

## **Phenomenal Translucency in Toyo Ito's *T House***

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Ellen Hartwell Alderman

As computers and mobile devices steadily become a ubiquitous part of our daily lives, so too do the communications and information networks that they enable. For better or worse, it is now possible to be almost constantly connected to friends and family, as well as employers, colleagues and work commitments. Throughout any given day we move through varied zones of psychic awareness, passing easily from acute attentiveness to physical surroundings to virtual connections and back again. As a result, once separate portions of life have come to overlap, blurring the lines between work and leisure, presence and absence, and what is tangible versus what is virtual.

What effect has this increasing engagement with ever expanding networks had on the ways in which we negotiate built spaces and relate to those around us? Has channel surfing, web browsing, email and text messaging changed our patterns of attention and movement through domestic spaces? How have these changes in actions and perception destabilized the concepts of nature, place and location? Do homes still serve our needs, or have the spatial and psychological requirements of the digital age made new demands on residential architecture? Japanese architect Toyo Ito has spent much of his career grappling with these types of questions. Born in 1941, Ito has spent his professional life living and working in Tokyo, where many of his projects have centered on exploring the interface between human life and information networks in Tokyo's complex urban setting. Ito's designs for residential architecture are powerful in their efforts to respond to current and future ways of living in a technological world.

In light of these questions about technology, built space and human relationships, I will explore the *T House*, a residential project designed by Toyo Ito and built between 1997 and 1999 in Tokyo's urban center. Close attention will be paid to how this home organizes the activities and interrelations of the residents as they can be read through floor plans and photographs. These observations will be considered in relation to Ito's writings about the nature of contemporary and future architecture in the digital age. The analysis of this project is rooted strongly in both the fast-paced, media-rich world of Tokyo and the persistence of traditional Japanese notions about the home and nature and it has been conducted with a consideration of the humanistic possibilities of Ito's synthesis and extension of modern architectural ideals, especially in his approach to transparency and translucency.

The *T House* is set on a small lot in Yutenji, a dense residential district of Tokyo's Setagaya-ku ward, an area characterized by low-rise homes on narrow, branching streets known for upper-middle class housing and restaurants (figure 1). Although it corresponds to the relative height and volume of neighboring homes, the appearance of the *T House* is striking due to the aqueous quality of its translucent two-storey façade. Wide horizontal

bands of slightly greenish translucent glass set into a rectilinear poured concrete frame contribute to this effect, creating the feeling that it might be full of water. The façade is punctuated by a full-height set of sliding white doors on the first floor and a transparent window on the second floor that has been fitted into the translucent bands of the facade and slid all the way to the left, flush with the exposed concrete frame of the house. In front of the window, a large cherry tree casts its shadow over the frosted façade, the shape of its leaves creating an organic pattern on the building's skin as if projected onto a striated screen. To a cultural outsider the sliding white doors could be mistaken as the front entrance, but in fact enclose the single car garage. Finding these doors locked, the visitor might discover the gated path to the house's main entrance around the right side of the building.

Following a path of regularly spaced rectangular stepping stones along the two-storey concrete wall forming the right side of the house, the visitor passes a small rectangular ventilation window and a full-height vertical band of translucent glass panels before reaching a wide landing at the center of the building. At night, the translucent column illuminates the pathway like a lantern, suggesting the domestic life of the interior without sharing any details. During the day, the same sense of guarded permeability is preserved by the stark contrast between the solid opacity of the concrete wall next to the milky translucency of the glass panels. Arriving at the main entrance after a few more steps, the visitor's curiosity about the interior is partially satisfied, as the entry way is set into the bottom left-hand corner of a four-panel vertical column of transparent glass twice the width of the unembellished steel door. Before even entering, the visitor may look into a double height interior space clad in light wood and straight through a matching transparent vertical grid set into the opposite wall revealing neighboring buildings on the other side.

