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Nihonbashi House (Osaka, 1994)

by Tadao Ando

We lived here together for eighteen years, since our children were four and six years old. Although it is a small house located in the center of Osaka city, I was wishing to give my children a life where they can look up at the sky, feel the wind, and enjoy nature even while living downtown. In the courtyard, we used to make a plastic pool for the children to play in when they were young. For children, this courtyard was enough to play in.

I like Ando's design. Despite the small size, the space is generous. The main reason for this is that there are many atriums. Small but rich: that's the very impression that I have felt many times during my living here. I studied architecture at college, but I took over my father's business as my career, which has nothing to do with architecture, so I wanted to be involved in architecture in some way at that time. Furthermore, I wanted to do something useful in the future for those who love architecture. In 1994, Mr. Ando designed this Nihonbashi House, and when completed, it was such a fascinating space that I knew that one day I would open it to the public. Then, after living there for eighteen years, I moved out to open it to the public, and five years ago, Mr. Ando renovated it into a gallery. Now I continue to work as a volunteer for public events. Everyone who comes here says it's interesting and enjoys it a lot. Even those who had no interest in architecture will also find fun in this house. By doing this, I feel our number of friends who are interested in architecture increasing.

(Images: EN p. 13, JP p. 13)

Shujiro Kanamori

Gallerist and owner of the Nihonbashi House

Arimaston Building (Tokyo, 2005–)

by Keisuke Oka

What I think about and what I want to talk about is that I want to build houses with my own hands, and to build them with care as human-made. In Japan, houses are built very fast, perhaps in just a few months. A wooden house could be finished within three months. In the same way that UNIQLO is called “fast fashion,” houses built so fast deserve the name of “fast architecture.” Instead, I want to build houses with my own hands. For me, it’s something very important for the times we are living in. Because of the current times, it can be realized. For example, I couldn’t get some particular tools or materials until just a few years ago. But nowadays, I can search for what I need and even order them online, and there are large home improvement stores in Japan where you can get most of the things you need. About construction methods, you can find most answers by searching how to make something on either YouTube or Google. In addition, you will see people making houses with so many creative ideas. By searching like that, we are now living in an age where houses can be made by our own hands with great effort. I think that’s great. I believe that architecture is not a high-tech thing, but an accumulation of low-tech things. I am building houses, while I don’t feel like I’m doing something so difficult. I’m just doing basic things with care to avoid mistakes. Just as we can DIY with food, clothing, and shelter, in the future it will be good for us to participate more in our own houses. That’s what I want to show by building this house. Thank you.

(Images: EN p. 17, JP p. 17)

Keisuke Oka

Architect and builder of the Arimaston Building



Nihonbashi House

SERENDIPITY AND EXACTITUDE

with Shujiro Kanamori, Christian Kerez, Hiroyuki Kimura, Masahiro Kinoshita,
Keisuke Oka, and Gabrielle Schaad. Moderated by Erwin Viray

Viray In this session, we will discuss how to experience material and texture in architecture and the making of a determined form versus serendipity in finding a form. As you know, the Nihonbashi House and the Arimaston Building are characterized by their purism in use of material—concrete—even though they express utterly different surface textures. Both houses show sculptural qualities and a radical concept. The building process of the two houses, however, couldn't be more different. One is mathematically planned, and nothing is left to chance. The other continuously grows out of bodily intuition. Mr. Kanamori, would you please open the conversation by sharing your impression of the recording of the Nihonbashi House?

Kanamori*¹ The house in Nihonbashi appears well integrated in the cityscape. A concrete wall three meters wide and ten to fifteen meters high is inserted into a small gap in the city; the space within is carved out of that massive structure. For me, being able to see beyond the wall is a refreshing experience.

Viray In the animation of the Arimaston Building, we could hear the sound of water dripping. The quality of being unfinished lets the weather enter the house.

I would like to ask Mr. Oka the same question: What is your reaction to the point cloud video of your work? Can you relate your thoughts to the unfinished state of the house?

Oka* I grew up admiring and looking up to Tadao Ando. I forced myself to go against my admiration of his style and ask myself, "How can I surpass the style of Ando-san?" while also thinking about building with concrete.

My building is still not yet finished. We had to pause due to ongoing public works. But soon we will be able to restart the construction again, and it is my great hope to finish in the next three years. Even though the building is still not completed, I feel excited to continue the building process after a long time of not being able to work on it. I was grateful to see the animation. In a very short time, it helped me remember and realize a lot of things I wasn't aware of, such as where the structures were connected to each other.

Viray Gabrielle, you visited the Arimaston Building some years ago. As an expert of Gutai,² I am curious about your personal experience when traversing the house. Referring to Oka-san's work, what could immediacy in art and architecture mean in our times?

Schaad Yes, I had the good fortune to visit the Arimaston Building in 2014. Passing by on a walk, my friends and I started a conversation with Oka-san, and he kindly guided us through the building. What a construction site! In some moments, it even seemed dangerous to climb through the building. Many textures and spaces surprised me—not only in their materiality but in the way they enclosed you. And then, all of a sudden, new perspectives opened up within the house itself but also to its surroundings, which are specific. As you know, we are in a district of Tokyo with many embassies. So one would not expect such a self-built, intuitive, long-term project there.

