

Syracuse University

SURFACE

Full list of publications from School of
Architecture

School of Architecture

Fall 11-7-2007

Graduate Sessions 5: Johnston Marklee

James Degennaro

Amanda Jones

Follow this and additional works at: <https://surface.syr.edu/arc>



Part of the [Architectural History and Criticism Commons](#), and the [Theory and Criticism Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Degennaro, James and Jones, Amanda, "Graduate Sessions 5: Johnston Marklee" (2007). *Full list of publications from School of Architecture*. 134.

<https://surface.syr.edu/arc/134>

This Conference Document is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Architecture at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Full list of publications from School of Architecture by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.

graduate sessions



Johnston



SHEALUS
ARCHITECTURE

Sharon Johnston & Mark Lee
Graduate Session 05
11.07.07

Syracuse University
School Of Architecture
Graduate Programs
Mark Linder, Chair
Mark Robbins, Dean

Student Cast:

Jamie DeGennaro
Aubrey Hartman
Amanda Jones
James Utterback
Jared Wright-Ward

Credits:

Editors: James DeGennaro & Amanda Jones
Graphic Design: Jared Wright-Ward
Digital Exhibition: Kervin Brisseaux

Sharon Johnston, AIA & Mark Lee are the principal founders of Johnston MarkLee Associates. Sharon currently teaches at UCLA's Department of Architecture and Urban Design and has directed visiting critic studios throughout the country. Mark Lee is an integral faculty member at UCLA and is currently the Vice Chair.

Founded in 1998, Los Angeles-based Johnston MarkLee & Associates designs and develops distinctive architectural environments that are responsive to the variable intermix of specific conditions of site, program and economics. Recent projects include an exhibition design at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art entitled nano, numerous award-winning houses that are responsive to contemporary issues and, yet, perpetuate historical disciplinary practices regarding housing issues; and more recently major large-scale commissions in China.

Graduate Sessions is a seminar series offering Syracuse Architecture graduate students the opportunity to engage leading scholars and practitioners in conversation and debate. The resulting pamphlets offer unique insights into the work of our guests as well as the ongoing concerns of our students and the graduate programs.

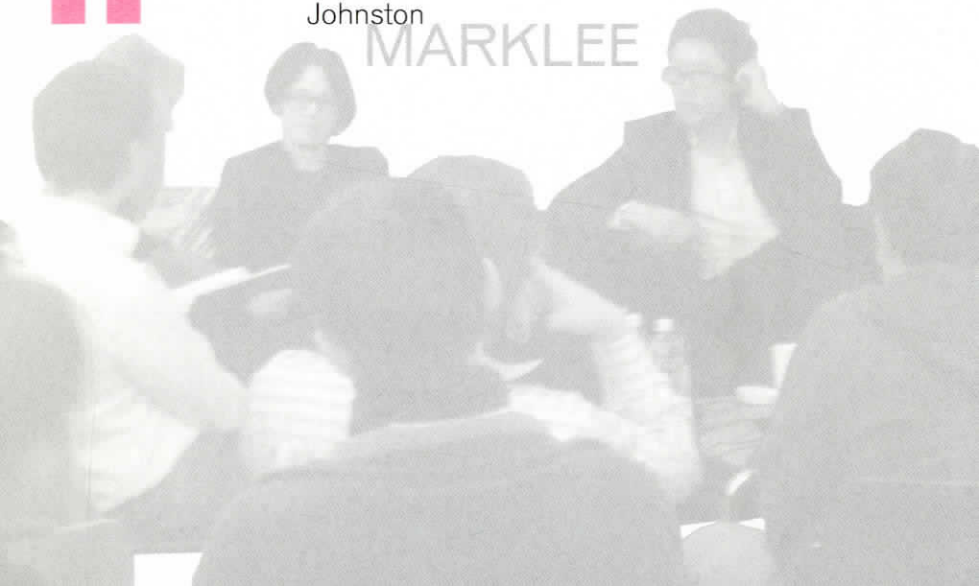
soa.syr.edu



graduate sessions

Johnston

MARKLEE





JWW: On behalf of the graduate students here at Syracuse Architecture, we'd like to welcome Sharon Johnston and Mark Lee, founders and principals of L.A.-based Johnston Marklee Associates, and thank them for agreeing to participate in this seminar, which is the fifth in our ongoing series of Graduate Sessions. Sharon has taught at UCLA's Department of Architecture and Urban Design and has been involved in numerous projects at the school, including a new landscape design for the University Elementary School, originally designed by Richard Neutra. Mark Lee's expertise is rooted in historic and contemporary building technologies and design. He has both taught

and served as coordinator of the M. Arch I Core program at UCLA's Department of Architecture and Urban Design. The work of Johnston Marklee has received numerous awards, including the 2007 American Architecture Award of The Chicago Athenaeum and the 2007 AIA/CC Merit Award for their Hill House, the 2007 Honor Award of the Westside Urban Forum for the Helios House and the 2004 American Institute of Architects Citation for their View House. They were one of 25 firms represented in Young Americans , DOM 2007, and the associated exhibition at the Deutsches Architekturmuseum in Frankfurt also in 2007. They were selected as one of the 2007 Emerging Voices by the Architectural League of New York. We are very pleased to have them with us today

ML & SJ: Thank you.

