HATCH

On the State of Quick Images

HATCH

On the State of Quick Images

Department of Architecture

University of Pennsylvania School of Design

Philadelphia, PA

2016

Hatch: *On the State of Quick Images*

First Printing, 2016

ISBN: 978-0-9796087-5-9

Editors
Michael Royer
Walaid Sehwail
Michael Zimmerman

Printing
Printed in the United States by
CRW Graphics (www.crwgraphics.com)

Published by
Department of Architecture
University of Pennsylvania School of Design
207 Meyerson Hall
210 S. 34th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104
www.design.upenn.edu/architecture

For additional information, please email
the editors at info@hatchconversations.com

Content

Foreword

I don't know, I'm giving you explanations I never thought of before now.

Marcel Duchamp, *The Afternoon Interviews*

A few years ago, I showed up in a dimly lit basement room where a group of PennDesign students were waiting. Unsure of their motives but interested in their curiosity, I had agreed to meet and chat. I was fortunate to have been invited to what became an invigorating discussion full of charged questions and positions. When it ended my hope was that they'd drag more people down into their interrogation room and develop a platform for them to have conversations with those whose work and teachings they were curious about. The group was looking for ways to spark a bigger conversation. They wanted an open dialogue with their mentors and an outlet to bring up their concerns for the discipline. That conversation was an early indication of a dramatic shift that PennDesign has undergone in the past few years, which has revitalized the school. New and visiting faculty, excellent lectures and events, an updated curriculum, studio competitions, and publications are just a few of the elements contributing to the new discussions and tendencies emerging in the school. The changes are most clear in the students and their engagement with each other and the faculty. A strengthened community has emerged, which is talking and debating. The students and their commitment to being part of the larger dialogue they face in the field as they move toward graduation have largely driven this conversation. The students who pulled me into the basement years ago have succeeded in expanding those conversations and also in rewiring the culture of the school. It's not just in the formal conversations they've arranged but also in the ways those have spilled over. From hallway follow-ups to updates after lectures, these conversations continue and multiply.

There has been a healthy rise of discussion series emerging from schools and finding their way to print and video. These recorded moments help capture the interests and explorations going on within the field. Perhaps a

reaction against the anonymous nature of the web or calculated nature of essays and lectures, these discussions meander, take turns, and uncover the unexpected. In a time of one-line anonymous Internet comments and 140 character rants, deep conversations are needed more than ever. These act as a tool for students to understand how one progresses and defines their project and a statement for peers to react to. It's through talking with each other that new understandings will emerge in our work and our field.

The following selection of transcribed conversations captures the energy and curiosity at the school today. A bubbling up of thinking best captured through talking. It is in these conversations where architects articulate their thoughts, not as calibrated essays but honest musings, that new ideas and realizations are unpacked. They provide a moment to step back and articulate what they are working through. Moments of fresh understandings, half thoughts, or maybe even false starts all elucidate the excitement of their offices and teachings. Discussions like these are vital for the field and essential for an architect's development. The project undertaken by *Hatch* encapsulates many of the key discussions taking place at PennDesign and in the discipline at large. It has also amplified the students thinking about the polemics they face and how they can enter into the field. Not satisfied to blindly produce or watch quietly, they have forged a platform for dialogue between their mentors and colleagues; a place to ask questions and delve deeper into their pressing concerns. These conversations beautifully illustrate the school as a place for thought and inquiry. *An important multi-generational conversation has been started.*

Nate Hume
May 2016

Introduction:
On the State of Quick Images

These pages are filled with conversations "Recommended for You" based on your interests in the weird, strange, and mysterious. We have noticed your recent activity on other sites that offer architectural content, and have curated this collection for you to enjoy. Each conversation was held at the University of Pennsylvania School of Design during the spring of 2015 with a group of about twenty to thirty students and one or two faculty members. Please feel free to browse at your own discretion, as there is no particular order by which you should consume this product. Whether you're in the mood for the frothy pleasures of Michael Loverich, reflections of the unknown with Tom Wiscombe and Josh Freese, the ambiguous complexity of Ferda Kolatan, the parafictions of Kutan Ayata, or an agreeable debate between Eduardo Rega and Andrew Saunders, we hope you will find surprising connections that blur distinctions between the individual conversations and the collection as a whole.

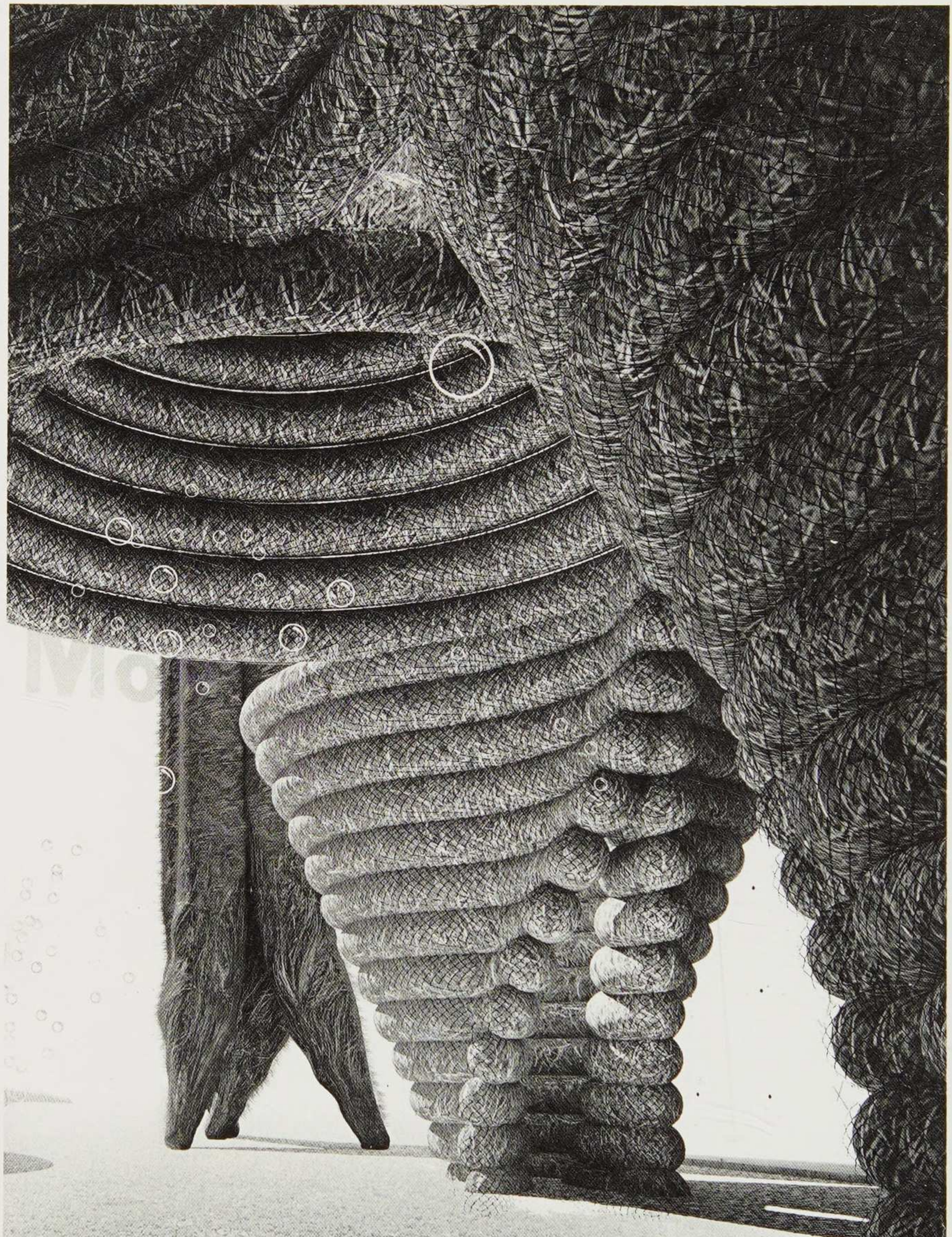
This collection of conversations represents the culmination of many chats, debates, and musings that were fueled by frustrations over how flat the current discourse seems. Early discussions were rooted in the challenge of attempting to locate ourselves within the discipline at a moment when the discipline seemed to be represented by a clutter of projects that championed the state of density, quickness, and lack of canon. The discipline, as we see it, is currently defined by a vast plurality of projects and a new age of viewing (and judging) work via online blogs and social media sites. These sites highlight visual content and quick images, typically with little concern for curation or cohesion. For us, the quick image blurs categories and disciplinary positions to mere images of form, shape, color, style, and trends. Even the boundaries between professional work and student projects are being blurred. We applaud and take part in the current culture of dense, visual media

but we've also attempted to approach these conversations with concern over the disconnection between the image and its disciplinary content. These conversations are an interrogation of the current status of architectural discourse and the implications of the quick image within that status.

Truth be told, *Hatch* was not the first name we decided to call this. The original title aimed to capture, in a more visceral way, the explosive energy that we felt was stimulating these conversations. The decision to change its name—well, that's another story. So for now we have *Hatch*. Simply as a word, hatch is quick, a little more catchy, and a little bit silly. It implies the start of a new life, or the beginning of something new. To hatch a plan is to scheme and conspire. A hatch (as in hatchway) is simply an opening for passage from one space to another. *Hatch* is all of these, and more.

The Editors

CONVERSATIONS



Gels
Rendering
2015

I Never Really Thought of this Stuff as Weird

a conversation with Michael Loverich

Student 1:

On your website, there is a list of different categories such as sculpture, coloration, the pleasurable. Those seem to make sense within architectural discourse, but as the list goes on, there are some weird things on there like babies, animal posturing, and frothy seams. How do you set the limits of the boundaries you work within, and how did you come up with those categories?

Loverich:

One of the biggest things about the boundaries that we set for ourselves is that if it isn't something that is making us laugh, if it's not something that we're enjoying, then it goes away—it's something else, and that's not something that we want to go into. A lot of those themes come from that—we're finding these tendencies that these were the things that were starting to make us laugh, and we enjoy that.

Buru Buru
Photograph
2014

Student 2:

Do you think that architecture takes itself too seriously at a certain point?

Loverich:

I do, for sure, but recently there have been a lot more humorous takes on architecture.

Student 2:

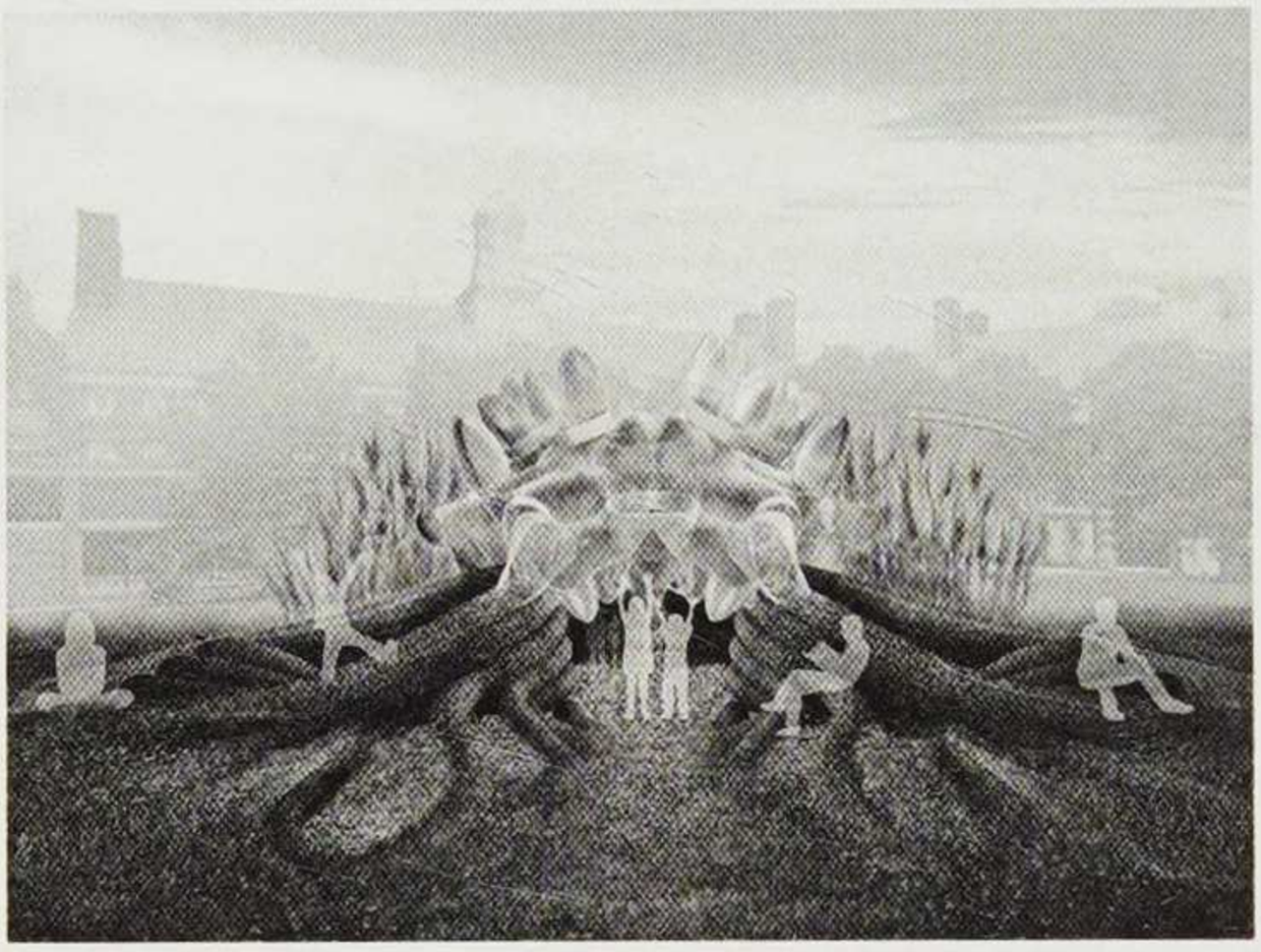
Are you worried that now this humorous thing is going to get extremely disciplined and become not fun anymore?

Loverich:

There's always a little bit of that fear, but our understanding of playfulness, fun, and humor has

also changed. I also don't care that much if people want to take it seriously, as long as I'm still having fun.

Student 1:
As a professor, especially here, you're dealing with students just entering grad school. Do you see them taking it too seriously?



Burple Bup
Rendering
2014

Loverich:
No, the incoming students are great because they're new to it.

Student 1:
Our first year seemed pretty serious.

Student 4:
Yeah, it was definitely different. I was just telling this story today about my first review where I basically did a stand-up routine and it went *very, very, very* badly. [Laughter]

Student 5:
Trust me, I was there.

Student 2:
Is that because you're not funny?

Student 5:
No, it was the opposite. Everyone was laughing, and the professor said, "This isn't a joke!"

Student 4:
I appreciate that you get this stuff actually built because I was passionate about the project, and I tried to marry that with humor, but I guess it didn't go so well in that instance. It's good you bring that level of humor to your work. Humor doesn't mean a lack of caring about the project—it's a different outlook on it. This isn't really a question ... but I say thank you for doing that. [Laughter]

Student 1:
On the other hand, do you see students who might have you as their first professor here, and maybe they're looking at your work—do you see students who bring stuff to the studio that is too carefree or too careless and you have to reel them back in?

Loverich:

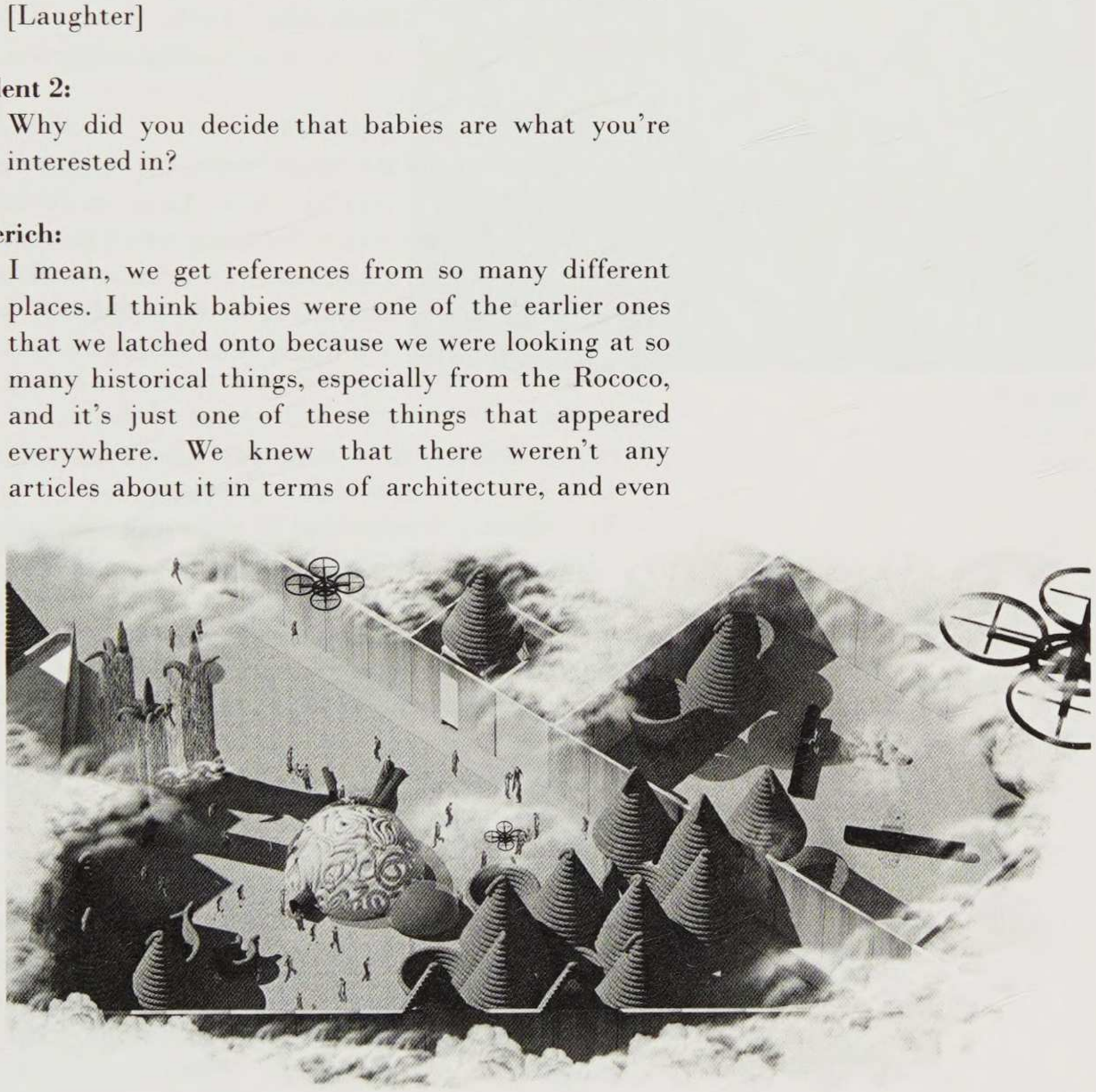
I think there is occasionally a "reeling in." I definitely like it when students make me feel uncomfortable ... where it's like, "Should I say anything or just let this go down its own path?" At some point, as incoming students, some of them don't have enough experience. I wouldn't say it's about trying to rein in the humor so much as trying to be like, "Ok, there are certain things we need to figure out how to do," like techniques or organization or other things. That's the only restraint on that ... or if it makes me so uncomfortable ... then yeah, I'd say something. [Laughter]

Student 2:

Why did you decide that babies are what you're interested in?

Loverich:

I mean, we get references from so many different places. I think babies were one of the earlier ones that we latched onto because we were looking at so many historical things, especially from the Rococo, and it's just one of these things that appeared everywhere. We knew that there weren't any articles about it in terms of architecture, and even



Gels
Rendering
2015

in the art world there wasn't that much, so part of it was thinking, "How can we make something that's totally not architectural into something that is architectural?" It's about trying to find something—like plush toys—how do you make that into something that's architectural? Babies

definitely guided a lot of work, but I wouldn't say that we've successfully figured out how to make a baby architectural, whereas the inflatable work comes directly from all the studies of plush toys.

Burple Bup
Photograph
2014

Student 2:
How do you define weird?

Loverich:
I don't know. Everyone's talking about weird these days, right? [Laughter]

Student 2:
It's like the new fun thing.

Student 10:
In your work, it seems more playful. You have more of a reason for being weird because it's supposed to be more sensual, more human. A lot of people are being weird just to be weird, it seems.

Loverich:
Weird didn't enter into our conversations until relatively recently when someone called our stuff the weirdest thing they'd ever seen. Actually, I think it was Michael Young. I do remember that being very uncomfortable ... because I never really thought of this stuff as weird ... other than that it's different.

Student 5:
Do you consider weird good?

Loverich:
Yeah.

Student 2:
How much do you do in the digital before mocking something up and deciding when something will work?

Loverich:
Quite a bit happens digitally, and we start making the mock-ups when it's time to build it. The digital stuff for this [see image, page 18] was different. Once we started to work with materials, we basically stopped modeling anything and just developed it.

Student 2:

Do you like getting surprises? You talked about the butt that was growing off the one on Governor's Island.

Loverich:

Anything that happens unexpectedly—we want to encourage that. I don't like making things where I know the outcome. Things should grow and change ... and when we make something, we want it to actually take on a life of its own and be something else. That's also part of the idea of a character where you can start to relate to an element if it starts to be able to take on a life of its own and be something else.

Student 5:

Do you ever start with materiality as opposed to an idea?

Loverich:

Yeah, we've done that a few times. Actually, that happens a lot, and then we usually run into problems pretty early because sometimes it's harder to control the material when you're physically doing the studies. If we start with a material, we usually do lots of studies, and then we'll start to work digitally to push it to do things you wouldn't expect it to do.

Student 4:

Do you find that it's tougher to get into the digital realm once you have such specific material qualities?

Loverich:

Yeah, for sure. Some of it, though, like the hay sausages [see image, page 11]—some of that stuff is much easier to model digitally.

Student 5:

How often do you let the design wander as you discover how the material works and progress through the job?

Loverich:

We definitely wander a bit. Thinking of the wax room or even Buru Buru, we knew the general shape and how we thought we were going to make it, but there were other issues that started to come up. They wouldn't necessarily stack the way that

we wanted them to, and even just getting them up as high as they were supposed to go became a construction challenge, so we had to develop these techniques for getting them up, which then also began to alter the form a bit. Not the form, more the surface articulation. We realized it wasn't looking exactly the way we were expecting, so we had to figure out how to work with the materials to get it to do something that was good and didn't require making something entirely new. The hay was working in a way we hadn't anticipated, so we took those sausages down and reworked them ... much to the disappointment of everyone that had helped stack them up.

For the fortune cookie holders [see image, page 18], those were made out of balloons filled with plaster and then shaped. When we cut off the balloon tip, which was actually an accident, it became the perfect holder for the fortune cookie. That was the thing that grasped it, so that was when the materiality definitely led the design. We decided not to force it, since that was too easy ... too perfect. It's a hard thing, because it's an intuitive thing when you're testing it out. Many times we'll compare renderings of things to see what's working or what's not, and then we have a design charrette thinking, "Ok, how can we get it to be the best of both options?"

Student 2:

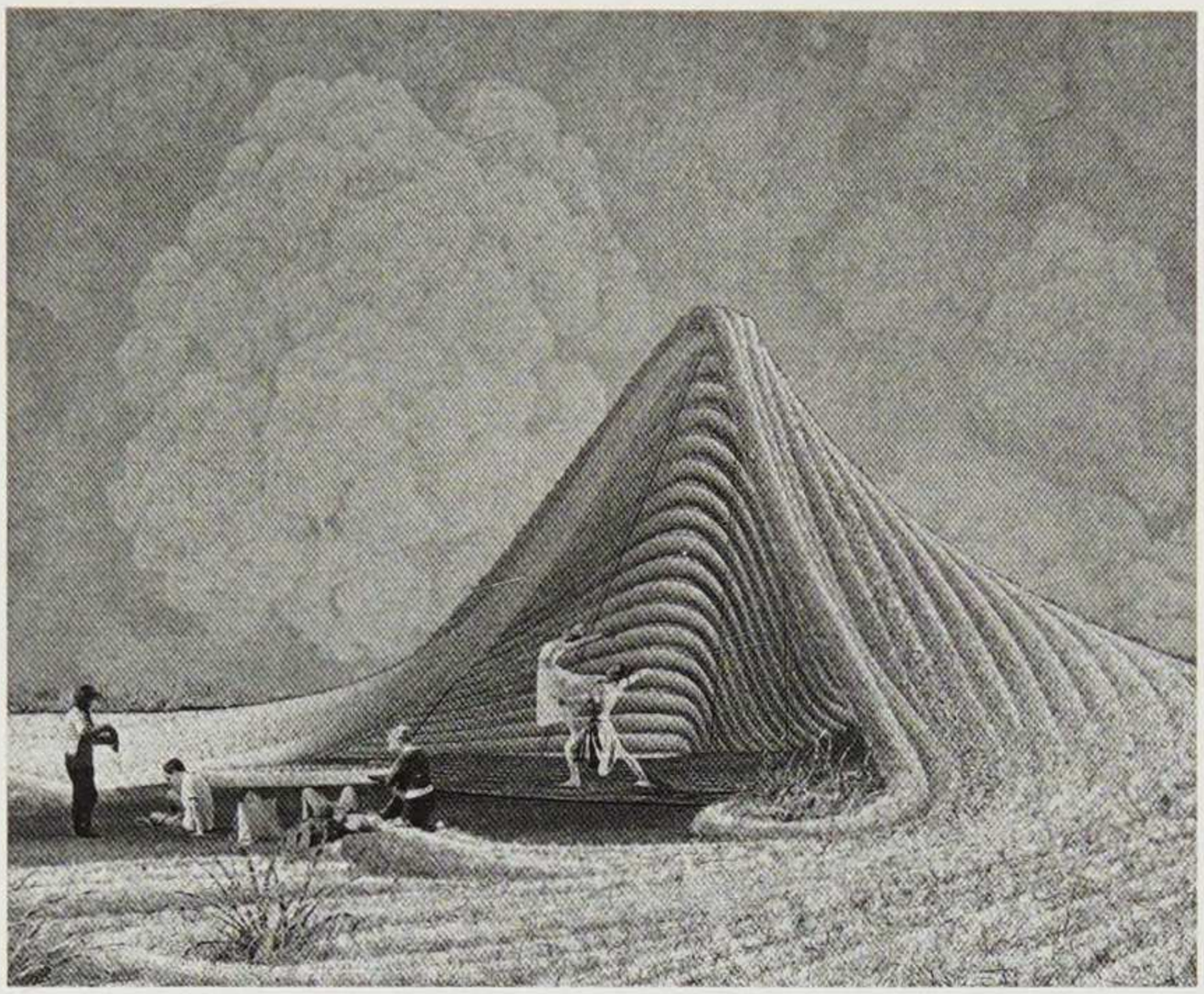
When you're comparing the rendering and the thing, are you comparing them so that it looks like the renderings, or are there other qualities in the object that you're looking for? How do you make the decisions about what you end up with?

Loverich:

I think it's mainly quality. Sometimes the form ends up better than the rendering. Sometimes it's forced to look like the render. Going back to the hay stacking—the rendering showed the hay stacking in a much more dynamic and interesting way before it was redone. Even though the form was slightly different, that was the quality that we wanted to get out of it. We're somewhat loose in the design documents that we show. These are guidelines for how we think that it's going to go. It's going to be pretty close to this, but it's going to be different. We know that from the beginning.

Student 3:

For the Buru Buru project, the haystack is something familiar, but you introduce it in a very unfamiliar way. The sausage haystack is more organic instead of the cubed hay that we're used to seeing. That's one aspect of it—taking the familiar and estranging it. Then, you also introduce these red A-frames. The red brings up the idea of a farm or something. It's very familiar. It's not strange at all, but it makes the hay look strange. It seems like the intention wasn't the A-frame being there, because it's not in your renderings, but I think it makes it so much better.



Buru Buru
Rendering
2014

Loverich:

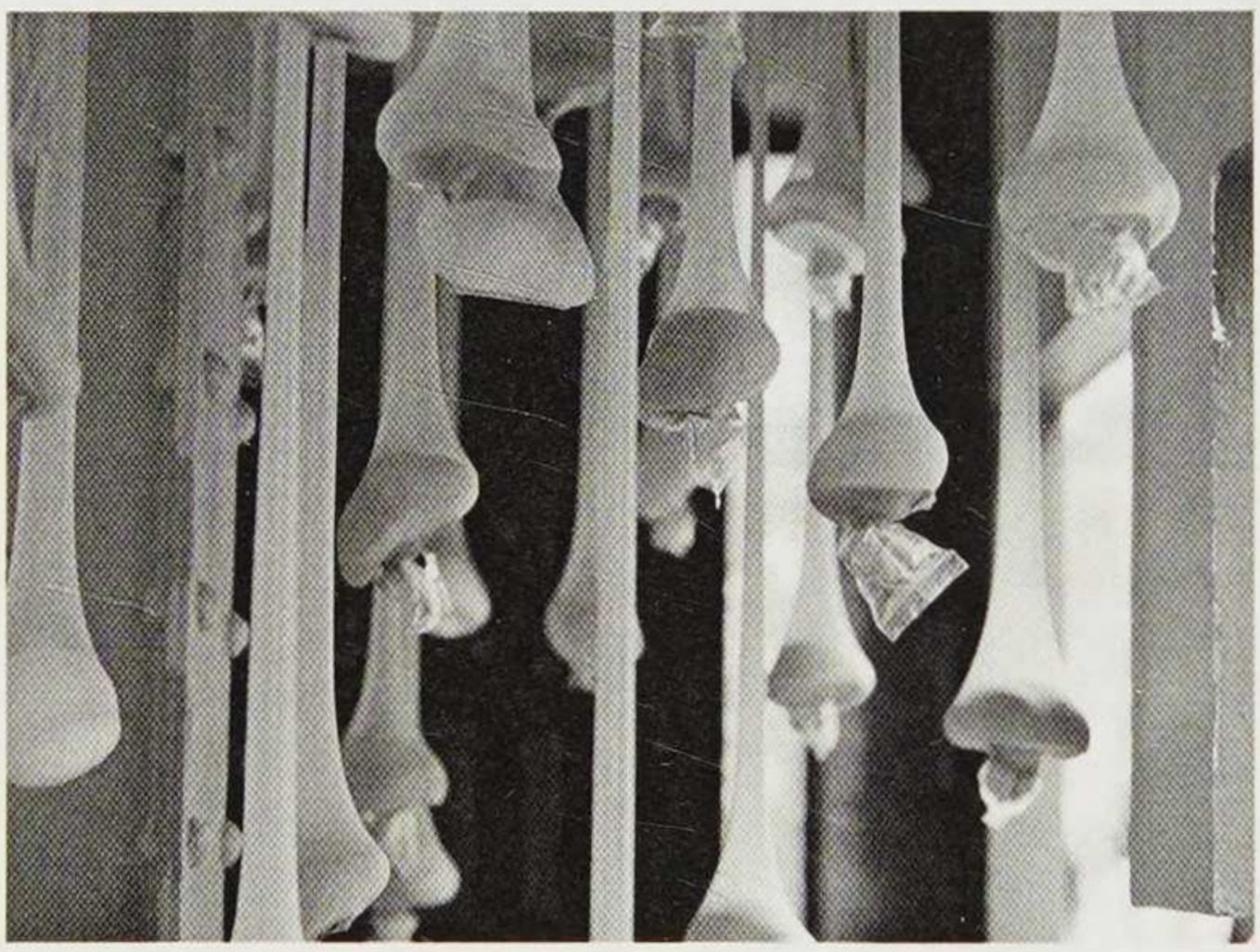
Initially, it wasn't there because there was a hidden tripod of steel that had a net that was tensioned between it, which we had a structural engineer work on for a month saying, "There's no way this is going to work. There's no way. You need foundations like crazy." We needed something cheap that we could do, and we were very excited about the possibility of an A-frame structure underneath. I'm definitely very glad that it's there. The net that's there is dyed pink, so the whole interior was supposed to be extremely pink. When you get up close, you start to see it, but the frame definitely begins to bring it out more. It looks like a very normal structure ... but that was such a bitch—[Laughter]—because nothing is parallel. We did about thirty iterations for what the structure should look like. This is the one that we settled on because it was the one that felt the least rigid ... that flowed and angled differently to the audience. Even the structural engineer said, "You guys suck. Why can't you make anything parallel?"

Student 1:

How much do you think about the "familiar" versus the "weird" or the "unfamiliar?" You're obviously looking at things, like the qualities of babies that get manifested through form and materials, but do you think about it within projects ... like, how familiar this will be for people to relate to or do you push it the other way to create different readings of it?

Loverich:

I think different readings is probably something more that we strive for. We haven't necessarily talked about the "familiar," but it does come in because it's sometimes easier to do, especially with the structure. We did talk about barns and we were looking at more complex roof structures, but in the end, we settled on a variation of the A-frame because it made a lot of structural sense. We were able to play with the spacing and the shaping of it, but the "familiar," as an idea, wasn't necessarily a conversation in that project.



Fortune Mommies
Photograph
2014

Student 2:

You use quasi-familiar things too—things that people recognize, but obviously it makes them uncomfortable ... like the bondage belt tying things together, the fleshlights, and some of the other stuff. How do you want people to read that? Do you think seeing that is good?

Student 3:

Will recognizing it improve the project?

Loverich:

I don't think it matters.

Student 2:

But does it matter to you guys? It's almost like you're hiding things in it.

Loverich:

I enjoy hiding things in there. I guess it is subversive. It's fun to slip things in. Whether or not someone sees it doesn't matter to us so much. Most people see lots of different things in this stuff.

Student 3:

What influences your work? I know you're not part of a crew, but is there someone that you look up to who has influenced your work? If you were to look back at the disciplinary field, do you belong somewhere? Do you have a relationship to Jason Payne, for instance?

Loverich:

Well, that's the easiest one to situate myself in. Jason and Heather [Roberge] are definitely like archi-parents. Basically, all of the instructors I had at UCLA. Greg Lynn, for sure ... even though he hardly met with us, there were a few things he said that were some of the most powerful things that I still remember. Also Jesse [Reiser] and Nanako [Umemoto]. Much of it too is that you're fighting them the whole time that you're learning from them.

Student 3:

Did you have Bob Somol? Was he there while you were there?

Loverich:

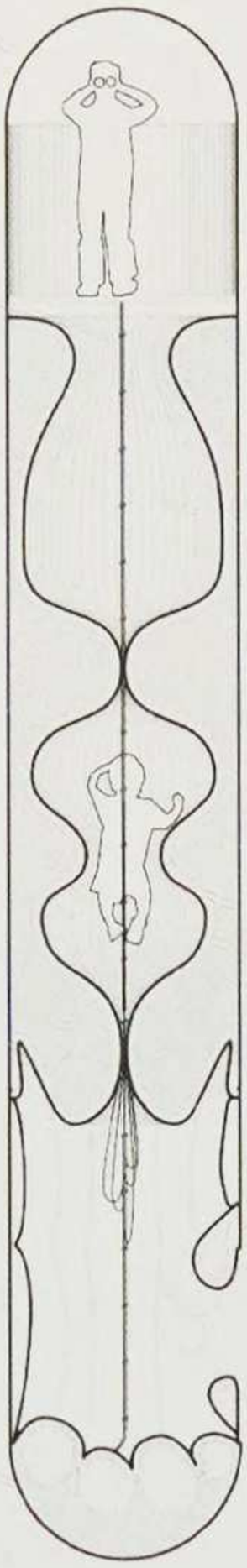
He was there my first year.

Student 3:

Did he influence you at all?

Loverich:

For sure, but he left so early. I remember in terms of reviews, he was super influential, but he wasn't there enough. Sylvia [Lavin] was there the whole time, but she was just on reviews.



Pink Fortress
Drawing
2013

Student 1:

Are there specific things that you're working on that you think you've taken from those people and have now made your own?

Loverich:

Heather and Jason talked a lot about tactility while I was there. That was something I was interested in before I got to UCLA, but I was thinking about it in such a totally abstract and different way that it wasn't until being there that I thought I could be much more literal about it—much more humorous about it. The plush toy was a direct reaction to what was going on in David Erdman's classes. There were other things, but it's hard to pinpoint because I worked with many people who shared similar sensibilities and was equally influenced by my time at Snohetta as well.

Student 2:

Did you fit in at Snohetta? You said earlier that you got stuck with the weird things in the office. Did you enjoy doing that?

Loverich:

For sure. It was so much fun because they just let me do stuff, and if it got rejected ... whatever! [Laughter]

The coolest thing I worked on there was a dollhouse. It was the most expensive dollhouse ever. It was also a very sexual dollhouse, which everyone seemed to be totally fine with ... kind of.

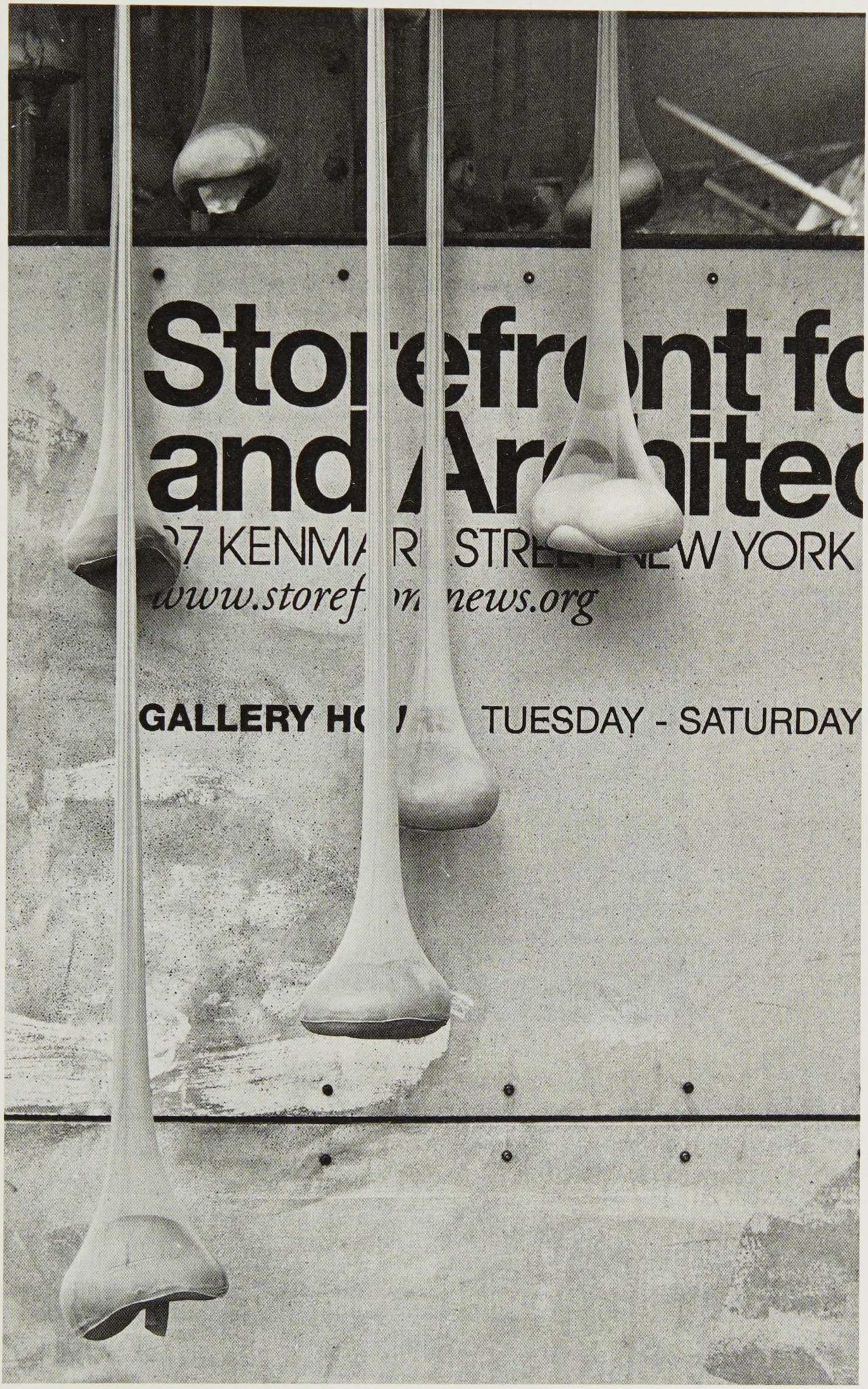
Student 1:

I wanted to ask you about narrative. Something that I thought was interesting on your website—the more you click through, you realize that characters, or things you've designed for one project, end up in other places. Does narrative help you talk about the work at the end, or do you see it as a way of developing ideas while you work through a project?

Loverich:

They are primarily used as we're working through the project. They're actually a super common thing, but we never actually end up doing specific work to showcase those narratives. The plush toys have a bunch of stories about them and most of the projects have some idea and narrative behind them.

(Opposite)
Fortune Mommies
Photograph
2014


Storefront fo
and Ar ite
97 KENMA R STRE NEW YORK
www.storef n news.org
GALLERY H TUESDAY - SATURDAY

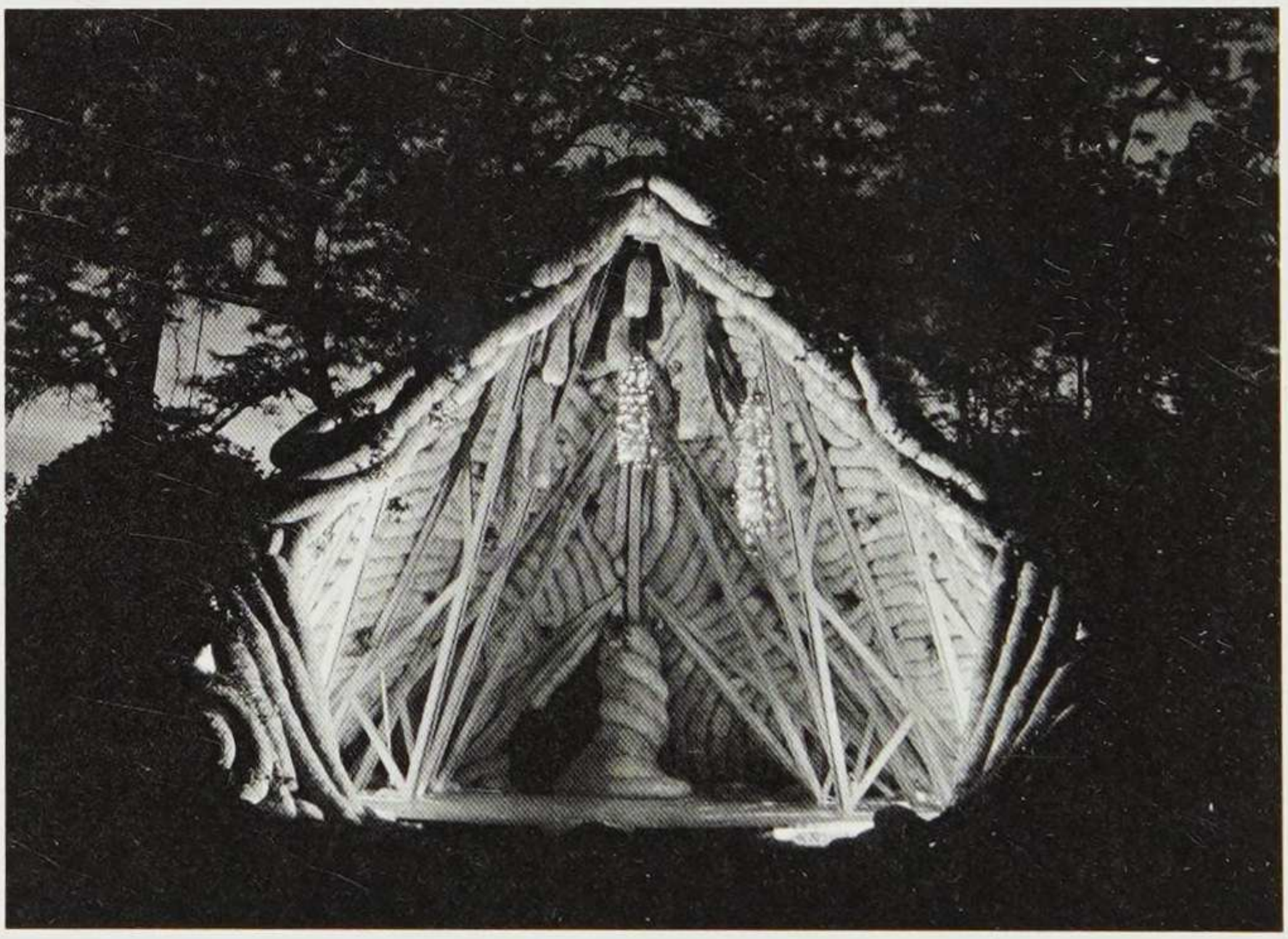
Some of it also has to do with communication, especially when you have to talk about physical things with someone who's not in the same space as you. Narrative, actually, became a way for Antonio and I to start to talk about things in a very specific way. You can start to create a story around our creatures or projects so the other person can understand how the thing functions, how it could move, which all relates to formal qualities or to other things.

Student 2:

Were you guys always in New York and Mexico?

Loverich:

There was a year and a half where we were in New York at the same time.



Buru Buru
Photograph
2014

Student 5:

What's the dream Bittertang project?

Loverich:

I don't know if there is one. We've been obsessed with water recently, and one of our first projects was a proposal for an aquaculture project that was all made of gelatin. So I don't know ... if someone was to come to us with anything to do with water, we'd be really excited. I don't know what that is. It could be Seaworld!

Student 10:

Your work is so different than anything that I've seen, so I'm wondering what led you to architecture? What was your background?

Loverich:

I've been doing architecture the whole way through, and one morning I said, "I want to be an architect," so there's not a very good story.

The other thing that I'd love to do is cooking. Most of our projects get cooked somehow. [Laughter] There's so much wax, and we try melting things, or we will use food materials as things to explore.

Student 2:

When did your work start to go down this alley? In undergrad, were you making things and were there people saying, "That doesn't look quite like what the other people are making?"

Loverich:

In undergrad my work definitely looked different, but I would say that the work transformed early on in grad school. I did some animal stuff in undergrad, but it looked pretty tame.

Student 2:

What's your favorite word?

Loverich:

Well, I've been very intrigued by words that start with "sm" because if you look those words up they're fucking disgusting. [Laughter]

Student 10:

Smells, smegma, smudges, smites, smorgasborg ...

Loverich:

There's a weird visceral quality to "smuh" when you say it. Like smooch. [Laughter]

Student 2:

Do you have any projects that begin with "sm"?

Loverich:

No, I keep trying to get that in there, but again, it's too hard, because sometimes it's too—

Student 2:

—You don't want to make the project by the name?

Loverich:

Yeah.

Student 3:

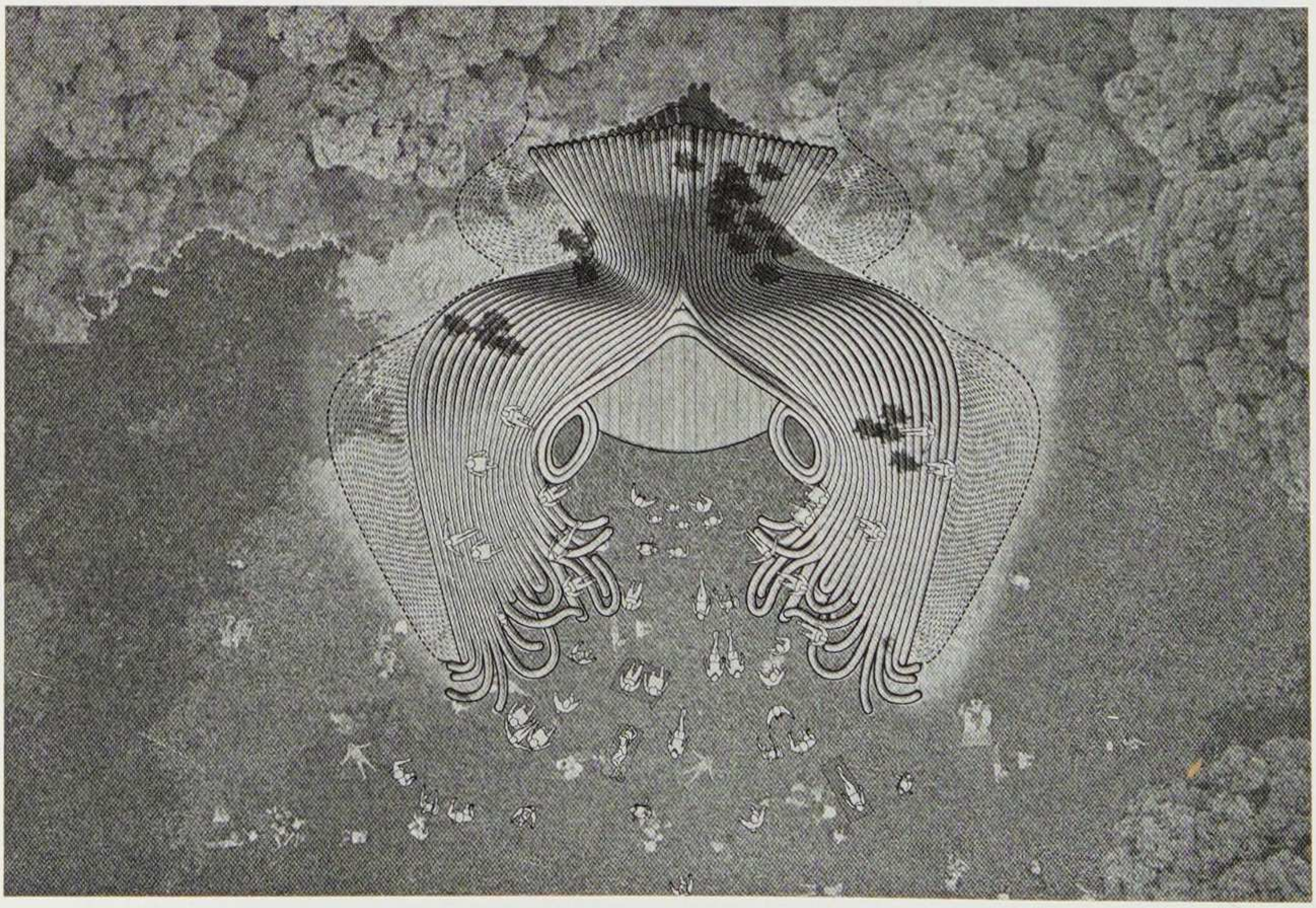
How do you get the title? You have some really great titles.

Loverich:

The names are sometimes about how they make us feel. There's something about Burble Bup ... the name came from us going back and forth about the kind of sounds that we thought this was making and settled on Burple Bup. We always Google it to make sure there is nothing out there that has the same name. It also comes down to how it sounds on the mouth. For Buru Buru, at some point, we thought it looked like a volcano—like a tropical volcano. We actually went through volcano names and found one called Buru, so we thought that was cool.

