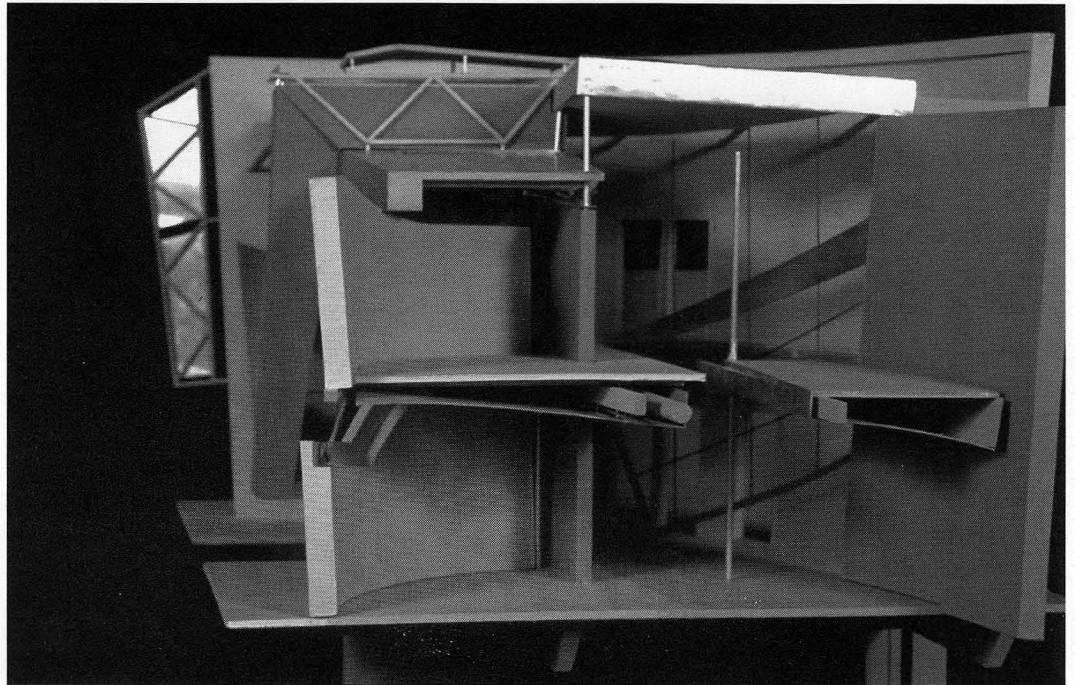# The Place of Studio
David Cronrath

Detail of interior, Matthew Krunteraud, fourth year design studio

Placing the studio within most curricula of architecture is not a particularly difficult locational task for most professionals, educators, or students. It stands in a central position. This position is held by the studio whether it is seen as the point toward which other information and activities flow (similar to the undergraduate natural science laboratory), or the point from which other activities and courses extend out (as in the American Beaux-Arts), or finally a combination of both, an ebb and flow, to and from. No matter what the conception of exchange between the studio and its surrounds, the studio is seen as the central point upon which architectural education seems grounded. This central location for studio seems simultaneously obvious and essential for the education of an architect. One might even say that its position is so secure that it is taken for granted. In this sense the studio can be seen as *the* place of architectural education. Given this condition it seems prudent to ask, what force is exerted on studio activity that makes its site within the boundaries of architectural education seem so logical and natural?

The force that holds the architectural design studio in this strategic position seems to come from the outside. The activities internal to studio—analyzing, researching, exploring, drawing, assembling, etc.—can all be performed in different formats or through other courses. Historically these activities were effectively performed and honed through an apprenticeship that had a very different structure than does contemporary architectural education. There appear to be no inherent pedagogical constraints that stop us from slicing up the educational objectives for studio and distributing them in a different manner across a curriculum. Problem solving, creativity, critical thinking, and skills enhancement can be accomplished, and are effectively taught, in formats other than studio. My point is not to suggest any alternative is superior, but merely to demonstrate briefly the lack of any internal rationale for the studio's existence or curricular position. In fact, many within academia, almost all of whom are outside architectural education, would support a move away from studio instruction as a way to improve instructional efficiency. The force that controls studio seems to lie beyond the walls of the institution and at the same time much closer to our home. The central position held by the architectural design studio within architectural curricula is so obviously correct precisely because its position is one of the mechanisms the discipline of architecture has created to keep the practice of architecture firmly located. How can the studio be seen as providing this important structural support for practice? And if studio plays this role, what impact does this role have on studio work?

