FORuM and Formalisms:
ARCHITECTURAL STRATEGIES

INTERVIEW WITH JOAN OCKMAN
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When the interview took place, Joan Ockman was Director of the Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture at Columbia University, where she was also teaching in the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation. She has held visiting teaching appointments at the Graduate School of Fine Arts of the University of Pennsylvania, the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and Yale University School of Architecture. In 2002–2003 she was a Center Fellow at the International Center for Advanced Studies at New York University. She has edited a number of books, amongst others *Architecture Culture 1943–1968: A Documentary Anthology and Out of Ground Zero: Case Studies in Urban Reinvention*. In collaboration with Berlage Institute she was working on the FORuM project for two years. A series of lectures at the closing event was accompanied by a book launch and an exhibition at Columbia University in New York.

FORM AS STRATEGY

Giorgio Agamben once addressed Guy Debord in conversation as a philosopher and Debord replied, "I am not a philosopher, I am a strategist." With this Debord insisted, as McKenzie Wark points out, that the strategist, unlike the philosopher, is not the possessor of a field of knowledge, but rather an assessor and mobilizer of the forces aligned in any available territory. To Debord, what mattered was not the production of detached speculations about society, art or politics. His field of operation was life itself, which meant for him an urgent and incessant construction of strategic forms of intervention.

In a time when production and consumption are virtually co-extensive with life itself, when power has become bio-power, the crucial site for strategic form-making is neither aesthetic nor technological nor even environmental. It is rather the political or metapolitical space in which one negotiates a position within which and against the economic and political forces that tend to determine existence today. Given the extremely complex nature of these forces, any position must be constantly tested and contested. It is just as naive to see architectural form in this context as a container of some "authentic" pre-existing content as it is frivolous to see it as mere shape-making. The making of form is rather an intensive, ongoing labor, a rigorous elaborating and mapping out of a relationship between critical thought and concerted action. In fact, this approach has always distinguished the most radical architecture and art practices. Form-making in this sense is not a process, but a directed process; not a stylistic product or technical by-product, but rather an activity of organization, in all senses of the term.

Pier Vittorio Aureli and Joan Ockman

THE EXHIBITION *"FORM AS STRATEGY"*, ONE OF THE OUTCOMES OF THE FORuM PROJECT, IS NOT A TYPICAL ARCHITECTURAL EXHIBITION FOCUSED ON AESTHETIC OR HISTORICAL TAXONOMIES. WHAT IS THE CONCEPT OF THE PROJECT AND WHAT WAS THE REASON YOU DECIDED TO APPROACH READING OF ARCHITECTURAL FORM IN A DIFFERENT WAY?

From the start the project was collaboration with Pier Vittorio Aureli. The motivation was a desire to reclaim issues of form (and formalism) from the discourse of autonomy and apolitical architectural practices that has characterized it for over half a century. We wanted to connect formal thinking back to the city and to social reality. To do so we decided to make several strategic moves. One was to take Russian Formalism as a point of departure. Unlike the Anglo-American formal tradition, Russian Formalism was embedded in a highly political context, in a revolutionary and then post-revolutionary condition. Within that context the stakes for architects and other artists were very high: there was a struggle for survival, a struggle for creative freedom. We felt that returning to Russian Formalism would allow us to make a productive "swerve" with respect to recent architectural practices driven by formal considerations or—to put it better —to give architectural form-making a new *raison d'être*.

IN THE SEMINAR TEACHING YOU COMPARE RUSSIAN FORMALISM TO THE FORMALISM OF ANGLO-AMERICAN TRADITION THROUGH THE THEORIES OF PHENOMENOLOGY, STRUCTURALISM AND POST-STRUCTURALISM. AT THE SAME TIME YOU EMPHASIZE THAT FORM IS A PRODUCT OF A SPECIFIC HISTORICAL CONTEXT WHICH HAS SPECIFIC MOTIVATIONS AND EFFECTS. HOW HAS TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS IN RELATION TO FORM AFFECTED THE CONNECTION TO THE HUMAN BODY?

