

Urban Guerrilla Dwellings

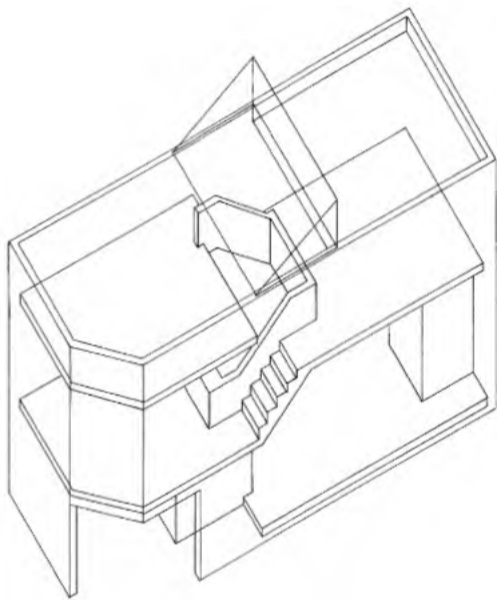
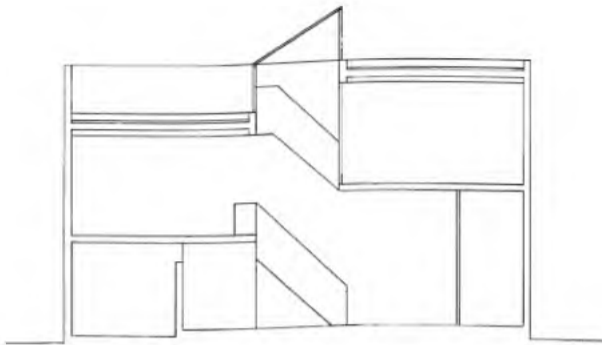
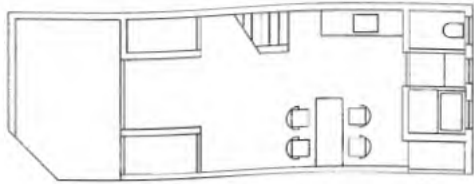
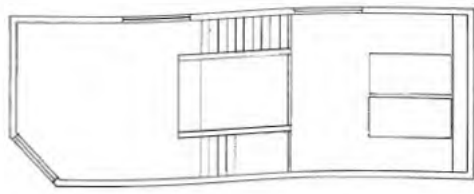
Placing the individual at the center of logic, or else...

It is now perhaps a hackneyed cliché to say that the modern human being has become *Homo economicus*, degraded to a merely tool-like existence due to technological advances since the Industrial Revolution being oriented entirely toward the logic of “industrial” development, around which is entwined the “principle of economic efficiency,” from which the logic of capital manifests as the formal types enabled by the “principle of technological development.” Nonetheless, how many “human phenomena” are being driven into forgotten corners through this process of saturation by the logics of modern capitalism and modern technology? In the field of architecture too, a “resistance” movement inaugurated by the Arts and Crafts Movement of William Morris, flowing into the early Bauhaus and onward, has been drawn into confrontations with the maladies of the “modern,” but that resistance invariably fails and evaporates before these problems, and even now meanders without finding a clear direction. Recalling the way that these circumstances have been absorbed by the convenient and ambiguous word *diversity* without consideration of the real situation, we cannot avoid sensing the depth of these tendencies.

In the field of architecture, sensitive to the flow of the times, the response to diversity is a truly deep sense of profusion in an expanding vocabulary that includes *capsules*, *pop architecture*, *vernacularism*, *anonymous architecture*, and *design surveys*, but can the *urban guerrilla dwelling* provide any kind of meaning in this chaotic cross section of the era?

For example, one of the terms in this varied vocabulary is *information city*, which is, in short, a way of apprehending the city as an enormous “information” processing system that attains meaning by investigating the mechanisms of society, implying a world that is homogeneous and chilly, but this is no more than a communal fantasy of a metallicly gleaming, white image. Essentially, such a “top-down” vocabulary cannot be brought directly into the logic of a dwelling.