JWW: I'd like to start by asking you about possible affiliations between your Hill House and the Case Study Houses such as Pierre Koenig's House 21 and Richard Neutra's House 20. In what ways are you perpetuating this tradition? Would you characterize your work as related to Neutra or Koenig?

ML: The realities of building in Los Angeles have changed since the time that Neutra and Koenig were practicing. In the most pragmatic sense, there are a lot more code requirements, especially in terms of structural and seismic issues. At the Hill House we considered building with exposed steel, but we would have been required to use a lot more steel and much heavier and deeper members compared to 40 or 50 years ago. When we saw the steel model after the

structural engineer did the calculations, it was immediately clear that we couldn't build an exposed steel skeleton—we couldn't express the steel in the way that the case study architects did because it would look like a case study house on steroids. But we were able to achieve a result that gives a sense of the steel construction with large span openings and cantilevers, and lack of vertical supports. Since we maximized the building envelope of Hill House, we couldn't have any projected balconies like the Koenig House. Instead, we maximized or exaggerated the size of the openings in the main corner where the best view from the house is located. All the windows slide open, and rather than a 1950s California style indoor-outdoor spatial extension where ceilings, roofs, or floors typically extend beyond the glass, we needed a way to flip the exterior of the house into the interior. This happens at Hill House when the windows are completely open. It's really like a gazebo. So in that sense, the notions of indoor-outdoor space are different from the modernist model.

AH: So it becomes a restatement of an old problem that is playing off a new solution or process?

SJ: The Case Study Houses can be seen as a collective practice that was experimenting with different kinds of construction techniques and indoor-outdoor sensibilities, and the group of young architects that are building in Los Angeles or Southern California—a lot of us start by doing house commissions—are attempting to push these parameters whether it's construction or spatial practice. This project emerged as both a research project—innovating on a type as well as a development-type project for our office, where we had to calibrate the

design in accordance with the real estate market. Most of the sites that we are confronted with are the ones that nobody else wants. These particular sites had either been built on already, or prior proposals had been made and they couldn't make it happen either for monetary reasons or due to restrictions imposed by the site. We also took on the challenges as a way of thinking about new paradigms for building on hillsides because there aren't a lot of virgin lots left in Los Angeles, or in Southern California, for that matter. So rethinking the hillside as a paradigm and looking for new ways to innovate was important. It became a rethinking of how you can address the lifestyle model of the Case Study House, that is very flexible, on the hillside which legislates sectional stacking versus horizontal extension. It's a paradox as a problem, and we like working in those kinds of impossible parameters, looking for coherence within seemingly irreconcilable conditions.

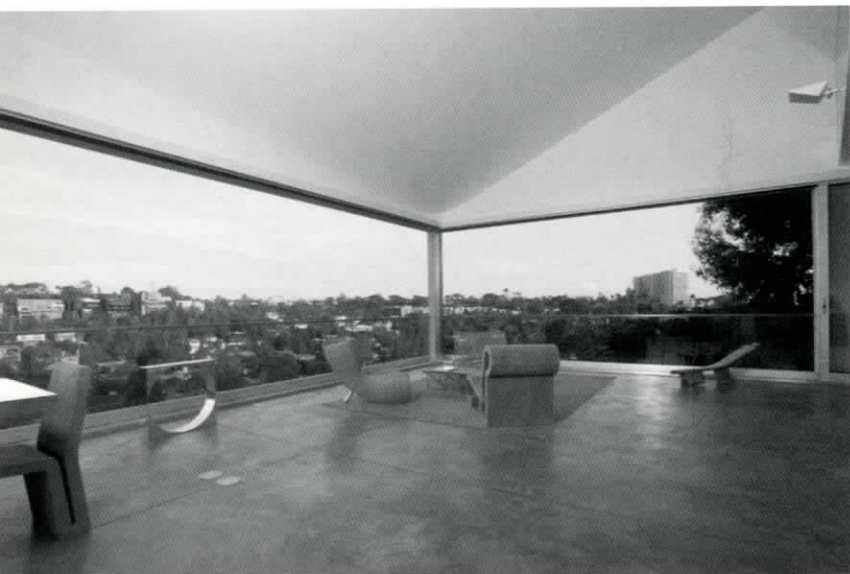
**Rethinking the hillside as a kind of paradigm
and looking for new ways to innovate was
important.**

JWW: The Case Study House program sought to achieve radical solutions to post-war housing needs, in part through innovation in construction technology, but perhaps the program's greatest achievement was the serialization of the housing problem, a continuous and additive process that never really gets solved, but rather is pushed and transfigured with each contribution. Do you approach your housing investigations in the same way, as a

progression from project to project, or is each house a specific response to isolated conditions?

