

## **A perfect Beirut**

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A Perfect Beirut  
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Architecture degree  
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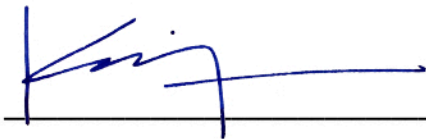
A PERFECT BEIRUT

by  
ISSA YASSER NOUREDDINE

ARCH 508/509– FINAL YEAR THESIS I & II  
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Department of Architecture and Design

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May 27<sup>th</sup> 2020

**AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT**

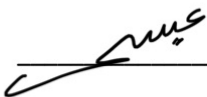
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## Abstract

Thesis I is a personal sketchbook done during the 17 October revolution in Lebanon; the exercise was to observe the demonstration spaces to finally produce numerous sketches that focus on the mental and social spaces generated in those spaces.

Thesis II seeks to reimagine the city of Beirut, Lebanon, in a new and different context through a personal illustrated narrative. The narrative follows a day in my life in the 'Perfect Beirut', envisions the future city if the 17 October revolution succeeded and tackles mainly the demonstration areas to generate a different urban fabric to the capital.

The narrative is personal and is inspired from the personal sketchbook. Plus, the illustrations are used as a medium to challenge political, social, economical and public spaces issues through a new and calm face to Beirut.





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personal sketchbook

all work done in Fall 2019

بيوت لثورة  
Homes for a revolution

عيسر نور الدين



----- عيسر نور الدين -----  
----- ٢٢ سنة -----  
----- دفتر عن التورة -----

## text

Perception is the organization, identification, and interpretation of sensory information to represent and understand the environment. In our daily lives, unintentionally, we perceive numerous information from the outside world, some meaningless, other meaningful to us personally. So, what makes an outside stimulus personal to one person? Each one of us identifies outside stimuli differently, whether it s a sight, a movement, a specific odor or sound, because of our personal association with that exact stimulus. Our memories play a great role in our perception as it shapes the world that we perceive through our senses, in a very personalized manner; for instance, a unique odor can elicit memories and emotions inside the perceiver that will ultimately change the outcome: the perceived. The perceived world is created from the inside out. In his book, *The eye of the skin*, Juhani Pallasmaa says: We behold, touch, listen and measure the world with our entire bodily existence, and the experiential world becomes organized and articulated around the center of the body. Our domicile is the refuge of our body, memory and identity. We are in constant dialogue and interaction with the environment, to the degree that it is impossible to detach the image of the Self from its spatial and situational existence. I am my body, Gabriel Marcel claims, but I am the space, where I am, establishes the poet Noel Arnaud.

Nowadays, as technology is constantly evolving, we perceive too many information per day, and all that surrounds us are flickering lights and loud noises. Personally, to escape this sensory overload phenomenon, I have created my personal home, a cathartic bubble, where I am mostly comfortable doing one activity I rely on, sketching, to disconnect and detach from the physical environment and release unexpressed emotions.

*From this point on, architecture is not defined by its physical form, but rather how we personally perceive the space mentally and emotionally, doing a certain activity in it.*

Henri Lefebvre gave a great deal of time to his production of social space study, he claims that The users space is lived - not represented or conceived . He created the spatial triad which consists of three elements interlinking to produce the social space: firstly, the perceived space which is the physical space and what is seen, secondly, the conceived space which is the abstract space and what is thought, and finally the lived space which is the embodied experience and what is felt.

The Lebanese revolution commenced on the night of 17 October 2019. To follow its events and understand myself and the citizens different ways to take over spaces, I started sketching several events that occurred to me and other people, aiming to create the mental and emotional spaces produced. The first Friday, in front of the Seray building, a lot of aggressiveness was striking back and forth between the protestors and the police, consequently, tear gas bombs were thrown on the protestors to spread them out and drive them away. The first sketch shows a self-portrait of my face melting due to the bombs effects, not able to catch a breath and blinded in a scared big crowd. Terror is created.

Additionally, the second drawing depicts myself running from the terror that has been created to take cover under the first tree I could see, gasping for air. A shelter is created. Also, the third sketch displays myself parachuting from a danger zone into a safe zone using the medical face mask as a guard from the outside gas.

Protection is provided.



The following day (19 October), I was completely paranoid, and preferred to remain alone as crowds, loud noises and quick movements were scaring me. I have become very alert and cautious; therefore, isolation was my new home.

As we move forward, the feelings illustrated move from being simple feelings to being constructed mental spaces. The same day, a chain of women frontline stood between the protesters and the police at the Seray to avoid confrontation and violence. A warm mom-child shelter was created.

Plus, many markets were offering food and drinks to keep the protestors going. They were being layed out on stands or concrete blocks.

To conclude, I transformed these mental spaces into physical architectural components, I projected my feelings on the physical spaces. In Riad el Solh area, I depicted the long street leading to the Seray as endless, with a closed portal at the end. A tree canopy between the monumental statue the Opera house. Plus, many tables are layed out as market stands.

On the 21st of October, few hairdressers visited the protest areas to offer haircuts for free, to show solidarity. A salon was created.

Afterwards (24 October), the weather started getting unpredictable, but this did not stop the people from protesting. Ponchos were getting distributed freely, and some people already had their umbrellas; these simple elements heavily impacted the protest as they allowed the citizens to continue their activities while facing the rain obstacle. Underneath these objects, shelters are created.

People were talking about the protestors climbing on the iconic Egg building, claiming that these are the students climbing for a better future, which explains the reviving of the abandoned landmark in this revolution. Classes, meetings and lectures were given in the theatre. The students appropriated the space in their personal was to comply with their needs, thus, a classroom and lecture hall were created inside of it.

An isometric of how I perceived the space is shown, the area is locked with a floating sphere as the egg; and next to it, Gelass street is fortified and its buildings are inaccessible.

Nevertheless, the Azarieh area (25 October) was changed tremendously also. The space was completely appropriate it by campaigns and initiative groups aiding the revolution, to educate and keep the protestor going. On one hand, public spaces were being appropriated, and daily, different talks were being held under the tents to tackle different valuable topics. On the other hand, The country s kitchen domesticated the Azarieh area, produced food for the protestors in need, while staying self-funded from the citizens. A kitchen was created.

An isometric shows the strong tent structure in Azarieh parking that represents the actual tents that were broken and built all over again several times; while many policemen grouped in the Azarieh area.

On the 26th of October, the protestors started closing the Ring bridge to block vehicles from passing. Oppositely from the home I found in isolation after the tear gases incident, while closing the road, I found personal strength when in a group and not alone. The crowd provided me with safety, and belonging was my new home.

Back to the Ring bridge, different groups of people started reigniting the road and public space in an extreme manner, giving out strong statements by doing so. (27-29 October) A group exercised yoga in the middle of the road; the sketch shows a completely decontextualized Ring bridge, with no buildings in sight, just a few people practicing yoga. A fitness class is created. Others took over the Ring bridge and claimed it for themselves as they put out home furniture such as a carpet, a sofa, a refrigerator, etc... on the street. A kitchen/living room is created.

On the same hand, some people (28 October) created their bedrooms on the bridge as they laid on the sidewalks. Here we see how the protestors are starting to fully domesticate these spaces, deconstructing, decontextualizing them and claiming them as personal spaces.

An isometric depicts the Ring bridge as a closed block with barriers and cracks on each end, while it receives many activities in its midst.

At diverse places, tents were put up, so that people would make themselves at home while protesting for the longest time possible. Different tents were colliding as people started to merge, smoke shisha and appropriate the spaces together. In the sketch A break for the rebel, clothes are being washed and hanged from one tent to another, to show the connection created between these people, how they transformed this private domestic activity into a public display.

Unfortunately, the day the precedent prime minister Saad el Hariri resigned (29 October), a group of anti-revolution people terrorized the areas and broke down the protestors tents, which for the protestors was their temporary revolution homes. The protestors frustration

did not stop them from fixing their tents and rebuilding their homes again. On the same hand, when violence occur, protestors would hide out or protest in other areas peacefully, which is explained in Catch me if you can sketch. Additionally, A prison in my home talks about the barrier that television screens create between me and the revolution.

Martyr square is drawn as an isometric that represents the big fist statue and Martyr statue as monumental and important meeting points.

On the 15th of November, protestors residing in the tents took a shower from a police water hose next in Riad el Solh area (15 November). They completely deconstructed the current environment and transformed this private domestic activity into a public shared one. A bathroom is created.

A comparison between the police shield and the woman with the burned car is sketched. The policemen defend themselves in case of confrontation with the shield; the woman s destructed car did not put her down as she used the incident to show strength.

On the 30th of November, to avoid civil war and assure national unity, the women from Khanda el Ghami and Tabaris grouped and marched together, hand in hand. Protection is provided

Throughout the whole period, phones were a major part of the revolution as they helped manage the movement of protestors and covered the live events without bias. The revolution lives virtually, too.

So, a map of the revolution was created in my mind as I personally perceived the different spaces throughout the protests. Many isometrics portrayed Bechara el Khoury and Damascus streets as seating area and a broken area. The

mosque and the church collided to form one entity. People pass in them and around them as they unite. Then, the addition of all the isometrics generated the mental map in my mind in a physical form, as one revolution area. All along, the experience in a certain space and the activity it holds create its physical form in my mind.

How can I benefit from this information?

I drew a final isometric map from what I gathered before, but now, the physical spaces are constructed to benefit the revolution. From what I learnt in my journey, each element should help the protest activity it holds to maximize the revolution experience and ultimately make it more successful. The ring provides room for activities and hide-out while being locked. The egg is fortified and presents platforms for different usages. Next to it there is a shelter. The Azarieh area has a big strong pavilion to withstand the attacks. Martyr square is a landmark that hosts big talks and has shelter. The Riad el Solh area has several water ponds and showers to defend the protesters from tear gas bombs, has a canopy and a shelter next to the monument. The Mosque-Church is now a fortress that is immune to any violence and its only goal is to gather people around it and inside of it to assure peace and unity. Roads are branching out from everywhere to facilitate circulation and the whole area is shielded by a square fortification.

In conclusion, this revolution made it clear for me that what makes architecture is not its physical components, but rather its emotional and mental components, and how the people use it to produce their social space. Throughout the cathartic journey I underwent, sketching different moments in the revolution, initially I was solely focusing on depicting feelings I sensed, but as I continued, these feelings were subconsciously creating spaces in my drawings that I can easily identify now.



**Welcome to my personal sketchbook!**

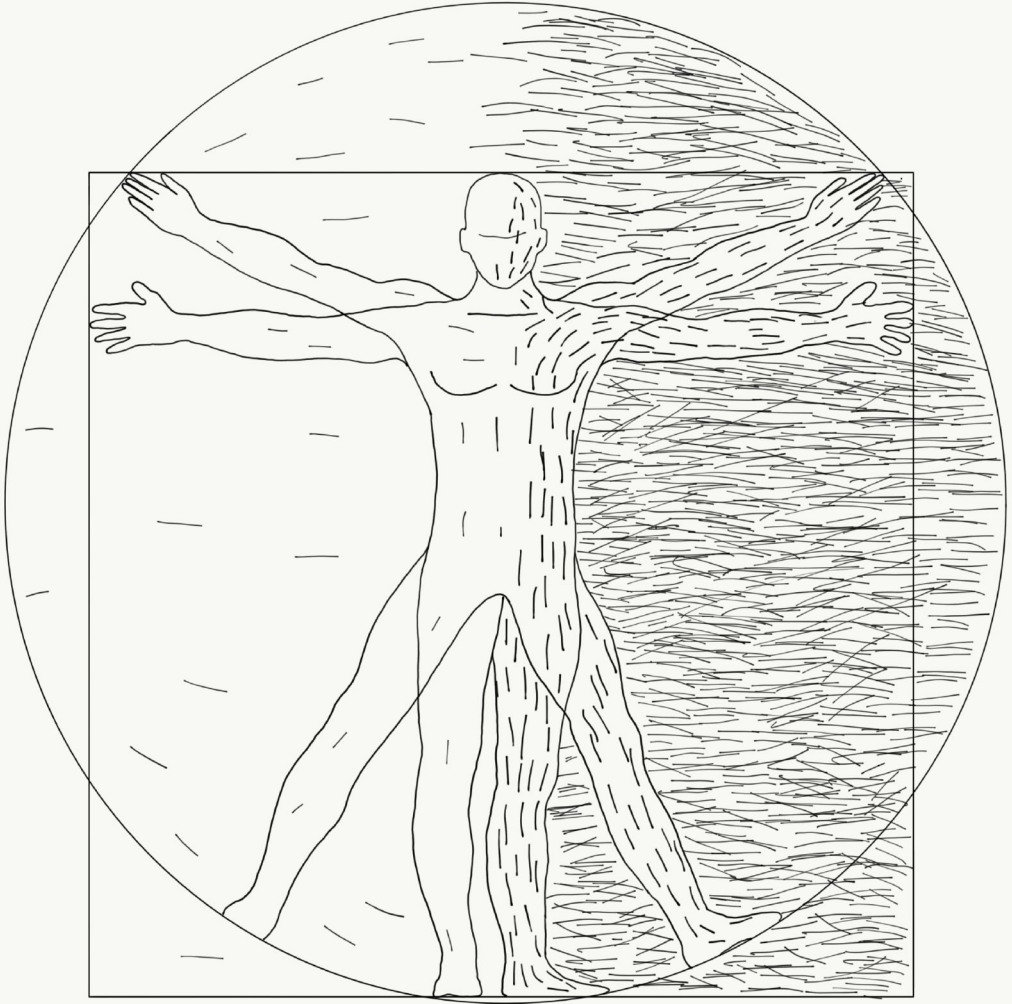
**You will walk through the Lebanese revolution experience through my lens.  
Different days are depicted and as you walk through, you will start to create  
mental spaces based on what you see and interpret from the sketches.**

**Disclaimer: everything you see here is based on my personal perception & feelings  
and does not represent reality!**

إدراك المساحات

**Perception of spaces**



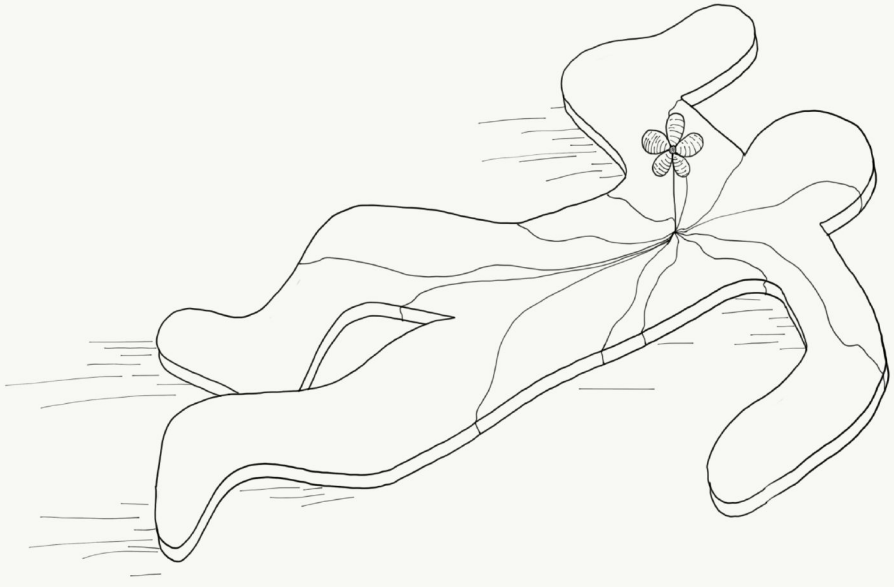


**We behold, touch, listen and measure  
the world with our entire bodily existence,  
and the experiential world becomes organized  
and articulated around the center of the body.  
Our domicile is the refuge of our body, memory and identity.**

**We are in constant dialogue and interaction with the environment,  
to the degree that it is impossible to detach the image of the Self  
from its spatial and situational existence.**

**'I am my body,' Gabriel Marcel claims,  
but 'I am the space, where I am,' establishes the poet Noel Arnaud.**

**'Juhani Pallasmaa - The eyes of the skin'**



التنفس السطحي: رسم

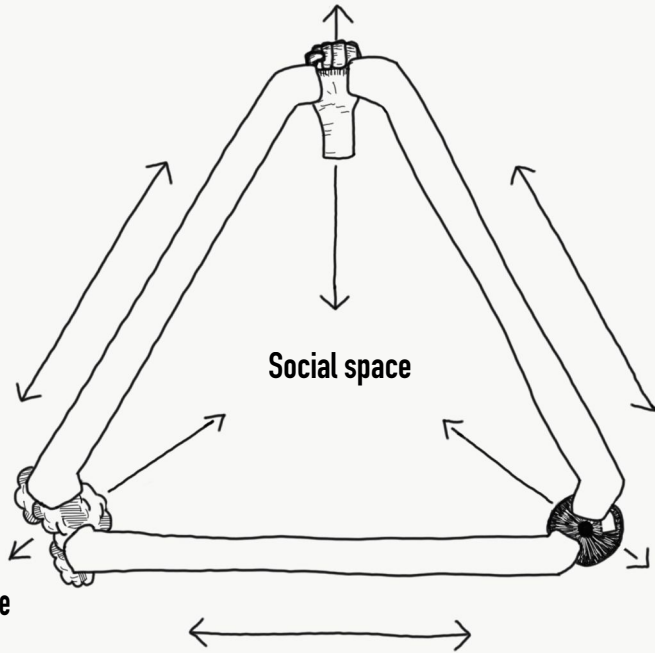
**Personal Catharsis: Sketching**



**'The users' space is lived - not represented or conceived'**  
**Henri Lefebvre**

## Lived space

embodied experience  
'what is felt'



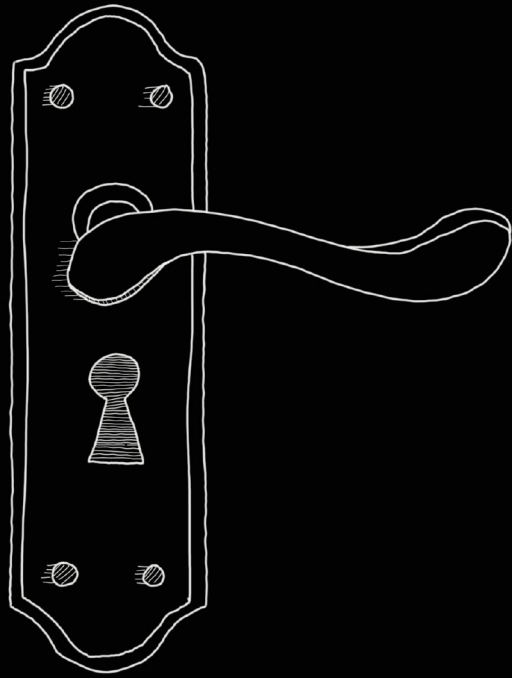
## Conceived space

abstract; representations  
'what is thought'