Let me give you a recent example of the historical relationship between form and technology. In the last two decades, and especially in relation to computer design, the "organic" has emerged as a buzzword. It largely replaced the "fragment," a trope or motif associated with postmodernism. Greg Lynn was one of the early architects to put forward a contemporary notion of organic form. Despite, or maybe to compensate for, the intensifying mediation of digital technology, the organic was presented in the 1990s as somehow connected to the realm of bodily experience and morphology, and to smoothness and continuity rather than disjunction. To what extent it was a matter of imagery and metaphor more than actual affinity with the body or "natural" processes,

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at least initially, is debatable. At the same time, as this idea has evolved in the context of advanced computer technology and contemporary life, it has also been related to a "cyborgian" or "actor-network" space in which the boundary between the body and technology has eroded. Perhaps it is the task of architectural form today to elaborate and enhance this new space. But organicism has always been a slippery concept in architecture, with many different points of origin and development. Itis one of those words that need to be unpacked historically, like functionalism. Probably its most salient feature is vitalism, the aspiration on the part of architects to transform inert matter into a dynamic, living system.

IS IT A REACTION TO THE *REALISM* OF TODAY? IS IT POSSIBLE TO ESCAPE THE LENS THROUGH WHICH ARCHITECTURE HAS BECOME NORMALIZED, NAMELY THROUGH THE LENS OF TECHNOLOGY, PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION?

Realism is another tricky concept to define in architecture! But organicism has often been a reaction against scientific rationalism and abstraction. Today the early modern paradigm of mechanization and standardization has yielded to "mass customization," to the "nonstandard." The relationship between production and consumption began to change after World War II; the idea of the individual trumped that of the mass, or the masses. Industrial technology was geared to the anonymous masses. Computer technology is geared more to the individual user. The question is always asked whether technology is merely a new set of tools, an exchange of the pen for the computer keyboard, or whether the difference is more qualitative. I tend to think the latter. I believe new technologies foster new modes of perception, new kinds of consciousness. This observation has direct implications for architectural form-making.

THE PREDOMINANT NOTION OF ARCHITECTURE IN RELATION TO TECHNOLOGY HAS BEEN CONNECTED TO THE MODERN MOVEMENT. HOWEVER, IF MODERNITY HAD ITS HIGH IDEALS AFTER WWII, TODAY IT SEEMS THE IDEALISM HAS VANISHED. IS THERE A POSSIBILITY FOR A NEW IDEALISM WITH TODAY'S TECHNOLOGIES?

Maybe I am being romantic, but I think so. I feel that for the first time in the last 150 years the majority of architects are using advanced technology in substantive ways. Reyner Banham's critique of the modern movement's use of the new technology—that it was really mostly window dressing, using pipe rails and porthole windows as appliqué and symbolism—was largely correct.

It is true that buildings are not airplanes or rockets; yet today when architects talk about smart, efficient buildings and environmental sustainability, they understand the potential of the new technologies to play a major role in the design of architecture. So architecture is now beginning to incorporate advanced technologies, and these technologies in turn are having effects on the way architecture both looks and performs. The relationship was less convincing during most of the twentieth century. With Mies van der Rohe, for example, technology was more a matter of philosophy—of "Zeitgeist"—than of actual performance, and to give his buildings the image of high technology he often had to treat it as craft. Moreover, the technology of mass production was quickly appropriated for purposes of capitalism (cheapness, profitability) and lost the progressive thrust that someone like Walter Benjamin, for example, had wished to ascribe to it. Today architects are looking to borrow technological innovations—both hardware and software—from applied scientific and engineering disciplines like aviation, nano-physics, molecular biology, communications and information science, and so on, and they are starting to integrate them into their buildings in more sophisticated ways. There is a long way to go. We are still in the infant stages.

DO WE NEED NEW STRATEGIES? ONE OF THE FORuM EXHIBITS IS ALSO GUY DEBORD'S *GAME OF WAR*. HE WAS THE MOST PROMINENT MEMBER OF THE ARTISTIC AND POLITICAL MOVEMENT *SITUATIONISTS INTERNATIONAL*. THE GAME IS ORGANIZED AS TWO FACING TERRITORIES OF 250 SQUARES EACH WITH MOVABLE PIECES REPRESENTING THE STRATEGIC BODIES OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY WARFARE. A BOARD GAME DOES NOT HAVE A LOT IN COMMON WITH ARCHITECTURE AT A FIRST GLANCE. HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND HIS STRATEGY?

No doubt there is certain nostalgia in evoking Debord today, despite his militant stance. He loved old cities and had little use for new ones. He ranted against the society of spectacle even though it had already become a *fait accompli* by the 1960s. His main argument was the old Marxist one of overcoming alienation and separation. He continued to nurture an avant-garde belief in aesthetic practice as a radical synthesis of art and life. But life has changed today, and with it, art. There is no part of life that is uncontaminated by the market and its relations. This is all the more true in architecture, which is enmeshed in every aspect of social and economic production.