For those of us who think that a dwelling is not simple, clear, or amenable to systematized patterns, and that it is difficult to rationalize the accumulated traces of behaviors, it is essential for a dwelling to diverge from “objects” (including the city, and so on) and from “masses.” And if we persist on beginning with the “individual,” then eventually the desire of the



Tadao Ando, Guerrilla III (Tomishima House), Oyodo, Osaka, 1973. Opposite page: model. Images courtesy the architect.

self for an almost grotesque level of naked exposure to “dwelling” and “living” will be lodged at the center of our thoughts, at the center of our images. That is to say, the dwelling is envisaged as a shelter able to encompass all of these aspects.

The sole fortress from which to oppose and escape the stratified and complicated city, with its high degree of informatization and concomitant bureaucracy – in which the “individual” becomes a component deprived of a sense of wholeness, and the soul is eliminated from “technique” – is a dwelling constructed for the “individual,” which is the strongest contender for a rehabilitation of humanity in the modern city. The essence of this rehabilitation is the desire to “dwell.” Accordingly, such a dwelling must naturally include spaces that I would call animalistic and intense, or that “attain a dramatic vitality.” The image of the “Urban Guerrilla Dwelling” is a lair for a guerrilla fighter. This notion must not be implemented from “above” but should always begin from the level of the “individual,” by either placing the “individual” at the center of thought or pursuing a dwelling as personal expression founded on corporeal instincts.

Packaged Environment

Each client for the dwellings presented here has a profession that is intimately related to social functions in the city: the owner of Guerrilla I (Kato House) is a television producer; Guerrilla III (Tomishima House) belongs to a salaryman in a midtown corporation; and the owner of Guerrilla II (Kobayashi House / Swan Building) runs an industrial laundry that deals with the dirty work clothes generated day and night in the neighborhood. As they have their own large businesses, their desires for a dwelling have been manifested as the “output” of weighing multiple factors in relation to budget, various issues in their families, their professions, and so on. Each of these people owns a site as small as a cat’s pawprint in this congested metropolis, on which they decided to construct freestanding dwellings. What is the significance of this...?

Rather than half-baked, hypocritical theories of community, isn’t it a far more grounded act to accurately assimilate the intentions of these people who wish to continue dwelling in such a city, and find solutions unique to the times? Considering the degraded context that surrounds these three projects, to pursue a spatial theme of, for example, “dramatic interpenetration of interior and exterior spaces” is illusory and nonsensical. Rather than being excessively conspicuous, the theme for all three dwellings is to neutralize the facade in



an expression of “loathing” and “revulsion” for the external environment, aiming at fully abstract interior spaces wherein microcosms emerge and reality is once again pursued. Here, as explained above, the “individual” as the basic concept of the dwelling is placed at the center of logic, leading these three dwellings to be resolved as excessively pure forms. As much as possible, well-meaning feelers extending toward the inhumane surroundings are blocked, giving rise to three dwellings with inverted, brutal standpoints toward the environment, symbolizing a mild “revulsion” and “loathing” for the dilution of spirit found in homogenous, white modernist architecture based on conventional doctrines. Wrapped in black outer shells, these three dwellings are isolated from all the sniveling and irritations and multifarious problems of the outside world, aiming at what might be called a “packaged environment.”

And so, the space at the core of the interior has its contact with the outside world reduced to the minimum, imagined as a space of encounter between the resulting “individual” part and the light that pours in through the sole feeler of the “projecting hole,” which extends toward the sky. It does not need repeating that the corresponding “dark” part also has its own character. The isolation of the dwelling from all the evils of the city, thereby surely enhancing the quality of the manipulable interior spaces in the individual domain, may be entirely entrusted to these urban guerrilla dwellings – put another way, based on the concept of a lair for an urban dweller, these dwellings seek a “field of personal existence” for the minimum unit of the “single person,” “married couple,” or “family.” In metropolises such as Osaka and Tokyo, the urban guerrilla dwelling possesses a logic that gives meaning to the freestanding dwelling. The childish jokes in the names and forms given to these dwellings in fact reveal the profound sadness latent within the congested and exhausted metropolis, and should not be dismissed as mere “jokes.”

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