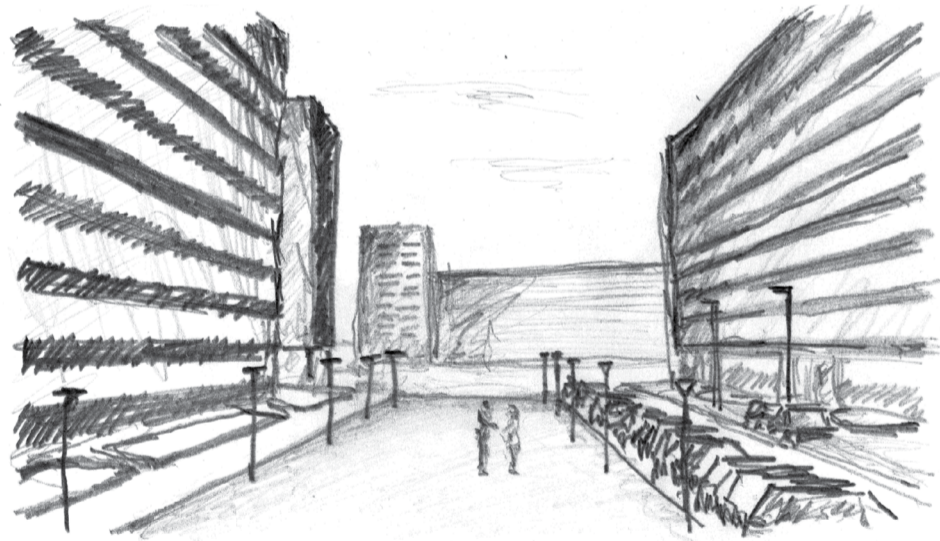


INTERPLAY  
IMPLEMENTATION ESSAY

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4,882 WORDS

FOREWORD OR AFTERWORD

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO READ THIS LAST OR FIRST

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*"What is very important is to distinguish two types of writing: one that I would call writing about architecture and one that I would call writing of architecture. Writing about architecture is the most common [...] the texts are generally descriptive... but in themselves they are not architecture [...] [There are now] a number of texts written that are architecture. They are not writing about architecture. They are architecture in themselves. In other words, they propose forms of architectural strategies, literally in the form of a substitute." – Bernard Tschumi, 1993*

*"The world must be romanticized. [...] Romanticization is nothing but a qualitative realization of potential. The lower self is identified, in this operation, with a better self. [...] Insofar as I give a higher meaning to what is commonplace, and a mysterious appearance to what is ordinary, the dignity of the unknown to what is known, a semblance of infinity to what is finite, I romanticize it." – Novalis, 1798*

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The following story has been produced from my fieldwork period in Paris from March 2020 to October 2020 and serves as a way to communicate the experiences, encounters and knowledge I've acquired during this time. It portrays, in a narrative construct, how my research and design intent could integrate themselves in the wider efforts and forces already present in the area. The story should be understood as a form of exofiction, in the sense that it finds essentially its roots in the concrete existence of real political, physical, social and economic conditions at play, but expands, in a fictional and romanced narrative, the strategies I am advancing to navigate the issues that lay in the way of the development of my design intentions. In other words, although the context in which the story is set is based on a concrete location – the district of Les Agnettes in the commune of Gennevilliers in the Hauts-de-Seine department of Île-de-France – and the characters, dialogues and situations are based on real encounters – through observations and interviews conducted with local actors, inhabitants and associations such as APPUII and Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée(AAA) – the story told should be understood as a way to illustrate and communicate the projected blueprint for the eventual implementation of my research and design objects.

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As the reader will be able to understand through the reading of the following story, my research and design intentions build on a distinct performative approach to the process of mutual city-making. The research aims, firstly, to recognise love and its imagery as a potential trigger, drive or intention for the imagination and formulation of prospective urban forms; and secondly, to explore the path for an eventual incremental implementation of these forms in the face of urban densification procedures. By advancing love, a relational and affective framework, as an alternative approach to negotiate the intricate forces at play in the making of urban form, I am attempting to unsettle, bypass and provide a diversion to the practical assumptions archetypically built into people's engagement within such hierarchical and rational processes. What could be perceived at first as an initially innocent or *fluffy* intention – love having been historically dismissed of scientific inquiries altogether<sup>(Weis, 2006) (Ackerman, 1995)</sup> – is in effect, here, strategically advanced in order to open up a dormant space of the psyche for creative discourses within city-making processes. It takes effect on two front, first through the use of fiction, in its performative nature, as a form of imaginative release, social liberation and individual empowerment; a tradition that goes as far back as Aristotle's theory of dramatic catharsis and of which experimental theatre companies are still practising the benefits, highlighting the processes at play in performative fiction and its collective construction as "[...]necessary for the maintenance of well-being both for individuals and societies." <sup>(Torrissen, 2017)</sup> In that sense, the process I am advancing can also be aligned with the perspective of thinkers such as Joseph Campbell or George Lakoff, who have emphasised the central importance of myths or metaphors as the vehicles through which individuals find a sense of place in the world. <sup>(Lakoff and Johnson, 1981) (Campbell, 1991)</sup> Secondly, in an environment such as urban design where the prevalence of individualism is assumed implicitly and where rational and practical communication is implied, considering love, because of its very nature<sup>(May, 2019)</sup> diverts the attention and opens up a space for the construction of an imagination built on a relational dimension; a frame-shifting process at the cognitive level that emphasises the individual ability for empathy, compassion and creativity. Love provides ways not to escape, dodge or reject the practical and rational imperatives of reality, but on the contrary "gives us a chance to inhabit it fully"<sup>(Chollet, 2006)</sup>. This approach builds on an array of contemporary thinkers from all social sciences such as Giddens, Baumann, Illouz, Luhmann, May, Nussbaum, Hooks, Hardt, Irigaray or Badiou. Authors who have progressively shifted the academic attention from a sexual and rational focus to an affective and emotional attention and have dialectically linked the conditions and consequences of modernity with the advent and nature of love – a transfer in line with the observed "affective turn", noticed by Patricia Clough in 2007, outlining the expanding enthusiasm given to affects within social sciences from the 1990s onwards. Their work has been building on the effort of pioneers before them such as Marx, Weber, Simmel, Durkheim or Benjamin who have all recognised and studied the tangled relationship between love

and the alienating, disenchanting, dis-embedding and uprooting forces at play in the modern world. They have claimed love's "intrinsically subversive"<sup>(Giddens, 1993)</sup> power, uniquely able to work along the grain of modernity to "enchant our now long disenchanted world"<sup>(May, 2019)</sup> and provide the pathways and design for a "third language"<sup>(Wheeler, 2005)</sup> freed "[...]from the cold skeleton hands of rational orders."<sup>(Weber cited in Sica, 1988)</sup>

What Martha Nussbaum has called a "yes"<sup>(Nussbaum, 2015)</sup> – love – this uncynical self-projection into potential and affirmation, sets up the process for an alternative path out of the characteristic imperatives to think practically and technically within what could be creative, open-ended and unfolding discourses. A whole approach that goes as well in line with Paulo Freire's proposed shift<sup>(Freire, 1968)</sup> in education methods from a pedagogy as a practice of domination to a pedagogy as a transformation of structural forms of oppression. Echoing Freire, in what has been described as Freirean "radical love"<sup>(Fisher, 2017)</sup>, and its capacity for re-humanizing conversations, I propose a pathway that stands apart from so-called participatory design and its technocratic imperatives, using emotional fictional projections to bypass the indicative zero-sum game associated to such practices and encourage a space where participants generate images and unlock new languages by exploring their imaginary, their emotional experiences and by creatively identifying recurring motifs out of the exercise.

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The following story has voluntarily been written without names or link to any direct organisation or locality to stay in line with the wider scope intended by the research and design project; the attempt to point to the potential exportation and adaptation of the learnings to other areas that deal with similar tensions. However, some preliminary facts, not explicitly mentioned in the story, might be worth considering for a reader who would like to locate the story within the wider context of Les Agnettes. The area, located at 9km from the centre of Paris on its North West side, was built as part of the post-war reconstruction efforts, typical of the 1950s and 1960s, led by the *Ministère de la Reconstruction* (MRU) under Charles de Gaulle. It is a very low density, mono-functional area, with archetypical concrete *barres* and towers in the fashion of the predominating functionalist style of the era. Most have been lightly refurbished through the years with, most notably, the removal of some of the balconies in 2005. The area, of 6,827 inhabitants, with a culturally diverse population and a notably low-income average (20K/household)<sup>(Apur, 2014)</sup>, is at the centre of the heavy gentrification processes going on on the outskirts of Paris in relation to the coming of the Grand Paris Express: a new network of rapid transit lines. This new inter-communes system will connect Les Agnettes, with the construction of a new station on its North-West corner, to the surrounding suburbs. Most importantly, it will give access, in minutes, to La Défense, the most important economic area of Paris. The densification efforts come after the

neighbourhood has been selected as a high priority area by the NPRNU, a new national program for urban renewal, financed by the ANRU, the national agency for urban renewal, managing nationwide a budget of 42 billion Euros affecting a total of 4 million inhabitants.<sup>(Apur, 2014)</sup> The area has acquired a ZAC (Zone d'Aménagement Concerté) denomination in 2014 which gave the local mayor's office of Patrice Leclerc the legal, financial and technical framework for the realisation of a spatial reconfiguration of the area. The project was laid out for Les Agnettes in 2016 by the mayor's office in collaboration with the architecture and urbanism bureau of Michel Guthmann. The demolition and construction have already started and are currently phased for a completion in 2025.

The area has seen last year the establishment of an "Agrocité", developed by AAA, financed by the mayor's office and meant to be handed over progressively to a local association formed by local residents. The Agrocité is a community centre for the development of a wider strategy – that they have named R-URBAN – that involves the incremental implementation of urban agriculture, solidary economy, recycling and shared housing in the area. The centre acts as a centrally located space that fosters social interactions by mixing people of various interests around different activities such as urban agriculture, light construction projects and community cooking. The mayor supported this project in accordance with his vocalised desire<sup>(Leclerc, 2016)</sup> to develop a more democratic view of the city by supporting environmental and social initiatives in the area. The council still owns all the land of the area of Les Agnettes and has been in discussion with various developers to densify it and make it more active with the implementation of 600 new homes, the renovation of the Joliot-Curie school at the centre of the neighbourhood, the partial demolition of the Victor-Hugo Building and a reconfiguration of the public realm. The reader will then be able to associate characters in the following story such as the ARCHITECT (Me, Louis Lupien), the MAYOR (Patrice Leclerc) and obviously, all inhabitants of the area could be linked with some of my encounters which I won't name here in respect of their privacy. In parallel to this, I've been conducting over 20 interviews with people of different age, gender identity, sexual orientation and economic situation about their own perception of a romantic street. [See Appendix p.55]

Finally, the age or cultural background of the MAN and the WOMAN have not been indicated on purpose as the reader is encouraged to make herself or himself a vision that suits her or his imaginary. Also, while the term MAN and WOMAN have been used – using in this case the narrative angle of a heterosexual romantic relationship – the reader is encouraged to interchange them as they please or to project them as people of the same gender. Additionally, the gender, age or cultural background of most of the supporting characters have not been identified to leave space for imagination. However, the reader should be aware of the rich and plural cultural diversity of the studied area of Les Agnettes.

NOTE ON READING

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The following story and its strategic implications can be read and understood through the outline rendered in the synopsis hereunder [page 8-12]. Having said that, the reader is nevertheless invited and encouraged to willingly consider the script and storyboard placed in appendix [page 13-55] for a more immersive, engaging, complex and complete involvement in the proposed narrative experience.

## INTERPLAY – SYNOPSIS

A Woman and Man are living in large apartment buildings that stand one in front of the other. After a mysterious event forces them to work from their homes, and after all public transport and cars have been prohibited, they slowly start to adapt their lifestyles to this new strange situation. They feel now impeded to open the windows that were always closed and to draw open the curtains that were always pulled.

On the first day, the woman notices for the first time the man across the street at his window. Being now limited to a one-kilometre radius around their house, they start to take the habit to walk around their block to get fresh air, something they have never really been doing before. In the process, they start noticing details of their neighbourhood. Small things that they have never paid attention to before: plants growing in concrete cracks, colours of buildings, interesting graffiti, etc. In their walks, they start to recognise every day people that they have never seen before. They become characters in their lives. One day, she sees the man and recognizes him from afar. He was looking attentively at a sign on a wall and taking a photograph of something on the sidewalk. Hiding behind a nook of a building, she observes him. As she peeked subtly, her eyes crossed. She hid again embarrassed in her corner. She continues to wander around the neighbourhood until later, once she made sure he was gone, she went back there where he was to read the sign he appeared to be reading. It was mentioning the project for the densification of the neighbourhood and the destruction of a building close by. She was not aware of any of it...

Forced now to go to their small local grocery store (since the big one was now outside of their 1km radius) they happen to meet in the queue in front of it. For some reason, only a limited amount of people is now authorised to be inside the store at a given time which was now causing these queues in the street. He recognised her and she recognised him. After standing silently one behind another, they entered and picked up groceries, crossing each other time and time again in the aisles. They didn't talk at that time but they were now recognising each other's existence.

The next day, seeing him leave his building with bags, she rushes out of her apartment and heads to the grocery store. After she arrived, she couldn't see him at all. She had lost his sight. Still puzzled, she leaves with her groceries in hand. Out of the store, she gets curious about a group of people a bit further that was watching a building nearby being destroyed. It is after joining them that the man, of whom she didn't notice the presence, engaged the conversation. Later, walking back together towards their respective apartment, they exchange a few words about the densification of the area and agree that it should happen— or could have happened — differently. They look with disappointment at an advertisement for what was coming up in its place. They both share their sentiment of hopelessness in the face of it all.

The next day, he waves at her from his window and invites her to meet outside for a walk. They go for a walk and they share the things that they have been noticing in the area over the past few weeks. On the wiper of a car, they see a flyer talking about an event coming up for people who would like to discuss for ways of imagining new possibilities for their neighbourhood. It was called "Alternative Urban Imaginary".



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A few days later, they meet each other at the community centre where the event was organised and they recognise a few of the characters that they've met in their walks. They begin to talk with a few of them. Some of them sharing that they have now started to do some garden here at the community centre. In the middle of the room, a large model of the neighbourhood is there, they recognise their respective buildings on it. Nothing else than the existing buildings, streets and trees were represented. Boards and drawings were hanged around on the walls of the room. The organiser began to explain what was the event about. As he explains we understand that this was organised from a group of architects, independently financed that responded a few weeks ago to a request from a local association formed of people of the area who were overwhelmed about the unclarity of the information the mayor has communicated and general dissatisfaction of the look of it all. They, therefore, decided, along with the local association, to organise a series of event for three purposes. First, to raise awareness of the upcoming densification projects for the area, clarify what's going to happen and when. Second, to reinforce the mobilisation already put in place by the association in the area. And third, to try to visualise an alternative vision about how the area could potentially look and feel. All of this to potentially get more involved with the mayor and developers about the future for the area. As he explained that much was still possible – since all the land of the area still belonged to the council but that the pressure was strong in the face of developers wanting to capitalise their investments – he emphasised the potential of developing a new image that could potentially have some effect with the developers, architects or the mayor himself.