Still, Debord's idea that life has to be lived strategically, that it involves the construction of critical or challenging positions with respect to a reality that is often unacceptable, is inspiring. This is still an important message.

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Strategy implies a goal, an objective. So-called radicalism cannot just be a fashionable stance; it cannot just be about newness. The FORuM project was intended as a strategic intervention in the current situation of architecture education. One thing I particularly wanted to counter was something that seems endemic these days in the architecture schools, particularly at Columbia—the fetish of "research." What used to be called studios are now "labs," meaning, presumably, places where you carry out experimental research. Yet it is necessary to ask: research for what, experimentation for what? Research has to be directed, it has to have a telos. It is fine to shift the emphasis from form as object to form-making as process, but process in itself is meaningless. It has to be a process directed toward something, toward improving something.

EISENMAN'S OVERLAID DRAWINGS TAKE AWAY THE STEREOTYPE OF ARCHITECTURE BEING A SINGULAR STATIC ENTITY, THEY ARE REVEALING A PROCESS. HOWEVER, ARCHITECTURE *DOES* RESULT IN A PHYSICAL FORM.

Eisenman is certainly the right example to invoke with regard to process. And there is undoubtedly something obsessive about his work. The exhibition includes sixteen images from a project of his that has never been exhibited before. It consists of diagrams of every single villa Palladio designed, about 800 images in all. Palazzo Chiericati, the one we are showing, is the most interesting, we thought; that is why a small slice of it is here. Eisenman's drawings raise questions about a process that seems to go on and on forever, with no end in sight. However, I would argue that Eisenman's use of formal analysis is always both creative and constructive; he uses it to produce knowledge that informs his own work. His analytical diagrams are very intense, based on hard looking. Eisenman comes from the Anglo-American formal tradition I mentioned earlier; it is all about what the New Critics used to call "close reading." It is a tradition that de-contextualizes, depoliticizes the object and treats it as pure form. Yet by pushing this analytical technique to a kind of limit or excess, Eisenman arguably does something subversive. Thus for him to take an architect like Terragni—of all the Italian modernists the one least apologetically affiliated with Mussolini's regime in the 1930s—and to re-read Terragni's work in a deliberately apolitical way involves a kind of politics. In this respect, Eisenman's work goes beyond pure play, beyond a game of endless textuality (although it certainly has elements of that, as became explicit in the Derridean moment of the 1980s). It is possible to read his work as a calculated swerve from, or de-familiarization of, the discourse on architectural form. It also contains a lot of original formal thinking in the process.

HOW WOULD YOU COMPARE EISENMAN'S WORK TO THE WORK OF BERNARD TSCHUMI, THE WINNER OF AN ARCHITECTURAL COMPETITION FOR THE *CHARTRES BUSINESS PARK* IN 1995, WHICH IS ALSO PRESENTED IN THE EXHIBITION. HIS PROJECT FOR A *TABULA RASA* SITE ALONG THE HIGHWAY WAS A BOARD GAME WITH PLEXIGLAS PLAYING PIECES, AN ATTEMPT TO PRODUCE NEW RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN WORK AND LEISURE. THE PROJECT DIVIDED THE SITE INTO AN OFFICE PARK, INDOOR LEISURE FACILITIES, SPORTS FIELDS, AND A HOUSING COMPLEX. THE ARCHITECT THEN PROPOSED A SET OF RULES ACCORDING TO WHICH THE PROGRAMMATIC FUNCTIONS AND FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS, THE SPATIAL CONCEPT OF REALIZATION MIGHT INTERSECT. DESPITE THE FACT THAT HE WAS THE WINNER OF THE COMPETITION, THE CLIENTS DECIDED TO BUILD THE PROJECT THEMSELVES, WITHOUT THE ARCHITECT. IS IT NOT AN IRONIC STATEMENT EXHIBITING HIS PROJECT?

Having a strategy, of course, hardly guarantees that one will produce desired results or effects all the time. Since Tschumi addresses the question of strategy very literally in his work, it seemed like an obvious choice to include him in the exhibition. He has also been deeply influenced by Guy Debord, so there was a bridge there. Tschumi has stated that the Chartres Business Park, the project we have in the show, was the next step in his thinking after his scheme for La Villette. One can debate how successful, or even significant, a project it is. One can also question the basic strategy of doing the equivalent of throwing dice to organize a plan that ultimately affects people's lives. The use of chance or arbitrariness to avoid or subvert conventional compositional techniques is obviously ironic in the case of a profession notoriously preoccupied with control, and in Tschumi's case, it's very possible to see it as a kind of overcompensation. (Similarly with Rem Koolhaas' interest in generic architecture - perhaps only an architect with a very large ego would be such a polemical celebrant of the generic.)