## Perceived space

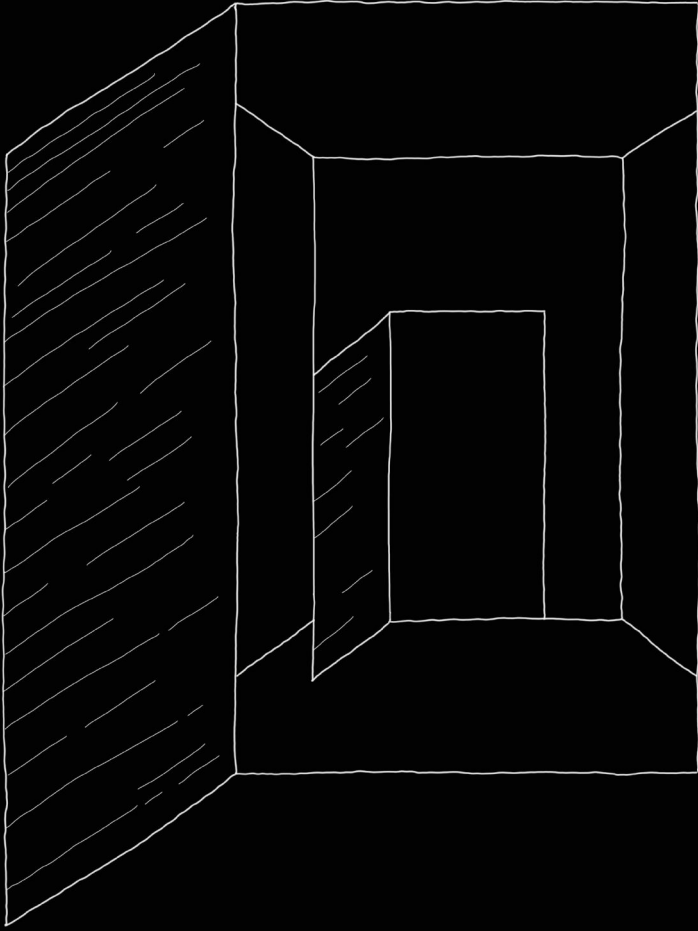
material; spatial practice  
'what is seen'

## The spatial Triad



**a deep breath**





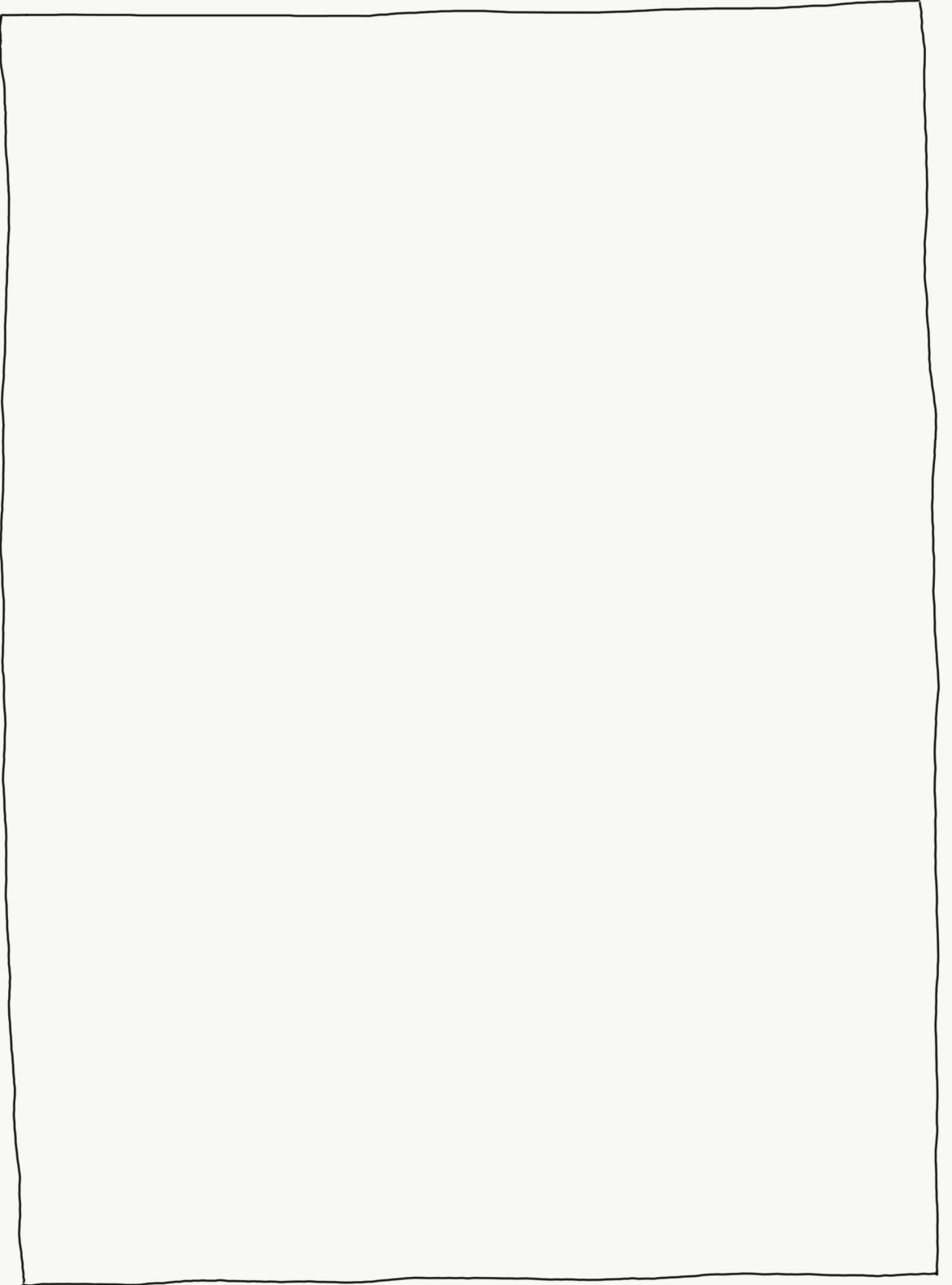
نفس عمير

فُسْهَد مِنْ النُّورَة

**a sight from the revolution**

ارسم كما تَرى

draw as you see





دراسة الثورة من خلال رسومات شخصية

**Studying the revolution through personal drawings**

اختناق وعمر

**Suffocation and blindness**

**Tear gases are thrown on the protestors.**

**Terror is created.**



بصت عن الهواء

**Gasping for air**

**Running from the tear gas, my instinct directed me  
to take cover under the first tree I could see.**

**A shelter is created.**

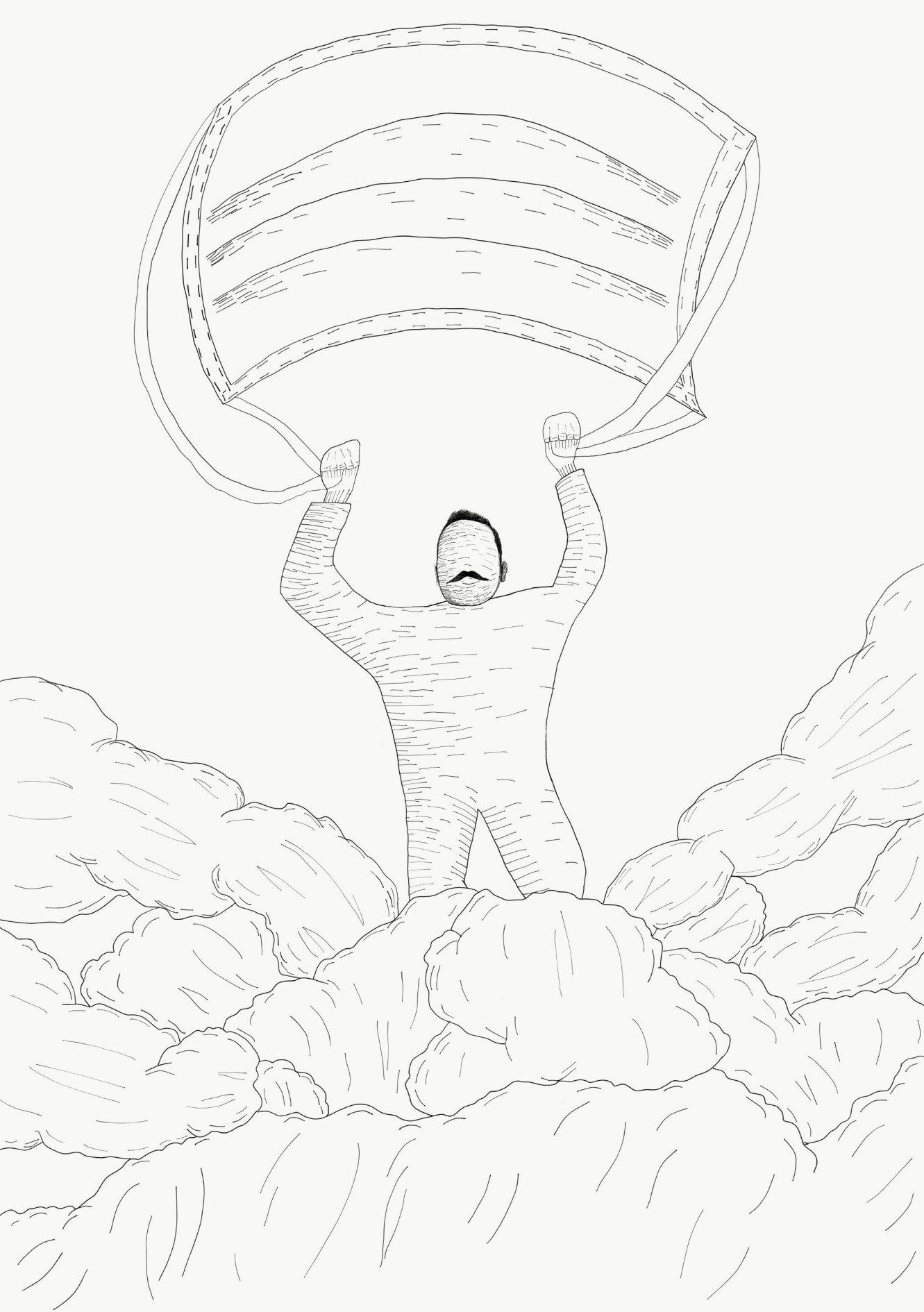




احبس أنفاسك لتبقى على قيد الحياة  
Hold your breath to stay alive

The face mask, pressed against my face, protected me from the outside gas.

Protection is provided.



حذر  
Alert

**Following the previous events, I have become very cautious.  
Crowds, quick movements and loud noises scare me.**

**Isolation is my new home.**

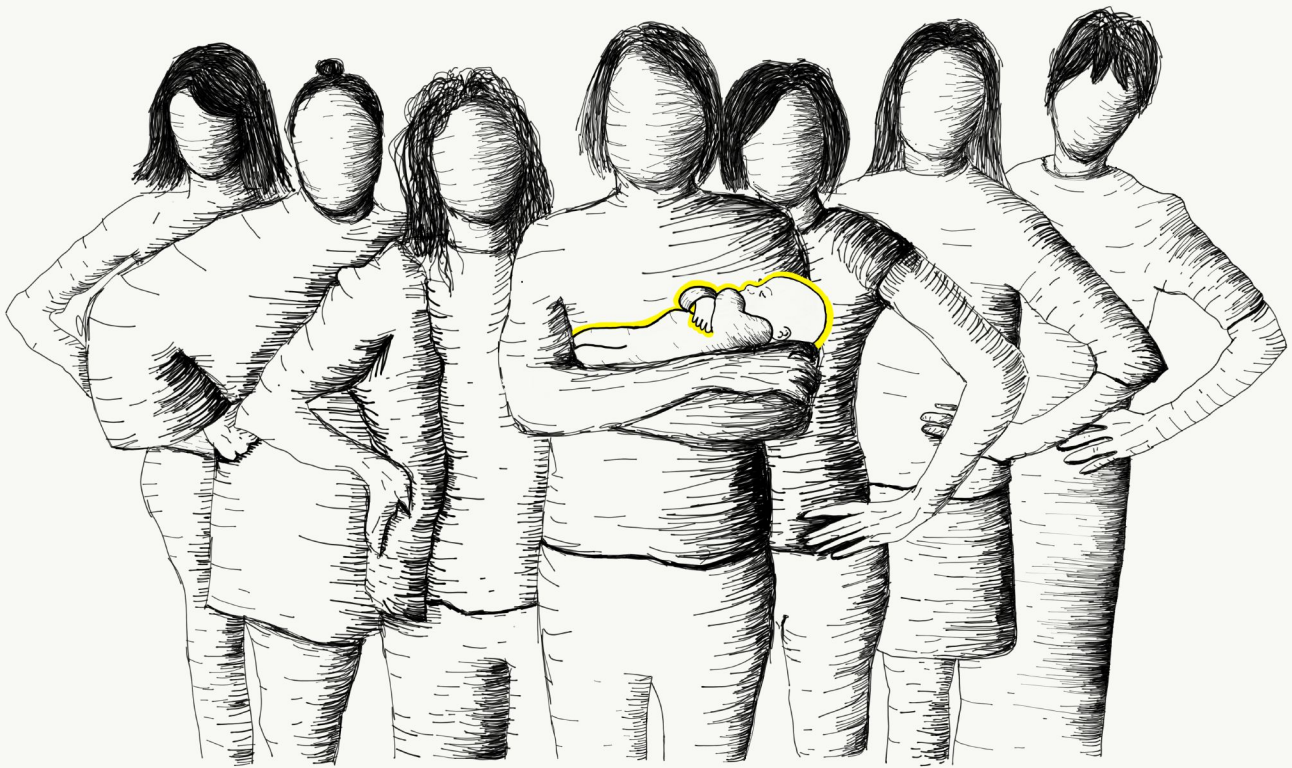


سند أنثى بألف رجال  
تبنى بفسه و سدود

**The support of a woman, worth a thousand men  
Builds shields on their backs**

**A women frontline stands between the protesters and the police  
at the Seray to avoid confrontation and violence.**

**A shelter is created.**



كعك

Ka'ak, ka'ak

**Merchants appropriated different spaces to put up their sends.  
Different local goods were sold all across the areas.**

**Markets are created.**



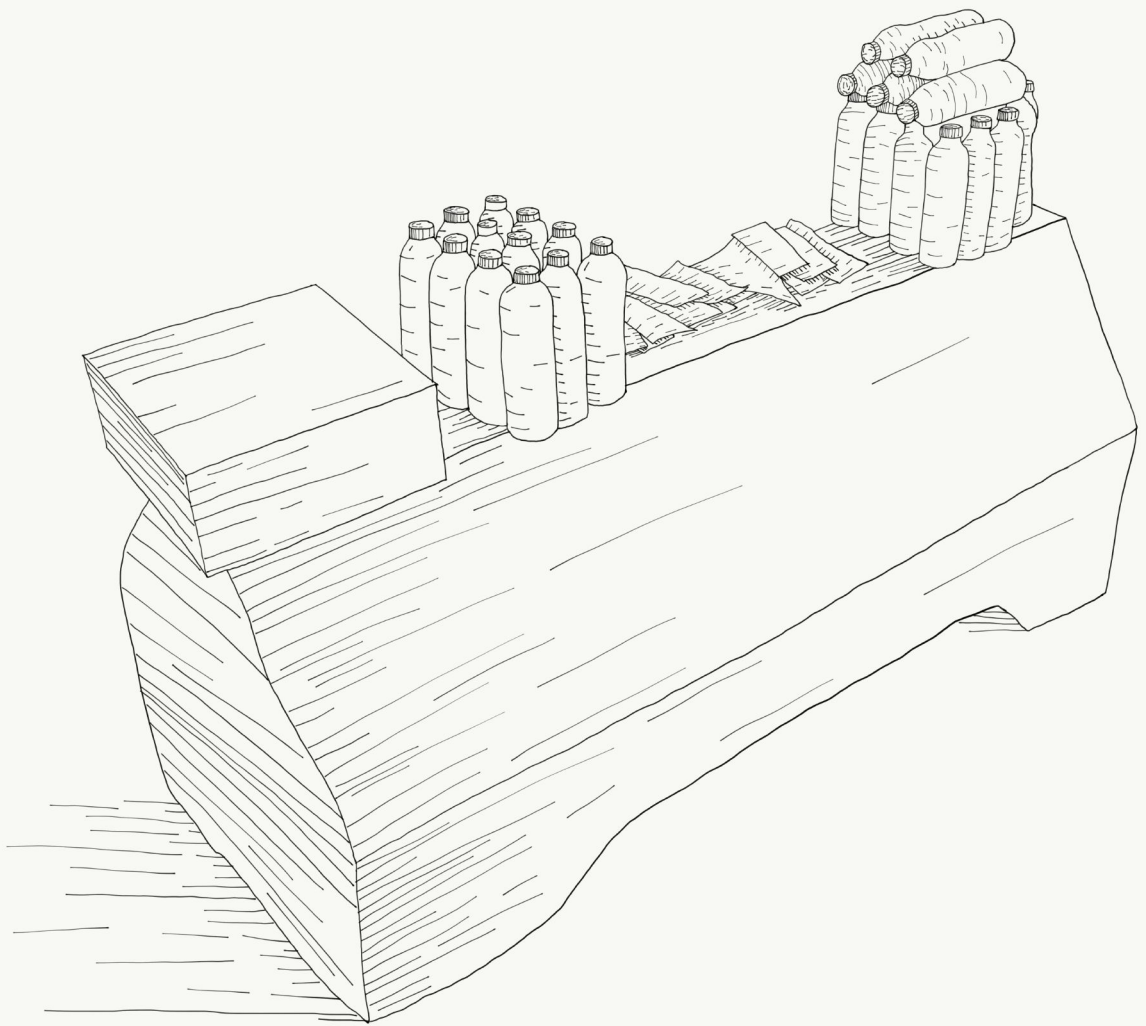


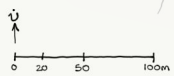
دکانہ

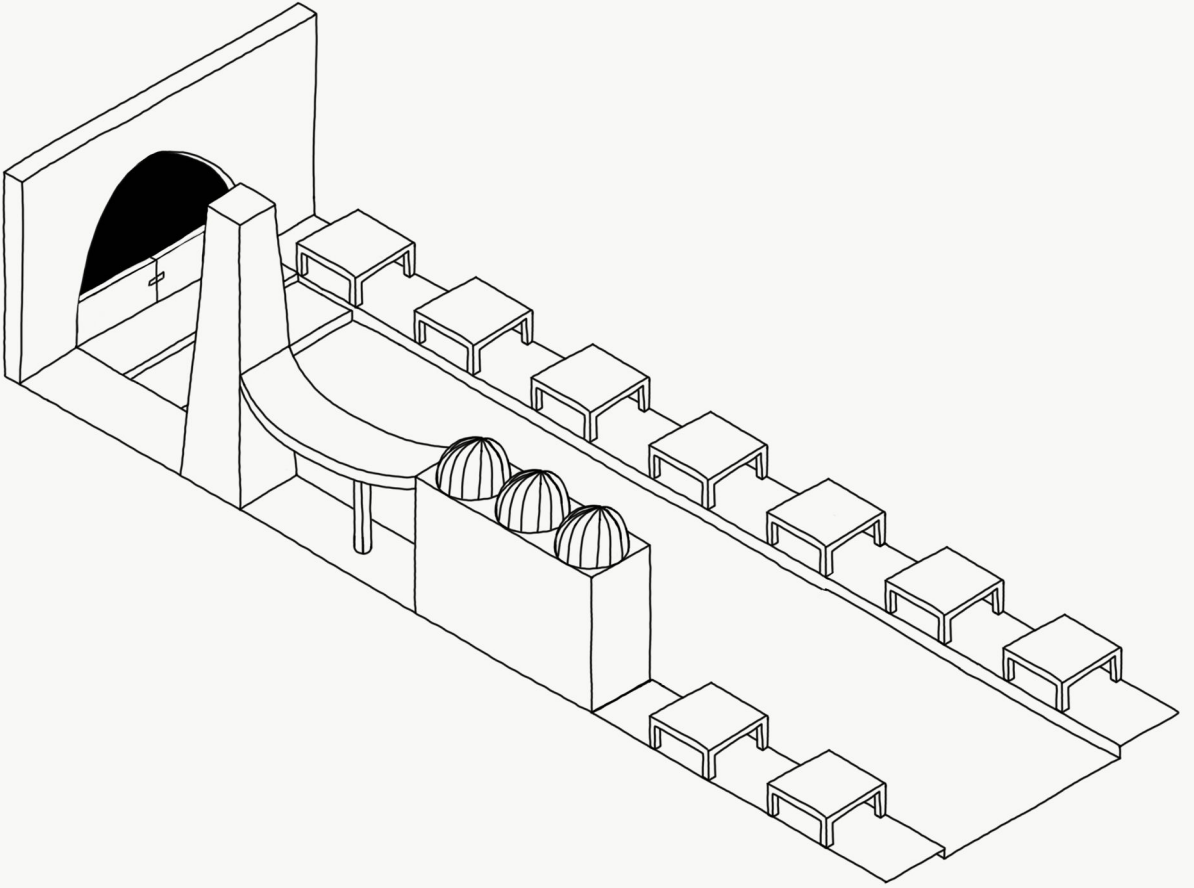
## A minimarket

Merchants were making use of pre existing elements in the area to showcase their products.

