

# Dwelling for a HOSTAGE

by Will Cummings

## THE CLIENT

Terrorist attacks, hijackings, and hostage takings have become commonplace and literally millions of refugees are in flight. Refugees and terrorists are in a state of becoming: the refugees are responding to some form of violent domination or control by turning their backs and fleeing to a promised land; the terrorists are responding to some ideological domination by attacking it, spurred by a foreign ideology. On the other hand, chain gangs, prison camps, concentration camps, and hostages are modern metaphors of permanence: they are in a state of being. Perhaps they are the refugees and terrorists who got caught. An alternative to our permeable impermanence is institutionalized terrorism: the inhumanitarian and ruthless Authoritarian state.

## THE SITE

Any international airport.

## THE BUILDING

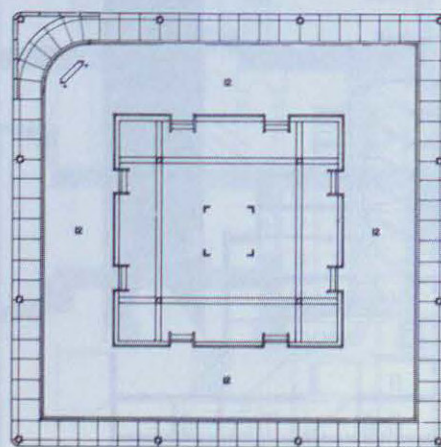
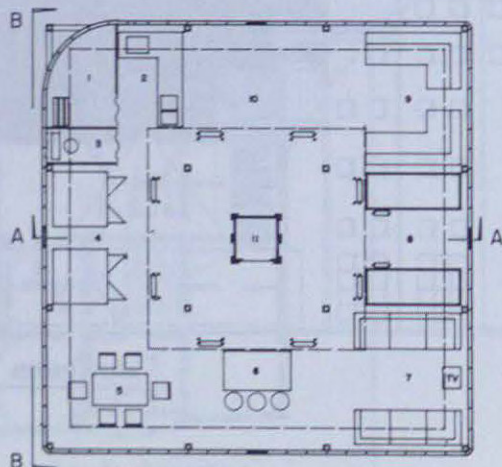
In pragmatic America what works is institutionalized and what does not is discarded. Thus, a dwelling for one hostage and twelve terrorists which, after refinements and simplifications for mass production, rapid-erection, demountability, and portability, will be advertised in mail-order catalogues, underground newspapers, and post offices all over the world.

One of the primary concerns of a prospective terrorist group, would be the quality of control and defense provided. Entrances into the structure are possible by the removal of two panels —

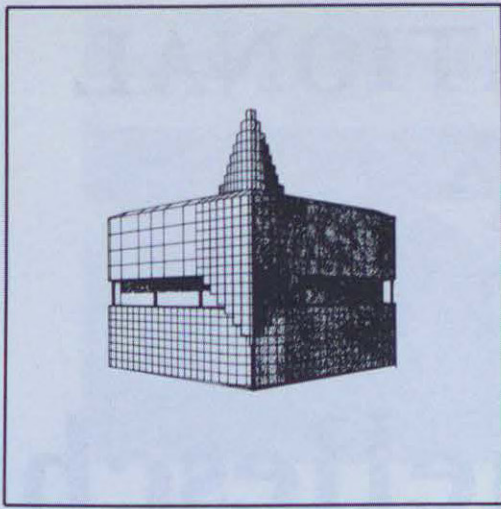
## THE SCENE

The ramshackle constructions of colonial suburbia, the "built-in-obsolence" of Detroit iron, the infinitude of highway systems, and the footloose growth and easy disappearance of trailerparks are emblematic of our restless state. Impermanence, flux, permeability, and portability are the words which best describe American culture. Things seem constantly in a state of *becoming*, not *being*. Therefore, one might say that they do not yet exist. To what do we owe such an ignominious condition? Perhaps to Darwin, who promulgated one of the most dominant ordering principles of the modern mind — the concept of evolution, a vision of a state of ordered change which gave the notion of "Progress" the authority of a Natural Law. Bereft of a dominant frame of reference against which to evaluate and judge, all theories and criticisms are immediately individualized and equalized.