SJ: I think it's both. There is definitely a set of ideas that is coursing through the three representative houses we have built. In the Sale House, which was one of the early projects, or even the earlier Mound House, which is in Marfa, there are issues about tectonics and view conditions that get folded into studies about form and context. We invent our own context. Or in some cases, the hillside project for example, the site had a strong impact on the formal and structural resolution of the overall project.

In other cases, it's more of an internal obsession that we have that starts to make a landscape of its own, or its own context for a project.



Hill House - Pacific Palisades, CA - 2004

ML: I think there is an aspect of serialization in all our work, although at the outset of projects we never start off thinking about serializations and generalizations because the density and diversity of Los Angeles make it very hard to generalize. So we always start off with hyper-specific problems, whether it's the programmed site or context, and then we develop the projects in view of a more generalized framework. I think after a few iterations (or after a few projects) we begin to find certain serial attitudes toward how we solve particular design issues within the building. It's more of a bottom up approach to serialization.

...we like working in those kinds of impossible parameters, looking for coherence within seemingly irreconcilable conditions.

One of those particular aspects might be the notion of aperture and how we deal with openings in a building. Having worked in Switzerland where everything is built like a Rolex watch, it's very difficult to come back to deal with detail specification in the American construction industry. There's a certain crudeness and roughness about it. If you flip through an architectural magazine like Global Architecture or something, you don't even have to read the text to tell if it's an American building or European building. You can tell just by looking at the thickness of the mullion bar. So having been exposed to this kind of European precision and facing American construction contingencies, we know that it will be an uphill battle if we are trying to recreate that kind of perfection and that kind of attenuation in the American context.

Instead we try to find another approach that is more controllable within our means.

JU: There seems to be a predilection for the house as a “viewing machine” in your work. Often your houses seem to emphasize an inside looking out to an exterior structure, which at the same time emphasizes the conflict as you look from exterior to the built work in the larger context. I’m wondering how you negotiate that conflict or exploit that conflict in your work?

ML: I think it’s a Loosian position. Loos talked about the blankness of the exterior, which has an urban decorum, or urban responsibility, versus the interior, which is a more private realm. In our work, there is a blank quality that we try to achieve, a certain radical blankness on the exterior that contrasts with the complexity of the interior. The aperture becomes the interface between the two extremes and often is developed as a volumetric space. For example, at the Hill House, the windows are absorbed into larger spatial ‘pockets’ that create more privacy for the interior sleeping spaces. Or at the Sale House, the window apertures generate the contours of the rooms themselves as interior volumes of color and light.

AH: Formally the View House is shaped by sight lines, volumetric mass and site constraints. How do you prescribe these forms and give them shape? Is it through drawing and physical models, or do you practice with more digitally based methods?

SJ: I would say that we work intensely in both modes in all of our projects. For the Hill House, the formal envelope of the house

was generated at the beginning of the project by a mandate from our client: "I want the biggest house possible!" Given the Hillside Ordinance in Los Angeles, which legislates a number of ways that you have to control heights and setbacks, it started off as a very carefully calibrated digital exercise. Then, it went back and forth between modeling and drawing. The View House probably started out much more as a digital project. But most of our projects are commissioned projects, and we have to build a lot of models for communication with our client as well as for speculation. Layers of research dealing with form, structure, atmospheric quality of light, or other considerations become space-making systems for us, ultimately. We feel that the tangible artifact is the best and toughest critic for us. It is the closest approximation to the final building, and we feel we need to work in both modes.

**I think after a few iterations (or a few projects)
we begin to find evidence of certain serial
attitudes towards how we solve particular
aspects within the building**

ML: We can't necessarily generalize how we work in terms of methodology. It's really based on the projects. I think it's important that we have all the tools available in front of us, and we find the best place to begin, based on the project. When it comes to design methodologies, we generally like the position of being either one

step ahead or one step behind, so we don't feel the need to force our projects to adopt CAD/CAM technology when it is not necessary.

AH: You are very conscious about constructing and representing specific views around the site. Do you leave any room for unexpected effects?

