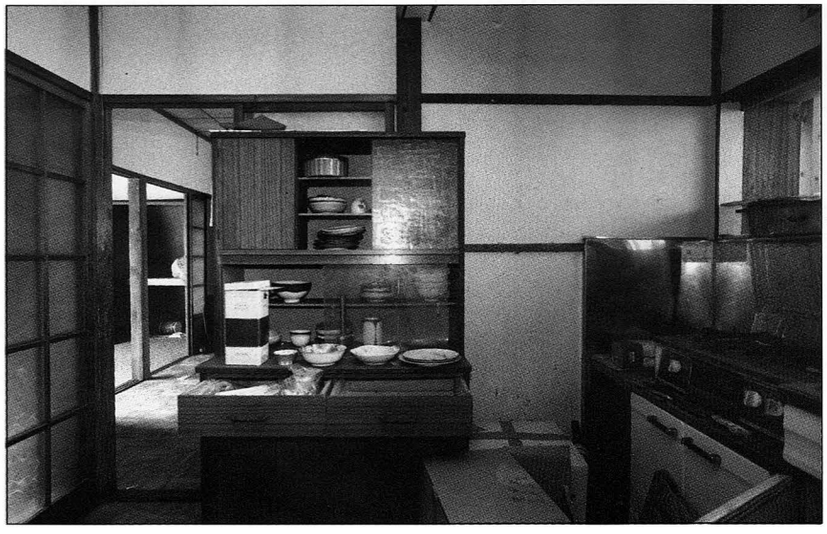
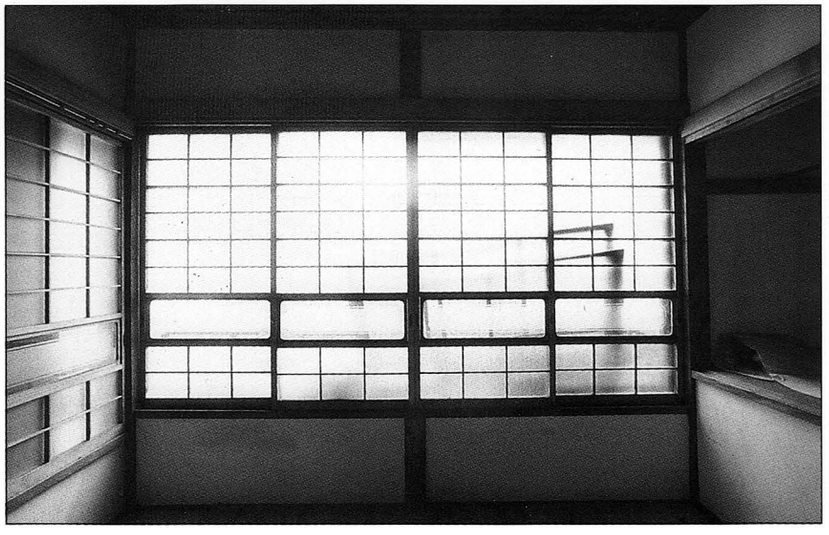
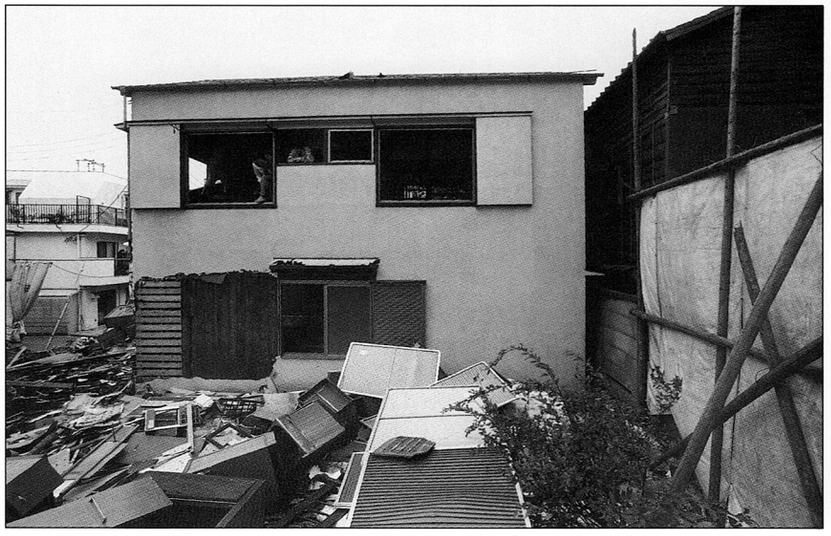
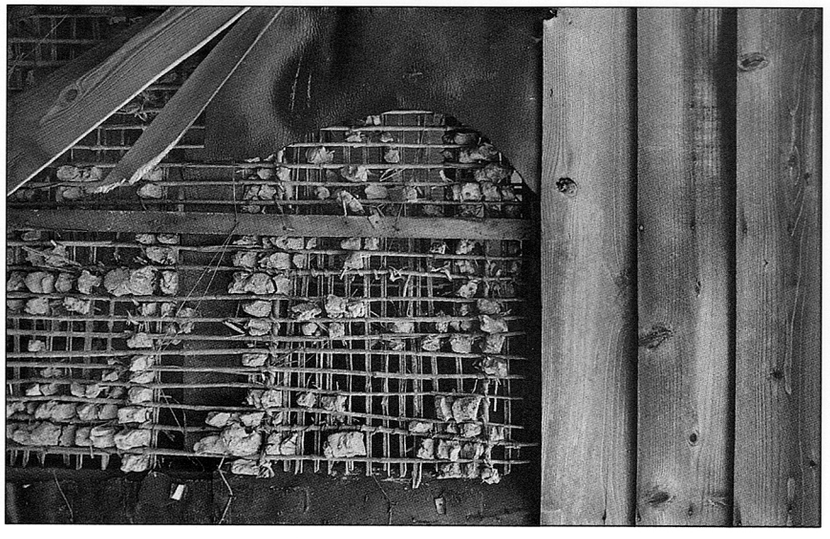
Abolute Scene 1987