Actually, this was kind of funny. I had to print out a portfolio, and I go to Kinko's all the time to print out my portfolios and the guy who printed it out—he was looking through it, and he said, "Buru Buru

Buru Buru
Rendering
2014



... why did you call this Buru Buru?" I said, "I don't know. It was the name that we came up with." He said, "I'm from Buru Buru." [Laughter]

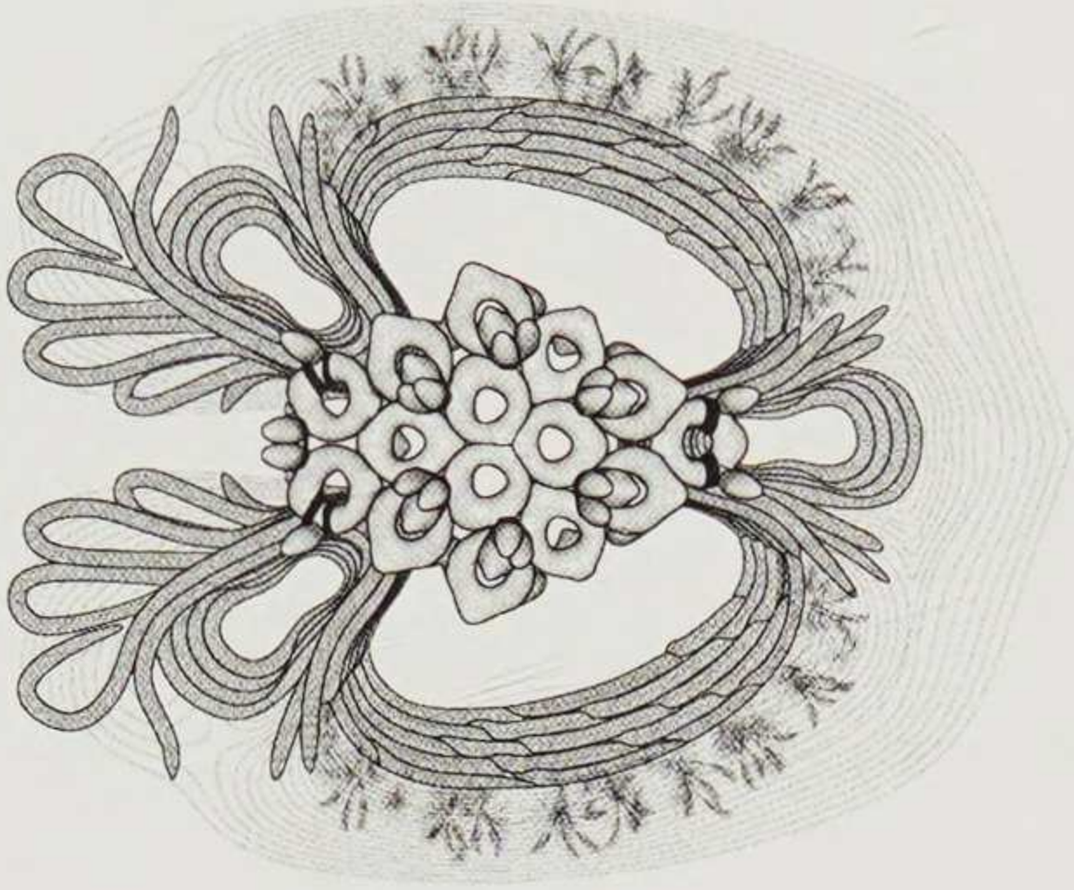
I said, "What? Buru Buru is a place?"

"Yes," he said, "It's in Kenya. It's this neighborhood ... you've got to look it up."

So I looked it up, and he was totally right! We never found this the entire time, and it just happened that the guy looking through my portfolio was from there. [Laughter]

Student 3:

Does any kind of disciplinary theory influence any of your work or do you try to avoid it?



Burple Bup Drawing
2014

Loverich:

I think we try and avoid stuff, but it's hard to.

Student 3:

I'd imagine it's hard, especially being in an academic setting.

Loverich:

We went to school and teach so we got a lot of that, so it's hard to separate. Whenever we realize we're falling into something, we either try and embrace it or reject it.

Student 5:

I'm very curious. If you were forced into a situation where you had to build an office building, like in Midtown, how would you approach it? Would you work on the material of it? When it comes to something that's required to have such set standards and be practical in many different ways ...

Loverich:

Yeah ... I might focus on the bathroom. How you pull out the shelves in the drawers, where the water closet is located ... and how people get water.

Student 5:

That's really interesting.

Loverich:

I'm not sure how much I would like to work in something where everything is totally crazy. Finding the moments—so it might be more regular or expected—but then the faucets are something different.

Romulus & Remus
Drawing
2014

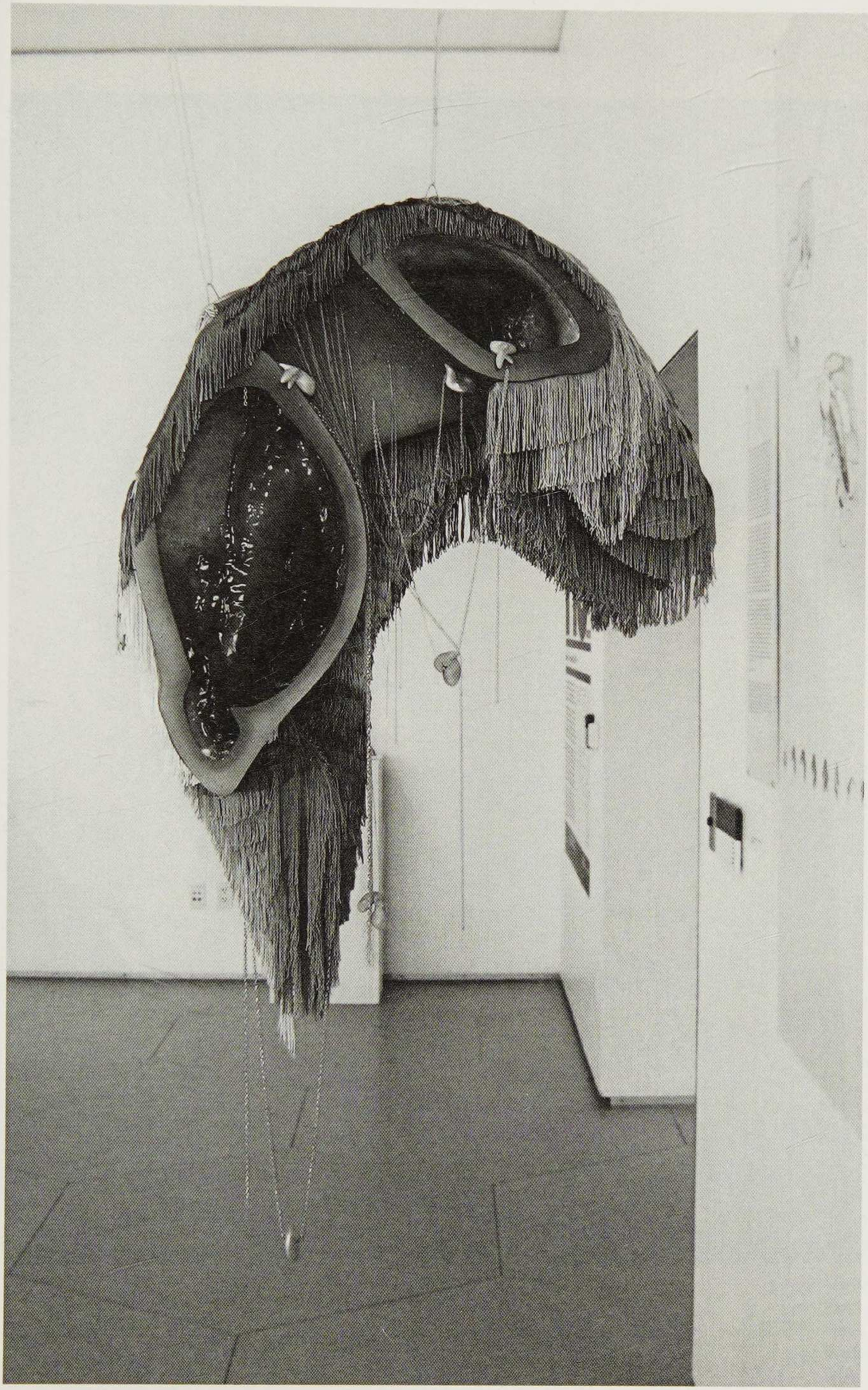
Student 8:

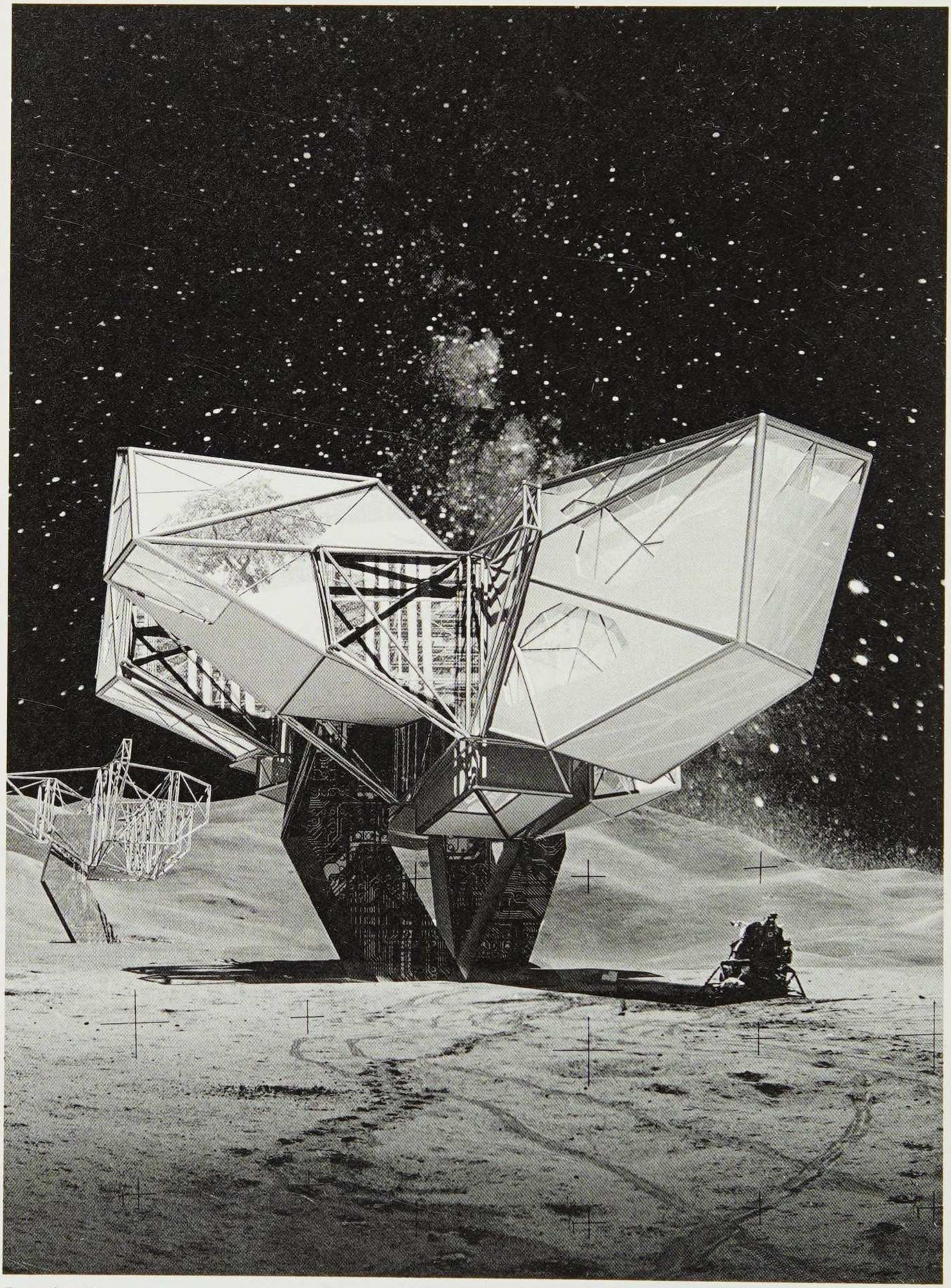
I also used to be a cook, and I'm very passionate about cooking. I'm very curious to hear what characteristics do you think make someone good or interested in both architecture and cooking?

Loverich:

The thing I like about cooking—if you think about things like yeast or eggs—the enjoyment of it is being able to turn an egg into a giant soufflé, or knead bread to make super airy dough. There's a way of understanding materials and how you can get it to do something totally different that has no relationship to an egg. That's the thing that translates more into architecture—figuring out how to make one thing into something else. It's all model-making to me ... but the great thing about food is that it's also super pleasurable.

(Opposite)
Romulus & Remus
Photograph
2014





Rega Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Rendering
2014

Discourse Is Another Term for Criticality

a conversation with Eduardo Rega and Andrew Saunders

Saunders:
One of the things I really like about Eduardo's approach is the idea of autonomy within architecture. It acknowledges that there is a discourse, the interior discourse of architecture, that is something to mine and reproduce. That's where we share some similarities, even though formally or aesthetically, we probably have completely different outputs.

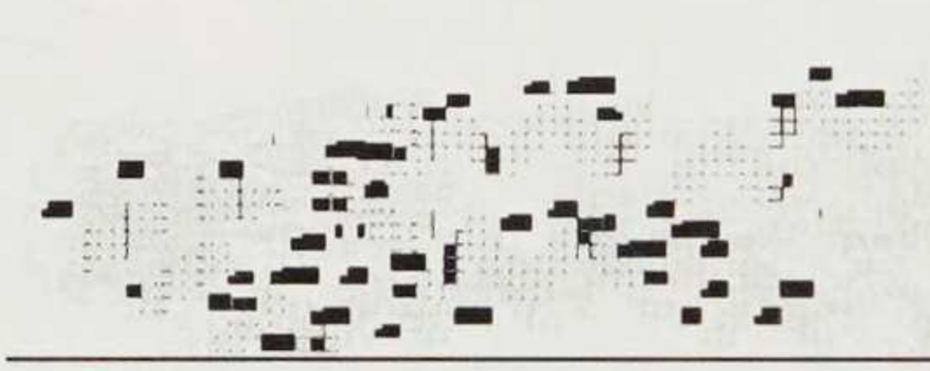
When you talk about the autonomy of architecture, it seems that you're really quite literally drawing from, or referencing, modernist projects. In the latest slide [see image, page 28], it's really utopian Modernist projects that are being used as a language to establish. It's much like [Rem] Koolhaas who, also having a screen writing background, takes a narrative approach. Certain elements throughout his architecture are stolen from all of these modernist projects and reconfigured in order to construct a narrative, which actually works really well in his early projects.

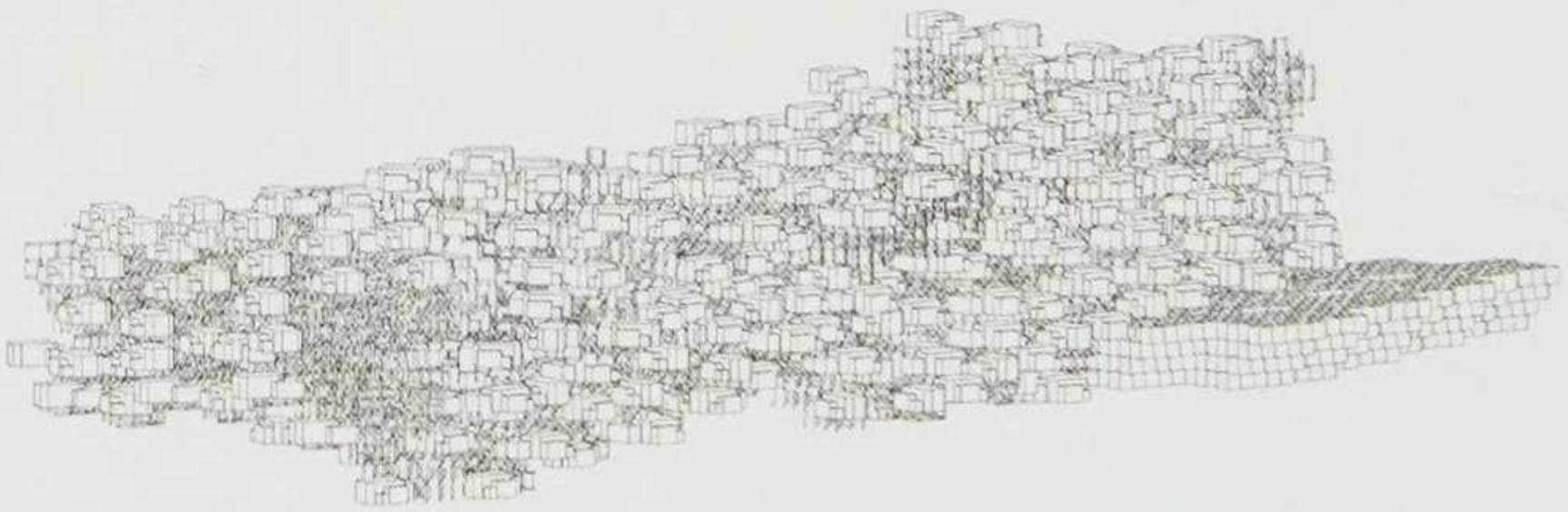
That's quite different from my approach, where I wouldn't limit the set of references to Modernism, and I wouldn't necessarily take it so literally as a design language. If we're referencing Baroque or Nolli or any of these older ideas or concepts, we're not literally taking the language of that architecture, but trying to take more of a formal understanding of the structure of that architecture. The reason why I avoid being too literal is because I like the abstraction. There's a certain romanticism to it in the sense that you can start to create things that haven't been seen before ... which is a typical type of avant-garde mentality. So it seems that your discourse and the use of the modern language, repositions it in a certain way, activates it, and creates its own novelty and avant-garde approach. But it doesn't seem to be in the same romantic way of the "new" ... so maybe that's just a conversation point ...

Rega:

Yes, that's an important point. We use modern examples, but we also use examples from today. Let's take an example of a spatial tactic, or trope, we developed in my studio, the megastructure. The notion of the megastructure has transformed over time, and when we reassess the megastructure, we are taking into account contemporary projects as well. The point is that the manual we propose for the megastructure has never been seen before because it learns and extracts fragments from multiple architectural references, operations, typological moves, and agendas on the city. There is, consequently, not one project that can fully respond to the manual that we end up writing of the megastructure. Not Yona Friedman's nor any other can be defined entirely through the manuals we develop in our studio because there are new, contemporary preoccupations and student criteria in the selection of references that infect the new type.

Rega Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Drawing
2015





We do use those fragments literally, and we even engage in producing what we call "proto-documents," following Federico Soriano, an old architecture professor of mine from Madrid. To do these, we take actual fragments from existing architecture projects, using drawings like plans and sections to recombine them very loosely ... but following the agendas of each student. Those become the first iterations of a possible project that then gets redrawn over and over again until it gains autonomy from the process and can be defended outside of it.

So, I guess that answers the question of the presence of Modernism in our selection of examples. When you referred to romanticizing the examples, they're actually not romanticized at all. In any case, they are highly perverted. We use the term "post-production" very much. We post-produce our drawings, fragments, and outside references all the time, and it's through post-production, like in the culture of the DJ—but in our case, using Photoshop, Grasshopper, Maya, or whatever tool the student wants to engage with. This will depend on the agenda, ambitions, and level of expertise of the student. The non-romanticizing aspect comes through the notion and practice of post-production. We remix everything as long as there is a clear agenda and purpose for that manual and that contemporary interpretation of the manual.

But that's on one side ... the side that relates to the project of autonomy. It also has to do with the point of abstraction that you make, which relates to [Peter] Eisenman and his essay, "Autonomy or the Will to be Critical," among others. He raises this notion of abstraction and the ambition of achieving deeper structures, deeper geometries, deeper forms of geometric organization and diagramming, in order to arrive at a certain essence of the field. In a way, that could also be romanticized. The problem with Eisenman's proposition, I would say, is that it's difficult to evaluate, or to generate the frameworks of evaluation, because it detaches from history. It detaches from its surroundings, from almost everything, in order to arrive at this essential condition, where almost everything depends on the process. The geometric processes and steps take it to that point where it is suddenly pushing the autonomy of the field and innovating within its own discourse. But my main problem with that position is that it's very difficult to evaluate, since it's the end of history ... we evaluate it against what? Against itself.

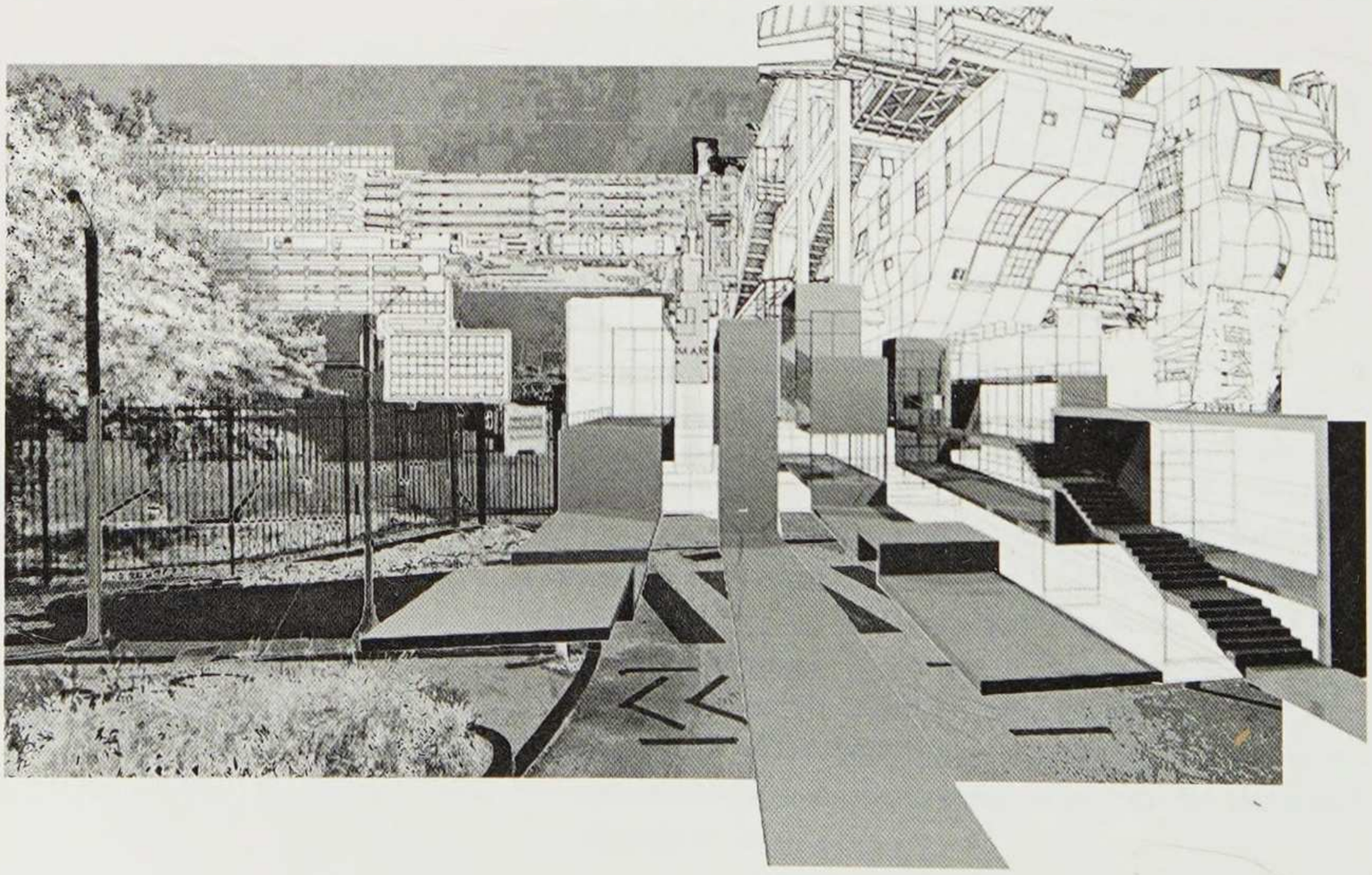
But this leads me to a question for you then ... I think that through your geometric explorations, there is a lot of potential for typological innovation, an aspect of autonomy that I am interested in as well. I do think that there is a lot of innovation in the typologies that those forms are enacting ...

Saunders:

You know, Eisenman was certainly a huge influence on me in many ways, but I think that just as much so was working with [Preston] Scott Cohen. The part of Eisenman's discourse that interests me is that he just knows history, and he knows it very well from his formalist background. He is one in a long generation that goes to Colin Rowe, to [Rudolph] Wittkower, and all the way back to German art historians. Certainly, Scott Cohen is a part of that lineage as well. He's not something radically different ... but Eisenmann's deep structuralism is much more semiotic, from his work with Derrida and the syntactically based work in the houses. But I was less interested in the idea of reading architecture as a language which was meant to be read, which he's very good at ... but that's also the way he sees the world.

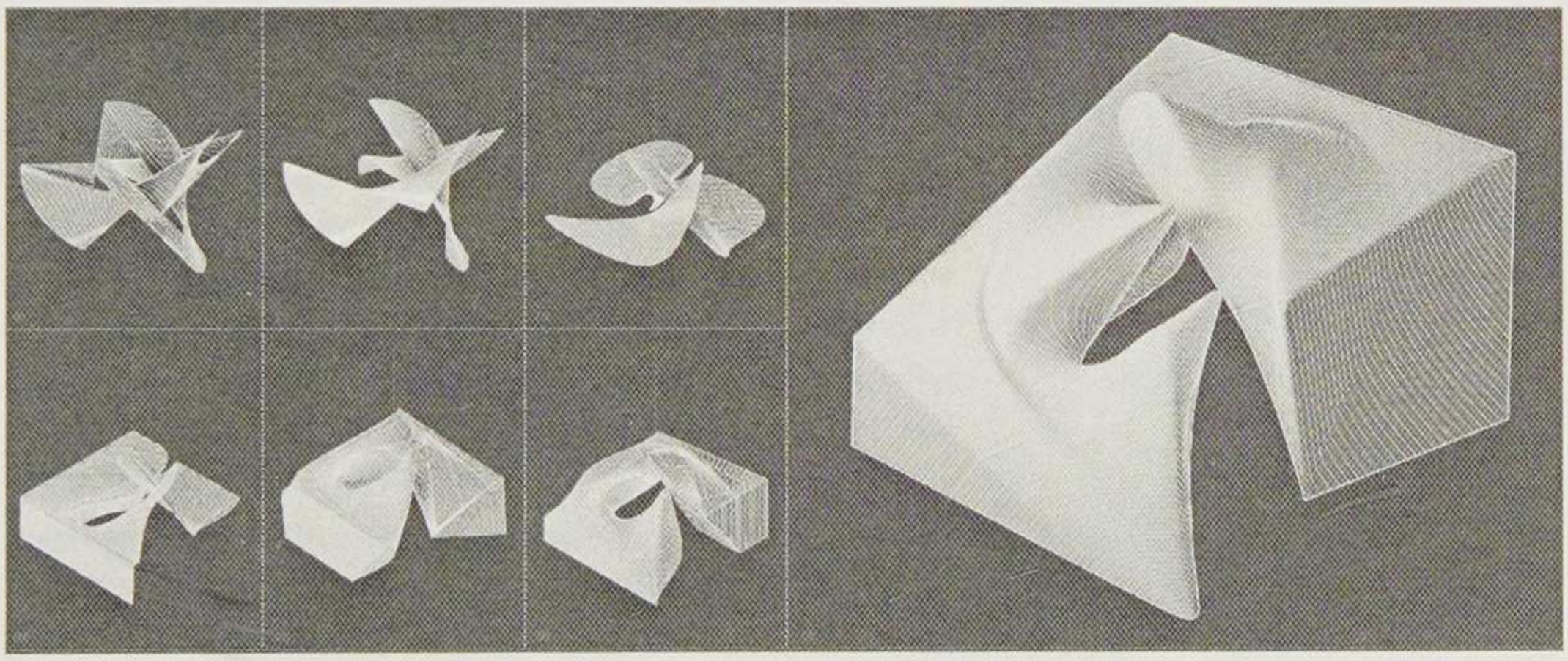
Scott Cohen comes from a similar discourse, but probably via Robin Evans, who's looking at projective geometry and how it can be much more spatial. His discourse is more about a way to read architecture that comes from stereotomy and the history of architecture from orthographic drawings to perspective. It's less about the deep structure, meaning, and semiotics, but more about the spatial geometry, abstraction, and the understanding of geometry as a discipline. For Scott, it is projective geometry, which is also my personal interest.

Rega Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Drawing
2014



Eisenmann has the grid, and the grid is the deep structure, whereas Scott has projective geometry, where every line comes together in three dimensions ... and there's a whole discourse to the idea of geometry producing something other than itself. Projected geometry is what the artist gave back to geometry after perspective. It was sort of an accident.

The thing that ties those two together is the idea of generative analysis, which is also in your project, Eduardo. And this idea of generative analysis is what I've always liked about someone like [Gilles] Deleuze. Deleuze was very good at it ... the first books that he ever wrote were all books on other philosophers from [Michel] Foucault to [Henri] Bergson to Plato. So, I'm not that interested in Deleuze as a geo-philosopher, but I'm interested in him as a disciplinarian, as a philosophical disciplinarian, who was able to rewrite the books about his philosophers and make them say something else.



Saunders Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Drawing
2015

It's an interesting point to consider in some reviews. That's a goal that any student should have when taking a course here from an instructor that brings a certain discourse. You have to suspend your disbelief. You obviously want to gain value from that instructor and that exposure, but I think your duty is not to fight it or not to endorse it but to try to really understand what the discourse is ... so much so that you can make it say something else. For my students, what would be great would be if they could follow along so well that they can all of a sudden say things that I haven't said, couldn't say, or wouldn't even think about saying before.

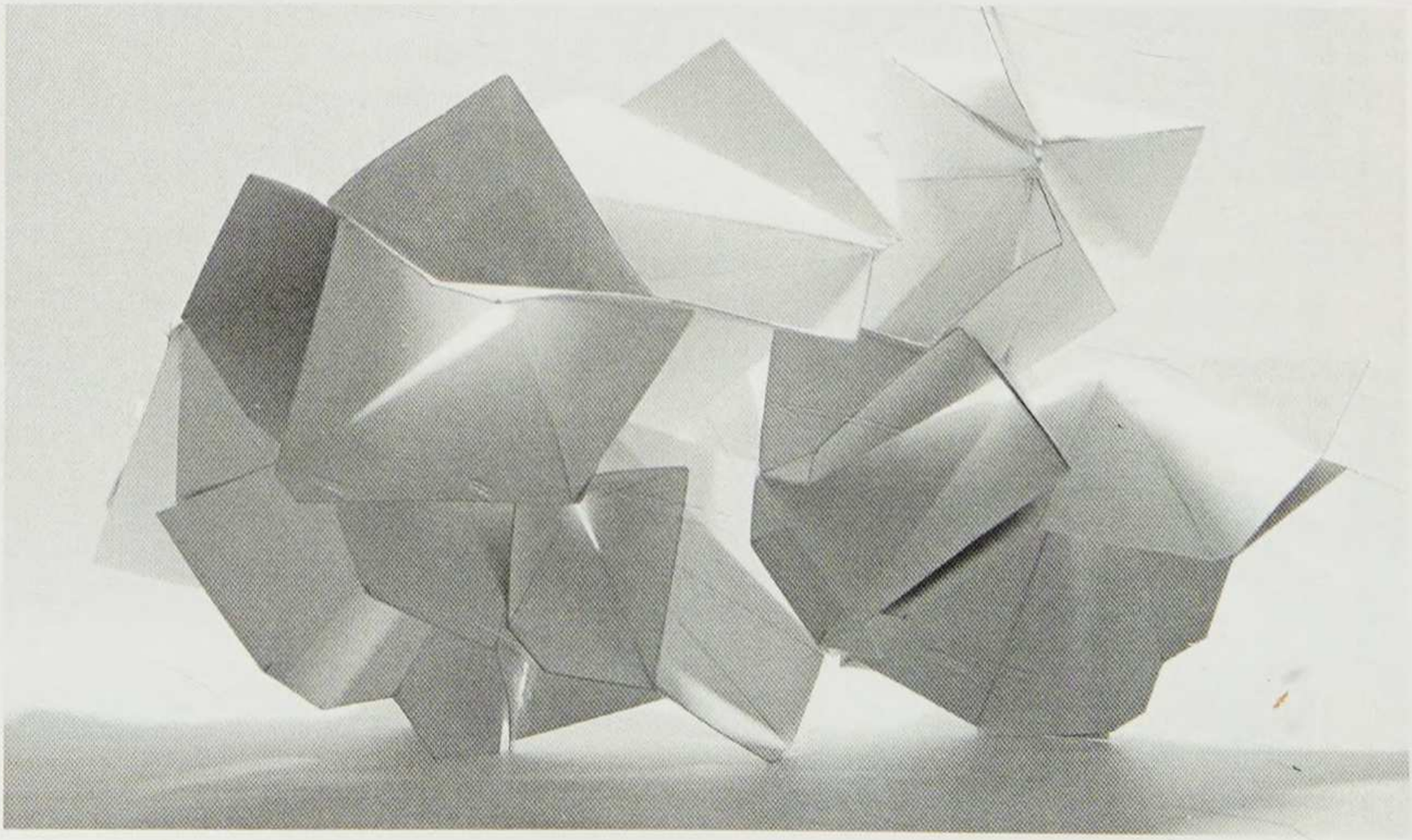
Student 2:

Something that is great about this comparison is that the work takes very different directions, but something that is clearly very important to each project is the development of the process along the way and the use of precedents within that process. My question is about the relationship between the process and the final product. For each of you, how much of the process do you want to be read in the final product of the design? How important is that? If it's not important for you that the process should be read to evaluate the final product, then by what criteria should the final design be evaluated?

Rega:

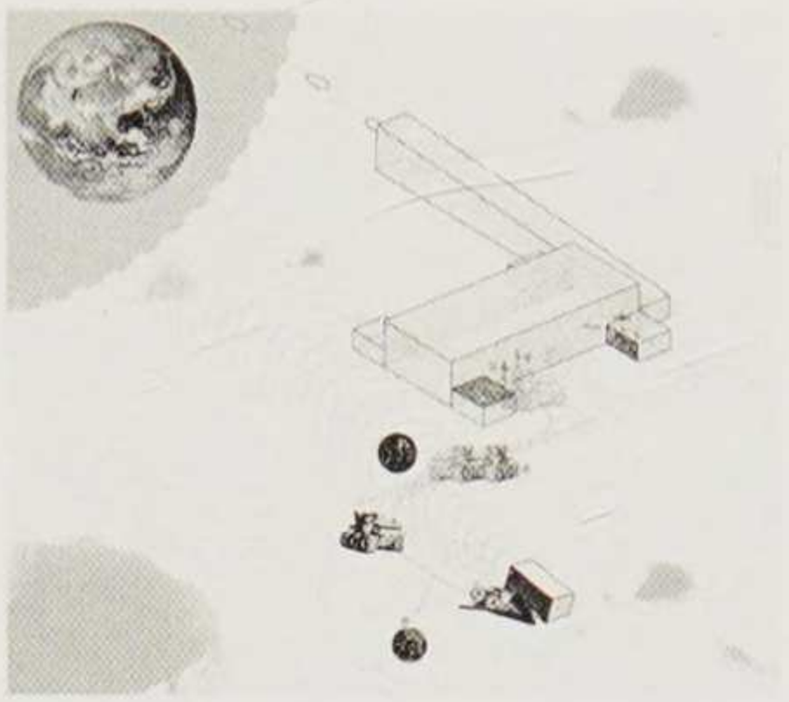
Yes. So in my case, the process does not validate the project. The project validates itself. The process helps us generate what I described before; a collective intelligence that gives us tools for evaluation and of design that will allow us to arrive to form, typology, and so on, and is responding to a specific narrative, fiction, or set of described conflicts. It gives us that framework of evaluation, but it's not like, "If I follow step one up to step ten, then I don't need to explain the project in its own terms because it's seamless," as if having done all of these iterations from one to ten suddenly validates ten. No, ten validates itself, and the process creates the tools that allow us to get to ten and also generates a common ground of discussion for the whole studio. At the end of the day, I always argue

Saunders Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Rendering
2014

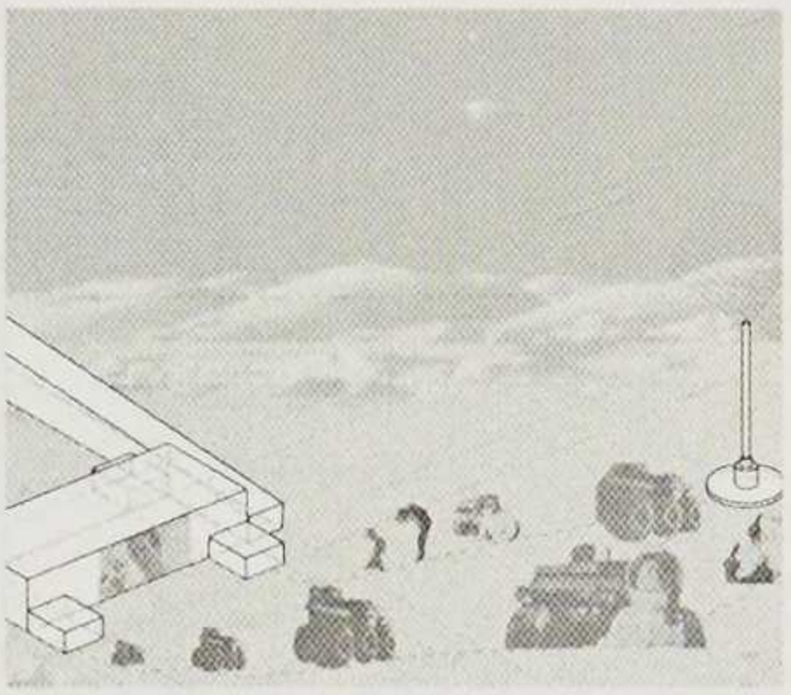


against this when the students present their work by saying, "First I did this, then I did that, and then I used that, and then I used that, and then we arrived to this."

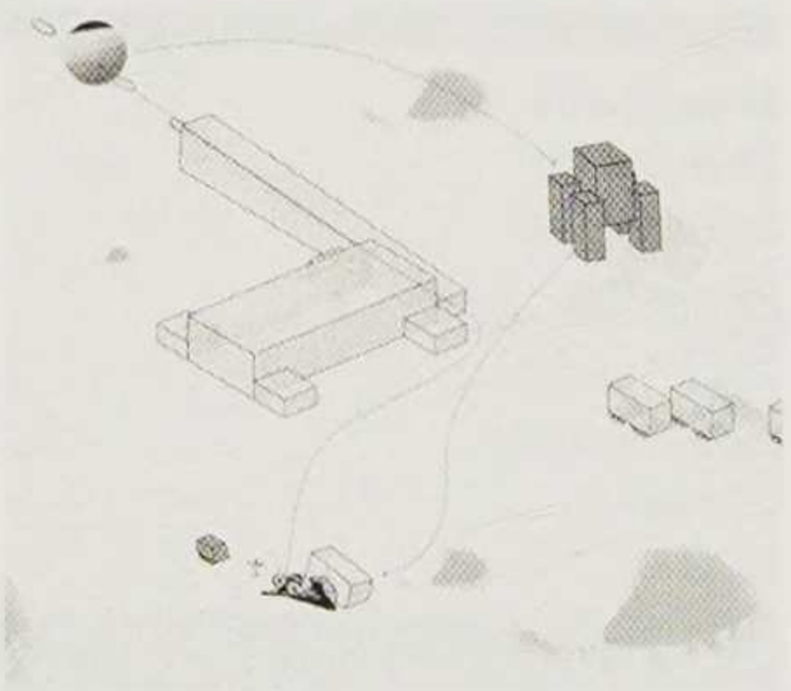
So, the way that I understand process is that it creates a framework of evaluation, content, archive, typological knowledge, and also site specific knowledge. Then, the project needs to be intelligent enough to respond specifically with an agenda, or with an argument, to those frameworks. A student of mine, hopefully, will say, "This is what my project does, and this is what it does to the field of architecture, and what it does to the place that it's sitting, and this is how it reorganizes the conflicts or controversies detected."



THE HARVESTER CRASH
SAM #1, HALUCINATING, CRASHES VEHICLE INTO A HARVESTER, INJURING HIMSELF. SAM #2, FINDS SAM #1 WHILE INVESTIGATING, BRINGS INJURED SAM #1 BACK TO BASE



JOURNEY TO THE SECRET ANTENNEA
BOTH SAMS VENTURE ACCROSS THE LUNAR SURFACE IN SEARCH OF AN ANTENNEA THAT HAS BEEN BLOCKING THEIR ABILITY TO TRANSMIT MESSAGES. SAM #1 GETS VERY SICK



ESCAPE FROM THE MOON
WHEN LUNAR'S ELIZA REPAIR SHIP COMES TO THE STATION TO SERVICE THE CRASHED HARVESTER, THE SAMS USE IT AS A DIVERSION TO SEND SAM #2 OFF IN AN ENERGY

Saunders:

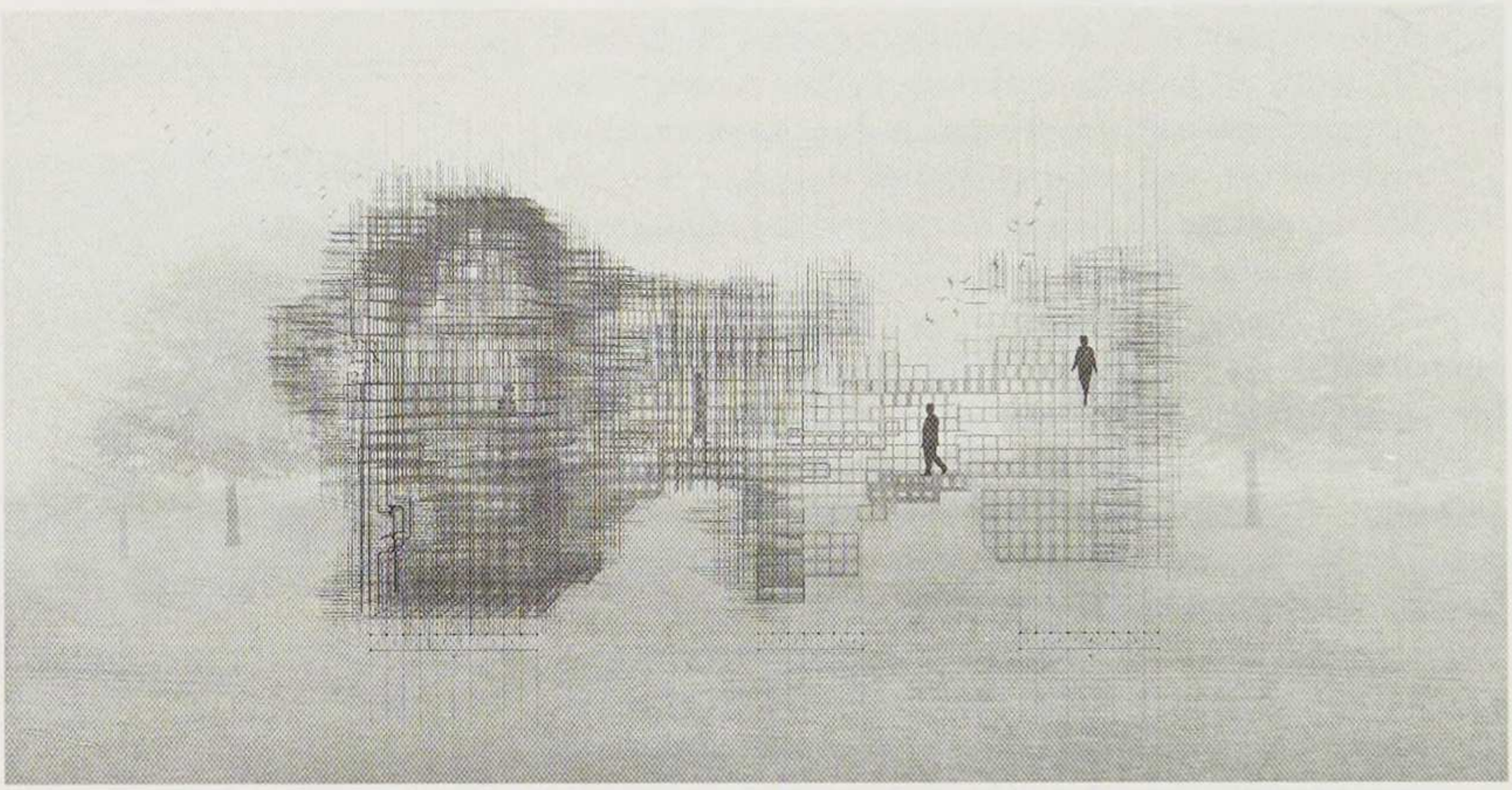
Yes, I think that's great, and it's a really great question. It seems like every generation is getting over a hiccup of the previous generation, right? The current conversation on process is one which comes out of a '90s emphasis, or overemphasis, on process, right? You have a process, and at that point, typically it's to remove authorship—the non-authorial process that comes out of the avant-garde indexical work of the '60s and '70s artists like Sol Lewitt. The indexical project was definitely re-enacted in the '90s, and you certainly see glimpses of other faculty here redistributing the indexical project, sometimes critically, sometimes unaware of it ... but the indexical project, the process, and removing authorship was very important at a certain point. I mean, it was productive at a certain point when it was novel ... but then it got old.

I was just talking to Ali Rahim about this and he was talking about his studio, which had a tour of the Fashion Institute in New York City, and how one starts to describe fashion collections from an academic assessment. That's probably more in line today with how one needs to be able to describe their work because within a fashion show, and I don't mean to reduce architecture to fashion, but you are presented with a certain discourse, and not necessarily the kind of step by step process. You have to be able to read, peel layers, and probably follow the discourse of that particular designer. From one collection to another, they may seem entirely different, but ultimately, many of them

Rega Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Drawings
2014

have the same purpose of challenging certain aesthetics, effects, thresholds, and these kind of things.

I start early with process and geometries, but it's about having students look more closely at geometry and really start to have explicit control over what they're doing. Especially with so many digital toolsets, data is easily generated. I'm not



Rega Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Rendering
2014

against the procedural softwares, but for everything you've gained there, you've lost a complete ability to explicitly decide and to recognize certain spatial and formal qualities ... and create them. It's problematic. My process, lately, has been about having students look closer at geometry and start to understand, be responsible, and take authorship over what they're doing. It's the inverse of the early indexical project, which was about removing the author. In the '90s, coming out of pencil drawing and explicitly modeling geometry with computation, we left the authorship behind. We needed that. That's not the case so much, now, in the post-digital.

You need to have a belief before you suspend it. I use the models that the students produce to achieve certain desired effects as a mechanism for reassessing the design all the way through. Process becomes a bit of a ball and chain that they have to carry through to every review and have on their desk at all times, and we're always re-referencing that. As we proceed through different

stages of design, where we're gaining more and more multiplicity in the project through the complexity of the program, or site, we're always constantly using the original process as a way to reassess the process itself. For instance, my current studio started with refraction, which had nothing to do with program or site. Then it starts to integrate program and site, and now we're looking at refraction in a way that these new objects can refract the city. The indexical project was also a very linear process. I went through that, and I understand its value, but now it's very non-linear. I don't think that the work needs to be evaluated by the process, but I do think that sometimes there's a bit of overcorrection about completely removing the process. You're left to the fashion show to evaluate it. There needs to be some sort of access to process, at least within the academic realm, in order to fully assess and access the projects.

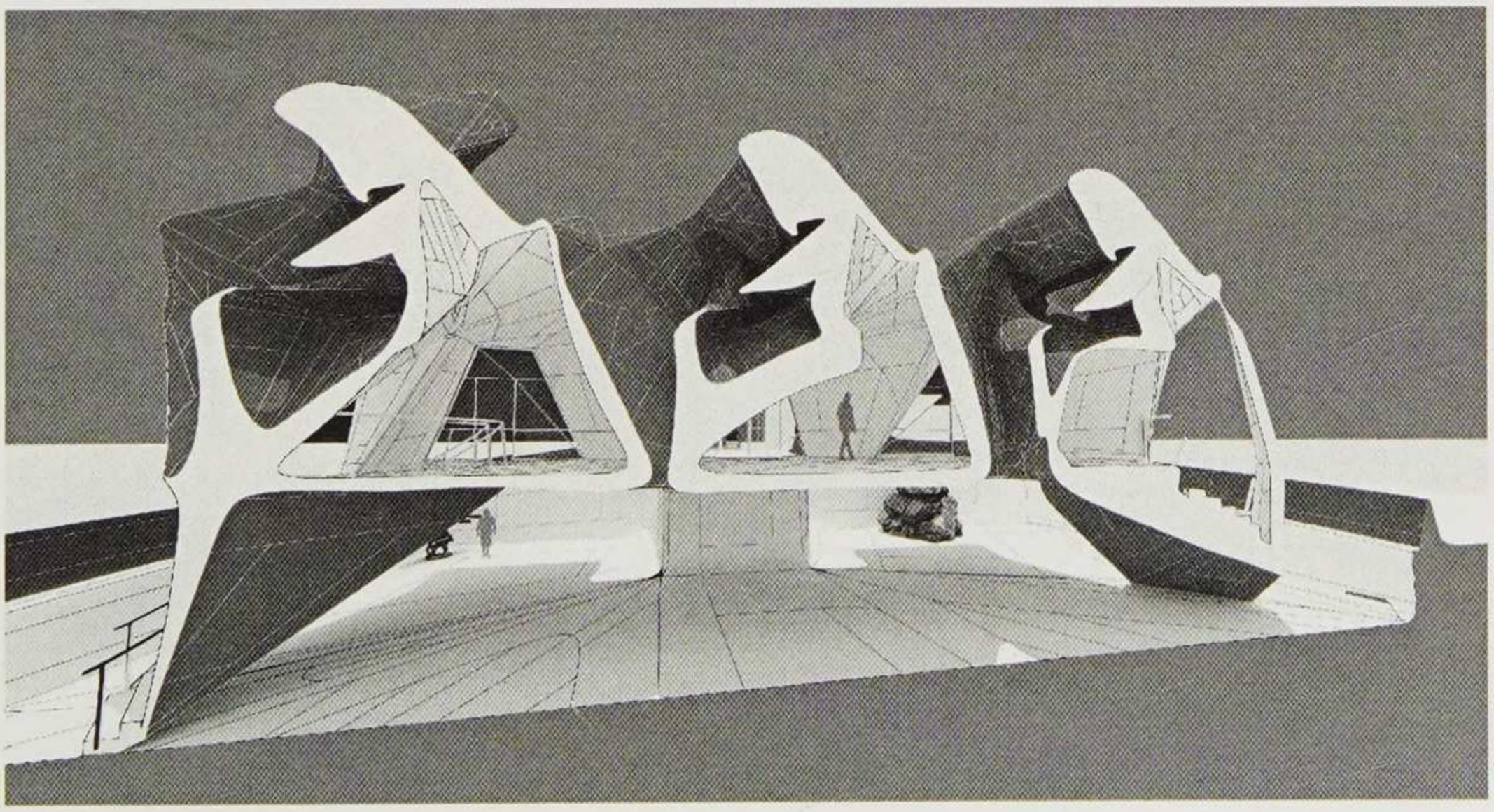
Student 3:

Looking through these images, especially yours, Andrew, there's certain geometry at hand, but there's also a certain aesthetic at hand. Maybe it's not the aesthetic of the building, but an aesthetic in the representation. I'm interested in how that plays out for either one of you—the aesthetic role or aesthetic argument of the project.