Viray Mr. Oka, can you tell us more about the story of that context?

Oka* I really love the Kuwait Embassy made by Kenzo Tange. In its neighbourhood, there is also the Furendo Gakuen school building by Hiroshi Ôe. The two architects were in the same class at university. To be able to see the two buildings from my site had an enormous influence on the making of the Arimaston Building.

Viray Christian, in your project *Incidental Space* at the 2016 Venice Biennale, digital scans were used to scale small physical models into habitable space. The material textures were translated into a digital model, scaled up, and reproduced as an abstract yet complex space. I wonder what happens to the materiality and the experience of space after it has undergone such a process? Do we experience it as a house for living or architecture as sculpture?

Kerez You know, parametric design has a long history. Nowadays, we are able to produce a whole house or at least parts of it with digital fabrication. What has drastically changed since the 1960s is the exponential growth in the amount of information we can work with. At the beginning of parametric design, a form produced by the computer led to digital fabrication guided by the computer. But now, through scans, you can have enormous point clouds that make the controlled form obsolete.

What interested us in *Incidental Space*—and what somehow relates quite closely to the studio of Christophe Girot—is how you can work with this point cloud. At the start of the production process for the Venice Biennale were handmade models. The only goal was to make a form so complex that it would have been impossible to capture fifteen years ago. Only now one should be able to grasp it. I see certain similarities with the studio, for these houses might be tiny, but they are very complex, especially if I think of the house by Oka-san. Imagine how hard it would be to draw it. Maybe it is a complexity that you can only reach by using your own hands. It would not be possible if you had a control apparatus like a section and floor plan. When

I originally watched the point cloud animations, they didn't remind me of Incidental Space, but now that you mention it, yes, there are also some similarities in the question of sculpture and housing.

A fascination I have with houses in Japan is that they are so small. It has nothing to do with modesty but much more with complexity. If you have a lot of information squeezed through a minimal space, you get something like an inversion of the actual scale. This is what we tried to do with Incidental Space. It is, first of all, a space that is extremely small, but on the other hand, something infinite. A Japanese teahouse—probably one of the smallest spaces we know in the history of architecture—is very hard to describe. Its experience has nothing to do with being in a simple, modest, and easily understandable space. On the contrary, you are nearly overwhelmed by the different aspects of the space. This paradox interests me and attracts me a lot to Japanese architecture: the house as a private universe, this contradiction of the actual small scale of a building but then the revelation of something different, something opposite, nearly reaching out for eternity or for the whole world that wants to be represented and comes together in an atomized space.

Viray Going inside your installation was fascinating because it was at first unimaginable to step into a room that small. But once inside, you can actually *feel* something. It felt like being inside a Borromini chapel. Gabrielle, could you relate this bodily feeling to the practice of *Gutai*?

Schaad It is not easy to compare those two things: 1960s painters who moved away from the frame to exercise their art in public space and a concrete building. Yet, to materialize bodily experience through various practices, spatial practices, with paint—I think there is indeed a kind of relatable feeling. Moving through Oka-san's building is almost like dancing. When talking about the Arimaston Building, I realize that the focus lies on the phenomenological, subjective bodily experience. However, the point cloud evokes a very different feeling that could even enlarge this physical experience. It becomes a thoughtmodel or a machine, showing a long-lasting process that does not stop moving forward. In the simultaneity of all these angles and aspects lies the potential to trigger a creative process. Not only mentally but also bodily, if this makes sense.

Viray What is your thought, Mr. Kinoshita, on the space as a process? What did you feel inside the Arimaston Building, compared to being inside the Nihonbashi House?

Kinoshita I was already familiar with Tadao Ando's architecture because I was a student in the Osaka area. And then I experienced Oka-san's building. I was shocked because we learned to design architecture through geometrical

methods. But Oka-san explained to me that he creates at the same time that he makes or builds. So he does not need geometry as a medium to design architecture. It is much more direct, which is surprising.

Viray Linking the notion of directness to the digital scan—Mr. Kimura, we have talked about the direct making of architecture and being almost physically touched by a space. Can these aspects be relived in a digital scan?

Kimura I must say that I was fascinated by the point cloud videos of the two houses, not visually but sonically. The sound was solid and touching. I mean touching like humid air when it's raining in Tokyo at the beginning of the rainy season. Another striking aspect of the point cloud video is that, as you approach, you lose the detail. The closer you move towards a wall, the more it dissolves. It is the opposite of photography, or maybe filming. I intuitively thought of long-term memories. What long-term memory means, I don't know exactly, but this is what I felt. It is not a singular shot you present, but it is remembering a space somehow in the back of your head, composing your experiences over time, in your mind, in your body. The point cloud transforms this experience in a very immediate way. As Christian said, it is remarkable that digital technology has been used for the production of architecture. And now it is becoming a realm of production and experience both together. I think it is an exciting aspect to discuss.