While the group approved with a sound of approval, they sat individually in the proposed exercise each with a different architect. The man, initially puzzled and sceptical about their approach, ended up participating. They were being asked to describe the most "romantic street" according to them and to try to imagine how they would visualise their neighbourhood as more romantic according to them. The architect explained to him that the exercise was based on a research from the University of Cambridge, who had identified the strange and unique power of the nature of romantic love for the formulation of urban forms. After seeing the woman participate willingly, he finally accepts to take part. As the man was describing his view, the architect was drawing and noting ideas. They stayed for a bit afterwards, talking with the people who were there as well. They walked back to their respective home, reflecting on what happened.

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For a few weeks, the same sort of event had been taking place. After two months, the architects behind these meetings organised a concluding celebration. They invited the mayor, the city officials, some current developers, a few architects currently working on the master plan of the area, the local population and, evidently, the people who had participated. Most local authorities were not understanding the purpose of the event – or the process – and most of them were also not in favour of it happening at all. But the "romantic events" had been raising awareness and most were now curious to see the results.

As the man and the woman got in, they saw a lot of people standing in and out of the community centre. Most of them were surrounding a big model in the centre of the room that the architects had been developing progressively with the participants over the past few weeks. When they managed to get close to the model after greeting a couple of people they met on the way, they finally saw it. The result was magnificent. The man and the woman were standing there open-mouthed at the colourful and breathtaking model. There were tons of new streets, new places, new trees, new parks, new things. Everything, even if heterogeneous, seemed strangely to be fitting with the existing buildings which were now sometimes covered with new awnings at certain windows, new balconies here and there, and sometimes even full protruding extensions out of some of the blocks. The roofs of the existing buildings were covered in trees and plants; some of them even had what appeared to be houses and greenhouses, even full streets on top of them. Intricate staircases connected different levels together, reaching to the roofs of the buildings. Some new detailed collection of buildings were occupying the space of car parks. The buildings that had already been proposed in the context of the mayor's master plan were also there and integrated in the vision, with additions and modifications that made the whole area interestingly coherent and attractive. The views that had been developed with the people had been translated and transposed into the model and the drawings, resulting from the conversation, were covering the walls all around.

The man and the woman were astonished. Their neighbourhood looked unreal. The developers and their architects looked puzzled in front of the enthusiasm of the local population. What were they going to think about their own projects now? Even if the local authorities were also confused, the atmosphere was light and people were impressed by the result. The model looked like an art piece.

After the event, the mayor and the local planning authorities organised a meeting to discuss the event. They were impressed with the results but were faced with the impossibility of its realisation. The population having now been shown the potential of the area, they had to find a way to canalise this energy. They contacted the architects and together they tried to find a way to integrate a bit of what they have done into the local plan. Since most of the land was still belonging to the council, it was up to them to figure out how to deal with it. While they had already started construction on parts of it, most of it was still under discussion.

After analysing the model itself that has resulted from the research process, the architects had isolated some key physical characteristics that were recurrent in the various views:

The land was partitioned into many smaller plots.

All plots looked like they had been developed, designed and owned by different individuals. Lots of bits of streets or buildings were reflecting the personalities of the local population who participated in the event.

It appeared as if there had been some limitations set beforehand on regards to heights and width of streets.

There was a seemingly organised chaotic sense to the way the streets and buildings were organised.

The streets were always ending onto either a building with a certain importance or into a wider square, place or parc.

Most buildings were blurring the boundaries between public and private realm with the use of gradient ground floor, balconies and roof terraces.

Most buildings had external staircases instead of internal ones. Overhangs were above many streets in the shape of vegetation, lights or garlands.

There were many types of buildings responding to different uses. Homes, coffee shops, restaurants, cinemas, offices, pharmacy, hairdressers, flower shops, dentist, etc. All were piling one above the other without apparent order. They were all fundamentally different and scattered across the area.

There were many informal places for seating. Almost every building edges had a space for sitting, either on window sills, wall detail or in the shape of an actual bench.

The pavements were all textured in some way.

[More elements in the script p.41-42]

...

Their observations continued for a while and they were surprised (and not at the same time), that all these conditions were not only describing a place of romance but essentially describing a positive place to live. The exercise allowed the inhabitant to formulate a mutual prospective view of their neighbourhood, based on their personal emotional perspective. Instead of a debate or a tug of war, the exercise has been effectively a creative constructive process and it was now possible to use as conceptual inspiration for the future of the area.

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A few months later, the woman, having now starting gardening on the roof of her building (which had been opened up a few weeks earlier from new funding allocated from the mayor to a local gardening association, redirected from funds that were originally directed to the master-plan) saw on the building on the other side the man installing something at his window. Wondering what it was, she paused to observe him. She could not properly see from that far. After a while, she understood. The man was installing a red awning to his window. She shouted at him from the roof. But he couldn't hear. Was she allowed to install an awning to her window? Coming back down to her flat, she crossed in the stairs a neighbour who was going to take some sun on the roof. She asked if about any new rules that were allowing residents to install awnings? The neighbour explained that indeed, the local planning authorities had authorised the installation of awnings, planters, window modification and even the addition of balconies to the buildings. You could even apply and they would fund most of it. The mayor was now paying people to have plants at their windows? Yeah. Supposedly, it was all part of this new plan they've developed with the architects that organised the romantic street events. They are like redirecting funds to small projects like that to test and see how it evolves.

She went all the way down the stairs to the street. She could see where his window was, he was there and the red hue of the awning was catching her eye. He appeared to be struggling. She proposed to help and went up to his flat. It was the first time she was stepping in this building. Identical to hers, things were slightly different, mirrored. She arrived at the flat and knocked on the door, the corridor was empty. He invited her in, she helped him out while laughing and sweating and swearing. When the job was done, they brought two chairs next to the window. The curtains could be open and the window as well without having the glaring sun coming in. He gave her a glass of water. And they talked.

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Two years later, she was in his living room by the window. On the other side, she could see her building with all its new heterogeneous collection of new balconies, awnings, extensions and planters of different colours, shade, size and styles. The council had even started to build an external staircase to reach the rooftop connecting the street with the roof that was now covered in plants and trees and tiny constructions.

The man and the woman had developed romantic feelings for one another and they have been hopping into each others apartment whenever they could. She would sometimes stay at hers and wave at him in the morning.

They had applied to a new local program by the council that were pairing developers and local residents wishing to move into a new home. While families who were living in dwellings too narrow for their needs were prioritised, all residents could apply. The program was part of a new experimental process that the council was testing. It was donating progressively fragments of the land to community land trusts formed by future residents and the wider community. Future residents were then responsible for developing this parcel of the land according to their needs. In some cases, boundaries were imposed by architects, developers and the council. Boundaries on height, uses or design. But most of the time, there were no boundaries and people were developing their plot of land according to their own taste and needs. The plots of land were small enough so that people were opting mainly for external staircases, as advised by the architects. And they were also maximising the use of roof by making gardens and terraces on them.

Only a few of those buildings had now been built, but the results were promising. The council, the architects and the developers were learning from building to building about what was working and what wasn't. The spaces in between were slowly taking life and the neighbourhood was welcoming new people from surrounding areas as well. While locals were prioritised in the program, people from close by could as well.

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Only a year later were they finally able to start the construction on their plot of land. They had been paired with two families and a local woman who wanted to open a flower shop from the flowers she had been planting on the greenhouse on the roof. While the design part has been a bit of a struggle trying to capture everyone's wishes needs and taste (the building looking now more like a patchwork than anything!), all were proud about it and the construction could start. They learned that it was going to stand right next to a small cinema that has been proposed by a group of retired people and managed by two motivated young women who have decided to leave their job for something closer. Right in front of the small park with the square that the council had decided to keep space for. Also, the mayor was now testing a new access to property system. They were implementing a system with interest-free mortgages. And the amount you would pay would be proportional to your income. No matter how much you would earn, you would end up paying never more than 30% of your income to your mortgage and become progressively owner of your dwelling. Their neighbourhood was looking now like it was meant to be constantly changing and some parts of it were slowly starting to take shape.

APPENDIX ONE – SCRIPT

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As previously mentioned, even if the synopsis above outlines all the strategic implications of my implementation intent, the reader is nevertheless invited and encouraged to willingly consider the following script and storyboard [page 13-55] for a more immersive, engaging, complex and complete involvement in the proposed narrative experience.

INTERPLAY - SCRIPT

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INT. APARTMENT A: SOFA - UNKNOWN TIME OF DAY

A man is in his apartment. He is sitting on the sofa. He looks at the ceiling. He appears to be waiting. We don't know the time of the day and no indications on the general arrangement of the apartment. We can only understand that curtains are closed and that the apartment is dark.

EXT. CAR

A woman is in her car. Windows are closed. It appears to be cold outside while she appears to be hot inside her vehicle. Condensation in the windows prevents her from seeing outside. She tries to wipe a part of a side window without convincing success. She leans on the wheel to see better.

INT. APARTMENT A: DESK

The Man stands up, picks up his food from the micro-wave and sits at his computer. The screen is showing a video game going on. He eats while he exchanges by text with the other players. We see, next to his keyboard, a slightly crumpled leaflet about the upcoming destruction of a neighbouring building.

INT. PARKING GARAGE

The Woman parks her car inside a parking garage. She gets out of her car and runs to the elevator. No light is visible except the ones of the garage.

WOMAN

(Shouting to the person in the elevator.)  
Wait!

The person in the elevator doesn't hear her. She pushes the button, the door doesn't open. She waits. No one is in the garage. She appears puzzled. She looks around. Waits more, impatient, and decides to take the stairs.

INT. OFFICE CORRIDOR

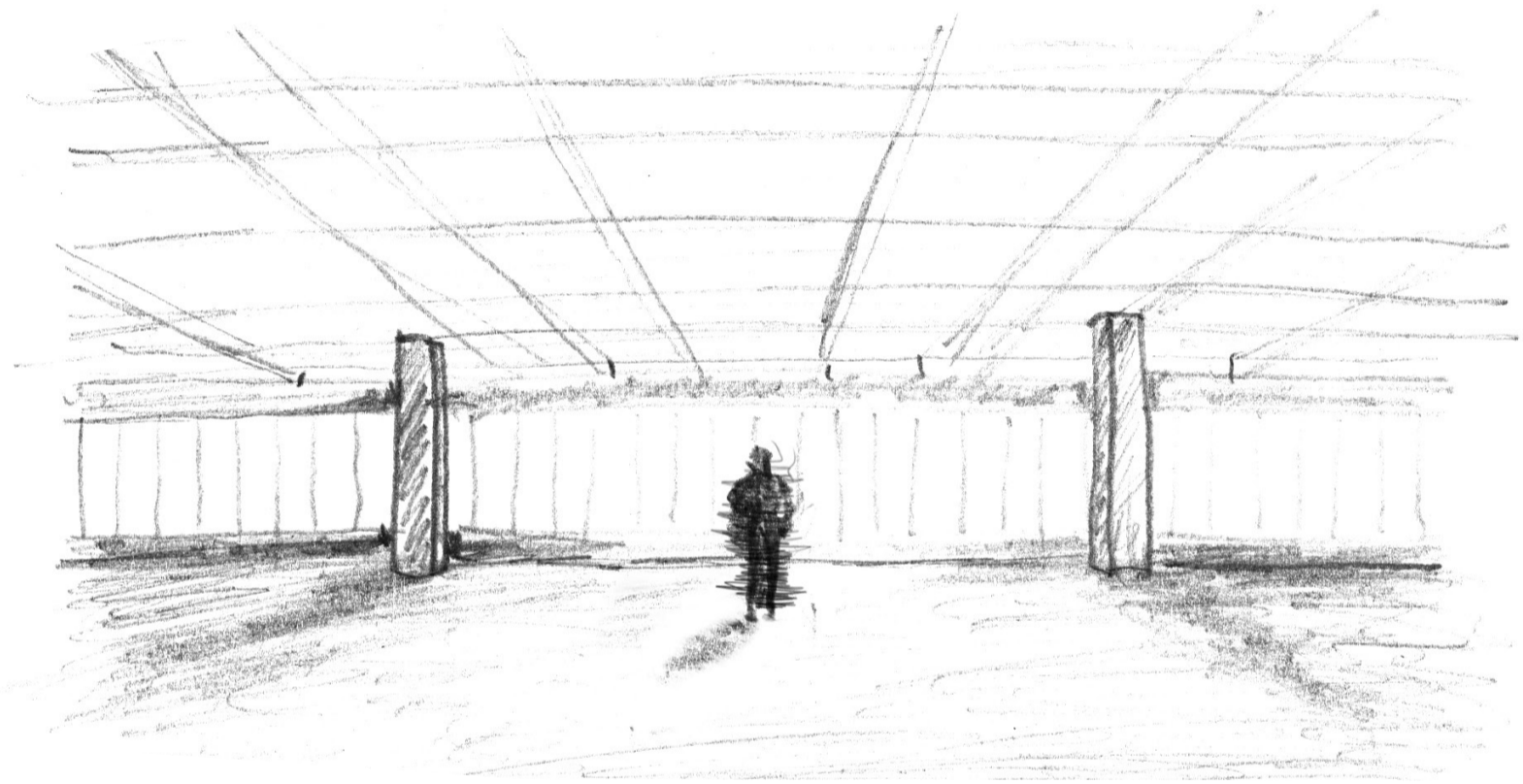
Sweaty, she arrives on the 8th floor, where her office is. She looks confused at people carrying their computers out of the office. We don't see anyone's face.

WOMAN

(To a passing coworker)  
What's happening?

COWORKER A

(Waiting and looking at the elevator screen showing levels)  
Work from home now.



The floor is completely empty.

The elevator arrives, COWORKER A gets in. She's puzzled.

OFFICE MANAGER

(Handing to her a computer – we still can't see  
the face)  
Here you go.

With the heavy computer in her hands, still sweating from her climb upstairs, she asks again to a new (faceless) coworker waiting for the elevator.

WOMAN

What's happening?

COWORKER B

(Looking at the elevator)  
Yeah.

WOMAN

Yeah, what?

COWORKER B

(Looking at the floor)  
No... I don't think so.

(He gets in the elevator)

Completely lost, she put the computer on the floor and heads inside the office. The floor is completely empty, we can see the whole floor with no interruptions. The rest of a city is perceptible from the wide horizontal windows on each side of the floor. The office manager is far now.

WOMAN

(Shouting – Towards the office manager)  
Hey!

Nothing. She walks slowly on the office floor, between cables, sheets of paper and chairs. She looks peacefully lost. She heads back to the elevator. No one is around now. She picks the computer back up and calls the elevator.

INT. PARKING GARAGE

She packs her computer in the back of her car. She struggles. Sitting back in the driver's seat, she thinks.