Rega:

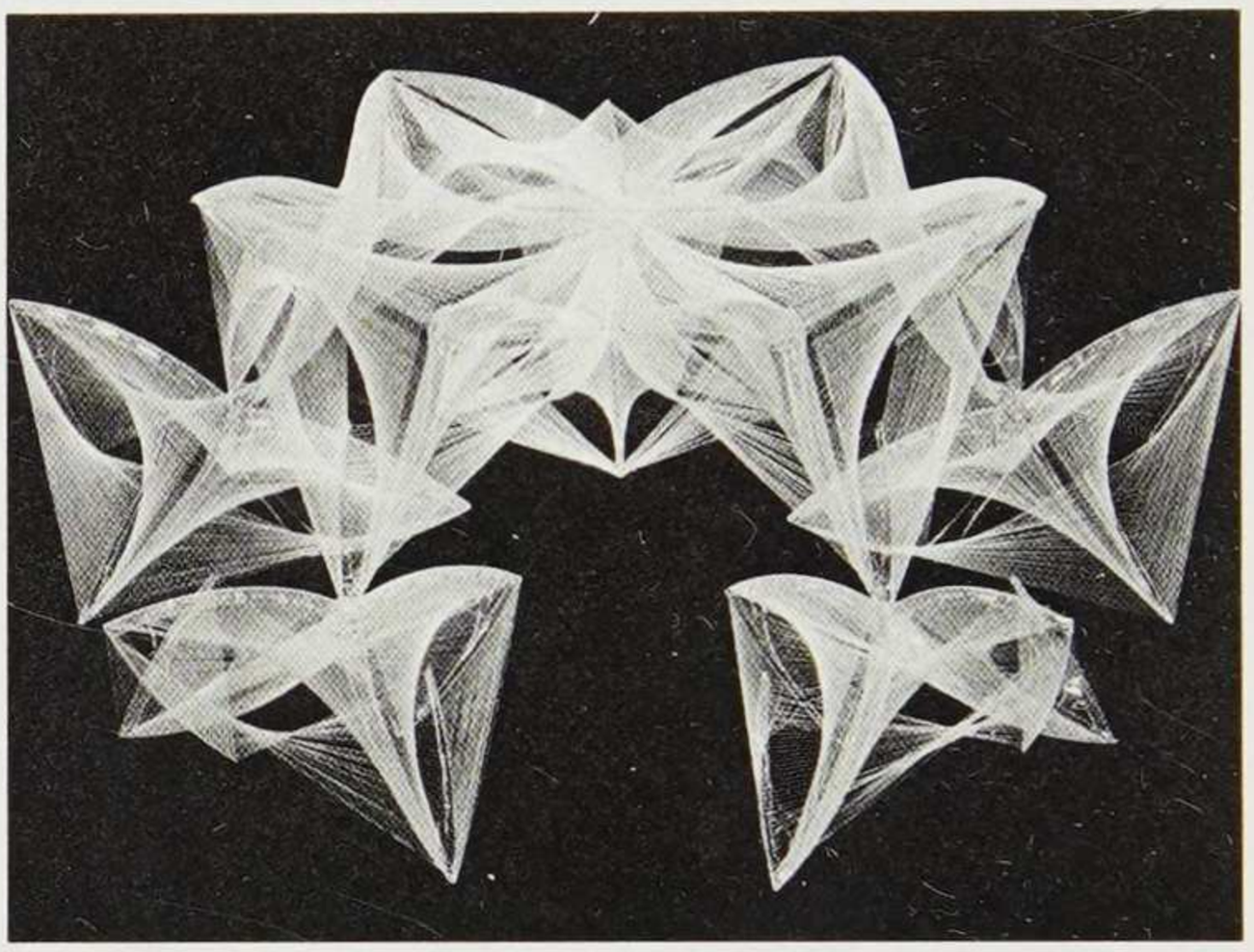
It's an important question ... architecture is also about beauty. In my 502 studio, the first thing that I do is give out a manifesto, which includes a point on aesthetics and experience. Once I hand out the

Saunders Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Rendering
2015



manifesto, we do a set of readings and a seminar session about the content in the manifesto for the students to intervene, question, transform, and post-produce the manifesto itself. It's constantly a provisional document. In the manifesto, there is a part that relates to aesthetics, and it's true that aesthetics need to be reevaluated. We don't know exactly how, but we introduce and discuss possibilities of an aesthetic of the relational.

Saunders Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Model
2014



Relational Aesthetics is a book by curator and art historian Nicolas Bourriaud. He curated the London Tate Triennial of 2009, if I remember well, and he was the director of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. Relational aesthetics are those that emerge out of human and contextual relations and affect complex experiences. We are most interested in investigating architecture's role in mediating these emergent relational aesthetics.

There is another side of aesthetics, that of representation. In this regard I ask students to deliberately choose their own aesthetic agenda. I give them a variety of examples and forms of representation in architecture from the '70s to now. Apart from the aesthetics of the building and the aesthetics of the architecture, there's also this idea of trying to direct the aesthetics of the project and its representation to re-present, reveal, or present the project with an aesthetic condition that will reinforce its unique arguments, typological innovations, and positions. In my studio you see multiple aesthetics, and the difference between the projects is extreme. I could never imagine what the projects are going to look like before we start.

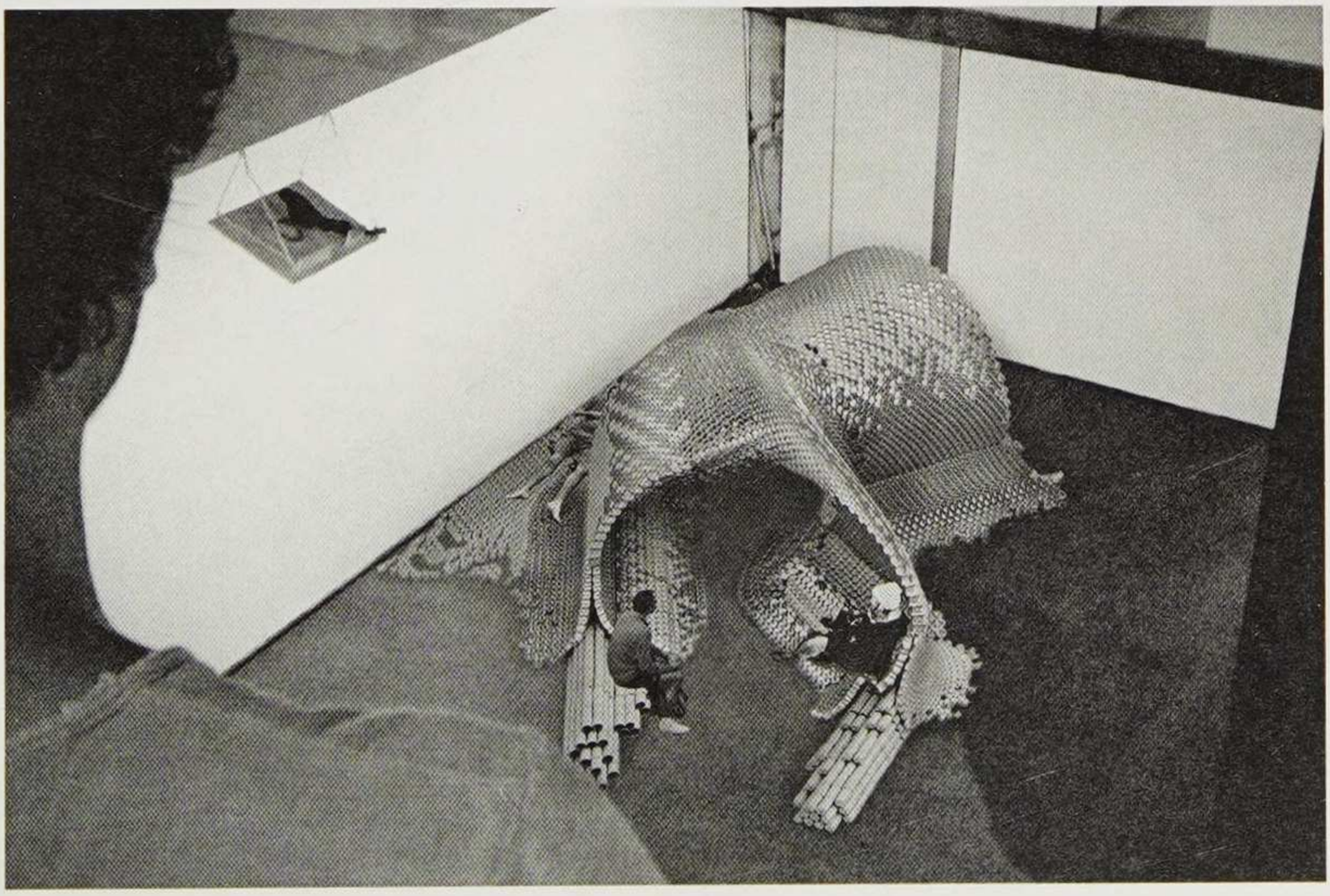
There is no way I could predict that. Part of it has to do with asking students to generate, select, and curate their own aesthetic agenda ... also looking at references, not in order to romanticize them but in order to post-produce them, to question them, and to critically engage with them.

Saunders:

Aesthetics and representation certainly aren't equal. You know, Mark Foster Gage edited a book on aesthetics, and his introduction goes back to this idea of process and semiotics ... the idea of architecture being able to be read and mentally conceived, versus experienced in a more immediate fashion. That's what the aesthetics are—it really deals with the sensorial.

It's interesting on a number of levels. We're dealing with the Baroque right now in my seminar. We're going to the origins of geometry through [Edmund] Husserl, but there's a crisis starting with Galileo in science where you start to have new instruments like telescopes and microscopes, and you're starting to have a new dependence on math. You're getting farther and farther away from the sensorial. These things that were supposed to amplify sight, all of a sudden, are now criticizing the human senses, and now the eye is just a weak instrument.

Rega Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Rendering
2014



Now, if you go into representation, that's different than aesthetics ... at least the discourse is. Representation is very important, such as what you were saying about the consistency of the representation. We're using subdivisional modeling, which is really interesting. It's an industrial shift. Everything is going to subdivisional modeling, and it avoids the pitfalls of NURBS modeling in terms of topological limitations. It also allows you to have a 90-degree straight corner, normative and smooth, all within the same topology. I really enjoy that ability. That's the ability that architects haven't necessarily ever had. The representation of the projects in my studio is a way to make that legible. The contours on those white renderings [see image, page 43] are a way to read the speed and the difference between the 90-degree to the smooth curvature ... without them, it just becomes a white area. They're a bit of a placeholder for other tectonics as these things start to develop.

Student 1:

I have a question for you guys about the idea of topology and the idea of typology. You guys come from almost opposite sides of this spectrum. Andrew is dealing with topological instances, and Eduardo is dealing very much with typological instances. Can you each describe what your view is on these terms? Eduardo, would you say your studio deals with topology at all? And Andrew, is there room for typology in your studios?

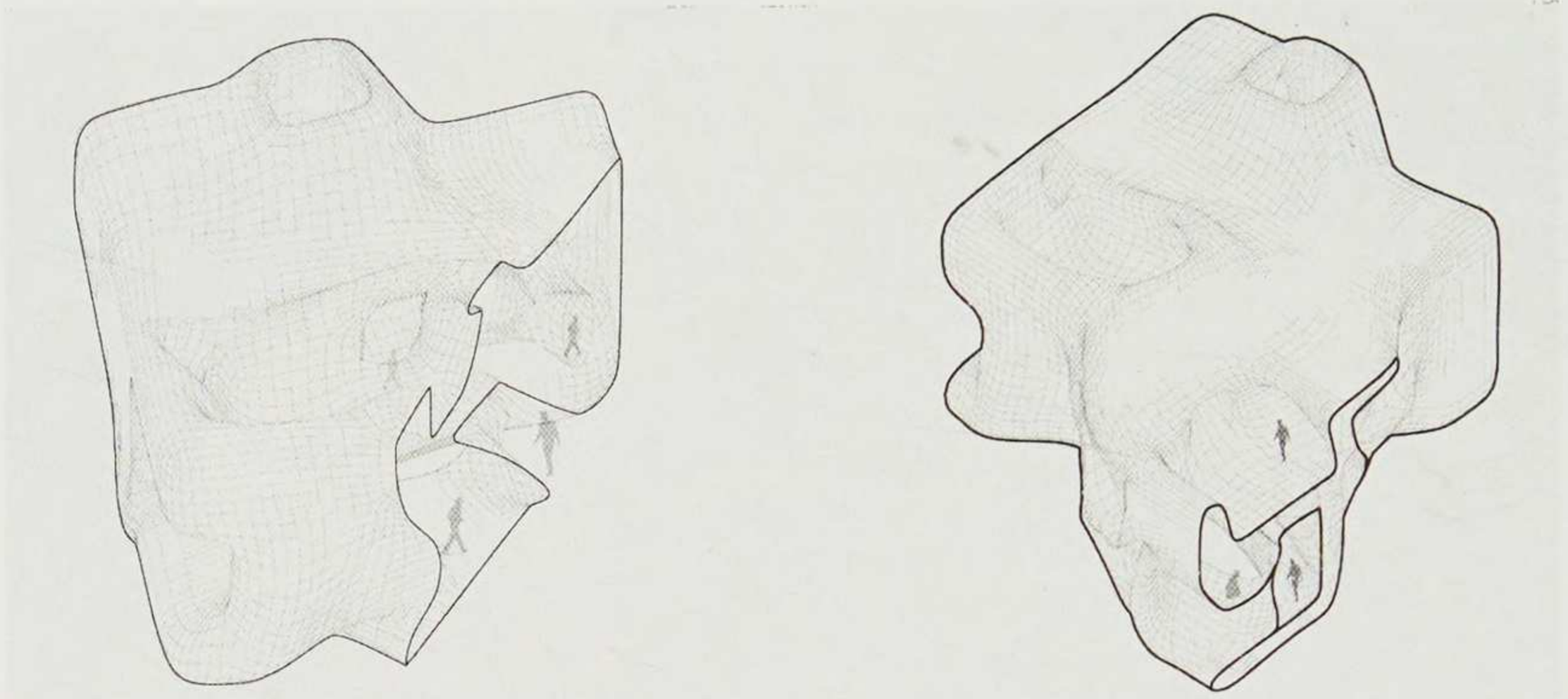
Rega:

In the studio, we post-produce, so topology is part of the remix too. There are students in my studio that have tackled topology and have generated projects that are competent in those terms too. I don't have an opposition to it. Also, certain topological investigations can lead to innovative typologies and refresh the core of the field through that, through a certain geometric investigation and through techniques. So I don't see the opposition of the spectrum you're proposing.

Saunders:

Topology is a discourse of geometry that deals with certain relationships that are able to resist morphological change ... the idea that you have a flexible model, right? That's very important because architecture needs to be flexible as it develops.

(Opposite)
Rega Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Model
2014



Rega Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Drawing
2014

Certainly within the discipline of geometry, topology is a very productive discourse to engage and understand.

You see a re-emergence of notions of typology coming back, which I'm less enthusiastic about. But in our Baroque class, we're looking at the Renaissance. They shifted from a basilica cruciform church of the medieval Gothic to symbolize the crucifix—that was a type—to a centrally planned type that was radically different. That was a typological change that ushered in a new idea. If you then look at the Baroque, it actually takes those centrally planned churches and starts to stretch them and distort them, and now all of a sudden, you have major axes ... so there is a topological transformation.

My personal interest is in the topological transformation because the topological can embed so much more complexity and multiplicity. It can be either or. Type gets back into semiotics, and I know you can play games with it, but that type of Postmodernism is a bit difficult for me to go back into. I haven't really ventured into that within my own work. You can't avoid typology, but specifically using typology as a vehicle for creating architecture that is an extension of the discourse ... I don't know.

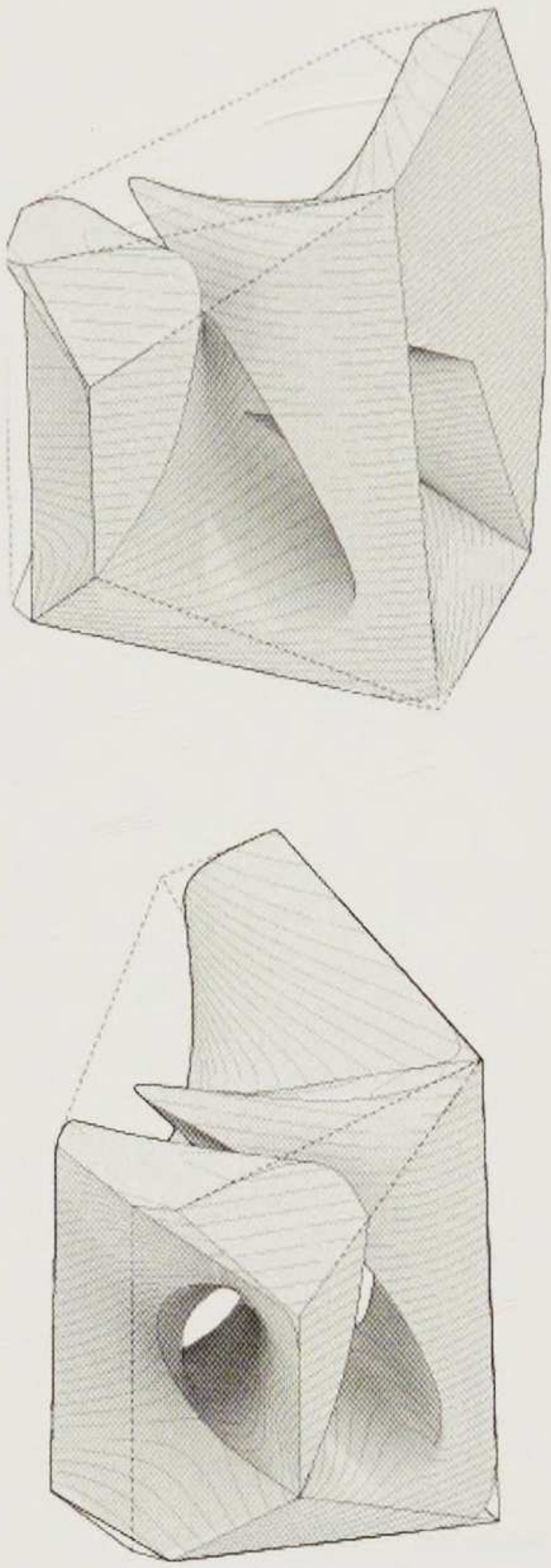
Student 1:

Couldn't you say that you're [Louis] Kahn analysis was dealing with typology? The fact that you have these Kahn houses that you analyze, but then you don't necessarily begin to recreate the Kahn house. There's some other idea of—what was the program?

Saunders:

It was a pavilion. So yes, maybe I could start to talk about typology with that project. The pavilion that we started with, which was something that I inherited to a certain extent, was one way to relate back to Kahn. There's this notion that he always started with pavilions, not only in his residential projects. The more you look back, if you take the idea of a pavilion—take the Adler and DeVore House —you can see these cubes that operate on the horizontal line. Then the other house is the break up of the nine square grid, where the nine squares start to migrate and shift. This was radical for Kahn. He had done houses before this, but this was when he was published in *Perspecta*. This is his big break after he gets back from the Rome Prize and had this new attitude from looking at Greek versus Roman—but what he's doing is he's starting to take each module as a pavilion. He calls them "pavilions for living." Then, if you look at the axonometric drawing analyses from Eisenman's book, Ten *Canonical Buildings*, you can see those "pavilions" as modules start to house different domestic programs. It's an idea that it's not a whole house but made up of multiple pavilions.

So, maybe that's a good reassessment of it. It became a way to begin to link the pavilion project to Kahn through typology. Maybe I have to retract that statement on typology. [Laughter]



Saunders Studio
Penn Design
Student Work
Drawing
2015

Rega:

We expanded the idea of pavilion for an exhibition. It seemed like a specific program, but it was a very loose one. It could acquire multiple forms and interpretations and it was vague ... purposefully vague. Using these ideas of ready-made fictions, extracted from movies, in order to diagram a network of relations that the students could then reorganize through their architecture, would trigger unexpected forms and programs. One student did an architecture as a weapon, a pavilion for exhibition that was also a weapon against birds—she was doing Birds by Alfred Hitchcock. The architecture acted as that mediation between birds and humans. This generated a typology for a pavilion that would rethink many aspects of the mediation between humans and nonhumans. Then, when we had to say, "Ok, this can now receive any other program. What new kind of exhibition would this receive?"

Suddenly we see that the typology is flexible and open. It can suddenly provoke change in other scenarios and according to other programs.

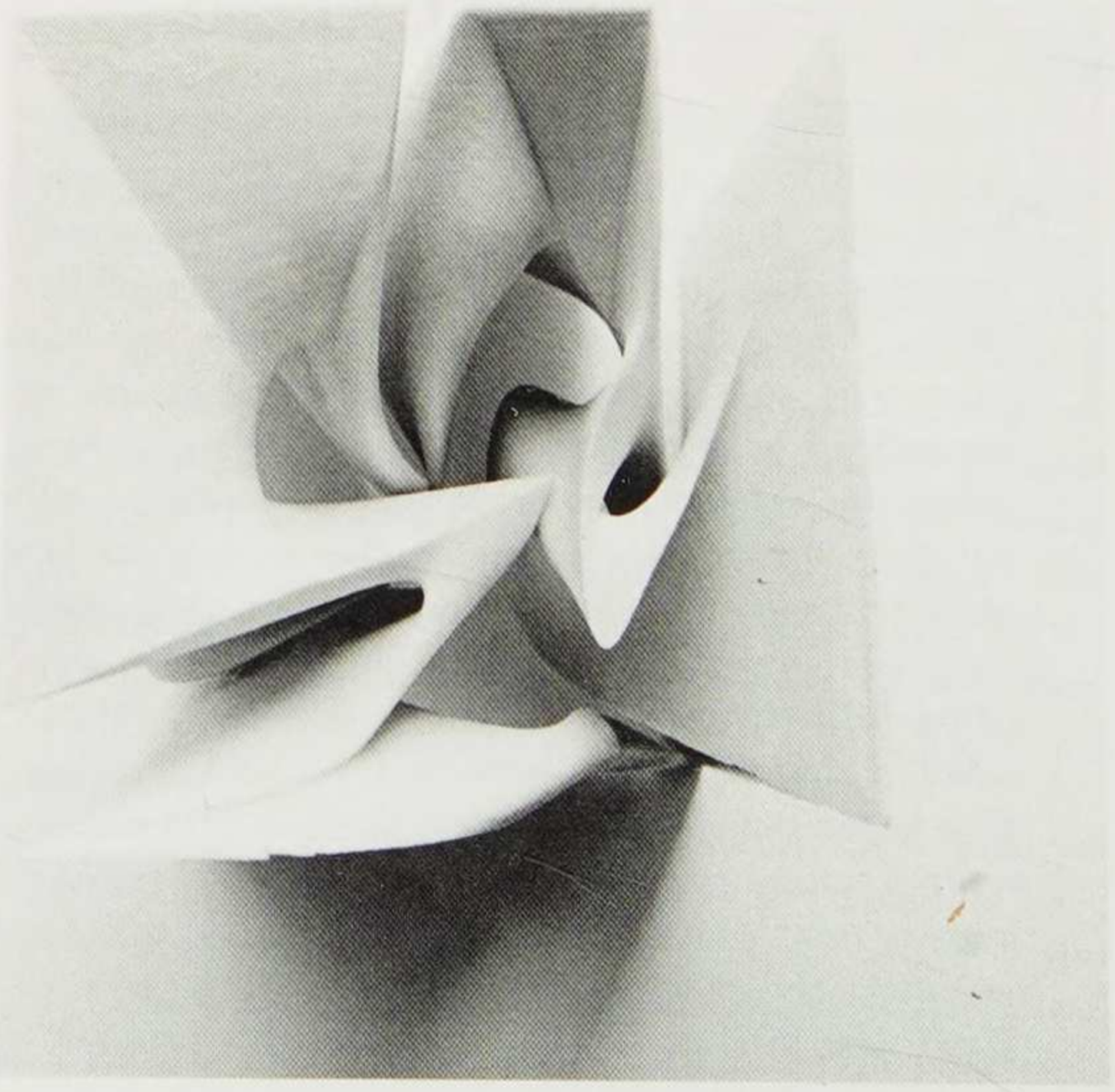
Student 4:

Eduardo, thinking back to your presentation, you used the word "autonomy" quite a bit. I don't know if I see it in the projects. Can you reiterate that idea?

Rega:

The idea of autonomy applies only to one side of the studio methodology and is used, or applied, through the analysis and cannibalization of tropes or architectural tactics that escape program, context, site specificity, and so on. In this side of the studio we are dealing only with structure, typology, spatial organization, and form. That's what I mean by autonomy ... an investigation that is outside of program, or event. This might encounter a conflict with [Bernard] Tschumi's statement where event and space are the defining elements of architecture ... but anyway, in this side of the studio we'd define events as geometric events. That would be the aspect of autonomy, where we are detaching architecture from any relations outside of itself, and we are understanding it from its own internal, historical, formal, and typological discourse.

Saunders Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Model
2015



Student 1:

Do you think you deal with autonomy in your project, Andrew?

Saunders:

Certainly. You can look at the autonomy of architecture as the interior discourse of architecture. There are certain things that an architect deals with, like clients, structure, all of these kinds of things ... and then there are certain things that are conversations within the discourse that are things that you don't talk about with the client.

Maybe the questions within that sort of autonomy are about total autonomy or how they react with other intrinsic forces. For instance, you have something like Eisenman's hanging column at the Wexner Center, right? Columns don't usually hang. You do that so the idea to build a column that hangs is completely not needed for that building to function in a certain sense. Every studio in academia has some kind of relationship to autonomy.

It's interesting if you look at some other work—like Koolhaas was very interested in, I would argue, autonomy in terms of syntax, or in the sort of diagram language. Some of the later offices that came from Rem—I see them trying to put in topology and other kinds of things into the project, but for me, I have a real lack of patience for the work because it's left the autonomy out of it. It's really clearly the very pragmatic "diagram." One would argue, if you were a BIG fan ... which is great ... I mean they're doing excellent ... [Laughter] ... but I think if you look at them versus MVRDV versus Koolhaas, there's been a general loss of the autonomy within that diagrammatic project.

Student 5:

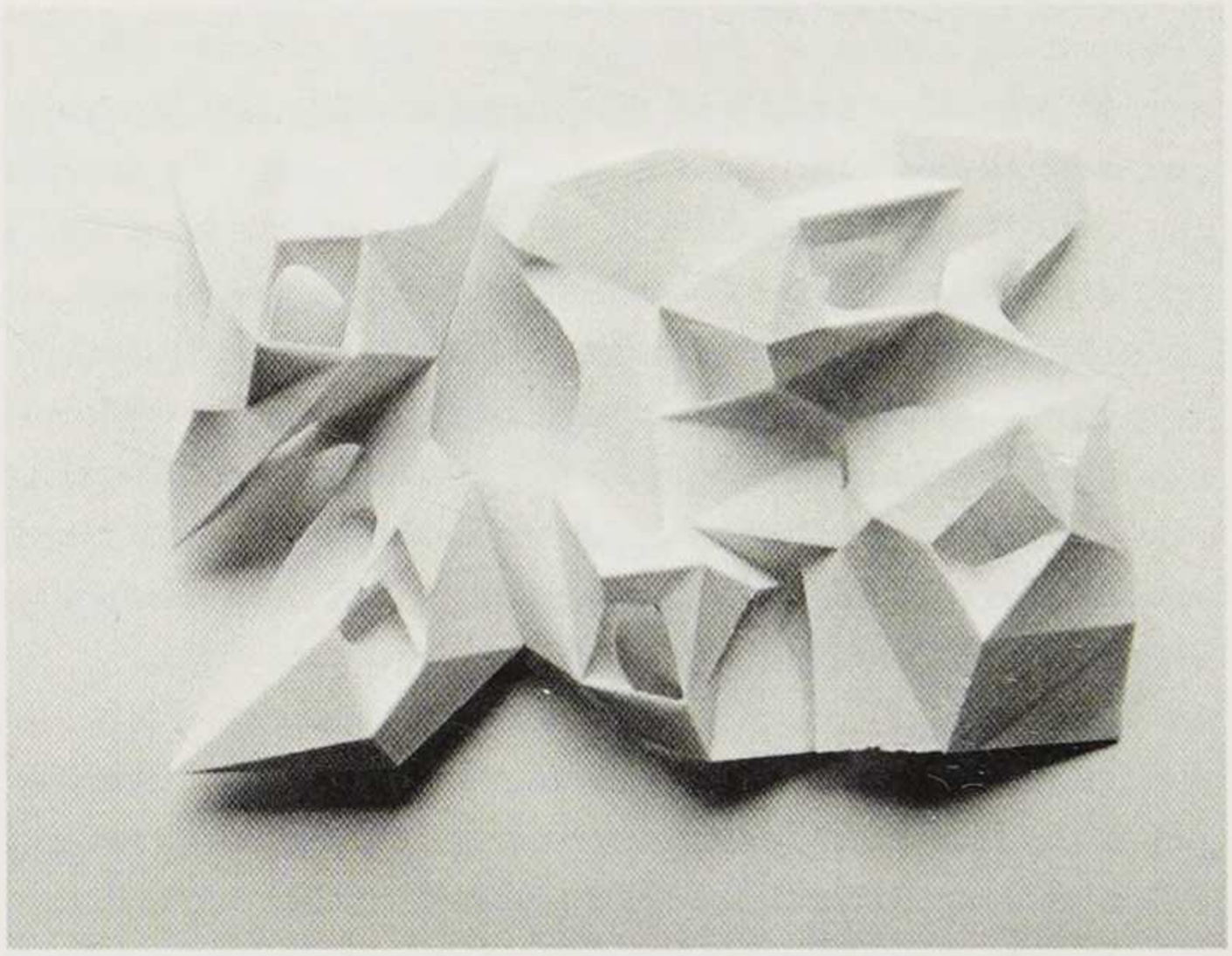
But is that a loss of autonomy or a loss of criticality? It seems like in both of your work, there's some notion of connoisseurship ... you're not looking, necessarily, at how to evaluate the work in some sort of performative way but it's evaluated as being what it is. I'm wondering how you introduce criticality into the process. It has to be taught somewhere ...

Rega:

Ok, so it's a very important question. Criticality.

In our case, criticality is also built up through a collective effort. We are generating material, an archive, that has been self-evaluated by the studio against precedents from history, and also against its possibility to have agency in a given outside. We intend to understand how it operates critically within other networks of relations that are, for instance, affected by the site in which it

Saunders Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Model
2015



sits, the fiction that it's inserted in, or the set of controversies that it's connected to. We also evaluate the project according to the arguments that the students are making on how they are innovating, in terms of typology.

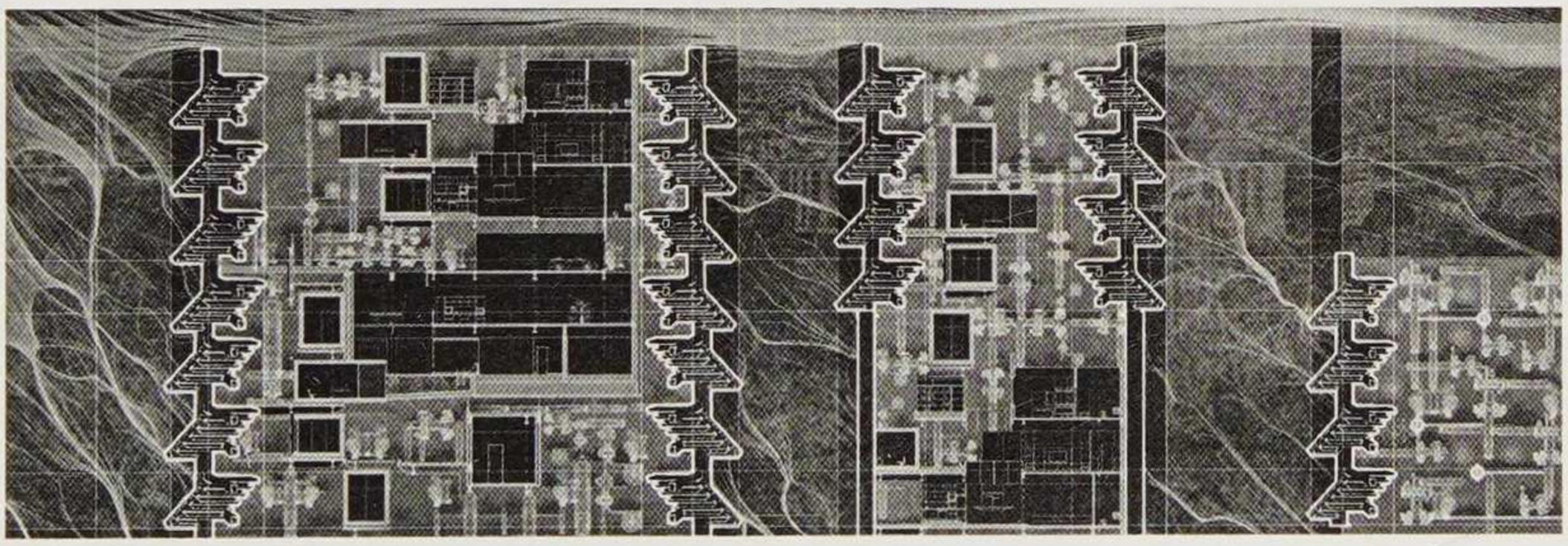
At the end of the day, you have that system, and that archive, and that frame of reference that allows you to put your project in relationship to your argument within a very solid background. Those are the tools you need in order to be able to critically evaluate your project. In any case, what I'd want any juror to ask would be, "What are you claiming, and how are the evidences that you're showing demonstrating what you're claiming that your project is doing?" So we are asking what the project does, both to the field and to outside the field.

Saunders:

It's interesting. How are you critical in a post-critical generation, right? What does criticality mean? On a base level, it means avoiding the status

quo. Status quo, basically the way that society and everything generates and would make architecture designed by committee, I would say, is the antithesis of criticality. It seems to be that there are certain architects that would have a project that's really about economy. There are some that can produce to the client's will and desires and others that look beyond the status quo and start to look at areas where the status quo is lacking, or where other things are coming in the future. It's a way to move beyond. It's basically the avant-garde project, right? It's the critical project of avoiding status quo, and it's a romantic version that you would produce something, which has not been seen or experienced, to elevate society as opposed to only going with the status quo. That's the way I would take criticality.

What would probably be interesting, in relationship to the digital arena, is that there's a status quo of digital instruments that come packaged, from a designer, and they get here to the school, and you certainly need to know how to use them. From every software package, you understand and learn those kind of techniques. Then the issue is that when you start to use those techniques, they can certainly be helpful in many ways, but they also start to enforce a certain status quo unless there's a kind of criticality that operates beyond the agenda of the software designers.



Rega Studio/
PennDesign
Student Work
Drawing
2015

I always look at some of the people now that are operating as a post '68 generation of architects, which I would say, is governing architecture right now. They came out of a very critical time period that wasn't digital. So someone like Koolhaas, Zaha [Hadid], Eisenman, of course ... but you could also say even younger generations, like [Enric] Miralles and Wolf Prix that come out of

that critical generation. I'm always curious to see how the digital works within their discourse ... and "discourse" is another term for criticality. Zaha's work is amazing now, but she had a certain discourse that was working in reaction to the digital project. Hernan [Diaz Alonso], who I worked with ... he worked with Miralles for a while. Miralles was great, but he died of a brain tumor early, before someone could "digitalize" him. And Hernan worked for him, so a lot of what he's doing is sort of the digital engagement with the discourse of Miralles.

It's an interesting question about criticality and discourse ... especially within school, in relationship to all that you have to learn. It's not something you're going to develop in the three years here. You're going to get exposure to it, but it's just going to sink in later. You, at least, want good exposure to that sort of criticality. I don't know if that is what you were talking about ...

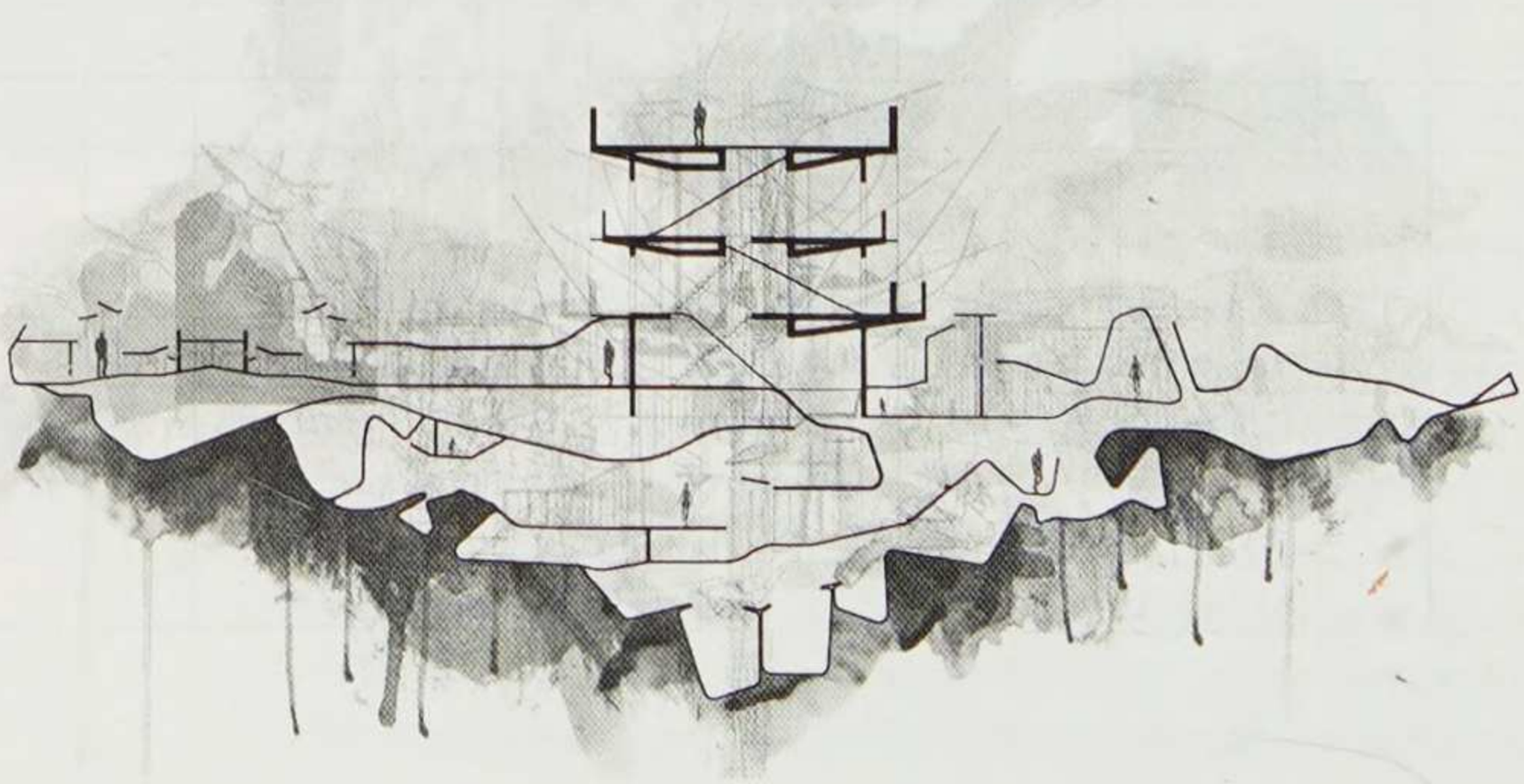
Student 6:

It's interesting that for 502 we're dealing with urban scale projects, which is more about the relationship and connection to the city and to a bigger scale of space. Eduardo, I see that some of your student projects are going out of the site boundary and into the city. I wonder how this takes place and deals with the ideas of autonomy.

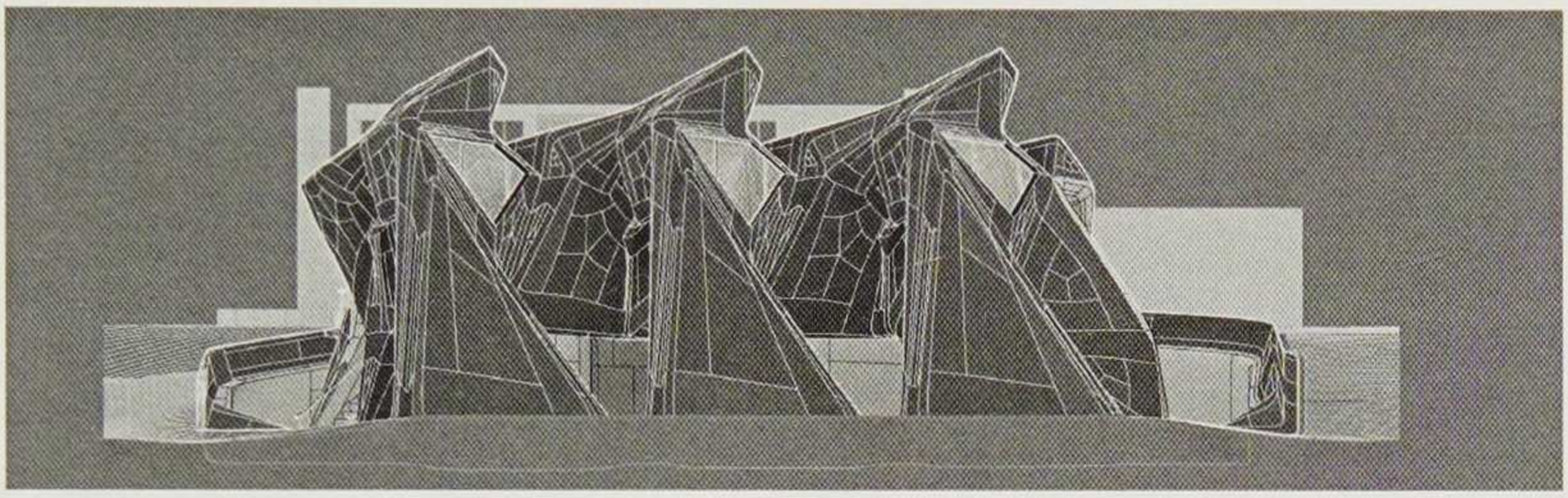
Rega:

As I was saying before, we are critical and we intend to challenge the status quo, both of the field and of outside of the field. The status quo outside of it, as

Rega Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Drawing
2014



defined by the 502 studio prompt, is characterized by radical capitalism and the spectacles associated with it. We are also engaging with it through the program, an aquatic center that could even be a part of the Olympic network of stadiums and facilities of Philadelphia—a modern spectacle. We are integrating into a radical capitalist scenario and understanding the problems that arise when we deliberately bring to the table, anarchist groups, homeless populations, and vegetation or

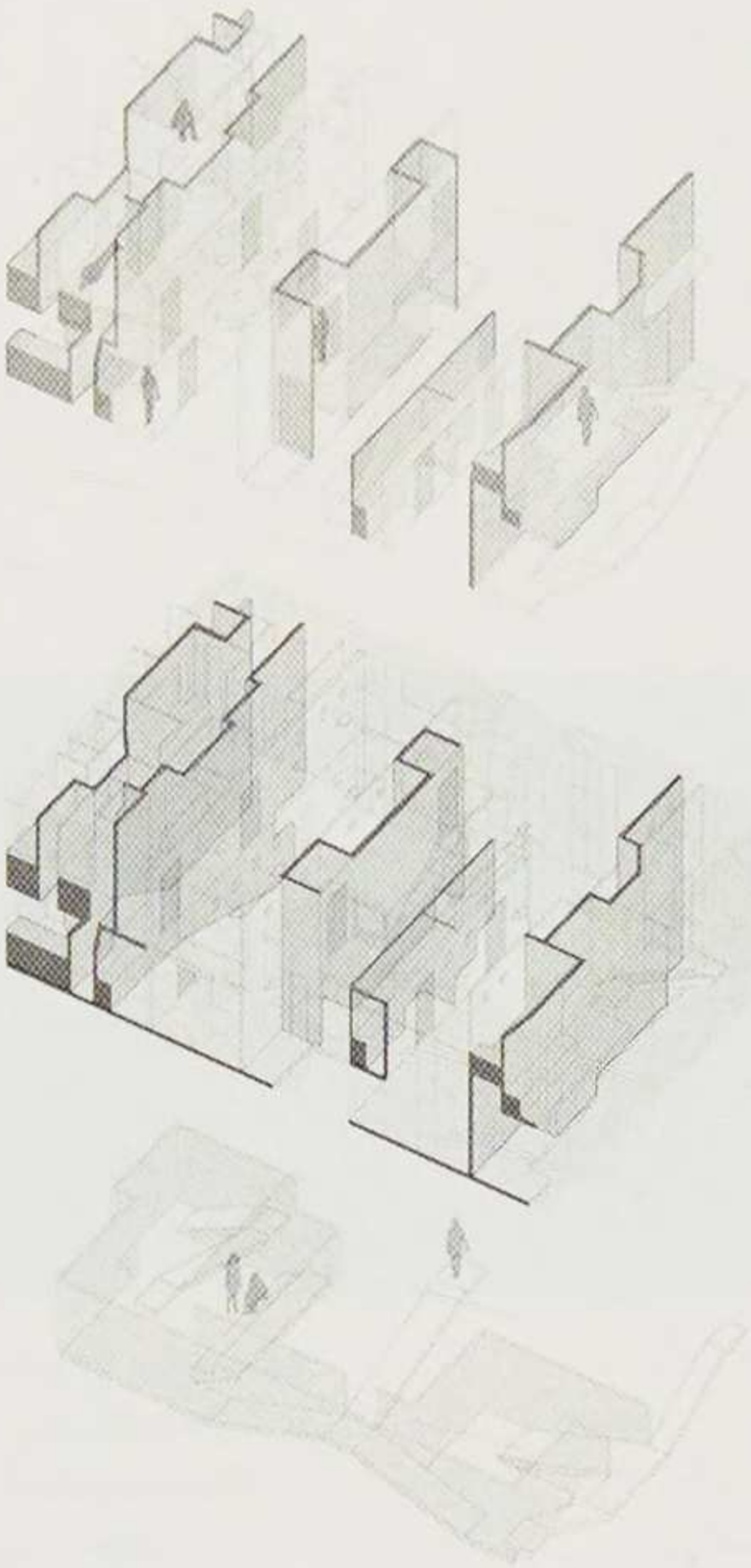


Saunders Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Drawing
2014

other non-human actors. Also, the conversation expands to integrate the city of Philadelphia and the office of the arts, or the department of parks and recreations, etc. Once we understand what their desires and their obstacles to achieving those desires are, we create a very rich map of relations between actors that we can critically reorganize. That's why we cannot stay within the boundaries of our site, usually, because even if we don't build anything or if we build the minimum that we can, we are aiming at affecting a larger scope.

We are trying to challenge the status quo—also politically—not only within the internal forces of the field. We believe that architecture should have a say in politics using notions of architecture as critical engagement or architecture as a critical spatial practice. We see authors like Keller Easterling or Markus Miessen working in this direction, a critical spatial practice portrays the architect having an effect outside of the field, therefore being part of a public discussion and challenging the decision-making processes of the city.

We are public intellectuals above all. Apart from experts in geometry, typology, and the history of our field, we are also public intellectuals that operate and engage through an expertise on space. In terms

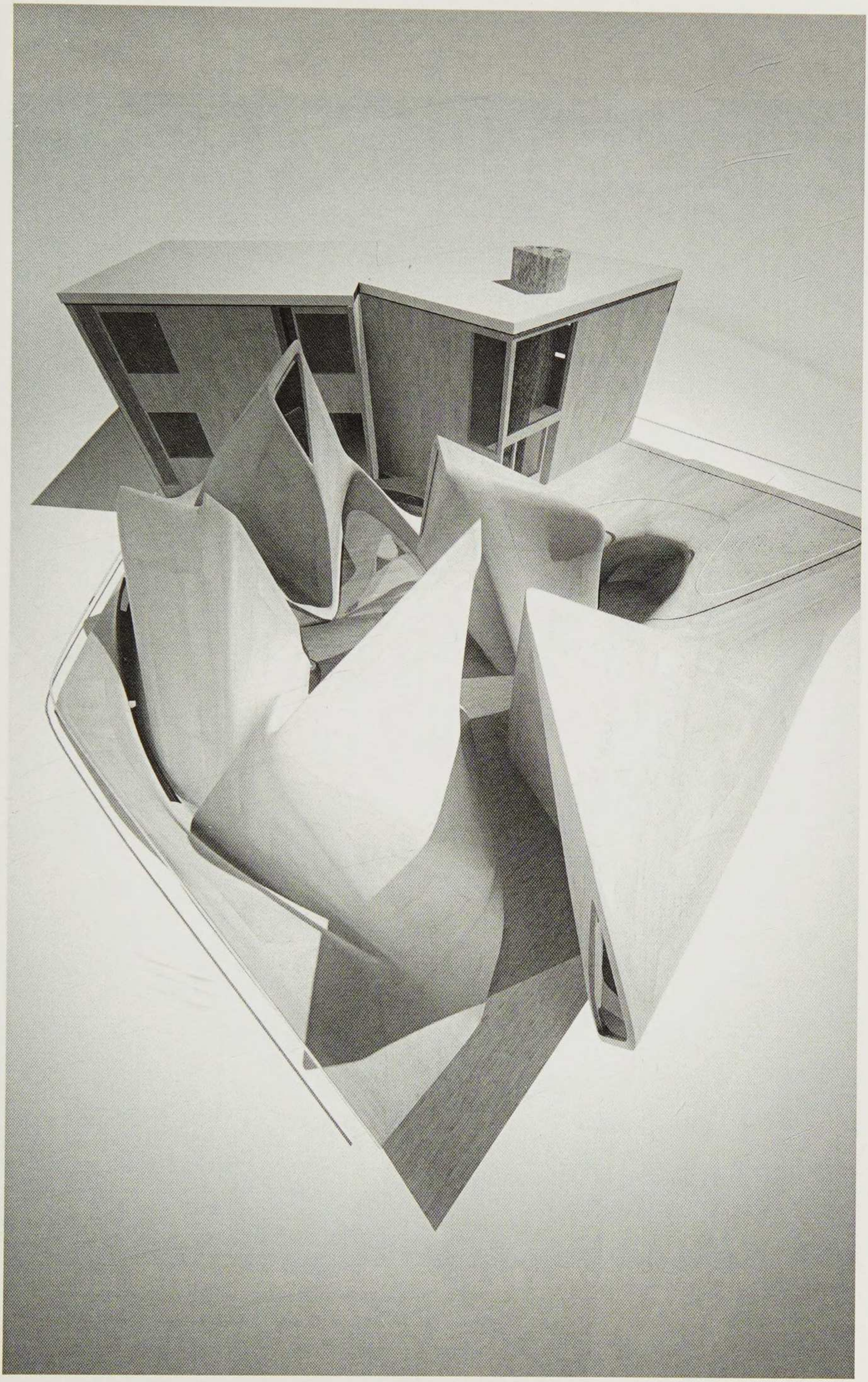


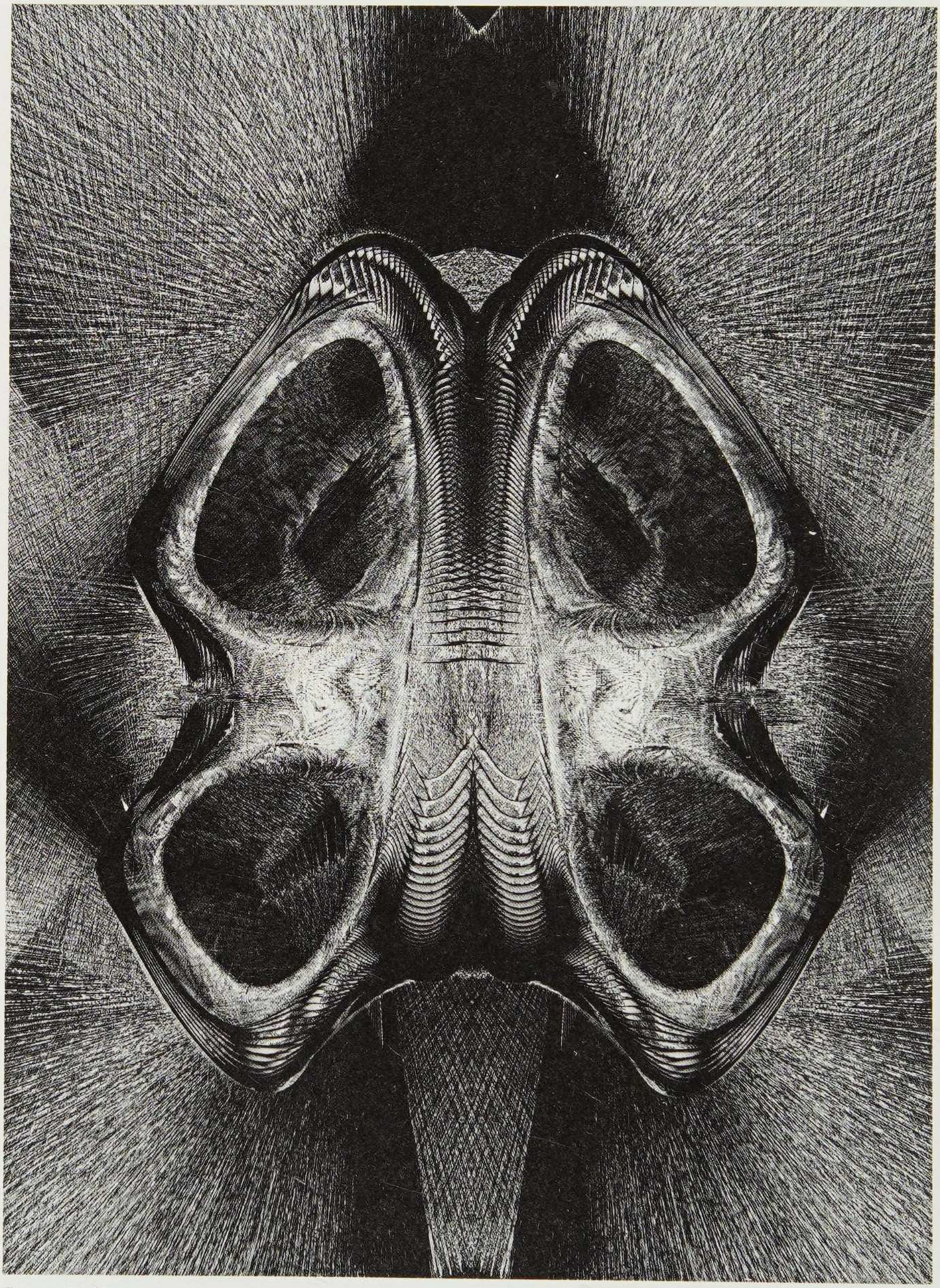
Rega Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Drawing
2014

of how to use space, typology, and the autonomy of the field critically is a big question. That's the question that we are also trying to address in the studio. Let's see what it brings, but I believe we can. I believe that architecture can reorganize the status quo of the outside world as much as its own internal disciplinary status quo.