The wood paneled entrance hall is banked to the left by a slender steel stair leading up to the second floor. From this vantage point the visitor becomes aware that the house has been sunk into a small hill sloping away from the street, situating the ground floor slightly below grade. Looking across the vestibule from the front door and out through the facing glass wall, this awareness is enhanced by the presence of a low retaining wall topped with steel wire fence running about six feet from the opposite side of the building. Just inside of this wall, tall slender trunks of bamboo trees planted in pairs draw the eye up, their waving leaves visible through the upper half of the grid of windows. Walking up the stairs, the entire plan of the second floor is revealed, with a work studio to the left, toward the street and a kitchen and living area to the right. These two areas are separated, yet connected by the open area of the atrium and a walkway along the far wall

that serves as a landing for the stair. If desired, sliding translucent screens can partially or wholly divide the second floor into three distinct areas or be folded back against the walls to create a large open space. Through a sliding door off this landing, an exterior stair leads to a small roof deck at the back of the house. Downstairs, a master bedroom and bath occupy the space below the kitchen and a small second bedroom is tucked between the garage and the entrance hall. The door to a guest bath is disguised within the wood paneling, just to the right of the main entrance.

Commissioned by a married couple who run a graphic design studio and their adult son, a researcher, the *T House* is noteworthy in the way that it reveals common Japanese social trends as well as Toyo Ito's philosophies about the relationship between architecture and the context of his clients' lives in Tokyo. It is not uncommon in Japan for adult children to live with their parents until they are married, although space limitations in the city now limit the number of extended families living together. While little has been published about the specifics of the families' lives, it is known that all three individuals conduct their work from home, a requirement that formed one of the most important design challenges for Toyo Ito and his team in the development of the project. Although it is not known whether or not the couple entertain graphic design clients in the residence, the literature produced by Toyo Ito and Associates about the *T-House* insinuates that the house was designed in order for them to do so. The fact that all three inhabitants work from home reflects the steady increase in the number of Japanese who tele-commute as companies strive to cut costs on office space.<sup>1</sup> Working from home can also be favorable for many as it can spare workers up to three hours of commuting daily. While no direct sources about the families' use of technology are available, the nature of contemporary graphic design and research tools including, to a large extent, computers and the internet as a basic requirement, indicates the likelihood that all three individuals interact with virtual networks often, at least for professional purposes. These assumptions are supported by the presence of at least one computer for each inhabitant present in a series of photographs taken of the house as part of a *Japan Architect* photo shoot in 2000, one year after occupation. As a result of these factors, the *T House* inhabitants required a flexible design that would allow all of the residents to both live and work comfortably while negotiating varying relationships with the one another and both remote and physically present clients.

In Ito's design, the living spaces are organized so that the activities of the family members overlap. While the sleeping quarters are the most private, nestled into the slight depression of the ground floor, the working, living and kitchen areas are left open

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1 Ross Mouer and Hirosuke Kawanishi, *A Sociology of Work in Japan (Contemporary Japanese Society)* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2005) pg. 117.

and flexible to the changing needs of the family throughout the day. Although the translucent partitions can be used to separate the second floor into sections, the small size of the building, only 750 square feet in total, and the semi-permeable nature of the thin partitions to both light and sound, discloses an acceptance of (or indifference) to the concurrent activities of other inhabitants. Surely cooking smells and sounds would permeate the second floor and entrance hall regardless of the position of the screens, as would the audible details of a meeting with a client held at a small table in the work area. It is not hard to imagine that between the actions of the three inhabitants, domestic and professional tasks would be closely intertwined in such an environment.