INT. APARTMENT A: DESK

The Man, at his desk, is playing some game and is chatting with other players of the game. His phone vibrates. He looks at it and some alert appears on the screen. The spoon still in his mouth, he bends closely towards his phone and reads: "ALL TO WORK FROM HOME NOW". Puzzled, he asks the players of the game he's playing if they've received the same message. They all answer one after the other "Yeah" "Yes" "Y". He googles it without anything appearing about it. He calls his boss, his mom, no answer. Nothing.



EXT. CAR

While driving, the Woman, confused, arrives at a roadblock by the police. A faceless police person stops her.

POLICE

Hi there, where are you going?

WOMAN

Home, why?

POLICE

Alright, please proceed. And stay home. All cars and public transport will stop from tomorrow onwards.

WOMAN

Can I ask why are you stopping people like that?

No answer. She leans back in her seat.

CUT TO INT. APARTMENT B : DOOR

The Woman pushes the door of her apartment with the computer in her hands. She struggles with the key. Holds the door with her foot. She removes her coat, drops her keys and sits on the sofa. She stands up quickly and heads to the window. She opens up the curtains that were previously closed. The window is misted, she wipes out a part of it with the sleeve of her sweater with success. We see, through the clearance she made with her sweater, the surrounding buildings. Straight in front of hers, we see what appears to be a 1960's concrete *barre*.

INT. APARTMENT A :

The Man is on the phone walking back and forth in his apartment.

MAN

(To the phone)

No, I don't know. It's like nothing is working anymore.

(He pulls the curtains and opens the small window)

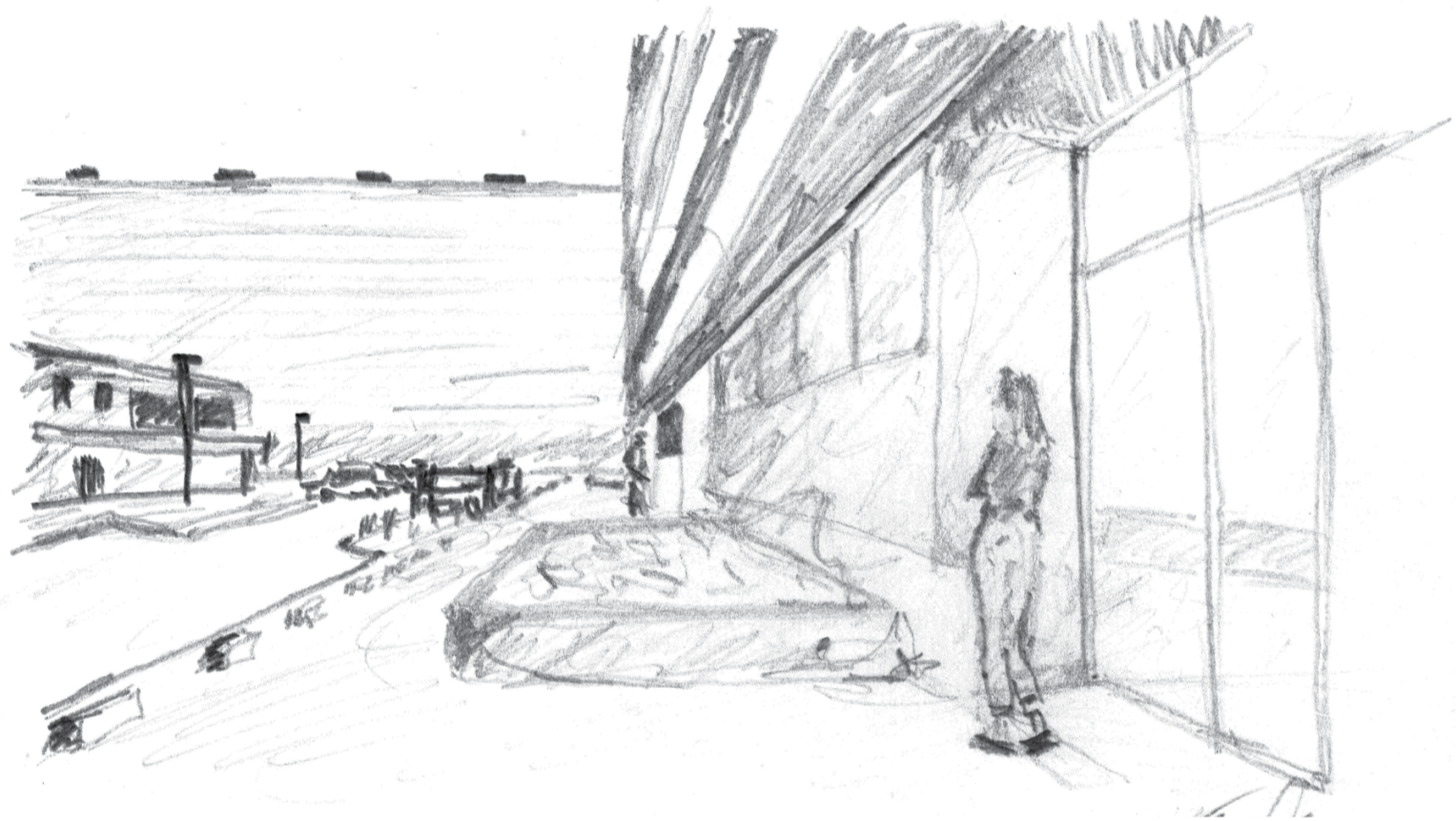
(Looking outside)

Well... But what about...

CUT TO INT. APARTMENT B :

Looking through the clearing she made in her window, the Woman sees a man (we recognise him from the previous scene through his clothing) in an apartment across the street. She looks down in the street, no one is there except a lady walking a small white dog.

She turns on the television and what appears to be the news is on.



She leans on the wall, in a nook created by a concrete column.

NEWSREADER

... from now on, all are to stay within a one-kilometer radius of their home address and should not exit their household other than for necessary errands ...

She stops in her way to the kitchen and stares puzzled at the TV.

CUT TO NEXT MORNING - APARTMENT B - ROOM

She lies in her bed, eyes open, pensive.

She gets out of bed sluggishly. Stands up and heads towards the door of her room. She stops midway and turns back to the window of her room. When she opens the thick curtain, the light blinds her. She squints her eyes and attempts to open the window. It is stuck. She struggles with it. After a bit, she goes, decided, to the kitchen and picks a random metal tool of some sort. She uses the tool as a lever and, in one grand gesture, with a satisfying and releasing sound, the window breaks open and the air breaks in. She breathes.

CUT TO INT. APARTMENT B - ENTRANCE / EXT.

The Woman, still in her pyjamas, is lacing her boots. She puts her coat, wraps a big scarf around her and heads out. We follow her in the windowless corridor of her block and down the stairs until she opens the door to the outside. It is very early. No one is around. She looks left and right, undecided, she follows her feet and walks, slowly.

EXT. STREET

In a street bordered on one side by a slab block and by parked cars on the other, appears the Man, the same she had seen the day before through her window. He hasn't noticed her. She leans on the wall, in a nook created by a concrete column. She subtly peeks at him to see what he is doing.

He is looking at a sign on the wall. He then kneels on the floor and appears to be taking a picture of a plant growing through the sidewalk. He stands and looks in her direction. She leans back in her nook, waits a bit, smile, and walk back where she came from.

With a smile still hooked on her face, she wanders. Looking up, she notices clothes on windows, colourful graffitis, the different shades of beige of buildings, plants crawling, writings on the walls, a football left by teenagers, a lady smoking at her window, a pinwheel attached to a guard rail, etc. When she turns a corner, she stumbles upon the lady with the small white dog. The same she had seen the day before. She passes her, nods politely and heads back where she had seen the Man earlier. She notices on the ground the same plant he was photographing earlier and looks at the sign on the wall. The sign informs about the densification of the neighbourhood, the destruction of a building close by and the partial demolition of another one.

WOMAN  
(To herself - confused)  
What's that...?

EXT. IN FRONT OF SMALL GROCERY STORE - LATER IN THE DAY

A small crowd is gathered in front of a small grocery store. They are queuing. The Man approaches. As he approaches the line, the Woman steps in the line right before him. We recognize her from her clothing. She's on the phone, she hasn't seen him.

WOMAN  
(On the phone)  
Yeah... I don't know ... I guess I'll just have to stay here. Well... At least until things go back to normal... police is everywhere...  
(Looking around and falling into the eyes of the Man)

She pauses and continues.

WOMAN  
Well... Anyway. Talk to you later.

She stands in the queue quietly, a bit stiff. They get in the store and do their groceries, picking up stuff and crossing each other time and time again in the aisles.

CUT TO NEXT MORNING - APARTMENT B - ROOM

She lies in her bed. She opens her eyes, jump out of bed and pulls the curtains. She looks left and right... at his window... nothing... When she was about to head back to bed, she sees him getting out of his block with his bag for groceries.

CUT TO INT. APARTMENT B - ENTRANCE / EXT.

She laces her shoes, picks her bag quickly and heads out of the apartment.

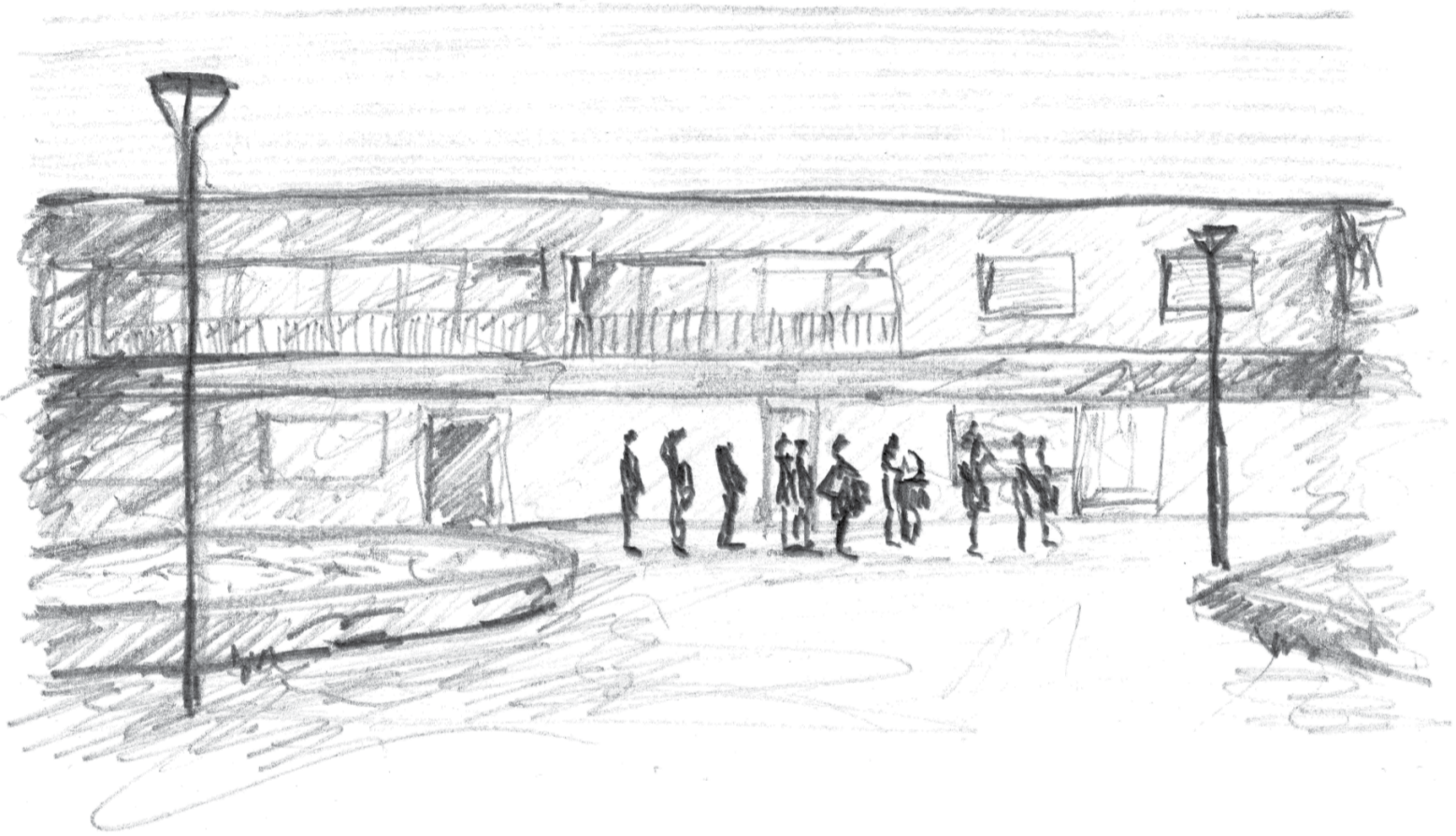
INT. GROCERY STORE

She walks around the aisles picking up groceries and pretending to do so. She's looking around. She can't see him. She heads to the cashier. She is still looking around her. She leaves.

OUT. STREET

Out of the grocery store, she sees in the distance a small gathering of people and the noise of heavy machinery. She heads towards them with her grocery bags. As she approaches, she notices machines that are about to start the demolition of the building. As the excavators start to break the walls of the block, a 1960's slab block similar to hers and his, she hears him next to her.

MAN  
(To her)  
Hi.



A small crowd is gathered in front of the small grocery store.

WOMAN  
(Surprised)

Sorry?

MAN  
Oh, I just said hi.

WOMAN  
(Nervous)  
Oh! Hi, hmmm. Hello. Hi.

Staying there in silence for a bit, while the noise grows stronger.

MAN  
(Watching the building collapse progressively)  
Nice pyjamas.

WOMAN  
(Looking at herself and realizing)  
Oh. Thanks.

MAN  
(Big chunks of concrete are falling on the floor)  
I've never seen you around.

WOMAN  
Yeah.

He turns towards her, puzzled.

WOMAN  
Crazy no?

MAN  
Yeah, well. I didn't know anyone from this  
block. Did you?