Also, the project of autonomy has two sides: There is the European approach to autonomy developed by [Manfredo] Tafuri, [Aldo] Rossi, and others, and on the other end, you have the American autonomy that is the one taken forward by Colin Rowe and others, including Eisenman, [John] Hejduk, and so on. They are very different projects of autonomy. The European project of autonomy is one that you can read about, for instance, in one of the books of Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy: Politics and Architecture Within and Against Capitalism*. This project of autonomy is a political project. The field needs to clearly define its own limits in order to have an effect outside of itself. That's the version of autonomy that I'm most interested in or the one that I'm trying to apply, but it needs to be aware of its exteriority. We can extend the expertise of the architect outside of its current disciplinary boundaries, and that's a way of subverting the status quo too ... another critical approach to practice that also goes beyond making buildings. As Cedric Price would famously say, "Maybe the solution to your problem is not architecture at all."

(Opposite)
Saunders Studio
PennDesign
Student Work
Rendering
2015





Busan Fields
Drawing
2011

There's a Difference Between a Bad Curve and a Good Curve

a conversation with Kutan Ayata

Student 1:

I have a question about representation. In all previous Young & Ayata projects, there are these drawings you guys do, which are rigorous and beautiful, they use contours, lines that are overlapping, but then you introduce animation to this project. Also the renderings you guys do are really strange—

Ayata:

Symmetric people? [Laughter]

Student 1:

Yeah, there are some weird things happening! Can you explain the strategy with these renderings?

Ayata:

Sure.

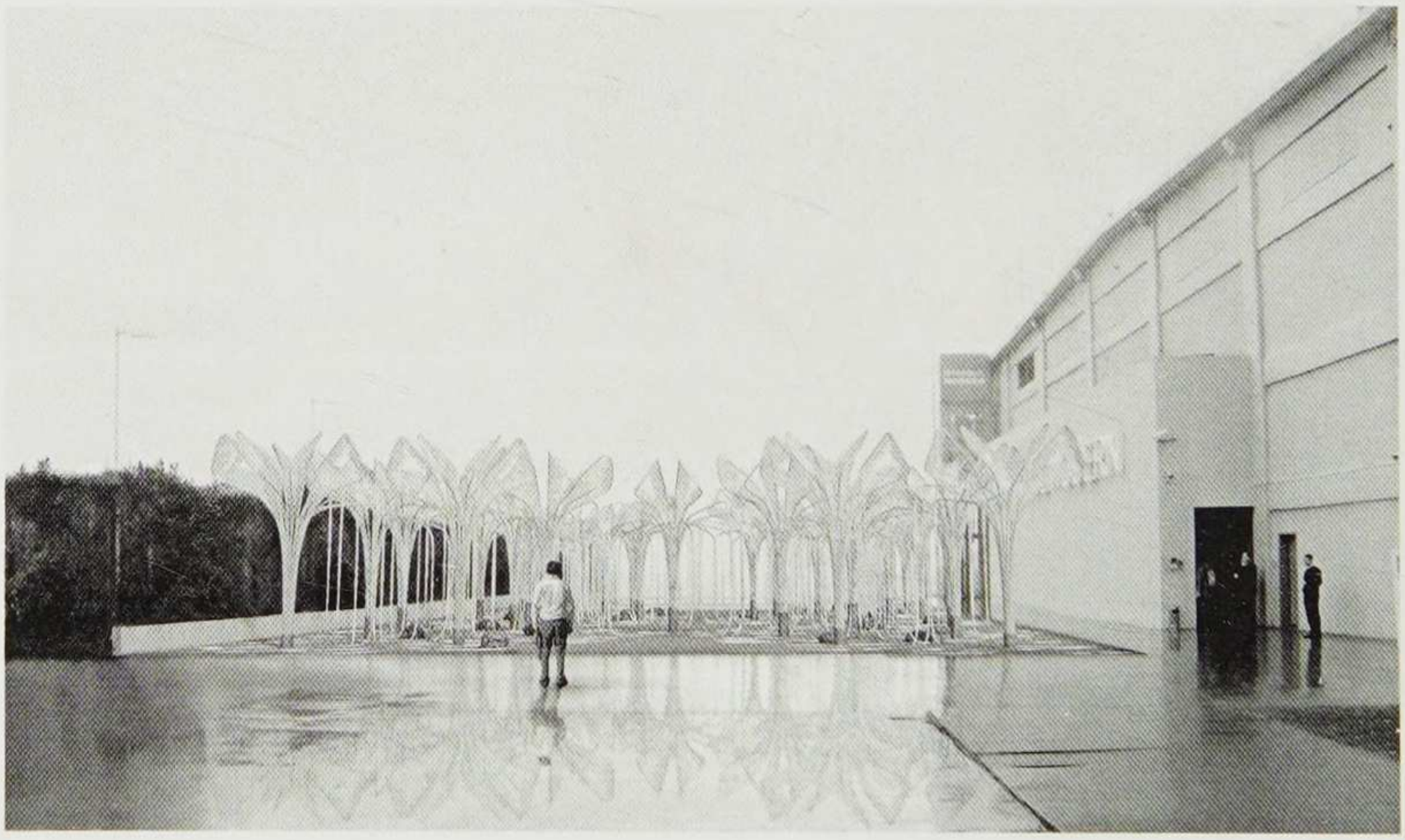
Student 1:

Because this was very constructed, right? It's not just putting people in for scale. It seems like there is some other kind of realism at play.

Ayata:

The renderings basically define a sequence of getting close and into the project. It is a summer pavilion, but the pictures of the site were taken on a winter day, simply because the competition ran through the months of December and January. We liked the idea of transforming the seasonal environment and we felt that it would be too predictable to make it about a happy summer setting. So we stuck with what we had as base images and constructed scenes on these rainy, overcast "summer" days. Since we imagined a future life for the pavilion immersed in the water, it seemed kind of fitting to situate it in semi-wet environments for the "present." For instance, this scene—my favorite image of the sequence [see image, page 54]—is wintry, and it's an overcast day with a wet ground, but it is as lush as spring ... so there are things that are at play in terms of this

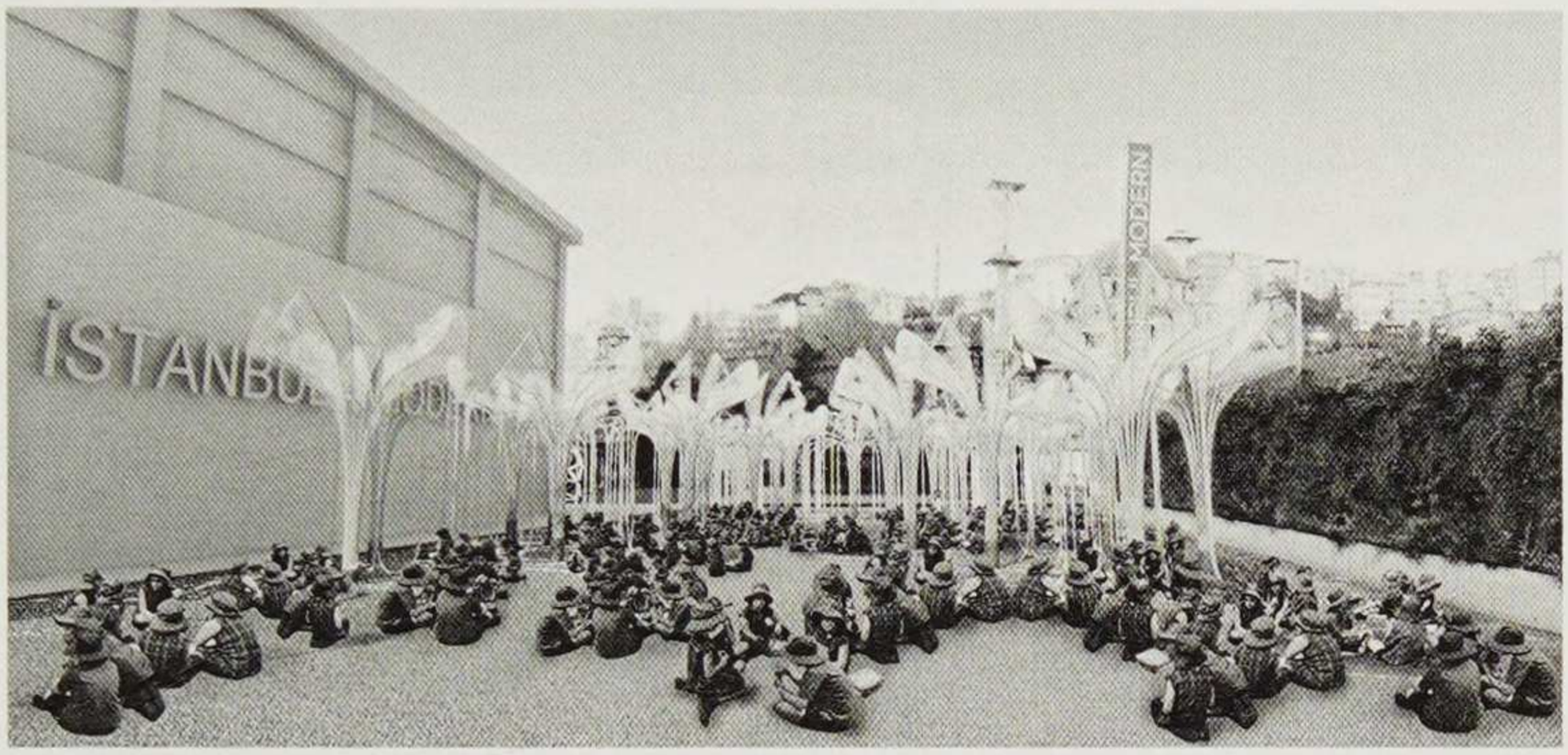
duality. The reflections on the ground already begin to hint at the future configuration of the pavilion. The green patch which is visible on the right is the other grassy courtyard in the back. As an opposition to it, we wanted our ground to gain a degree of artificiality and be in a hue that pushes away from green into reds and yellows ... but we also wanted to have a play on the material, the fine gravel that was already covering the site, so we proposed colored gravel to replace it. What we are trying to get here, through multiple tactics in terms of realism, is to build a degree of ambiguity through less abstract means. In our view, realism is not merely a truthful depiction of reality but a tension between reality and its representation. And the hope is that that tension, an aesthetic experience, produces a doubt, a prolonged contemplation about our assumptions regarding the real.

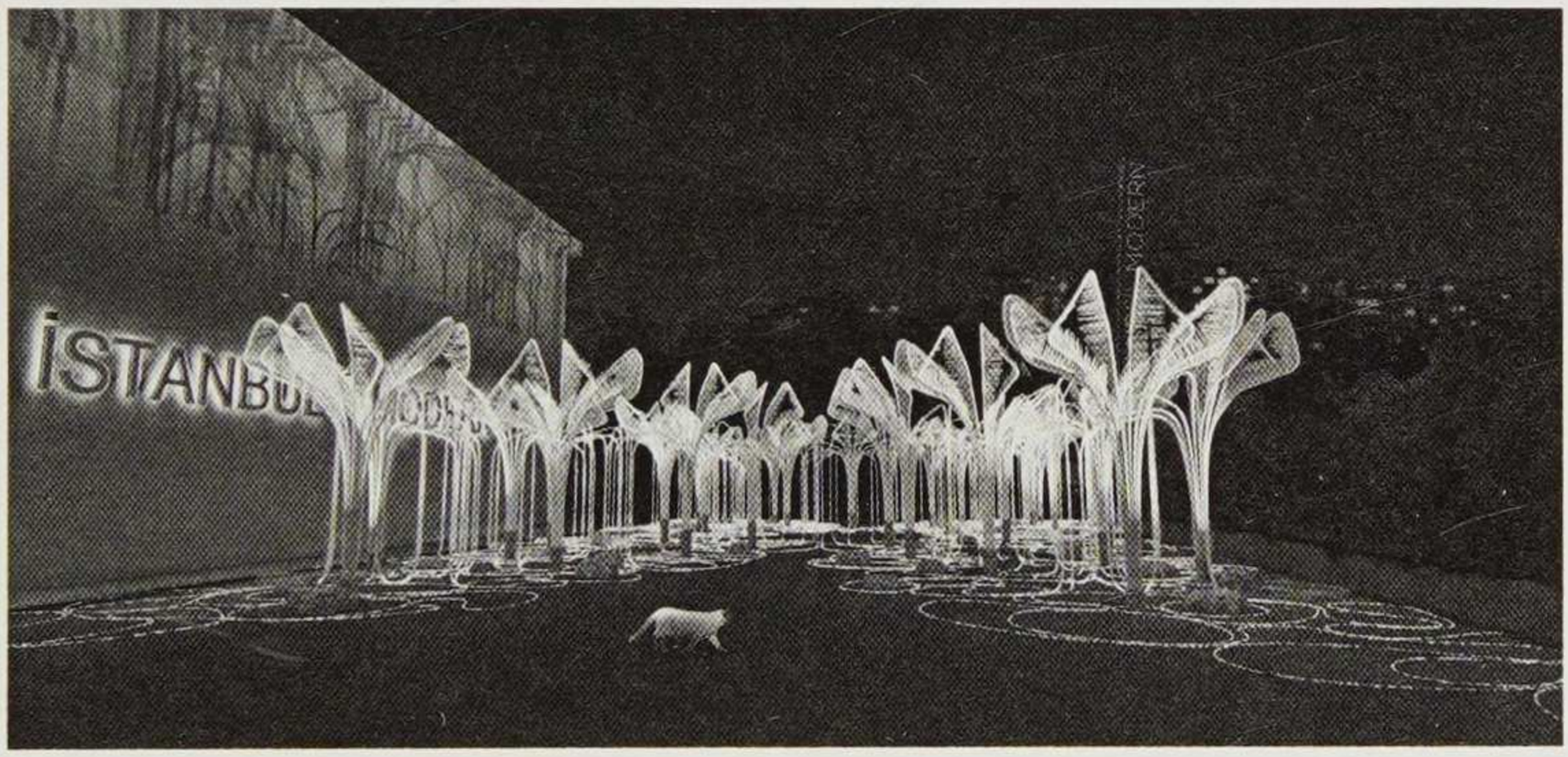


The Bosphorus Grove
Rendering
2015

We are going through a phase in the discipline where the output of photo-realistic images is the main mode of representation. What we find a little problematic is that this production of imagery is mostly unquestioned. In the beginning of our practice we were less interested in the potential of renderings, and we conveniently considered them more or less generic. Our focus was in the line work—plus we just didn't have the patience, the technical savvy, and had not yet developed a theoretical position to undertake hyperrealistic renders. Everybody does realistic renderings. You

will all be doing them when you go out to practice, and you will be asked to do produce them. They are the most efficient means of communicating with the general public, clients, etc. Within that, though, just like in the movie here, there are positions you can take to challenge the assumptions regarding the nature of the "real." There are scenes you can create and there are scenarios you can build. I don't think in our case, at the moment, they go as far as we would like to take them. For us, this is really the first attempt of what we can explore in this direction of inquiry. In fact, not much is happening in these scenes [see images, opposite and current page]. This has a bit to do with the format of the presentation for the competition. We thought that if more was happening within these scenes, along with the movie, it would have been too much.





The Bosphorus Grove
Renderings
2015

This is the one we had a lot of fun with [see image, top of current page] because, basically, people are beginning to be symmetrical. There is something

really creepy about children sort of mirroring ... subjects immediately become objects. Then you get a strange symmetry towards the center and characters begin to repeat. There is a global symmetry but also subtle local asymmetries in the way things move. We kind of treat all entities as objects in these scenes, building a still life arrangement if you will. I am not sure ... people seem to be more interesting in these than the project itself. The project was hard to represent, actually, because there is so little material mass in the project. We had a very hard time seeing them and navigating in the model. I think it gets more effective if you are within the space, when things get layered and one perceives the elements more obliquely ... when the figural becomes atmospheric.

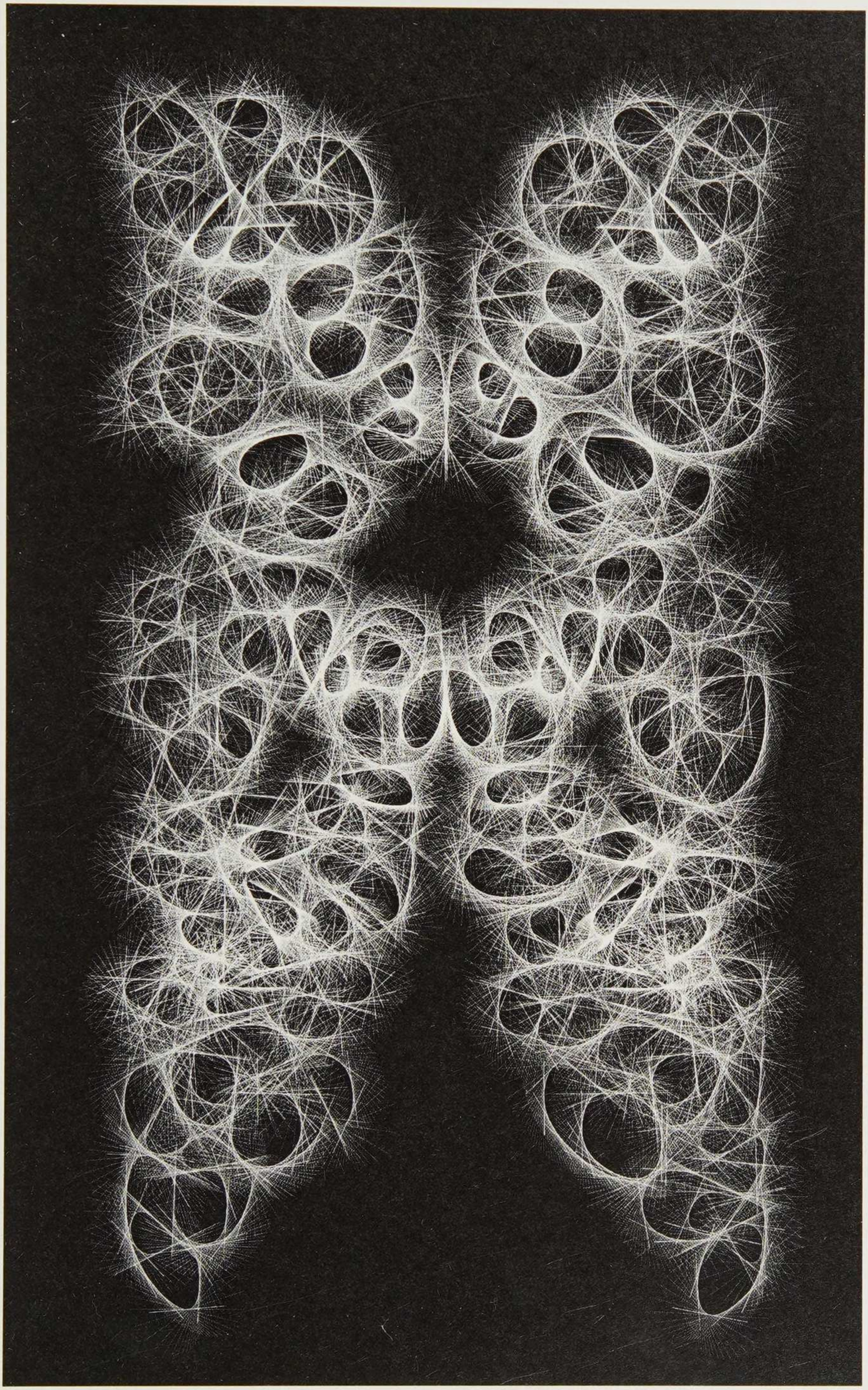
Student 2:

Can you talk about the drawings in that respect? I know it is really hard to draw a piped project, but your drawings are really rich, so I was wondering if you can walk us through this a little bit.

Ayata:

The interesting drawing was the ground floor. It cuts through the trunks and then begins to actually show the cuts of the tubes as they go down, and then they begin to inscribe the curvature on the ground ... which really, at the end, would be about the performance of material computation. There would be a certain bending radius of the hoses. The material would behave through specific curvature when pinned down, and it would behave other ways when released at the ends. We bought a fifty foot hose to test and it was behaving quite erratically. It just wants to do what it wants to do. You have to pin it down, but if you pin it down in one place, and pull it in the other, then it begins to behave in some other way. So I think what we drew, really, was our formal decisions about how we assumed the hoses would droop towards the ground and scribble the surface. In the end, it had almost nothing to do with how the hoses would actually behave. You could, of course, restrain it to be exactly how we drew it, for sure, but part of our argument was that the "misbehavior" of the hoses would continuously reorganize the ground through the life of the pavilion.

(Opposite)
The Bosphorus Grove
Drawing
2015



To try to represent this indeterminacy, we worked with series of tangents along the trajectory of the curvature that begin to fuzz out the edge. This is also an attempt to represent an idea of instability to the drawing as a whole and to the curvature itself. Curves are actually removed from this drawing, [see image, page 57]. It's only about the tangents that operate here as a field. We talked about how to simulate, perhaps through an animation, how they might move, how much more asymmetric it could get, and how much further relief-like it could become ... like a relief from the ground. It would not stay flat but would begin to gain depth.

Student 2:

Can you talk about your obsession with, as you say, "crafted curvature?"

Ayata:

Do you want to talk about it? [Laughter]

Student 2:

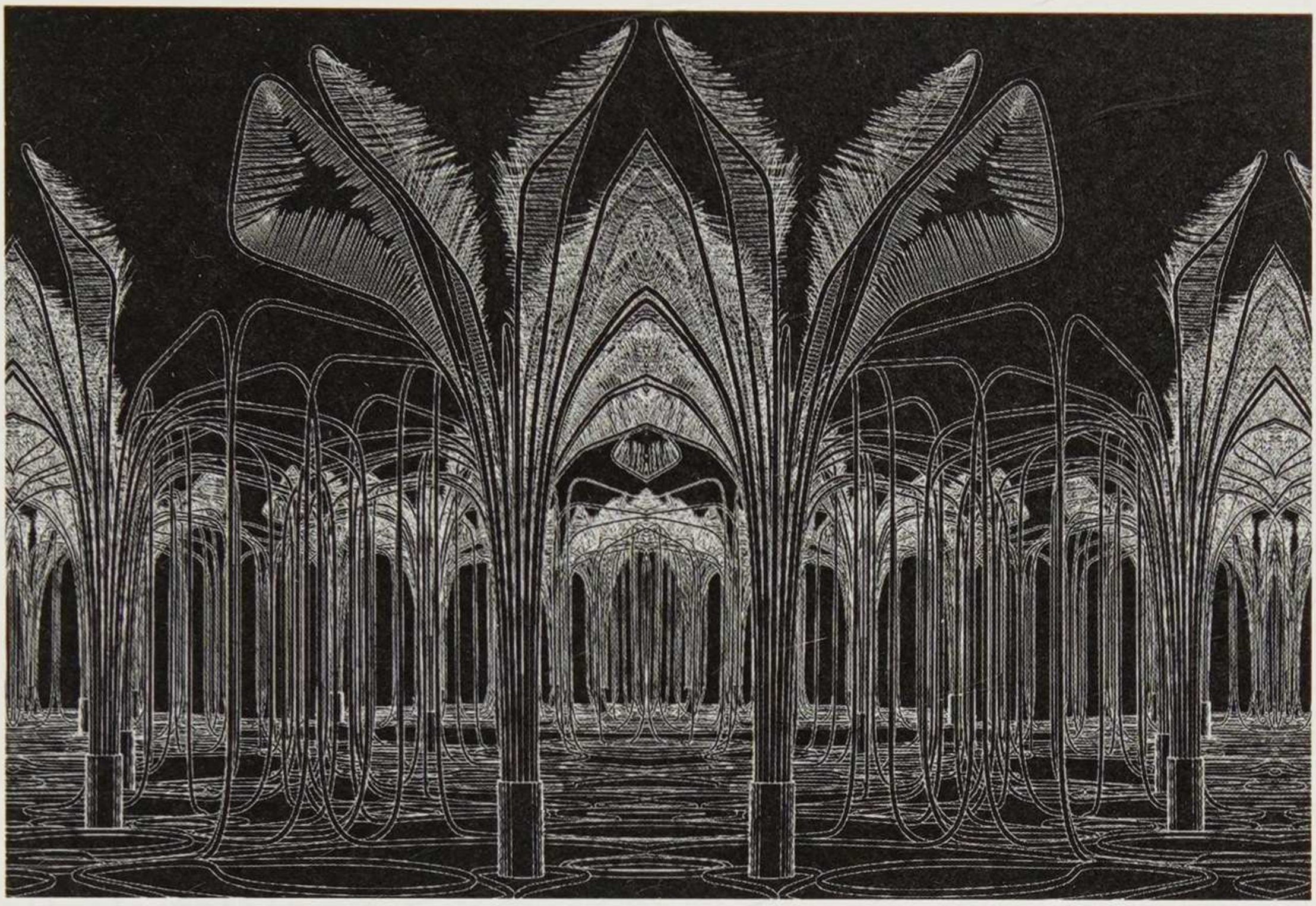
Hey, my project for you was all faceted! I don't know if you remember ...

Ayata:

Yeah I do ... Unforgettable! [Laughter]

This is really a question about our deep belief in craft. I guess this has to do with a reaction towards being able to operate through software platforms, where a lot is dictated through the pre-packaged program definitions, and the desire to develop a level of mannerism as well as a rigorous craft within them ... and then really to understand how we control them. I don't know Maya, like some of these guys know. It drives me a little crazy when you open up a program and there is a box, which you then have to pull and push. I am happy to model a box ... but a box as a starting point is kind of weird to me. I like to draw.

Part of it is also has to do with the fact that when I started there were no computers. I started drawing by hand. So I am in this generation where I have seen both sides, and I have to say that I resisted computers for a very long time. I went through grad school without touching much 3D software at all. The only 3D modeling I had done was in AutoCAD, which you can imagine is kind of clumsy



The Bosphorus Grove Drawing
2015

and unproductive ... but I was always interested in *crafting* something. I think when mediums shifted for me, and Rhino became the primary tool that we were engaging with, where one could draw and build surfaces simultaneously—draw and model, or model through drawing—it was a natural shift for me coming from hand drawing. I guess the obsession with curvature is to be able to gain the ability to really dictate what specific forms or what specific curvatures suggest and what they do. There is a difference between a bad curve and a good curve. Bad curves can be good for some projects and good curves don't always work. They might do different things in different circumstances, and both might be necessary in relationship to one another. It's hard to say what that is ... but the obsession is to be able to develop a sensibility in which you can respond to those on a case-by-case basis.

Student 6:

Can you talk more about the rendering with the children sitting on the ground and what is symmetric or what is not symmetric?

Ayata:

The scene is not symmetric at all. I took the picture in the wrong place, so we just had to adjust to that.

Student 6:

Well, I feel like you like symmetry—

Ayata:

—But not ...

Student 6:

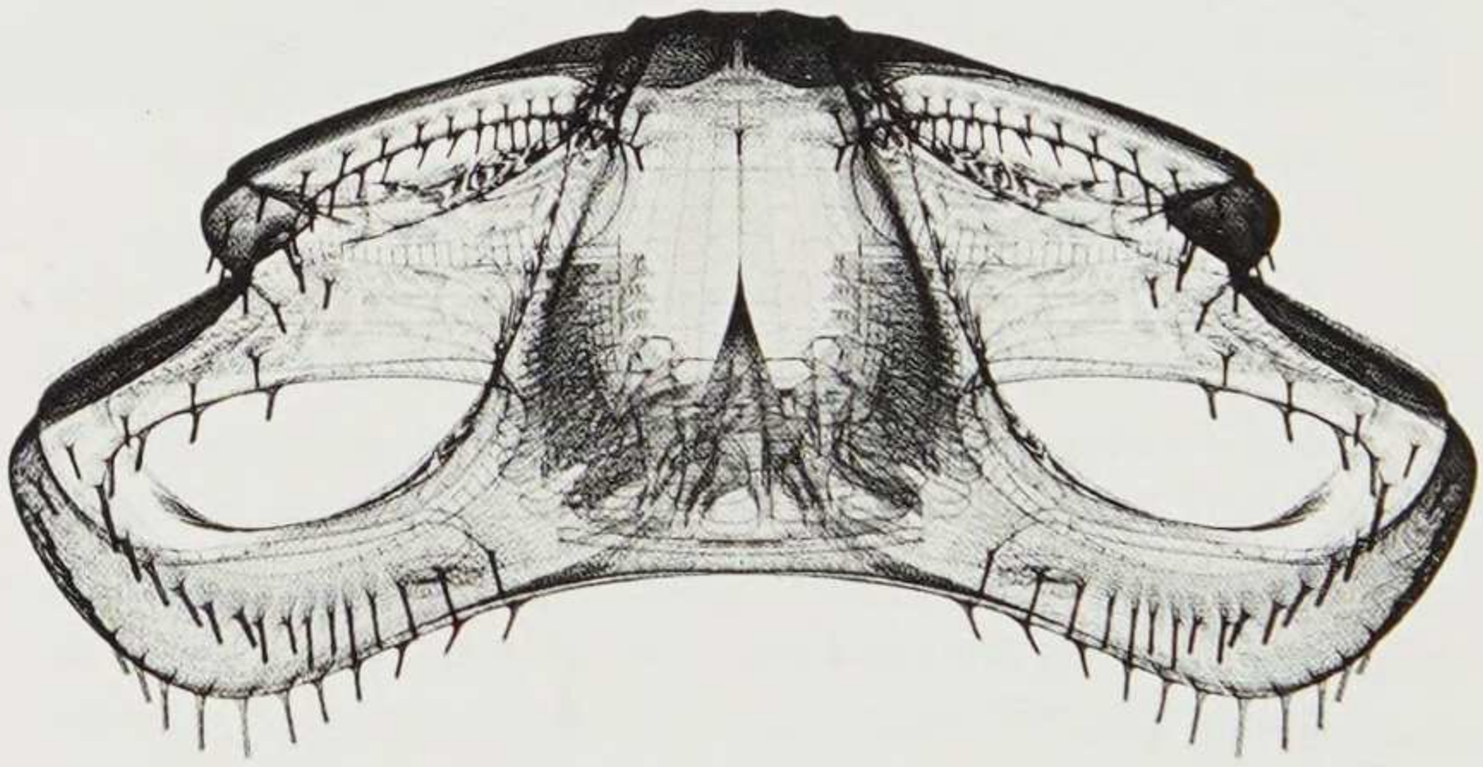
Yeah! [Laughter]

Sometimes professors don't like symmetry and ... there is no reason. They just don't like symmetry!

Ayata:

Until we did our Busan Opera House project, I had never done anything symmetrical in my life! I think that was the moment where we began to think about figuration and architectural objects in a different way.

Busan Opera
Drawing
2011



Historically, symmetry is about a central narrative that goes towards the axis, like in the Renaissance, and it always reinforces the singularity of a central axis. Everything goes through that focal point ... all the narration ... all sense of order and power goes towards that axis. For us, the axis is the way we start to establish global symmetry, and then develop local asymmetries around that axis. So it's not a narrative driven strategy that's central towards that focal point, but it's a non-linear narrative about multiple conditions that grow out of the central axis. The symmetry is a moment for us to pin down any field condition, any non-directional pattern, or any incomplete figure and start to iterate. This allows us to produce figuration in a very efficient way. There have been different things we've done with symmetry. We are really trying to explore it in

multiple ways. I am not sure if anything will be as purely symmetrical as Busan. That was kind of a first attempt. Everything after that has found ways of challenging that strong symmetry. Even though the thing might appear symmetrical, there are a lot of moments within projects that begin to push on the initial order of the symmetry.

Student 6:

When we deal with complex objects, it is really hard to make or give it order.

Ayata:

You can't do symmetry for the sake of symmetry. I don't think there is a project in that. We call our symmetries "odd symmetries." Globally, they might appear to be symmetrical, but when you get into it, one begins to experience nuances, which hopefully produce a very different trajectory for one to experience the work. It's not that one side equates to the other ... it is different, but it's just not apparent. That subtlety is something we are really interested in. Not necessarily subtlety of form—that's not what I'm suggesting—but subtlety of articulation in the way halves of local symmetries or halves of global symmetries begin to differ.

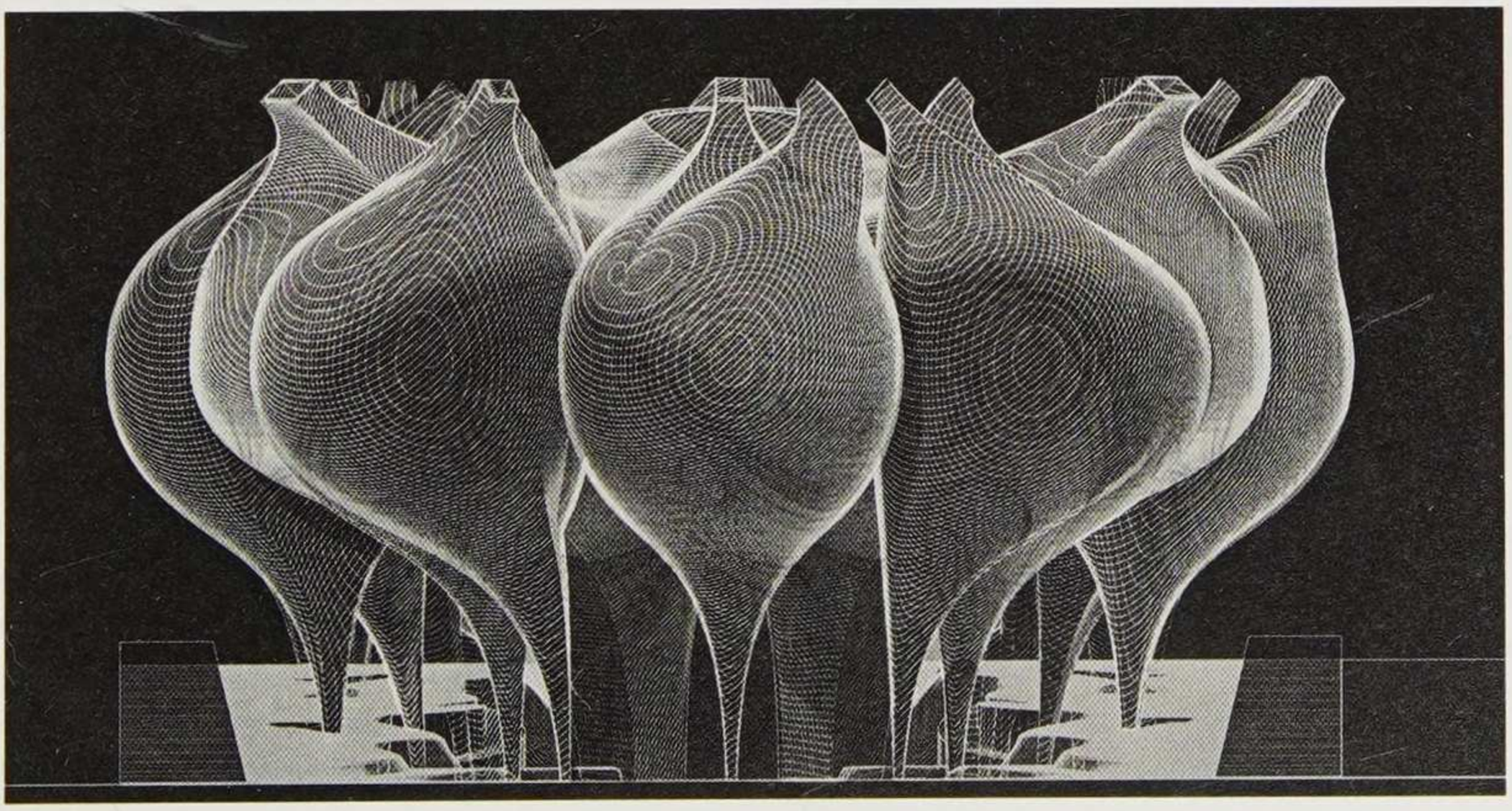
Student 6:

Would the Guggenheim Helsinki Museum be seen that way?

Ayata:

Right, it seems symmetrical, but the only thing that is symmetrical there is the moment the columns

Guggenheim Helsinki
Drawing
2014



touch the ground and the moment the skylights end. It's only in those two moments where the project is absolutely symmetrical. Everything else in between—the geometries and the articulations — are absolutely asymmetrical, but it's hard to catch because they move in very subtle, weird ways. There are no other moments of perfect symmetry across the axis.

There is absolutely no condition in the world, as in site condition, which would necessitate an architect to say, "This should be symmetrical!" There is absolutely no condition, right? So it automatically allows one to produce a degree of autonomy in the way one conceptualizes the work. There is absolutely no reason to do symmetry ... but we, as architects, have been doing it for a few thousand years. It's our way to say, "Here is this thing that has no relationship to anything else." So the object withdraws and gains its autonomy. I think that is an incredibly powerful notion.

Guggenheim Helsinki
Rendering
2014

Student 7:

Speaking of autonomy, do you guys ever completely say no to any sort of contextualization, or do you see crafting a video like the one for the Bosphorus Grove as a way to produce your own sort of fake cultural context?

Ayata:

We are getting increasingly more interested in the notion of context as an influence on the projects, but not in the way of either material continuity or local reference. This is what we trying to explore in my seminar, "Parafictional Objects," through alterations of the Dutch Still Lifes. We take out an object, we re-figure it, we articulate it anew, and we put it back into the same setting. When

you put it back, you try to fit it into that scene as much as possible, however exotic or dull it might be ... but it should do something that changes how we understand the reality of that scene. Architecture performs very similarly as it enables the participation of objects of different periods to occupy the same scene. To us, that's where context becomes very crucial. You don't call attention to the thing that you make, but by way of just having it there, you begin to understand your entire surrounding in a new way. Increasingly we are becoming interested in how we can produce a sense of estrangement in the context.

Busan Opera
Rendering
2011

Student 2:

Do you think that affects the iconography of the building?

Ayata:

Sure. Right now, I think we are shifting from explorations of singular forms towards more fractured, kit-bashed, broken forms in order to lose the sense of gestural wholeness. This is definitely a recent turn, and I would exclude a couple of earlier projects, but I think the more recent projects we are dealing with—be it the Guggenheim Helsinki Museum, be it the Dalseong Gymnasium or be it the Bosphorus Grove—are an accumulation of parts in some way. There is this desire to never make it singular, to avoid any singular gesture, and at the other end of the scale, never to make it so it breaks down to modules of fabrication to create aggregations.

Student 2 :

Do you think that starts to cause some estrangement in the buildings too?

Ayata:

I think so ... because it attacks the problem at the mid-scale. If you start from the middle and begin to think of that as an assembly that resists the whole and resists breaking down, then there's kind of a strange condition of what we understand a building to be. I think it's playing with that space in between the two approaches where you begin to find that sense of estrangement. It's hard to pin down what estrangement is. I mean, we are talking about it all the time ... and it happens, but you cannot exactly pinpoint it. You just try and hopefully it happens.

Defamiliarization is something you can produce through the rigors of the disciplinary exercises. You can take something and begin to modify it, or disfigure it, but I don't think one can begin to explore its potentials of estrangement in isolation. That's why I think the Dutch Still Lifes are important as an exercise. They serve as a setting, or as a medium, through which one can begin to speculate on various fictions regarding the object.

Student 4:

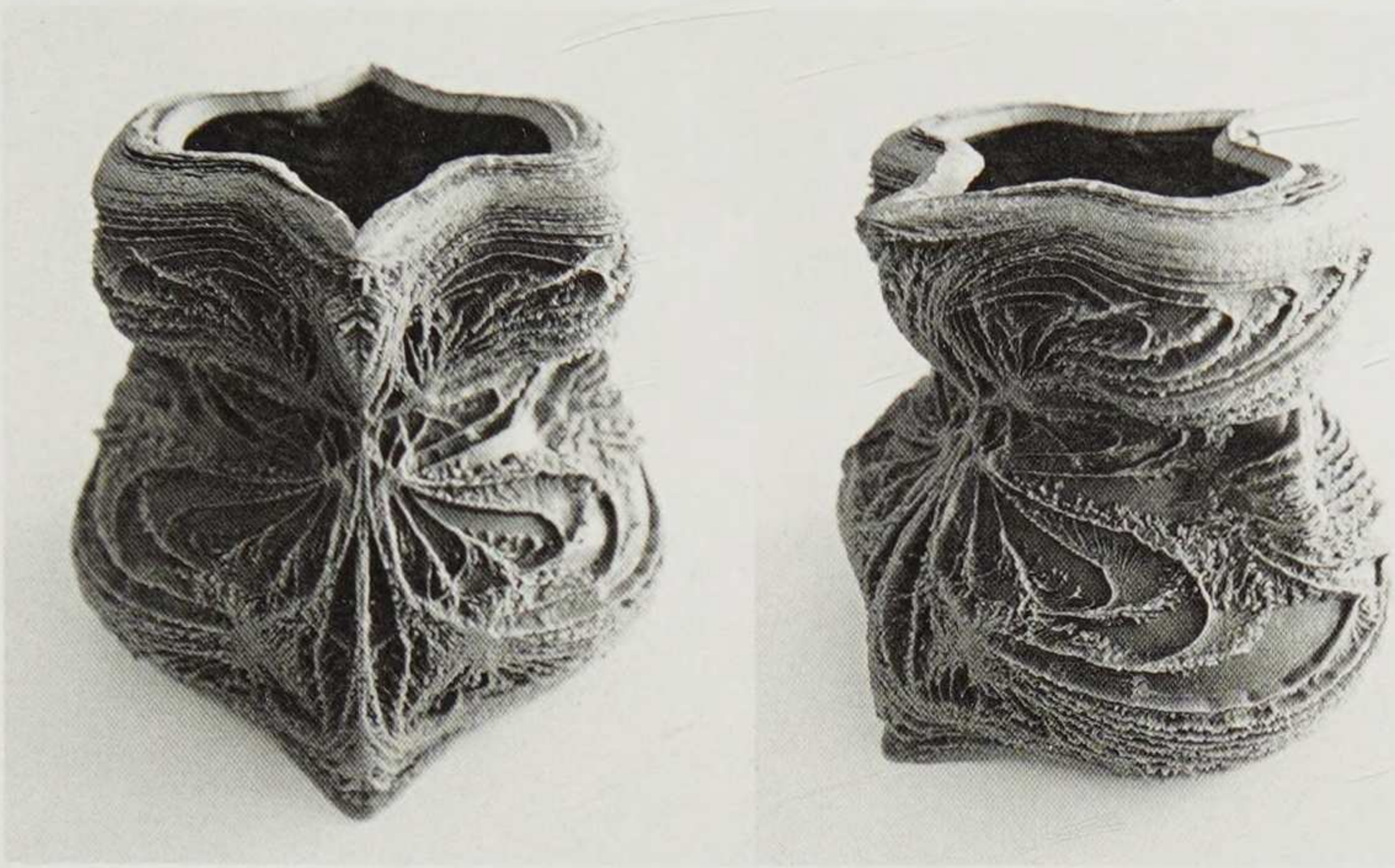
Can you talk more about the discourse that's driving your interest in representation and realism, and can you be more explicit about the discourse within architecture, as opposed to realism within art?

Ayata:

When we started our practice, we immediately started doing design projects. In terms of representation, we strongly felt that a disciplinary "Project" was not possible without a representational agenda. The vector-field drawings are a segue into this effort. Our interest in realism allows us to directly confront the tools we engage with. We don't have any interest in foregoing the potentials of digital mediums and resorting to them as mere tools. So we take them on. It's a bit strategic on some level, but it felt like the most direct way to build an argument.

Realism is really not about things being, or looking real, right? Realism is an argument about representation, an aesthetic argument between reality and its representation. The example I like giving is Harmen Brethouwer's "False Abstracts" series, which consists of paintings in the grain of abstract expressionism. They are paintings done by decorative stone painters, who specialize in painting stone details and making them look as "real" as possible ... but when you paint decorative stones so specifically on a square and try to make them look as accurate as possible, and then hang them on a gallery wall, their intended realism transforms to total abstraction. So something abstract, in one notion, can be an agenda about realism. Realism should not be viewed as the opposite end of abstraction. The drawings that we make, at the end of the day, are lines tangent and normal to a curve. There is a very realist way you can begin to talk about it and argue it. There are absolutely no

Still Life Interventions
Rendering
2014



Donkeys and Feathers:
Fuzzy Feathers
Photograph
2014

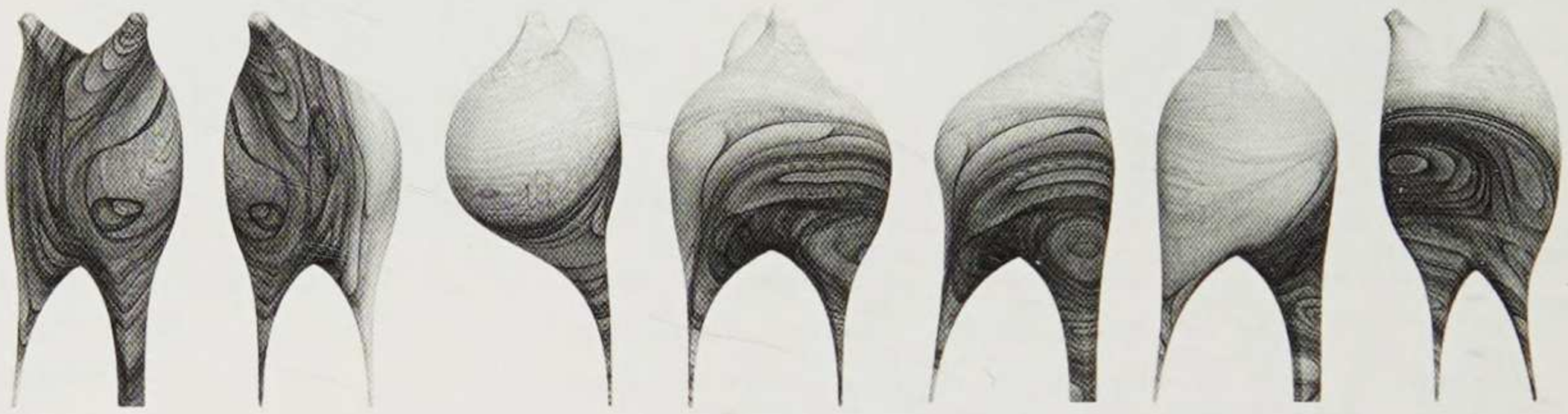
abstractions. They are about the realism of their order, and they are quite literal descriptions of the change in rate of curvature. Asking ourselves how to turn it into a larger agenda is what took us into further explorations of realism.

In terms of projecting into the future of where this goes, we will see. Perhaps I don't want to know, not just yet. We just published a book, *The Estranged Object*. The first part, in a way, is out of our system. It builds the foundation for how we need to respond to it because we both feel that we only scratched the surface. I think the way we represent our ideas are evolving and responding to the concepts outlined in the book. We are trying, but I don't think the attempts in our recent projects are nearly as interesting as the still lifes, or nearly as interesting as some of the parafictional art that I love to indulge in ... at least not just yet. Hopefully the book will force us to push this agenda a lot further, both in practice and teaching.

Student 1:

How do you approach the notion of character in your work? If you look at the recent projects, at least the last three, they are very different. You look at them and you tie them down to the way you represent stuff, whether it is drawings or renderings, and I think it's also in the geometry itself ... the obsession with curves or whatever it may be. Whether it's you or Michael Young, there is always something that comes back, and there is

also something new that comes in. The Guggenheim had something new to bring, the Bosphorus Grove had something different to it, etc. What drives the differences? I mean, that's not the right question because you clearly just told us ... but I think there is a lot more than just that. For instance, you tried to explore how to find an architectural project within the parafictional world and something new came out of it, but then there is also the "Young & Ayata" character and your aesthetic ... the moves ... the signature moves you guys do! [Laughter]



Guggenheim Helsinki
Rendering
2014

Ayata:

It's there. It's bad habits ... habits that don't go away! [Laughter]

Student 1:

I just want to know how it works together from project to project ...

Ayata:

I don't think I ever want to give that away—[Laughter]—not give it away in the sense of not sharing it. I don't want to let go of what I love to do and the way I obsess about it, or draw it, or generate it. It's extremely inefficient, extremely painful, extremely—I don't know—it's kind of nightmarish at times.