There is little doubt that the architecture school is *not* a site of professional practice. The territory inscribed by architectural education, while closely related to architectural practice, is exterior to it. And what is true for the school applies to the architectural design studio within it. The exterior position given to the school of architecture is essential to uphold the
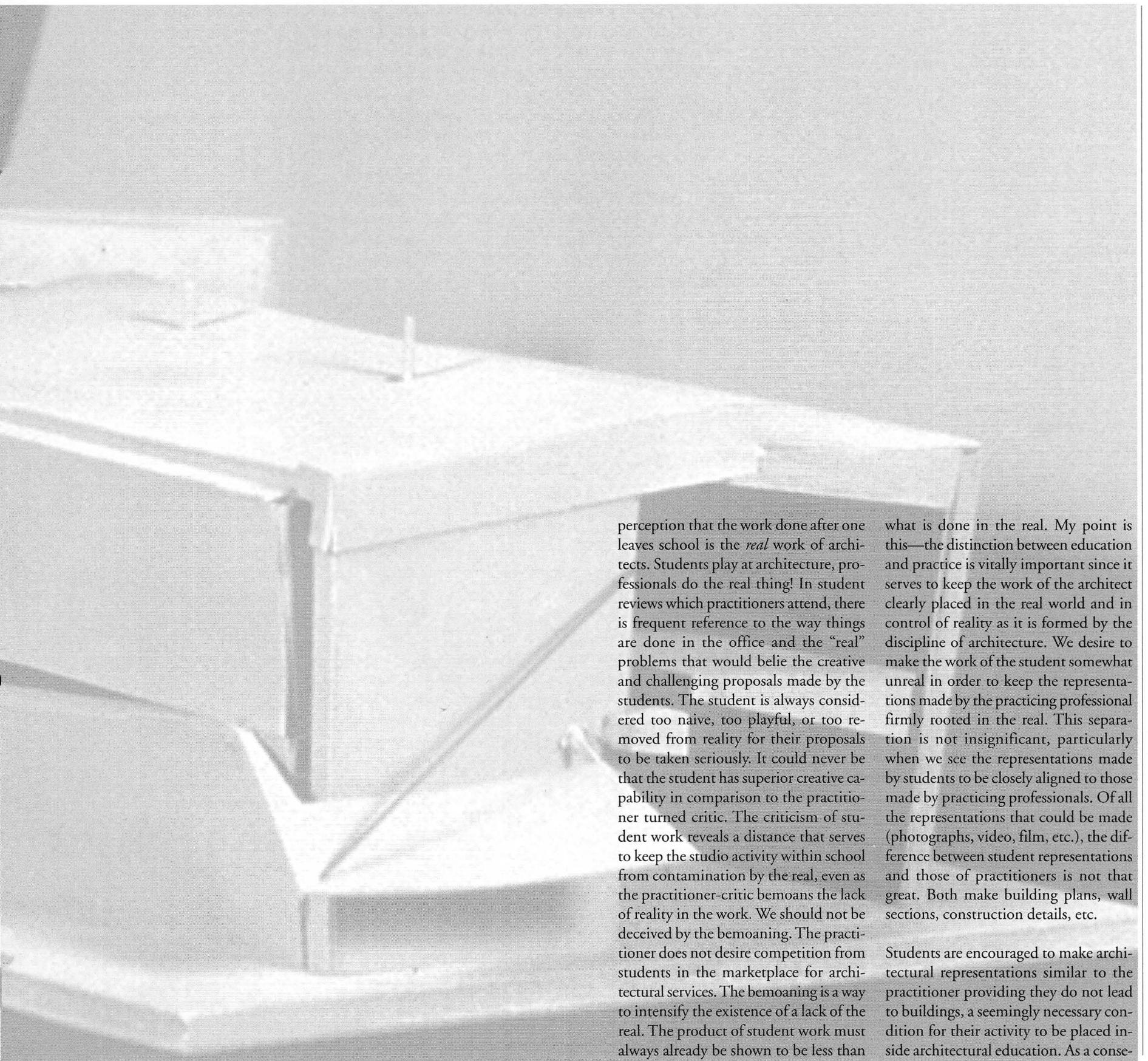
perception that the work done after one leaves school is the *real* work of architects. Students play at architecture, professionals do the real thing! In student reviews which practitioners attend, there is frequent reference to the way things are done in the office and the "real" problems that would belie the creative and challenging proposals made by the students. The student is always considered too naive, too playful, or too removed from reality for their proposals to be taken seriously. It could never be that the student has superior creative capability in comparison to the practitioner turned critic. The criticism of student work reveals a distance that serves to keep the studio activity within school from contamination by the real, even as the practitioner-critic bemoans the lack of reality in the work. We should not be deceived by the bemoaning. The practitioner does not desire competition from students in the marketplace for architectural services. The bemoaning is a way to intensify the existence of a lack of the real. The product of student work must always already be shown to be less than what is done in the real. My point is this—the distinction between education and practice is vitally important since it serves to keep the work of the architect clearly placed in the real world and in control of reality as it is formed by the discipline of architecture. We desire to make the work of the student somewhat unreal in order to keep the representations made by the practicing professional firmly rooted in the real. This separation is not insignificant, particularly when we see the representations made by students to be closely aligned to those made by practicing professionals. Of all the representations that could be made (photographs, video, film, etc.), the difference between student representations and those of practitioners is not that great. Both make building plans, wall sections, construction details, etc.