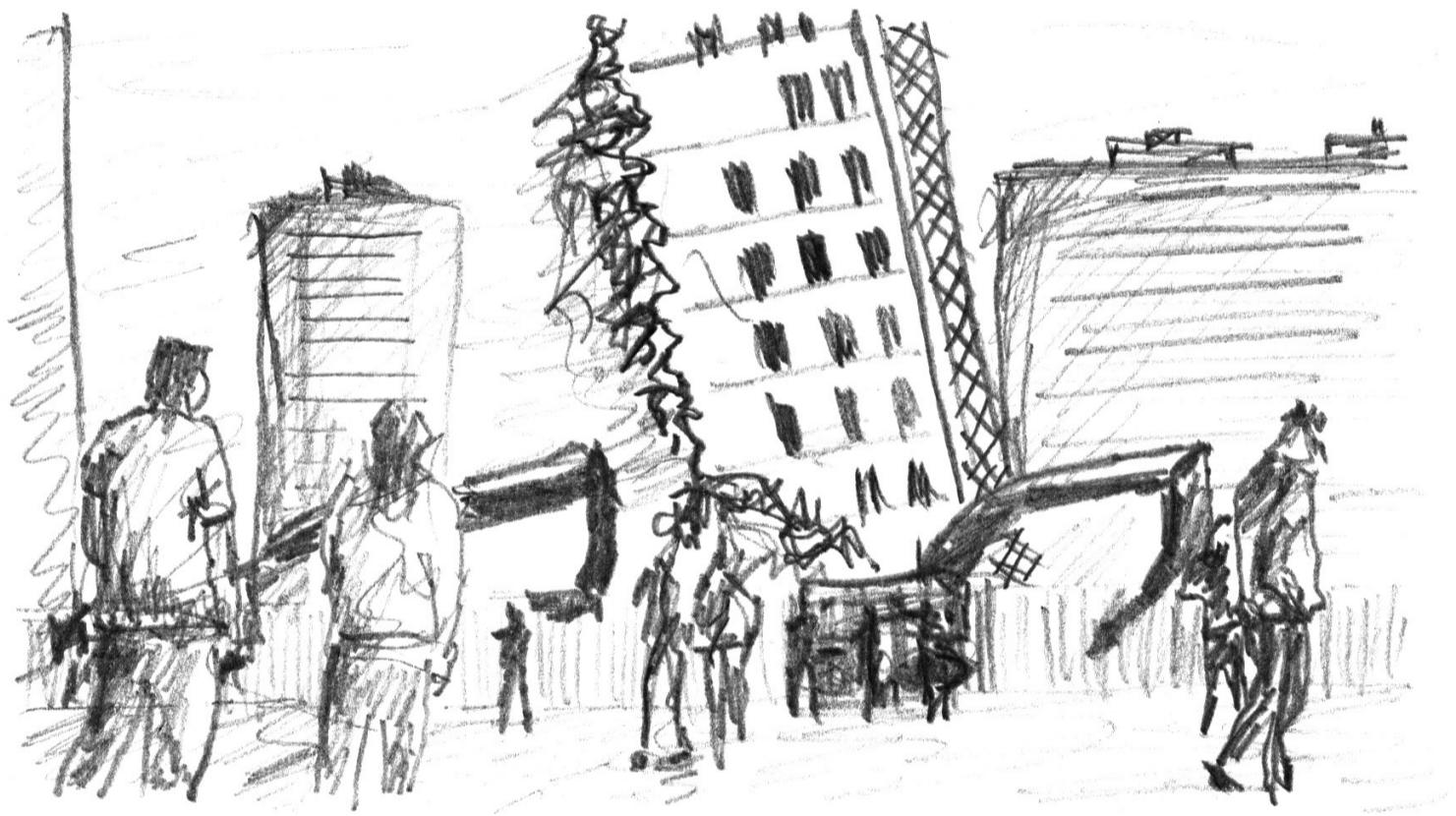
WOMAN  
Well, I just moved in so... Hardly know anyone around.

MAN  
Oh, I see.

(Beat)  
What do you think of all that?

WOMAN  
I don't know. I was not aware of any of it.

MAN  
Me neither. I just learned about it last week.  
They are building a new school I think, new  
blocks, destroying this one and slicing the  
long one over there. They supposedly have been  
talking about it for years, but well...



They had arrived in between their respective buildings.

WOMAN

They didn't ask anyone here or told anything about what was going to happen?

MAN

Well, maybe. I just didn't hear about it. Always the same people anyway who go in these events anyway. Not my kind of people you know. Just an e-mail or something would have done it.

(Beat)

I like it here, I hope it'll stay like it is.

WOMAN

Like what?

MAN

I don't know. Like here. Like home.

Machinery continues.

CUT TO EXT. STREET

Both are walking towards their homes while talking.

MAN

(Enthusiastic)

It's not that I'm against any of that. It's just that I feel they're gonna manage, just like they did around the corner, to make it look and feel terrible.

(Stopping and pointing to a sign with renders of the new development)

It just lacks (sigh)... charm I guess... I don't know...

Nothing is fundamentally wrong about it. And that's the main problem. They manage to make it look dull enough, tick all the boxes they need to tick so that you just can't argue or have an opinion about it. It's like they want to make here, a place like anywhere.

(Beat)

As it was just starting to actually feel like somewhere you know.

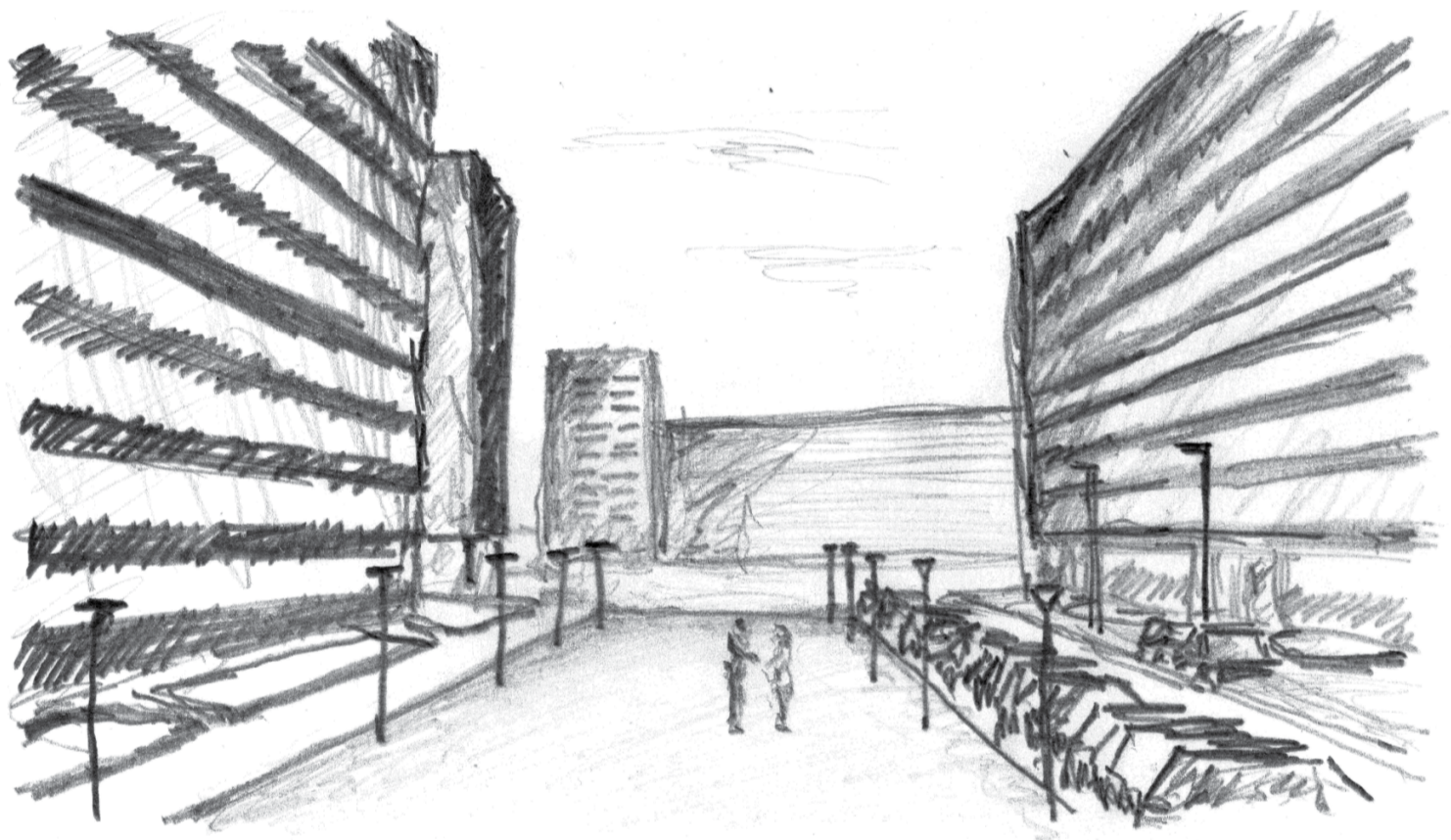
WOMAN

How long have you lived here?

MAN

Long enough.





They had arrived in between their respective buildings.

They had arrived in between their respective buildings.

WOMAN

Hopefully, it'll bring a bit of life in the area.

MAN

Yeah, and chase the life that is already there.

WOMAN

I agree, it could be done differently.

MAN

Yeah, it could.

CUT TO INT. APARTMENT B

The Woman is in her apartment, cooking scrambled eggs. The windows are open, curtains fly with the wind. Appears to be sunny outside. Some music is playing in the apartment.

With a pan in one hand and a spatula in the other, she heads to look through the window. He's at his window as well. He waves with a fork in his hands. She waves back with her spatula. He puts the fork in his mouth to free his hand and makes a sign with his fingers with interrogation in his face if she wants to go take a walk outside. She checks the time on the oven clock, it's flashing at 12:00 as if it's broken. She looks back at him and makes a thumbs up. Heading back to the stove to finish the eggs, she can't take the smile off her face.

CUT TO EXT. STREET

Both are walking and talking.

WOMAN

(In the middle of a sentence)

I still haven't had any news from work either. I guess they're just like trying to organise this mess.

(Beat)

Feels weirdly good to be stuck anyway.

MAN

Yeah, same.

WOMAN

(Pointing subtly to the lady she saw smoking at her window the other day)

Look at her.

(He Looks)

She's great no?

MAN

(Pausing and laughing a bit)  
Yeah, she looks straight out of a film.

She looks in their direction and stays there.

They continue walking as they point to each other things in the neighbourhood.

WOMAN

(Picking a flyer on a wiper of a car)  
Have you seen this?

MAN

(Still looking around)  
No, what's that?

WOMAN

I don't know, it looks like someone heard us yesterday.

MAN

(Looking more closely at the flyer in her hand)  
What do you mean?

We see a close up of the flyer saying:

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ALTERNATIVE URBAN IMAGINARY  
An association to picture another  
vision for our neighbourhood.

Let's join and gather at:  
COMMUNITY CENTRE THIS SATURDAY

-----

CUT TO EXT. COMMUNITY CENTRE

A small group of people are gathered sitting and standing around wooden steps of the Community Centre, a collective garden established last year in the area that also hosts events for the community or associations of the neighbourhood.

The Woman is already sitting there talking with people around when the Man arrives. He joins quietly the circle of conversation and listens silently to people talking.

PERSON #1

(Enthusiastic)

Yeah, I also live there! We've just started to make a small vegetable garden in the back of the building, did you see it?

WOMAN

Oh really, that's fun.



People start to get in slowly the community centre.

PERSON #3

Yeah, I guess since no one is caring about that corner of land anyway, that would make it be something at least.

PERSON #1

(Looking around as if someone could be listening)  
Yeah. So far, no one has complained. Especially in these conditions.

PERSON #2

Yeah, crazy times...

WOMAN

Do you also have a garden plot over here in the Community Centre as well?

PERSON #1

Yeah, just over there. And the one of my daughter is just over there as well.

PERSON #2

And mine is right next to it. That's actually how we met.

Sometimes people are quiet and just come to water their plants or whatever. But now, I feel, since everyone is stuck home, people are strangely more eager to talk.

PERSON #1

Yeah, like that lady over there.

She recognizes the lady with the white dog she's seen a few days earlier.

ORGANISER

(A bit loud – On top of the stairs)  
Alright everybody, if you want to step in, we'll start.

People start to get in slowly the community centre.

The Man heads towards the Woman as she was heading inside.

MAN

Hey there.

WOMAN

Hi!

MAN

I didn't know you would come.

WOMAN

Yeah, I don't know. That's great. Better than staying home right?

MAN

Yeah, I guess. (Small Laugh)

(Beat)

Anyway, good to see you.

She smiles.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTRE

In the middle of the room, a large model of the neighbourhood is there, they recognise their respective buildings on it. Nothing else than the existing buildings, streets and trees were represented. Boards and drawings are hanged around on the walls of the room

ORGANISER

(To the whole group)

Alright everybody, welcome.

(Waiting for silence to settle)

So, thank you for coming. I'm sure all of you are full of questions. Don't worry, I am as well. I'll try to be as brief as possible to share why we organised this gathering here. Basically, we are a group of architects, independently financed, that responded a few weeks ago to a request from a local association...

(Waving to a few people in the room while we see them smile)

... formed of people of the area who were overwhelmed about the unclarity of the information the mayor has communicated about the project, how badly it had been communicated and just unhappy about the look of it all.

PERSON IN THE ROOM

Yeah, I just learned last week that my block was going to be destroyed.

ORGANISER

Exactly, and you are not the only one. After discussing with the association, for a couple of weeks, we realised that it would be a good idea to host a series of events for three purposes. First, (he indicates with his fingers) to raise awareness of the upcoming densification projects for the area, clarify what's going to happen and when. Second, to reinforce the mobilisation already put in place by the association in the area. And third, to try to visualise an alternative vision about how the area could look and feel according to you. We think that by having these events, we might be able to get a chance to be more involved in the conversations with the mayor and developers about the future for the area.

We've summarised here the situation on these boards the ongoing projects and the ones that are in developing phases.

The group gathers around the boards.

ORGANISER

As you can see, much is still possible. The land of the whole area still belongs to the council which means that some of the decisions are still within their powers. However, the pressure they are receiving coming from developers is huge considering the construction of the train station which should be operational in a year or two and which, as you probably know, will allow people to get to from here to the centre way faster.

While the destruction of the first phase here (pointing now on the model) has already started and the construction of the station is already in process, including a couple of new blocks and the new primary school, of which you've now seen the pictures I'm sure. Most of the other developments haven't been concretised yet and are either currently on the drawing board or in planning phase. Which is where we might still be able to leverage some power. We could still hope to develop an image, a view, a feel, that might have some effect in the hands of the mayor and/or the developers and/or the architects.

PERSON IN THE ROOM

And how do you know they will take it into consideration?

ORGANISER

We don't. But one thing we know now for sure is that they are already not taking it into consideration.

The group agrees with a sound of approval. The organiser continues to explain by pointing at images on boards and at the model.

CUT TO INT. COMMUNITY CENTRE - TABLE

The Man is sitting at a table with one of the architects.

ARCHITECT

So the idea, well, what we'd like to try today and in the upcoming weeks, is to try to identify how you, yourself, would make your neighbourhood feels more romantic to you. How could you...

MAN

(Interrupting the architect)

Wait, what?

ARCHITECT

Yeah, I know this may sound silly but, we want to test this new approach to imagination for new urban environments. It's based on a research that was published in 2020 at Cambridge University. What they've found out was that the idea that each one of us has of a romantic place, or more specifically a romantic street, is actually powerful on three fronts. First, it acts as a strong trigger for imagination, connecting past, present and future in one clear and synthesised individual image. Second, it creates a new language out of the typical urbanistic jargon, a language that is more personal, more emotional and more detailed. And finally, they've found out that in one image, generated swiftly by anyone, architect or not, encapsulated a lot of constructive and positive elements that have been supported over the past 100 years by research in urban design and architecture.