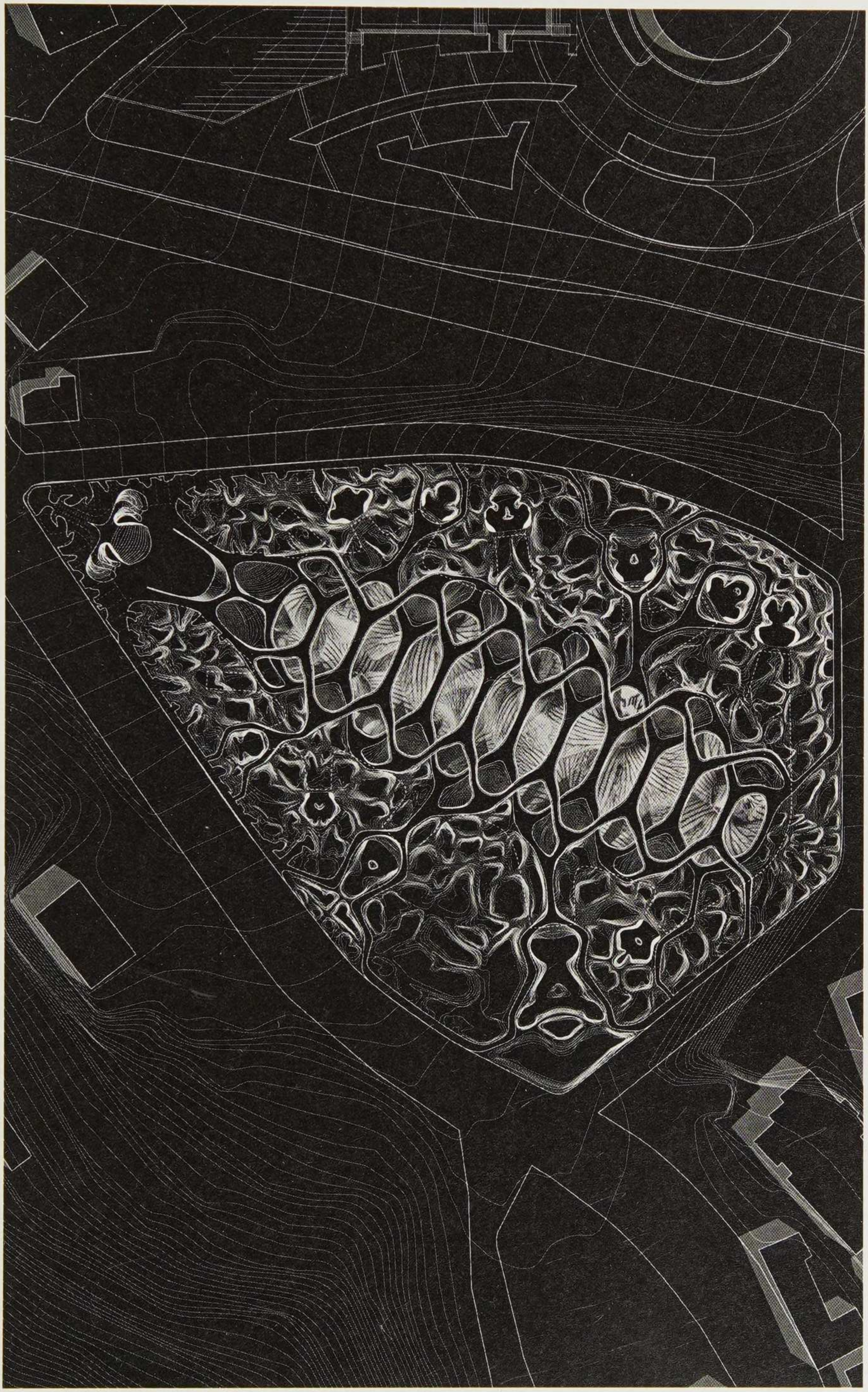
Student 1:

I guess what I'm asking is: how do you choose what you keep and what you take?

Ayata:

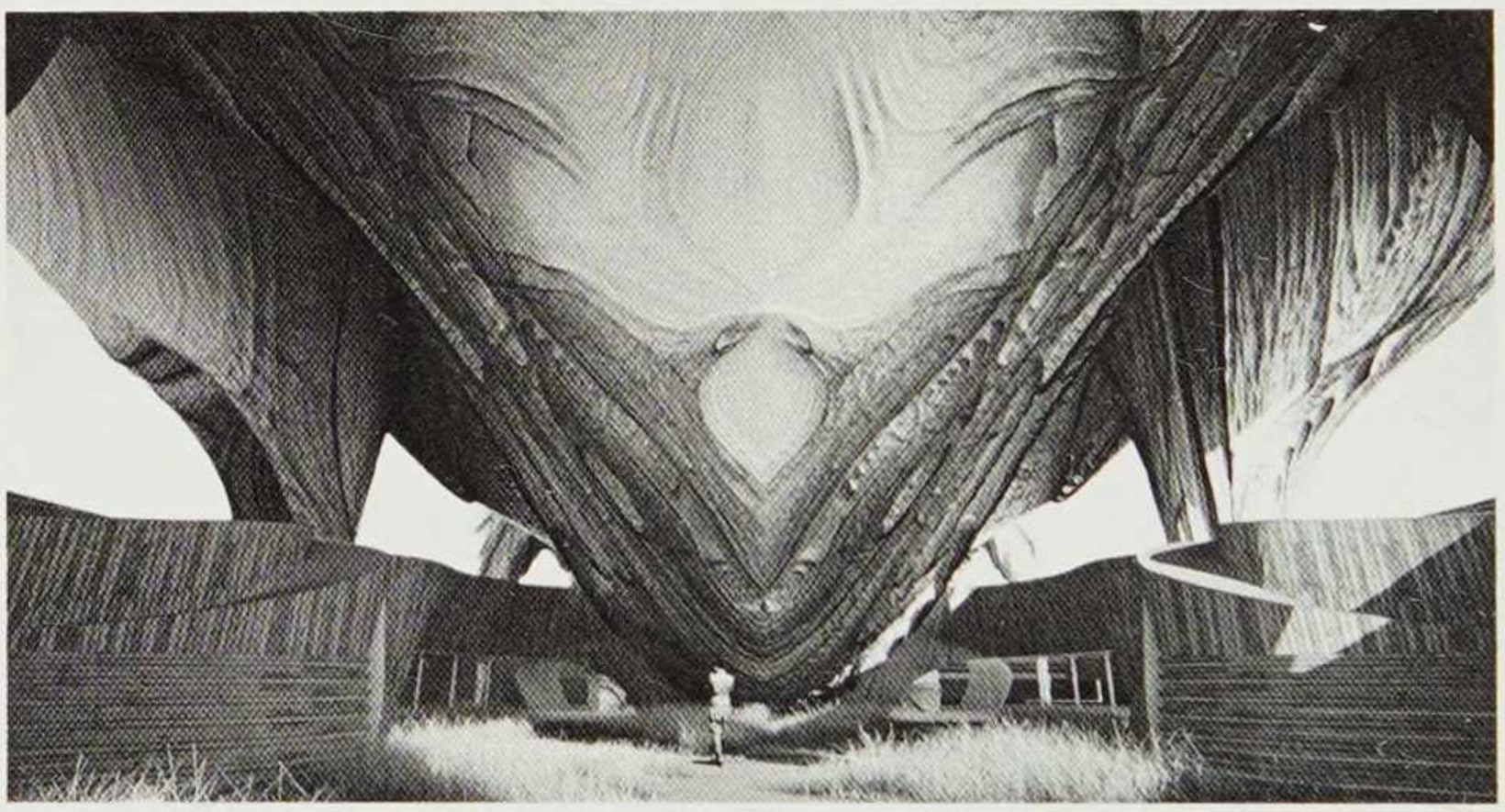
If you look at how things are drawn or modeled in all of these projects, they are all generated with the same principles. Actually, the formal attributes and approach doesn't change. It's how we argue about it that changes. In some ways, the exoticness of form takes a back seat in the argument. I don't

(Opposite)
Dalseong Gymnasium
Drawing
2014



have a problem with a formally ambitious project, but I think we have exhausted our eyes over the last twenty years without a serious argument about representation and how we engage the digital era with a new understanding of a representational project. The previous generation might sound off statements like, "Oh, it's just a tool. It's just a production tool. I don't understand these young architects. How can they be on the screen? They don't draw." It's actually an incredibly seismic moment in the discourse of architecture. The mode of representation changed very little for five hundred years, and then the digital era challenged all our notions of how we design, produce, and visualize projects. It's truly an historical moment. When this moment is studied in the distant future, it's going to be seen as an incredibly important moment in the discourse of architecture.

Guggenheim Helsinki
Rendering
2014



For us, it was that drive to ask, "What can we make out of this?" So, you cannot leave your sensibility behind when you take up a question like that. It has to come with you, but the argument has to change. We still draw the way we do. We still obsess the way we obsess. It's just the argument that needs to change and evolve. Another way to put it, I guess, is that as you get older, it gets more difficult to strip down habits ... [Laughter]

I remember a particular studio at Princeton. I was modeling this staircase, which was basically just twenty steps that sort of oscillated between being a sitting stair and a tilted wall. Now you can just do the curve at the bottom, do the curve on top, loft it, contour it and get your stairs that are perfectly ordered, right? I didn't know how to do that—[Laughter]—nobody told me. I just could

not comprehend the digital interface at the time. So with AutoCAD splines I drew twenty steps that looked like they were done with the surface. You can imagine the inefficiency and waste of time, but I think it was almost perfect. So the obsession has always been there. Maybe it's neurotic ... maybe it's compulsive ... I don't know. It's certainly not efficient, but in some way it drives the desire to do this.

Student 4:

How do you approach teaching your studios or critiquing within your studios? Do you want students to learn specific techniques or is it more about developing a certain sensibility?

Student 1:

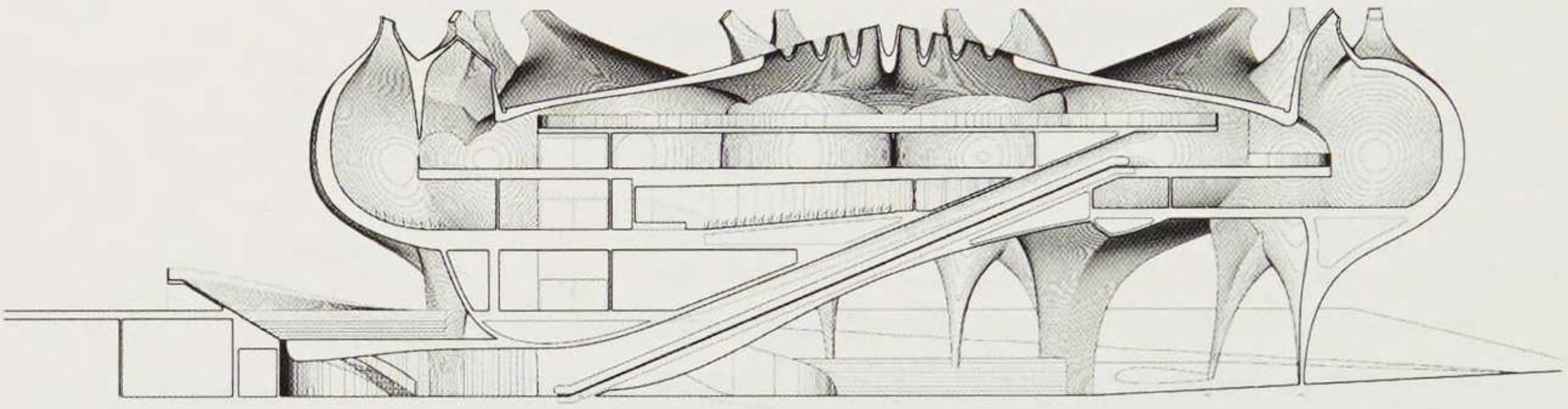
Actually, I'll add on to that. Over the summer, we had a discussion with you and Michael Young about overly prescriptive teaching methodologies, about whether you guys see that to be productive, and whether either of you typically teach in that way. Then this past fall, you tested out teaching your students a "Young & Ayata" project. You sort of taught them how to do your Guggenheim Helsinki project. How do you respond to that? You didn't necessarily do that the year before, right?

Ayata:

I think I did something in-between, and it depends from studio to studio ... and it depends on the agenda of the studio. The core studios are really difficult to teach that way. When you have a housing studio that dictates certain things and then you have a comprehensive studio dictating certain other criteria, one has to tread a fine line in terms of what you prescribe and what you leave open for subjective interpretation. I think prescriptive studios are well proven methods and we have some good examples of that model here at Penn. Students learn a great deal in them. I find myself in-between, in terms of prescribing something that's hopefully open ended. This year I didn't prescribe anything for my 602 comprehensive studio. I mean, I did for some things ... but most things were actually open-ended. [Laughter]

And you're right, the housing studio last fall was the one that was the most prescribed, in terms of a method, but I didn't have any hang-ups about what

it should look like. I guess that's the difference. I was curious to see if we could incorporate the formal strategies of volumetric aggregations we experimented with in the Guggenheim Helsinki Competition, but this time within the constraints of a subdivided housing program. For me, if the studio can open up towards multiple trajectories, in terms of how it produces multiple aesthetics, it gets more interesting for me as a teacher. I think it was successful in last year's 602 comprehensive



Guggenheim Helsinki
Drawing
2014

studio and in this year's 602 as well, in the way projects diverged into different directions. In some way the 602 studio last year was kind of prescribed in the beginning—with the imaging, the drawing, the scripting, etc.—but, ultimately, all the projects reached very different conclusions. I'm a happy camper when that happens. I am not interested in a singular aesthetic. This is the ultimate potential of the aesthetics of estrangement, it resists singular aesthetics, and it resists style. I am also not interested in students producing, or reproducing, our projects. I'd rather have them learn to develop their ideas through their projects. I just want all of them to have a sense of care, craft, and obsession, and that can be expressed through many different forms and many different attitudes.

Student 1:

When you approached it with that middle ground, between the project that you've been exploring and the students' desires, did you find it harder to get the difference in those projects? As opposed to, let's say, how you approached it in the year before when it was less prescriptive?

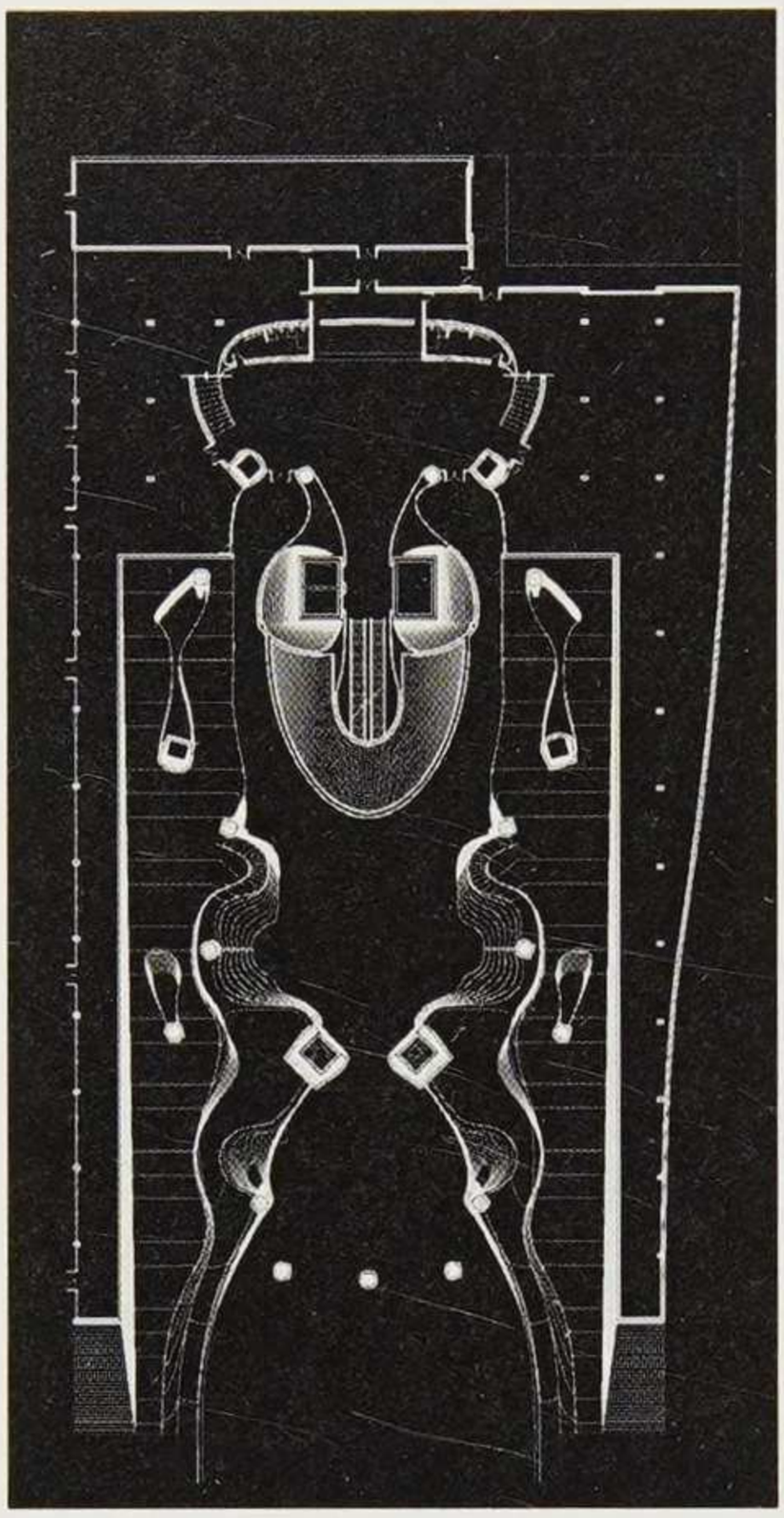
Ayata:

I think the two years were very different. It was also my first year at Penn so I was not familiar with the level of students at that specific moment in the curriculum. Honestly, you guys came from

very different first year experiences. The culture of the school had a seismic shift. Your class had some students who were not well versed in digital design, representation and fabrication tools, so there was a lot of time spent building up skills. Whereas, last semester's class, when they came in for the first pin-up, everybody demonstrated broad skills. On the one hand, the output was impressive, and on the other hand, you realize very quickly that it's just about having skills. I think on the argument level, where projects ultimately gain their significance, there was absolutely no difference. I think you're all smart individuals, operating at a high level. You're all open-minded in many ways. I enjoyed that, in either case, there was no pushback on anything. You guys really go for it here ... it is quite impressive. It's hard to compare both 601 studios from that perspective. I think I got more "building-like" buildings from last year's 601 studio and less "building-like" buildings this year. I don't know if that's good or bad. There were definitely things that I am interested in that I took away from each year's work ... that I want to explore further in next year's 601 studio, after accreditation ... [Laughter]

It was interesting to see that what we tried as a method in the Guggenheim proposal yielded strange results in the next studio that I did. For the formal method to completely lose its programmatic association, and then to become a housing project, produced some really unexpected proposals from

Dalseong Gymnasium
Rendering
2014



Guggenheim Helsinki
Drawing
2014

the students. This allowed me to kind of test the range of this particular approach through another typology. When I look back, though, I can relate this formal strategy to HyeJi's [Yang] project in our 601 studio last fall. I can honestly say that the way her project developed in the studio made me push the method of mid-scale aggregation further. From her project, to the Guggenheim Helsinki, to this year's studio, there's a strong set of relationships.

Student 1:

I find that super interesting ... how you go from teaching in a non-prescriptive way to then doing a project in your office and saying, "Let's learn from what we just did," and there's a lineage to the students' work from your studio.

Ayata:

I am still learning how to teach, I guess. I might be in a different state of mind next year. What I find is that not prescribing anything can become somewhat inefficient ... both for me and probably for the students as well. It can become a world of limbo, and they're probably wondering, "Holy shit! What does he want?" It takes a long time and quite a bit of struggle to meet where we need to meet for the projects to be solid projects. By prescribing it to a certain degree, and then leaving it open-ended towards the explorations of multiple aesthetics, I think we achieved more successful results in terms of project quality and the culture of the studio as well. I know you guys still suffered though. [Laughter]

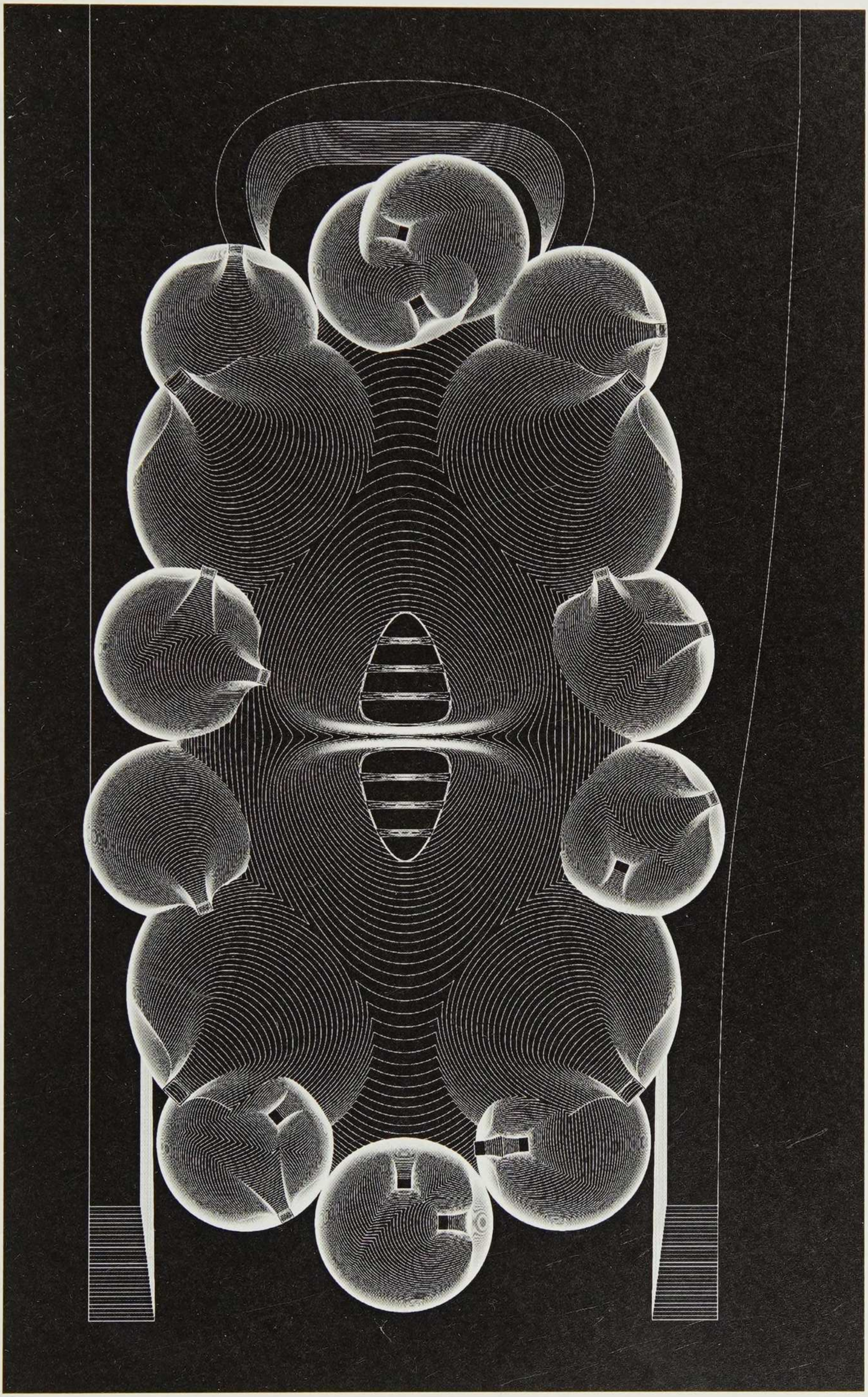
Student 2:

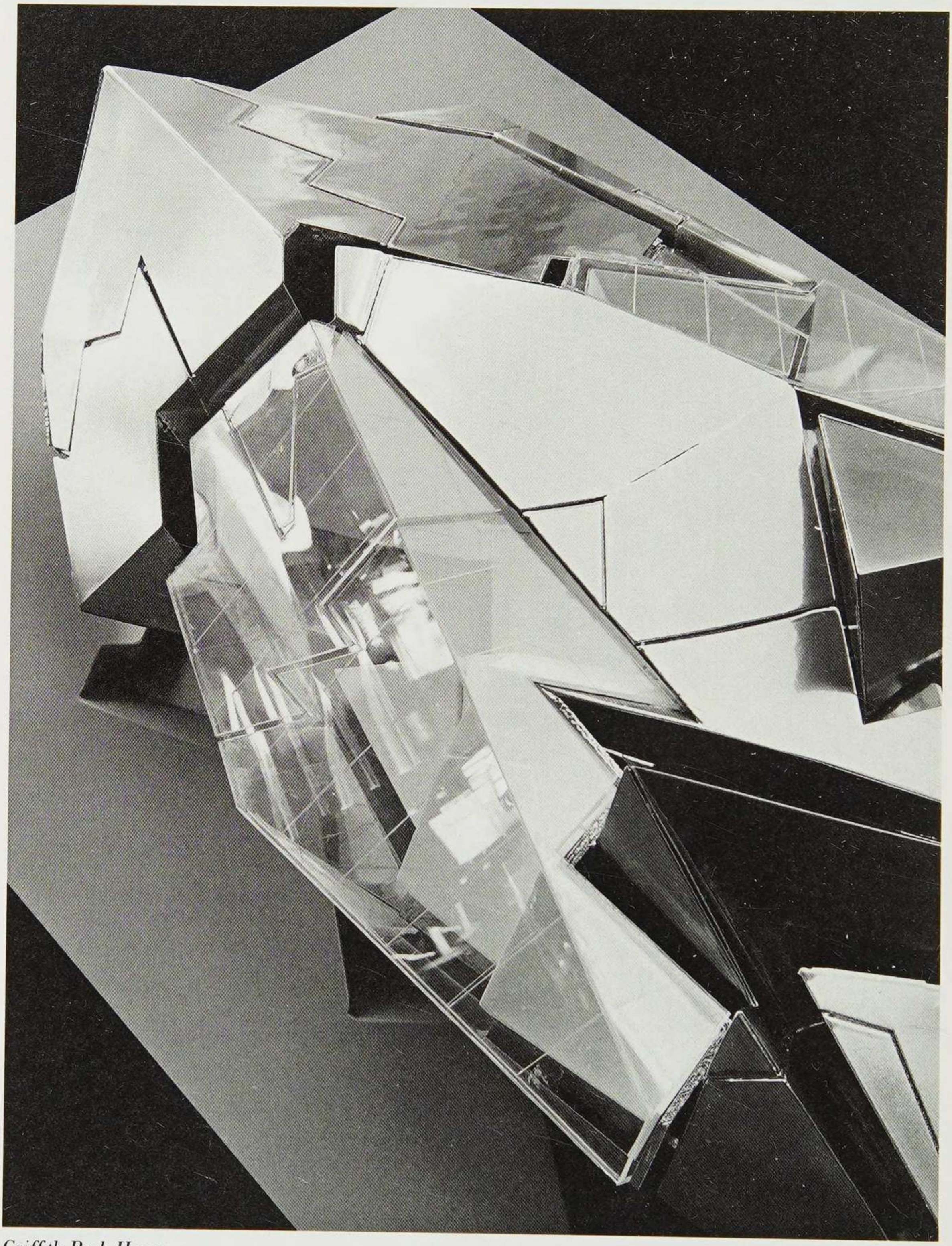
I think we all suffered a little bit. I blew my top, maybe once or twice! [Laughter]

Ayata:

It was alright. It's an interesting question when you teach, as to what kind of distance you keep from the projects. Ultimately, it's a level of attachment to the ideas that you are engaged with. Every project is a collaboration with the student. Not in the sense of ownership, but more like a sense of being deeply involved in it. To me that's very important because if you don't have that desire then I don't think it's worth teaching. That's why I get emotional at times. [Laughter]

(Opposite)
Guggenheim Helsinki
Drawing
2014





Griffith Park House
Model
2015

None More Black

a conversation with Tom Wiscombe and Josh Freese

Student 1:

Some of us have been watching the lectures that Jeffrey Kipnis has been doing at SCI-Arc, where he presents a faculty member's work and then engages them in a conversation ... obviously there is one with you. One thing I noticed that was brought up a lot, especially in consideration of what's going on in your studio at Penn right now, was the question of the tattoos. Since your conversation with Jeffrey Kipnis, what would you say is your stance on the tattoo? I know that's very broad, but to me it's important. The first time I saw one of your lectures, you talked about the tattoo and its relationship—or the direct removal of its relationship—to its massing. The tattoo is another "object" in play. Now when you present, you also say, "This isn't the emergent project where two or three things come together to create a new, emergent whole. It is something else ... it's a different ontology." You are doing a project in L.A., so maybe you can speak about how the tattoo is in play there and how it relates to the more theoretical part of your project.

Wiscombe:

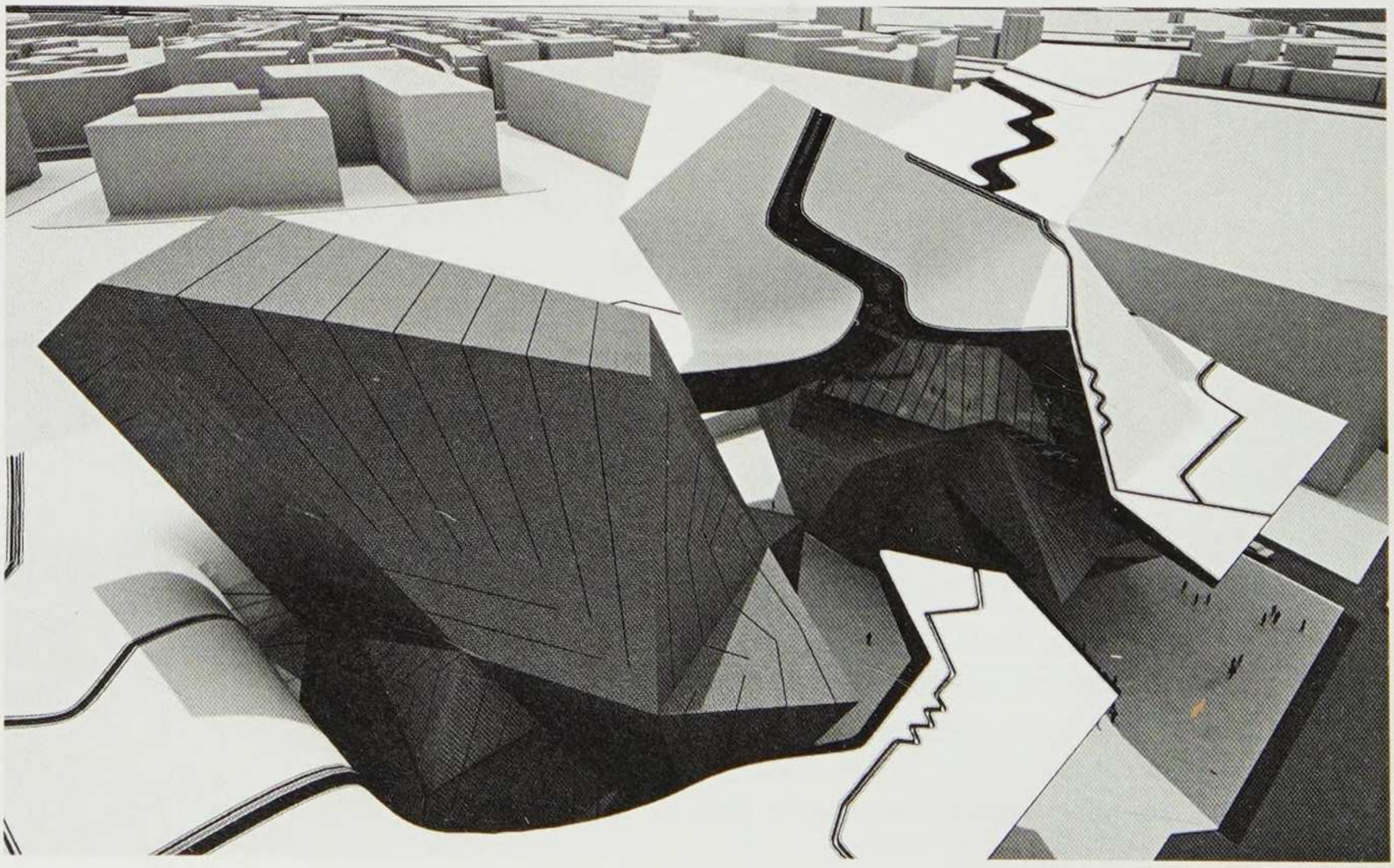
I assume there are some people in this room who don't know anything about what we are talking about or why an architect would be talking about tattoos. So maybe I'll give a little bit of background about that ...

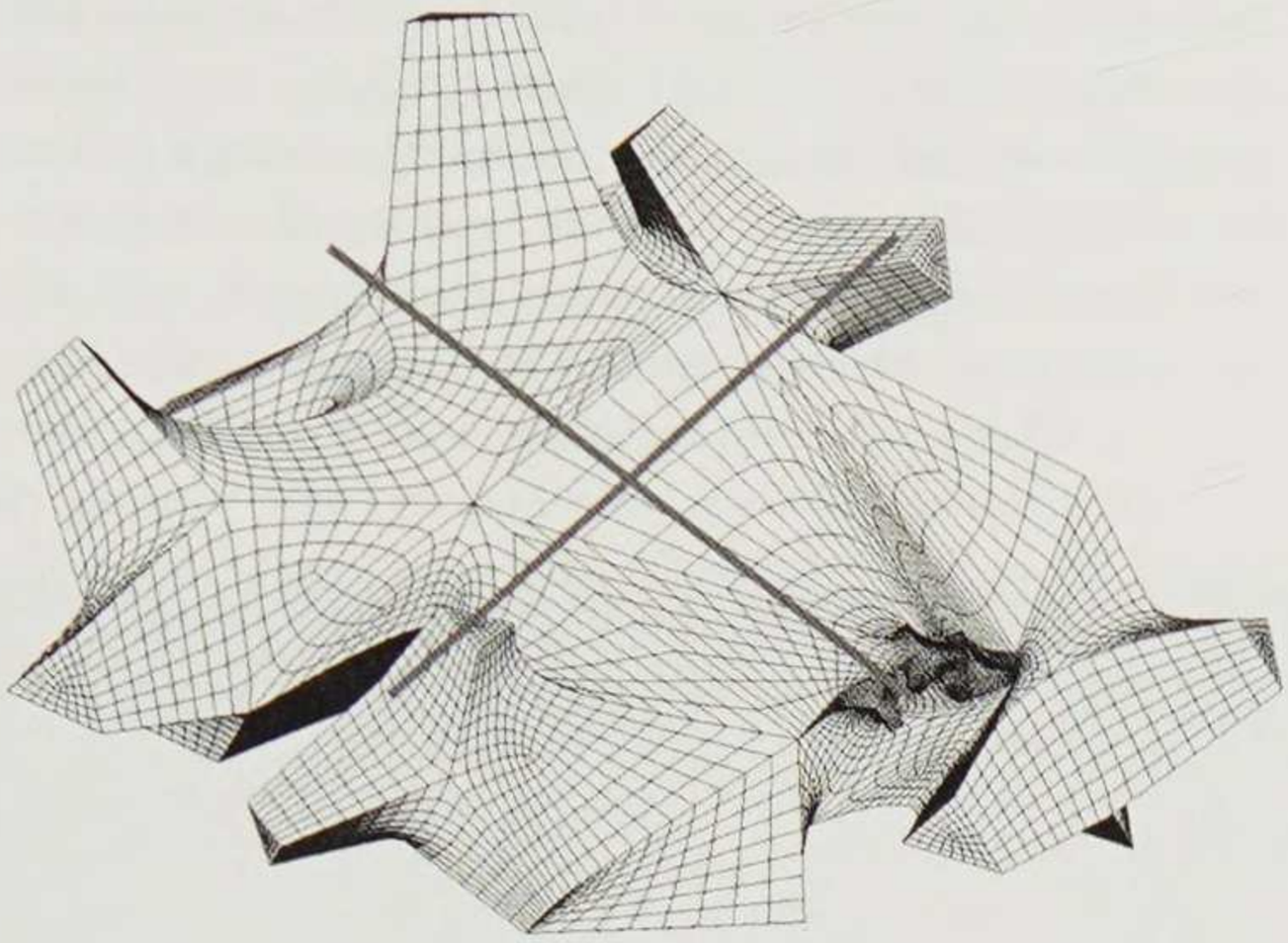
The first thing is that I know that "tattoo" is not an architectural term. It is not a disciplinary term. It's a rhetorical term. I am also not the first architect to use it. I find it really valuable because it opens the possibility of a broken relation between the qualities that happen on the skin of a thing and the thing itself. The idea that you can release surface articulation from total alignment with its underlying form, and create tension between them, is at the core of the tattoo idea. As you say, this is a new ontological framework that is not about

one thing subjugating another but, rather, about different things existing equally ... something that Ian Bogost talks about. The tattoo is my critique of meshes, panelization, and especially continuous variability, which Parametricism argues is the holy grail of architecture. With the tattoo, I am arguing that architecture is not about total alignment of systems and subsystems, and not about refinement into ever smaller little pieces. I am arguing that it is about the specific lives of each of the parts of architecture, and that, in fact, everything is a part. There is no upward fusion of all things into a big lump. Separation and difference is crucial. A tattoo can drift and slide around on things ... it does not need to emphasize that which lies beneath and presumed to be more fundamental, like structure in [Gottfried] Semper's theories of cladding. I remember when Grasshopper arrived at our doorstep in 2007. Grasshopper said, "Everything is connected and everything is at the service of a larger holistic and smooth effect." It has said it through so many zombie-projects by now. Now it's time to say something else. Not everything is relevant forever. That is the definition of relevance!

I'd also like to point out that mesh-thinking has also created another kind of reductionism ... namely, the reduction of tectonic discourse to technique. The history of tectonic discourse is so vital and crucial

Taichung City Cultural Center
Rendering
2013





National Center for Contemporary Arts Rendering 2013

A MESH IS EVERYWHERE, ALL THE TIME

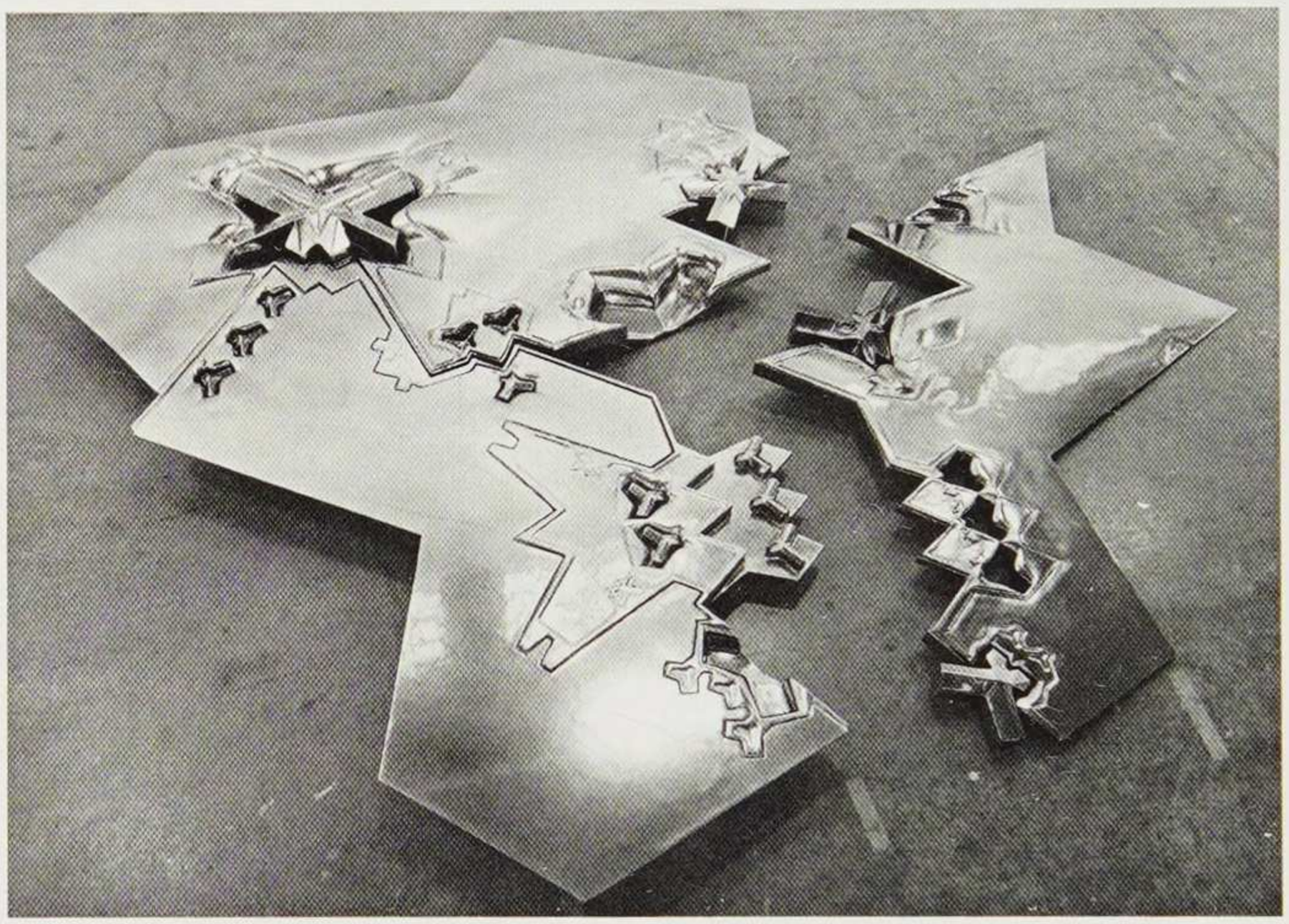
to architectural effects, I am sad to see all of that be downgraded to a tool. Tectonics can make small things look gigantic ... and gigantic things look tiny. It can make wood look like alabaster and fiberglass look like chrome. It can make structure look like a drawing or suppress structure in favor of mass effects. The worst offenses are by architects who confuse computer meshes with panels or structural frames [see image, page 79].

In a sense, the tattoo is a particular statement of autonomy. For me it is part of my larger theory of discreteness or architecture of a flat ontology, where mass, interior, ground, and tectonic articulation can be dealt with on a flat plane of difference. This is not Deleuze's "plateau," which is more a kind of space of mixtures and "lines of flight." Everything is not a mixture. Everything does not align with everything else. What I'm working on now, at least, is exploring how things can be discrete but also resonate with one another without fusing. There are, of course, many voices to the contrary ... some in this building, some in this room probably ... [Laughter]

One last thing I would like to say about the tattoo ... for me, it is linked to what I consider to be the materiality of the 21st century, which is composites. It does not require composites to exist as an idea—I don't believe that material "generates" architecture—but the existence of composites makes the argument seem prescient. Basically, what happens when you start to deal with composites is that you don't have to think about architecture

in terms of little pieces of mineral materials like steel sticks, bricks, metal panels, and pieces of stone. You can start to think about things as much larger chunks, which I call super-components. I have been talking about building in chunks for many years now, and it's starting to become real ... where you can actually fold together new ways of project delivery, sequencing, and joining things

Figural Joint
Photograph
2015



together, with strange results. I often feel like the location of joints is wrong, or there are too many of them. I think 21st century tectonics is about fiction, not about refinement. What does it mean to make a fictional joint or seam? Is it a drawing? Can drawings flow across different materials on a surface? Are we undermining legibility of the industrial fabrication processes? Are we increasing the sense of mystery? Yes to all of those. I love this idea that after the age of mineral material—which is also, by the way, the age of the Anthropocene and the idea that construction materials should be manufactured in the scale of man—we are forced to conceive of a whole new tectonics. We don't get anything for free anymore. All of that rustication and patterning and hardware goes away and we have to build up new ideas. I've always loved science fiction for that reason, because it projects a future where we assume there are new ways of making things, and you sense the production designer trying to figure out how exactly a surface should be broken down, or if it should be at all ... and again, what

fictional material it should be made out of. I read this great book recently by [Quentin] Meillassoux called *Science Fiction and Extro-Science Fiction*, which outlined how science fiction itself is closer to everyday reality, and that a truly progressive, and alienating, science fiction would have to exist outside known physics.

So to be clear, composite materiality is not "driving" my work, but it conveniently allows me to think new thoughts in tectonic theory at this juncture. I am not a "neo-materialist," a ubiquitous ethos that you do find in many academic and professional circles, especially in Europe. I don't believe that composites or any material can ever generate architecture. Authors generate architecture. Call me a "tectonic fictionalist" if you like!

Student 1:

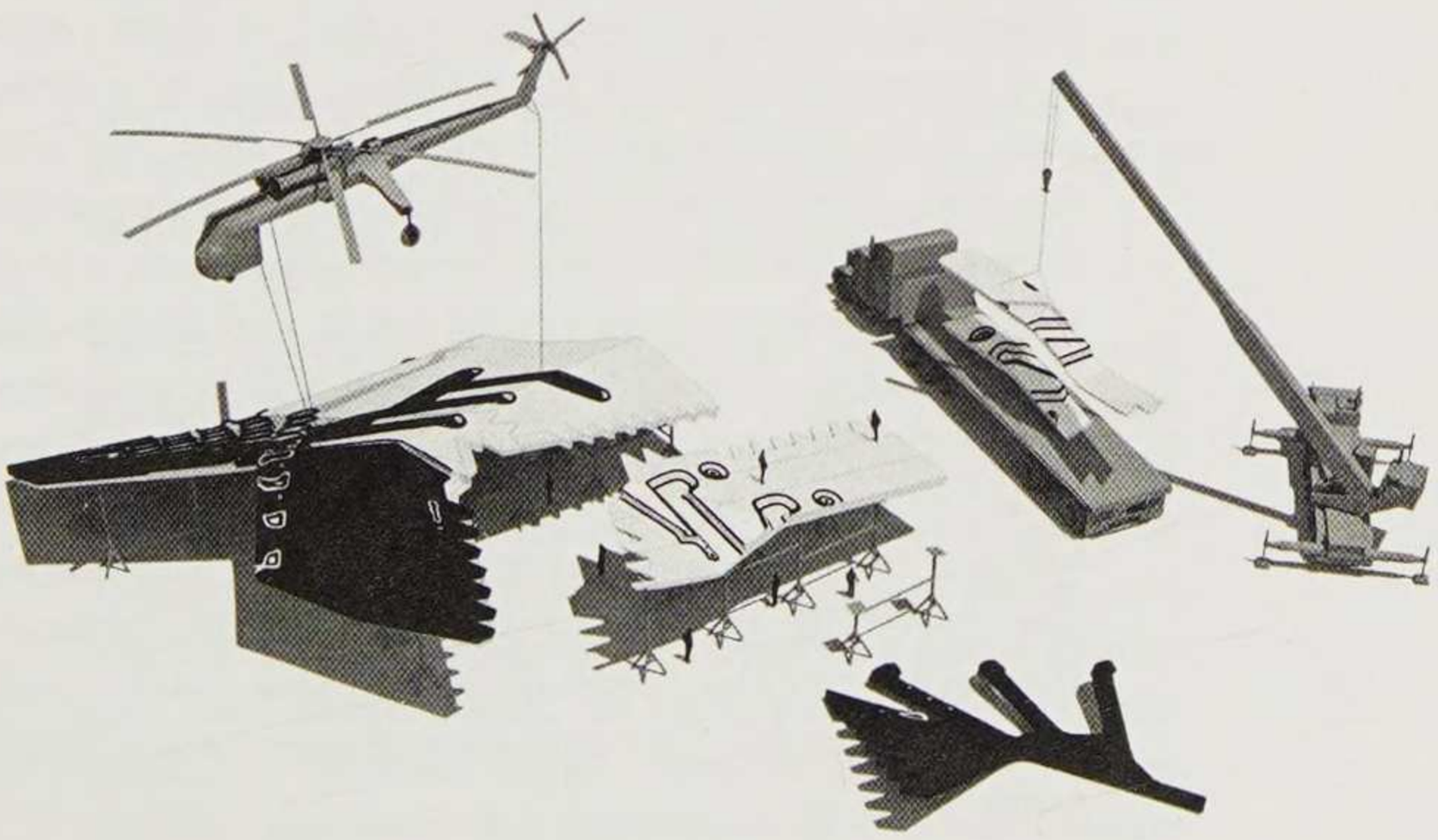
So why do you think you get criticized about them?

Wiscombe:

Well, I didn't know I was. I mean, are you criticizing me? [Laughter]

Student 2:

Well, in your conversation at SCI-Arc [with Jeffrey Kipnis, Todd Gannon, and John Enright], Todd Gannon said that when you call him to ask for a critique, it always has to do with the tattoo. You won't ask him about anything else, and he thinks that's because you are more confident in your approach to massing and near-figuration, yet you lack the same confidence with the tattoos.

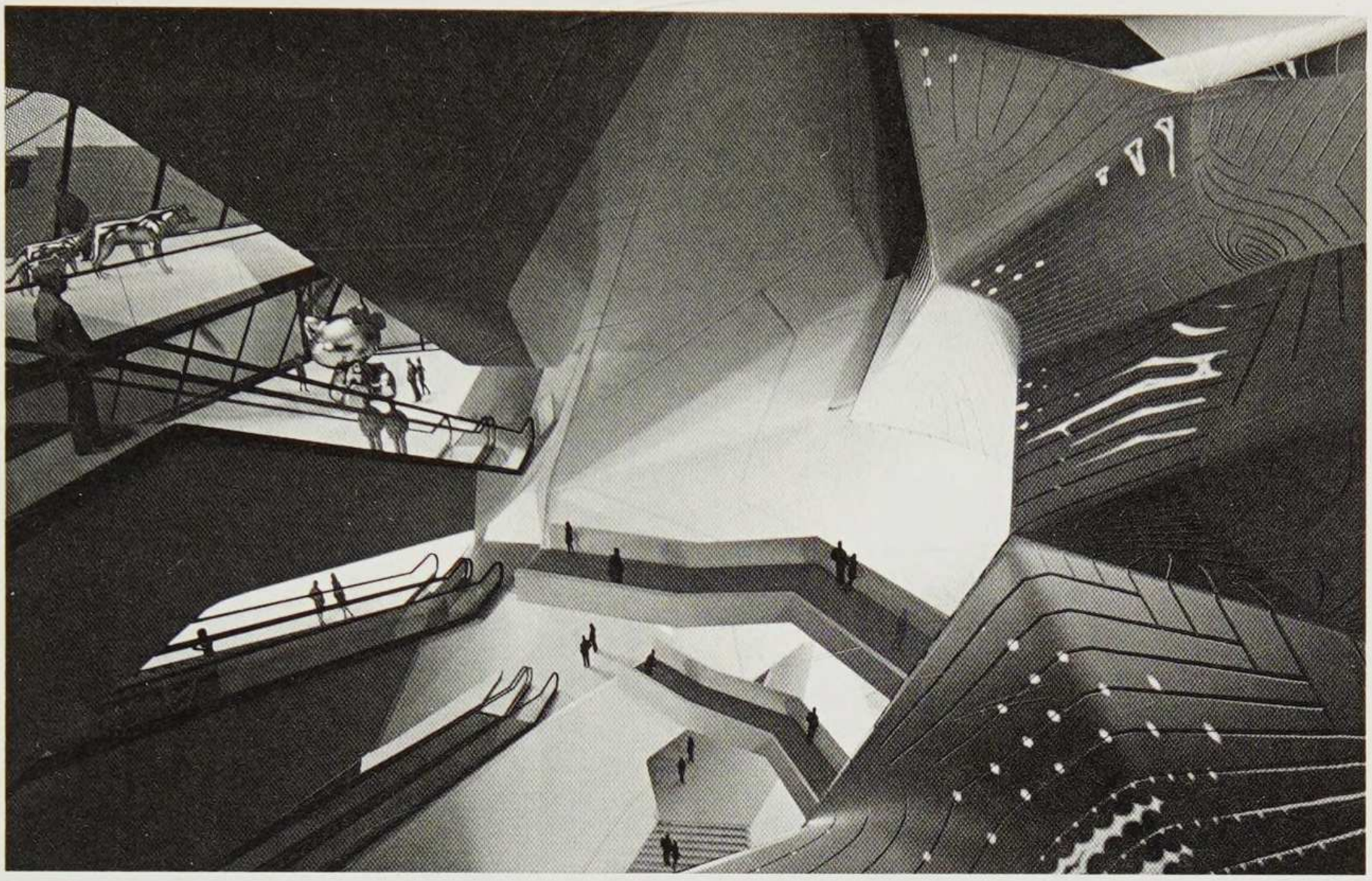


National Center for Contemporary Arts
Rendering
2013

Wiscombe:

That's a fair criticism. I question everything I do and don't pretend to have some kind of watertight theory of everything. Yes, it's true, I have a sense that what I am doing with the tattoos sometimes appears to be graphic, when I am really much more interested in dimensional effects that come with embedding one thing inside another. We often build models this way in the office, and I ask my students to do this as well, actually inlaying objects into surfaces, similar to techniques of over-molding in industrial design. Anyway, if I seemed confident all the time, wouldn't it feel inauthentic? Honestly, who in the creative fields goes around feeling confident all the time? I think it's more like standing in front of an abyss. Nobody sees it but you.