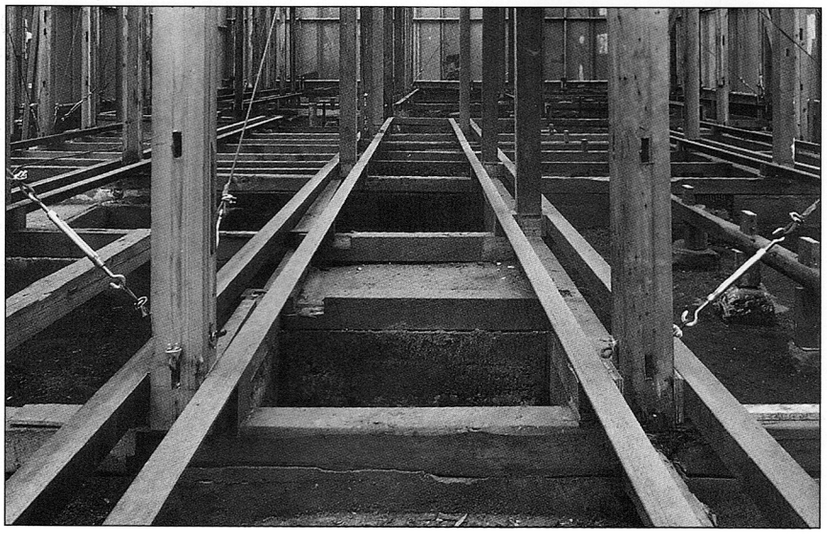
Ryoji Suzuki

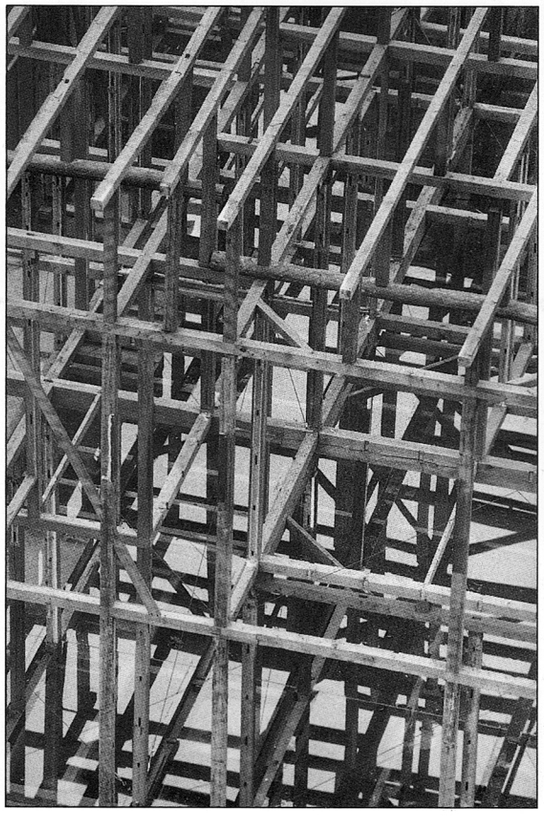


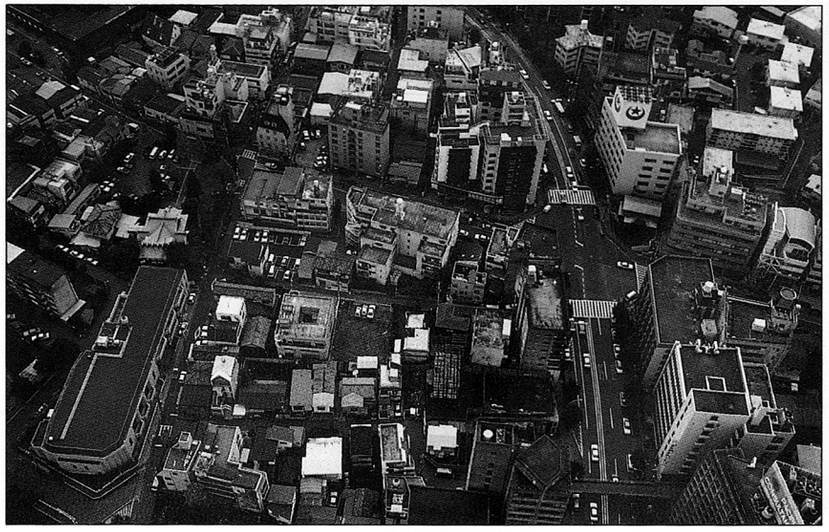


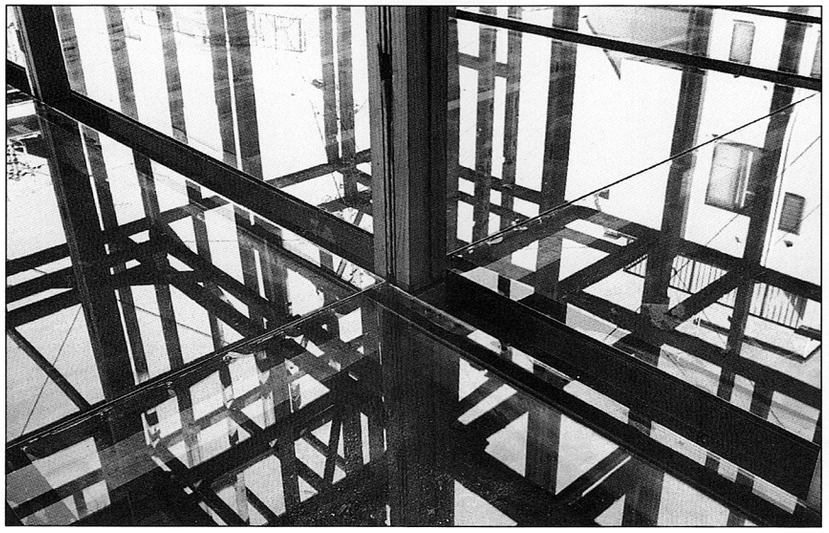