Students are encouraged to make architectural representations similar to the practitioner providing they do not lead to buildings, a seemingly necessary condition for their activity to be placed inside architectural education. As a conse-

quence the representations that emerge from studio have no productive value in the real world of architecture. However, the practicing architect is not free from contradictions. The architect rarely produces a building. Architects in practice, like their subordinates in education, only investigate buildings through drawings. The practicing architect operates in much the same manner as the student. Thus, the only thing that can position the practicing architect firmly within the real is the autonomy and distinctness of the academy and its placement in something that is an imitation of the real. Also, since practitioners must be seen as holding the power to produce reality from their drawings, students must assume a powerless position for their representations and an inability to produce, or alter, reality. It seems that any other position for the students' representations might threaten the practitioners' location within society and its hold on what is considered real work, products, or architecture.

Not only must the representations made inside the academic institution avoid any ambiguity about their inability to produce architecture, a "built" reality, they must also refrain from contributing to the general cultural perception or production of reality. This is because the only legitimate contributions practitioners can make in this cultural arena are through the products of architecture, which are "buildings." Thus, for the student of architecture a territory has been inscribed that can only produce the illegitimate and unacceptable. On the one hand, if architectural education produced meaningful representations that made "buildings", it would remove the dependent and subservient role of education to architectural practice. On the other hand, if schools alter the general conception or perception of cultural reality by some other means, then the alteration would result from a product that lies outside architecture. In both circumstances the product becomes illegitimate. As a consequence of the need to avoid making illegitimate products, architectural education and its representations turn their backs on the rest of academia, where representations are produced and have value. It is perhaps important to summarize how this difference for representations between architectural education and the rest of the academic institution it resides within comes into being. Academia is a cultural institution that produces, manipulates, and represents information. These activities serve to construct a cultural reality that is carefully entwined in facts to disguise its very fabrication. Therefore, the rest of academia produces representations with a purpose of contributing to the construction of a cultural reality. Representations made by architectural education are not afforded this same possibility for the reasons stated earlier.

Yet, this wrapping operation performed by an academic is similar to what a practicing architect does; the architect makes representations that are carefully wrapped in the social position of the professional class in order to hide the fact that these products are not real buildings as much as mere drawings. This intellectual pirouette permits the
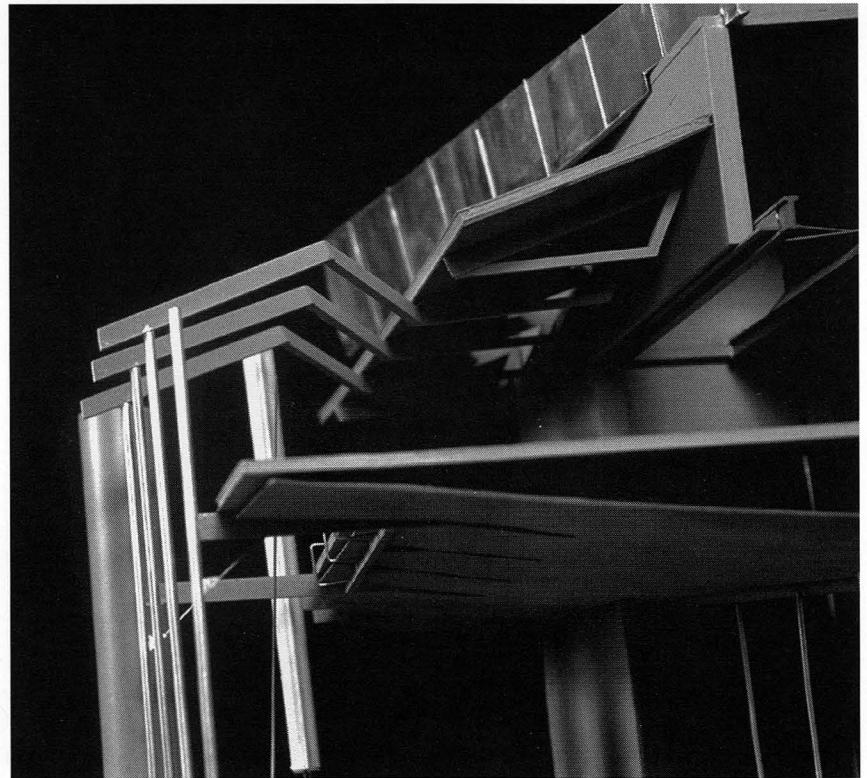
Detail section, Gary Fibich, fourth year design studio