Now one thing that we have been working on for a couple of years, which I think of as tattoos 2.0, is the idea that the creation of ambiguity in a building's mass may, in fact, require an even more intense resonance between the tattoo and the mass's edges. This led me to a new technique that moves past "mapping," as it were, towards physical reflections. The interesting thing about reflections, but also shadows and halos, is that they degrade the legibility of the object through features that actually emanate from the object. We have been using black chrome and mirror-chrome rendering in a fake digital "light studio" in order to see what kind of self-reflexive figuration and aesthetic drift can occur. So we are using rendering not to describe architecture, but rather to design it. I think the first project we did this in was Diamond City in 2013, [see image, page 94] but I'm not sure. The patterns of light generated by the architecture reflecting on itself sometimes magnet to mass edges and sometimes deviate from them. And, of course, they never heed changes in material—they just run straight over opaque materials and transparent materials. This produces a tectonic approach which we nonetheless reify as actual joints and seams. We build them in. I don't know yet if it will be a success or failure. I have never done this exact studio before, so we will see. This is one of the great things about being a teacher. You can try things like that in an open environment with a diverse array of authors. Honestly, at the beginning of the work with reflections, it felt like throwing a dart into a black hole.



Guggenheim Helsinki
Rendering
2014

Student 3:

Something that I never heard you talk about is the graphic quality of the projects. To me, there seem to be two types of graphic qualities in your work. I'm not sure exactly how to describe them, but I think The Main Museum [see image, page 82], for instance, is more graphic than the Guggenheim Helsinki [see images, current page and page 93] type of graphic. Do you think the graphicness is important?

Wiscombe:

It's absolutely important. I love the way you can change the reading of mass through surface articulation, something we assume to be hierarchically below mass. Le Corbusier assumes this in his three reminders to architects. He talks about mass-primitives first and surface articulation second, as if it were a light decorative coat. But I think we've covered this already so I'll leave it at that.

As far as those two projects you mention ... yes, Guggenheim Helsinki was a really indirect riff on Norwegian Stave Church architecture. These are amazing and dark wooden structures built by Vikings. There was this episode on Vikings (on television) where they all went up to a stave church and did mushrooms, or something, and it was amazing. So that project had to be black on the exterior and built like fake wood. If you look closely

at the physical model [see image, page 83], you will see lines on there that look like wood slats but of a scale that couldn't possibly be wood. Anyway, you can't use wood by the water so we used sooty FRP. We also wanted to keep the exterior mute and not let it represent a particular meme, like, "Hi, I'm

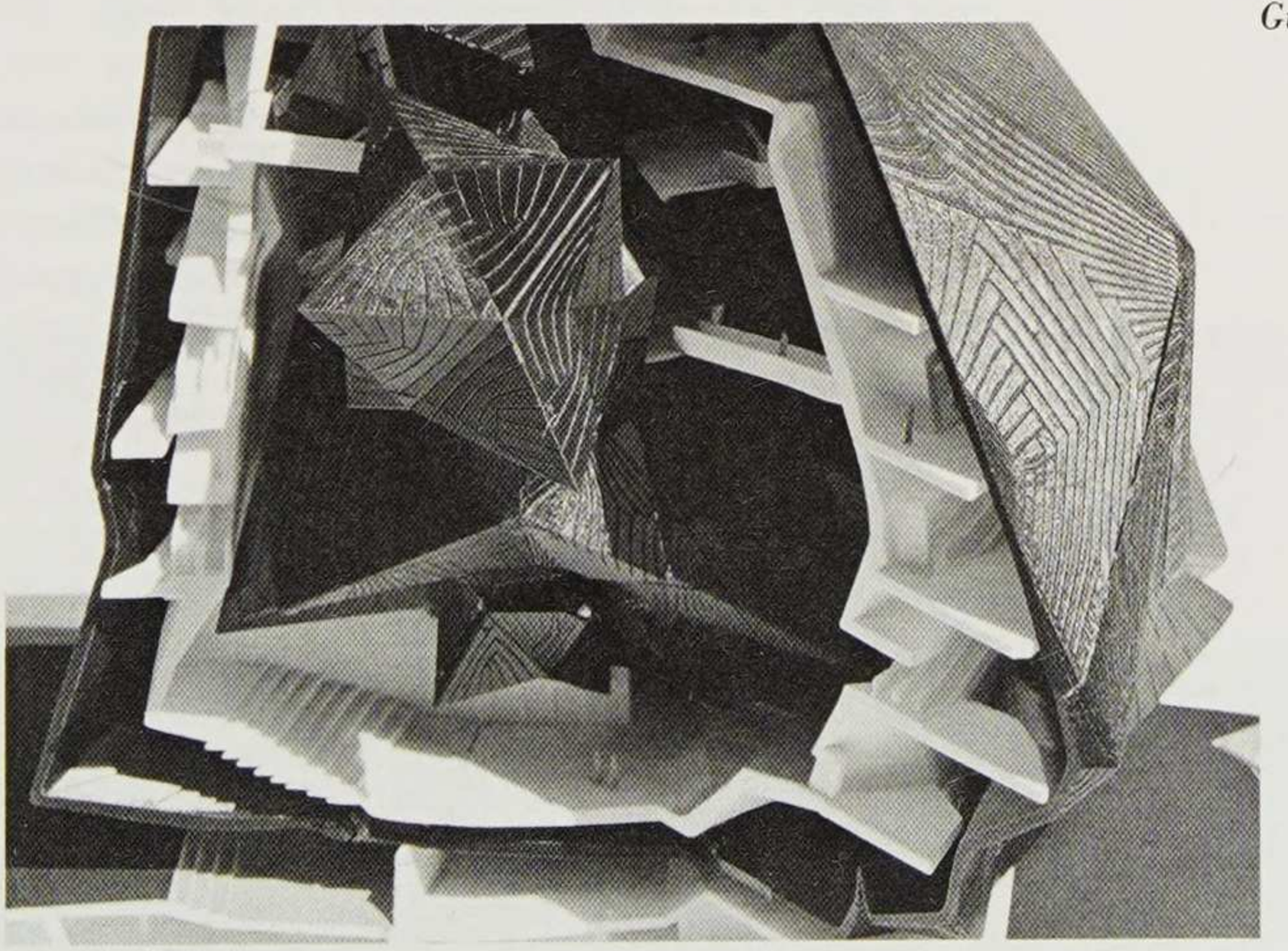
The Main Museum of
Los Angeles Art
Rendering
2014-Present

another cultural building!" So we decided to focus instead on the interiority of the building and create a vast vertical space with an object nested inside that pushes on the outer mass. The Main Museum is another problem—at least the café element which you are probably referring to—where we wanted to actually emphasize some of the mass's features to an extreme ... for instance, around the "black hole," where we used a high-contrast circle pattern fading to black in the deepest crevices. It shows how much of an impact graphics can have on mass. It literally feels like the hole is endlessly deep but it is, in fact, measurably deep. I think that's an achievement.

Another form of graphic interest in contemporary discourse is the painterly, which is related to what I am doing in some ways, but in others it is an entirely different sensibility. The painterly, as I know it from the outside, focuses on flatness and the attempt to flatten mass. This is something that painting often tries to do. So on that level, the level of altering mass through image matching and mismatching, there is some shared territory. But part

of the painterly in architecture often has to do with an indifference towards mass and section, which I am against. I thought that Alejandro Zaera-Polo's article "The Politics of the Envelope" was really interesting because it was the first theory in a long time to deal with envelope tectonics versus culture. But I am suspicious, maybe to a fault, of any theory that suggests a retraction of the architect's influence to the skin of a building. I think architecture is defined by interiority and separation from the world. I think we make new worlds as architects.

So, anyway, I am not ready to skin parking garages for the rest of my life ... although that has its place. Here's the thing ... deep down it seems like a type of complacency to me, a kind of giving-in by architects, and an acceptance of a reduction in power and operative territory. I also think that too much focus on elevation makes architecture into a communicative device. I don't think architecture should be saying anything. When it does it almost always says the wrong thing, or in fifteen years it says something different. So why bother? I prefer to concentrate on the mysterious and durable possibilities of architecture. Anyway, I don't mean to connect Alejandro too much with the painterly because these are clearly different threads, but they do share faith in the envelope to do all of the representational and spatial work of architecture.



Guggenheim Helsinki
Model
2014

Student 3:

Well that's [the painterly] been happening for a long time now, right?

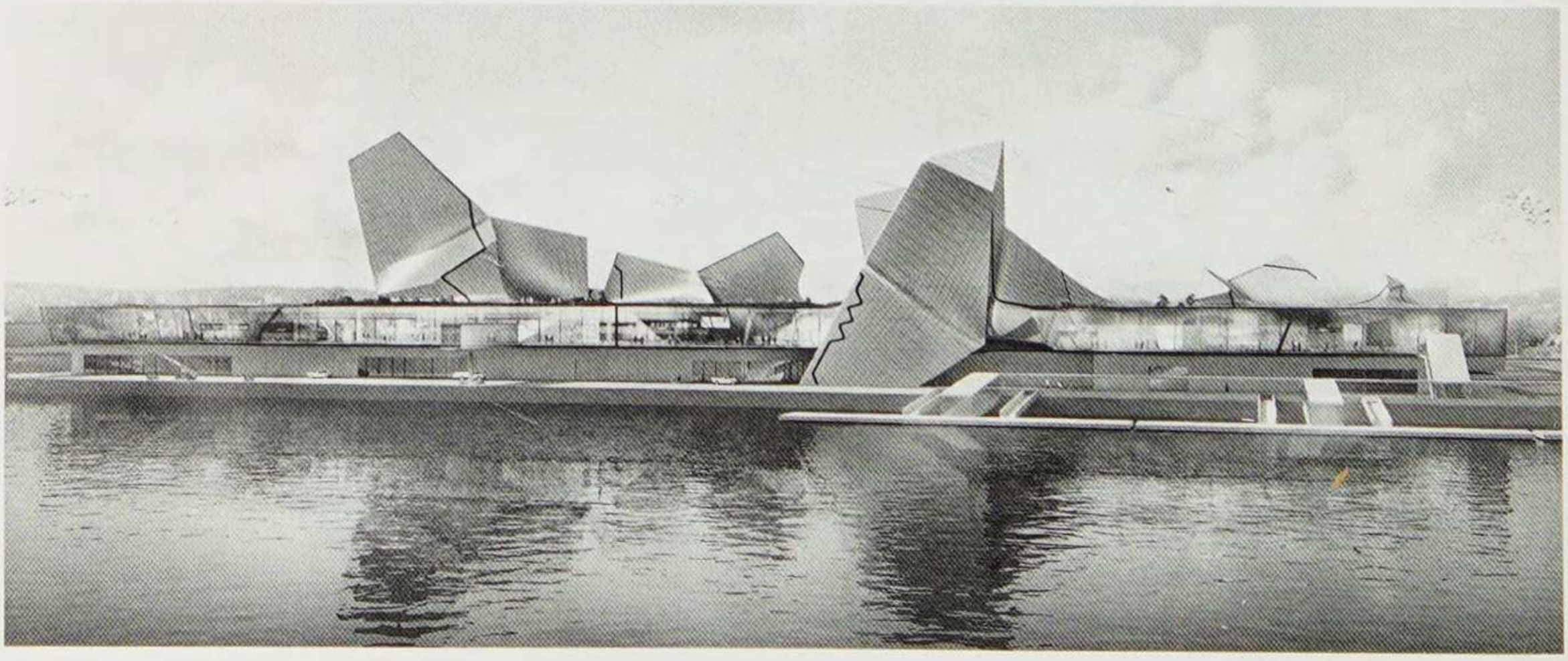
Wiscombe:

The painterly is an ancient thread in architecture. Michelangelo turned the ceiling and walls of the Sistine Chapel into a giant painting ... a sky ... a story. You feel like you are in a painting, not in a three-dimensional space. But, of course, intellectually you know you are in a three-dimensional space and that is where the painterly begins.

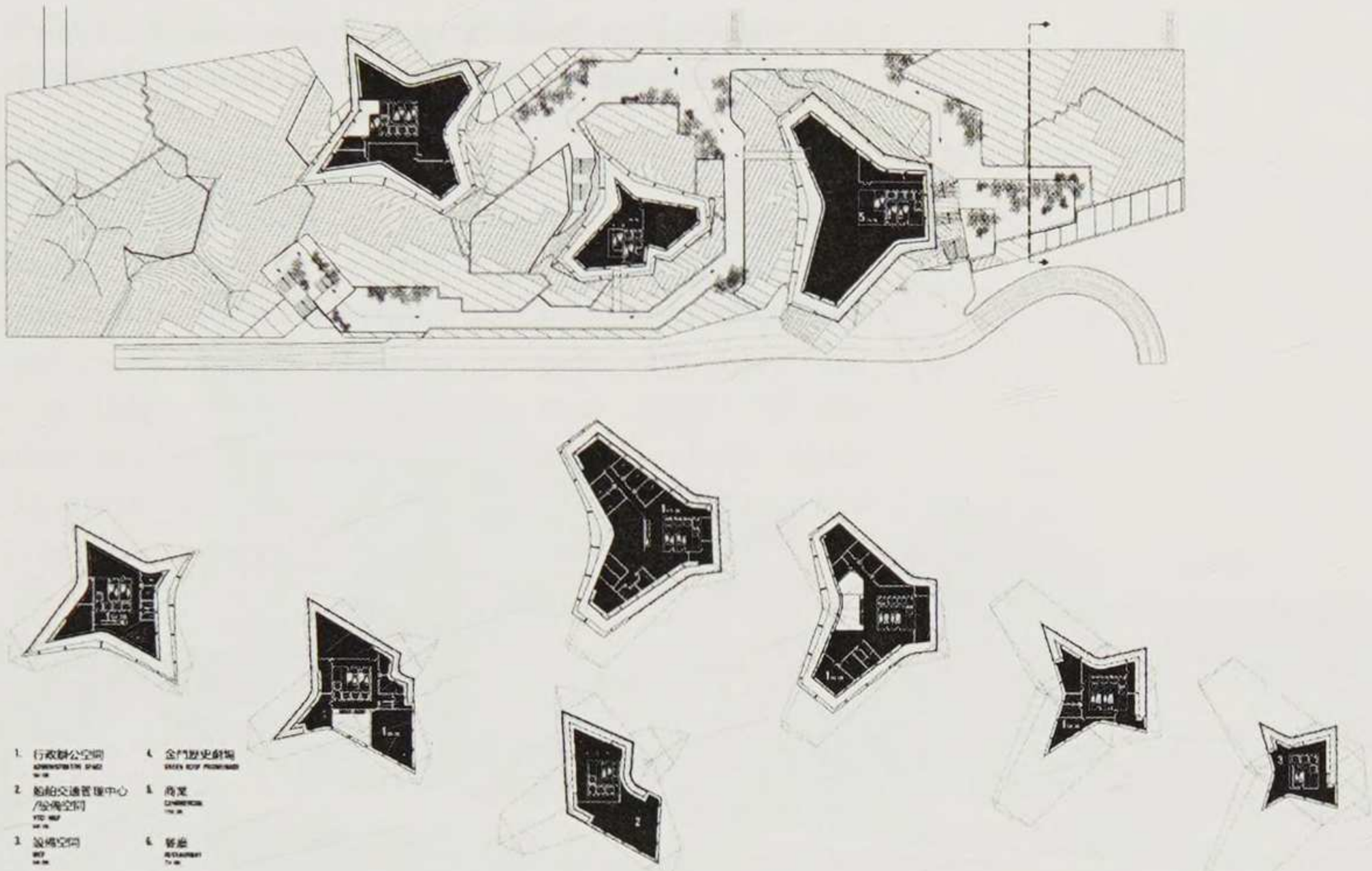
Anyway, I'm not sure where we were before, but I think you were asking about different graphic approaches between projects ... The answer is that I don't like to do everything the same on every project. If we are not tweaking the dial or changing something then I don't know what the point is of doing the next project. We use our own work at a distance, meaning that we don't take DNA core samples from a project to do the next, but we might look back at a series of projects almost historically and see where they brought us and which parts still resonate. I am interested in durability, so if some effect seems to be fading, or seems to be less vexing, then we might scrap it. Other things we re-discover and bring back. That happens all the time. We find something we overlooked in our own work that was unexpectedly the best part.

We are constantly increasing, changing, and opening up our whole repertoire. While I have developed a clearer position over the last five years, I don't think that a position and a repertoire are the same thing.

Kinmen Passenger Service Center
Rendering
2014



A repertoire—or maybe a style if you like—changes over time and it needs to be fed ... and it feeds. I honestly think that position and repertoire are non-hierarchical, that projects often feed back into one's position and alter it. I don't like this idea that you go to the grave with your position. Remember when [Peter] Eisenman felt his work of the '60s and

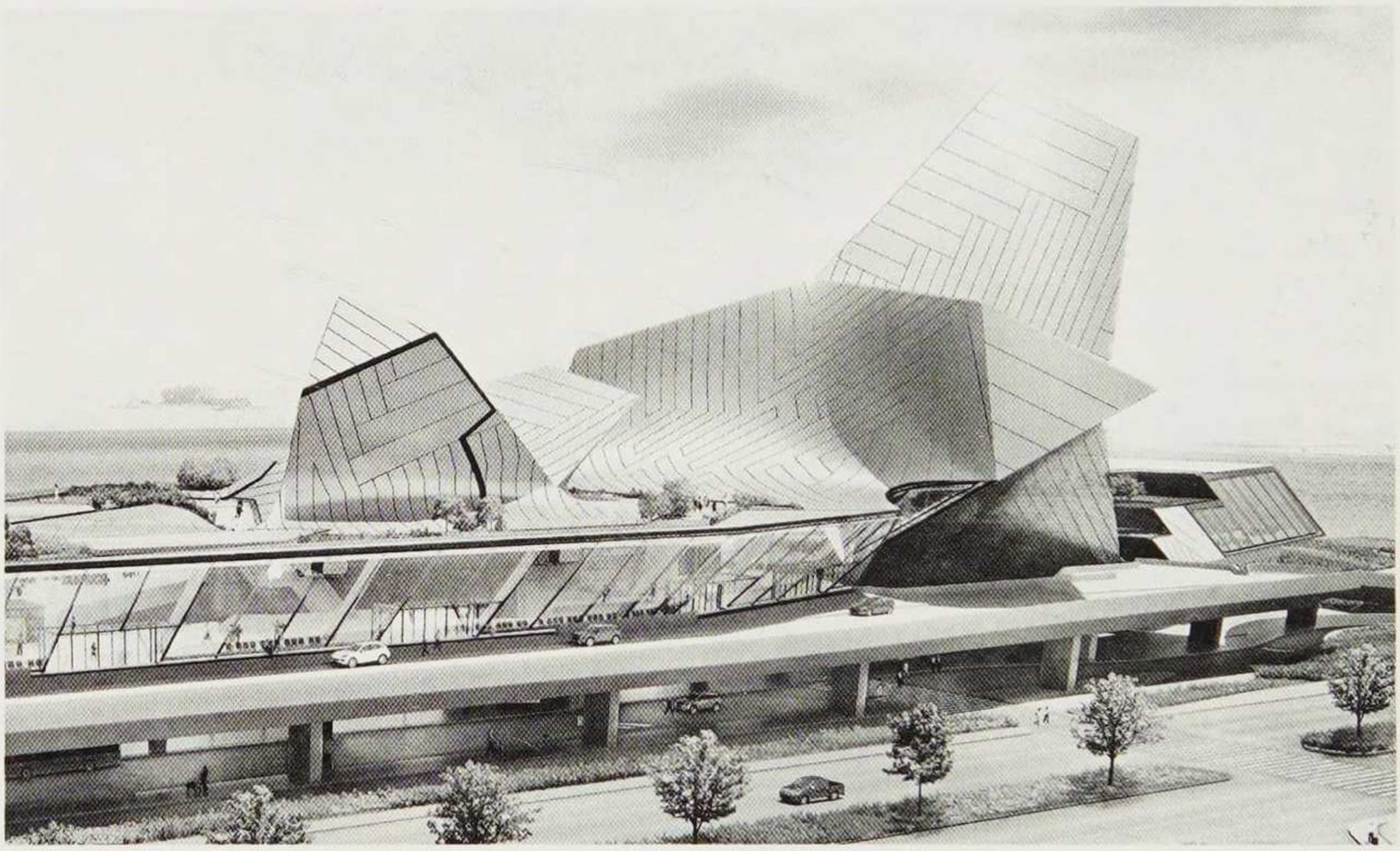


Kinmen Passenger Service Center Drawings 2014

'70s was too autonomous and began what he called "the time of the site"? That was a significant shift. Or when Jesse Reiser announced that structure was an unproductive form of articulation after working on it for two decades? Or when Bob Somol spoke against criticality ten years ago. I think that intellectual flexibility and the courage to detour or change direction is the utmost sign of intelligence. George W. was always "sure" of his position if you remember ...

I think for you guys, the most important thing is to become completely obsessive about something. That is how you make discoveries. It's repetition. When you repeat, you learn, and also you fuck up ... which is a good thing. I'm completely obsessed. The people in my office literally think I'm a vampire because they've never seen me eat. I'm usually staring at something, imagining a hundred versions like chess moves, trying to get inside it. Anyway, become completely obsessive about something, and I think you'll eventually, and automatically,

move from obsession to project. You can't stop it. I think that moment is the most crucial moment in any architect's career. And the good news is it may happen multiple times in your career. And, by the way, I don't think that event is required for you to be a good architect, and you may not even be conscious that it's happened either. My model is to make a lot of projects, and then attempt to place them back into a framework. As you do that the loop gets tighter and tighter over time. I often



Kinmen Passenger Service Center
Rendering
2014

go back and attempt to theorize my own work. For me ... at this point in my career, I have to have that theoretical framework, so that the design culture I'm building in the office and where I teach is intelligible and possible to execute on. But it's a work in progress. It's not a manifesto or call or action. It is what it is ... a kind of weather vane for me to both push forward and evaluate things in front of me.

I love the story from Marcel Duchamp—and admittedly I don't believe the story—but he said that in order to create a new art, basically it was going to be required of him to stop talking to his peers and never go to a gallery show again. Whether or not that's true, or whether or not he actually did it is irrelevant. The important thing is that he knew that in order to do something completely "other," he had to close or limit the information flow. I actually

think he is wrong and that ambient information is crucial for the creative process ... but that's me. The reason I bring that up here is that for you guys, it's going to be problematic how you both allow curated information in but also create an intellectual space that is distinct from that flow ... a space where you can focus. The new form of life based on constant distraction and discursive jumping around is going to be a big deal for your generation, and I hope that you figure out a way to make that a positive thing.

Student 4:

I think about this a lot—the fact that there's so much information in the world. I think that our generation has to develop a sense of what to believe and what not to believe because obviously not everything on the internet is true, right? So my question for you, and maybe for some of the older students who have developed an idea of what to pay attention to and what not to pay attention to—

Student 3:

Believe the things that aren't true and don't pay attention to the things that are true. [Laughter]

Student 4:

Why do you say that?

Student 3:

I think that sometimes it's important to not simply take things as what they are ...

Wiscombe:

You have to be critical about the flow, right? It's not meant for you. It's not an extension of your consciousness.

Student 3:

Yeah. There's just so much stuff that you have to take what you like and do what you want with it. I think one of the most important things is learning to figure out what you like and just roll with it. You can't be dependent on what other people are doing and try to follow a discipline or discourse because I feel like there isn't one.

Student 5:

Do you think that many people do that? I mean, not everyone is so blindly consumed by what they're looking at—

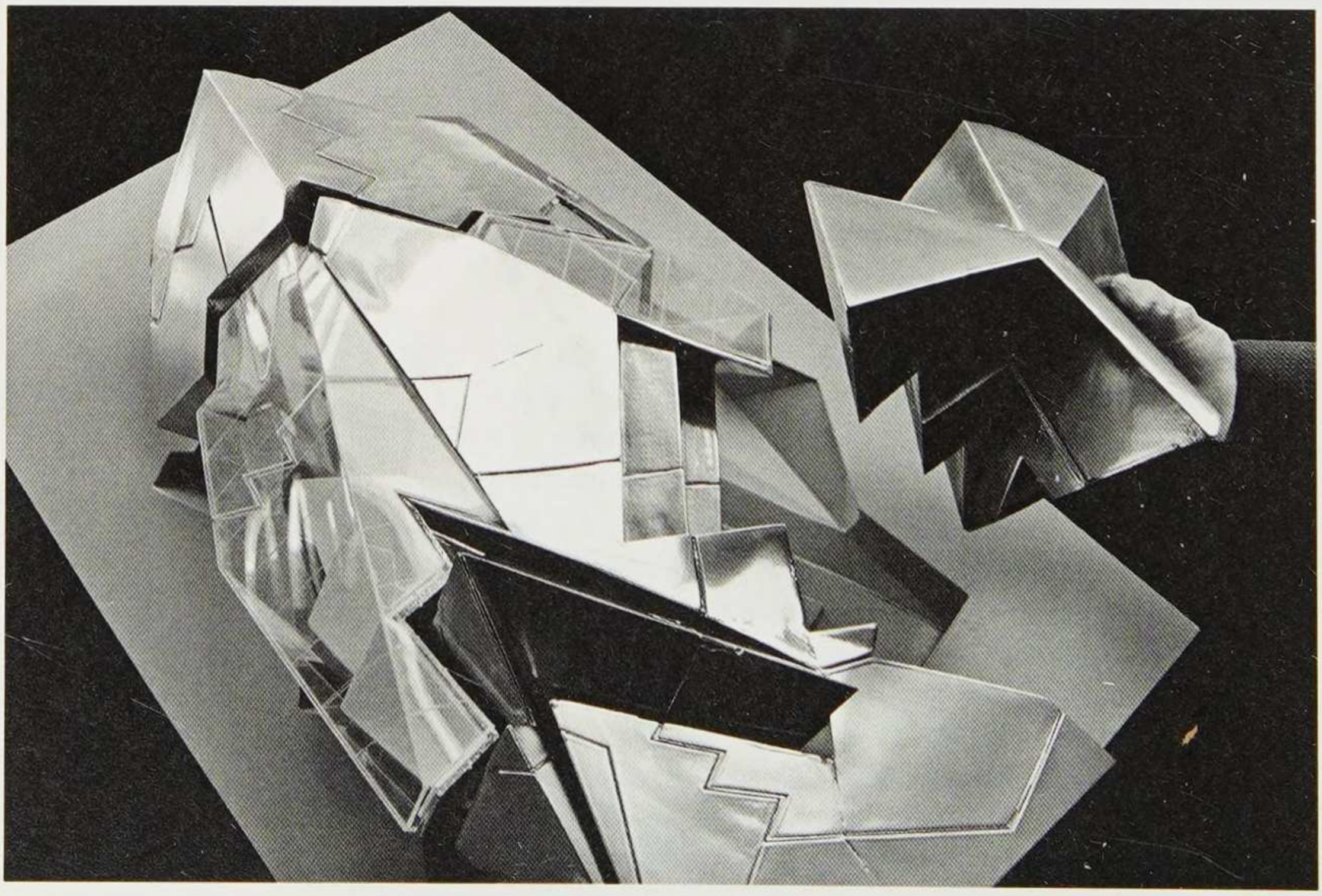
Student 1:

I disagree. For instance, think about the culture of *suckerPUNCH* ... and it's full of mass counterfeits. It's a great thing, but it's a bad thing at the same time. Actually, the "test pilot" of this conversation series was with Nate Hume last year, and we sat down with him and spoke about the idea of *suckerPUNCH* and the posting culture and the subject of "counterfeits." It's reliant on the blog and how you can submit your work, right? So, *suckerPUNCH* may post your work, and other people will see it and might feel influenced by it ... but I don't believe that a project is a good project just because it's on *suckerPUNCH*. It's a project typically done under a critic. So with Hernan's [Diaz Alonso] students' projects, the student might have no idea what Hernan is doing, but they will submit it to a blog and since Nate, or another editor, knows what Hernan is doing, he'll put it on their site. The danger is that then another student might see part of that project that they like—maybe just the curves—and that student will do those types of curves without any idea what Hernan's project is about.

Student 2:

I mean, I don't think that you can hold the student projects responsible because they're going through

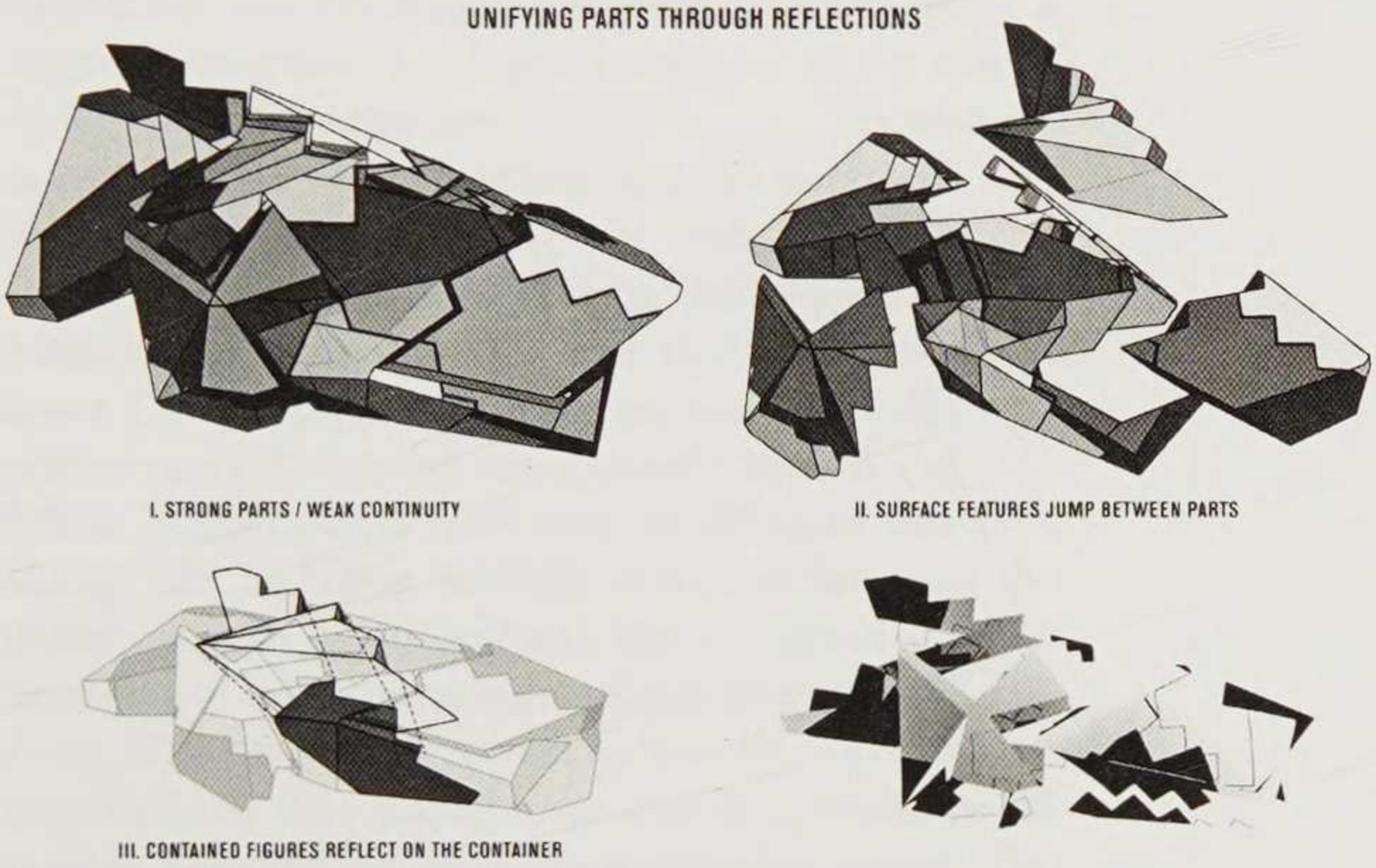
Griffith Park House
Model
2015



school and you have to work on what your teachers are presenting to you. Do you think that there's a point, in terms of counterfeiting or riffing, where it crosses the line?

Wiscombe:

I think that's a good subject. It also has everything to do with this issue of over-mediation. The most important thing about *suckerPUNCH* now is that Nate [Hume] and Abby [Coover] are turning it from a cool-hunting site into a site with curated content. I wish them luck with that because that's the only way that I think that it can survive. I don't think that it can survive the other way.



Griffith Park House
Drawing
2015

I do have to say, in terms of credit ... is the work that is posted authentic? Is it a rip-off? Is it a riff? It's difficult to say anymore, but I definitely believe in basic respect here. Work done with a professor at a school at a given time has to be credited with the school, the program, the teacher, any teaching assistant, and the student, in that order, because otherwise it is ethically inappropriate. Not crediting things properly seems like a gross misunderstanding of the amount of investment of time, resources, and risk it actually takes to do something fresh in the world. That applies to a school, a faculty, specific course's content and techniques, and of course the student's specific contribution.

I have to say that ultimately what Nate is up to there is timely. He's engaging popular culture and not receding from it. He knows how this works. He

knows people are looking at everything anyway. He's organizing it now and I think that organizers just have to up their game and become curators, not just consolidators of information and images. Information is cheap these days.

Student 1:

I think another way of doing that is by looking at schools. SCI-Arc is a school, and it's different than Penn ... Yale is a different school. I think the work you do at Yale is not the same as what you do here, and it's not the same as what you do at SCI-Arc.

Wiscombe:

That's true. A school is like a vital entity, and you engage with each one differently.

Student 1:

Speaking of different schools ... another interesting one right now is UIC, under the direction of Bob Somol. When I first came to Penn, I was obsessed with Somol. It was about two years ago and that's the first time you presented here, and I remember my friends showing me images of your work and I was like, "Whatever, that's just formal stuff," but you talked about it and attacked the parametric project, attacked the landscape project, and I was like, "I love this guy. He sounds like Bob Somol!"

Wiscombe:

Somol was my teacher in grad school, just so you know.

Student 1:

Yes, and that's what I was going to bring up. What's your relationship with Somol and the "pop culture project" ... the "easy and difficult" project? What relationship do you have with that kind of culture? What does Bob have to say about this stuff?

Wiscombe:

Well, I'm not going to speak for Bob ... but Bob is clearly not interested in the formal project as it might relate to topology or deformation. I think that his point of view is extremely particular and it's really valuable, and I'm a huge fan of his style as a provocateur and thinker. I was very influenced by his "12 Reasons to Get Back into Shape" in *Content* from about ten years ago, and I continue to be. Do you guys know this one? It was republished

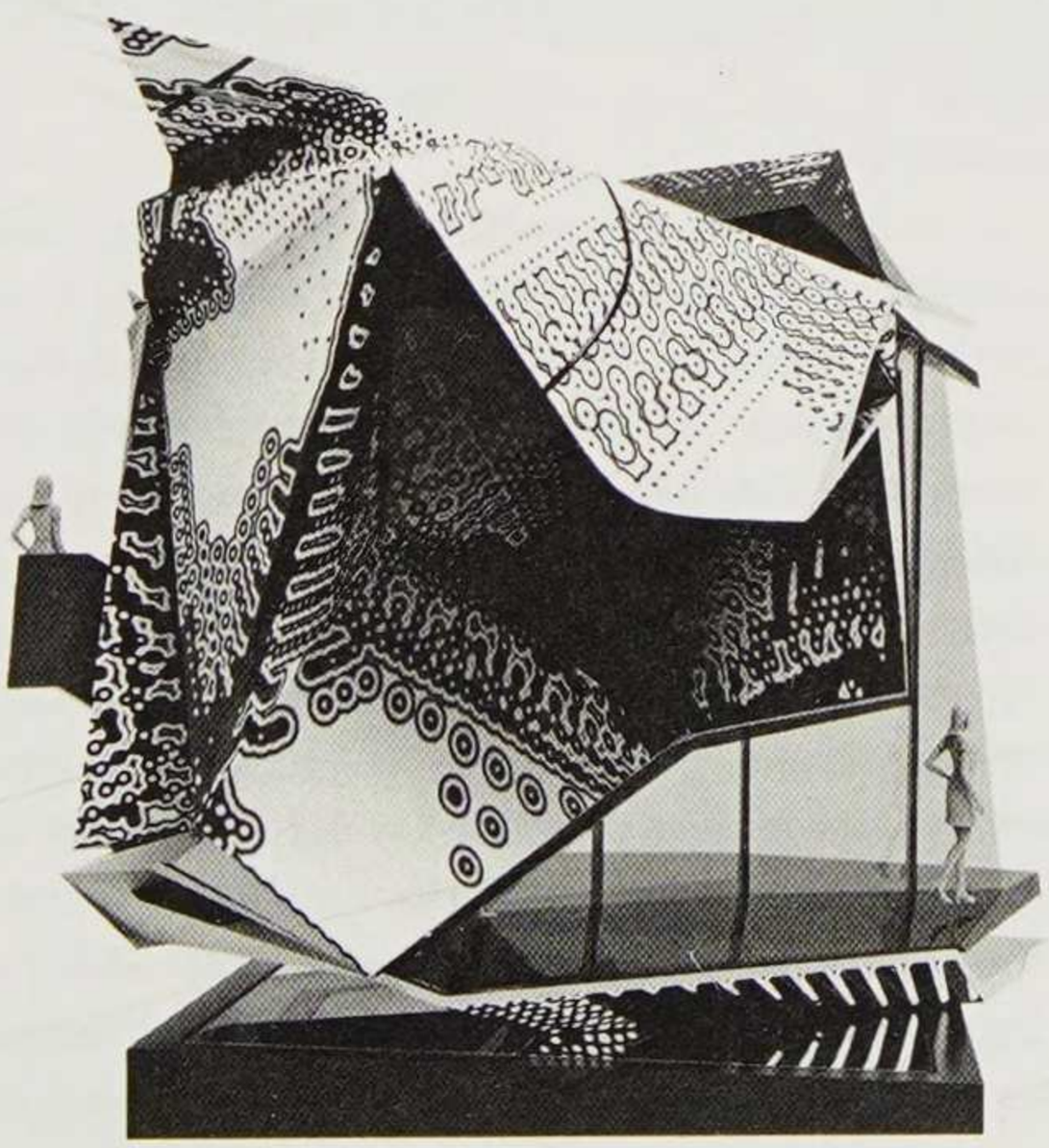
in *Log 33*, which was weird for me ... and amazing to think about how much of today's discourse on the figure and form versus shape came from that! I am very interested in walking the line between form and shape in my own work. I use shape and its strict contours as a foil against form, which wants to resolve and make transitions. I think the two together create powerful effects, which I call near-figuration. You guys in my studio sometimes ask me, "Why are you giving us ziggurats?" and the reason is because dumb stepped objects like ziggurats or Space Invaders have extremely powerful, but also ambiguous, silhouettes that put edges back into the smoothness of form. Their use also reveals my interest in combinations of low-resolution and high-resolution objects in architecture, rather than a single homogeneous polygon resolution as we saw in Maya work from the early 2000s.

Student 2:

Can you elaborate more on the difference between form and shape?

Wiscombe:

Sure. Form has to do with transitions between things. It has to do with things that can be deformed. It has to do with things that can transform. It has to do, basically, with mutability of form. That would be my definition of form. Shape is something that is unchangeable, simple, and more legible. So that would be Bob Somol's "easy." The whole discourse of figuration today is located in shape, while the discourse of form is often located in



The Main Museum of Los Angeles Art, Detail Rendering 2014-Present

parametrics or other field-logics. But I don't think that being in one camp or another is that productive at this point in time. I always insist that things need edges and I am against total continuity. In fact, just today looking at a student's project, we were saying, "Throw another ziggurat in there." Why? Because it was turning into a formless mess of digital point-pulling, whereas I'd much rather see strong silhouettes, or better, partial silhouettes expressed. This is a very particular project I'm working on, but one not without precedent. I'm not saying that this is the answer for architecture. I will say this ... it does provide a way through the shape versus form debate, particularly in terms of the discourse between Bob and Greg Lynn who have argued their respective sides for years. In the end, I'm finding that form versus shape is a false distinction.

So ... someone ask a question who's not in my studio ...

Student 5:

I was at your midterm and after the first presentation, all the jurors kind of attacked you on a couple issues ...

Wiscombe:

Is that what that looked like? [Laughter]

Student 5:

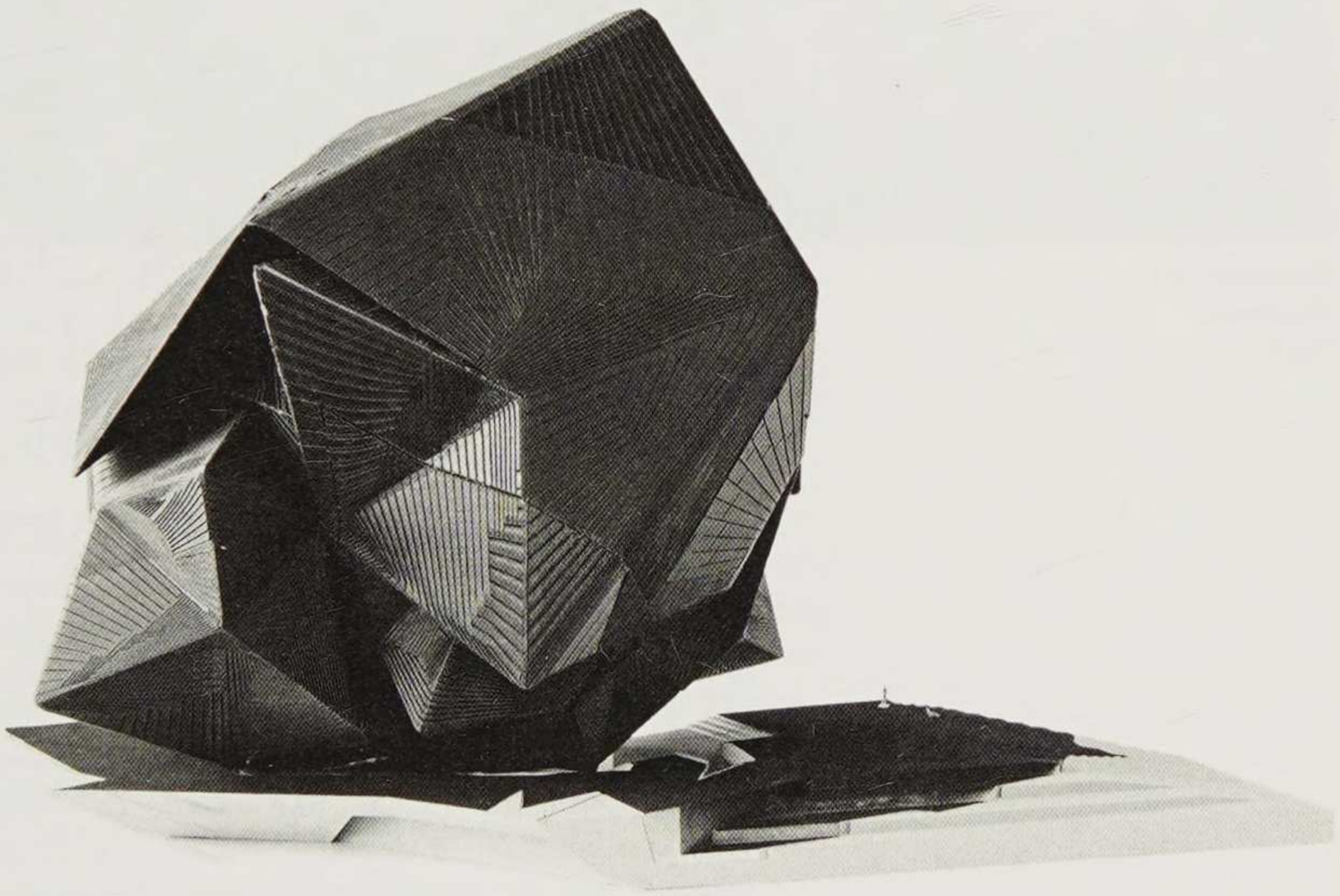
Something that I could make out of it was the idea de-contextualizing the project. Can you just summarize what was happening there and how would you defend yourself on it?

Wiscombe:

So, this is a three part question in my brain. The first part is: what's the point of having a review in architecture? It wasn't always the case that we did public juries ... don't forget that. Alvin Boyarsky from the AA [Architectural Association School of Architecture] invented juries in their contemporary form. That was not that long ago. Before that it was closer to a Beaux-Arts model of mentor to student, which could potentially become sentimental or destructive, and certainly did nothing to foster architectural discourse. Anyway, what went down at the midterm was me inviting people who I consider to be smarter than me to the review, which I like to do at that point in a semester, in order to test

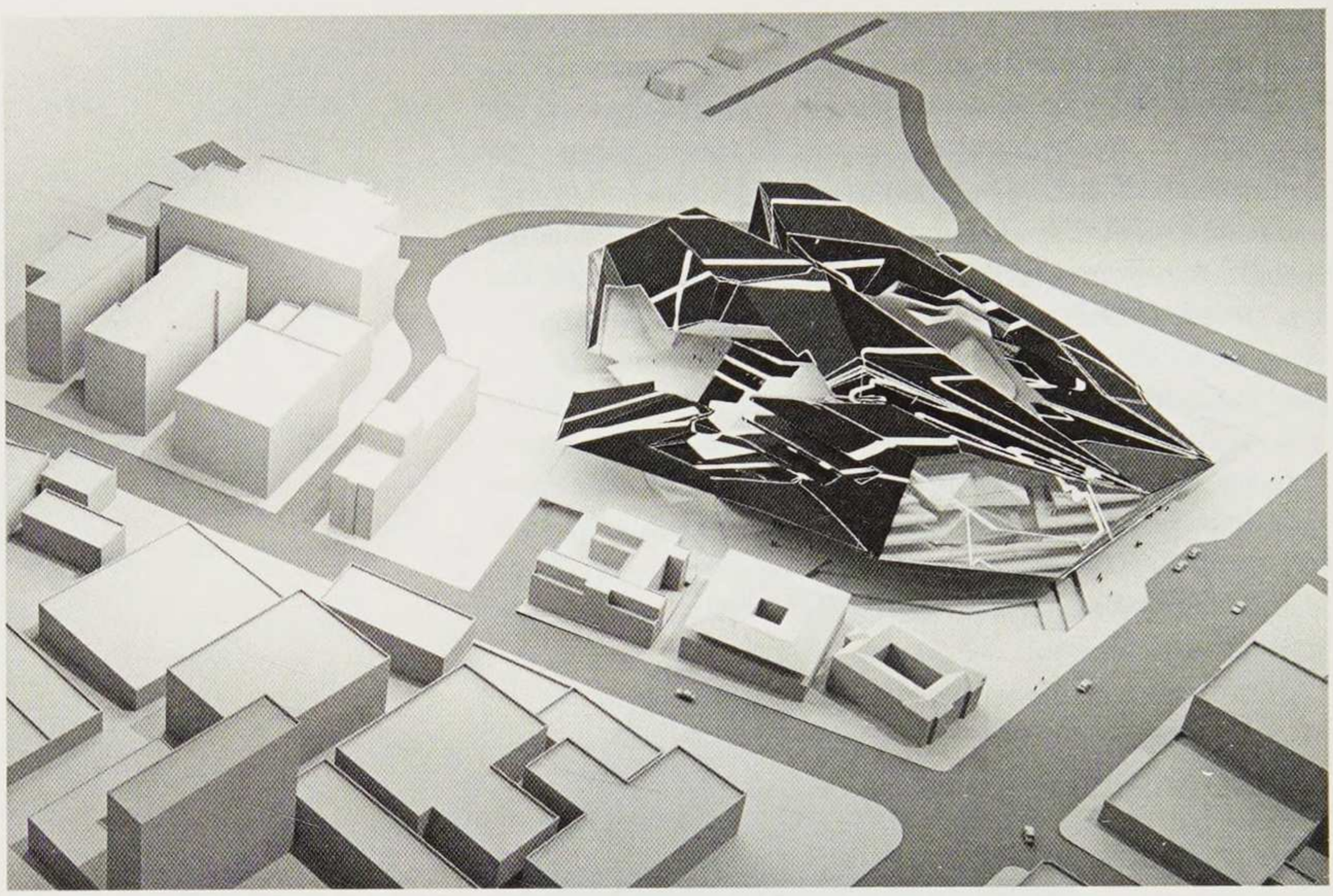
the agenda, the assumptions, and maybe even the techniques if the jury is good. You are forced to mount a defense in real-time. Ultimately, you agree with them and change it up, or more likely you press forward and try to integrate things you heard. That's what I always try to do anyway. The point of a midterm review is for both the students and the teachers to learn.

So, what you heard were my smart friends basically saying, "But seriously, are you talking about a new project of autonomy? And, if so, in what terms and how do you deal with context which is there, like it or not?" So, what I was fighting for in the review, and what we're all fighting for in the studio right



Guggenheim Helsinki
Model
2014

now, is the idea that over the last ten years, mass media has begun a campaign to make architecture provincial. We always hear about context, as if architecture could be drawn forth from it. I will tell you, it cannot. So in studio we are turning the volume up to eleven to see how we could be contextual but in a radically different way, by being so self-reflexive that the building literally creates a new world and then begins to influence and remake its context. That is why we are using the "light studio" I mentioned earlier—the light studio is of this earth but also not of this earth. It is real but it has no determinate scale. The effects it produces



Diamond City
Rendering
2013

might range from something like a toy to something like a black hole. This interest is related to Timothy Morton's hyperobjects, or rethinking the world in terms of things which are massively distributed and disassociated with anthropocentric notions of scale.

So to try to answer the third part of your question, ultimately I believe that reviews are there to produce and reveal contention about architectural ideas. Otherwise, if everyone agrees, then what's the point of bringing people together? I believe that the review is as much for the instructors as for the students. Ideas like non-local context, vicarious context, or fictional context are not fully formed, and it's productive to swarm on them, or maybe even kill them. This semester I'd say we're embarking on an extreme route, which I'm calling at this point, "None More Black." [Laughter]

That comes from Spinal Tap [*This is Spinal Tap*]. Can we show that clip?

(Break to watch "None More Black" scene from *This is Spinal Tap*)

Wiscombe:

So, we've been asking that question in studio. How can it be more black, and at this point it can't be, it can be only none … none more black. [Laughter]

But seriously, we are finding so many blacks, matte to gloss, and even chrome, which is really even more black than black ... Notice I am talking about materiality, and not materials, which is related to the idea of tectonic fictions.

Student 2:

I have two questions from that. The first is for Josh. I'm interested to hear your response to Tom's critique of contextualism. Then, for the second question, I'm interested to hear more from both of you about the review process. I actually think that what I've seen in Tom's reviews is fairly unique.

Wiscombe:

Really?

Student 3:

Yeah, I think so. At a certain point, the reviewers seem to get caught up with themselves. Sometimes they're not even looking at what's on the walls or they're facing each other ...

Wiscombe:

Oh, really? I thought reviews were always like that! [Laughter]

Student 6:

I also found it really peculiar ... it's like there's another discursive discussion going on among them. It seems like it's not really about the project anymore, but it's deeper and it's beyond the project.

Student 4:

Was that just in the beginning though?

Student 6:

No it's the entire time.

Wiscombe:

Ok, you answer this question, Josh.