By creating a floor plan flexible enough to adapt to the different forms demanded by the inhabitant's overlapping daily routines in such a small space, Ito's *T House* poses a solution to what he describes as one of the main problems of building contemporary architecture in a technological world; that of reconciling the competing modes of the tangible and the virtual. In an article entitled *Blurring Architecture*, Ito asks what kind of architecture is appropriate for the electronic era of modernism. He contends that with early twentieth-century modernism came a paradoxical state wherein subjects both locate themselves and live through a bodily experience of the world, yet through a consciousness extended by technology, yearn to be free of the body.<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, Ito states:

Every time that I have been given the opportunity, I have stressed my conviction that in a society like ours, in which informatics has invaded every area, human beings have two bodies. The "real body", made up of our physical essence, and the "virtual body", linked to the world of information. Of course in daily life the two entities are not clearly divided but constitute a single interactive body. The virtual body exercises an ever greater influence and is radically modifying the dynamics that bind together the units of which society is composed, from individual relationships to those between families, neighbors and communities.<sup>3</sup>

Ito claims that by using the metaphor of the machine, modern architecture strove to be autonomous from its location, functioning well when it was self-contained and independent. As communications networks have become ever more non-localized, the contemporary subject of "electronic modernism" desires an architecture that is even

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2 Toyo Ito and Ulrich Schneider, *Blurring Architecture Toyo Ito, 1971-2005 : Rethinking the Relationship Between Architecture and Media* (Milano: Charta, 1999) pg. 50.

3 Toyo Ito, "Simple Lines for Le Corbusier," *Toyo Ito works, projects, writings* (Milano: Electa, 2002) 340.

more conducive to the non-place and simultaneity of these networks, yet acknowledges the integration of the living body into the experience of the interface. By eradicating the simplified compartmentalization of functionalism that resulted in highly abstract programs for how a space would be used, in favor of a more fluid plan that allows material and virtual activities of a space to blur, blend and overlap, Ito claims that the rational structure of modern space can become distorted, offering opportunities for creating and assimilating the changes inherent in digital technologies of the twenty-first-century.

The use of the term 'virtual' has increased in recent years and its meaning varies across the fields of philosophy and technology. In the realm of philosophy it is most often used in the sense of the term delineated by Gilles Deleuze, who uses it to describe an aspect of experience that is real but not tangible. While most secondary sources reflecting on translations of Ito's writing refer to the antagonism between the virtual and the real, I have understood his argument to hinge more specifically on the relationship between the virtual and the actual, the experience of both being situated in reality. While the word 'virtual' is often thought of as relating to technology and specifically virtual reality, a philosophical understanding of the term would posit that virtuality is not a new phenomenon and that it includes thoughts and meanings derived from books and other imaginative wanderings in the natural world, as much as the apprehension of a simulated landscape on a computer screen. A second aspect of the term under Deleuze's definition includes a reference to potential or the unknown of the future as it exists in relation to the known reality of the present. In *Architecture from the Outside*, Elizabeth Grosz takes up this sense potential, wondering about how the perception of undefined possibility embedded in both the technological and philosophical senses of virtuality can be understood in terms of the embodied experience of architecture.<sup>4</sup> Taking a cue from the ebb and flow of Tokyo wherein humans, information and energy surge through layered networks of transportation and information systems, Ito attempts to account for the physiological realities of negotiating between the virtual and the tangible within the *T House*. For most readers who use computers or mobile devices, the experience of shifting mental focus back-and-forth from a consciousness of physical location, to a virtual presence and back again is common practice. It is the accommodation of this sort of cyber-corporal gear shifting in the *T House* that differentiates its plan from the modern tradition. According to Ito, twentieth-century machine age aesthetics and

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4 Elizabeth Grosz and Peter Eisenman, *Architecture from the Outside : Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (New York: MIT P, 2001) 77-82.

Grosz also describes the widening gulf between the physical body and a virtual presence.