ML: Sometimes the context is strong enough to generate the architecture like in the case of the Hill House, but I wouldn't say that for View House where the design packs enough of a punch to generate a context around it. A good example might be Mies van der Rohe's project for Bacardi Rum, which was not built. When he later got the commission for the National Art Gallery, he took the same model, painted the steel black, changed the dimensions a little bit and built it in Berlin. Everyone thought it was very dramatic, nationalistic and site specific. I think sometimes the architecture could be strong enough to generate the context. If the context doesn't merit enough stimulation or juice to evolve an architecture, then the architecture has to impose on the context to create a new context. When the View House was first designed, it wasn't sited in Argentina. It was designed for a site in Malibu. It was a very open site with very open views. A lot of it has to do with how the views are choreographed with the circulation of the house. When that project didn't happen, we thought that the architectural model had a lot of potential, so when the site in Argentina came about, we saw a lot of similarity between the two sites and adapted the initial Malibu solution to Argentina. We decided at the outset not to treat it as a Farnsworth or Glass House where the view is wallpaper. We tried to choreograph and focus on the site. So the house

became a kind of 'viewing machine', because when you're outside of the house, the view is everywhere. We didn't want to duplicate that within the house, but rather frame views choreographed to work with the circulation. The space unfolds as you walk through and encounter surprises within the house.

SJ: In a more general way, we could talk about your question as it relates to some of our obsessions over questions of coherence. We are interested always in the idea of oscillation between diverse systems and singular form. For example when we approach a project, we have an idea about its formal logic. There's an idea about a volumetric system, an aperture or a structural system, and sometimes they are all aligned. But there are often moments of misalignment, and the idea of localized difference within a global system. We actually like a bit of awkwardness in our work. It's not about a kind of synthetic exercise; it's just finding an overall balance within localized, different conditions.

JD: In one of your essays you discuss a "new conceptualization" of transparency "that straddles between the literal and phenomenal." Could you speak more about this interest and how it might manifest itself in some of your more recent projects like the Hong Kong Design Institute?

ML: Well, you're bringing two parts of our lives together that are ten years apart. When I wrote the transparency essay, I was generally interested in design devices that are predominantly understood as formal strategies--compositional or visual organizations-- that could

have a programmatic, functional or structural potential. I was trying to rethink Frank Stella's work from the late 1970s as something more than syntactic or indexical, and I saw a similarity between it and OMA's Jussieu Library. It's not something just to be read, but it could be used and affect behavior. I don't know if it relates directly to the projects we are doing now, but that's something I have to think about.

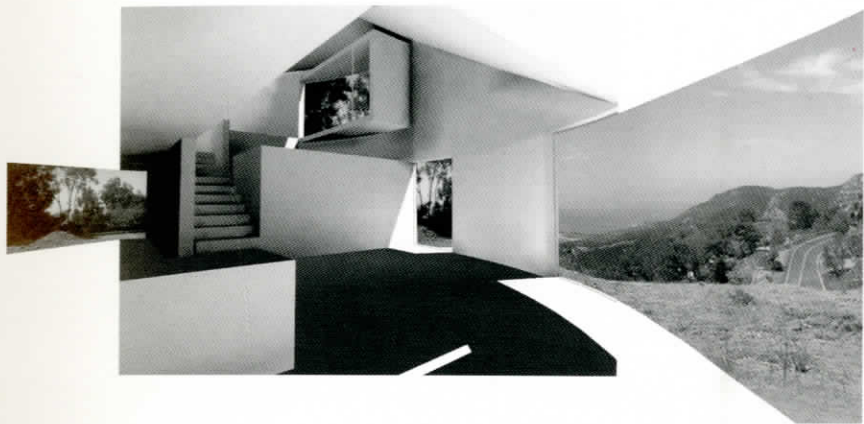
...sometimes the context is strong enough to generate the architecture...

AJ: It's been written that the Hill House, "uses its thick and impervious skin to absorb all matters of unwanted elements." What is it about the Los Angeles environment that makes it both a charged field of hostility as well as an idealized place?

ML: I'm hearing Mike Davis in your question: a criticism of the unfriendly defensive posture of the house from the exterior.

SJ: In that particular case, the extreme condition that we were addressing was the hill and the landscape. Besides fires, landslides are probably the next biggest disaster waiting to strike in Southern California, and a lot of times our work takes on a perceived, or real, kind of negative condition, and tries to reinvent it as a new opportunity. In that project we are touching on the issues of coherence and multiplicity in relationship to the synthesis (or lack thereof) of the

multiple forces at work on the site and the building as designed. There was a very complex set of structural conditions that we had to address to both shore up the existing hillside that had some significant geological challenges and to resolve in the form of the house. We wanted to remediate but also intensify the conditions, so it felt like you were suspended above the hill, as if you were just preventing a fall, and the structure was almost going to collapse. The idea of a radical envelope, a total erasure of any kind of detail that might give evidence of the forces at work was also of interest. We like the subversive notion that the work can solve a problem without highlighting all the work that comprises the solution.



View House - Rosario, Argentina - 2004

JD: When thinking about the house on the hill phenomena in L.A., I immediately think of images by Ezra Stoller and Julius Schulman of swank interiors that hover above the celluloid valley. It seems that in

L.A., you're not necessarily buying a domestic dwelling, but a lifestyle with a voyeuristic quality to it. Do you consider this an affected construction or subsequent condition?