Today all things are relative and no absolutes exist: such is the legacy of Einstein and Darwin. Commodity, delight, goodness, and beauty are redefined as the situation warrants; ethereal and pliable post-rationalizations are conjured up in tones of infallible authority. Like Daedalus in a labyrinthine prison of his own design, so too the architect seeking absolutes is held hostage by this mannered society. Although faith in the infallibility of Science has wavered, the improvements and comforts provided draw out the Spirit of American Pragmatism. Science still reigns supreme and technological innovations provide the control. It is an interesting, but typical paradox to note that in the name of Progress and Pragmatism, the industrialization of building materials and the universalization of identical and standard details, parts, components, and even whole buildings comes in the face of so much personalized creativity and constant change.



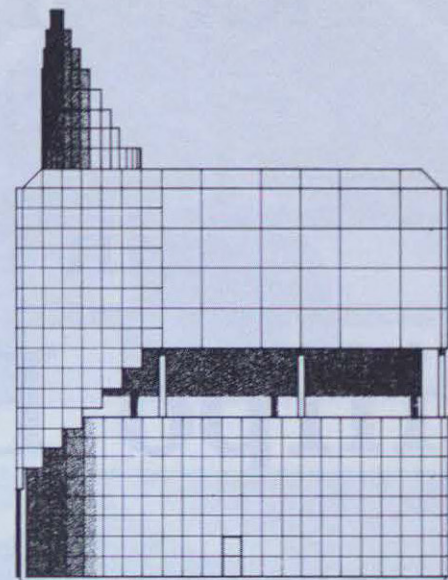
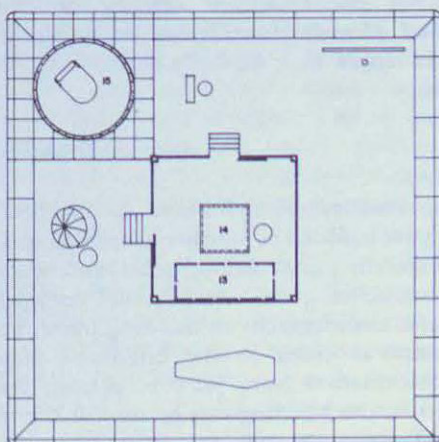




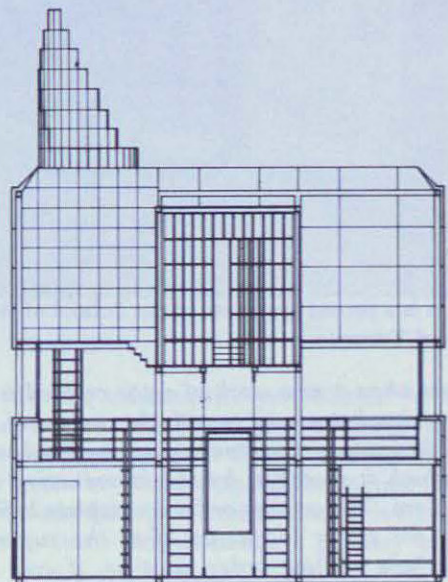
this small opening (.4m x .8m.) would oblige the visitor (whether a negotiator or member of the press) to enter sideways and bent over, thus giving a distinct and immediate advantage to the terrorists. For ceremonial purposes it would be desirable to use the entrance directly opposite the negotiation/press-interview table. The terrorists' living quarters are sheathed in armored metal panels, and the windows above are bulletproof dark mirror glass. To prevent visitors from gaining complete knowledge of the layout, all of the furnishings (except the plumbing) are on rollers and would be rearranged after every visit. The four possible entrances would then be used in a random sequence. The hostage remains the terrorists' main defense. The constant presence of a guard in the watchtower eliminates the possibility of rescue or attack from above, and escape is impossible because of the height and smoothness of the enclosing walls. The elevator, which doubles as a table, is the final defense against escape — the hostage cannot come down except in that elevator. the hostage is the symbol of the terrorists' objectives and the subject of negotiation, so it is appropriate that he occupy such a prominent place in the building.

The hostage's quarters proper are simple and static with no view to the outside world except the heavens and several appropriately grim reminders of his situation. The yard walls are mirror glass facing inwards, to allow the interested parties ample evidence of his good health while encouraging him to come to terms with his conscience and his Maker.

*Will Cummings is a recent graduate of the school of Architecture at the University of Waterloo.*



B-B



A-A

#### Legend

1. shower
2. kitchen
3. toilet
4. hot and cold storage closets
5. dining table
6. negotiation/interrogation table
7. lounge
8. barracks
9. communications
10. vestibule
11. elevator
12. cat walk
13. fold-downcot
14. hostage table
15. watch tower