MAN

(A bit upset)

Eh... Well....

ARCHITECT

(Laughing)

Yeah, I know... I was the same. I felt the same at first. My first reaction was like: "I don't want the city to end up like Disneyland or some other tacky, fake and quaint little place". But after seeing the results, I was quite impressed.

It supposedly has to do with the nature of romantic love itself. I didn't know at all but apparently our contemporary idea of romantic love finds its roots in the same roots as capitalism, rationality and modernity itself. Romantic love has always been – and still is somehow – even in the face of humongous pressures, one of the last indomitable forces that manage to resist and handle the challenge of structures of power. And it seems like it's because of its very nature, its history. Love appears to be fundamentally subversive.

(Beat)

It's just a test anyway.

MAN

(A bit shy)

Well... Any place can be romantic if you're with the person you like.





He is at his window and she can easily identify which one it is because of the red hue of the awning is catching her eye.

ARCHITECT

Yes indeed, but when I tell you to picture a romantic street in your mind, does "any place" come to you at first?

MAN

Well...no but that's because of the movies. Like what they put into our brains.

ARCHITECT

Yeah, maybe. But what do you, personally, imagine as a romantic street?

He peeks a bit nervously over his shoulder and sees the Woman with another architect. She's talking volubly, looking up to the ceiling as if she's trying to remember something. The architect in front of her is sketching and writing as she speaks.

MAN

Let's do this I guess...

CUT TO INT. COMMUNITY CENTRE - TABLE: WOMAN

WOMAN

...it wouldn't be asphalt on the floor but some kind of pavé, like anything with texture. When you'd look up, you'd see like... matter to about, you know... like flowers or plants or sculptures or anything... there would be two or three small benches, all different... in front of buildings... I like these kinds of places, sometimes in front of houses or buildings where you have a small bench where you can just sit or talk with people or do nothing or whatever you feel like doing, to be a bit inside but not really... looking at people... there would be a house made with stones, one with wood and one with concrete... all of them would be different... different heights... I don't know 2,3,4,5 stories maybe... different but simple... what else... balconies everywhere... the street would kind of kink at the end... it would lead to some kind of place, kind of bigger open space at the end. But you wouldn't see it from the street... you would hear it. One the house would have a kind of garden in front. This one, the house would be yellow... what else... Oh and it would smell like linden, because there would be a giant linden tree on the side of the street. You could see a bit through the windows you know. Not too much like some kind of creepy voyeur thing, but just like a tiny peek in... like you can imagine yourself in this life for a minute... There would be different shops around. Like a small café, a person selling furnitures and... an ice cream shop. It would be not too hot, not too cold, with just a tiny warm breeze. It would be that moment of the day in between day and night you

know... Not sunset, but that very dark blue sky when the night is coming but not there yet... And doors, lots of detailed doors. And other streets would kind of crisscross, intersect kind of....

The architect finishes to note what she was saying.

ARCHITECT

(Looking at his sheet full of notes)

Wow, that's great. That's amazing actually. So much stuff.

We see and hear some of the other conversations in bits. We see a wider view of the room, everyone is busy at their table talking much and architects filling pages and pages. Some of them start to pin up some of the drawings. Other people join and comment.

The event finishes, they are back in the stairs where they were at the beginning of the event with the people they met.

PERSON #1

Bye there! Nice to meet you.

MAN

Yeah, same. See you around!

PERSON #2

Bye-bye.

WOMAN

Bye!

Each one of them goes in their own direction except for the Man and the Woman who are still in the steps. The Woman is on top of the steps as she waves back at one of the architects inside. Lights from the community centre are warm and radiating out. The night is dark and we see some light windows from the surrounding buildings and we hear some music coming from one of them.

WOMAN

(Now looking towards the Man)

Well, that was fun.

MAN

Yeah, strange. But fun.

WOMAN

Yeah... I didn't know where this was going to go at first. But as I started to talk, I was more and more beginning to imagine how could all that take shape and actually be useful.

MAN

(Looking at the floor)

Yeah, indeed. Honestly, I actually thought this was going to be bullshit at first. Having grown up here and hearing a couple of random architects from I-don't-even-know-where asking me to talk about some random romantic fairy tale stuff sounded like the worst idea.

The Woman laughs. She goes down the stairs and they start to walk together towards their blocks.

MAN

But I mean, at the same time, any place can be romantic. Look at here. (Pointing around at the trees, lights, moon, stars)

A wider view allows to see the street in full with them walking.

WOMAN

Totally. I don't think any of them implied it wasn't. I don't even think they are actually trying to make this place more romantic. I think they just want to use the term as some sort of trigger. A trigger for the imagination.

(Beat)

And it worked! Look at all that stuff on the walls. And no one arguing. Just tons and tons of ideas about... about a great place.

(Beat)

I've never been to any event like that, and I am not an architect at all. But for a minute, I felt like I was super creative, alive. My head was full of images, ideas.

MAN

True... True. Maybe you're right.

They reach the middle point in between their respective buildings, they say bye to each other and head towards their block with a smile. The night is smooth. The view widens as we see the romantic character of the space in between their buildings.

CUT TO INT. APARTMENT A - ONE MONTH LATER

A couple of weeks have passed, we see the Man in his kitchen cooking stuff. He shouts through the window to the Woman on the other side.

MAN

(Across the street, in his building)  
Hey! You want some?

She appears in her window.

WOMAN

(Answering)  
I don't know. What is it? Better than your dodgy soup of last week?

MAN

(Looking at his pan)

Yeah. It's just a couscous. Can't go wrong with  
couscous no?

NEIGHBOUR (PERSON #1)

(We recognize from the event at the Community  
Centre, he lives in the Man's block, he's  
smoking at the window right under the Man's  
window)

Well, if she doesn't take it, I will.

MAN

(Shouting at both)

Don't worry, I'll make some for both of you.

The Man finishes to cook and put the food in plastic containers.  
He manages to find a rope in his apartment and passes one of the  
couscous containers to his downstairs neighbour from the window.

MAN

(To himself)

How much more cliché can it get...

PERSON #1

(Still at the window - laughing)

Oh, thanks. I was not expecting this. Express  
delivery.

The Man comes back inside to pack up the other containers and sees  
an email pop on his computer.

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#### ALTERNATIVE URBAN IMAGINARY

We thank you for your contributions, ideas and conversations of  
the past weeks, it was great to see so many of you coming at many  
of the events we've organised. You've developed a new rich and  
inspiring vision for the area and we would like to invite you for  
a special event next month where we'll present the fruit of your  
work. We'll try to have present for the occasion the mayor, city  
officials and some of the current developers and architects working  
on the masterplan for the area. Please join us.

-----

CUT TO EXT. COMMUNITY CENTRE - ONE MONTH LATER

The Man, the Woman and three other people (we recognise the  
downstairs neighbour of the Man) are walking towards the community  
centre. We hear music and see it bursting with light from far.

WOMAN

(Excited)

Can't wait to see!

MAN

(Intrigued)

Yeah, me too.



The Man and the Woman are standing there open-mouthed  
at the colourful and breathtaking model.

NEIGHBOUR

If the mayor is actually there, I'll be floored.

As they get in, they see a lot of people standing in and out of the centre. Most are surrounding the big model at the centre of the room. When they managed to get close to it after greeting a couple of people they met on the way, they finally see it.

The result is magnificent. The Man and the Woman are standing there open-mouthed at the colourful and breathtaking model. There are tons of new streets, new places, new trees new parks, new things. Everything, even if heterogeneous, seems strangely able to fit with the existing buildings which are now sometimes covered with new awnings at certain windows, new balconies here and there, and sometimes even full protruding extensions out of some of the blocks. The roofs of the existing buildings are covered in trees and plants; some of them even have what appears to be houses and greenhouses, even full streets on top of them. Intricate staircases connect different levels together, reaching to the roofs of the buildings. Some new detailed collection of buildings are occupying the space of car parks. The buildings that had been proposed by the mayor are also there and integrated into the vision, but with additions and modifications that make the whole area strangely coherent and attractive. The views that have been developed with the people have been translated and transposed into the model and the drawings resulting from the conversation were covering the walls all around.

WOMAN

(Speechless)

Wow... I was not expecting this... I mean, we've been there for weeks, developing this together. But seeing it all together in one artistic view like this, that's really inspiring.

MAN

(Eyes wide open)

Yeah, me neither.

(Beat)

Look, they've attached to the model lots of the phrases we've said I think. Like this one (pointing at one of the little flaglike sign on the model) "*When you'd look around, you'd see matter to about*" – Oh and it says it's from you!

As they continue to walk around they look at the drawings on the walls, they comment on them with people we've seen from the previous event.

A man that appears to be the mayor is discussing with what appears to be developers, architects and planing authorities. They point to some of the elements on the model and comment on them. Some of the inhabitants and architects who participated in the project are also with them. The night continues, everyone enjoying the food and drinks provided.

At the end of the event, most are gone. The mayor and the organizer are discussing in the room next to the model.

MAYOR

I mean, it's really nice, I'm sure you folks had real fun making this. But what do you want us to do with this. Really. There are so much of the sites which are already planned and designed by now.

ORGANIZER

Take this as food for thought. We have provided you with a free vision for what that area could look and feel like if you would involve the citizen of your city in the process of design. We understand that the timing is not so right but we think there are ways we could try to find to bring some of this in. They've mobilised themselves to imagine a future neighbourhood that they'd like to live in. If you want to, we can organise a meeting next week and just debrief on that to see what can be done with this.

MAYOR

(Quietly)

What do you mean, what can be done? None of that can be done. It's all made up. You cannot just imagine a city like that with cardboard and coloured pencil.

ORGANIZER

(Corner smiling)

Yeah, I know. That why we should organise a meeting.

CUT TO EXT. MAYOR OFFICE

The Organizer and the Architect gets in the Mayor's office. Three other people are present, we recognize from the event, they are the people from the local planning authority.

ORGANIZER

(Handshaking people)

Hi, thanks for having us.

The mayor points to them to have a seat.

MAYOR

(Affirmative)

Listen, we thought about it all. And we really think that what you've developed fits in every sense with what we had in mind at the beginning for the neighbourhood and we'd like to hear what you had in mind for including some of what has been explored in your exercise.



ORGANIZER

(Eyes wide open, opening a file)

Well, eh... Yes, hmmm. For sure.

(Looking briefly at the architect)

Well first, we've unpacked a lot of the motifs that came out of the conversations we've had with the local residents. Some are a bit more abstract, while some are more concrete. We think first that these could be a good starting point.

The architect shows a series of drawings or photographs from the events and comments on each of them. All were showing a view of the site as it "could be":

- > The whole land has been partitioned into many small plots.
- > All plots looked like it had been developed, designed and owned by different individuals. Lots of bits of streets or buildings were reflecting the personalities of the local population who participated in the event.
- > It appeared as if there has been some limitation had been set beforehand on regards to heights and width of streets.
- > There was a seemingly organised chaotic sense to the way the streets and buildings were organised.
- > The streets were always ending onto either a building with a certain importance or into a wider square, place or parc.
- > The omnipresence of natural materials such as stone, bricks, wood...etc.
- > No specific "style" could be associated with any of the buildings. They just appeared as improvised constructions. All were different though, of different colours, different feel.
- > Vegetation was everywhere, invading all it could, creating sometimes small pockets of green, and sometimes larger ones.
- > Most buildings were blurring the boundaries between public and private realm with the use of gradient ground floor, balconies and roof terraces.
- > Most buildings had external staircases instead of internal ones.
- > Overhangs were above many streets in the shape of vegetation, lights or garlands, creating a sort of wrapping character to the streets.
- > There were many types of buildings responding to different uses. Homes, coffee shops, restaurants, cinemas, offices, pharmacy, hairdressers, flower shops, dentist, etc. All were piling one above the other without apparent order. They were all fundamentally

- different and scattered across the area.
- > There were many informal places for seating. Almost every building edges had a space for sitting, either on window sills, wall detail or in the shape of an actual bench.
  - > There was a lot of details on buildings either in the shape of windows, railings, awnings, or any
  - > Lots of thresholds, either in the shape of gates or sometimes simply a passage.
  - > There was presence of water features all around, either in the shape of fountains or small stream.
  - > The streets were showing a general sense of pedestrian leadership, cars were present but invited.
  - > All distances appeared to respond to the senses of sight and hearing in the sense that from any point in any of the newly developed district streets, you could recognise a face or a voice of anyone at any other reachable point (with unimpaired eyesight or unimpaired hearing)
  - > Because of the crisscrossing of streets and places of the scheme, the streets appear to be creating a network of many moments.
  - > Lighting has been described often with a palette referring to warm tones.
  - > The pavements were all textured in some way.
  - > ...

He continued for a while. The mayor and planing people were listening carefully. He appears astonished from their level of attention.

#### MAYOR

All of these conclusions came from asking them to design what they wanted their city to be like?

#### ARCHITECT

No, and that's what is most striking about it. We just asked them first to describe to us the most romantic street they could imagine, and then to describe how they would make this part or that part of the area feel more romantic to them.

#### ORGANIZER

Through the weeks we've organised one to one conversations, sometimes group conversation. We did model making workshops. Our goal was just to try to unpack how they would see on a personal level their area feels more romantic.

#### ARCHITECT

We were astonished about the new language

and the level of collaboration that resulted from the exchanges. Although all these points we've just mentioned above appears essential physical in nature – for example, the scale of the buildings, the colour of the lighting or the size of the plots – what's interesting is how they compose themselves around something holistic and coherent and at the same time totally diverse and complex. And even more interestingly – and I'm not gonna go in the detail of the research on which this whole exercise was based on – but the romantic street, as an imagination trigger, acts as a powerful heterotopia, an "other" space, revealing gracefully the failings and insufficiencies of the real, of the day-to-day reality of the inhabitants of the area. It appears to be a direct highway to the ever-changing formulation of a rooting, embedding and enchanting vision of a perpetually constructed reality. After all, the very definition of the verb "to romanticise" is to imagine the world better than it is. No need to wonder why it opens up the mind to the very realm of possibility and why it answers our growing and pressing need for the imagination to weaves people's individual deeds, hopes and concerns and to trust, or counter, something beyond rationality and beyond bureaucracy.

(Taking a breath)

Sorry, I got excited.

All laugh.

#### ORGANIZER

Afterwards, we gathered all that has been done over the few weeks of conversations and composed a vision that we think was reflective of what has been constructed. We would get feedback with the people as we would develop it to make sure it was concordant with their thoughts. A group of 8 architects and artists managed to visualise the project and transfer thoughts into drawings and models.

#### MAYOR

Impressive. And with all these "motifs" as you call them. What would concretely and feasibly be doable to make the area feels that way?

#### EXT. ROOFTOP GARDEN APARTMENT B – COUPLE OF MONTHS LATER

A couple of people are on the roof of the apartment block. Activities related to gardening are going on. Some young people are sitting under a pergola talking, others are building planters, cutting wood. Others are carrying bags of soil. A few kids are running around.