rational processes are no longer appropriate to the electronic world, where the ruling organizational principle, from the composition of microchips to the urban fabric, is the superimposition of layers. The lightly delineated space of the *T House* facilitates an interpermeability between the virtual and corporeal selves of the inhabitants, striving to satisfy both bodies. The platform for the reconciliation of these opposing realms is achieved through the translucent effects of the façade, interior sliding panels and the vertical division of space created by the double height central space. Since the spatial divisions of the translucent screens do not entirely block out the presence of other inhabitants even when closed, a level of awareness and connection to others is always maintained, even when a resident is engaging virtually with cyber networks. Similarly, the open volume of the central atrium performs a mediating function in that it affords a degree of separation between persons on the first and second floor without creating an impenetrable division or the sense of surveillance that can be produced by unbroken open space. On a larger scale, by allowing a level of communication with the street, in which those outside can see a glimpse of an action or whether or not the inhabitants are home, the translucent façade indicates a gesture of association with the neighborhood. At the same time, the translucent material protects the residents' privacy, while allowing a full experience of natural light and shadow to penetrate the house, again keeping residents in touch with the natural (tangible) environment. Together, these elements create an atmosphere where virtual and physical activities flow over and around one another, maintaining psychic comfort for inhabitants by helping to maintain a cognitive connection to opposite poles of the virtual/material continuum as they move from one end to the other. This engaging physical environment seems particularly important in the case of the *T-House* inhabitants, as graphic designers and researchers generally spend the majority of their days absorbed in computer work. To have an architecture that could help to negotiate a continued correspondence between the virtual mind and present body would conceivably bring psychological and physical benefits. Antithetically, this synergy is achieved in the *T-House* by balancing the attributes of contemporary Japanese reality such as the often overwhelming experiences of media and advertising in commercial shopping districts that have come to feel synthetic and drawing on the actual phenomenal effects of the virtual.

In many of his writings, Ito has explored the nature of the relationship between the real and unreal in contemporary cities as it has been affected by sustained contact with virtual worlds and media-saturated environments. He describes how the group mentality of Japanese culture in addition to the persuasive effects of the government and the media has created lives that begin to resemble rows of mass-produced products

lined up on shelves.<sup>5</sup> As he says, "Today the whole of society is wrapped in an enormous transparent film. Should we not be trying to make the wrapping more visible, rather than attempting to make the content look real?"<sup>6</sup> Through identifying the highly commodified nature of our surroundings, Ito seeks to recognize and address the fact that our perception of certain qualities of reality have been so influenced by the artificial effects of the media that they cease to register to the natural body. Conversely, Ito is well aware that simulated influences can have a very real impact on and in the natural body. At an exhibition entitled *Room 3 Dreams, Visions of Japan*, at the 1991 Japan Festival at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, he demonstrated just how strong these effects can be by projecting multiple scenes of daily life over all the surfaces of the gallery walls and floor. Overwhelmed by the disorienting impact of the projections, visitors "bodies float[ed] on the river of the acrylic floor and sway[ed] as if seasick."<sup>7</sup> Rather than fighting for the integrity of reality and the ghettoisation of the virtual to the computer screen, Ito regards this blurring as a condition of the technological age and a fundamental change in technological societies, to which architecture must adjust.

The new technology is not antagonistic to nature. Rather, it is creating a new kind of nature. If nature as we have always known it is to be considered real, then this artificial nature should probably be called virtual. And we people of the modern age are provided with two types of body to match these two types of nature: The real body which is linked with the real world by the fluids flowing inside it, and the virtual body linked with the world by the flow of electrons.<sup>8</sup>

For Ito, the key to living within these parallel worlds lies in their fluid synthesis, achieved through the consistent maintenance of a degree of connection with the subordinate body. In order to satisfy the physical body, one must remain loosely in touch with it while engaging with the virtual. In the case of the *T House*, an inhabitant surfing the internet in the office or listening to music on a bed downstairs might be gently made aware of their bodies by the sound or smells of someone cooking in the kitchen. By contrast, the person

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5 Toyo Ito, "Three Transparencies," *Toyo Ito works, projects, writings* (Milano: Electa, 2002) 347.

6 Toyo Ito, *Toyo Ito works, projects, writings* (Milano: Electa, 2002) 336.

7 John McMorrough, "Re: Mediation and Toyo Ito's Architectures of Information," *Toyo Ito Sendai Mediatheque (Case Series)*, by Ron Witte (Grand Rapids: Prestel, 2002) 106.