A market is created.







رياض الصلح

Riad el Solh

فَهْمَ بِبَلَّاسْر

**A haircut for free**

**Hairdressers invaded the protest areas  
to offer haircuts for free.**

**A salon is created.**



السَّمْسُ وراء الغيوم  
The sun is behind the clouds

**Umbrellas and ponchos protecting the protestors from heavy rain.**

**A shelter is created.**



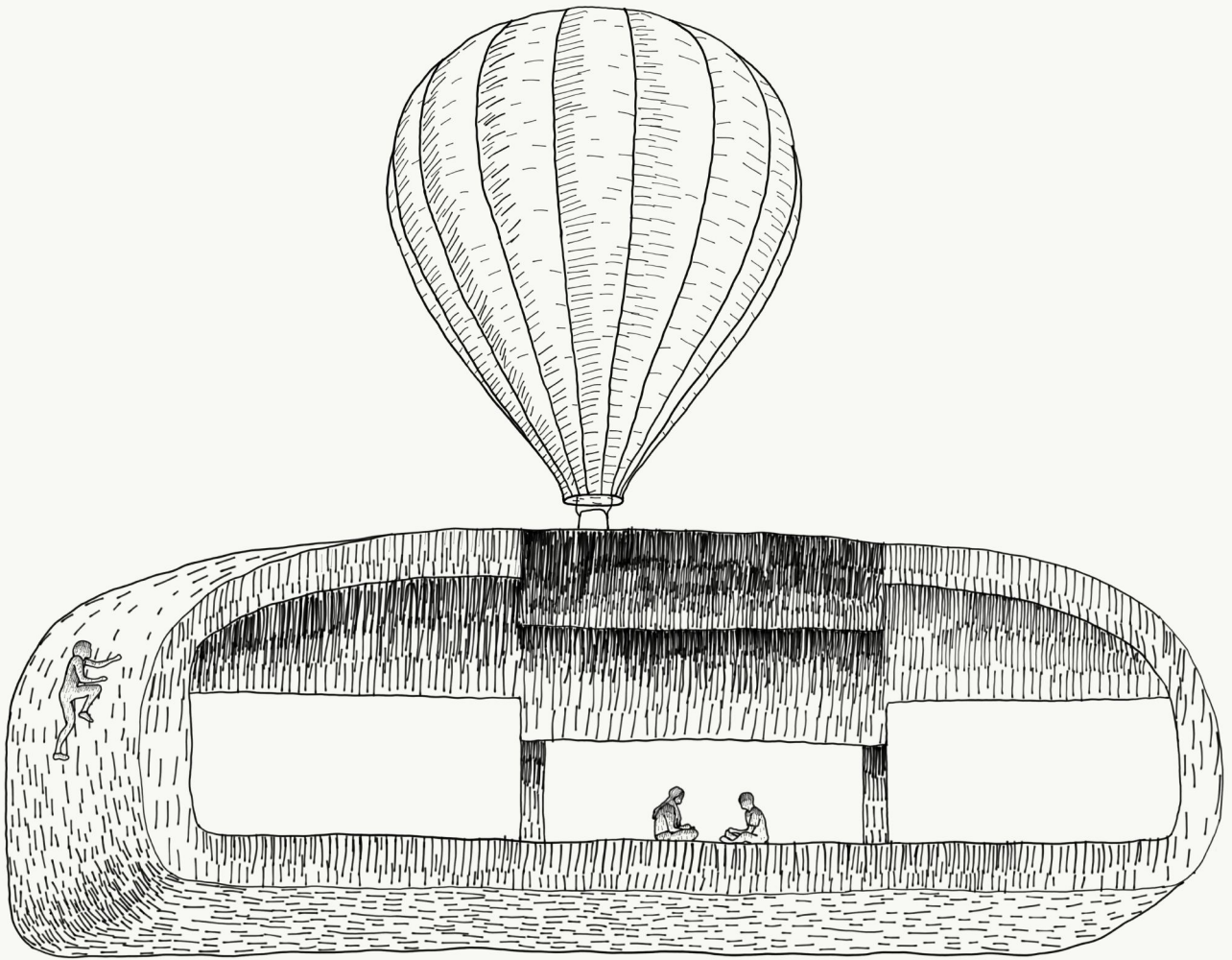


اطلب العلم ولو في البيضة

**Ask for education  
Even if found in the Egg**

**The abandoned landmark, "The Egg", gets revived  
as students move their meetings to it.**

**A classroom is created.**

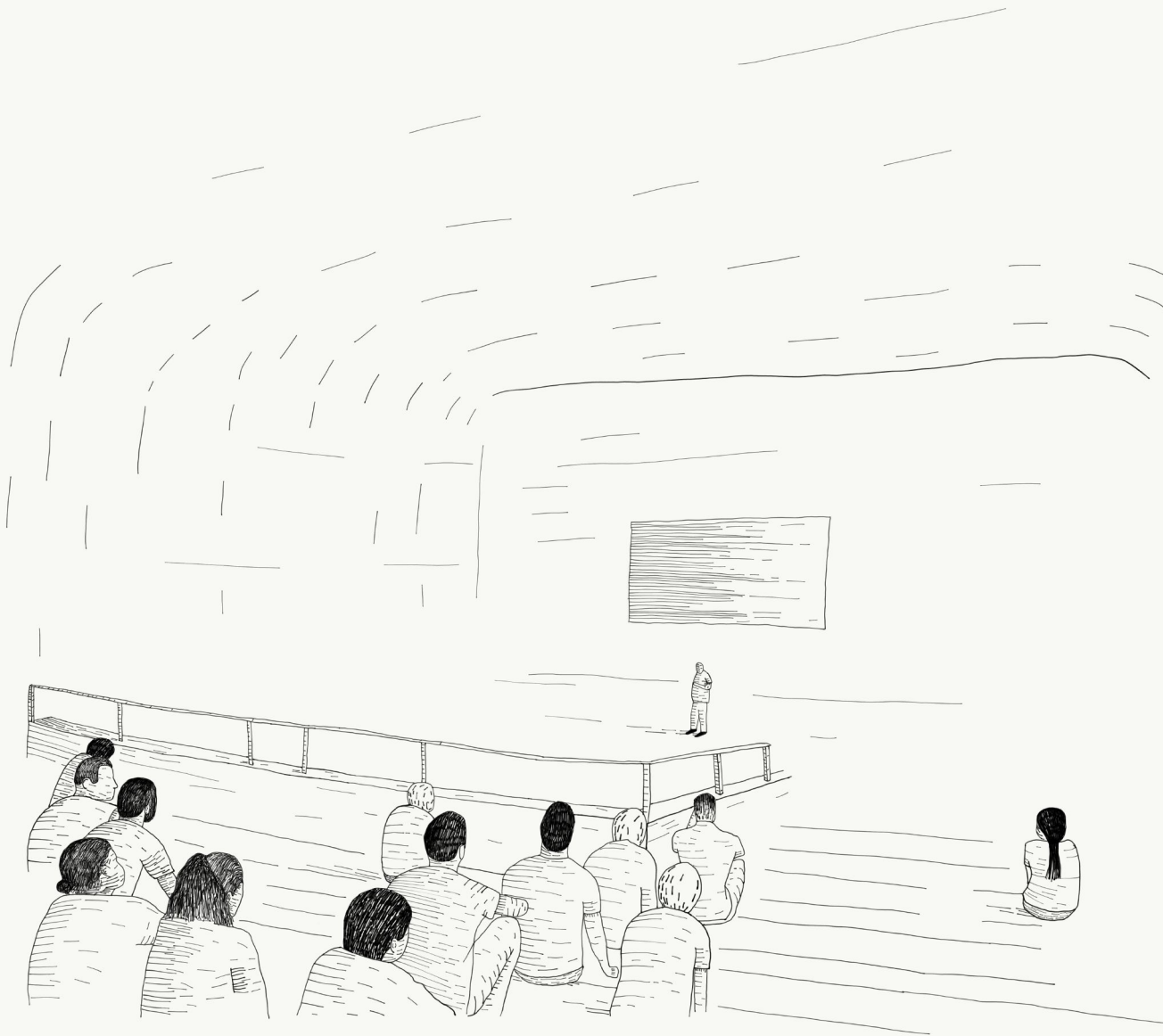


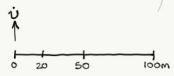
اطلب العلم ولو في البيضة

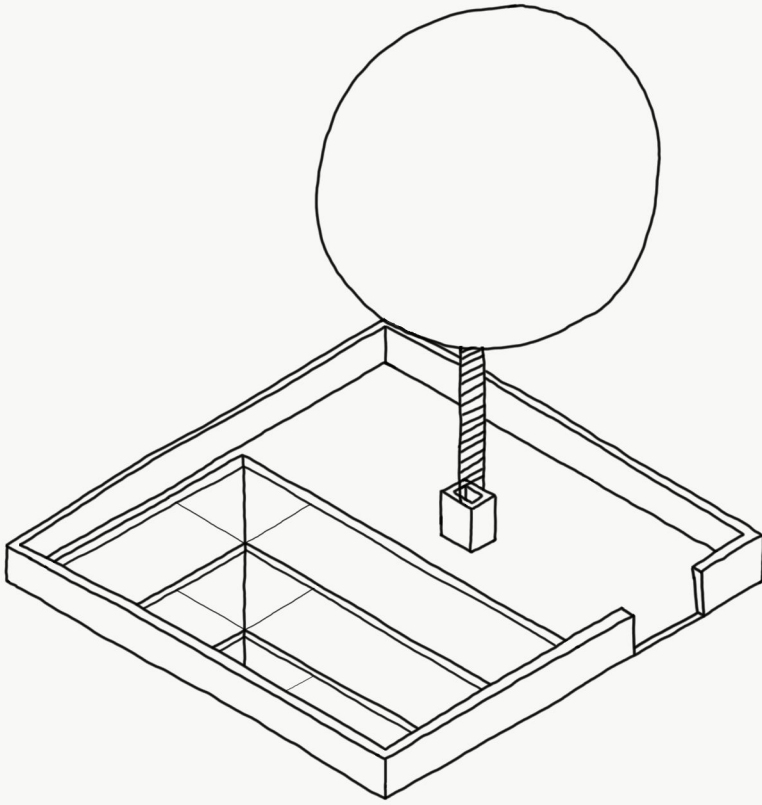
**Ask for education  
Even if found in the Egg**

**Progressively, "The Egg" is regaining its iconic value.  
Major lectures are being held inside of it.**

**A lecture hall is created.**

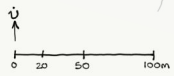




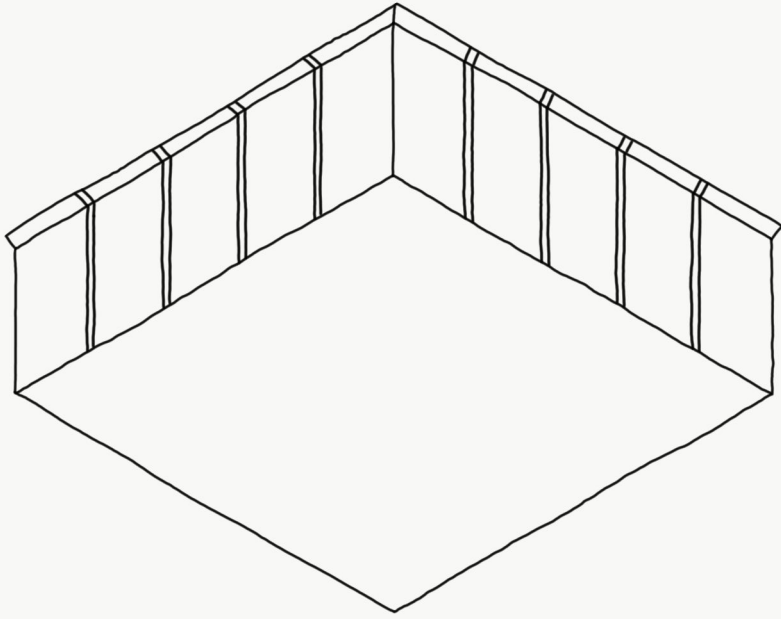


البيضة

The Egg







شارع غلاسر

Gellas St.

## طاولة حوار

### A table for discussion

**Public spaces are being appropriated.  
On a daily basis, different talks are being held under the tents in Azarieh area.**

**A conference area is created.**



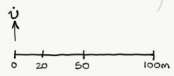
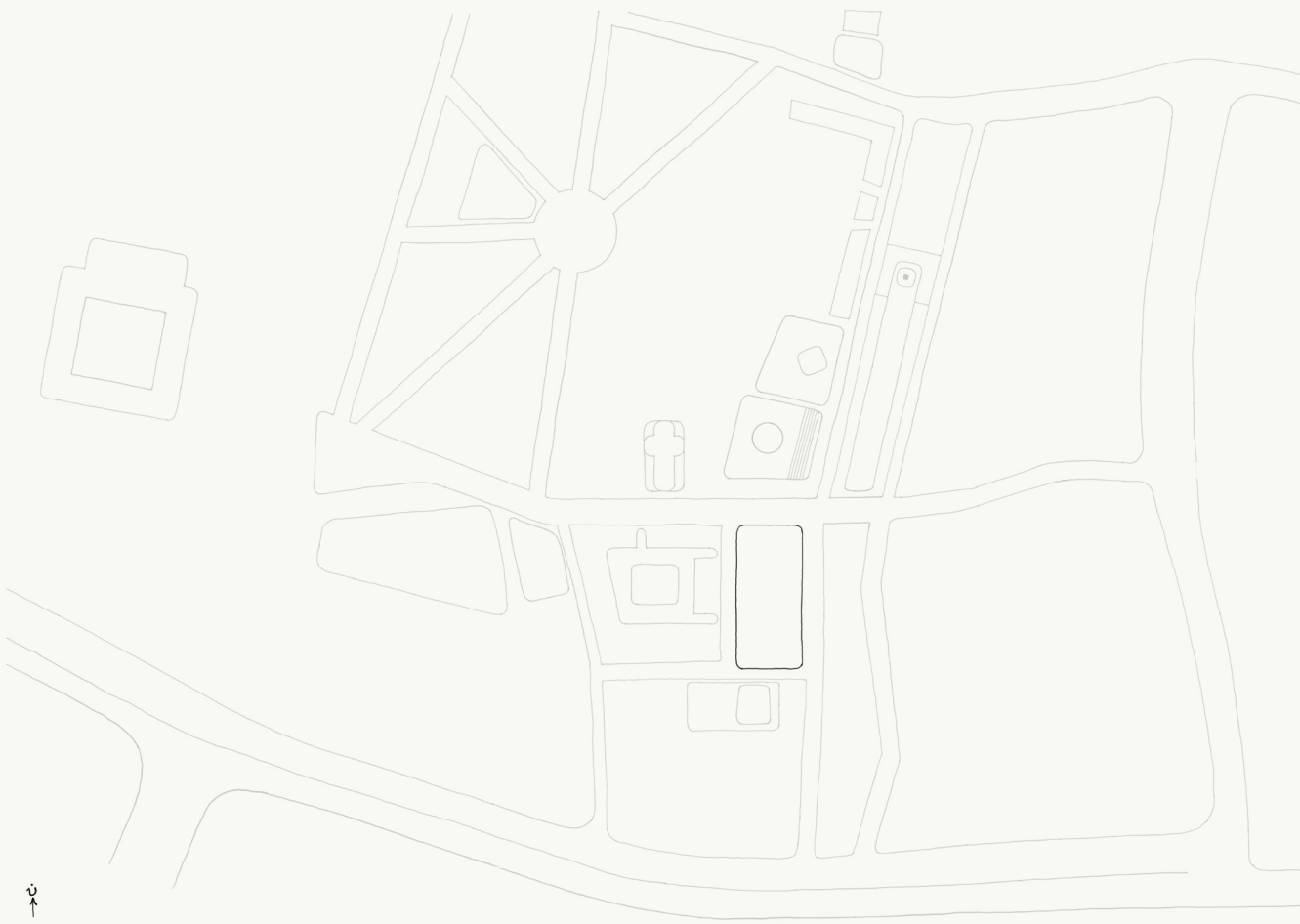
طبخ البلد

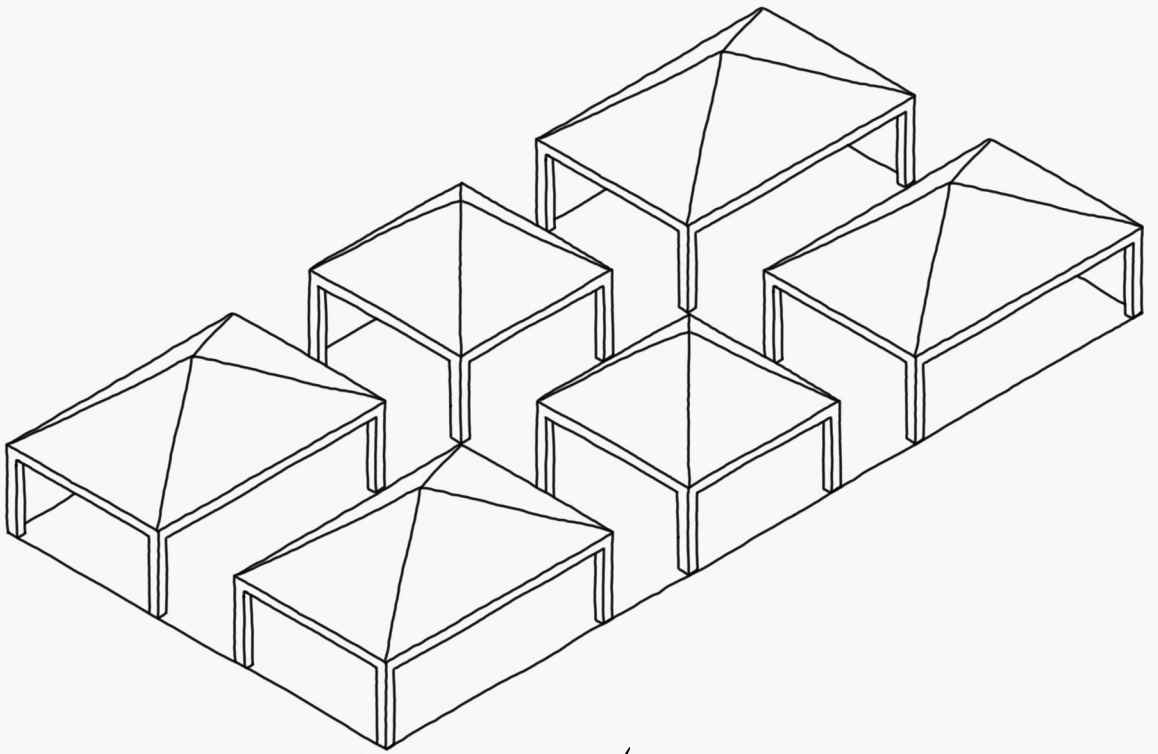
## The country's kitchen

The tents are turning from public to domestic spaces, slowly.  
Protestors are funding their own kitchen that feeds whoever is in need.