Her attention is grabbed by the man at his window.

The Woman, helped by the lady with the white dog (who is also running around with the kids), is planting a small tree in a planter.

WOMAN

(Slapping her hands to dust  
the soil left on them)

That'll do it.

LADY

(Looking from a bit further,  
her head slightly angled)

Yeah, we'll see in a few weeks I guess.

WOMAN

Hmm...

LADY

(Looking at her dog, running with the kids  
between the planters)

So good to be up here no?

WOMAN

(Looking up to the sky)

Yeah, the mayor is finally making things good. These small changes make such a difference. By just diverting to local associations some the money that was all getting lost in bureaucracy and planing, they made such a change. Associations now have the funds to do what they are aiming for. The neighbourhood gardeners they've hired have done such a good job. His only job is to greenify the area! How great is that! And they've put some of the money in organising gardening workshops and adapting some of the rooftops for planting and small constructions.

LADY

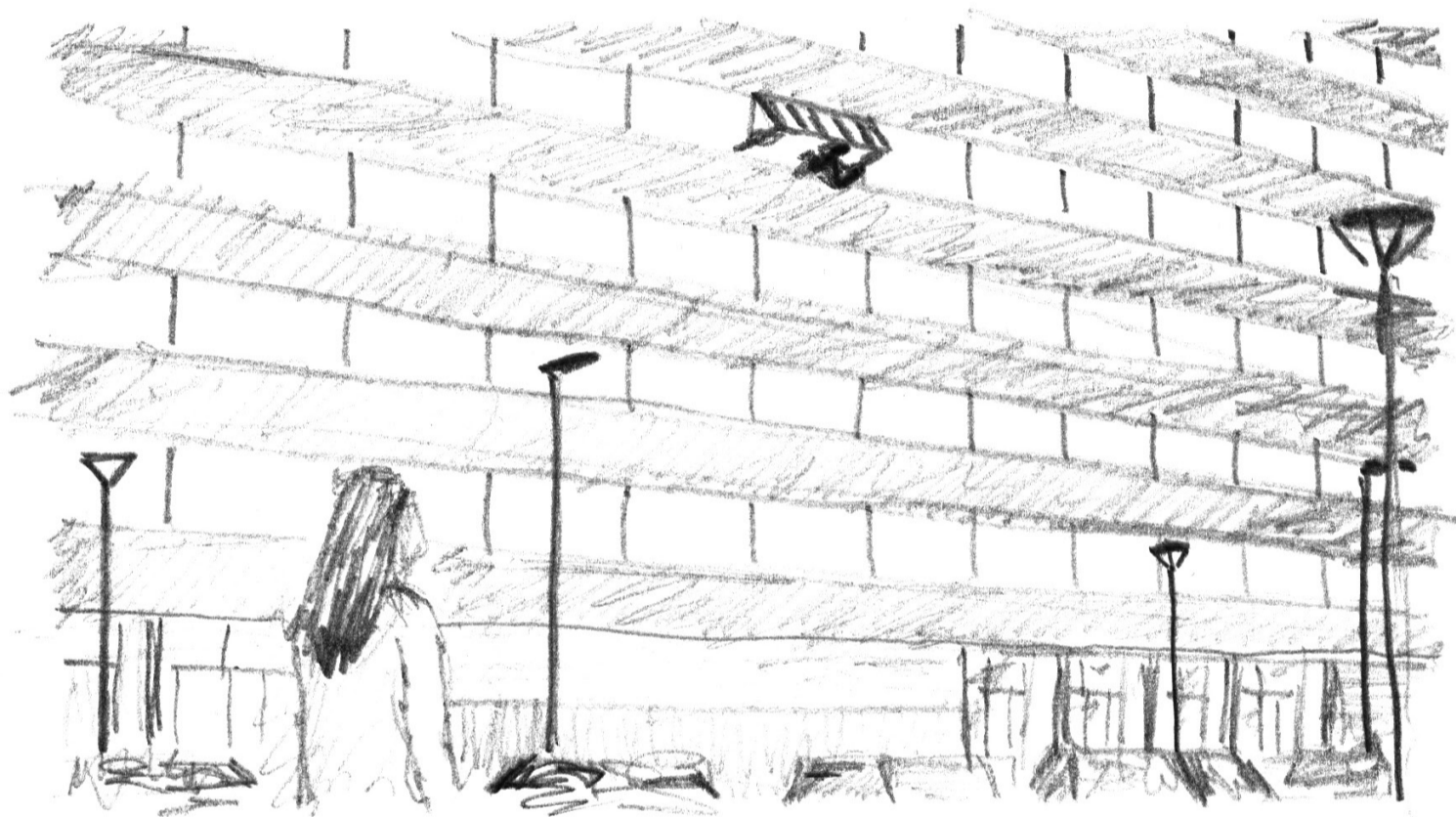
(Looking at her dog, running with the kids  
between the planters)

And the Family Association has finally got the means to build the playground they've been talking about for years.

WOMAN

Yes, and all this time that we can spend home now since this new work-at-home thing and the reduction of work hours. You know, it's now much more easier to get involved in projects like those. All the time and money I was spending on commuting or stressing out, I can now put into things I actually enjoy.

The lady leaves and the Woman stays for a bit looking in the distance. Her attention is grabbed by the Man at his window. He appears to be installing something on his window or fixing something



He is at his window and she can easily identify which one it is because of the red hue of the awning is catching her eye.

up. She's puzzled. Wondering what it is, she pauses to observe him. She cannot really see from that far. After a while, she understands. The Man is installing a red awning to his window. She shouts at him from the roof. But he cannot hear. She packs her stuff swiftly and heads back to her flat.

CUT TO INT. SERVICE STAIRCASE

In the service staircase of her block, she crosses someone who appears to be going to take some sun on the roof, carrying a camping chair and a book.

NEIGHBOUR

Hi!

WOMAN

Hi. How's it going.

NEIGHBOUR

Good, good! And you?

WOMAN

Good! Yeah, I was just up there, we planted the tree I told you about. Go have a look. It's small but...

NEIGHBOUR

Ouhhh! Yeah, I will.

WOMAN

Listen, have you heard about any new rules allowing us to install awnings at our windows? I thought it was prohibited but I just saw on the other side someone putting one up.

NEIGHBOUR

Oh yeah, you haven't heard? Not only the local planning authorities have authorised the installation of awnings, planters, window modifications and even the addition of balconies to the buildings but you can actually even apply for them to fund most of the costs. How great is that!

WOMAN

Wait, you're saying they are giving us money to put flowers at our windows?

NEIGHBOUR

Yeah. It's all part of this new plan that they've developed with the architects that organised the romantic street events. They are like redirecting funds to small projects like that to test and see how it evolves.

CUT TO EXT. STREET

The Woman goes all the way down the stairs to the street. He is at his window and she can easily identify which one it is because of

the red hue of the awning is catching her eye. She waves at him while he is still trying to install it. He waves back, wiping sweat out of his forehead with his wrist. He appears to be struggling.

WOMAN

(At him loud, using her hand to shade her eyes  
from the sun)  
Need any help maybe?

MAN

(Looking at the mess around him)  
Yeah... Yeah... That would be nice.

WOMAN

What's your apartment number?

MAN

She steps in the building after he buzzes her in. It is the first time she is actually going into another building of the area other than hers. She looks around and compares the similarities. Even if identical to hers, things are slightly different. She arrives at the flat and knocks at the door, the corridor is empty. He opens the door.

INT. APARTMENT A

She helps him out while they laugh and sweat and swear. It was a small awning that was retractable and could also be used as shutters and it was designed so you can install it safely from the inside of the apartment.

When the job was done, they brought two chairs next to the window. The curtains could be opened and the window as well without having the glaring sun coming in. He gives her a glass of water. And they talk.

While he's talking, we only see her face as she's looking outside, slightly smiling, still exhausted. She takes a sip of water. As the camera zooms out from her face, we understand that time has passed.

[2 YEARS LATER]

We can see her building, on the other side, with all its heterogeneous collection of new balconies, awnings, extensions, and planters of different colours, shade, size and styles. A long external staircase is in construction, connecting the street with the roof that is now covered in plants and trees and tiny constructions. A few new doors coming out from the apartments and balconies and orangeries.

INT. APARTMENT A - KITCHEN

MAN

(Cooking in the kitchen)  
Oh no... I forgot the cheese graters at yours...



WOMAN  
(Daydreaming)

What?

MAN  
(Still busy)

The cheese grater, I think it's at your place.

WOMAN  
(Still in her daydream)

Oh!  
(Getting out of her distraction)  
Don't worry I'll go get it.

She stands up and heads slowly to the door.

MAN  
Oh no, don't worry, I'll go. If you can  
just keep an eye on the pasta so they don't  
overcook.

She gets closer to him, passes her hand on his back.

WOMAN  
(Ironically funny)  
No, it's alright. I feel like going out a bit.

She kisses him swiftly and as she heads out:

WOMAN  
(Lightly, amusingly, smiling)  
Maybe if we'd live together, we wouldn't be  
chasing cheese graters all day.

From the window of the kitchen, he looks at her passing in the street in between their respective building. She waves at a few people she crosses. The lady with the white dog is there on a bench, they exchange a few words.

When she comes back, she is sorting mail in her hands with the cheese grater under her arm. She pauses with surprise and excitement in her face.

WOMAN  
(Very excited, impatient)  
Wait, wait, wait. No way. Impossible. No. Wait.

She drops all letters except one on the floor, the cheese grater falls as well. The Man struggling with steaming pasta in a strainer looks stressed in her direction.

MAN  
(A bit scared)  
What? What. What is it?

WOMAN  
(Reading the letter quickly)  
It's the mayor's office, they've finally accepted  
our request.

MAN

(Surprised, open-mouthed and smiling)  
Really!

CUT TO INT. ENTRANCE CAFÉ

The entrance of her building has been transformed, a new café led by inhabitants of the block. They are sitting there with a few friends of different age, some with kids in trolleys.

WOMAN

(Talking to all)

Yes, I'm telling you! It worked. We applied a few months ago when they launched the program and we just received the answer last week.

FRIEND #1

(Sipping a coffee that looks a bit too hot)  
What's that? Which program? I've never heard about it. Why is no one ever telling me anything...

MAN

It's this new local program that the council is testing out. What they are basically doing is pairing developers, architects and local residents or businesses wishing to move into a new home or location. While it is the families who are living in dwellings too small for their needs are prioritised, all residents can apply, which is what we did.

WOMAN

That's why we are quite shocked to receive an answer so fast. So many more people would like to move out as well.

FRIEND #2

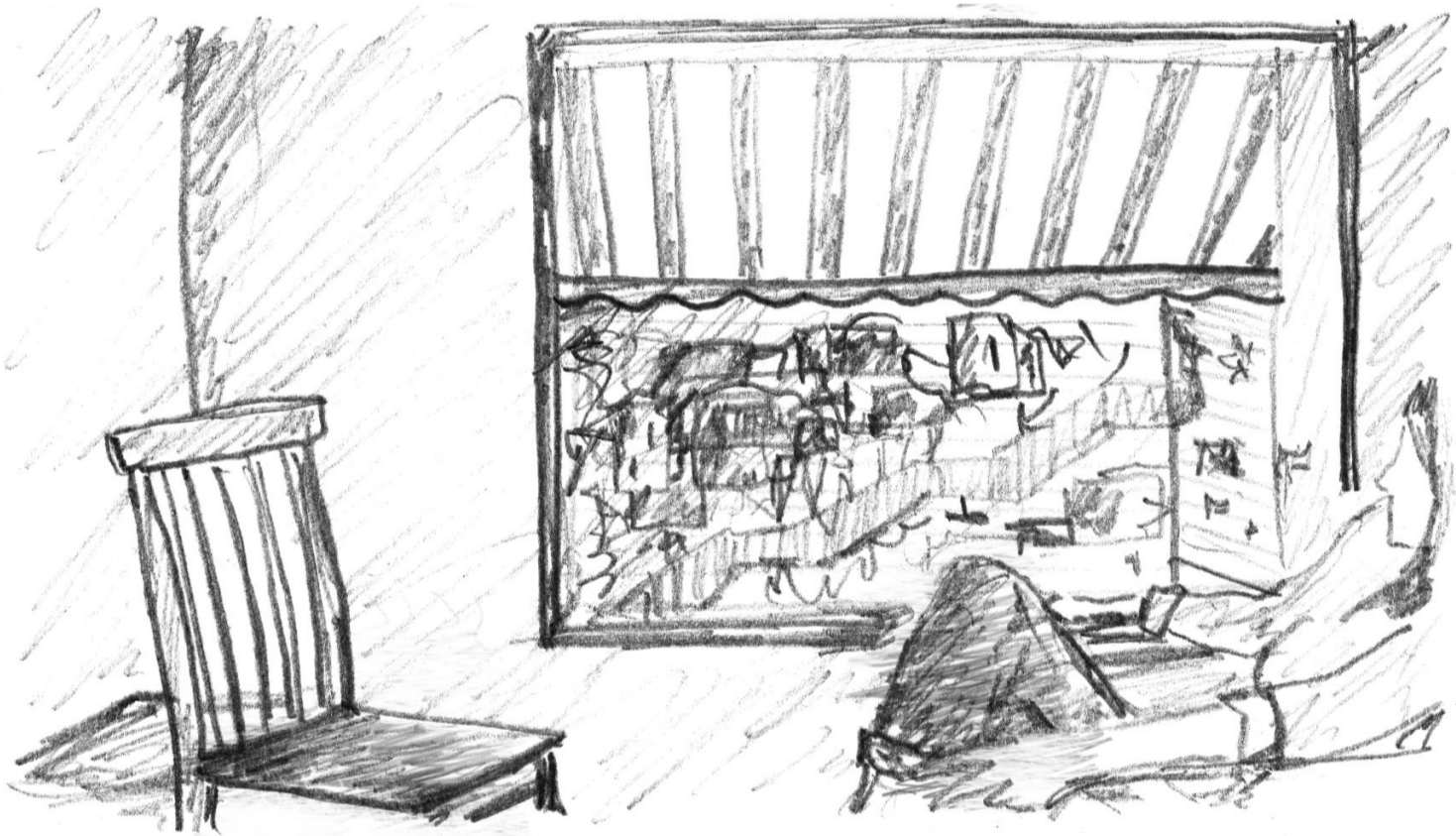
(Cute)

Maybe they were just touched by your story.

MAN

(Blushing)

Anyway. The program is part of a new experimental process that the mayor's office is testing. They are now donating progressively tiny fragments of the land to community land trusts formed by future residents and the wider community. Future residents are then responsible for developing this parcel of the land according to their needs. In some cases, boundaries might be imposed by architects, developers, planning authorities or the council. Boundaries on height, uses or design. But most of the time, they say that they might not need to apply any at all and people will be developing their plot of land according to what they wish. The plots of land given are quite small so you want to make the most out of it.



We can see her building, on the other side, with all its heterogeneous collection of new balconies, awnings, extensions, and planters of different colours, shade, size and styles.