Freese:

Well, I'll start with context. I do, though probably not in every way, but I do agree to a larger extent that it's been this kind of heavy handed limit, or kind of criteria that's falsely imposed ... by us! It's not necessarily by any other criteria, but our own assumption that if we don't do that localized reaction then somehow we're wrong, or we're

Menagerie
Rendering
2015

arrogant. I think it's becoming more important, especially with the idea of what we can do with technology and materials, to challenge what the context is and how far "local" goes. Actually, I was having an interesting conversation with a friend of mine the other day about objects in architectural history that weren't explicitly local, but they're some of the most pertinent ones in the history of architecture from Antiquity to now. For instance, the Guggenheim by Frank Lloyd Wright or the Pyramids at Giza ...

Wiscombe:

The National Gallery by Mies van der Rohe!

Freese:

Yes, they're orienting to other criteria and to other contexts and then they land there and the relationship of it landing without being sensitive is as exciting as something that is so obviously meant to be specifically vernacular or whatever. Where we are in architecture should reflect where we are in society right now ... we don't just live on these three blocks and we don't just decide our world is super local anymore.

Student 7:

It's great to hear you both say these things because I have an interest in vernacular architecture and an

interest in trying to create architecture that reflects place. So, I am wondering what you guys think about that considering what's just been said.

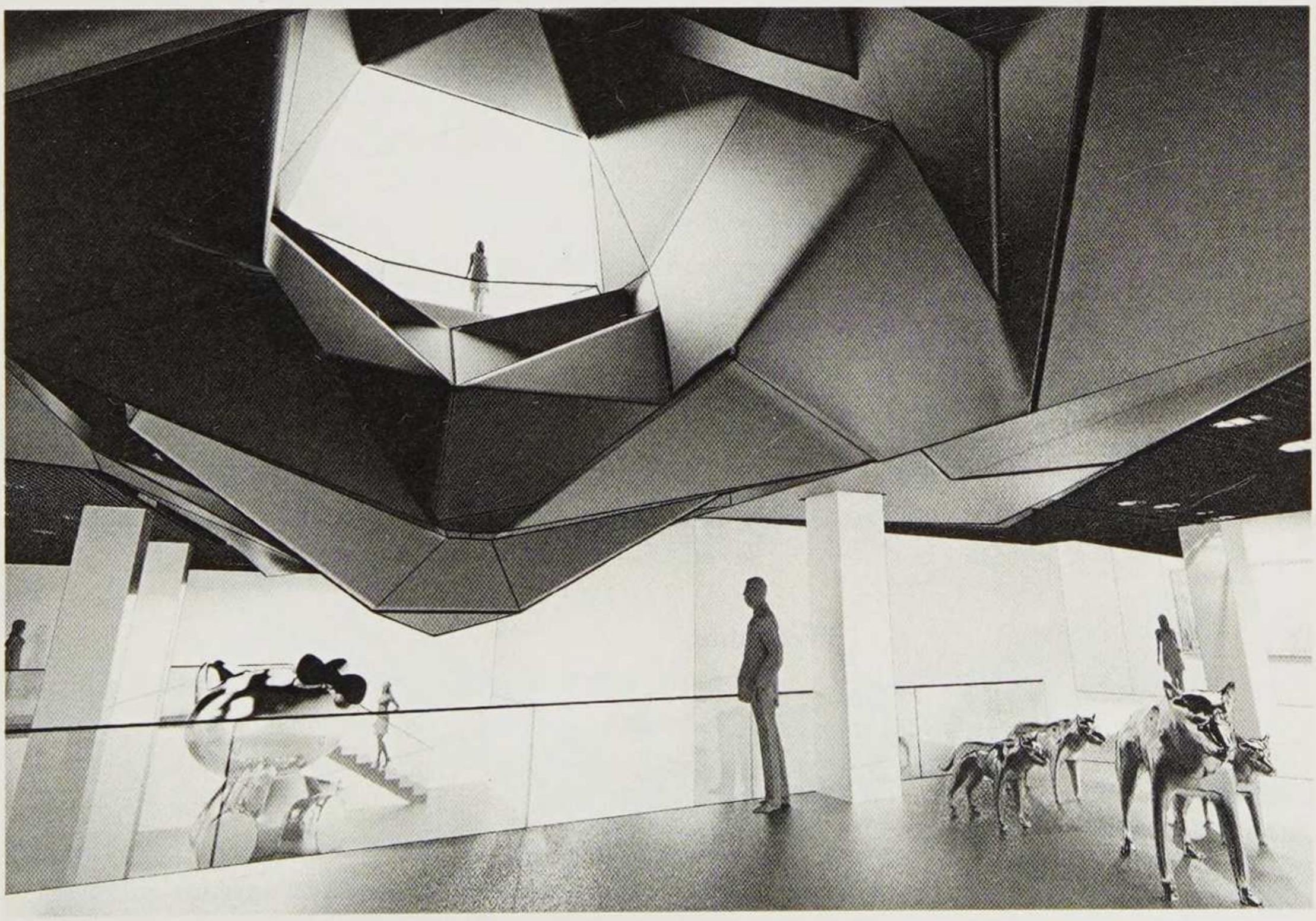
Wiscombe:

I'm definitely not an expert in this area, but I think we tend to think about things like vernacular architecture as being stabilized, like there is one vernacular for one place. But think about a related term, "language," and think about the word "dialect" versus "language." We tend to think about vernacular as something being stable over time, but isn't it really just an expression of a particular cultural and technological sensibility at a specific point in time? Isn't that like language, which is constantly undergoing fusion and fission? Language is a very local tradition, and kind of "place," but the reality is that all we ever speak are dialects. There is no Language. So vernacular is a continuum that is often misunderstood as an origin. There is no Vernacular. You know, we name things all the time and we kill a lot of things by calling them something. Naming can be a kind of violence.

Student 3:

I think that question about vernacular relates to certain ideas of historicism, and I'm interested to hear how you deal with that in your work, because

The Main Museum of Los Angeles Art
Rendering
2014-Present



the history of architecture—or maybe just certain histories—are important to your projects, right?

Wiscombe:

It's funny, I had a discussion with someone recently about this, so I can actually answer your question. I am very piecemeal with the way that I look at history. I'm not a scholar interested in studying all of the works and contributions of Palladio or Piranesi or someone else, in the hopes of literally making architecture from architecture ... although I respect those who do. People who do that are hedgehogs in my mind. I'm more of a fox. A fox will move around a little bit more and pick and choose ... maybe to the point of being fickle. While I believe architecture does come from architecture, it is also true that architecture comes from many other places as well. I would argue that some of the largest disruptions in architecture have been triggered by discoveries in philosophy for example. Anyway, I'm just saying that I love particular buildings for their particularities, and I have no use for a whole oeuvre. I have a list of favorites that will be on the pin-up wall at the office at any given time. Some will change over time, but again, I'm less interested in the lineage, or in trying to make consequent the transition of one style into another or one building into another or one author into another. I'm much more interested in the individual works, how they have a kind of secret life that draws you in. One project that hasn't left my wall for many years is Ledoux's House of the Gardner ...

Student 8:

I actually have a hard time believing that your projects are not contextual. Obviously they don't fit into the surrounding landscape, but you have such a strong interest in culture. I think "place-making" is kind of disappearing, but there's still the culture and habits of a place that are defined as different from one another. There has to be a relationship between what you're making and culture.

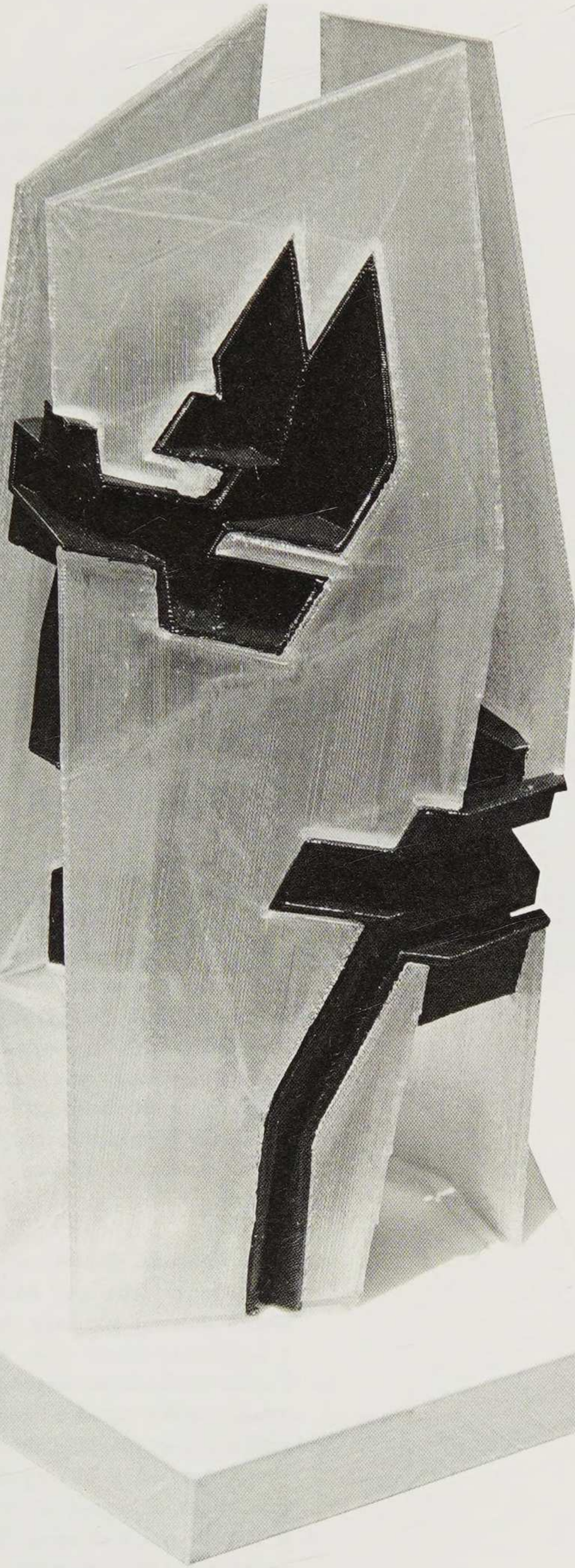
Wiscombe:

I would agree. It can't not, actually, since I am part of culture.

Student 8:

Can an argument be made about your work being contextual because it responds to current culture?

(Opposite)
Sunset Spectacular
Model
2016



Wiscombe:

At the end of the day, everything we do constitutes our cultural context. This discussion is making culture right now. There is no Culture, so to say. You can't remove yourself ... you could try like Marcel Duchamp, but it would be very difficult and I wouldn't pretend to try to do that. But I have this secret suspicion that what I'm trying to do has a kind of Los Angeles context, and I don't know if that's true or not, but it feels like that. I'm also really enjoying working on an existing building right now. I'm doing a museum inside and on top of a series of historical buildings in the Old Bank District of downtown L.A., and I have to respond to historically locked-in elements and even renovate them, and I'm really enjoying that. It's fun. I like to see a beautiful brass bank vault signaling across space to a 4-story high "black hole" atrium. So, I'm not an anti-contextualist. I'm not even sure it would be possible to be an anti-contextualist come to think of it. Even in death you just become a part of another context ... the context of dirt and bacteria and memory.

I do, however, think we need a serious reboot in the language that we use in relation to context, in the techniques that we have, and especially in all of the logical fallacies we commit when discussing context. I'm just tired of it. I'm tired of the clichés, and I want to see new non-essentialist thinking on that subject. I'm not saying that context is out the window. What I'm saying is: can we please have other alternatives to retrograde ideas like critical regionalism? Can we please unplug context from "place" and talk about much larger geo-political contexts, for instance the context of global capital or the context of an earth terraformed through the Anthropocene era?

The National Gallery by Mies changed Berlin. Architecture changed context, as it always does. Berlin did not generate that building. I'll tell you a little story about that, which I didn't know until I went to Berlin last spring with Andrew Zago. So, you go down to the "basement" in the National Gallery, and you walk by a niche in the wall, and there you see a history of the building. Usually you might disregard such a thing, especially when it is near the restrooms, but in this case I looked closer and saw a slightly smaller, white version of

the National Gallery. I assumed at first that it was a photograph of a study model, but then I noticed some palm trees in the background, and read the description. It said that the year before Mies proposed the black Berlin version, he had proposed a white version for the Bacardi headquarters in Cuba, one meter smaller in plan. For some reason that project didn't get realized. So Mies picks it up and carefully drops it in Berlin, and now it exists as the

MoMA/PS1
Urban Beach
Photograph
2003

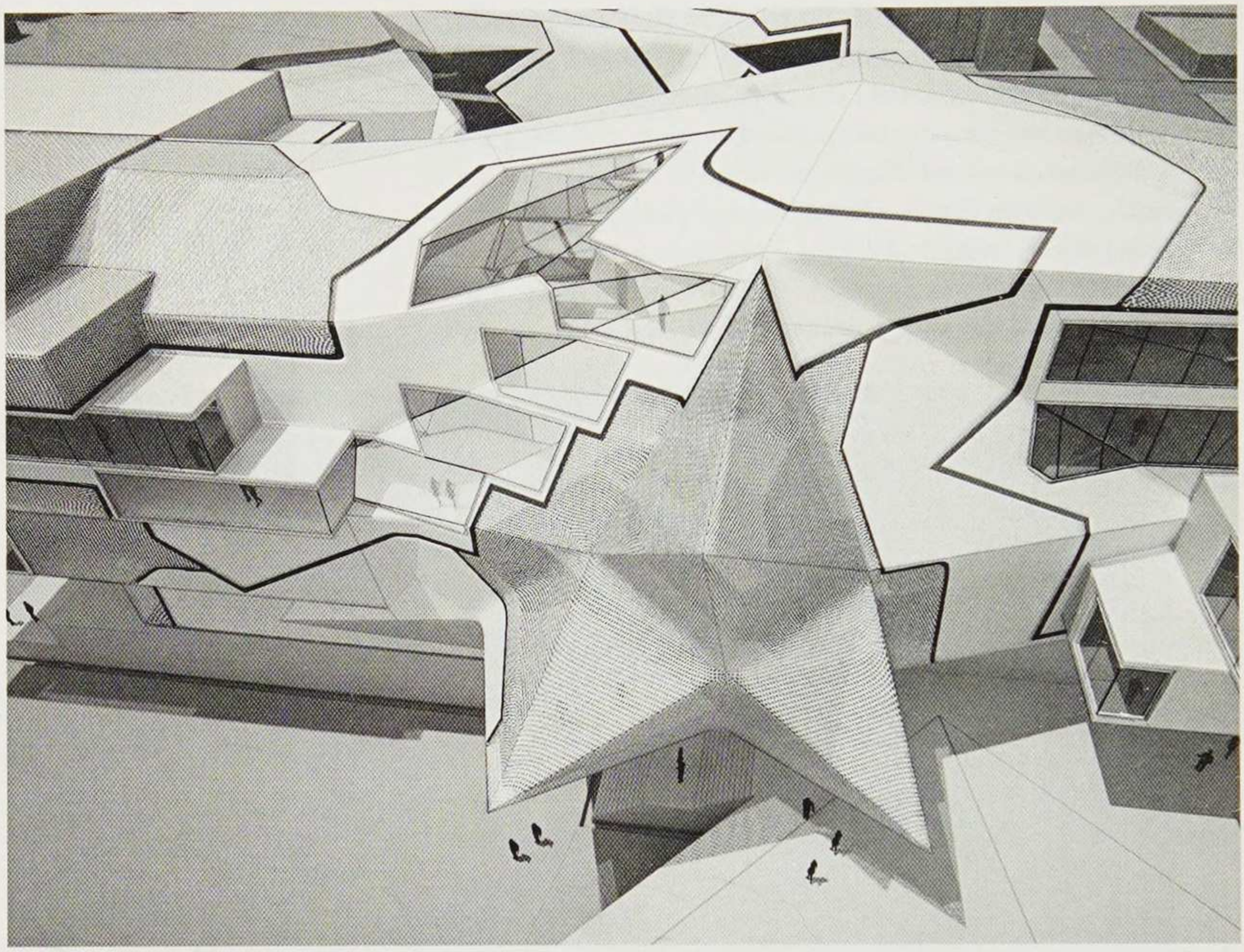
National Gallery we know, the one that has changed the city forever. It was not drawn forth from Berlin but it somehow resonates with Berlin. Its vacuous entry-level floor seems to make the city itself into its museum content. I think that is a really good form of contextualism.

Student 8:

So, buildings changing people and not buildings being shaped by people?

Wiscombe:

Yes, I think that's what we do as architects, if we are good. Maybe a better way to think of it is as animate and inanimate objects on a flat plane considering one another ...



Waterfront Gateway Housing
Rendering
2013

Student 8:

Do you have some kind of agenda about your buildings outside of their formal organization?

Wiscombe:

I think that form is in itself enough. Form is incredibly political. In a society obsessed with instrumentalizing everything, we forget that the things we most value are often the things that cannot be instrumentalized but feed our imagination. I don't need a separate agenda because I think all things are formal and aesthetics penetrate everything in culture. Mies was clearly completely obsessed about the formal purity and the almost cosmological resonance of the black square ... and that was enough. Everything else—all the social agendas applied to it, all of the theoretical agendas applied to it, or even what he said about it himself are all irrelevant. He's dead now. The building stands for itself. It is an aesthetic object. It transformed society and it continues to do so.

Student 8:

But now it stands for Berlin ...

Wiscombe:

Yes, it does. It's been owned and now it's the new context of Berlin. That shows how mutable context is because Berlin heavily refused that thing when it was first built, just like in the case of Centre Pompidou in Paris. Paris was up in arms when it got the Centre Pompidou, but now it's the heart of culture in Paris, even if it is still an aesthetic irritant to many. What things represent to humans is always problematic and always in motion. I don't think it is our job as architects to try to represent things. What we do is much more concrete than that.

Freese:

If you were to have denied any of the things you were pursuing—in the geometry, the form, the space, whatever—in favor of setting back five feet for the neighbors stoop, or the sun angle, or something, you undermine the exact quality of the object's integrity. You have this thing as an idea, an object, and as a material first and foremost, and if you cut that out in favor of some other thing before you even realize it, or at least visualize it, it's a lost opportunity.

Centre Pompidou was a complete and absolute bastard of a thing when it came into Paris because it was so against the idea and form of "the city." It was the same thing with Montparnasse ... this giant black tower. God forbid you make it tall, and you make it black, and you make it glass ... but those features are important because they challenge what it means to conform to context. There are degrees of site context and conformity in both of those projects, but they're not the highly legible part.

Student 3:

It's interesting because the examples we've mostly discussed are primarily civic spaces. Tom, a lot of your buildings are civic buildings ... and we're not talking about housing or other kinds of projects ...

Wiscombe:

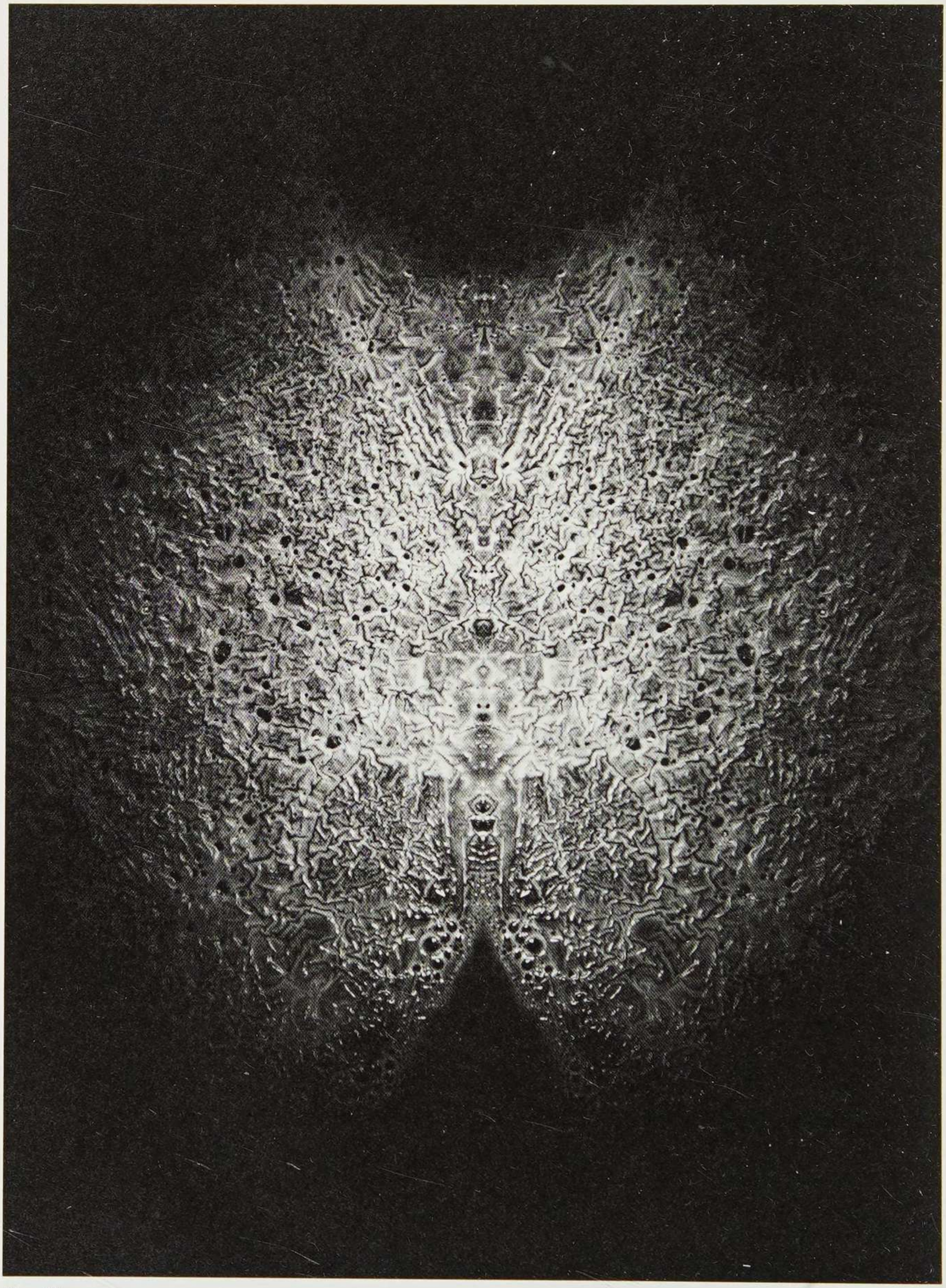
That's my particular focus. I am very interested in the civic realm, and I think it is a fundamental issue for architects to deal with the separation between the civic realm and the private realm, which is becoming much more complicated now that we have smart phones and civic space is in our pocket all the time.

I'm very interested in interior worlds being quite different than exterior worlds and I think that the transition and entry condition of any building, as well as how it hits the ground, are absolute priorities. I think that if you can't manage those well, then you don't really know how to do architecture yet. I think of buildings as containers. The word "container" implies something is contained, which goes back to my interest in the section and putting things inside of things. I like the idea of entering a container and finding a miniature city inside, or discovering an interior so massive it seems to exceed the physical size of the container. These are civic ideas in the sense that they ignore the idea of a city as an "urban tissue," and an anthropomorphic reference that seems to imply that we have to heal the city. The city is not sick! It is not a human body!

Instead I think that a city is a very specific object that can also contain other specific objects in a strange mereology rather than a part-to-whole relationship. By the way, I just reread what Alberti actually said about cities, which is often misquoted—he said, "If the city is like some large house and the house in turn like some small city, cannot the varied parts of the house ... be considered miniature buildings?" I love that because it is downright weird! It doesn't degrade parts through wholes, but rather allows for an infinite regress of things, which I find highly attractive.

(Opposite)
The Main Museum of
Los Angeles Art
Rendering
2014-Present


EXIT ONLY
BIGMANBAKES
KILOGRAPH



Corallines
Rendering
2012

The Complex and The Strange

a conversation with Ferda Kolatan

Student 1:

You mentioned that in your paperless studio with Greg [Lynn], many of you were nervous at the final review because it was the only studio experimenting with animation-based geometries in design at Columbia [GSAPP]. Were you excited by that or were there people that regretted jumping into it and thinking, "Why didn't I take another studio?"

Kolatan:

It was a little bit of both. I have to tell you, it took me much longer than the semester to figure out what we were actually doing. There were a couple of other people in the studio who had come from SCI-Arc, and Greg had taught there prior—Jason Payne was one of those guys. They seemed to know what Greg was talking about ... but I had no idea. I had just arrived from Germany where I had a very straightforward, modernist architectural upbringing. But Greg was the buzz. It was Greg and Jesse [Reiser], and you knew that was where you wanted to end up but you didn't really know why. Again, this was the first paperless studio, but even prior to that ... it was weird ... he was doing it by hand, but he was always trying to come up with new geometries. So to me it was certainly a struggle, but I always had the instinct that we were doing something special. There was a lot of frustration because we didn't have our own computers and had to wait our turn to be on one of the two allotted SGI machines. It was just so frustrating because what do you do for ten hours? You sit around. You can't even draw. You have to wait, and then you have half an hour on the computer, and we didn't really know what to do.

Student 2:

Do you think something like this could happen again? The digital revolution is a pretty big shift in architecture—I mean, that's a huge question, but do you think it's going to happen again?

Kolatan:

Of course. It will definitely happen, but it may not happen in our lifetimes. Not every generation has a huge technological invention. Some people find themselves in the midst of that innovation and then their role is more abstract, more pioneering ... and then the generation that comes after is more about refinement and figuring it out ... and then it becomes stale and boring so the generation after that needs to change it all up and do something new. New ideas in architecture are not always driven by technology, though, so you can have something very exciting—and I think something very exciting is happening right now. I think it has the potential to be just as important as what happened twenty years ago, but it's not driven by computation. It's not really driven by technology ... it's driven by other ideas.

Student 3:

It's pretty interesting that, in 1997, you did something in Form-Z that you didn't really have to do in Form-Z. Maybe that's because you had just learned it so you just started playing with it ... but then you showed us the chemical drawings and those are not digital, right?

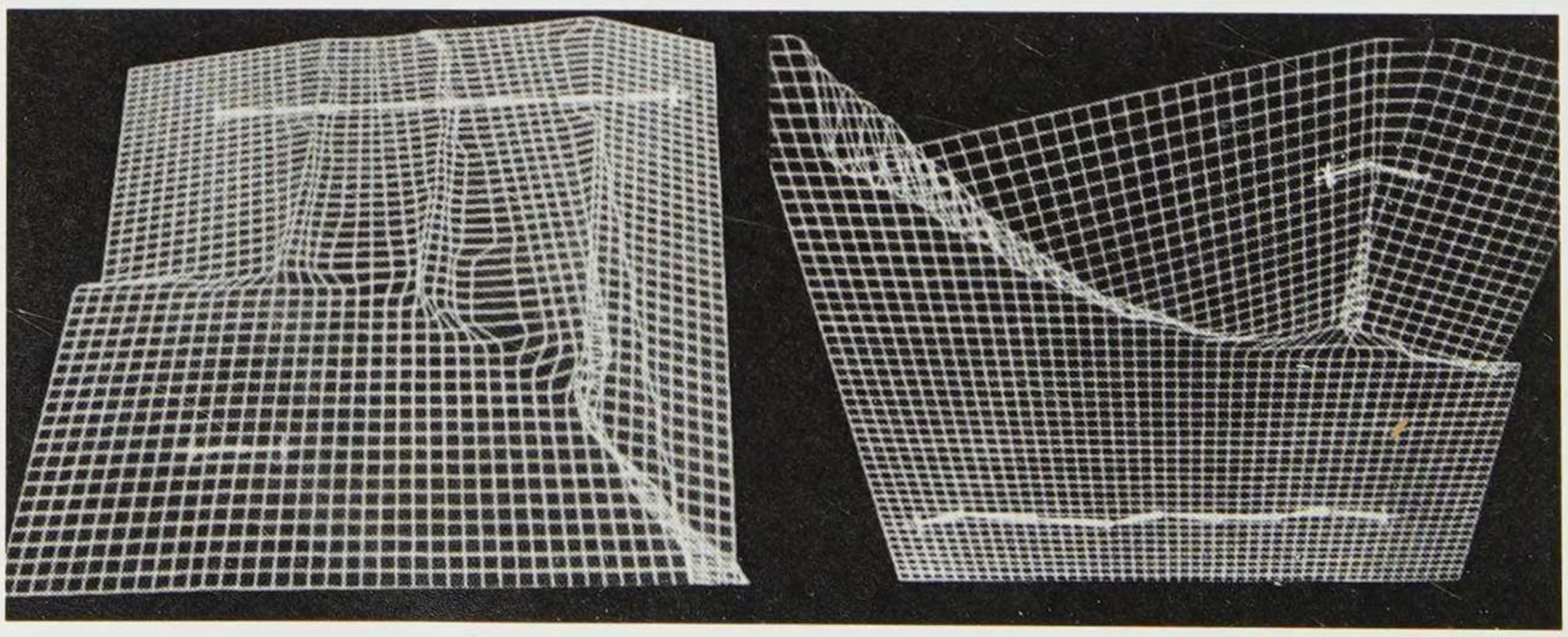
Kolatan:

Yes, that's right.

Student 3:

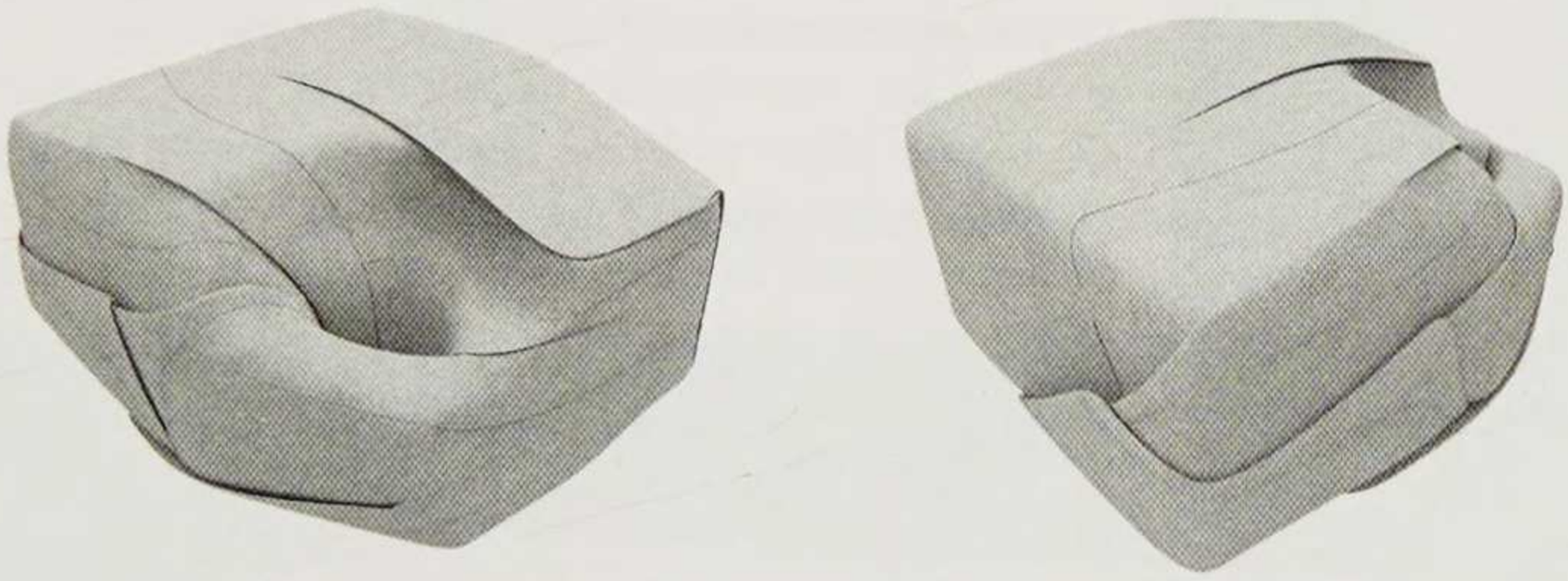
Ok, so I have two questions about this. Do you plan to keep separating the digital and non-digital in your work? The next question is about your approach towards representation. I know this is a totally different question, but is there a pop cultural reference that you use to represent your projects?

Metropark
Greg Lynn Studio
Columbia GSAPP
Ferda Kolatan
Drawing
1994



Kolatan:

Well, let's start with the first one. I mean, after everything is said and done, you design because you're obsessed with certain ideas, right? The idea is never "computer" or "not computer," though. You use them and there's a time when you get into a technique, and the technique can generate interesting stuff ... and if you haven't seen that stuff before, then that may excite you, but what really interests you—and all of you guys know this—is the moment when you see something emerge and you know it's right [snaps fingers]. I like complex stuff and to me, even the banal little things—these guys [see image, page 122]—I think they're quite complex in a very different kind of complexity. The chemical is all about natural complexity, and this one [see image, page 122] is all about very small refined detailing and cuts and slices and what not. We felt that we couldn't do this



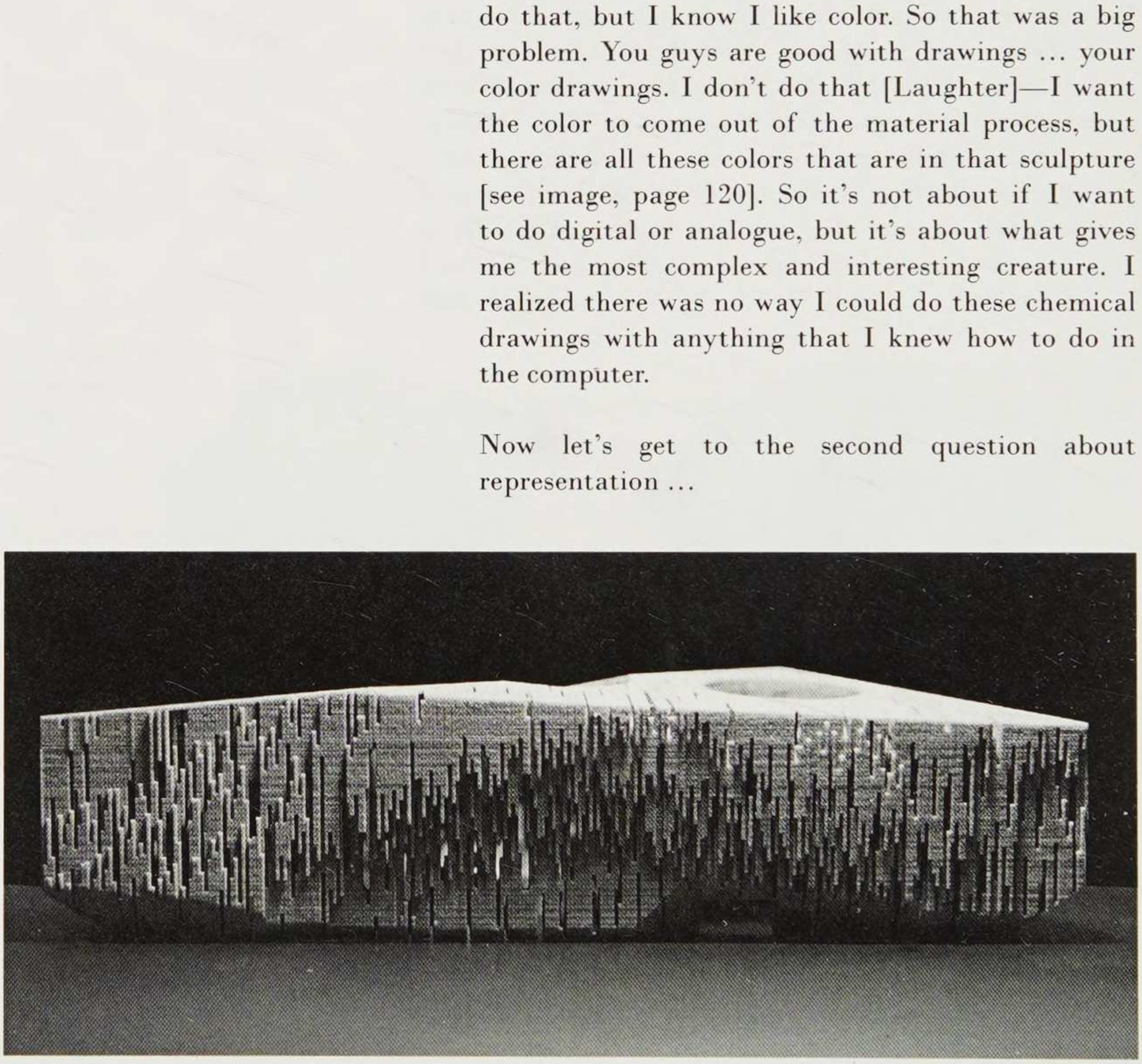
Tokyo PAC
Rendering
2015

without the computer because these are boolean cuts. Technically you could, but it would have been really difficult. The most interesting thing for us in Form-Z was boolean operations, so we were just playing with booleans at that time ... and we felt like it was kind of cool so we would model the whole thing and then we would begin to boolean it out. Where you stand creates a cone of vision, and then that cone becomes the boolean. To me, this is complex, and back then it was particularly complex. So when we go to this [see image, page 106], believe it or not, even though it looks very different, the interest is similar.

There was an interesting moment when we were doing parametric design and trying to make things weirder and weirder, and they would become more and more uniform ... more and more homogeneous

... and when we realized that, we were like, "Ok what is going here?" You want coherence but you don't want homogeneity. So then I became interested in these chemical experiments [see image, page 114], which started out very simple in my own kitchen. Then it became more sophisticated. What I was looking for here was, "Well, how can I make what I do even more complex? How can it have texture, color, organization, and structure all in one?" I hated having to apply color to models after the fact. Still to this day, I don't even know how to do that, but I know I like color. So that was a big problem. You guys are good with drawings ... your color drawings. I don't do that [Laughter]—I want the color to come out of the material process, but there are all these colors that are in that sculpture [see image, page 120]. So it's not about if I want to do digital or analogue, but it's about what gives me the most complex and interesting creature. I realized there was no way I could do these chemical drawings with anything that I knew how to do in the computer.

Now let's get to the second question about representation ...



Baltic Thermal Pool Park
Model
2014

Student 3:

Yeah. Are you referencing any kind of cultural or pop cultural ideas that drive the way that you represent your renderings, your drawings, and what not? Like this one [see image, current page]?

Kolatan:

This is not a rendering, it's a model.

Student 3:

Oh, sorry.

Kolatan:

But I like that you thought it was a rendering. [Laughter]

Student 3:

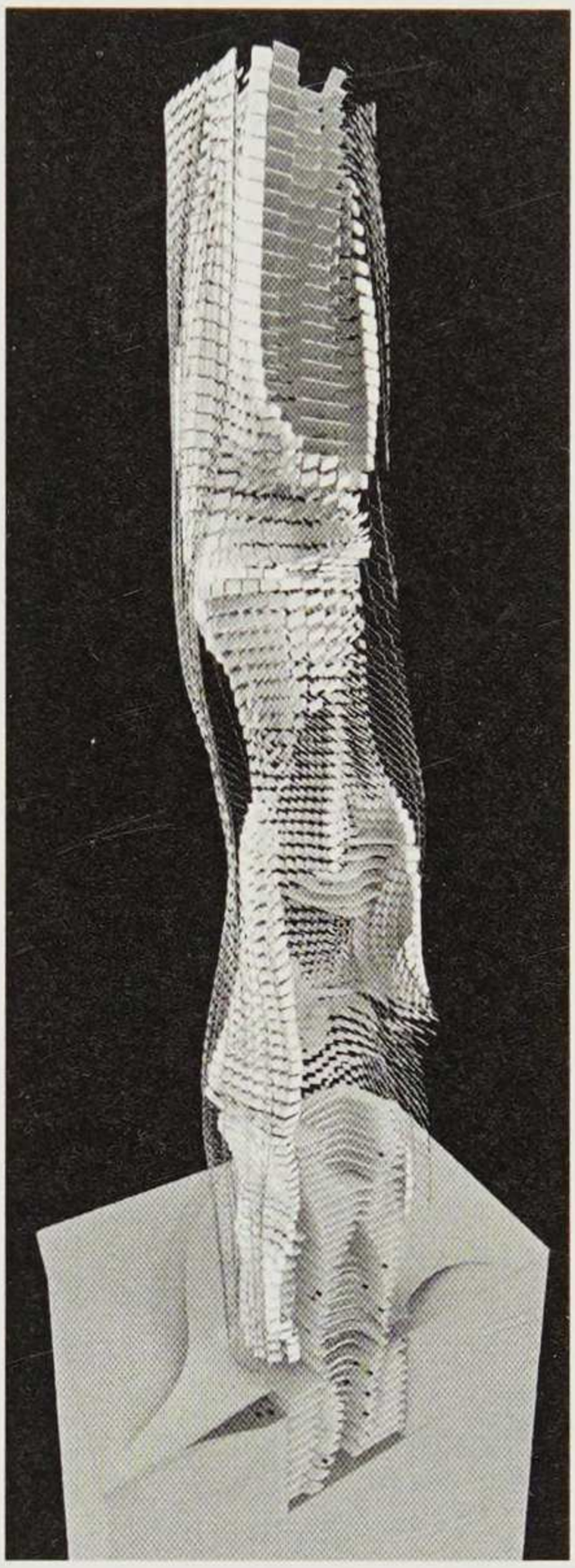
Let's say we think back to the 1997 project [see image, page 123] ... maybe that was limited by the computation back then, but some people will try to render something like this now! So I'm interested in the way you look at representation because you can do a project tomorrow that looks just like this, right?

Kolatan:

The question of representation is a difficult one. When you're driven by an idea of affect, you represent differently—you might bring things all the way to the edge because you don't want people to look at something as an object because an object doesn't have that kind of affect that, let's say, a pattern has or a surface has. Or we can talk about the sublime—you don't have edges and you don't frame it ... it's everywhere. You're being pulled in differently. The moment you're more interested in objects, it becomes about showing the whole thing.

Student 4:

It seems like in your early work, it's complexity through form, but by the time you get to the bath house [see image, page 110], it's a very different type of complexity. It seems to be a much simpler initial form and then complexity is applied in a different way. Is that where you see your work going?



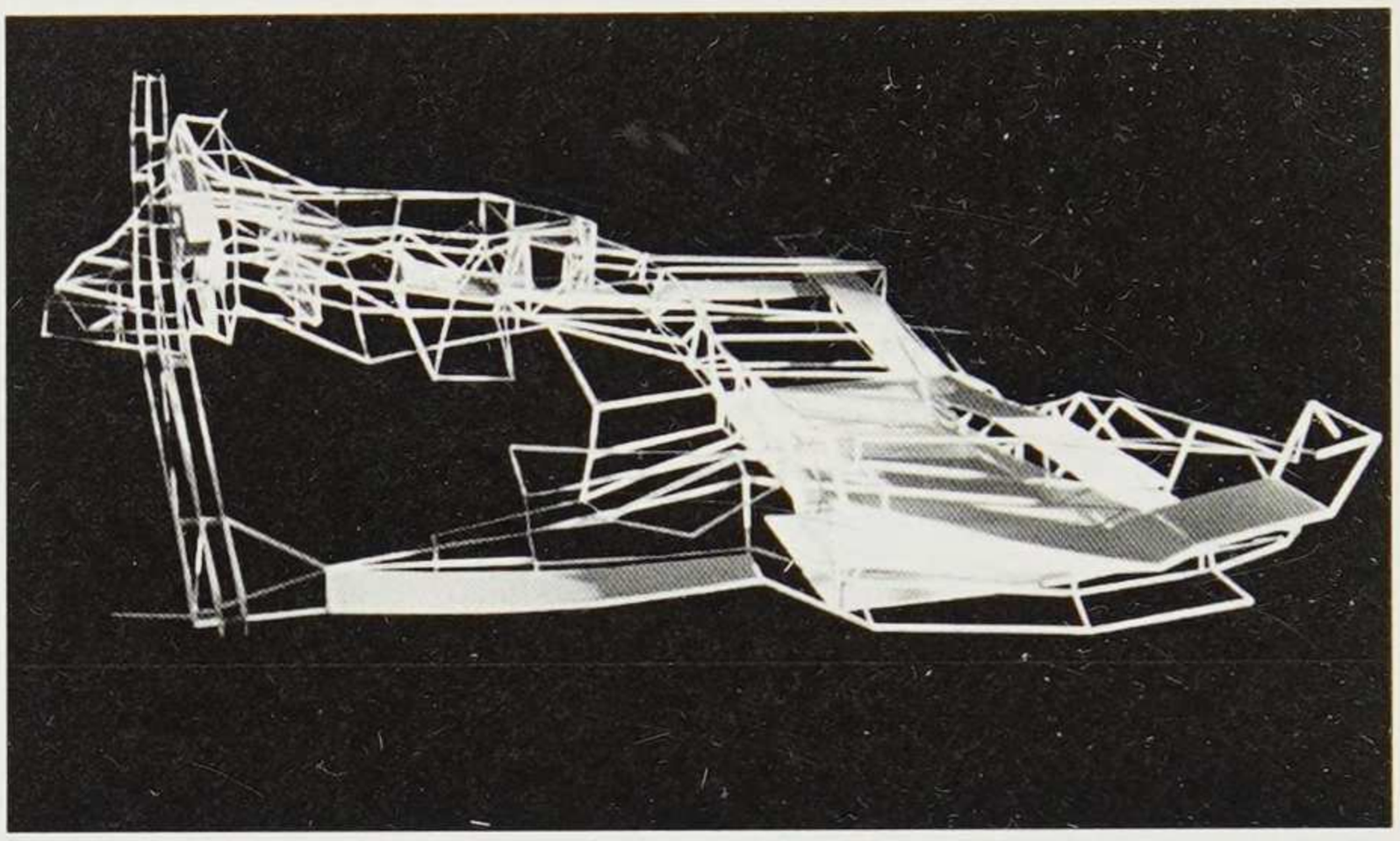
Dervish Tower
Rendering
2009

Kolatan:

Yeah, you're absolutely right. We are definitely going that way and there are a couple of reasons. One is that we really want to start building more ... and if you do it like this [see image, current page], you're not going to win it. [Laughter]

It's also that we're getting tired of a certain kind of wild expressivity. The bigger gesture, to me, is really not that interesting anymore. I'm much more interested in agonizing over this angle here, or where to put that damn door. I find it super

Metropark
Greg Lynn Studio
Columbia GSAPP
Ferda Kolatan
Model
1994



interesting now ... I didn't five years ago. I was like, "Well, wherever this thing opens up, that's where the door is." So, yes you're absolutely right. It is a very astute observation. Again, like a lot of things, you just keep doing it and you realize some ideas have a lifespan ... they're super interesting at some point, and then you get saturated. You see it many times and then you also ask yourself, "Is this really going towards practice?" In other words, is it buildable or is it just about an evocation of an idea? I was personally much more content to only evoke ideas for the first five to ten years after I was out of school. I didn't really care if it could be built. It was more about what could be the more provocative image that I could produce that evokes an idea for architecture.

Student 2:

How do you see objects and complexity resolved with each other? I feel like those two things—

Kolatan:

Like this [see image, page 117] ...it's resolved. [Laughter]

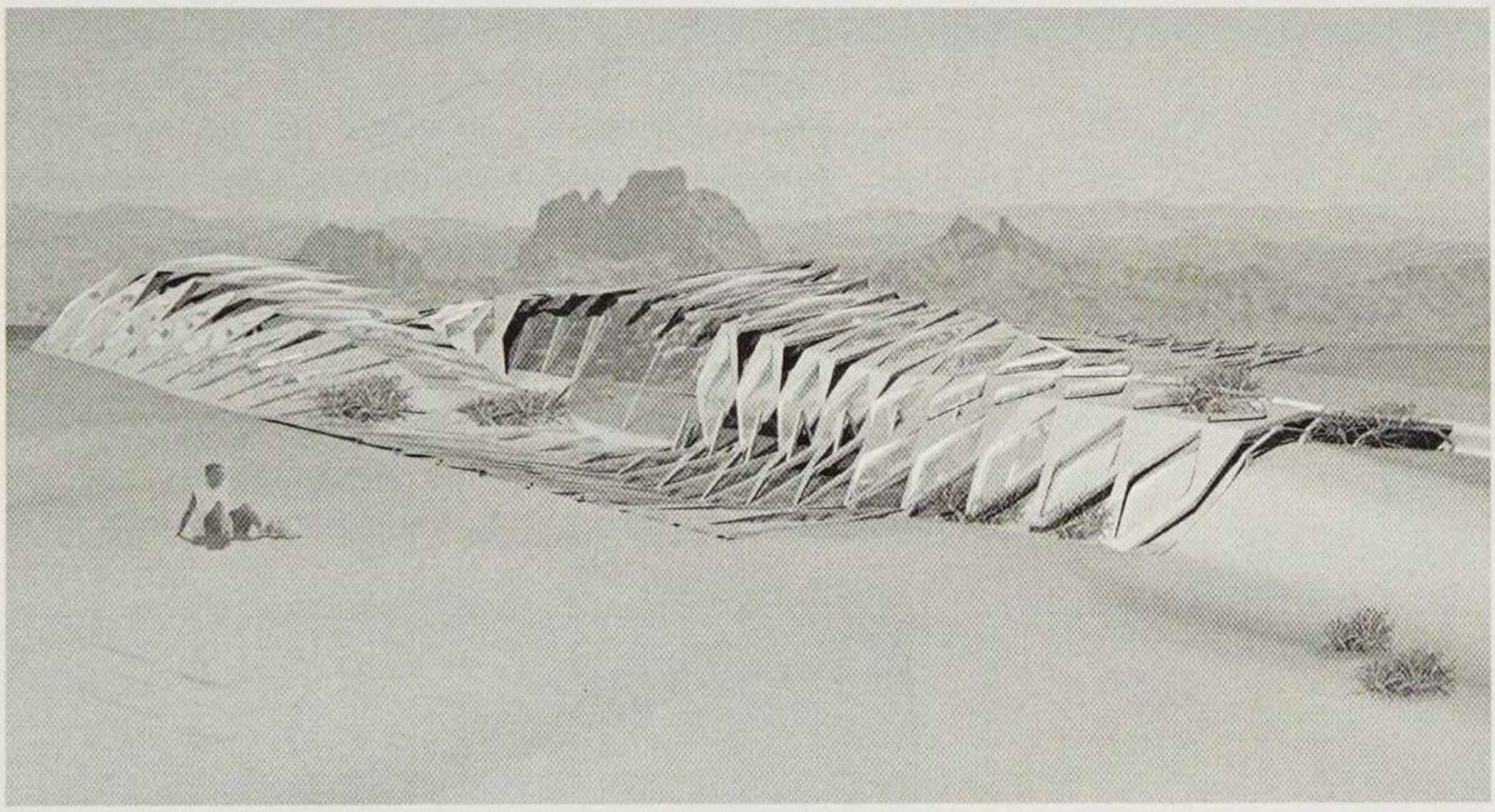
Student 2:

So it's done then? [Laughter]

When we talked to Kutan [Ayata], he described his obsession with curves. Now he's resolving the curves as objects. In your work there's an obsession with complexity, so how do you resolve that within the object discussion?

Kolatan:

In terms of the whole object discussion ... it's not really that much about objects. If you're in the architecture profession, you always produce objects. It's more how you think about it. It's more about how you place your emphasis or the cultural argument that you're making. The chemical complexity is a very different kind of complexity. It's more about the nature based complexity of chaos, and wind patterns, and fluids that go into each other, and they react in some ways. You have some sort of an idea that you can't really control. That's one way of thinking about complexity. The other way is that you take a simple object and ask yourself how you can add complexity to it. If you use a technique of estrangement, you make that object more complex because, in the end, complexity is our inability to understand something at once. That's it.