A kitchen is created.

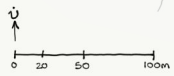




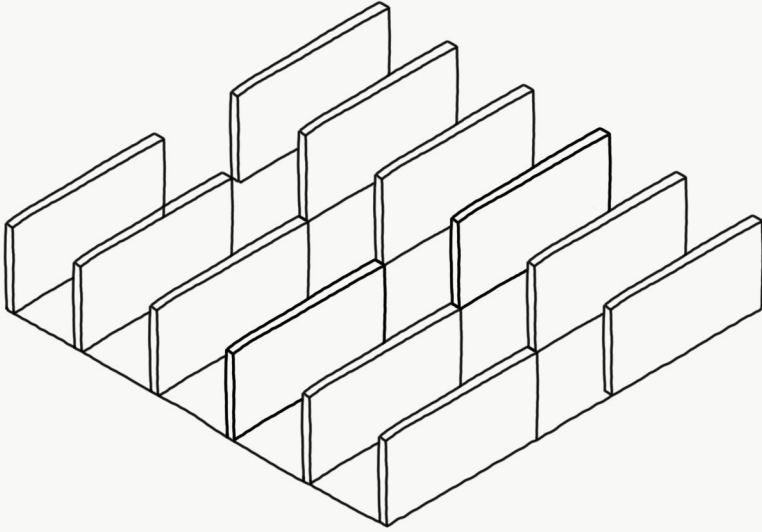


باركنغ العزازية

Azarieh parking







الغزاريّة

Azarieh



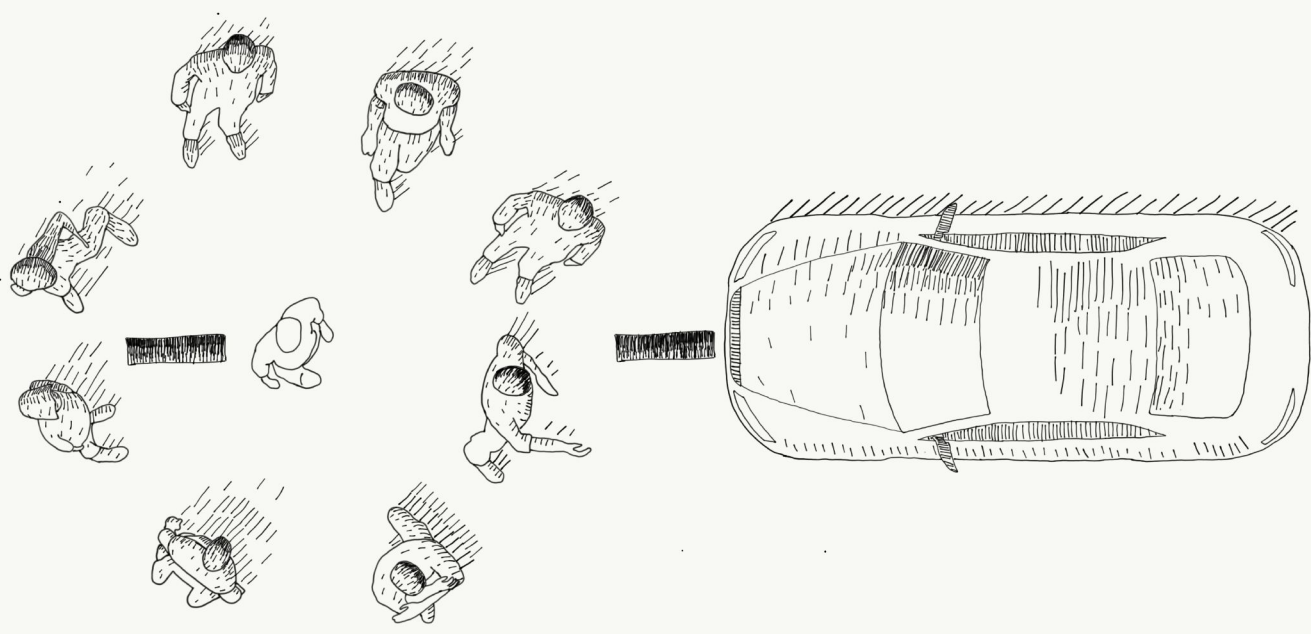


منزل فري وطننا

**A home within us**

**When closing El Ring bridge, I found safety in the midst of the people.  
Isolation made me weak.**

**Belonging is my new home.**



منزل فري وطننا

**A home within us**

**The protestors gave me strength.**

**Belonging is my new home.**



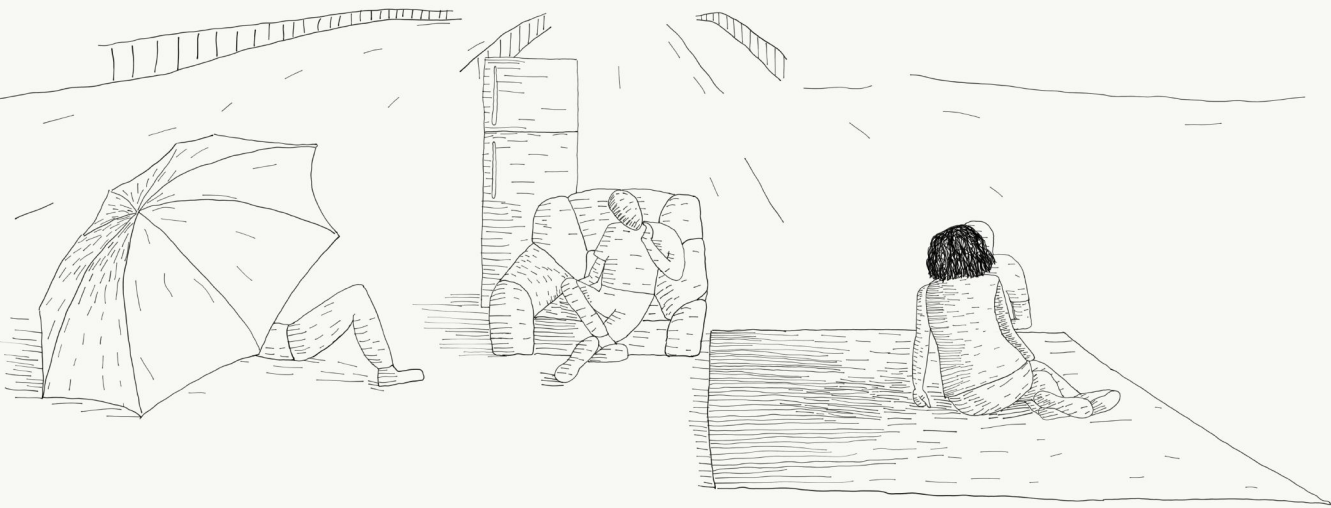
البيت بيتك

## Make yourself at home

The protestors took over the Ring bridge and claimed it for themselves as they put out a carpet, sofa, refrigerator, etc... on the road.

A kitchen/living room is created.





## نوم و النوافذ مفتوحة

### **Sleeping with the windows wide open**

**Some protestors domesticated the Ring bridge in their own way.  
They laid on its sidewalks.**

**A bedroom is created.**

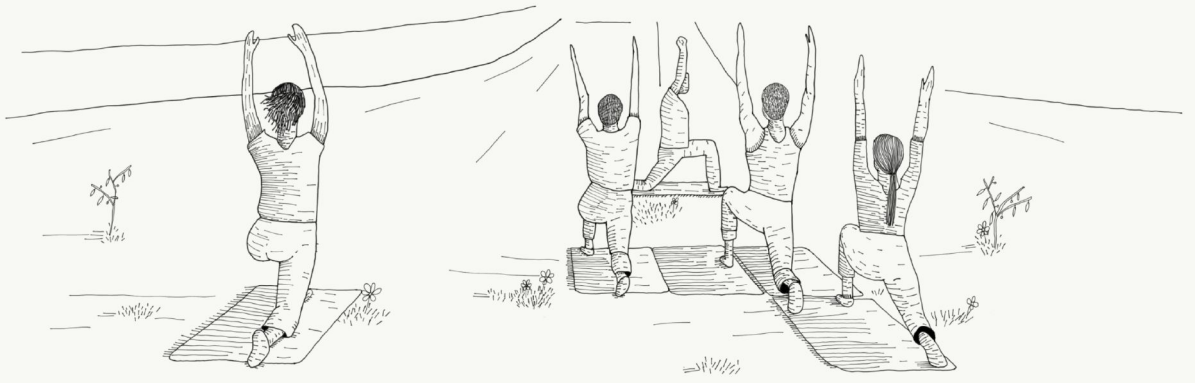


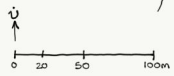
## يوغا في الطبيعة

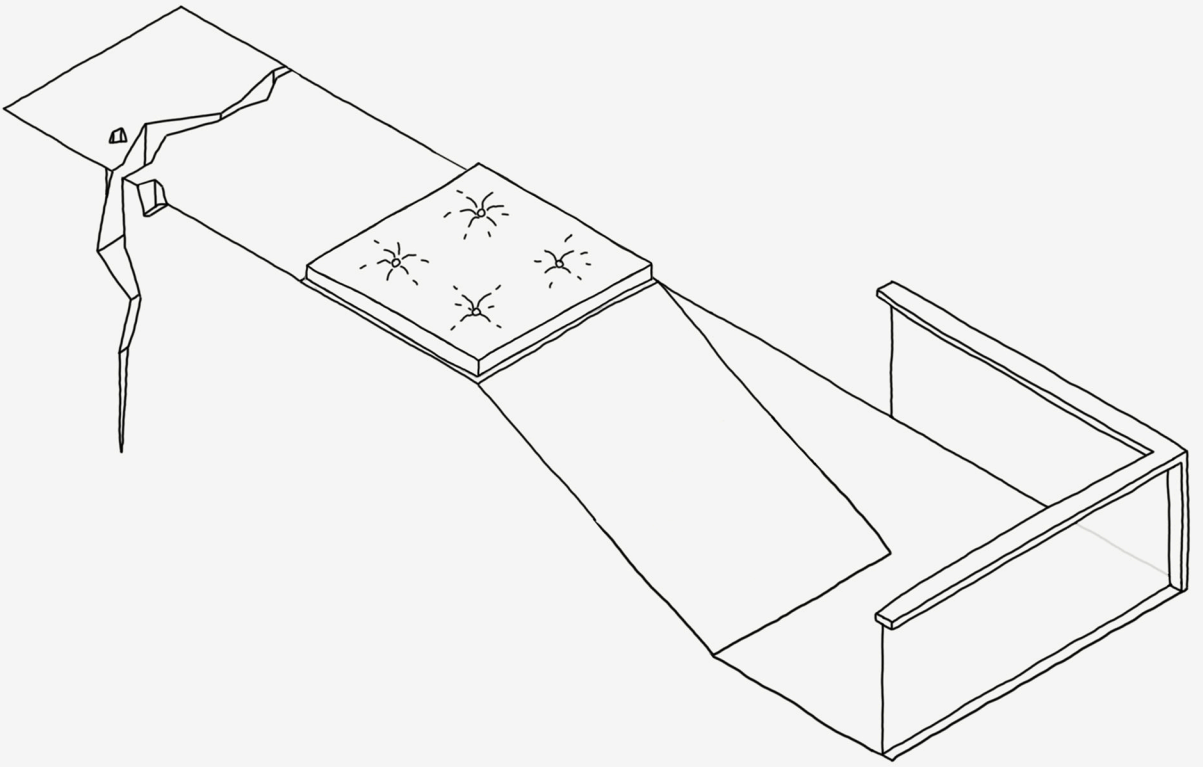
### Yoga in nature

**A group of protestors appropriated El Ring bridge  
and turned it into a yoga class.**

**A fitness/meditation area is created.**







جسر الرينغ

El Ring bridge

استراحة للمتظاهرين

**A break for the rebels**

**The protestors have appropriated the revolution's spaces, fully.  
Clothes are getting washed and hanged, and tents are colliding.**

**A living room is created.**





راجع ينعم

**It will be built all over again**

**Anti-revolution groups terrorized the areas  
and broke down the protestors' tents.**

**A home is destructed, but not for long...**

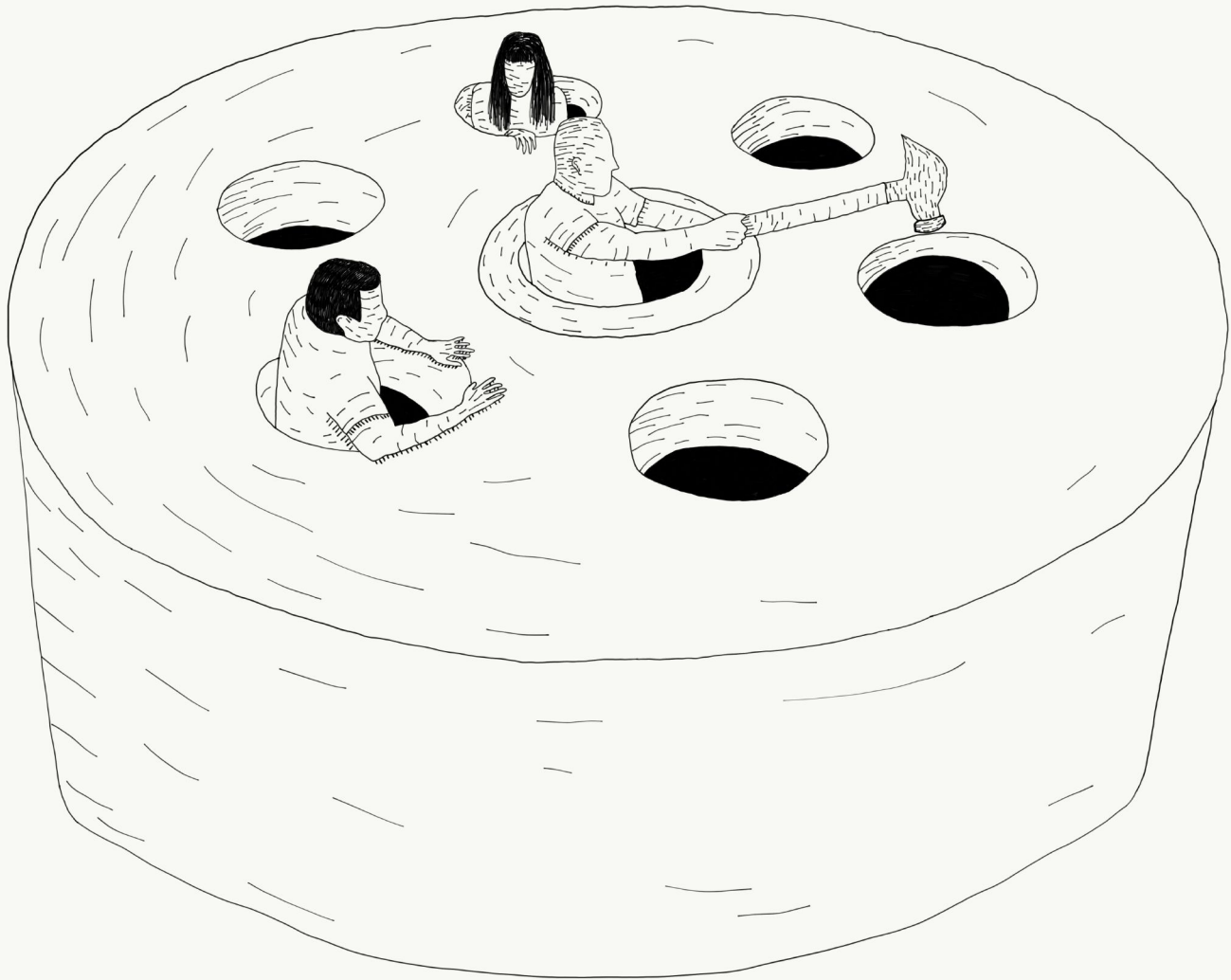


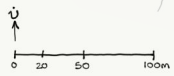
لَقَنِي اِذَا فِينِي

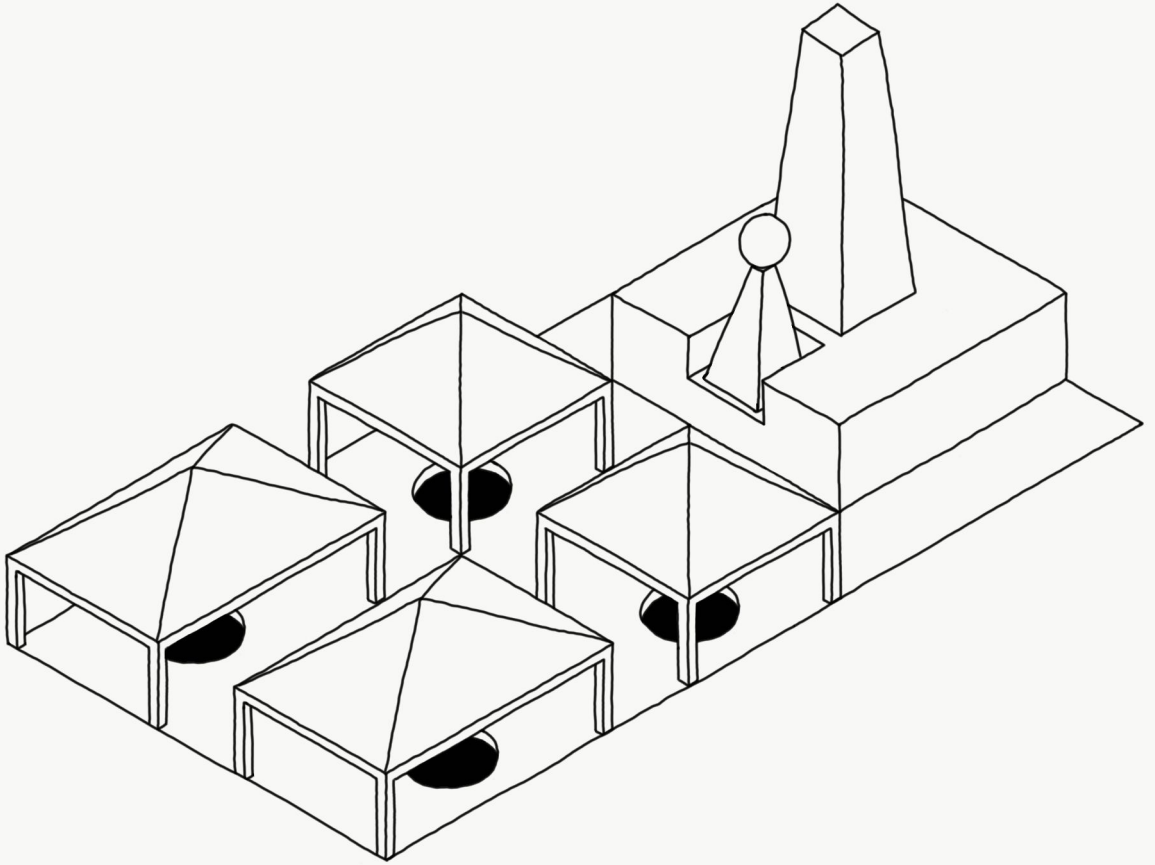
Catch me if you can

**When confronted, protestors avoid violence, they either return home to protest later or go directly to protest somewhere else. They are untouchable.**

**A hideout is created.**







ساحة الشهداء

Martyr Square

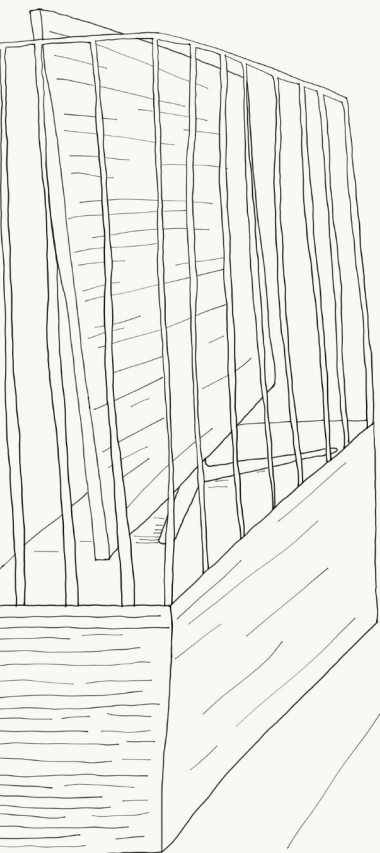
سجڻ ڦر ڦٽلير

**A prison in my home**

**Watching television from home creates a barrier between me and the revolution.**

**A barrier is created.**









ما تَنْفِئِ ال قازان

**Don't deplete the hot water**

**The protestors residing in the tents take a shower  
using the police water hose.**

**A bathroom is created.**



What will future Beirut be like if the revolution  
succeeds?

