with the Romans, but it also included fascism, Bolshevism etc. And then the inner ring showed the history of the EU, so you always could see them both together, since the inner panorama was lower in height than the outer. The present project, with the group of 10 thinkers, samples a number of criticisms of how Europe behaves, from places like Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Singapore and China.

**CJ:** You're bringing an international point of view to what is a new kind of empire. Robert Cooper in his book *Breaking of Nations* calls the EU 'a voluntary empire'. He divides political formations into pre-modern states, or the failed states; then the modern states, like Iraq, and then the very very modern evolving states such as America; and finally the Post-Modern formations like the EU. A modern state is based on hard power, centralised production, and the biggest standing armies and defence systems. In Post-Modern, soft-power states, Cooper puts the regional groupings, such as ASEAN but particularly the EU. He talks about Europe as 'a cooperative empire' of 27 nations that join voluntarily, and he uses Mark Leonard's metaphor of it being like a Visa card. As an empire it's a very small head on an extra large torso, but it's an enabling body for the 27 nations. They create unity by having 80,000 rules! So Mark Leonard, your friend and one adviser, calls it *the* system for the 21st century. To most of the world this body looks invisible, so your role has been to try to give it presence and an e-conology: in effect, to brand it. Your branding with the bar code, for instance – how did you come to the bar code?

**RK:** Basically the fear of Europe partly results from the fact that none of the leaders has actually explained the reason for the conception of Europe to the population. That creates a fear of losing national identity, so we tried to find a way of articulating the larger whole without abandoning the identity of the individual partners. The bar code seemed the most efficient way of doing that, and ironically it's something that everyone understands immediately.

**CJ:** Many people, including me, say that the bar code doesn't give much individuality. It may give the minimal, linear colours of a flag, but it actually subverts national identity behind the commercial metaphor, the triumph of the economy over nationhood. So, although there is plurality in the great number of colours, the check-out code is a bit nasty as a total metaphor. Have other people reacted this way?

**RK:** No, I think it's a fair comment. But, on the other hand it's a little bit far-fetched and I think that it's so cheerful.

**CJ:** Like the cheerfulness of your Edwardian tent for the EU exhibit, with its multiple colours, the feeling of going out to see a rowing event. The cheerfulness overcomes the commercial?

**RK:** Attempts to transcend the commercial …

**CJ:** As you know, I stole your design and made a new, improved version of the EU flag, which has yet to be accepted. It shows a rising, blue sun, exploding over the world, and yet it keeps the original 12 stars, the unity of where it came from, rather like the American flag with its original 13 stars; and of course it was partly derived from your bar code.

**RK:** Can I steal it back?

**CJ:** Yeah, please. My version is somehow less commercial and still pluralist.

**RK:** And a little bit more Japanese.

**CJ:** The stars are rising, so the past and the various colours are both embedded in it.

**RK:** Actually our bar code has been used intermittently, once by the kind of Austrian presidency, and now I guess we are facing a moment of truth where we could see whether we should make an all-out push to have it part of the real currency or not.

**CJ:** For conservative reasons EU leaders are regressing to the 12 stars. They don't want to give it up for fear of finding something worse. Typically today the EU has this unnameable head who no one can remember.

**RK:** Rompuy.

**CJ:** Except you.

**RK:** That's all part and parcel of the invisibility agenda, the stealth situation, and the interpretation of it as a kind of Post-Modern empire actually makes sense. The problem is that this mission has been so sloppily managed, but if you use stealth as a kind of metaphor then 'penetration' is obviously crucial, and I think that the last decade of total preoccupation with procedures has kind of interrupted the process of exchange and penetration.

**CJ:** Are you saying the cult of personality has destroyed a lot of national politics and this is a positive cult of impersonality?

**RK:** Partly. The concept of syndicated legislation could still work, provided it were efficient and they were smart enough to negotiate cleverly. It's true if you track the number of rules that are adopted even by people who don't want to be part of the EU. It's amazing that, for instance, in order to trade, South America is adopting European rules; and in order to trade, Africa is adopting European rules. So, more and more we are providing the laws that organise all the interactions. And so if we really focused on that, it could be an incredibly productive thing. Or the blueprints for Copenhagen, crafting the international framework without necessarily pushing it.

**CJ:** Stealth, rules of the road, bureaucratic rules, trading rules, rules of a club, the Club of Europe …

**RK:** The interesting thing is that they are no longer just the rules of the club, but simply the rules of any transaction between partners that have nothing to do with Europe.

**CJ:** Like Visa card. You're putting it forward as a kind of universal earth rule.

**RK:** Not rule …

**CJ:** But they *are* rules that you have to follow, or at least pretend that you are following, like Romania. But, one of the reasons that some people of Britain are so critical and sceptical is that other nations don't obey the rules. We know they cheat …

**RK:** I think there is always a political override. Basically Romania had to be made a member for political reasons, and I still think that it's working out – slowly but surely.