Viray Thank you, Mr. Kimura, for such very thoughtful words. When you mentioned this sort of memory—long-term memory—I was reminded of the Japanese term *yugen*, whereby certain things are there, and then, as if you are given a hint, you are brought back to a place where you have been before. William James said, “every definite image in the mind is steeped and dyed in the free water that flows round it.”³ Modern architecture is always determined to have a clear and precise image. Maybe we are coming to a time whereby “with it goes the sense of its relations, near and remote, the dying echo of whence it came to us, the dawning sense of whither it is to lead. The significance, the value, of the image is all in this halo or penumbra that surrounds and escorts it.”⁴ So, it's not the image only in itself, but the things around the image. The potential of point clouds may open up new possibilities for being more than just as a production tool, as you said. That is something we can think about.

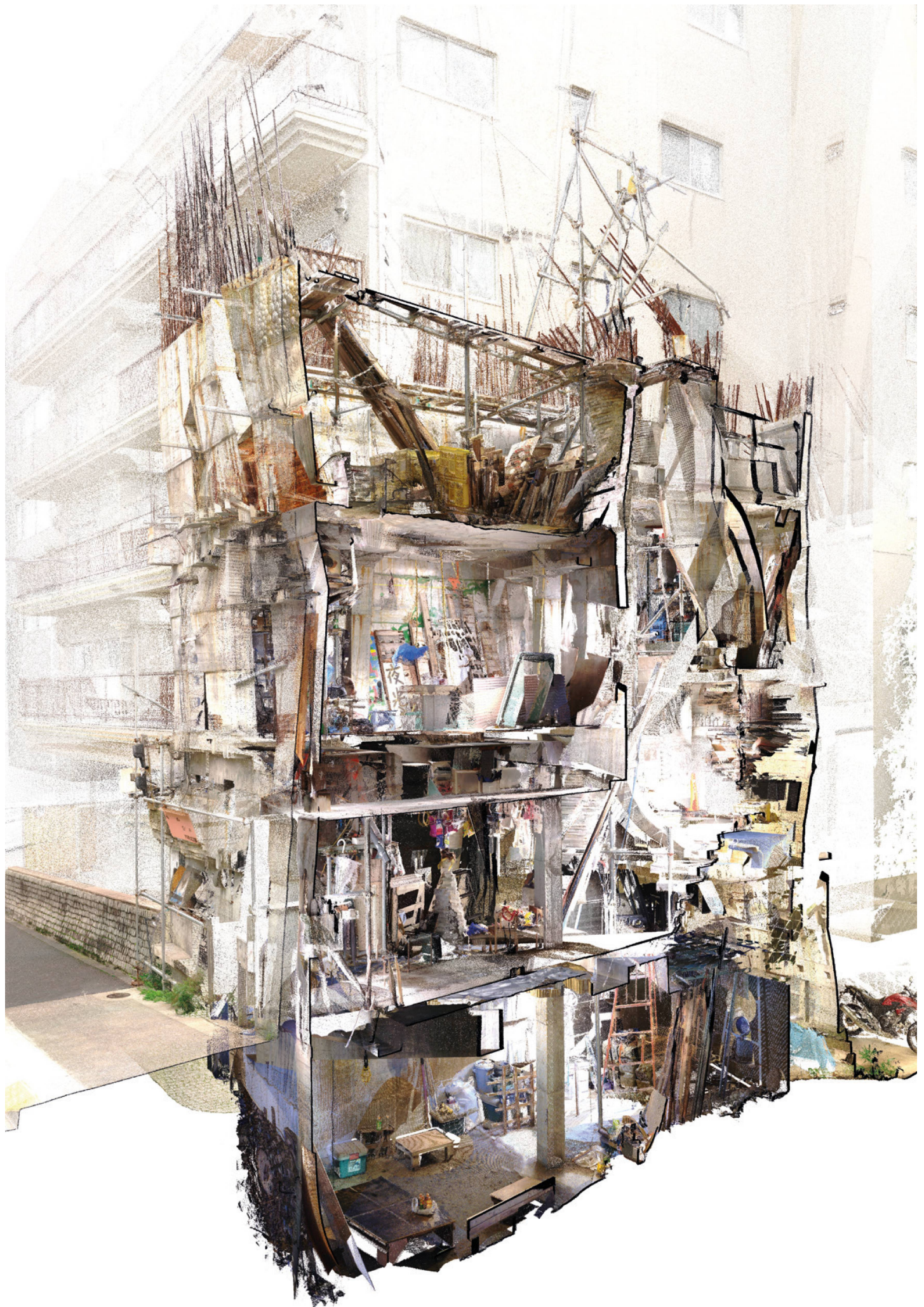
1 Responses marked with an asterisk (*) have been translated from Japanese.

2 Gutai was an artistic movement in the 1950s and 1960s in Japan that rejected traditional art styles favouring performative immediacy and

metabolism, turning the focus to the interaction of concrete, physical bodies.

3 James, William. *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1. (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1890), p. 255.

4 James, p. 255.



Arimaston Building