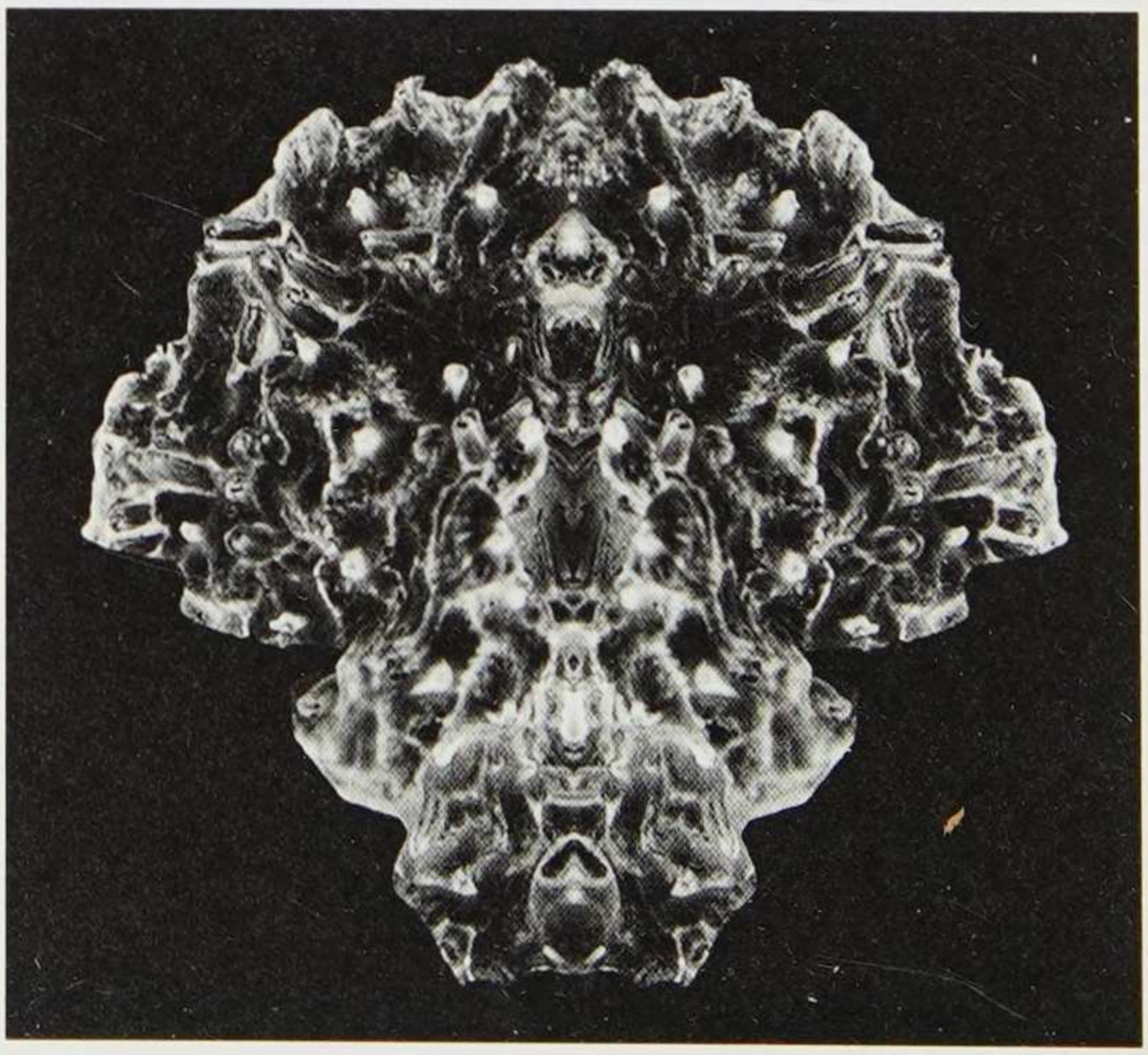
Dunehouse
Rendering
2006

The older models of complexity that are very gestural—I understand them really well now, and that's why they don't work for me. If I look at certain parametric models—and a lot of my students, particularly my PPD [Post Professional Degree] guys—they do it for the first time and they're super excited about it, and I say, "Eh," and they get very upset with me. I can see it in their eyes. And they say, "But this is fantastic!" It is fantastic, but it's also relatively easy to fall into some kind of formulaic approach and at that point it looks a certain way, but it's not really complexity—not in my definition. So I try to ask

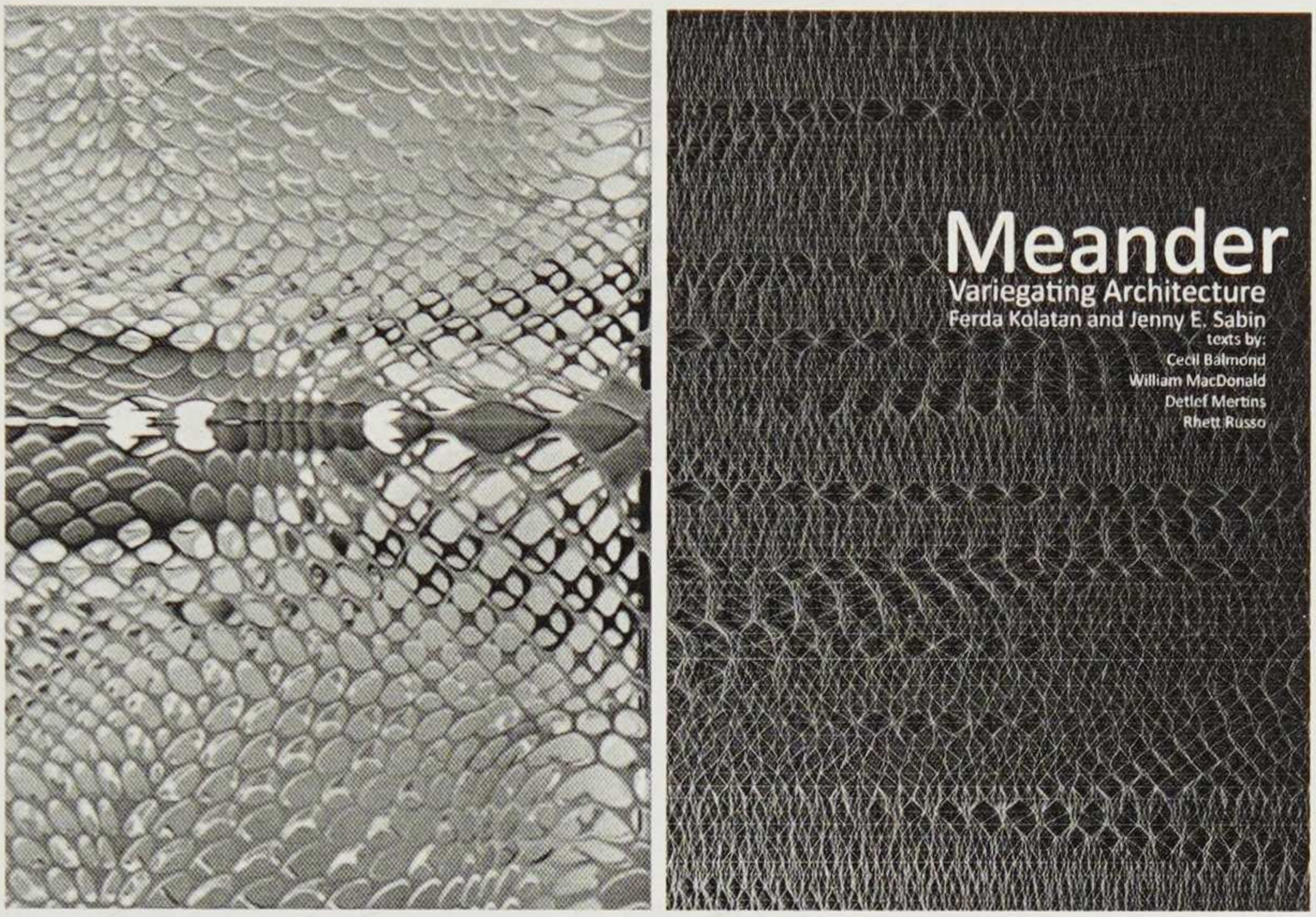
myself, "How can I keep myself, and everybody who looks at our projects, somewhat in suspense?" I understand that if I get a small project for $150,000 to renovate a place in New York, then I have to do that in different ways than if I get a house for $1.5m or when I work on a competition. I cannot—I mean, I can but I don't think it's very smart—I cannot approach each one of them with the same idea of complexity. So the chemical images, in the end, are images. I have them in my apartment. I hang them on the wall and they look really cool, and they produced the Coralline sculptures ... and they also look really cool ... but I understand I will never produce a building that will be *that* thing. It would be absurd.

Student 1:

Can we break down "strange" a little bit? Because "Strange" and "weird" seem to be hot topics right now. Last year there was a symposium that you were part of on OOO [Object Oriented Ontology], hosted by Syracuse University. All of the projects presented were described as "strange" and the word "strange" was thrown out a lot in the panel discussions ... but then I also kept hearing the name "Shklovsky" thrown around a lot. So I researched Shklovsky and discovered his idea of "estrangement" as a technique. I was surprised to discover that it was a term from a 1920's Russian literary theorist [Viktor Shklovsky]. That was fascinating to me because you can then think about estrangement as a way



Corallines
Drawing
2012



Meander
Publication
2010

of working, or as a concept, which is detached from contemporary or cultural aesthetics of "strange" or "weird" things. So, is it important for you to separate estrangement as a technique from things being strange as an aesthetic argument? In general, why do you think that "strange" is so hot right now?

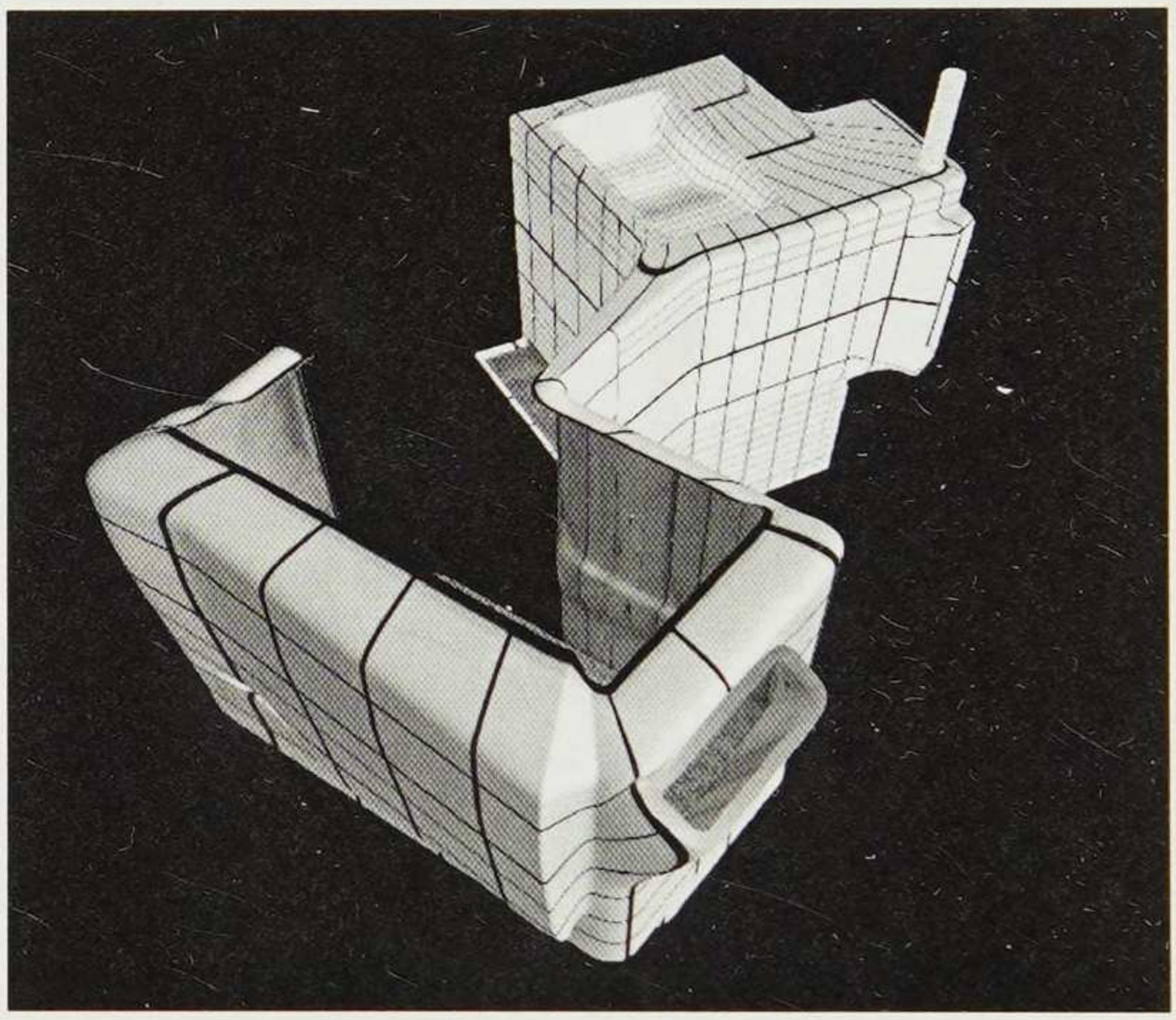
Kolatan:

First of all, I appreciate that you went all the way to check out Shklovsky. There are a couple of things that I'd like to say ... I mean, this could be a very long discussion. First of all, I would say "strange" is certainly not an invention of our time right now. You're absolutely right, and it doesn't end with Shklovsky either. I would say every avant-garde movement in art and architecture, in some ways, has touched on ideas of estrangement. You could make a very plausible argument that cubism is all about estrangement. They didn't use those words, so you understand it wasn't their intentionality. Their intentionality was to get to the truth by cutting off a figure and placing it in different ways, revealing all sides, and saying that was more true than what you actually see. What is that if not an act of estrangement?

I think one of the reasons why it's coming back very strongly is through OOO ... and there's a book that Graham Harman wrote called "Weird Realism."

So it's not "strange," but it's "weird," and it's not the same to him. He uses the notion of "weird" as a description of a kind of ontological condition—that we can never know what is real—and that in and of itself is very strange. And he says that you can only get to objects through allusion. So there's a kind of quality that the project is about alluding to the real, or that the real is never clear. It's never categorical. It's withdrawn. What does that mean for architecture, which for two thousand years, has always made claims to represent the real?

Composite House
Rendering
2002



So this is not a new idea. All the way up to Postmodernism, I would say, architecture was completely indulged in the reproduction, or representation, of the real. If you look at Antiquity and you look at Greek architecture, a temple is a kind of mathematical concept—or the representation of a mathematical concept—which is, idealistically speaking, the real. If you look at Baroque, then it becomes more about plasticity. Again, all of these ideas are architects' ways of trying to understand what the world is about and what nature is about. Even Modernism—even though they would claim otherwise—just by proclaiming this universal idea of an architecture that works everywhere and for everybody is clearly, to me, also a representation of the real as they project it. Postmodernism is the one exception where it's about something else. It's about language. It's about construction rather than truth.

Anyway, we're completely within the disciplinary dialogue of architecture when we talk about estrangement. The novelty is more within what kind of "strange" or what kind of "weird" we are talking about and how that can inform us as architects. It's very dangerous to align yourself with philosophy if you don't really know how and what to do with it. That's the test of OOO, at this point, because it's been around for four or five years within the architecture circle and we'll need to see where it goes. I'm fascinated by it. I've obviously been working with ideas like that for quite some time now, but I'm also curiously critical as well because I don't think it should be a one to one translation.

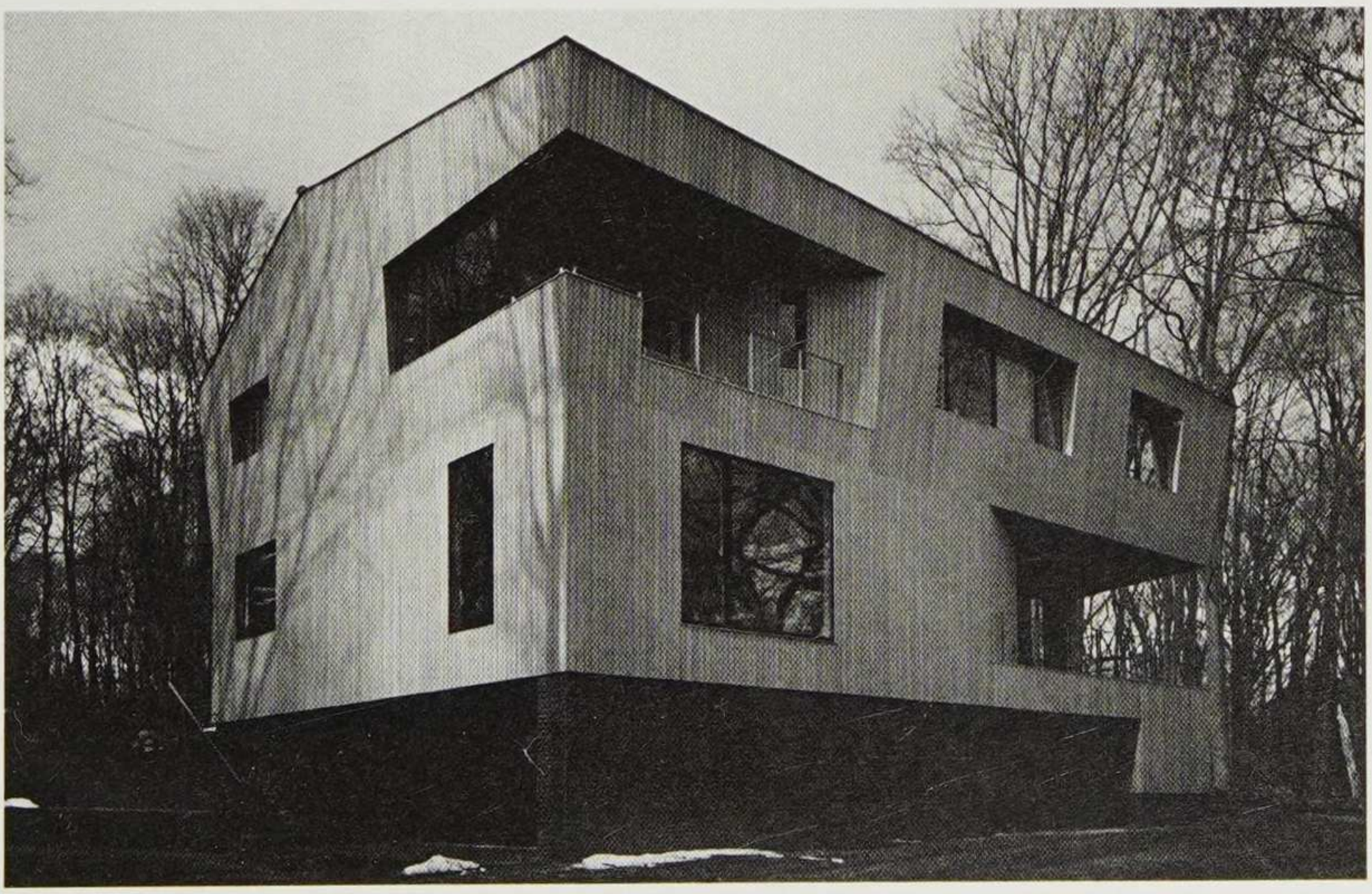
Student 2:

I think that's one of the more interesting things we've heard from most of the people who are interested in OOO. I think everyone who we've asked about it has said they're skeptical but want to see where it goes. I think it's interesting and really good because, otherwise, you end up not being able to progress with your project as you move forward.

Kolatan:

You know, I'm not skeptical about the philosophy, but I'm skeptical of what you do with it and where you drive it. There are architects who have always been working with philosophical ideas since Antiquity. Before this one, we were all working

DR_Residence
Photograph
2012



with people like Deleuze because that seemed to be the way to understand ideas of surfaces and continuities and the rhizome. Philosophers talk about the world, so if it's an interesting idea about the world, it makes perfect sense—as an architect who builds in the world, with the world—to engage in that dialogue. But you've got to understand how, and certainly Object Oriented Ontology is not about making buildings that look like objects. That's just an absurd thing to do. It's much more fundamentally important to rethink the older project through the notion of something like "Weird Realism." But ... you know ... we need more sessions to get through this kind of stuff. [Laughter]

Student 3:

Last week we talked to Tom [Wiscombe], and he said that he had both Bob Somol and Greg Lynn at UCLA. One of them is about figure and the other is about form, and they kind of had this conflicting thing at the time at UCLA. So I was just interested in where you see yourself in that dialogue. I mean, I don't see much figure in your work—

Kolatan:

Yeah, I didn't have Bob so ... there are no shapes. [Laughter]

Student 3:

I'm interested in your point of view on that because you and Tom are friends. Not to say that you're the type of guy who would be like, "This is what I do, this is what I believe in, and everything else is shit," but— [Laughter]

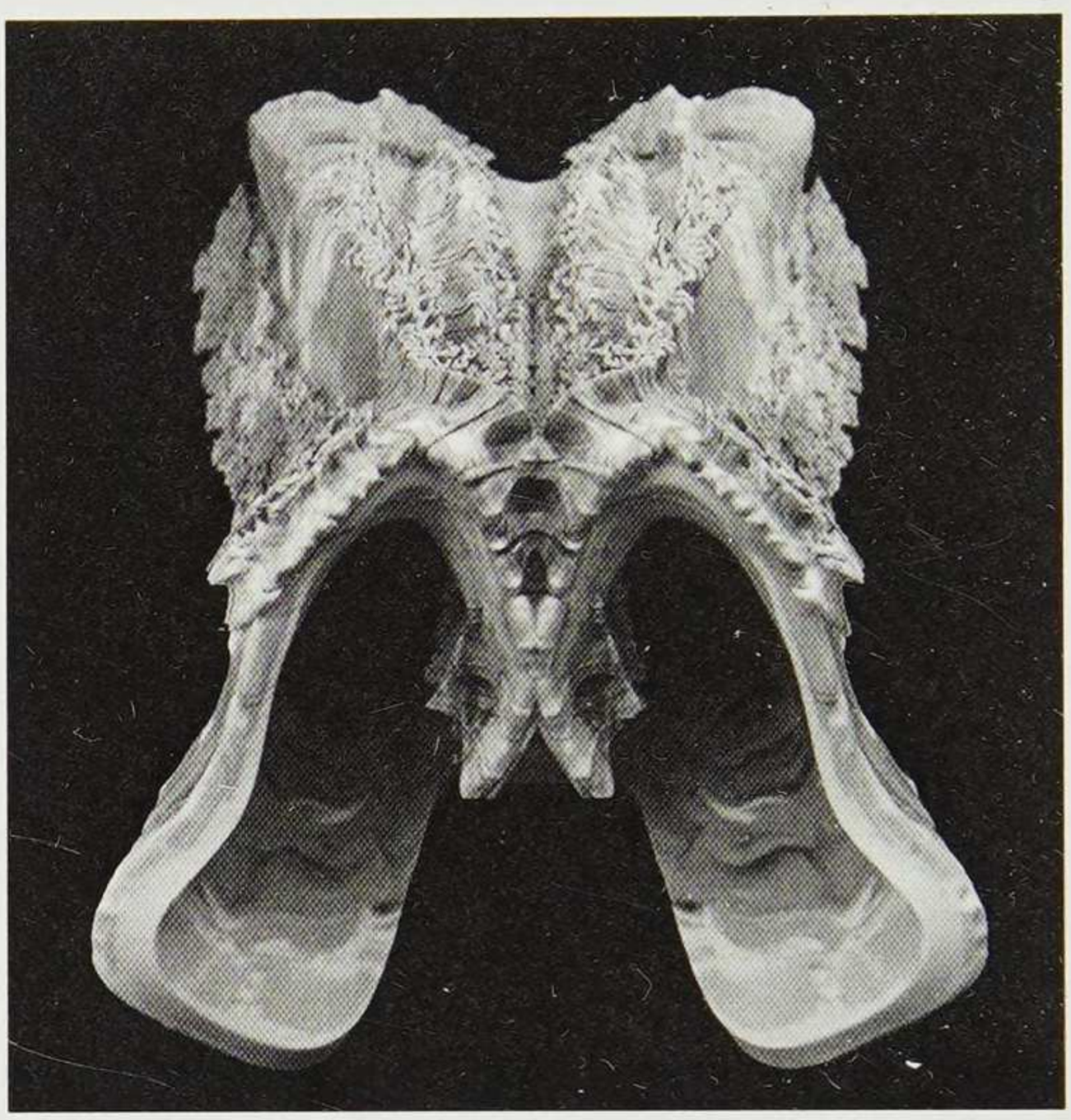
Well, there are people like that, right? Do you see the possibility of jumping into the realm of figure and shape? Is there a potential for it, especially because Tom's in that OOO camp, or crew, or whatever you want to call it?

Kolatan:

If you go to L.A. you see a lot of figure these days. It's also a regional thing. Never underestimate where you are and who your friends are and who your teachers are. Seriously, that's how these things work. Nobody is ever sitting at home and suddenly has a brilliant idea! [Laughter] That never happened to me. You're in a culture of people and that culture certainly makes you do certain things. I was never

(Opposite)
Changeling
Rendering
2008

Corallines
Model
2012

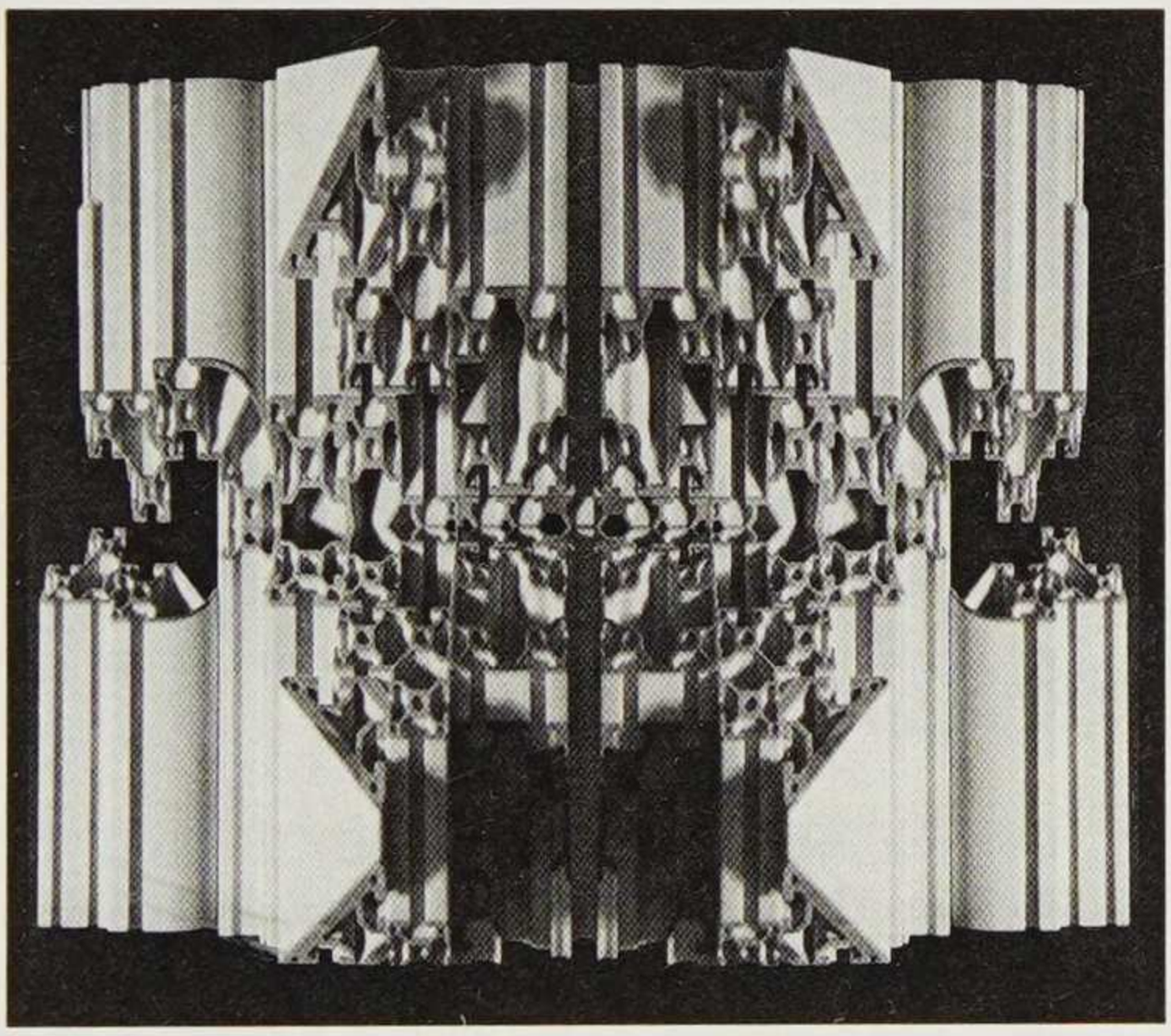


in that shape "camp," as you say, or clique, or whatever else you may use. My fascination with objects is two-fold ... and I'm just going to speak for myself, alright? I'm not going to say anything about Tom ... unless you switch that off [points to recorder], and then I'll say some things. [Laughter]

To me, it's about breaking away from the model of coherence and continuity and incremental differentiation, which is the "parametric." Parametricism is a problem because it has begun to translate itself into what I would call a "new universalism," and that's why I think that Parametricism is actually very modern, ideologically speaking. It gives you rules, but it's not just about banded windows anymore, or pilotis, or white walls and that kind of stuff. It's about rounded edges, connectivity, etc. But it's a formula, and any formula means that the person who comes up with the formula believes in some kind of universal value ... and I don't. I never have. I do not believe that anything I do has any universal validity. I'm not a religious person, in architectural terms. I honestly think that what I do today is certainly not what I'll be doing ten years from now. I can vouch for that. For some people that's a problem because they think that architecture should be the search for some sort of ultimate quality, and they're just trying to get there. I'm not interested in any of that.

So, the Object Oriented Ontology, or the Speculative Realist, discussion is interesting because it's a new way of thinking that I find compelling. It's more unprecedented. It opens up ways of working with a set of ideas that are different than the older set of ideas. It's really as simple as that.

I could be more specific when it comes to how I would describe what's actually going on in this façade [see image, page 117] ... like where those moments of dealing with the realist aspects of it begin to slip ... and how ... and what are the techniques of the architect to make those things slip. How can I alienate banal architectural conditions by bringing them together in unprecedented and interesting ways? That's how I look at the problem, but we have all been saying—I mean, anyone who is part of that group makes it very clear that OOO is not a style. So you don't have



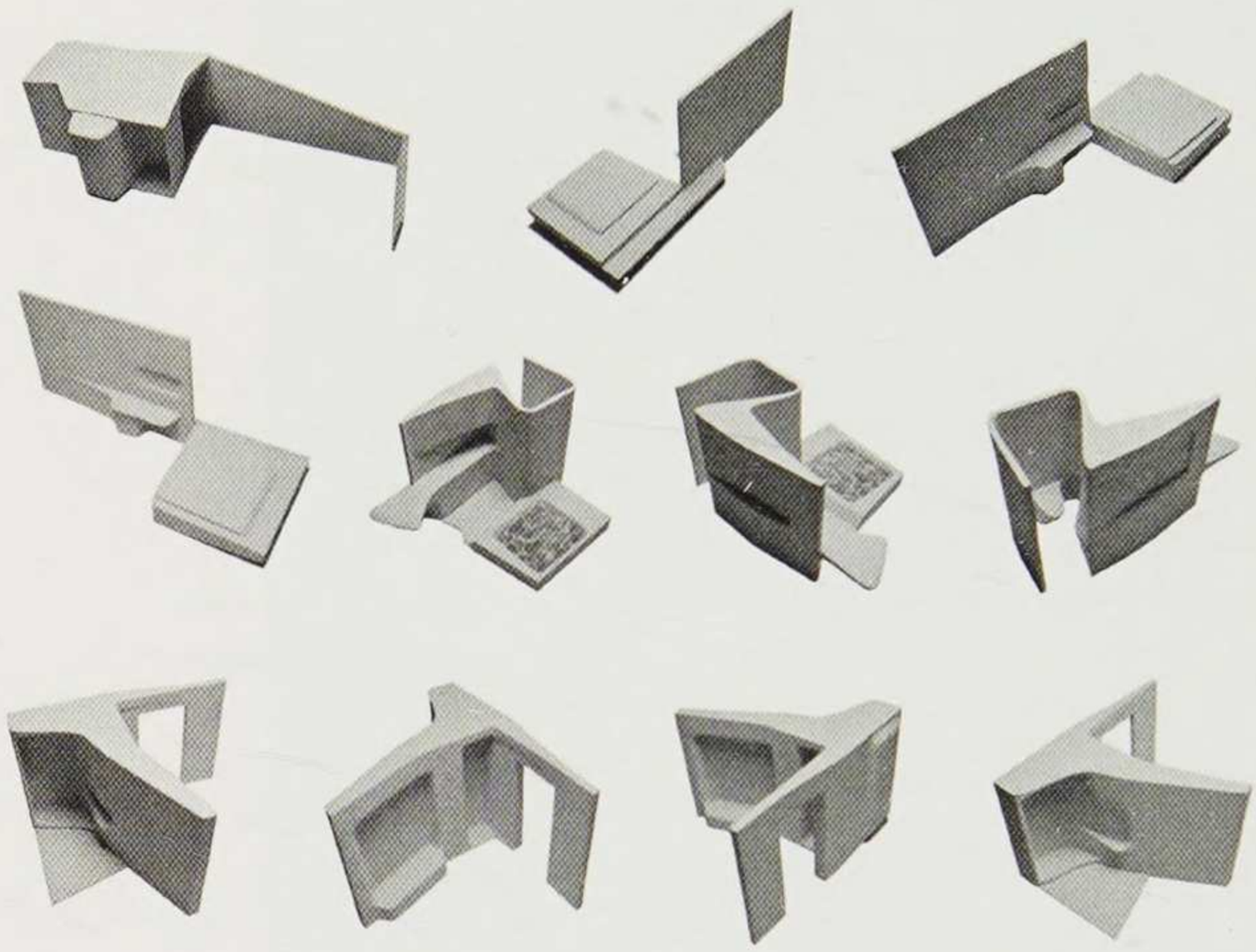
Obliques
Rendering
2015

to look at Tom's work and then other people's work and say, "Well, they don't look alike so how can they talk about the same thing?" They can talk about the same thing because the affinity does not come through the formal, stylistic quality of the project, but more through the conceptual ideology.

Student 2:

Architecture takes a long time to build, right? So what happens if you're constantly pushing your ideas forward and changing them? If you get a large project now, then it might not be done for ten years.

Composite House Models
2002



Kolatan:

I know. It's too long.

Student 2:

If your ideas are completely different, how do you work with that? What do you do?

Kolatan:

It's really one of the big frustrations as an architect. [Laughter] You build something that's five years old, and then you're like, "Oh my god, all these terrible ideas that I had five years ago ..." [Laughter]

Do you know what I honestly believe? If you do something right, at any moment in time, it's always good. I go back to those weird little things [see image, page 123], and I still love them. I don't go back to them and think, "Wow, what was I thinking?" I did this in total conviction, and therefore it still works for me. I have other projects where I would say maybe that's not the case anymore, and those are the ones I don't show. So not everything we do lives up to the test of time, but some things do, if you do them right, regardless if you have moved on stylistically. All the projects that I showed today are really important, and I would always proudly share them. So, when you get to build, try to do that. Make sure that there's something in the project that was meaningful in that point in time.

Student 1:

For some architects, something that helps work through that issue is the idea of having a "project" through the course of their work. Even though it might take a long time to build and realize, it's all culminating into a single body of work. Complexity is something that you've mentioned through all of your work. Would you say that it's something you would consider part of your "project?"

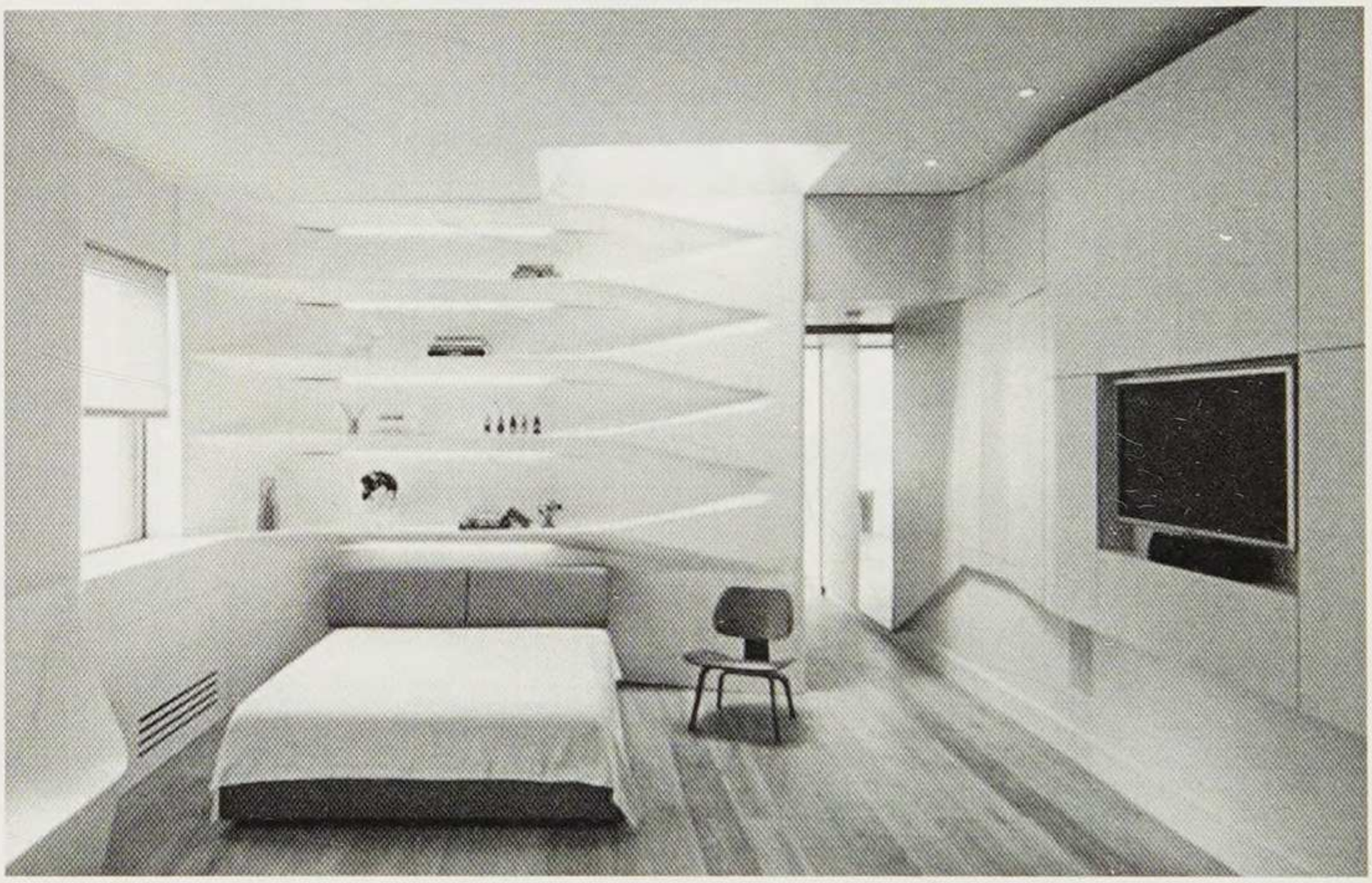
Kolatan:

No because complexity is not a "project." I mean, that's just sort of something I like. I just like certain things better than other things. Foremost, I see myself as a designer more than anything. I want things to look a certain way, but to me, it's never separated from how I think. If it doesn't also excite me in the ways I think about it, then I'll get bored very quickly. But the definition of a "project" is—you can define it very strictly in [Peter] Eisenman's terms, and then you spend your time figuring out that particular "project," which is tied to Colon Rowe, which is also tied to Polladio. It has a very clear lineage, but you can also think about a

Accessories
Renderings
1997

"project" in different ways. I'm not that kind of person. I know that I cannot do something that is so narrowly descriptive the entirety of my life—and this is no knock on Eisenman—it's just that you need to be a certain kind of person. I just get bored. I don't get bored too easily ... but I get bored. For me, there's kind of a four year or five year cycle, and then I get bored and I feel that something else needs to happen, but that's not counteracting the idea of a "project." I think everybody who does work that's not built and not meant to be built has a "project" of some sort. It may not be a very good "project"—I mean, other people will be the judge

K_Residence
Photograph
2009



of that—but it's why we work on competitions and why we work on projects like sculptures. It's because you want to understand something that is outside of the practice. So it's a "project" because you're trying to figure that thing out, and that's usually how Eisenman talks about it, right? He says you either have a "practice" or you have a "project." So I don't know. I would have a hard time telling you what my "project" is. To be perfectly honest, it's something I never thought about.

Student 1:

Would you say, then, that for you it's more about smaller issues that carry over from one project, or exploration, to another? How do you typically start a new project? What remains on the table and what doesn't?

Kolatan:

Well, I don't know ... it's a very organic process. You've seen through these twenty slides that there are certain lines of continuity and convergence and then there are sudden disruptions. I guess that's how I work. I don't plan it out, but I read something I'm interested in—so I read Graham Harman, and I go to his lecture, and I think, "That was kind of interesting," so I ask myself what that could mean for architecture. Could it mean anything? Is it riveting to me to think about it or is it just an annoyance or something? So it's much more organic. I certainly don't plan things like that. I don't say things like, "My architecture, or my 'project' is about projection, and I'll just do that in all possible forms for the rest of my life." No, I don't do that. Sometimes I'm more interested in complexity or atmospheric qualities ... then I'm more interested in ideas that are way less clear in how they impact the work. I have times when I'm much more interested in actual practice. I have times when I'm much more interested in reading and writing. So it's very personal. I don't know how it works ... I just know it works ... most of the time. [Laughter]

Kutan Ayata:

That's interesting, Ferda. I think it's a really good description of how you look at things—how you basically criticize relationism and the mode of working that you were engaged in ten to fifteen years ago. I think it's an incredibly great position to be in when you can look back at your work and identify things like, "Ok, this is how I felt ... then this is how I felt ... and this is wrong," especially to where you are now.

Kolatan:

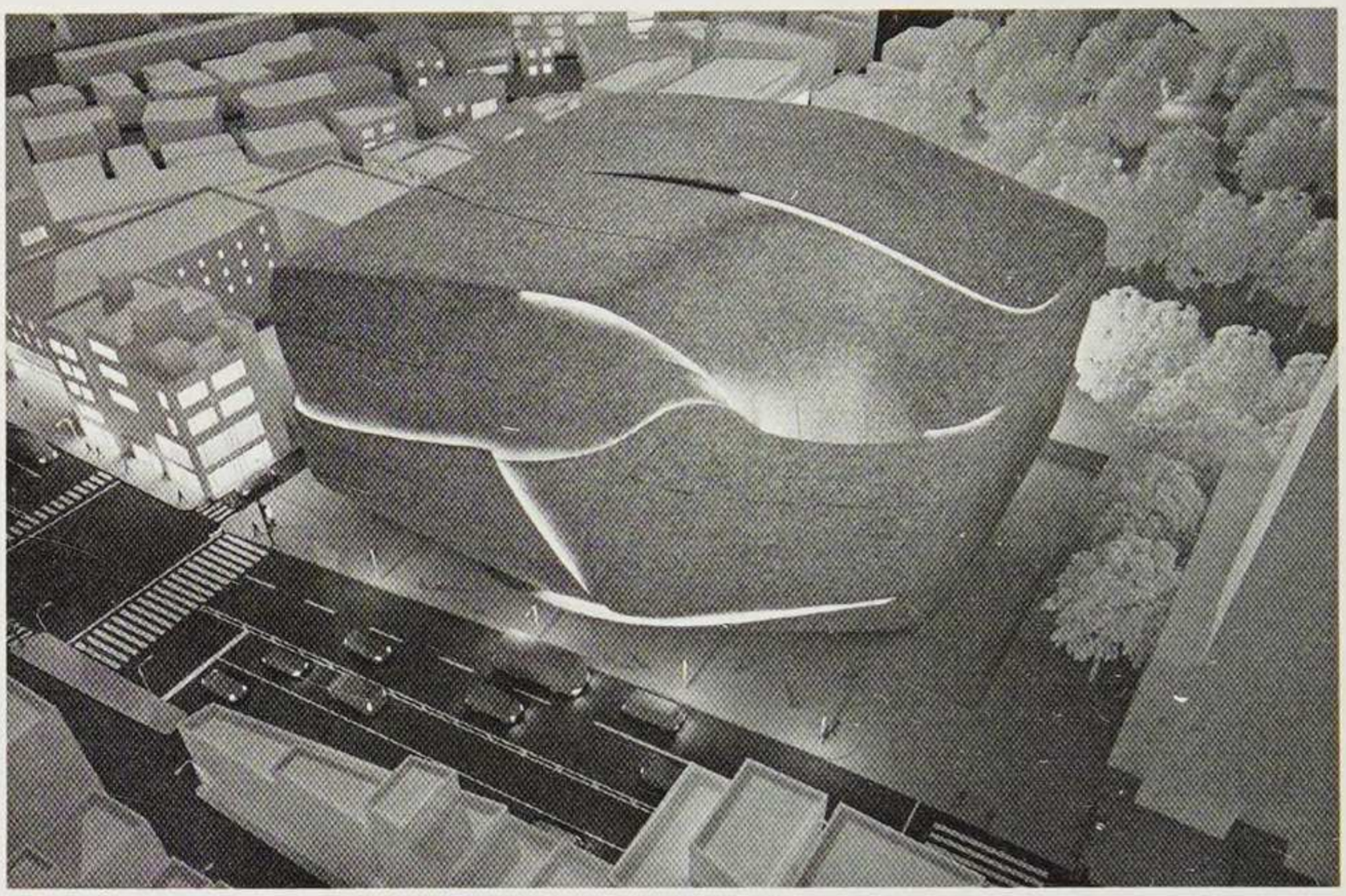
It's a bit Freudian, but—

Ayata:

Yeah, I'd say ... but I don't mean to get into psychoanalysis here! I think it's an important lesson, for every designer, to be self-critical so that you don't need to be comfortable in every project because it's not a single "project" but variations of projects, and I think your presentation highlights that very clearly.

Kolatan:

You know, I never felt that criticism means that you think the project is bad—be it my own, or be it anybody else's. I think criticality is part of intelligent architecture. I truly believe that.



Tokyo PAC
Rendering
2015

Otherwise, we just build. What makes it architecture, to use that tired description from [Rudolf] Wittkower—that there is "architecture" and there is "building"—but I think it's true. I wouldn't say, "Well, because it's a bicycle shed it's not architecture," like Wittkower did ... but I would say that there's a lot we see out there that I do not see as architecture. I would never look at that building across the street and critique it. If I can critique something, it means it has criticality built into it in some way, shape, or form ... and then it becomes architecture. If I go back and I look at the projects where I can make such an assessment, then those are the projects I still like, and they still mean something to me even though I don't work like that anymore. So, yeah ... I agree. [Laughter]

(Opposite)
Corallines
Drawing
2012

Acknowledgments

This publication was made possible by funding from the Department of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania School of Design. It is also being sponsored as part of the 125th anniversary of the PennDesign - Department of Architecture. We would like to thank Winka Dubbeldam, Professor and Chair of the Department of Architecture, for encouraging us to turn the conversation series into this publication and supporting us along the way. We also want to thank Dean Marilyn Taylor for showing much excitement and her support for this publication.

We owe a great deal to Kutan Ayata, Josh Freese, Nate Hume, Ferda Kolatan, Michael Loverich, Eduardo Rega, Andrew Saunders, and Tom Wiscombe; all of whom not only gave their time, but were enthusiastic about chatting with students and digging deeper with us into issues that we face within the school and within the broader context of the field of architecture.

There are many people who, in various ways, have been helpful since the beginning. For showing up to the "test run" conversation held with Nate Hume, for assisting to record or transcribe, for advice and guidance, and for feedback and copy-edits, we owe our gratitude to Chris Arth, Nick Auger, Somi Delano, Nathan Hammitt, Kyle Ingber, Josh Jordan, Janice Kim, Alfie Koetter, Steven Kocher, Kayleen Kulesza, Aeree Rho, Maria Teicher, Peter Wildfeuer, Eric Wong, Carly Zimmerman, and Zach Zimmerman. This would not have materialized without all of you.

Last, and most importantly, we would like to thank our peers and colleagues who participated in these conversations. There was a lot of energy and excitement in those discussions that we hope will continue!

Contributors

Kutan Ayata is an architect and an educator practicing in New York City, where he is a founding partner of the architecture and urban design studio Young & Ayata, recipients in 2014 of the Architectural League's Prize for Young Architects. Most recently, Young and Ayata was awarded one of two First Prizes for the New Bauhaus Museum Competition in Dessau, Germany. Ayata is a lecturer at PennDesign and an Adjunct Assistant Professor at Pratt Institute. Has has received a BFA in Architecture from the Massachusetts College of Art and an MArch from Princeton University. He is a registered architect in the Chamber of Architects in Turkey.

Josh Freese is an architectural designer and a professor at PennDesign. He teaches design studios and seminars in the Architecture Department, and has also taught in the Landscape Architecture Department. Freese recently established Studio JF, and has previously collaborated with offices like HWKN and !Melk, providing parametric and computational design consulting on various projects. Freese teaching and design work explore the range of aesthetic effects and computational techniques of geometric tiling and tessellation systems and their application in architecture and design.

Ferda Kolatan is a founding director of su11 architecture+design in New York City. He is also a Senior Lecturer at PennDesign and was a Visiting Critic at SCI-Arc in 2015. Projects by su11 have been exhibited nationally and internationally at venues such as MoMA, Walker Art Center, Vitra Design Museum, Archilab, Art Basel, Artists Space, PS1, and others. In 2010 he co-authored the book *Meander: Variegating Architecture*, and in 2011 was chosen as a Young Society Leader by the American Turkish Society. He received his Architectural Diploma (Dipl.Ing) from the RWTH Aachen and his Masters in Architecture (MSAAD) from Columbia University.

Michael Loverich founded The Bittertang Farm, along with Antonio Torres, to bring pleasure to the built environment. Their goal is to create frothy and turgid worlds. Trained as architects, their interests and methodology associates them closely to the organization of a farm. Bittertang material is bred, coaxed and grown to yield tasty morsels, new exotic beasts and fertilizer for future growth. Bittertang was a recipient in 2010 of the Architectural League's Prize for Young Architects. Loverich received a BA in Architecture from the University of Washington and an MArch from UCLA.

Eduardo Rega is an architect, urban designer and researcher based in New York. He is a visiting assistant professor at Pratt Institute and a faculty of architecture at PennDesign. He holds a professional degree in architecture and urbanism from the University of Las Palmas, and has completed the MSc in Advanced Architectural Design from Columbia University. His research and design work focuses on architecture's autonomy and on its capacity to translate, operate in, and affect social and political milieus spatially.

Andrew Saunders is the founder of Andrew Saunders Architecture + Design, which is an internationally published, award winning architecture, design and research practice committed to the tailoring of innovative digital methodologies to provoke novel exchange and reassessment of the broader cultural context. Saunders is an Associate Professor at PennDesign, and has taught at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Cooper Union, and the Cranbrook Academy of Art. He received his B.Arch from the University of Arkansas and his MArch from Harvard University.

Tom Wiscombe is founder and principal of Tom Wiscombe Architecture. His work stands out in terms of its mysterious figural features, its alluring graphic qualities, and its tectonic inventiveness. Wiscombe is Chair of the B.Arch. Program and Senior Faculty member at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc), and a visiting professor at PennDesign. He completed his B.A. in Architecture at UC Berkeley and his MArch degree at UCLA.

HATCH HATCH H
TCH HATCH HAT
ATCH HATCH H
HATCH HATCH

HATC
ATCH
ATCH
TCH HATCH HA

PennDesign

CH H
HHA
CHH

ISBN 978-0
9 780979 608759