SJ: I think it's because we're so entrenched in the L.A. lifestyle, we sometimes don't step back and think about it, except when we're in Syracuse.

ML: I remember when I first moved to L.A. in the mid 1980's and heard a lecture by Wolf Prix. He was comparing Vienna with Los Angeles, and he pointed out that when he's in Vienna and wants to feel like being a part of the city he walks the streets or goes to St. Stephen's Cathedral. When in L.A., if he wanted to be part of the city, he'd drive on the I-10 freeway, listen to KIIS FM, and blast the radio. That stuck in my mind because it's two different ways of being connected. In L.A. you don't necessarily have to have conventional notions of feeling connected to the city. Maybe it's just being part of the flow of the system, of the grid, of the freeway driving 75 MPH that makes you feel like a part of the flow. It translates spatially which relates to Schulman's photograph and the idea that the view connects you to the city, but with a kind of detachment. I'm really intrigued with the images you talked about, the constructed views: like in Charlie's Angels, where they recreated John Lautner's Chemosphere house, or when Steven Spielberg was shooting Close Encounters of the Third Kind and he designed the underbelly of the mothership from a photograph on a bluff in Los Angeles. The infinite light was re-projected back onto the spaceship making a kind of levitating, reversal of space. I think this has an important relationship to certain

architectural techniques. The whole notion of levitation is of interest to us, but we are also interested in how it doesn't always have to manifest itself in likeness. In the Hill House, we wanted to create heaviness, and at the same time have it float on the hillside. Before we came to the final scheme to develop, we had two other schemes, and we gave all of them pet names after Bob Dylan songs. The one that's built is named "Like a Rolling Stone," another one named "Señor," and the third "Mister Tambourine Man." That gave us a heuristic image of what the house could be. It's a monolithic stone, or it's a rolling stone, but not yet rolling. So we exploited that degree of awkwardness to produce something on the verge that can either roll forward or backwards.

JD: Interesting. You seem to find those qualities in a lot of your projects. In some sense it frees the object from its immediate surrounding and allows for certain flexibilities. There's also a projective quality to the imagery that it evokes. When you mentioned Schulman's photographs as constructions, it provokes a certain way of thinking about how architecture makes its appearance and certain potentials of what a project can produce. A lot of the Case Study Program's success was its depiction through photography.

ML: The Case Study Program could've been more successful than it was . . . but there is a funny story. When we were designing the Hill House, we did a collage with Julius Schulman's "photograph" of Case Study House 21 which served as a source not only for representing the building, but as a "photograph" that was also the emblem of post-war living in Southern California. Sometimes we ask questions like, "How much can you distill the photograph? What is the role of

architecture in that image?" So, in our collage, I think we tried to distill the basic essence. Before the house was built, our lawyer friend said, "Well, you better show it to Julius Schulman, because he can sue you for that." So we showed him our collage, and he liked it so much he came and photographed our house.

SJ: I think there's another way to think about the issues you're raising. Working with artists helps us look at our work in a different way. The Sale House, for example, is a house in Venice on a site that has a canonical project by Morphosis from the late 1970s called the 2-4-6-8 Studio. From the beginning, we felt like we were collaborators, even though Thom Mayne wasn't involved in a direct dialogue. We were addressing an important history, which was interesting to us, and it was imperative for us to respond to that history.

ML: The Case House Study 21 is as much a product of Pierre Koenig's as it is Julius Schulman's. With the Sale House, we were trying to actively collaborate with artists during several stages as a kind of research: during the conceptual design of the house the artist Jeff Elrod collaborated with color coordination, and after the house was finished Jack Pierson did a series of site-specific installations and Livia Corona did a photographic essay which responded to the mathematics and the color of the house. We were thinking about the different lives, both real and fictitious, that could inhabit the house or how an artist could contribute to the design process or the habitation of the house.

JD: Does this relate to the fact that a lot of your early work seems

to take on a gallery-like quality? It makes sense that an emerging practice would be engaged in house and gallery commissions, but your collaborations place art and artists in the context. Is this another type of ongoing research?

ML: [Long pause.] I guess it's not, because I had to think about it. I never thought of it that way.

How could we absorb all those systems with respect to the house as a collector of water and the hillside as a collector of water, and, again, not make it visible, but make it an embodied condition.

SJ: We're always searching for more abstract and different kinds of paradigms of space-making that can inform our projects. I think a lot of times it's apparent in how we photograph them. There's a degree of abstraction that we're interested in capturing. It's about research, and it doesn't really matter if it's a house or gallery or even a photograph. It's partly intentional that we try to capture and represent the projects in a way that is photographically latent. It's a larger operation. It has less to do with program, and more to do with space.

JD: How did working with other design practices and disciplines influence your Helios House project, which was a collaboration with Office dA and Ogilvy Mather?