So they told us that this is when you start to consider external staircases and using the roof by making gardens and terraces on them. They are doing it little by little, so everyone can learn from the previous ones about what's working and what's not. And while local people are actually prioritised in the program, people from areas close by can apply as well.

FRIEND #2

And you guys have been paired with who?

WOMAN

The architect is the same one who organised the romantic street events, remember? And, then, with us, there are two other families, one I knew but the other no. They have kids. And also that lady, you know, the one with the white dog?

FRIEND #2

Yes.

WOMAN

She applied for an apartment and also to open a flower shop on the ground floor. She hasn't been working for years, but she's still very healthy and has a lot more years in front of her. She's planning to sell some of the flowers she's been planting on the roof and in the greenhouse.

(Beat)

Anyway, we'll see. We had a first meeting yesterday. Everyone looks nice. Might be a bit complicated to agree on design stuff. Everyone might try to pull the blanket on their side you know... But they've given us this document, feels kind of like a book to be honest, with all the learnings from the romantic street events we did two years ago. They've laid out in a really inspiring manner all the motifs that came out of there, just as a source of inspiration for us. We'll see how we'll use it.

MAN

The building will probably end more looking like a patchwork more than anything. But anyway, we'll have our place, and you'll all be welcome to come whenever!

WOMAN

The councilperson says that we'll be right next to a small new cinema that has been proposed by an association of retired people and managed by two young women who've decided to leave their job for something closer. And supposedly, we'll be right in front of the small square with the park that the mayor's office has decided to keep space for.



The entrance of her building has been transformed,  
a new café led by inhabitants of the block.

FRIEND #2

Wow... that's great. Looks like our neighbourhood will be always changing.

MAN

Yeah, kind of like a city.

FRIEND #1

Did they say how long it will take?

MAN

They say that in about a year we should be moving in. Not so sure about that... But we'll see.

(Beat)

The greatest thing is that they are also testing a new access to property system. They are implementing a system with interest-free mortgages. And the amount you pay is actually proportional to your income. No matter how much you earn, you end up paying never more than 30% of your income to your mortgage and you actually become progressively owner of your apartment, eventually getting out of the endless pay cheque to pay cheque cycle that I'm sure you're all too familiar with. They say they will eventually extend the program to all renters of the area as well.

FRIEND 2

Wow, that would be great. With my income, I never thought I would be able to own my home you know.

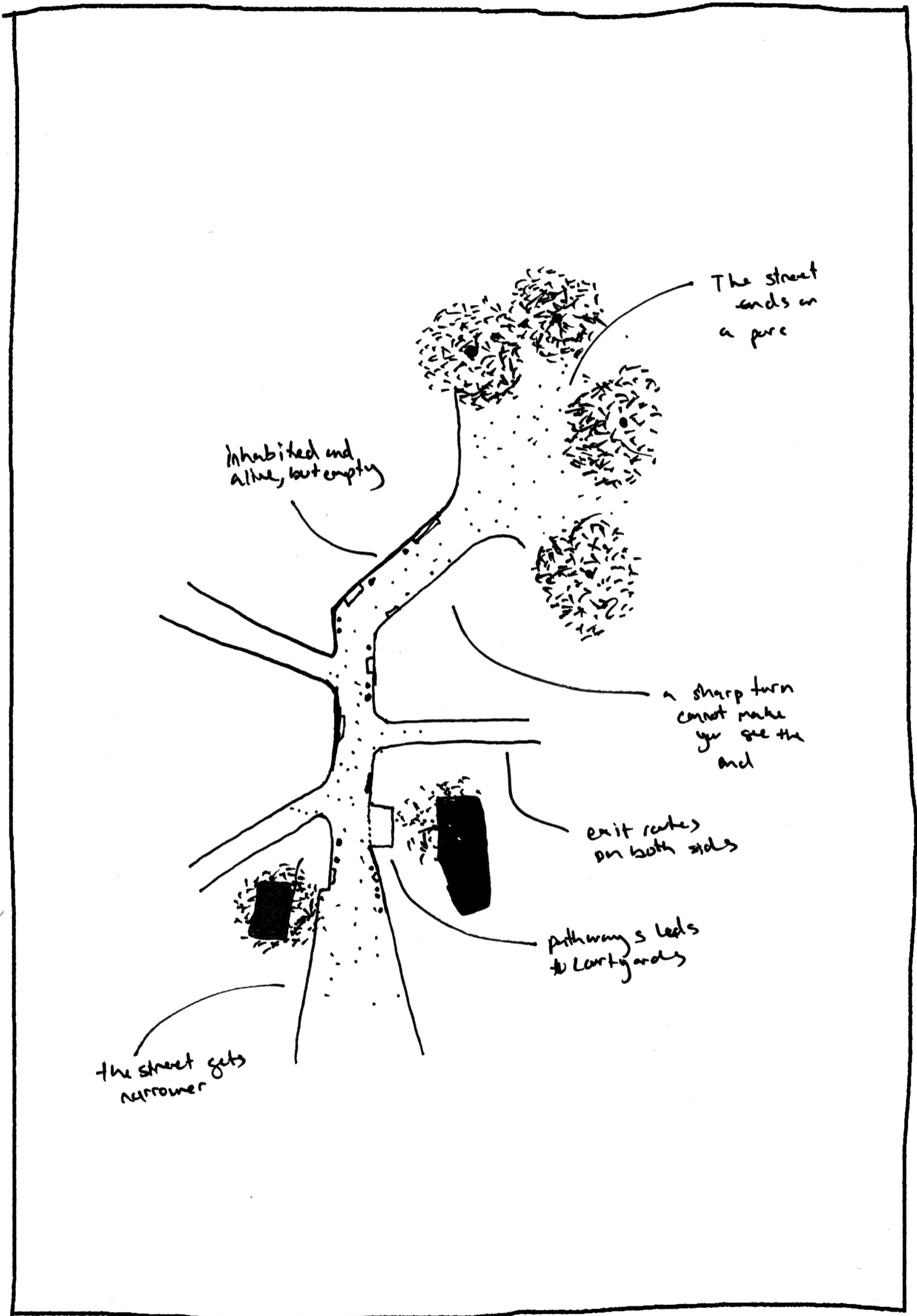
They all sat there pensively. Taking a sip of their drinks. Things have changed since they've been to that meeting at the community centre. The field of view widens, we see the block, now full of colours and additions, the garden on the roof, construction going on around, kids playing in the street, two people sitting and talking intimately on a bench in a corner by the side of the café. The sun is not even shining.

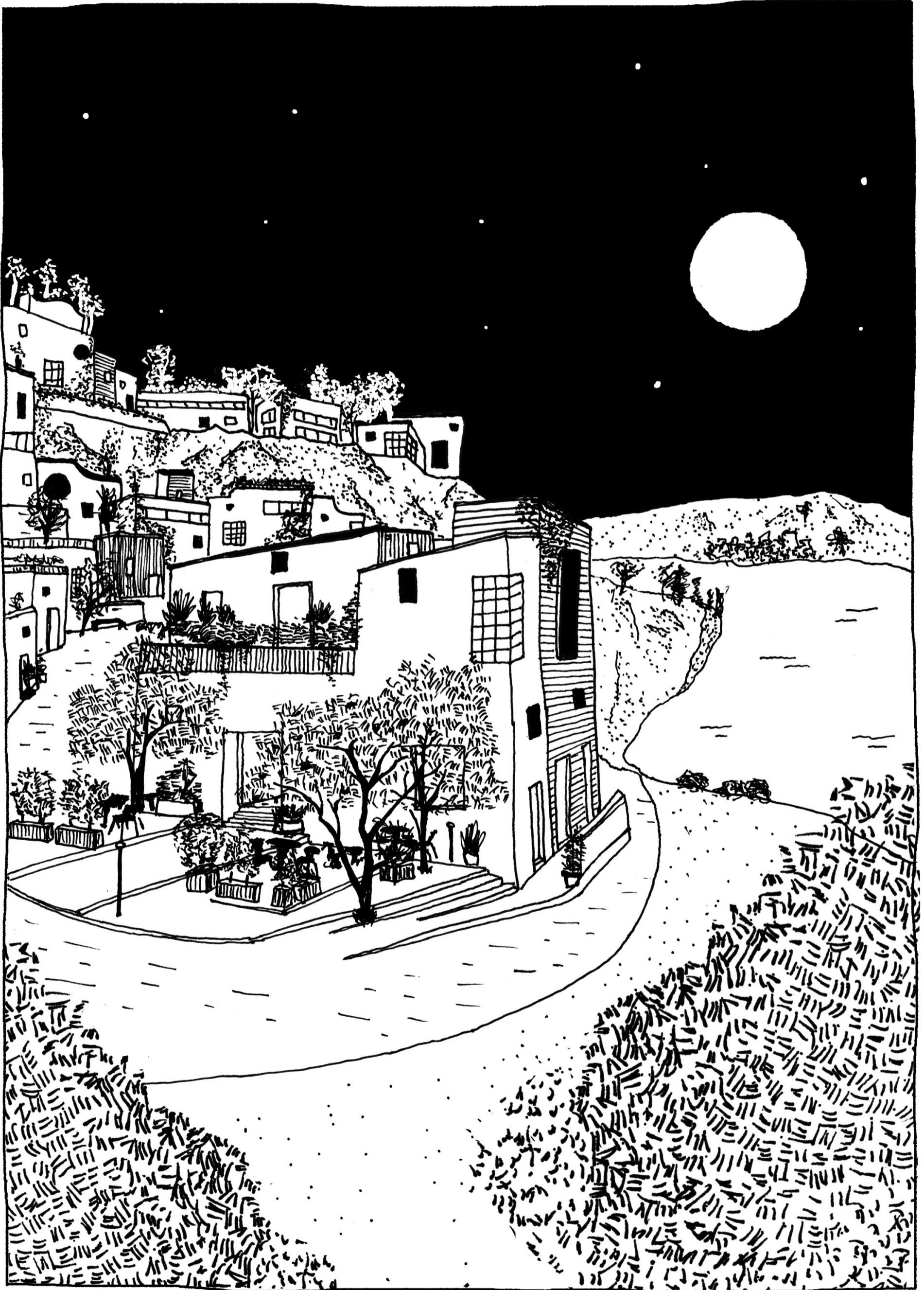
#### APPENDIX TWO – DRAWINGS

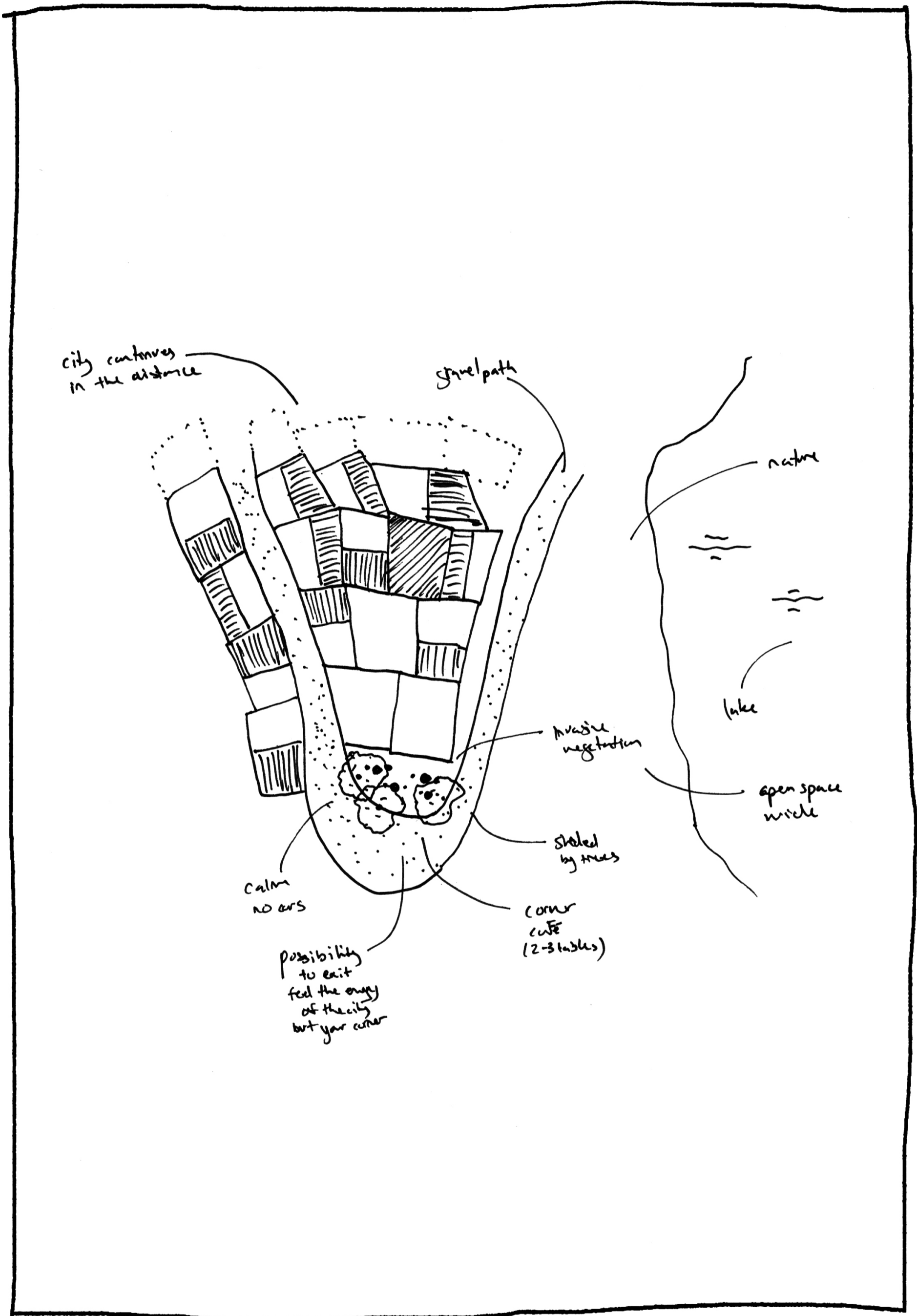
Sample of drawings made to translate visually some of the interviews I had with people of the Les Agnettes. Twenty interviews were conducted. Some were with local residents and some were with people living in or around the area. Respondents were of various age, sexual orientation, cultural background, economic situation and gender identity. The question that was being asked was "Describe, in the most detailed manner, a street that you would personally consider as romantic as possible according to your own perspective."