drawings of the practitioner to stand in for the real building in much the same way as the virtual reality constructed by academics stands for a natural reality. The consequence of the practitioner usurping the real within its boundary has pushed the school of architecture into a territory that can only be described as infertile. Students must always fail the test of practice by not re/producing. This boxing operation means that representations made within the walls of the architectural studio become eunuchated—they can't produce. The critical debate between contemporary architectural practitioners and their academic/theoretical counterparts (if and when they talk) can be seen as one for the control of a definition for architectural production and, therefore, architecture itself. This contested territory lies in between the boxes that have been constructed for practice and architectural education.

If architectural education is to step out of this box and participate in the expansion of the definition of architecture, then it is necessary to remove the architectural design stu-

dio from its oppositional stance relative to the practice of architecture. It is only through displacement that the studio can hope to acquire the power to produce representations that can affect change for both architecture and our culturally constructed reality that architecture exists within. However, this displacement of studio is not performed so that a substitute or surrogate for the design studio can be found and inserted into the curriculum. Such an exchange would only serve to strengthen or support a dialogue, and the agreement on definitions, that already exists. Instead, if architectural education is to escape its invisible and indirect confinement of the definition of architecture, then it needs to find a way to produce. To accomplish this goal the studio has to step into the same contested territory that lies between the practice of architecture and architectural education. However, as the studio takes up the production of architecture it can not succeed by mirroring or duplicating the profession. Only by continually defining the potentialities of architecture by its products will it take an active and coop-

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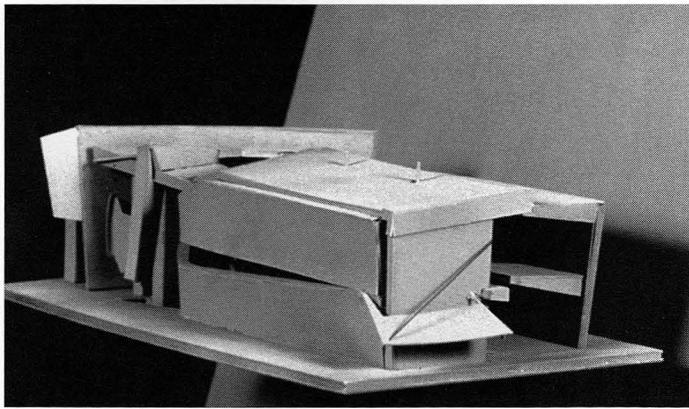
Matthew Krunteraud, fourth year design studio

erative (as compared to its current opposi-tional) role in addressing the problems that beset contemporary practice. The conse-quence of the displacement under discus-sion could be the turning of studio educa-tion into a site of practice that establishes new relationships with practitioners and the general public, shapes what one conceptu-alizes and perceives as architecture, and as a consequence, expands the definition of ar-chitecture, its discipline, and the products it makes.