SJ: That project was a new kind of collaboration for us, and it was particularly intense. It was probably different than our typical working relationships because it was a super-fast project, so divisions of responsibilities that might typically happen were completely eradicated. Everybody had all hands on the table. We basically had two and a half months to design the project, and three months to build it. We ask a lot of questions of the other's work as a way of helping us interrogate our own process. The idea of putting yourself into a different context through collaboration is an interesting way to work, because it helps you see your own work from a different perspective.

It's really the views, the structure, and how it works within the context of the hill that generates its form.

ML: The Sale House was almost like playing singles tennis with Thom Mayne, while the Helios House project was more like playing doubles with Office dA. They maybe make better volleys, and we're maybe better at baseline shots. So we play out the scenario. Sometimes, however, we would get too squished, and we would trade off to engage things that were not necessarily what we would usually take on. This is something that excites us because it brought us into new terrain that we don't typically deal with.

JD: What was Ogilvy's role in that collaboration?

SJ: BIG, which stands for Brand Innovation Group, which was a different division of the Ogilvy advertising agency, a large, global, branding company. They recognized early on that more and more international companies are looking for spatial renditions of their brand vision, so they were initially involved with the project on the client side and helped bring all of us together.

ML: They were important in the initiation of the project. It's no secret that the project is a sign. They were instrumental in figuring out how much it would cost to have a billboard in Times Square, and that they were smarter to reinvest that money into architecture for a greater effect. It was almost an inverse of the Venturi model. The building becomes a sign, and then the BP billboard behind the building becomes a rotating message. The building becomes an attraction, and then that leads you to the message itself.

JD: We find it reassuring that they needed to come to architects.

SJ: Right.

JD: But what can we learn from them and their practices?

SJ: Well, they were instrumental in getting beyond the standard practices of graphics and signage to achieve a vision for BP. The idea that you could employ design innovation as the delivery system for the overall experience of the site is important from a branding perspective.

There aren't a lot of global firms of that scale that have invested in architecture at that level. This is both an advertising project and a kind of laboratory for experimentation, which is new paradigm of sorts, and was especially new for us. I think that more of these collaborations, or these kinds of crossovers, are vital both in terms of practice and the built project.

JD: In our discipline, especially in the twentieth century, there's a rich history of another type of collaboration: personally-affiliated practices. You have the Eameses, Corb and Jeanneret, but even more recently there seems to be a lot of success in this model of practice. Is this a recipe for success or volatile territory?

ML: Volatile.



Helios House - Los Angeles, C. A. - 2007

Students: (Laughter)

SJ: Even though Mark and I started out as a partnership, we have a larger vision for our practice. We are starting to work much more globally and will have other partners. So we are starting to change the structure of our practice. Change is a reality, and I think it's the only way to stay productive. We're interested in more voices and not closing in.

ML: Offices should be very horizontal in structure. Anyone from senior designers to interns get to participate in the design process. Herzog & de Meuron has a fantastic model for how younger partners keep the intensity and reinvigorate the design agenda.

JD: How has the practice changed as the scale of your projects has grown?

SJ: It becomes more collaborative and more networked. As we grow and continue to take on work that's much further away from home, the challenge is to keep the intensity in the work, understand new information, and utilize outside expertise.

ML: (drawing on the blackboard) I'll draw you a diagram. This is design, meetings, daily operations, and travel. When we started our practice, we were here. We spent the majority of our time designing, a few meetings, a few phone calls, and almost no travel. As the practice grew, it shifts to here, progressing down. At some point, we're going to be here, and that's the tipping point. We have to make the decision.

What do we do here when it's all orchestration? The importance is to create a model that's much more open and flexible, forming a kind of Klein-bottle diagram that penetrates through as we grow.

MLi: It's as if there's this constant openness and willingness to always see every design problem, not as something to be solved, but as an opportunity to be exploited. I'm interested in that. Architects bring architectural knowledge, or take some enterprise that's already underway, and find a way to adapt it and reformulate it. Particularly with the Hong Kong Design Project, could you address how it is an open-ended enterprise that you're continuing to explore?

SJ: When we started our practice, it was a model building practice. We had both put in our time and were ready to go, but you are never quite totally prepared. Then something comes along and you just go for it. We were entering a lot of competitions, and were also doing small commissions. There was always a feedback loop that was occurring between our competition work and smaller opportunities to realize the bigger ideas we were taking away from our competition entries.

ML: With the HKDI, we were interested in relational aesthetics as a mode of participatory design. When we first started doing private commissions, it was really dealing with one client, but when we started doing public commissions, like the Marfa Public Library, we were dealing with committees. There would be a lot of people participating. It's not necessarily a democratic agenda, but we always think of how we can best make use of the group and design something out of it. It's

a version of the Trojan horse idea. Sometimes we can't help but think that all architects are, in one way or the other, formalists. They just have different ways of lying about it.

It was particularly provocative to think about the domestic, private realm of a house, which never gets turned inside out.