What will future Beirut be like if the revolution  
succeeds?

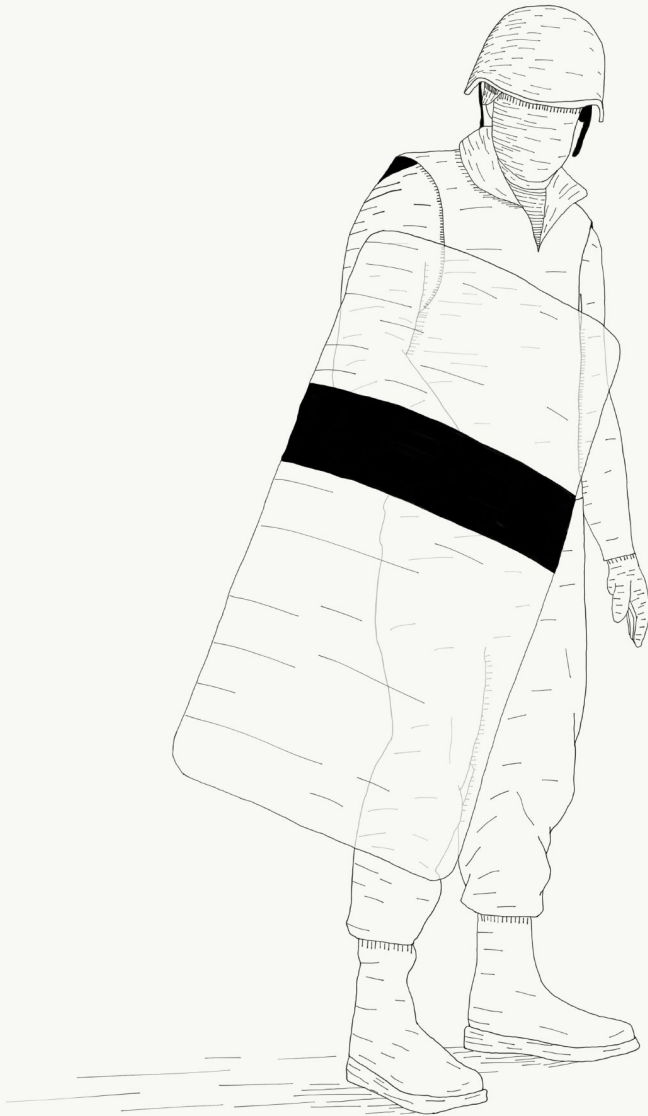
درع سلمی

Peace shield

The police needs protection as well, they use shields to defend themselves.

Protection is provided.





بعض الزهور تتفتح في الظلام

**Some flowers bloom in darkness**

**A woman's car was destroyed. She looked positive as the protestors were willing to fundraise her.**

**A shelter is destroyed. But not for long...**



كلنا بنفس التندق

**We are all in the same trench**

**Groups of women from Tabaris and Khanda' al Ghami' meet  
to assure national unity, and avoid civil war.**

**Protection is provided.**

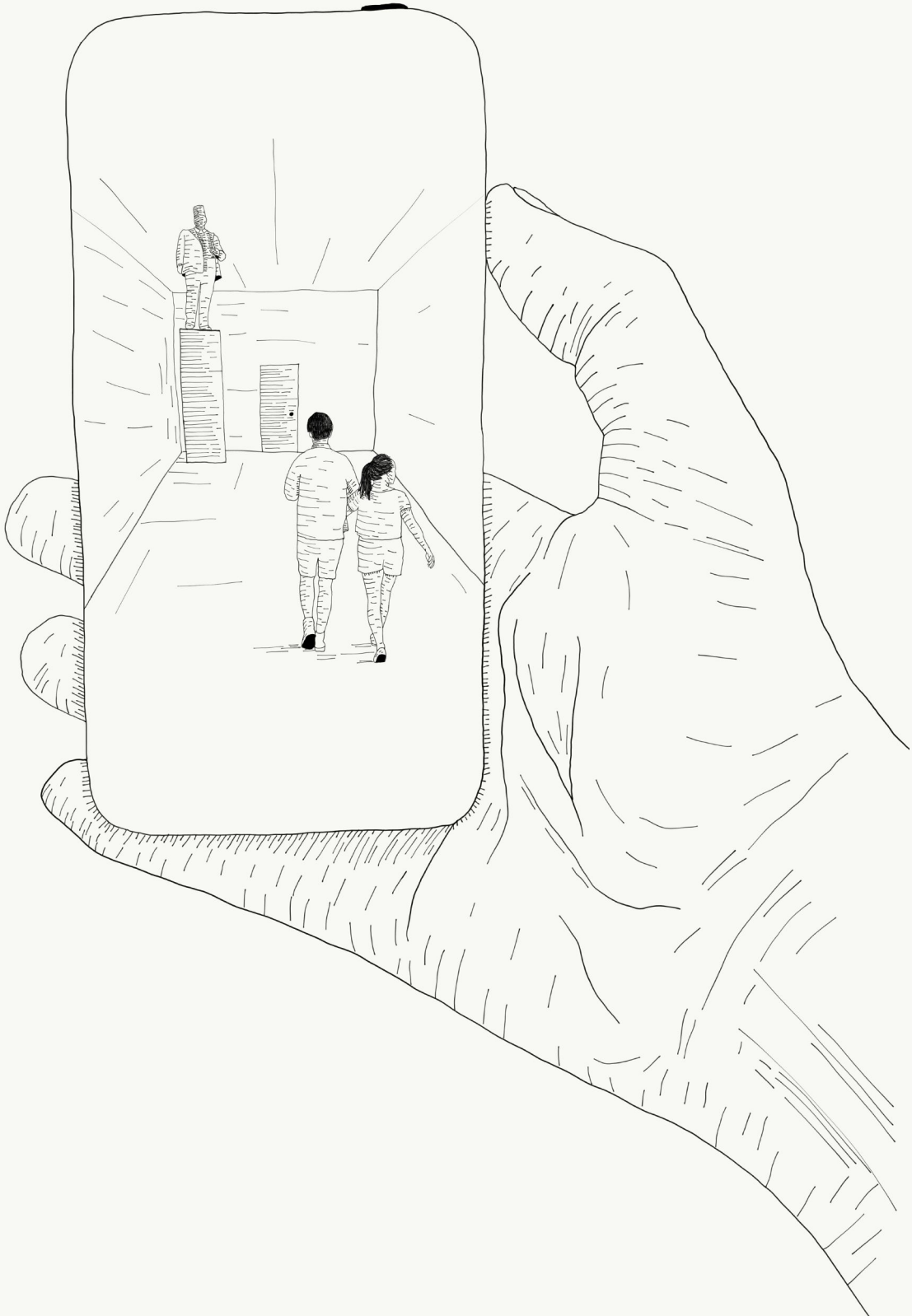


جسر بين الحقيقة و التورث

**A bridge between the truth and the turth**

**Keeping up with the news of the phone is very fast and much less biased.**

**A virtual revolution is created.**



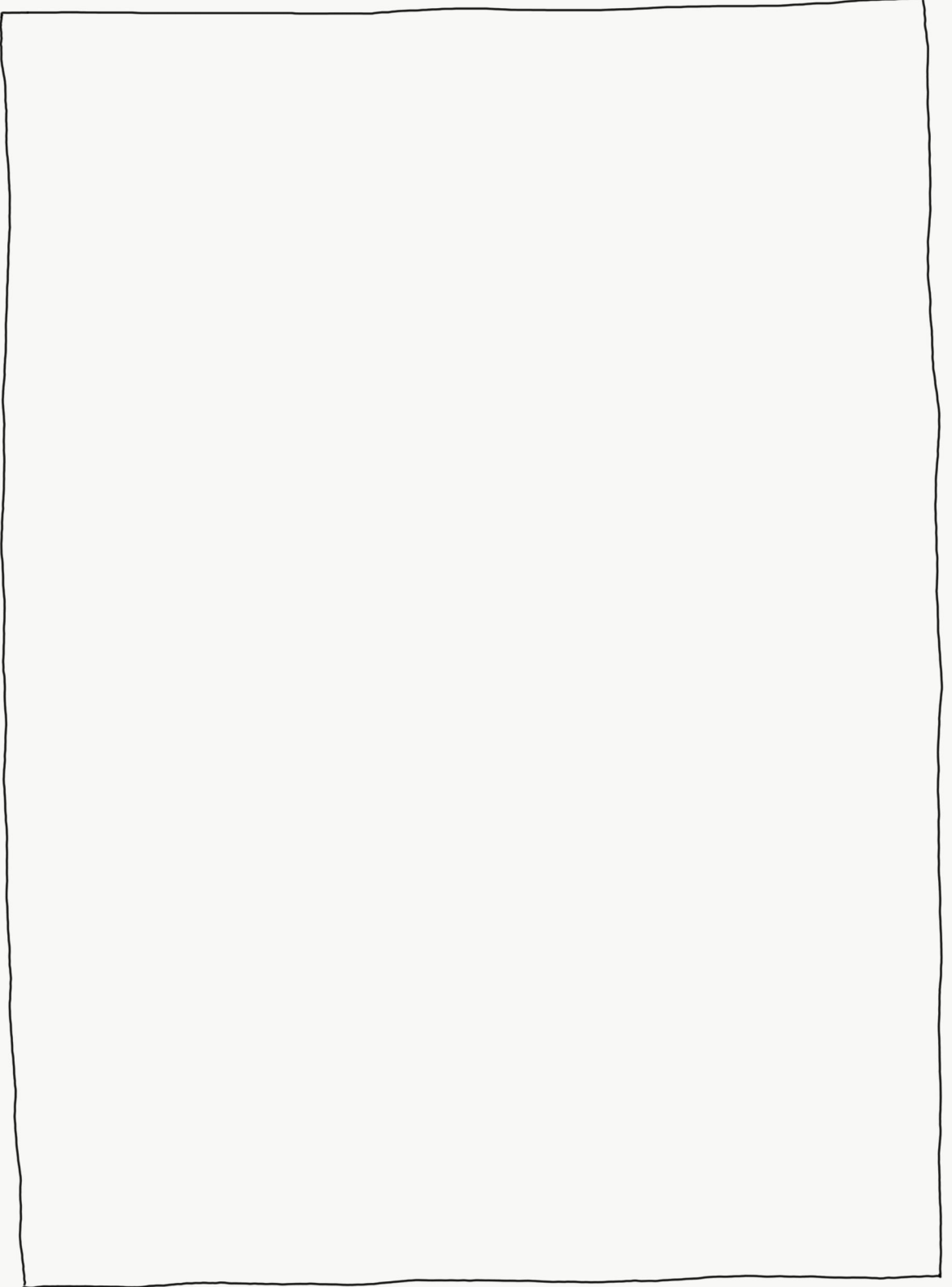
ذکر من الثورة

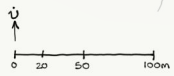
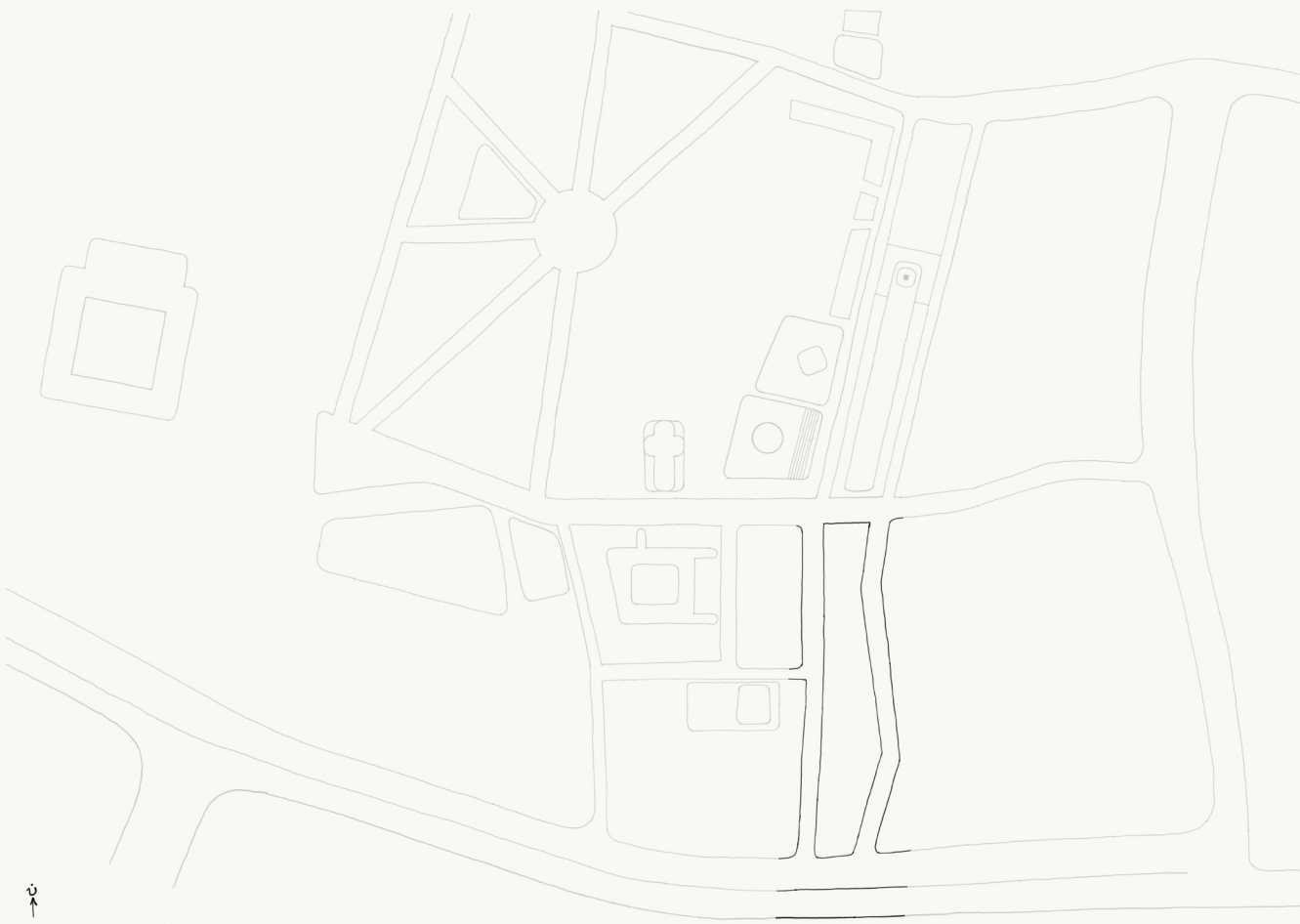
**a memory from the revolution**