The following illustrations are the work of fourth year students taught by Professor Cronrath in the Department of Architec-ture at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The focus of the studio is an investigation of society's institutions. Its purpose is to fos-ter a discussion about contemporary insti-tutions, the ideology they serve, and the supporting role of architecture. The studio begins by researching the history of an in-stitution and its associated building type. The research leads to an appreciation of the relationship between a particular cul-tural agenda and its corresponding physi-cal form. The analytical method is diachronic and anthropological/archeo-logical. Upon completion of this analysis each student identifies a set of values and beliefs relative to our contemporary cul-tural agenda—traditional, utopian, or critical. The adjacent illustrations are a result of a studio that looked at the rela-tionship between use value, social value and commodity exchange through the de-sign of a craft gallery. The students inves-tigated the role of craft, consumerism, and artistic production within contemporary society and searched to give their under-standing form. Their aspirations were not the production of an imitation building, but a critical dialogue about architecture and its limits that was provoked through their work and their words.
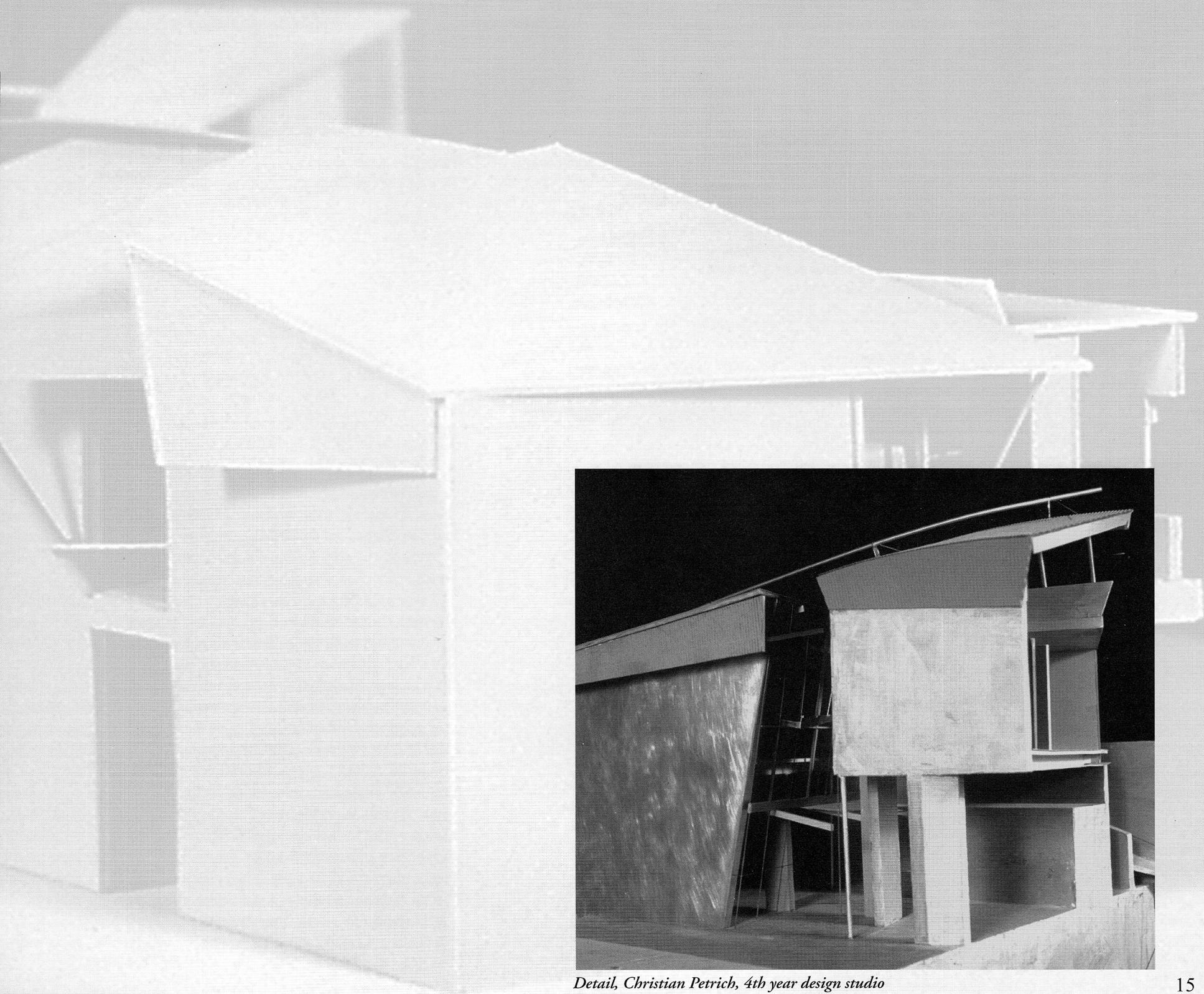
Detail, Christian Petrich, 4th year design studio