SJ: One model that really fascinates us is the work of Sol LeWitt. He worked in a lot of different mediums, but there was a point in time where he was doing a lot of wall drawings. Instead of going to the museum and drawing on the wall, he would write a set of instructions, a set of rules that anybody could follow. How do you set up a protocol for a project such that you can, to varying degrees, allow for innovation, specify a context, but set rules so precisely that you can still give shape and direction to the form and not be there?

ML: There are multiple degrees of LeWitt's work. The ones that I'm most fascinated with are the ones that left the most amount of wiggle room for people to execute the drawing; prescriptions like lines that cross or touch at their ends. We like that type of condition because the result is much more unpredictable.

SJ: Specific to your question, Mark, the HKDI emerged out of a logic of assembly and aggregation that has been preoccupying us. Then it had a lot of performance attributes that also became really interesting.

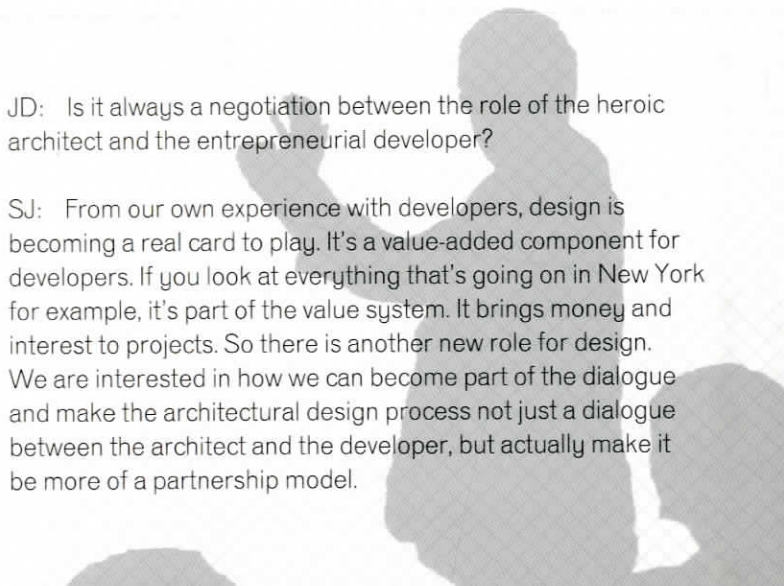
We're working on a similar project now. It's a very large housing project in China where we're pursuing this logic, but in a very different paradigm of organization. It's almost like borrowing from ourselves and replaying those rule sets.

JD: I was just thinking about the participatory design section in your chart up there, and how you've sector'd off those discreet labels. I think the participatory model you're describing might save you from moving toward the side of the diagram you don't want to go towards.

We're always searching for more abstract and different kinds of paradigms of space-making that can inform our projects.

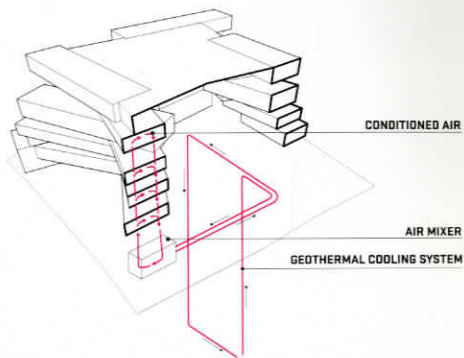
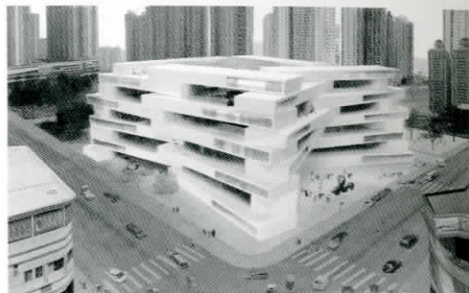
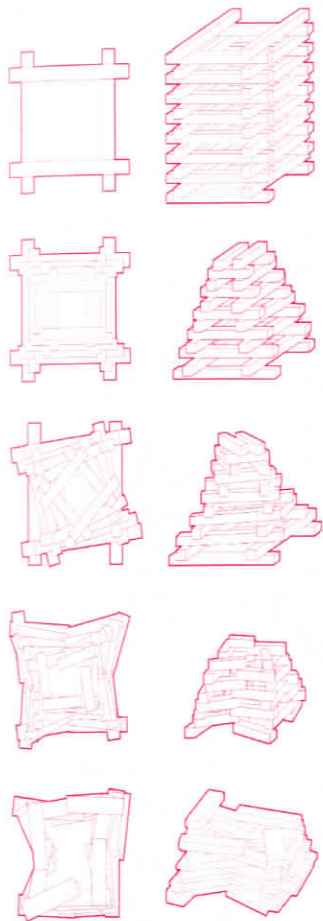
SJ: I would say everybody today has new work models which differ from ten years ago, especially with communication. In some ways, it's a simplification, but I think participating in design work when you're here and your office is there is just a different kind of engagement. So eventually it's more of a timing issue: how time is spent is more important than where you're spending time.