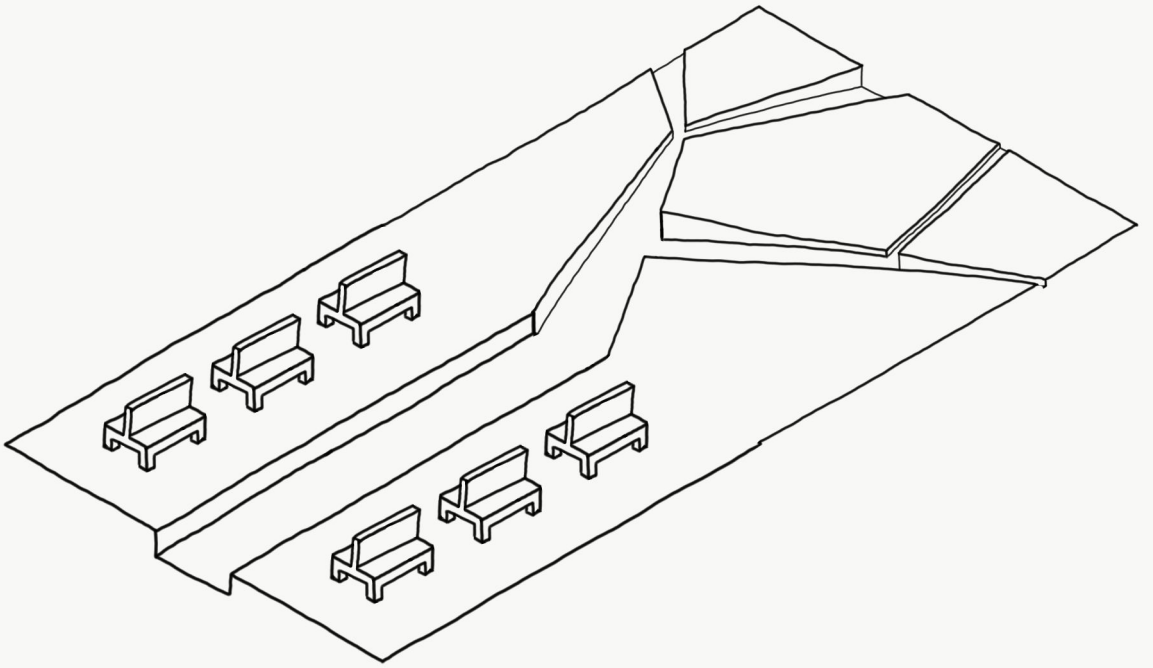


ارسم كما تشعر

draw as you feel

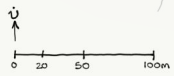
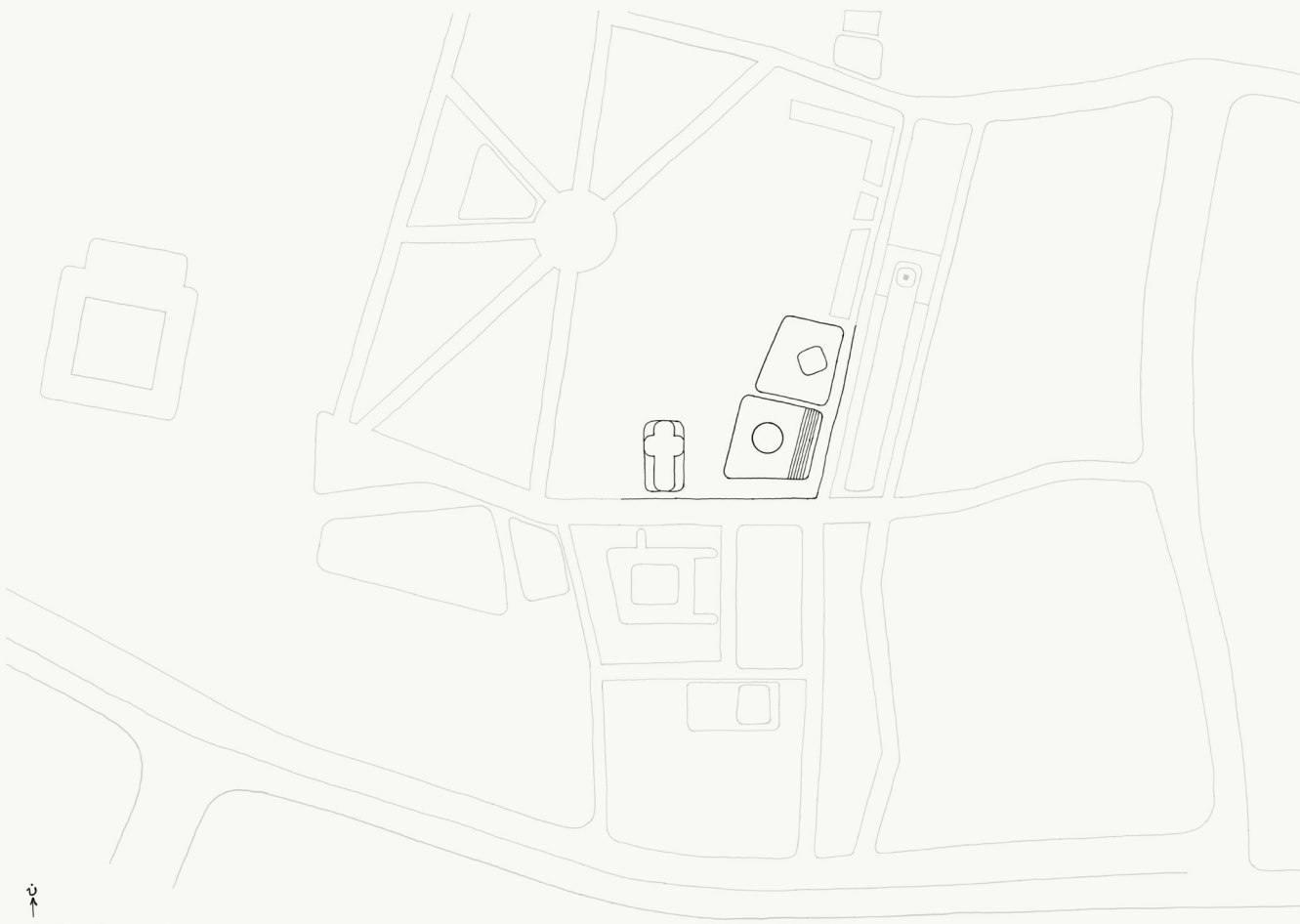


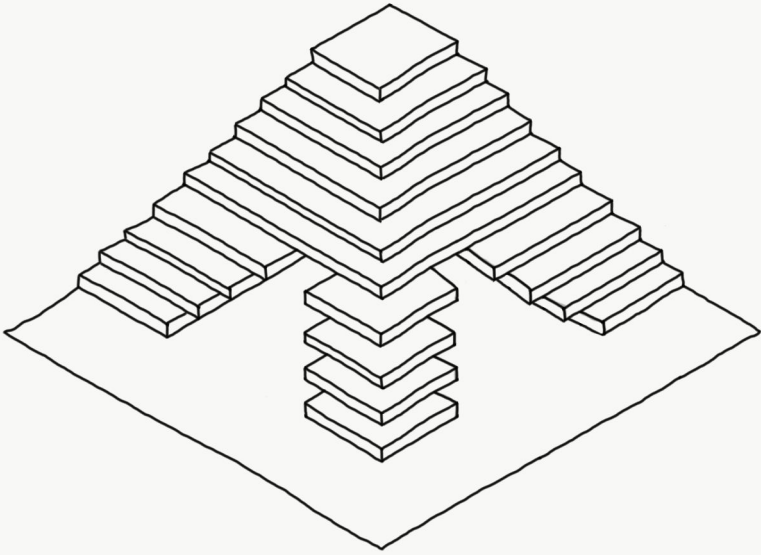




شارعاً بشارة الصوري و دمشق

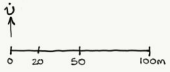
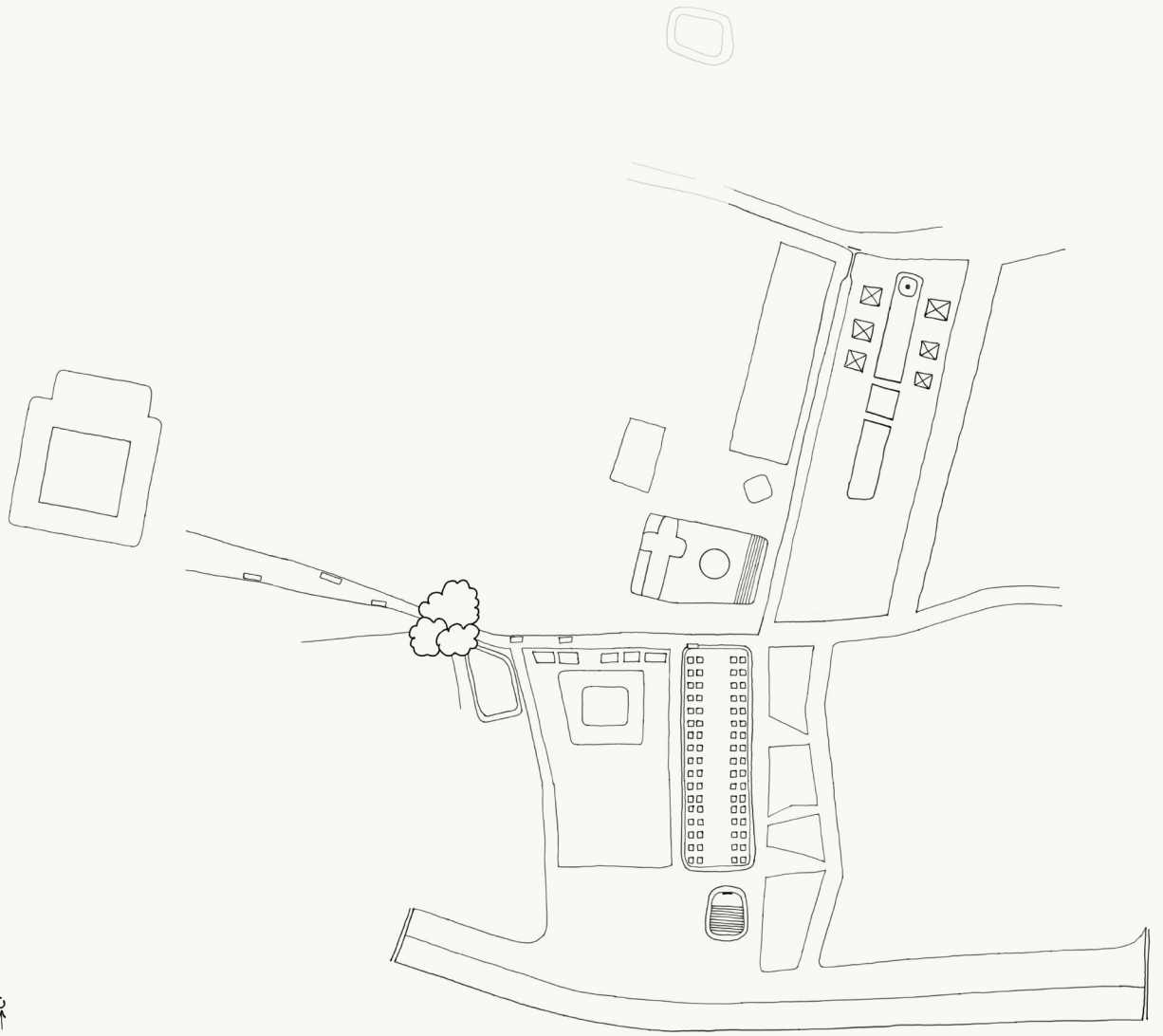
Bechara El Khoury - Damascus St.

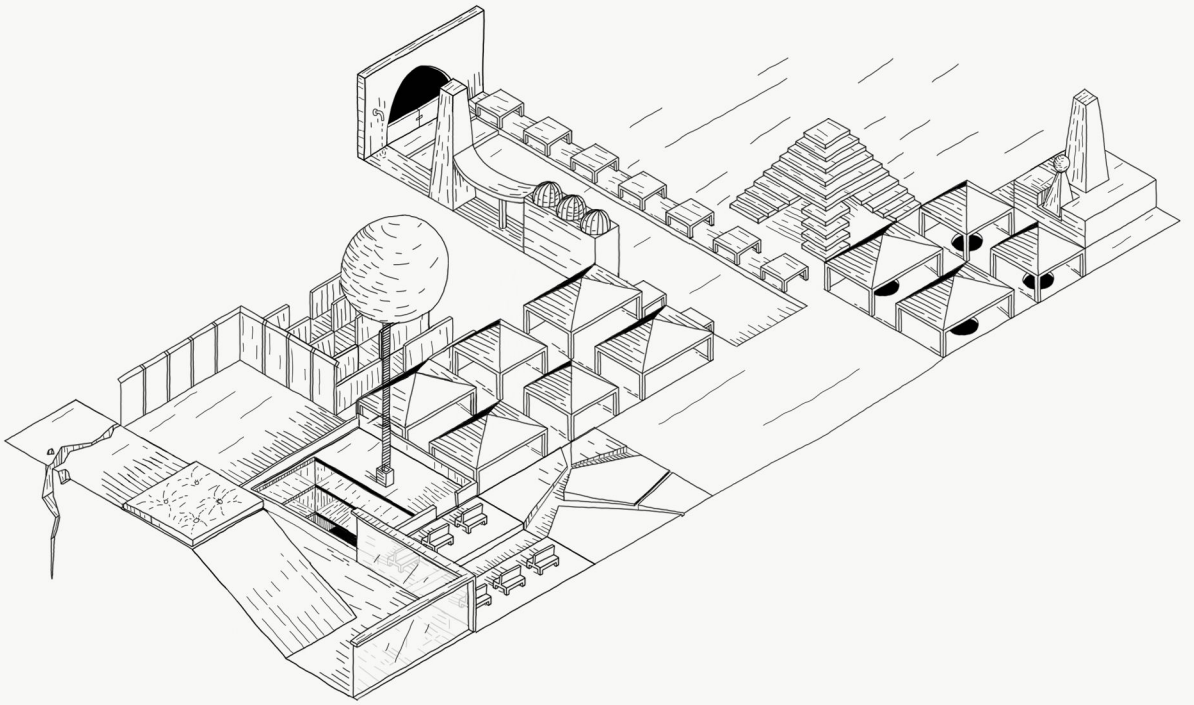




جامع - كنيسة

Mosque - Church





مساحات الثورة - ادراك شخصي

Revolution spaces - personal perception

SEA

INACCESSIBLE



- protest - chants
- food stands - markets
- graffiti walls
- never ending street -
- tear gas action -
- protestors vs. police



- collision
- unity
- multiple entrances
- sit on stairs
- IMMUNE

- press (dijwan)
- meeting point

- rest - a lot of ppl
- prone to invades
- food stands
- chants - festival
- tents (NGOs - invited)

- a lot of barriers

- locked by police

- more barriers

- tents
- talks
- food
- prone to get
- to get
- needed
- monumental
- stability
- great minds

- chaos
- not
- fragmented

- lectures
- screening
- required LAKHMANAS

- seats on sidewalks
- stores

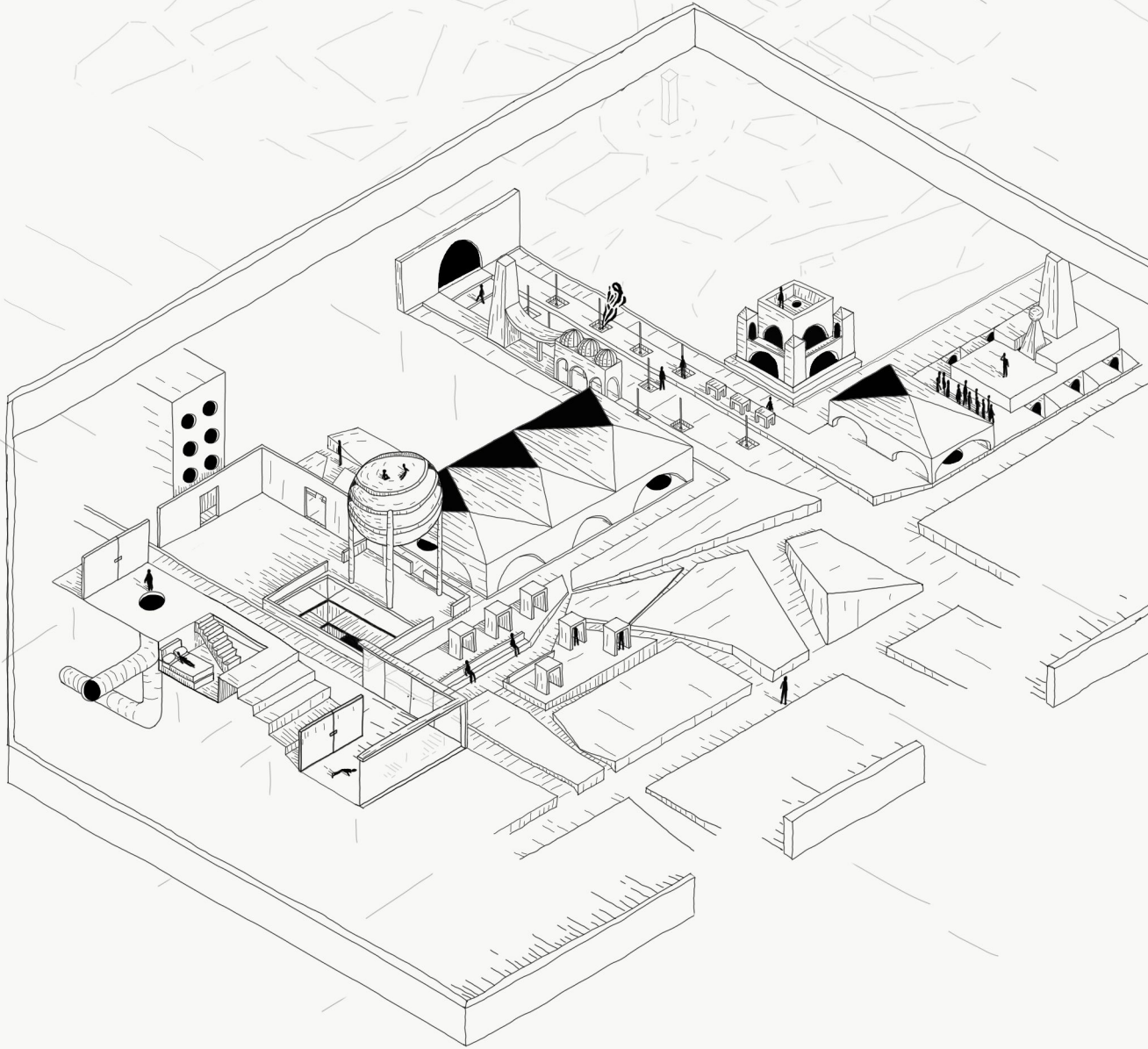
- meeting point
- closing roads
- create pressure
- yoga
- home furniture
- prone to get invaded



ملاحظات على وظائف كل مساحة

Notes on each space's different functions





مساحات الثورة - تعظيم التجربة  
Revolution spaces - maximize experience



end of  
personal sketchbook



What will future Beirut be like if the revolution  
succeeds?

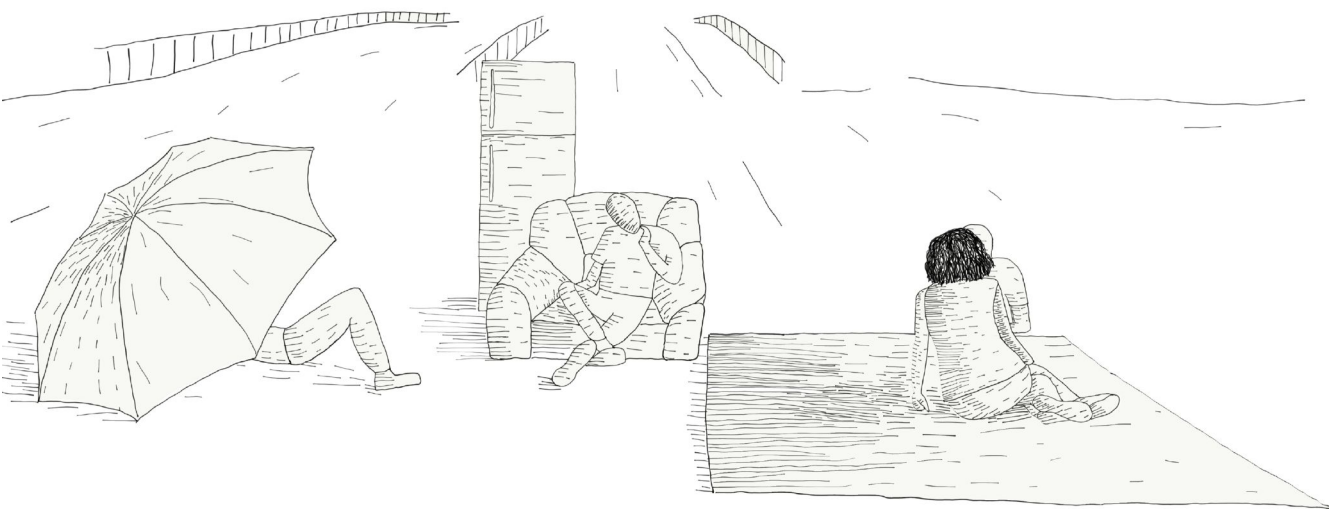


It is 7 am, I wake up. Out of my window, I see onions, basil leaves and a cannabis plant. My girlfriend sleeps next to me; she wakes up to the sound of our kid. I step outside to check on my vegetables; I pick an onion to cook with my omelette.