THE FORuM PROJECT MAKES PARALLELS BETWEEN ARCHITECTURAL, ARTISTIC, PHILOSOPHICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL PARADIGMS. YOU DESCRIBED ONE OF ILYA KABAKOV'S CHARACTERS, PRIMAKOV AS "*A CHILD WHO HAS THE HABIT OF SITTING IN A CLOSET IN HIS HOUSE, FROM WHERE HE CONJURES UP SCENES TAKING PLACE IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD ACCORDING TO THE SOUNDS AND NOISES THAT PENETRATE HIS REFUGE. HE BEGINS TO IMAGINE THE CITY, THE COUNTRYSIDE, THE LARGER WORLD, AND*

FINALLY THE SKY AND THESE IMAGINARY SPACES GRADUALLY REPLACE THE DARK SPACE OF THE CLOSET. THE FIRST FIVE PAGES OF THE ALBUM ARE COMPLETELY BLACK; THE FINAL PAGES ARE COMPLETELY WHITE." PRIMAKOV IS ONE OF TEN CHARACTERS KABAKOV CREATED IN HIS ILLUSTRATED ALBUMS AS A REACTION TO THE POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS.
ON THE OTHER HAND, THE CONTROVERSIAL WORK OF HERMANN NITSCH, *ARCHITECTURAL THEATER OF ORGIES AND MYSTERIES* COMBINES ELEMENTS OF RICHARD WAGNER'S *GESAMTKUNSTWERK* AND ANTONIN ARTAUD'S *THEATER OF CRUELTY* IN A SUBTERRANEAN THEATER OF A SIX-STOREY LABYRINTH STRUCTURE FILLED WITH ROOMS AND CORRIDORS. IN THE WORK OF KABAKOV AND NITSCH, BOTH SHOWN IN THE EXHIBITION, WE CAN READ DISTANCING FROM TWO DIFFERENT CONTEXTS. CAN WE SPEAK OF DISTANCING FROM TWO DIFFERENT REALITIES AND DOES ARCHITECTURE HAVE THE CAPACITY TO DO THE SAME SINCE ITS MATERIALIZATION IS BOUND UP WITH THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT?

If architecture loses its imaginative capacity, its capacity for fantasy, and for utopian projection at times, it is totally lost. What I find wonderful in Kabakov's drawings is not utopian fantasy. We are not dealing with Malevich or Chernikhov. Kabakov's fantasy is closer to what Foucault would call *heterotopias*. It's a technique for existing in the world. In the case of this particular project, the child literally lives in the closet, but he tries to invent something out of the cracks and crevices of this limited experience. It is true that in the West after World War II capitalist reality increasingly colonized every aspect of life, leaving fewer spaces where alternatives to the dominant reality could be found. Yet in the Soviet Union at the same time, spaces of creative freedom were, relatively speaking, almost nonexistent. Soviet artists and architects were thrown back on their own imagination as a last resource or recourse. The work of Kabakov and his compatriots in Russia during the Cold War was a survival strategy. It was a poignant attempt to overcome a huge obstacle by being incredibly clever and subtle, or sometimes just by waiting things out. Making art underground or in the closet involved a "knight's move" like that attempted earlier by Viktor Shklovsky, who was ultimately forced to renounce Russian Formalism as a "scientific error," but did so tongue-in-cheek.

The operative strategy of Hermann Nitsch, on the other hand, is hardly subtle. His work is a visceral contravention of established social codes and mores. It

therefore had to be outlawed by the authorities at certain moments. But for Nitsch too the aesthetic project is about finding some other space in which to function, to perform.

THIS BRINGS US TO SVETLANA BOYM. SHE IS COMING FROM THE RUSSIAN TRADITION AND IS SUGGESTING ANOTHER APPROACH TO MODERNITY. HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND HER WORK, ESPECIALLY THE TERM *OFF-MODERN*, WHICH IS ALSO THE TITLE OF HER BOOK, ONE OF THE BOOKS OF THE FORuM PROJECT?