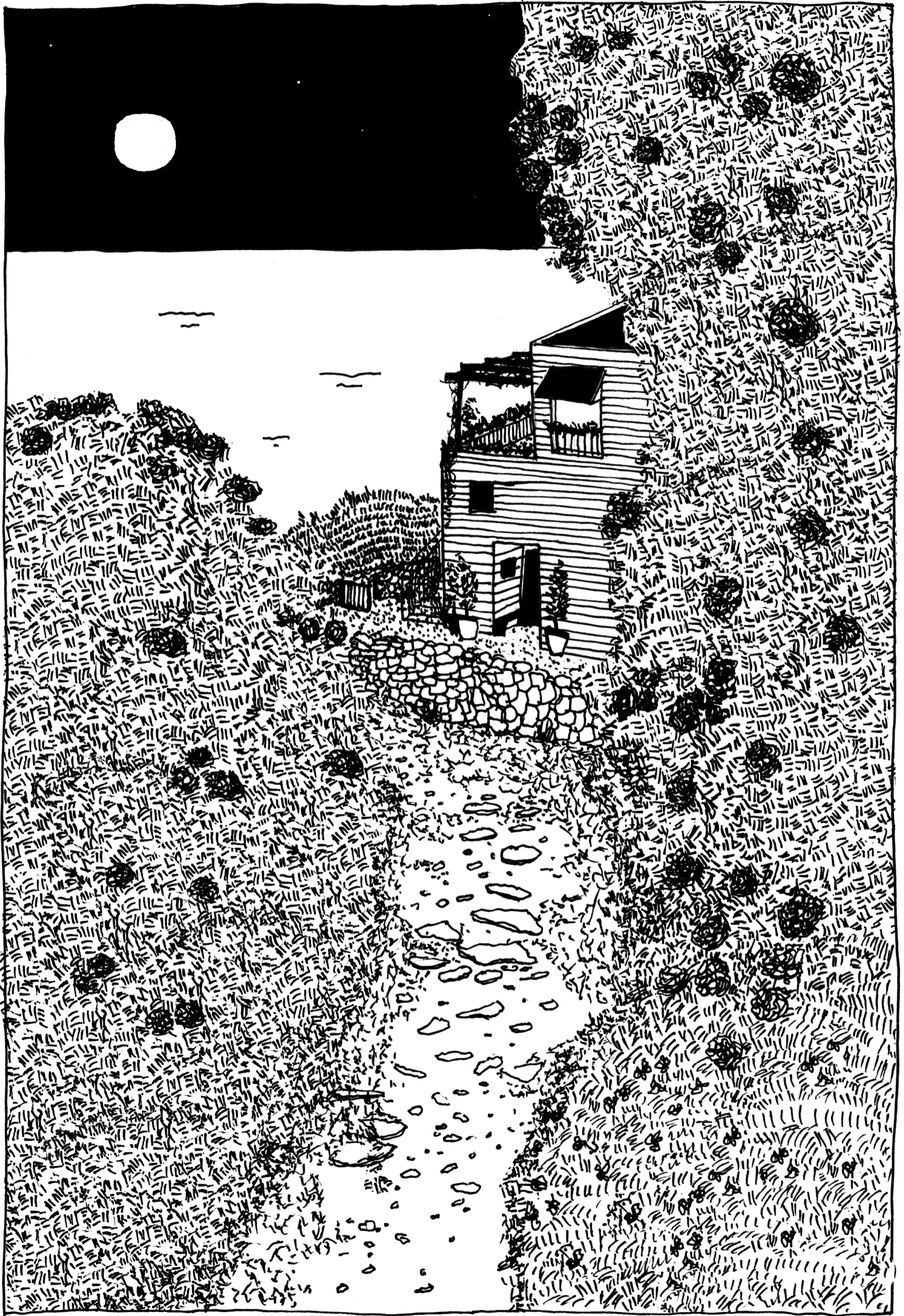


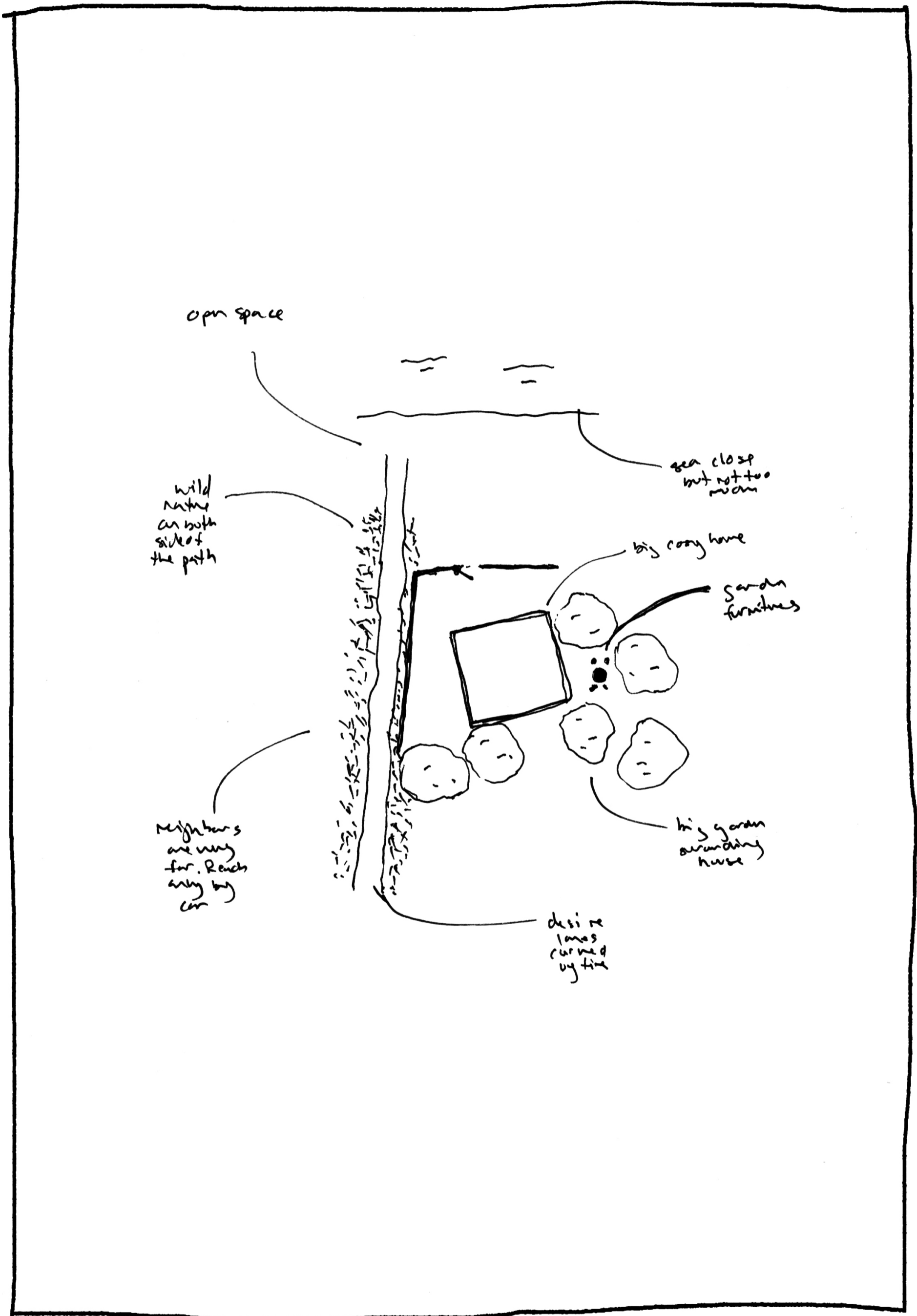


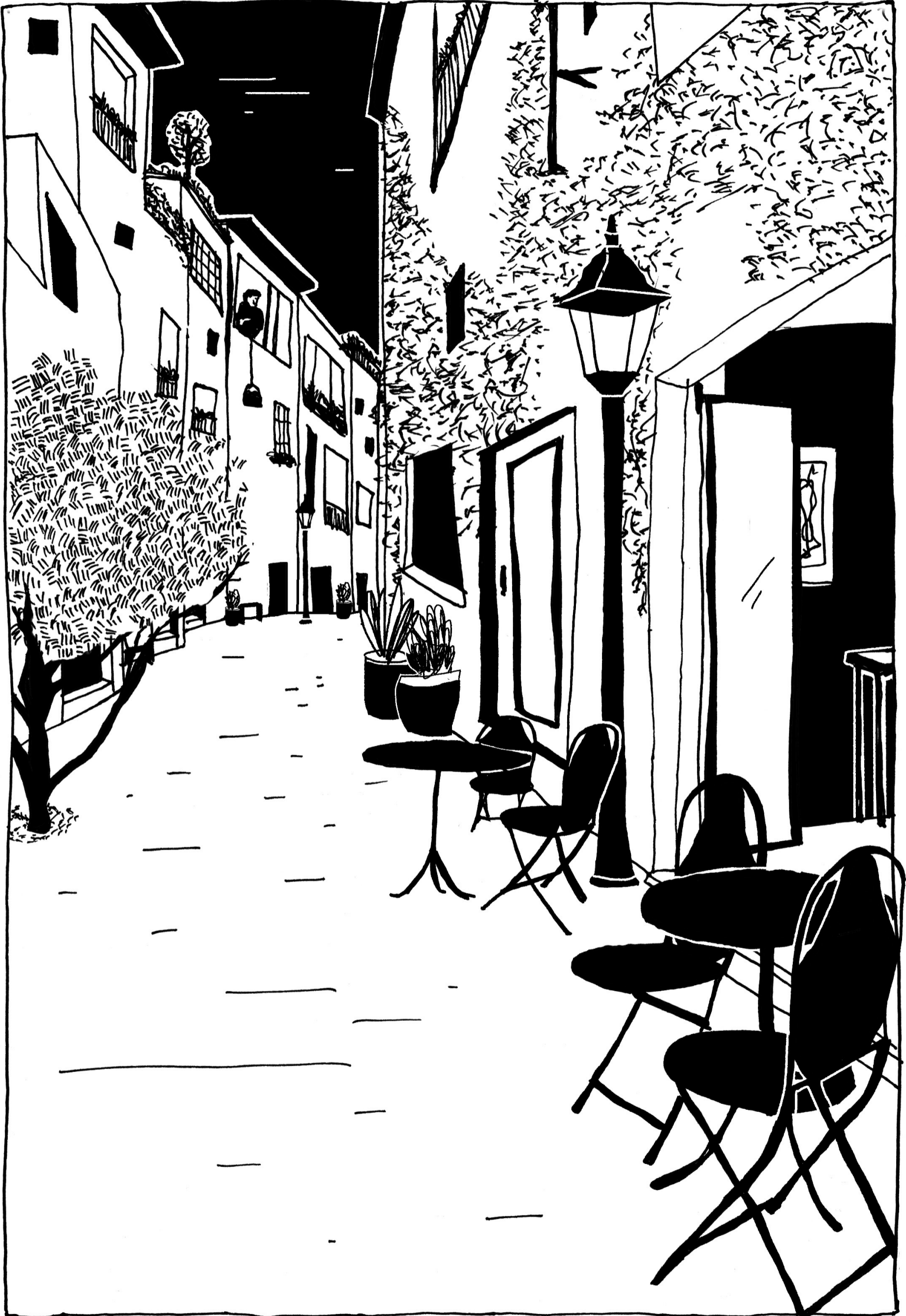


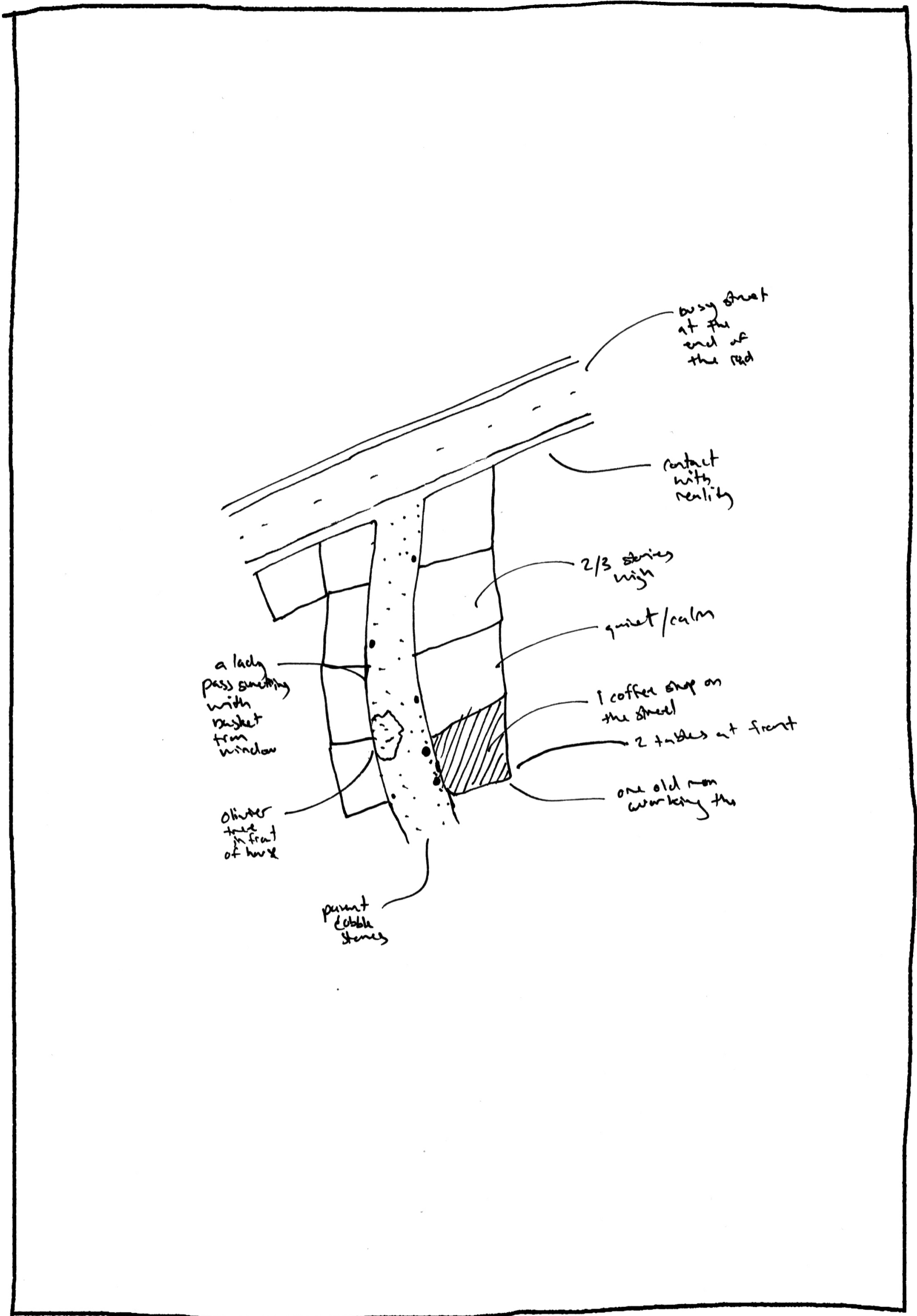












busy street  
at the  
end of  
the Rd

contact  
with  
reality

2/3 stories  
high

quiet/calm

1 coffee shop on  
the street

2 tables at front

one old man  
working the

a lady  
pass sweeping  
with  
basket  
from  
window

oliver  
tree  
in front  
of house

paved  
Cobble  
stones

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