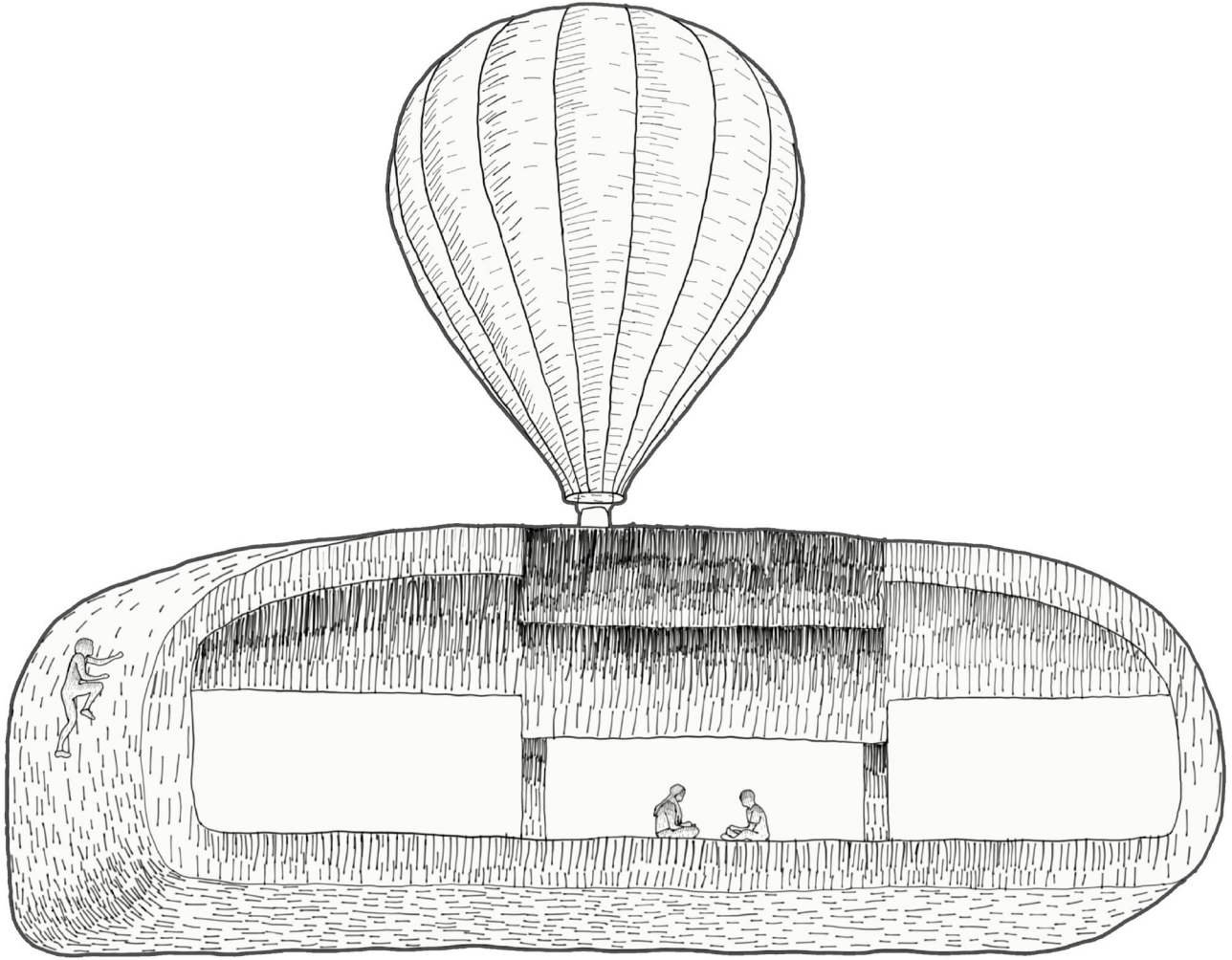
Next to my door, there is a leash, I grab it and my dog runs to me. It is walk time! We head to the Waterfront where we jog along the water edge; Some people are jogging too; others are swimming or riding their boat.

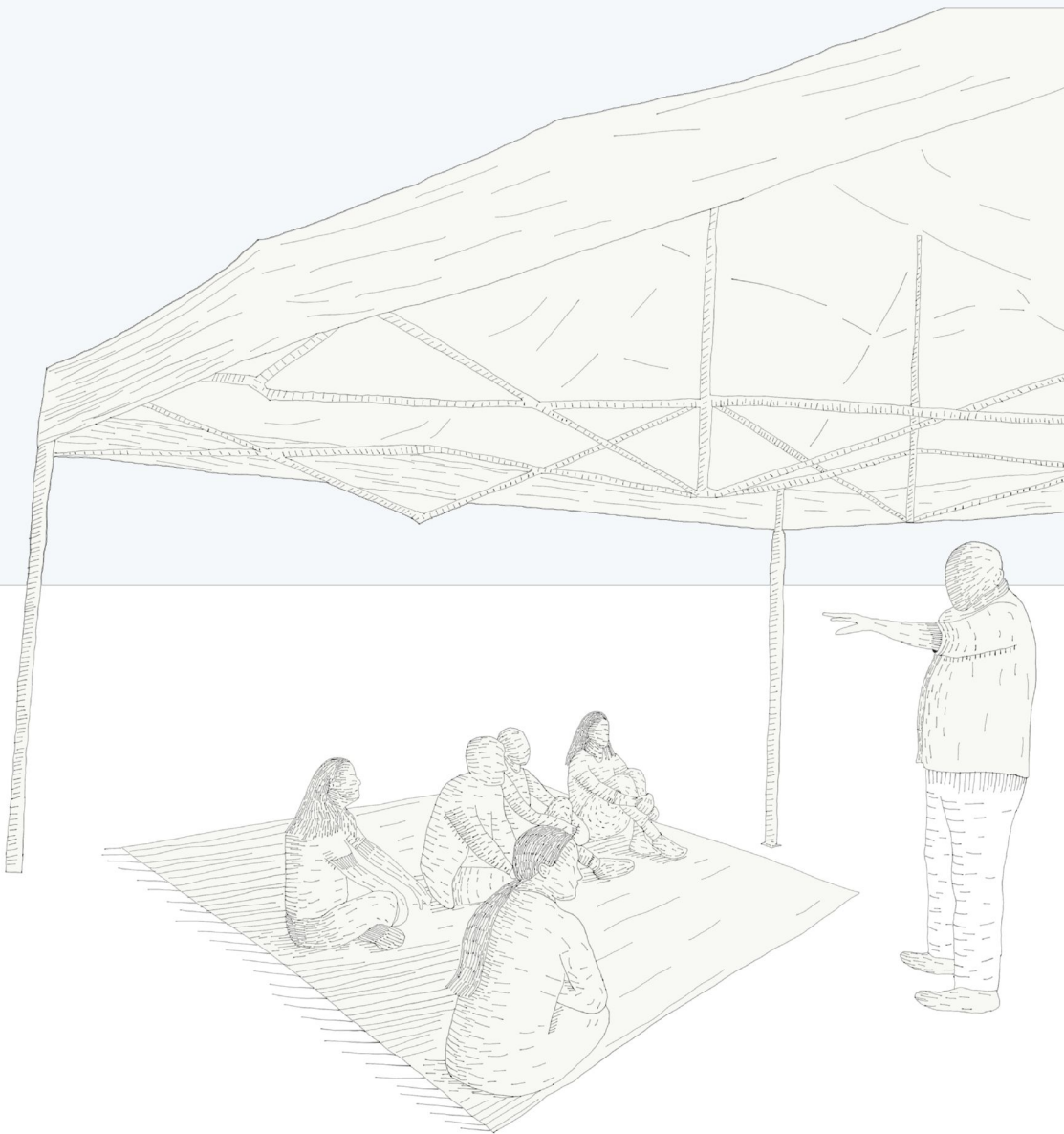






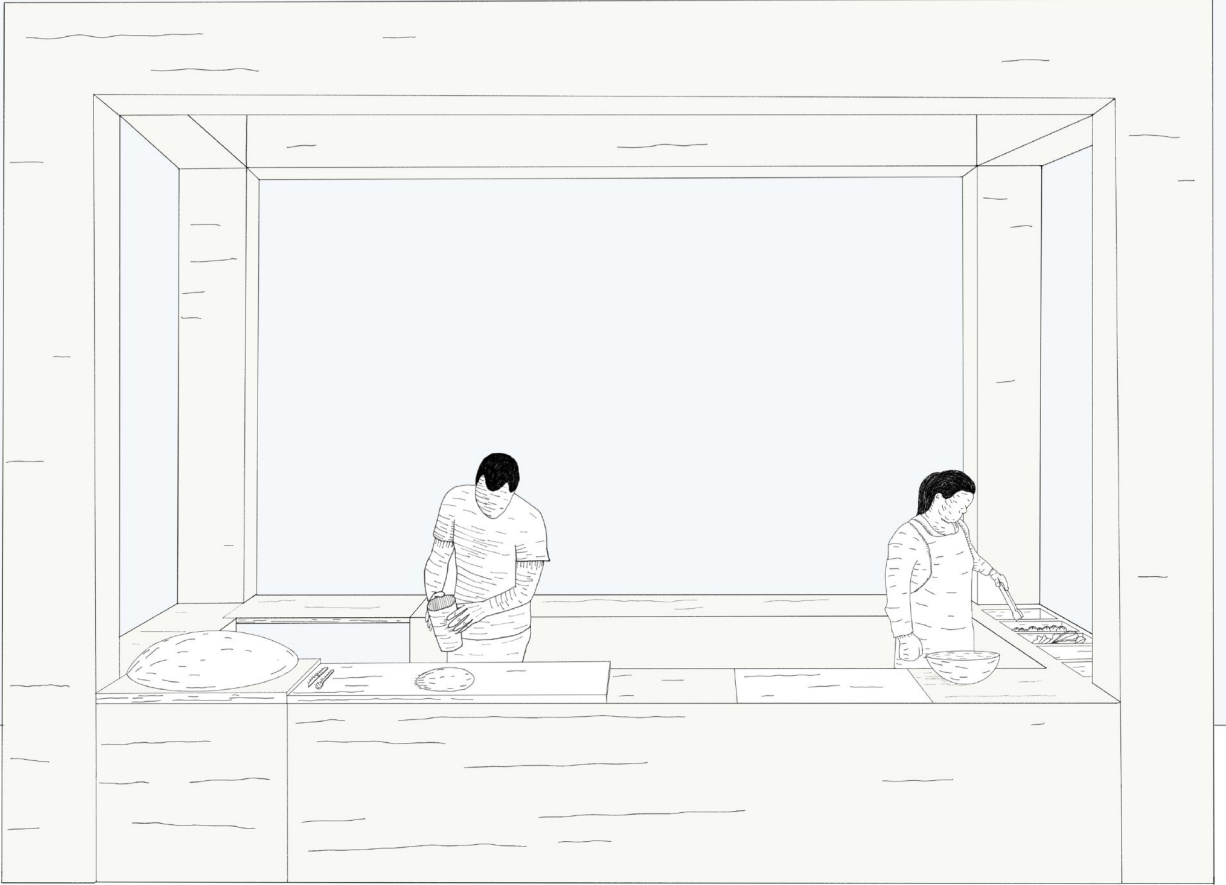
The Azarieh area looks lively now, the grid structure is holding different morning activities, and offering delicious man'oushehs. The egg looks as beautiful and venerated as ever!