She is looking for a third way, a third route. It is not modern, and she does not want to be postmodern. One of her original contributions is to defend nostalgia, or to try to mobilize nostalgia in a productive way. Again, it is about finding a place to work that has not been totally territorialized by everyone else. Boym writes about exploring a space of failure, of making use of glitches in the technology. In this respect she reveals her literary rather than architectural background. Architects are unlikely to put much hope in exploiting technological failures. But Boym is after something more poetic. I find it moving when in her book she talks about the pursuit of "architecture of adventure." This again involves constructing architecture of imagination, making a creative leap, especially when real leaps are prohibited by existing circumstances.

SHE HAS ALSO TALKED ABOUT PROFESSORS AND CRITICS ESCAPING INTO ART FROM THEIR OWN DISCIPLINE.

This is another strategy. When a discipline seems to be reaching a point of exhaustion, to be lacking inspiration and authority, one strategy is to break down its boundaries and open it up to outside influences. Another is to wall it off even more securely so as to preserve its potency within its own operative precincts. Manfredo Tafuri characterizes the latter approach as "l'architecture dans le boudoir," taking as an example the retreat by neo-avant-garde architects like Eisenman and Aldo Rossi in the 1960s into a "magic circle of language"—a world of pure form-making. On the other hand, Bernard Rudofsky with his exhibition *Architecture Without Architects*, or Hans Hollein with his manifesto "Everything Is Architecture," took just the opposite tack in the '60s.

ONE OF THE OUTCOMES OF THE FORuM PROJECT ALSO WAS A SERIES OF BOOKS. HOWEVER, THE SELECTION DOES NOT OFFER A COMPREHENSIVE NARRATIVE, AN ANSWER TO WHAT THE APPROACH TO ARCHITECTURE TODAY SHOULD BE LIKE. INSTEAD THEY ARE MORE LIKE A STRATEGY

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THEMSELVES, A STRATEGY INTO THE REALM OF THINKING. CAN YOU
TELL US WHICH BOOKS WERE PUBLISHED AS A PART OF THE PROJECT
AND WHY THEY ATTRACTED YOUR ATTENTION?

Admittedly it is a somewhat idiosyncratic and oblique series. None of the titles
was absolutely inevitable. On the other hand, without being an entirely coherent
set of approaches, the six volumes open up different points of departure for
thinking about form today in relation to the political and the real.

With *The Project of Autonomy: Politics and Architecture within and against
Capitalism*, Pier Vittorio Aureli sets out in a very polemical way to redefine
theautonomy discourse. By focusing on Italian politics in the '60s and '70s,
he connects the political project of the Autonomia movement, the workers'
movement, to the architecture of Rossi for one and Archizoom for another.

With *Architecture of the Off-Modern* Svetlana Boym explicitly introduces the
Russian Formalist project into the series. More specifically her book is about
the "afterlife" of Tatlin's Tower. It attests to the fact that utopian projects are
ultimately destined not just for the art gallery or museum, but have another
trajectory in the imagination, in experience, in the city. In tracing historical
allusions to and variations on Tatlin's Tower she shows how an unbuilt project
remains alive in the collective memory of Soviet and other architects over
the course of seventy-five years, offering a different understanding of the way
form works.

Brian O'Doherty's *Studio and Cube: On the Relationship Between Where Art
is Made and Where Art is Displayed*, is the first book in the series. O'Doherty
is both an artist and a writer, and back in the '80s he did a seminal analysis
of the art gallery system entitled *Inside the White Cube* (initially published in
Artforum magazine). When I approached him about revisiting his argument,
he said he was interested in exploring the relationship between the abstract
white space of the art gallery that is so inextricably identified with modernist
aesthetics and the messier reality of the artist's studio. So his book deals with
lived space, lived form, or form in relation to life, and the implications of the
removal of the art object into the space of the market, its transformation from
object to product. In a sense it is an inverse of Svetlana Boym's book: hers is
about the afterlife of form, his is about its birth place.

The fourth book in the series, McKenzie Wark's *50 Years of Recuperation of the
Situationist International*, addresses the most provocative avant-garde group

of the second half of the twentieth century, the Situationists, and their strategic efforts to forge a new relationship between aesthetics and politics. Wark not only pays attention to some of the lesser-known members of the group (in particular women), but in focusing specifically on the problem of their recuperation today, he raises questions about the meaning and appropriation of Debord's project. As a media theorist, Wark also considers the applicability of Situationist strategies to digital practices, making an argument for a radical use of software.

YOU ARE ALSO INTRODUCING FOUCAULT TO THE ARCHITECTURAL WORLD IN A DIFFERENT WAY WITH THE BOOK BIO-POLITICS.