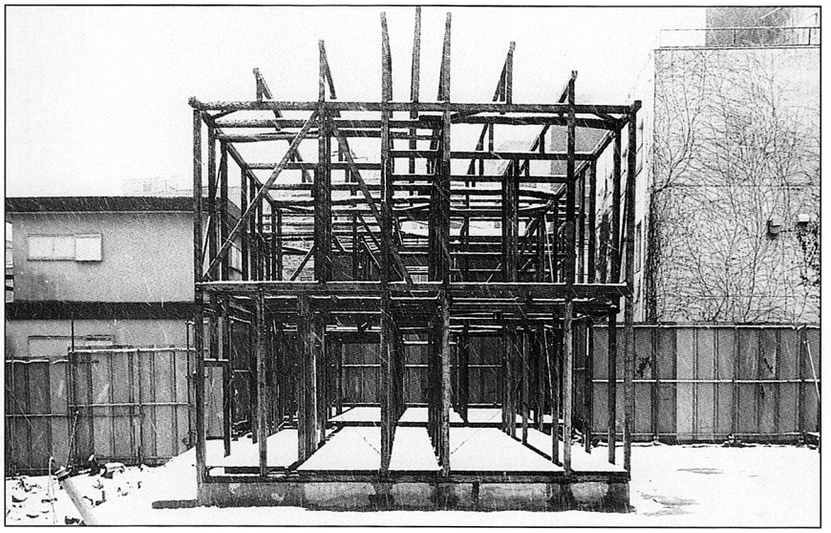


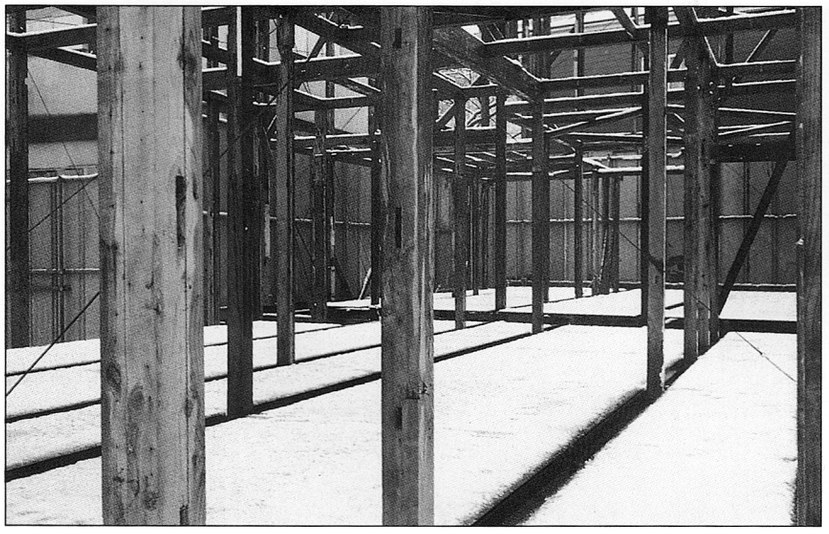


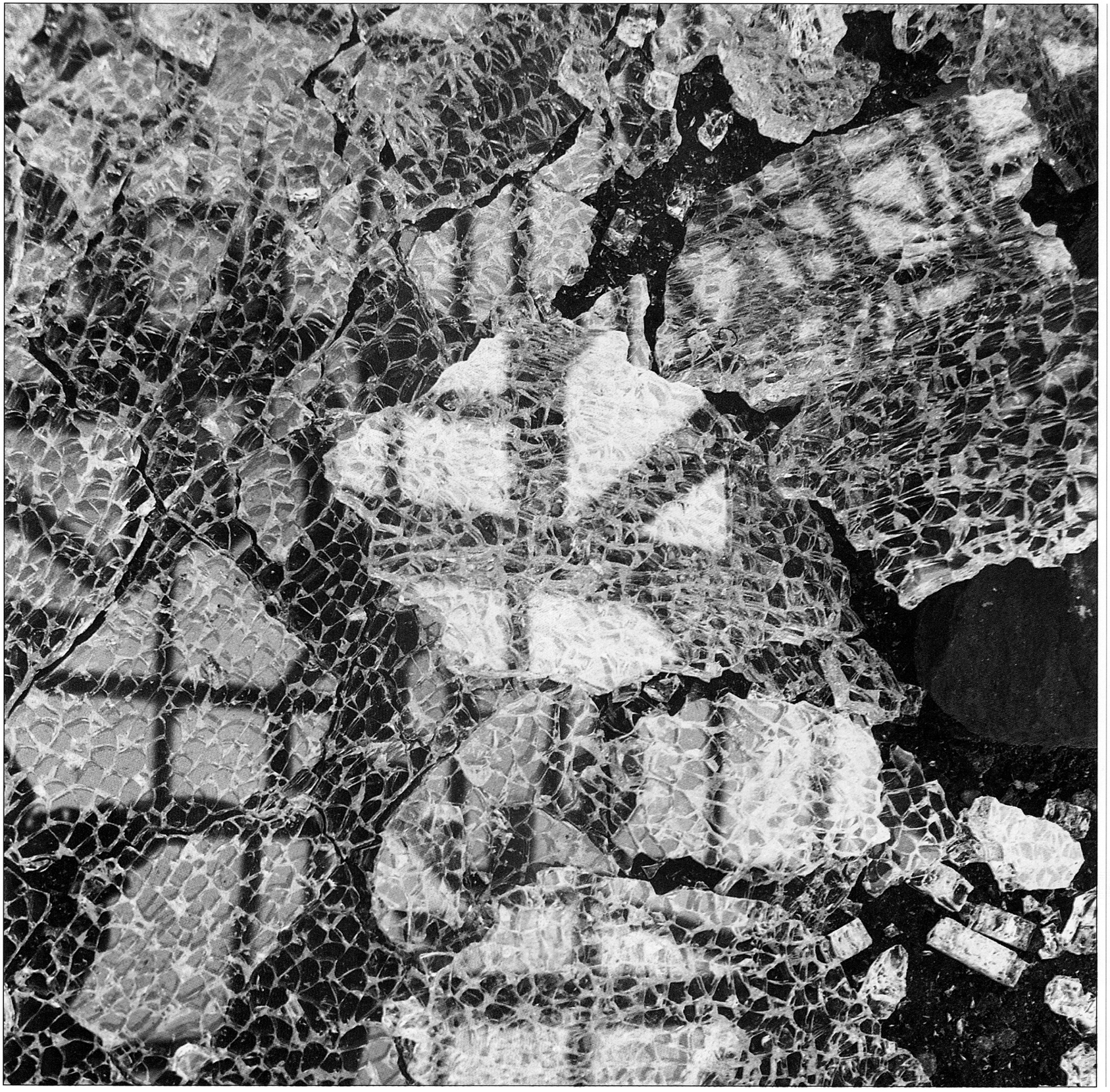


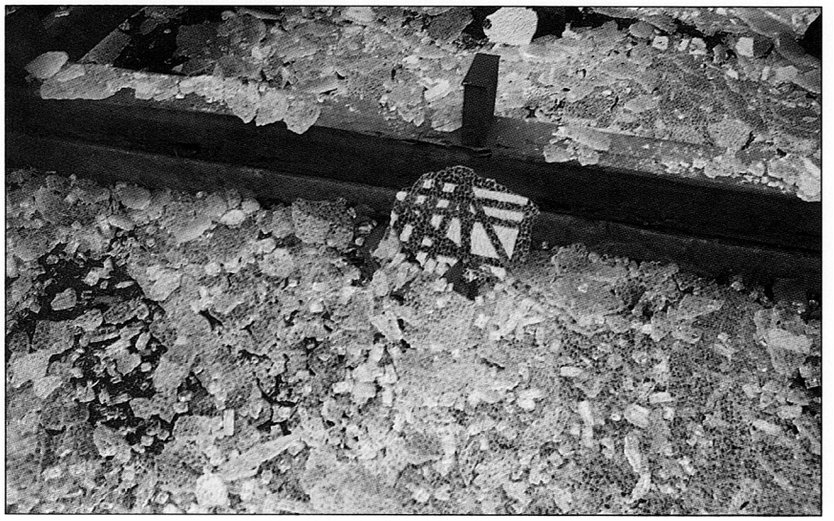












This project, which was carried out between the summer and winter of 1987 consisted of carefully dismantling two wooden two-story houses and making a detailed photographic record of the entire process. The houses were quite ordinary in post-war Japan—prevalent to an area called Jingumae which is located in the center of Tokyo.