8 Toyo Ito, "Tarzans in the Media Forest," *Toyo Ito works, projects, writings* (Milano: Electa, 2002) 344.

doing the cooking might be kept in touch with the desires of the virtual body through an imaginative projection of what is happening just beyond the surface of the translucent façade. Here, the visceral quality of the translucent materials and spaces of the *T House* work in two ways, instigating at least a dim awareness of the physical body on one hand and allowing the shadows and vague forms discernable through the semi-permeable partitions to peak the virtual imagination and mystery of the veil on the other.

The way in which the translucent effects of the *T House* allow for the vacillating awareness of both virtual and physical bodies is reminiscent of the way that architectural critics Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky use the term “phenomenal transparency” to describe the simultaneous perception of multiple depths in their seminal 1963 essay, “Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal.” Here, a modern definition of transparency is self-consciously constructed based on the foundation of spatial manipulation developed in analytic cubism, specifically in the eradication of a clearly delineated fore, middle and background where a perception of depth expands and contracts. Transparency is broken down into two categories in which phenomenal transparency, as the preferred circumstance, represents a more cerebral conception, where the viewer may freely associate the depth of planes in space, verses “literal transparency” which refers more directly to a *see-through* material condition.<sup>9</sup> The complex planar organization of Le Corbusier’s Villa Stein in Garches, France, 1927 is cited as initiating the effects of phenomenal transparency, while the glass curtain wall exposing the floor slabs and interior stair of the workshop wing at the Bauhaus in Dessau designed by Gropius in 1925-1926 represents the literal understanding.

For Rowe and Slutzky, the value of transparency lies not in the technological capabilities of glass, but in the way that it can simultaneously simulate the experience of different spatial configurations for the careful observer.

[The viewer] may enjoy the sensation of looking through a glass wall and thus be able to see the interior and the exterior of the building simultaneously; but, in doing so, he will be conscious of few of those equivocal emotions which derive from phenomenal transparency.<sup>10</sup>

The fact that Rowe and Slutzky locate the foundation of their theory in analytic cubism is interesting in relation to Toyo Ito’s discussion of the confused contemporary state of the real and virtual. The complex expression of space developed in analytic cubism can be

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9 Colin Rowe, and Robert Slutzky, “Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal,” *Perspecta* 8 (1963): 45-54.

10 Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, “Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal,” *Perspecta* 8 (1963): 48.

interpreted as a precursor to the fissures in twenty-first-century identity, in that it could be seen as expressive of the increasingly fragmented individual formed in response to the modern condition, where media and mass-production were already making their effects felt, albeit before the introduction of electronic information and communication networks.

While Ito's use of translucency in the *T House* reverberates with Rowe and Slutsky's description of phenomenal transparency in that a combination of spatial organization and material effects are used to influence or simulate varying perceptual readings, Ito's technique differs fundamentally in its intention and accessibility. A close reading of the judgemental overtones in Rowe and Slutsky's text reveals that the perceptual intricacy of phenomenal transparency would be recognized only by a sophisticated viewer and appreciated intellectually for the architect's virtuosity in mastering spatial complexity. Neither literal nor phenomenal transparency would seem to have any effect on what the architectural spaces felt like to live or work in, as no acknowledgement of a physical or visceral experience of the spaces in relation to the body is discussed. By contrast, Ito indicates a desire to design buildings for his clients that work unconsciously because of a physical response to space, materials and surroundings, rather than, if not in addition too, a singularly intellectual apperception. The use of what could be called "phenomenal translucency" extends this simultaneous synthesis of multiple spatial locations to include the physical body as well as the virtual mind, deriving its value from its ability to both materialize and dematerialize these forms of presence. Ito's rejection of a purely rational experience of architecture is supported by his stated interest in the potentially humanizing effect of architectural materials. As he states, "twentieth-century cities sought economic performance, so the same kind of buildings were constructed everywhere all over the world. More and more, however, such architecture strikes me as no environment for vibrant human life, so I've turned my attention to other possibilities in architecture. I feel there's a need to reassess the relationship between materials and people in order to reclaim a more fully human sense experience."<sup>11</sup> This interest in the visceral effects of building materials and the desire to move beyond the functional limits of program elucidates Ito's prolonged fascination with Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion.