Yes, Sven-Olov Wallenstein's book *Bio-Politics and the Emergence of Modern Architecture* is a re-reading of the late work of Foucault. To date Foucault has mostly been read by architects in relation to his early writings on archaeology and genealogy. However, his later work on bio-politics, which concerns the relationship between the body and space, or the body and the modern city, in eighteenth-century France demonstrates the way a precise logic of architectural form was used to discipline and constitute modern urban subjects. Wallenstein's essay is accompanied by a pictorial essay that traces two centuries of hospital architecture, a building type that literally exemplifies Foucault's bio-political logic.

The last book in the series, *Donogoo-Tonka, or the Miracles of Science*, is one I especially love. It is a translation of a short comic novel written in the form of a mock film script by the French author Jules Romains in 1920. I am just now completing what will be a long afterword to it. I mentioned earlier Shklovsky's tongue-in-cheek renunciation of Russian Formalism; in an article in the *Moscow Literary Gazette* in 1930, under pressure from the censors, he described his previous Formalist work as a "monument to scientific error." My curiosity was piqued when I discovered that this phrase is actually a reference to Romains's novel, which has been overlooked for years and was never translated into English. The plot of Donogoo-Tonka concerns a nonexistent city in South America that a geographer has mistakenly located on a map. The geographer's academic reputation is salvaged when a con artist miraculously appears and undertakes to trick a band of would-be settlers into going to this fictitious place. Paradoxically the city turns out to be a roaring success; having no other choice but to establish a new city in the middle of nowhere, the settlers discover gold there and create a boomtown (and erect a monument to the geographer's error). But the novel not only takes a Nietzschean view of

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historical causation; it also embodies Romains's fascinating philosophy of Unanimism, which has to do with the formation of collective urban consciousness and is closely related to Bergson's theory of creative evolution.

THE BOOK COVERS HAVE AN EMBLEM, AN ABSTRACTED IMAGE OF A KNIGHT FROM THE BAUHAUS CHESS MODEL. WHAT IS THE STORY BEHIND THE LOGO IN RELATION TO FORM-MAKING? WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THE FIGURE OF THE KNIGHT?

The graphic design of the series is by David Reinfurt and Stuart Bailey, two very talented and intellectual young designers with a firm called Dexter Sinister. In making books today, they are interested in the relationship between technology and craft. They are also very interested in codes of different kinds. Here they have transformed a chess piece into something that looks more like a digital diagram. The books are color-coded according to a system used in medieval heraldry; the color of each book jacket is then translated into a corresponding black-and-white hatching pattern on the cloth cover inside the jacket. It is admittedly an arcane idea, intended as a reflection on graphic design itself.

One of the provocations for the whole project, as I have already suggested, was the Shklovskian idea of the knight's move. In chess the knight is the one piece that moves obliquely. The knight's move is a metaphor for art: all art, all aesthetic production, Shklovsky says, is a strategic swerve with respect to reality. Like the projects in the exhibition, all of which have to do with either game-playing or mapping, the book series involves a serious idea of play, a politics of play. It is not a matter of frivolity, a celebratory "end of prohibitions," as in the postmodernist practices of the '70s and '80s. We view form as a constrained kind of play, play made rigorous by purpose.

THE NAME FORuM ITSELF IS SUGGESTING AN ARCHITECTURAL DIALOGUE. CAN WE UNDERSTAND THE PROJECT ALSO AS AN ATTEMPT TO RETHINK THE ROLE OF THE ARCHITECTURAL CRITIC, INSTITUTIONS, AND THE MEDIA?

All of the above, yes. The word FORuM is itself a word-play. The lower-case "u" in FORuM stands for urban, for form in the context of the city, of life, of reality, of the world. So FORuM = form + urbanity. At the same time, as you say, the word "forum" is meant to connote a space of public discourse, a place for debate.

I should mention that another component of the FORuM Project was a master class taught at the Berlage Institute in Rotterdam, where Pier Vittorio Aureli is based. He and I ran an international studio with thirteen teams from around the world. One team came from Columbia, mentored by Enrique Walker, and they produced a marvelous project called "The Invisible Monument." It was a strategic project: a set of machines and apparatus to be used for political activities, public confrontations, etc., that remained underground until it was called for. When the current exhibition began to materialize, I asked this team of students to reinterpret their project as an exhibition design. Based on their sketches, the Buell Center was painted black for the show, like Kabakov's closet, and each project emerges, individually illuminated, out of its own dark vitrine. In my fourteen years as director of the Buell Center, I have never seen this space so transformed. It's magical.