The first step was to make a careful, detailed and measured survey of these abandoned houses which were still equipped with furniture and built-ins. Based on the survey findings, measured diagrams were composed. At the same time, the houses were meticulously photographed in order to compile enough documentation to enable a complete restoration after the dismantling. When it was deemed that we had procured sufficient information, we moved on to the next step: the actual dismantling.

This action was not done mechanically as is usual in these cases, but manually by ourselves along with craftsmen we employed. The processes, procedural steps and methods were discussed at daily meetings during which the plan for our proceeding work was determined. This does not imply that we did not have a master plan when we began. Instead, we remained flexible in order to deal with numerous unexpected contingencies that arose as we progressed with the dismantling, revising our process at each development. We may call this simply "dismantling," but within this act sufficient layers (or perhaps, in this day and age, infinite layers) of possibilities exist necessary for the process of "creation." We strove to delve into each of these layers in an almost "archaeological" detail.

The dismantling process continued until only the fragile, minimum, wooden framework of the houses remained which we supported with tension cables. However, our work did not end here. It goes without saying, the purpose of our endeavors was not a display of the frame of a Japanese-style house nor a display of an art installation using old lumber, rather it was to open the entire process to another dimension or site. For that purpose, we laid steel-angle rails on the ground floor level over the foundation and covered the space of the entire floor with tempered glass panels so that people could walk over them. We opened the site to the general public for two weeks. Immediately after this period we crushed the tempered glass into obliteration and removed the frame and foundation leaving no trace.

This is the rough outline of what the project entailed. We were reluctant to dissertate on what this joint effort was about or on the meaning or intention of this project. This was not only because of the underlying belief that architecture, art, or photography flee from grasp when one attempts verbal "interpretation," but also because this project itself is something which nullifies efforts of "authorship" or properties of a "piece of work."

This is attested to socially by the fact that the project was a joint work of people encompassing the multiple professions of architect, artist, and photographer. Which one exactly could be said to own the "piece of work"? If we conceive each work of the photographer as the "piece of work," we realize that it exists as something which is going to be stripped of its properties of "authorship" immediately following its conception. This constant evolution or change is the action which continues to shred the desire for perpetuality which is inherent in a "piece of work." Can we then conceive of it as an "architectural piece"? Did we not simply select some anonymous structures? We did not attempt to make it a "piece of work" of "ready-made" materials, but rather, through the dismantling process we reversed the construction of "architecture." Needless to say, this is not a simple reverse motion of movie film. "Destruction" and "creation"; "dismantling" and "construction"—it is an overlapping of double, yet incongruous, time. It may be said that although this topological time may be a part of "architecture," it exists at the same time to erase "architecture."

Today, only photographs remain to visually communicate the project. These pictures can be perceived not as a privileged piece of "photography," but rather as a series of measured diagrams. They can be seen as a world which originated from the scope of the eye, not of a "human," but of a "machine." They have the same qualities as a photosensitive panel which demonstrates the orbit of generation and extinction of quantum, or as an oscilloscope which visually demonstrates the pattern of brain waves.

The "Absolute Scene" is a place "which belongs to one place, and which is nowhere"—it is, therefore, omnipresent. Yet there is an inevitability from the point of urban perception, that the sample we coincidentally became involved in was Tokyo in the year 1987. At that time, Japan began a rapid expansion of capital supported by high economic growth and the Jingumae area experienced a most drastic change. A few of its remaining private houses and small shops were destroyed instantaneously and in their places were built huge office buildings and expensive condominiums. The particular houses chosen for the "Absolute Scene" awaited similar fates of demolition. In this turbulent change, we sought not to affirm naively that which was to be destroyed or that which would reappear anew, but rather to penetrate into the gap which exists in the blind-like, automatic action of destruction and construction and to be witness to the change. At least, I believe, that is what motivated us originally.

In the rigorous winter month of December, the ice-cold glass reflected the depth of the clear blue sky-void, as well as the remains of what was once a standing structure. Literally hanging in the air this "Absolute Scene" within the gap of time is an architecture which belongs to no one or nowhere, without any historical attributes.