The Barcelona Pavilion creates a type of experience that even for Colin Rowe seems to go beyond the reaches of literal and phenomenal transparency. In a 1976 essay entitled "Chicago Frame," Rowe indicates that the universal space described by Mies differs fundamentally from early twentieth-century Chicago's established use of the steel frame in

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11 "Interview," *Toyo Ito: The New "Real" in Architecture Exhibition*, 7 Oct. 2006, Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery, 1 Aug. 2009 <[http://www.operacity.jp/ag/exh77/index\\_e.html](http://www.operacity.jp/ag/exh77/index_e.html)>.

that its use of space is ideological and not rational. Due to the building's nature as a multi-use pavilion, its program was not pragmatically designed for specific functions. Instead, Mies seems to focus the visitor's attention on the visceral experience of exploring and moving through the flexible space of the pavilion. This mode of inhabiting the structure is prompted more by a manipulation of translucent effects including reflections off tinted glass, highly polished stone and water than by the clearness of the transparent glass used. According to Ito,

... the transparency of the Barcelona Pavilion is not that of clear air. Rather, it makes us feel as if we are looking at things deep underwater, and would better be described as translucent. The infinite fluidity we sense in the pavilion must arise from this translucent, liquid-like space. What we experience here is not the flow of air but the sense of wandering and drifting gently underwater.<sup>12</sup>

It may be through this project that Ito derived his interest in "fluid" spaces and the phenomenal effects of translucency. The liquid metaphor is repeated throughout the *T House*, from the aquarium-like exterior appearance to the way in which the bamboo planted beside the home on the recessed ground floor could resemble seaweed in the way that it grows up beside the house, then branches out, swaying in front of the second floor windows. Also, the visual distortions produced by the translucent materials amplify the erotic suggestiveness of water.

In an article entitled "Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form," K. Michael Hays argues that Mies van der Rohe achieves a "critical architecture" by creating this very physical type of experience of space.<sup>13</sup> Here, Hays describes the tendency of architectural criticism to fall either on the side of an irreducible cultural or formal basis wherein proponents of the first case would claim that architectural objects are wholly a product of their cultural environment, entirely dependant for meaning on the sociocultural context in which they were built or conversely in the case of the latter, that architecture should be studied purely in terms of abstract form, independent of cultural origins. Rather than pursue these extremes, Hays argues for an approach to architecture that weighs both of these competing modes equally, locating meaning between the analysis of abstract form and cultural impetus. As a corollary to this statement, Hays posits that architecture

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12 Toyo Ito, "Tarzans in the Media Forest," *Toyo Ito works, projects, writings* (Milano: Electa, 2002) 343.

13 K. Michael Hays, "Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form," *Perspecta* 21 (1984): 15-29.

itself can function critically as exemplified by certain projects designed by Mies van der Rohe, the Barcelona Pavilion being one. Hays claims that although the space of the Barcelona Pavilion is highly abstract, the visitor's experience is grounded temporally, and thus socially and culturally, by the changing effects of the material surfaces. Since the reflective, translucent and transparent qualities of the water, polished stone, metal columns and tinted and clear glass continually shift and exchange properties as a visitor moves through the space, the experience of the pavilion is always unique, situated both culturally and formally. While continuing to reinvent itself through contemporary participation, the Barcelona Pavilion can also be read as a historical cultural critique in the way that it produces experience in relation to the modern circumstances in which it was built. The sense of silence in the face of multiple modes of refraction suggests Mies' prescribed method for coping with the frenetic quality of modern life, that of quiet withdrawal and appreciation from a distance.