ML: Well, I'm sure you've all also experienced in the studio context that when you participate in team projects -I think the best models are the ones where you meet very few times, everyone splits up and does a lot of work, rather than a lot of meetings and less production.

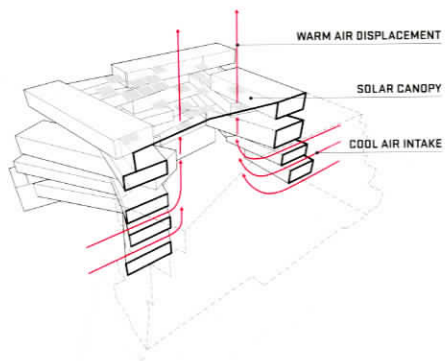
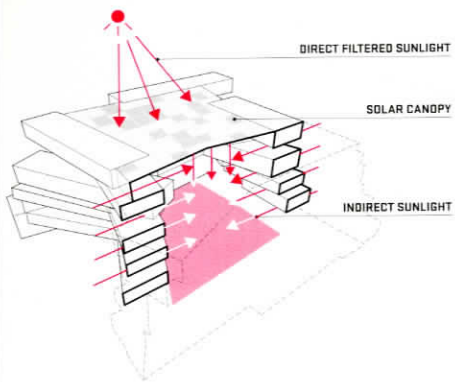
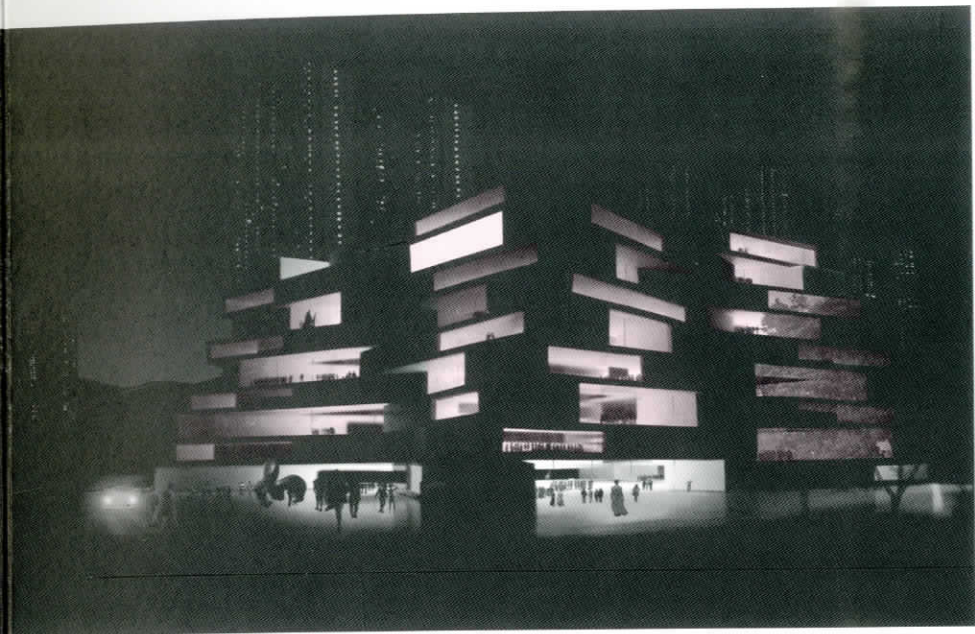
The background of the page features a light, textured pattern. Overlaid on this are several dark silhouettes of people, appearing to be in conversation. One silhouette in the center is gesturing with its hand raised. Other silhouettes are visible at the bottom and right edges of the page.

JD: Is it always a negotiation between the role of the heroic architect and the entrepreneurial developer?

SJ: From our own experience with developers, design is becoming a real card to play. It's a value-added component for developers. If you look at everything that's going on in New York for example, it's part of the value system. It brings money and interest to projects. So there is another new role for design. We are interested in how we can become part of the dialogue and make the architectural design process not just a dialogue between the architect and the developer, but actually make it be more of a partnership model.



Clockwise from above: formal diagrams illustrate stacking potential of modular units, competition scheme for Hong Kong Design Institute, interior atrium functions social mixer, night view of street, circulation and energy systems diagrams



ML: Politically, architecture is very powerful, but architects are relatively weak right now. It's important for architects to acknowledge this. Often, they are brought into the game very late, and it's important to understand how we, architects, could use the Trojan horse as opposed to the heroic or the avant-garde model, or be the kamikaze that sacrifices himself to open up the way for the others to come in.

Sometimes we can't help but think that all architects are, in one way or the other, formalists. They just have different ways of lying about it.