**CJ:** I'm pro-European but critical. Architecturally speaking the EU's bureaucratic production is really second-rate, PoMo not Radical Post-Modern.

**RK:** Really embarrassing.

**CJ:** It's handed out as pork-barrel, as 'jobs for the boys'. As e-conology the main sculpture by the front door is excruciating, a young Western woman trampling on an Eastern slave, as she holds the sign of the currency triumphantly in salute – 'Euro über alles'. It makes one cringe for the idea of Europe. The Court of Human Rights by Richard Rogers, or the new parliament building suffer from bureaucratic elephantiasis. The Euro-fudge of most symbolism is appalling. Take the money, the 5-euro note, which castrates its model, the real Pont du Gard, or the 10-euro note that emasculates an existing French bridge – everything is watered down.

**RK:** Everything is more generic.

**CJ:** You say generic, I say 'mid-cult' or 'glob-cult'. When I criticised the EU architecture to Mark Leonard at his public lecture he responded that the 40 buildings they inhabit are rented! This is the typical quisling riposte that, if they don't own them, they're not responsible. So they turn the centre of Brussels into a 'nowheresville' of *rentier* space, and argue it's the landlords what done it.

**RK:** That is complete nonsense. They didn't make a contribution either positive or negative to the centre of Brussels. The centre of Brussels was basically a developers' area.

**CJ:** Surely they have a responsibility for the EU area, and around their non-centre they have allowed, right next to them, these historic places to crumble. It is a cynical piece of architectural misdirection.

**RK:** What do you mean?

**CJ:** I've walked the major buildings, probably as you have, and seen their countenance. As Ruskin would say, if you judge a culture by its architecture, then the face of the EU is at a stage of premature decadence.

**RK:** It's true and obvious, we identified that as a major issue. Although the EU may be the most important subject we have dealt with, as you say, our work here is very modest. That's how I would rather formulate it.

**CJ:** In your book on *Content* you have a section, 'Go East', and go with Europe as opposed to America. But can we talk about *Content* per se, that is more the work of AMO than it is of OMA, right?

**RK:** It's mixed.

**CJ:** Anyway, and funnily enough, you mentioned at the same time as Norman Foster that architects have little power. But I know that, from time to time, you get exercised by the fact that pop stars and iconic artists command much more money than architects. So, in this context of money and power, I would comment on the odd coincidence that both you and Norman are now working in the Middle East, doing these new ecological cities that look rather similar. And you simultaneously come up with the fact that you architects are virtually powerless.

**RK:** No. I always said that there's a mixture of omnipotence and impotence, a poisonous oscillation between the two.

**CJ:** Because you're omnipotent when you're getting the job and then impotent when it starts?

**RK:** No. It's not a linear, sequential thing, and sometimes at the end, or in the middle, power comes back.

**CJ:** In what way are you impotent?

**RK:** Well, it's more about not being able to define your own content. It's very obvious that anyone who waits and essentially spends his life waiting has a kind of curious relationship with the passive. Let me put it that way.

**CJ:** So unlike a painter and a sculptor who initiates …

**RK:** You cannot put your own agenda first …

**CJ:** Or a writer …

**RK:** You're kind of stuck.

**CJ:** So you always have to wait to be asked to dance.

**RK:** Yeah.

**CJ:** While you do propose a lot of programmatic content, you are saying you're impotent about really designing the iconography?

**RK:** Of course you have limited possibilities, but once you've been asked to dance you can achieve a lot in whatever direction you want to aim. It is basically the waiting game, and then the inability to control the process to the end, that hurts. Because you don't have money and executive power, you're dependent. At first you're dependent on the initiative of somebody else, then you're dependent on the economy, and then the politics and …

**CJ:** In the past the client knew what a building was about and would hire artists and other ancillary trades and practices to carry out a socially shared vision. Isn't that why collaboration with artists and other media is essential if you want a complete building? I don't think a building has this kind of autonomy that it can complete itself.

**RK:** Maybe you're right, but collaboration does not work with artists the way the system currently works. I, of course, have an incredible nostalgia for the condition of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It would require a lot of sharing and the current culture has an absolute phobia of sharing.

**CJ:** The present system may have this phobia, but your work seems to be crossing the boundaries, jumping the categories and in that sense it continues the radical agenda of Post-Modernism. Crossing the gap, jumping the fence was the PoMo phrase, 'operating in the gap between art and life', and that seems to me what you're doing.

**RK:** So we are trying to develop our own initiatives and to develop on a really modest scale our own powers. ⍷