Ito's *T House* can be seen to function both formally and critically in much the same way as the Barcelona Pavilion in that the perceptual effects of the material surfaces, including varying degrees of reflection in the Barcelona Pavilion and opacity in the *T House*, corporeally ground the experience of the visitor in an otherwise abstract space based on the grid. Both Mies and Ito seem to make an explicit commentary on the cultural situation in which they designed each building by striving to compose the specific psychological effects of the spaces in response to cultural needs, without mandating the exact ways in which they should be used. While both architects use the surface effects of architectural materials to achieve these goals, Ito differs from Mies in the way that he suggests dealing with his understanding of the nature of contemporary life, as influenced by media and technology. Whereas Mies uses the subtle motif of water to create a feeling of silence and separation from modern life, Ito employs the quietness and fluidity of water to achieve a controlled connection to the technological and physical facets of contemporary circumstance. In the *T House*, sights, sounds and smells are all a vital part of everyday experience, however the degree to which each of these are experienced, whether they emanate from fellow inhabitants or outside of the home, are carefully mediated. Rather than creating an escape from the competing modes of connection characteristic of contemporary life, Ito has created a structure that strives to help users negotiate degrees of simultaneous interaction.

Ito has written that he hopes people will flow through the spaces that he designs like a fish moves around a reef, aware of and responsive to surrounding currents. By creating a flexible, multi-use space, the *T House* leaves its program open to be repurposed to fit the changing needs of the residents. At the same time, a sensuality is introduced

that permits the engagement with virtual networks, while retaining a degree of presence in and with actual bodies.

Like in Tokyo, urban living spaces in the West are becoming increasingly smaller and most people find themselves ever more integrated into the networks of transportation, online communities and communications. Although significant cultural differences exist between the United States and Japan, perhaps it could be beneficial to imagine how living in the *T House* might benefit western inhabitants, should the residence be rebuilt in an American urban neighborhood. The greatest differences between Japanese and American culture in terms of the psychological experience of residential architecture are the related issues of privacy and autonomy. Indeed, Americans raised with a strong sense of independence might find the small and porous space of the *T House* more difficult to get used to than their Japanese counterparts, who share a sociological tendency to favor group belonging over the autonomy of the individual. This difference in experiential preference might also play out specifically around the translucent interior panels, in that they directly suggest the Japanese cultural history of shoji screens. Here a sense of privacy would be most at odds, as the traditional Japanese understanding of privacy is based not on the degree of visual and audible isolation one senses, but on the honor bound code that family members would never mention whatever they heard, saw or sensed on the other side of the paper screens. The idea that inhabitants would often be aware of each other might seem uncomfortable to many Americans at first because of the high cultural value placed on individuality and autonomy that results in a fierce defense of privacy and strong aversion to surveillance. Nonetheless, the potential benefits made possible by phenomenal translucency as described, make this mode of living worth exploring.<sup>14</sup>

After almost a century of desiring larger, more individually purposed spaces, perhaps it is time for Americans to reconsider what makes a home function well today. While economic and environmental concerns continue to exert an exterior force reducing the size of homes, the increasing importance of identifying layouts, materials and techniques that help synchronize our lives with the inevitable effects of technology is more and more apparent. Through its use of phenomenal translucency, the *T House* presents one attempt at bridging the transition between the mechanical and electronic phases of modernism. As technology continues to become a greater part of our lives, the need for architecture to respond to its changing demands will continue to grow. We

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14 It is significant that Ito has afforded the bed and bathrooms more privacy than the rest of the house. This move indicates a cultural desire for this degree of isolation (or this type of privacy) as well as a demonstration of the degree to which the assimilation of western culture has shaped Japanese attitudes and home design.

can be assured that communications technology will continue to evolve; increasing the time spent wandering in a virtual body, while the physical one remains at rest. As the gap between these bodies widens, architects will be tasked with how to foster a harmonious synthesis between both internal and external divisions of space, privacy and community. Fortunately, the technological advancement of building materials is also progressing at a rapid pace, giving the architect new tools with which to answer these demands, including the production of media walls and photo chromic glass that can automatically adjust to changes in light, the desire for privacy or an inhabitant's mood. While the *T House* may only be one solution to the evolving needs of life in the digital age, it raises fundamentally important questions regarding our well-being in a technocratic world, specificity about the nature of this existence in relationship to a built environment and how necessary changes can and should be made to our modern inheritance as this tradition is extended into the future.