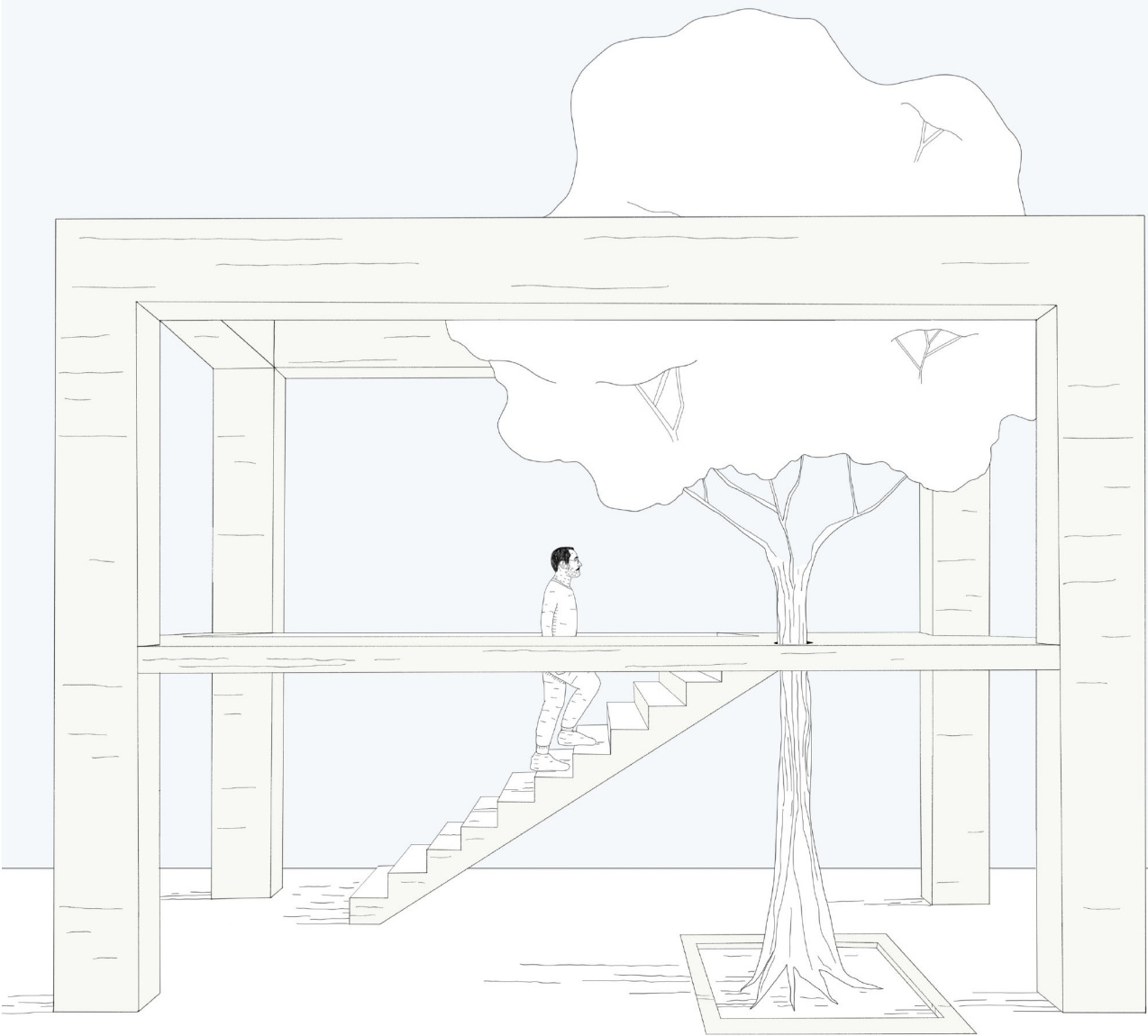


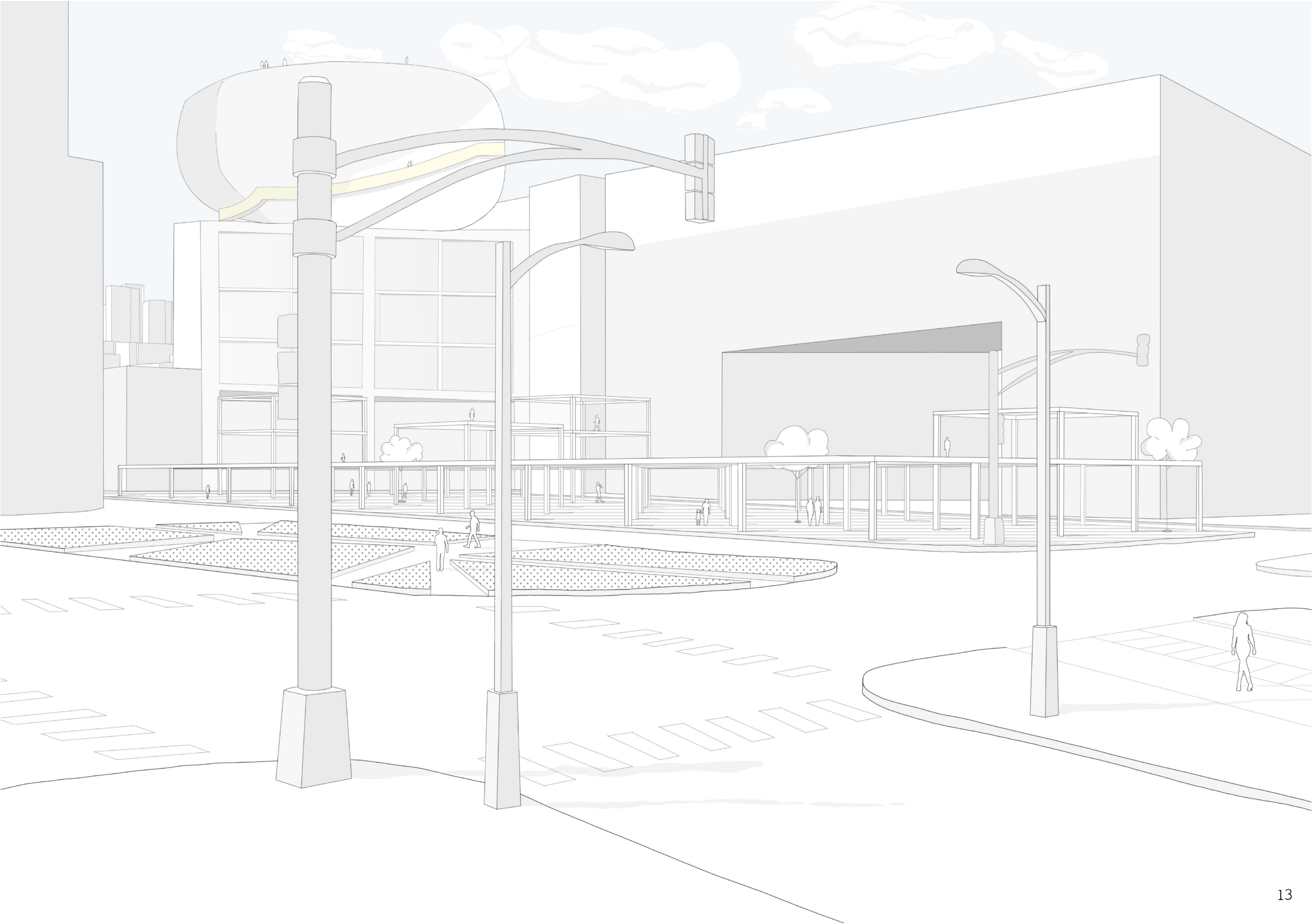






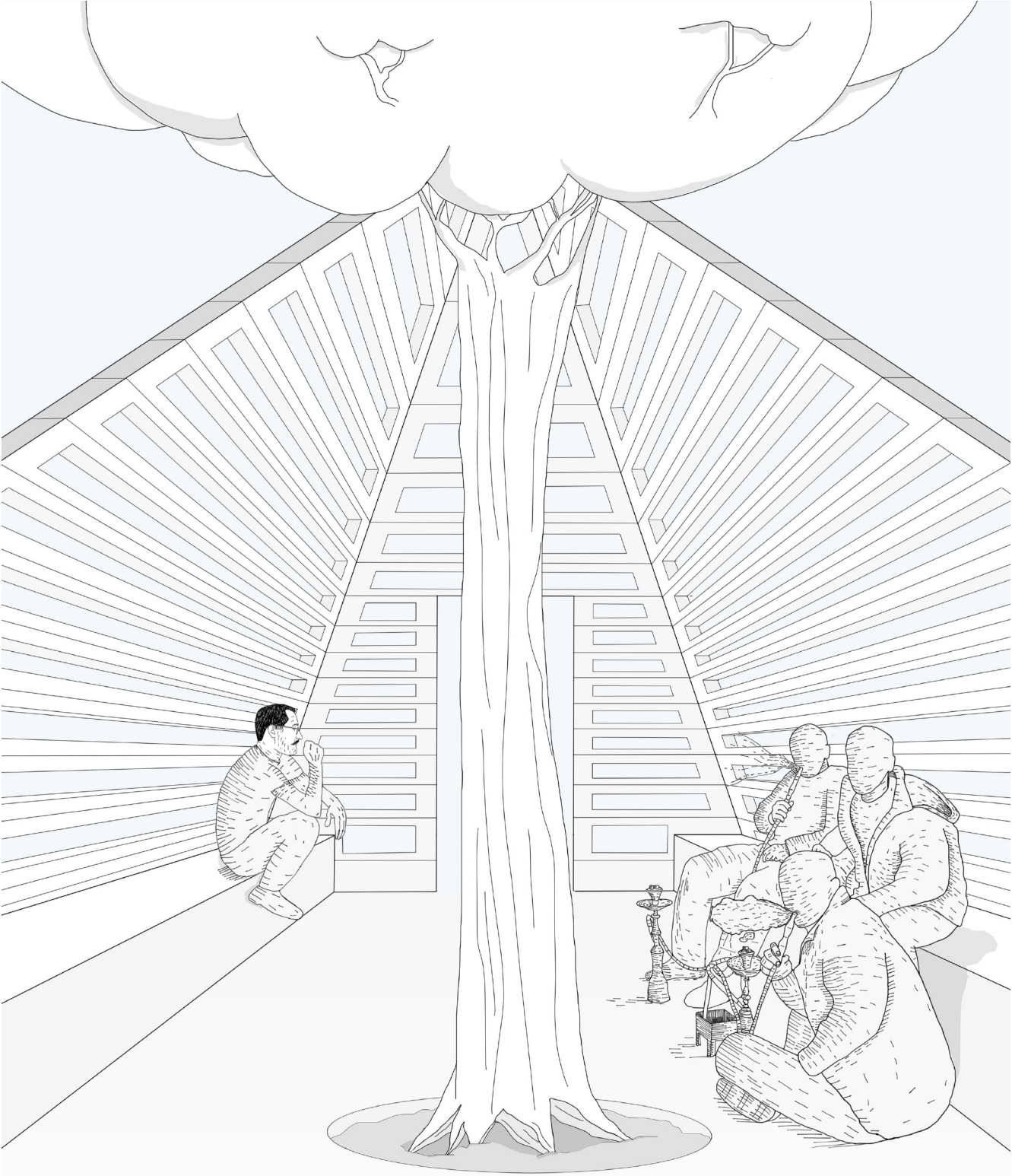


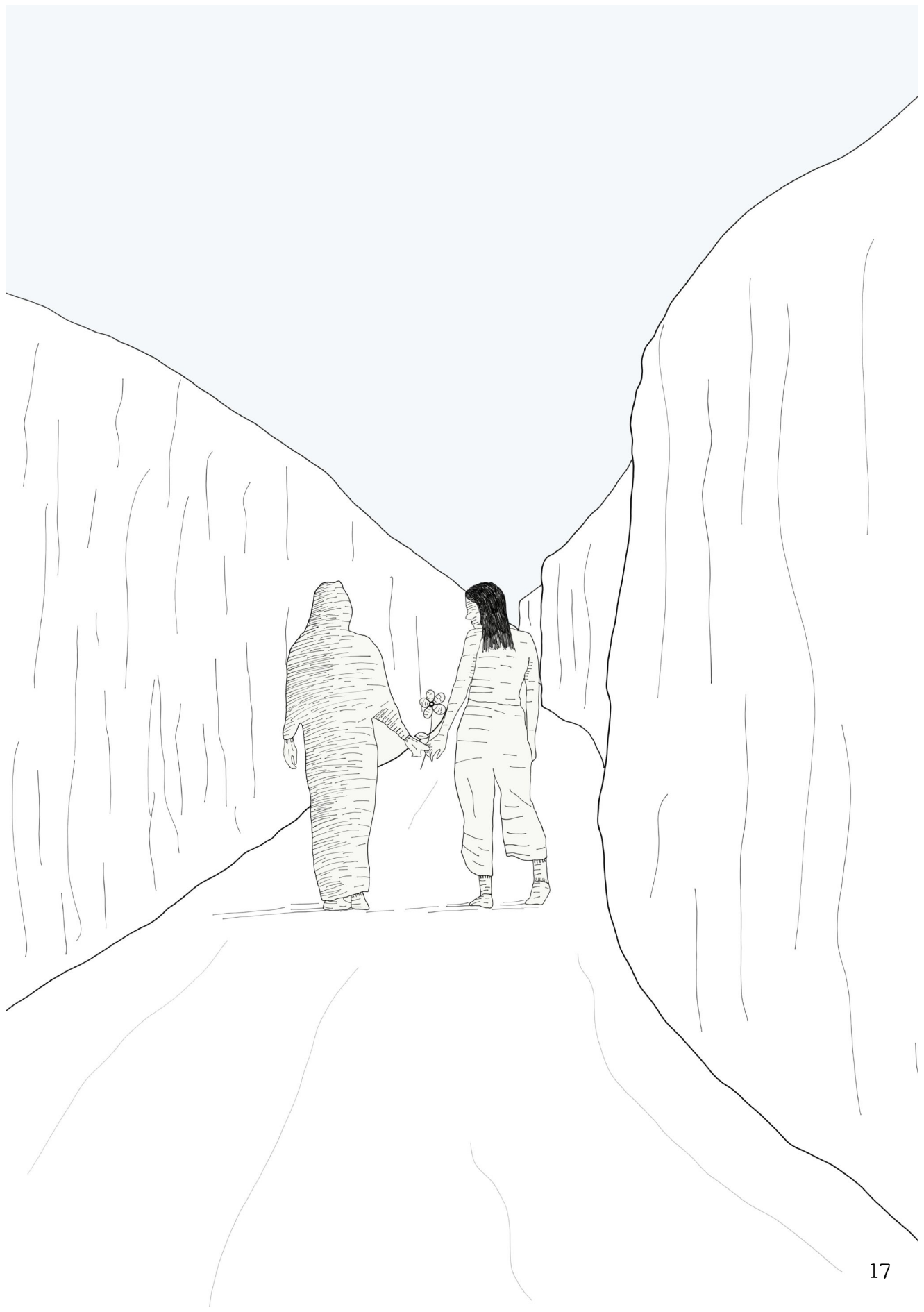




After my shower, I walk to Martyr square  
and wait for the train. I sit in a sidewalk café  
to get a Lebanese coffee; buses roam around Beirut.





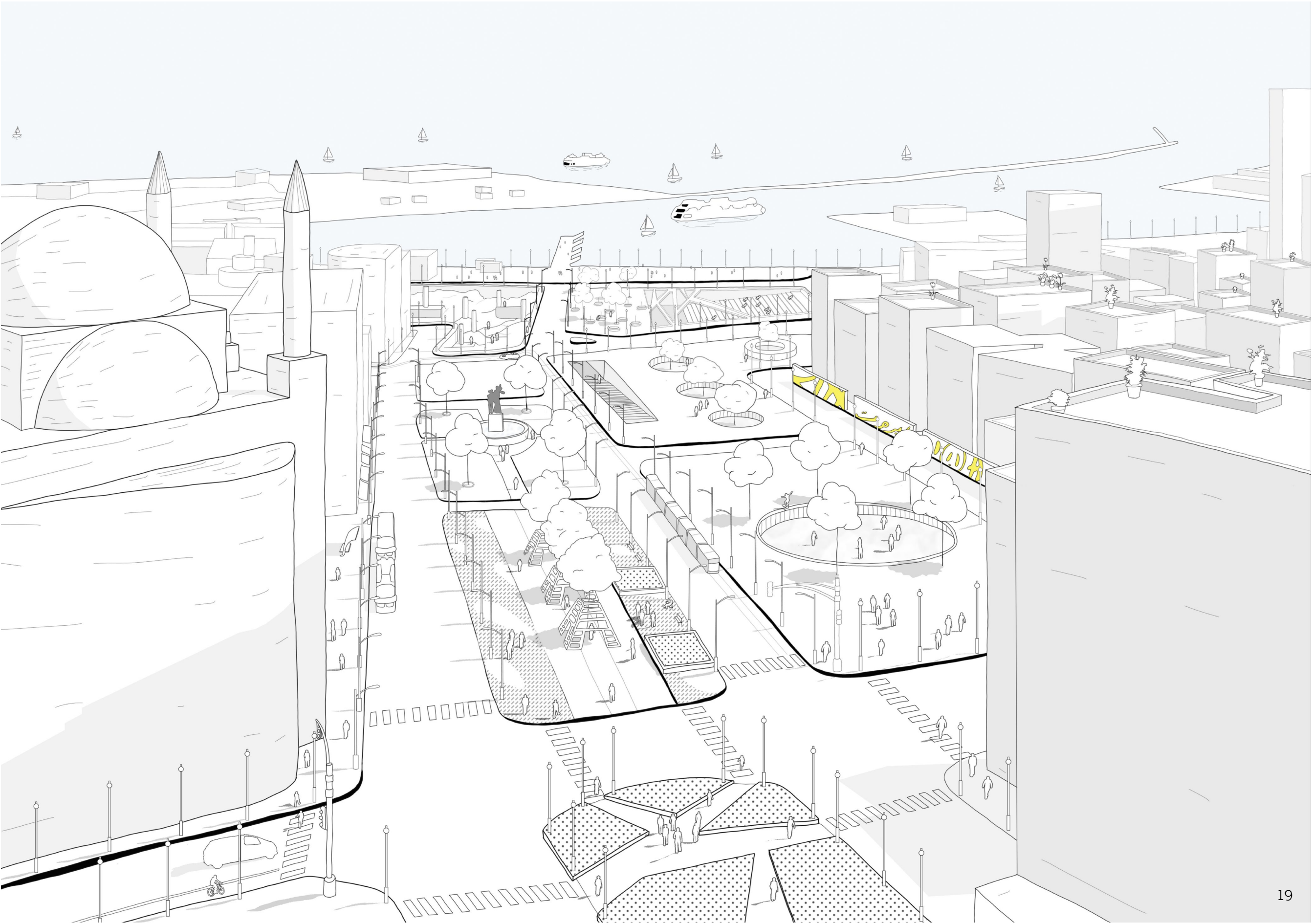


القلعة الصليبية وبقايا الرومان



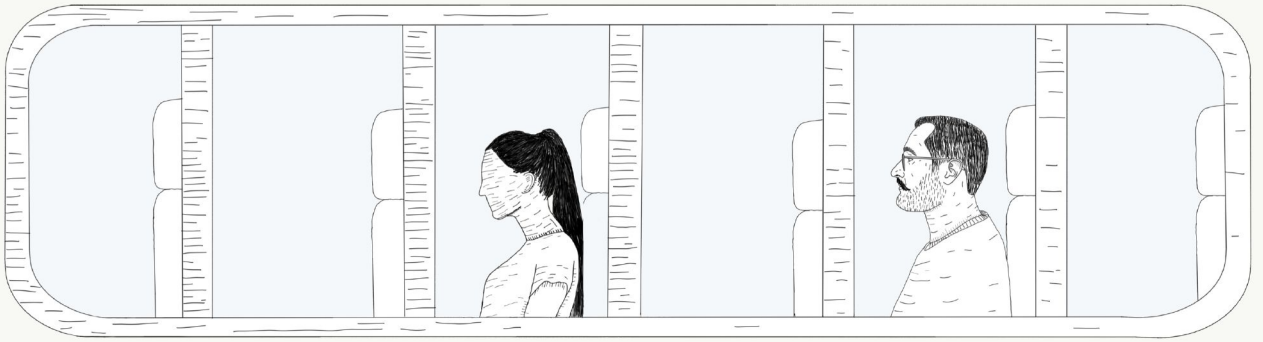
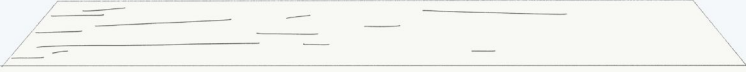
تعرف على حياة لبنان البحرية

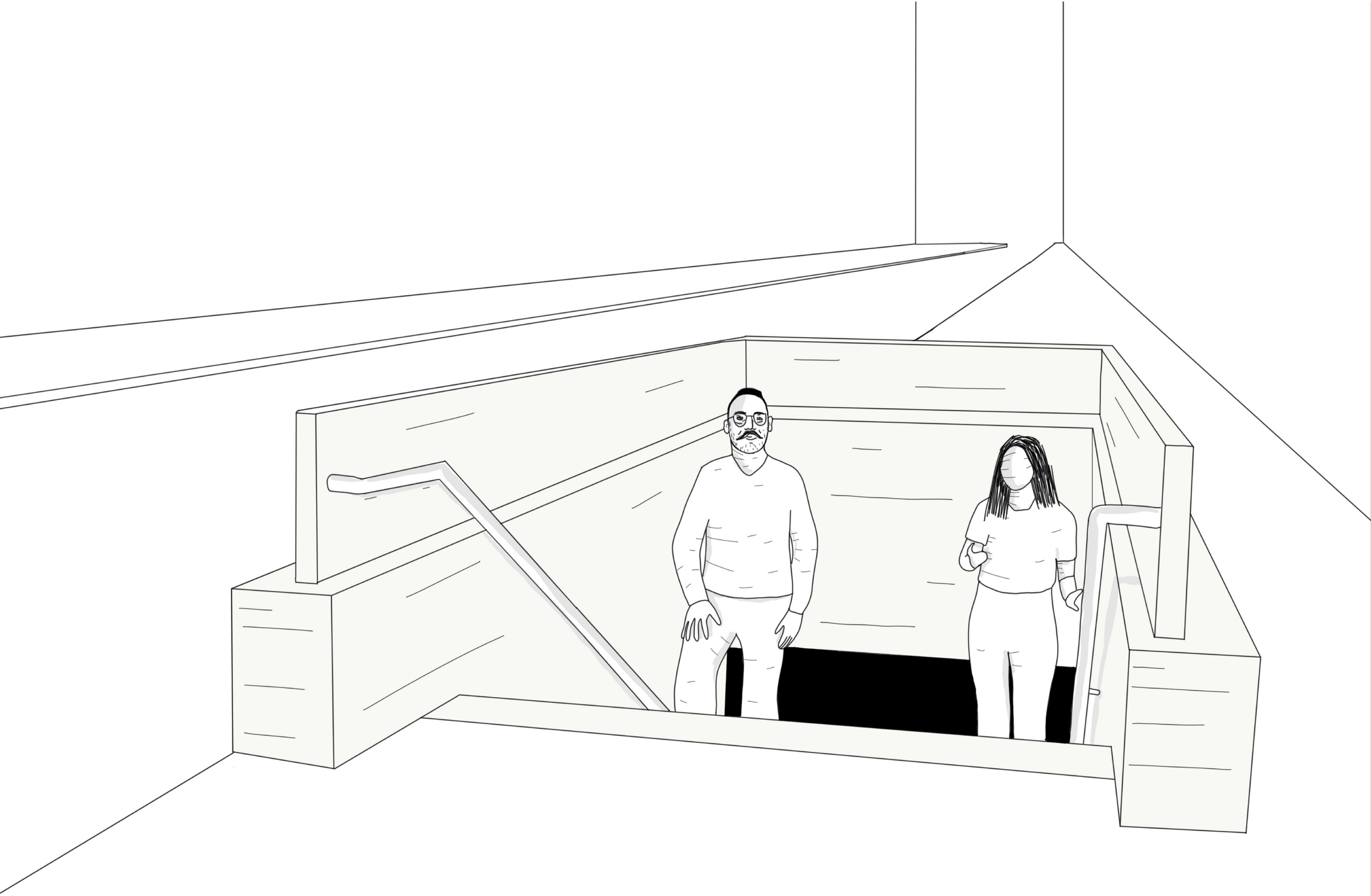


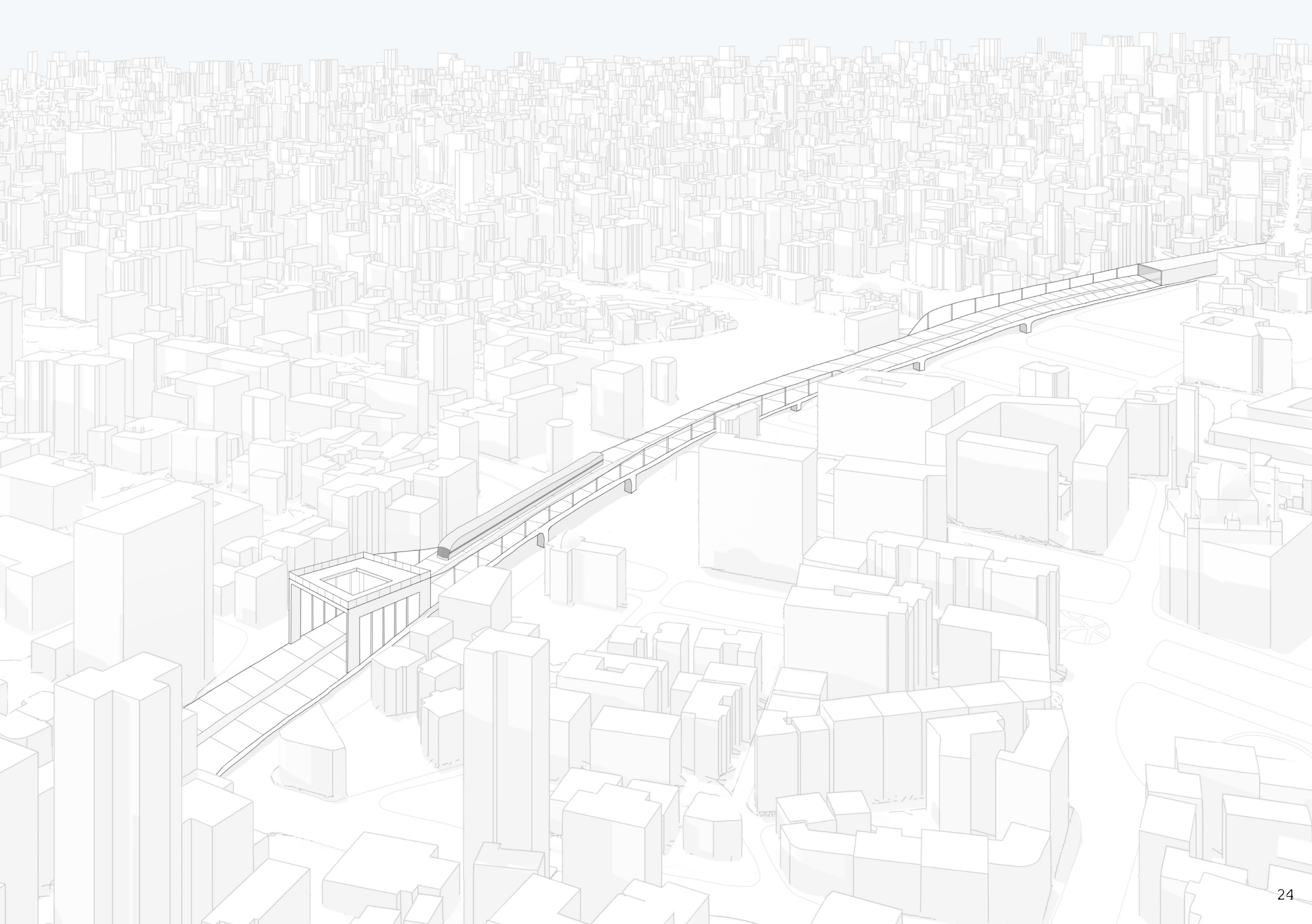


The train is here! I enter using my one month membership ticket which I bought for 0.02 Lebanese Liras (1 Lira = 1500 Dollars). Happily, our prime minister was on the same ride, I smile at her.

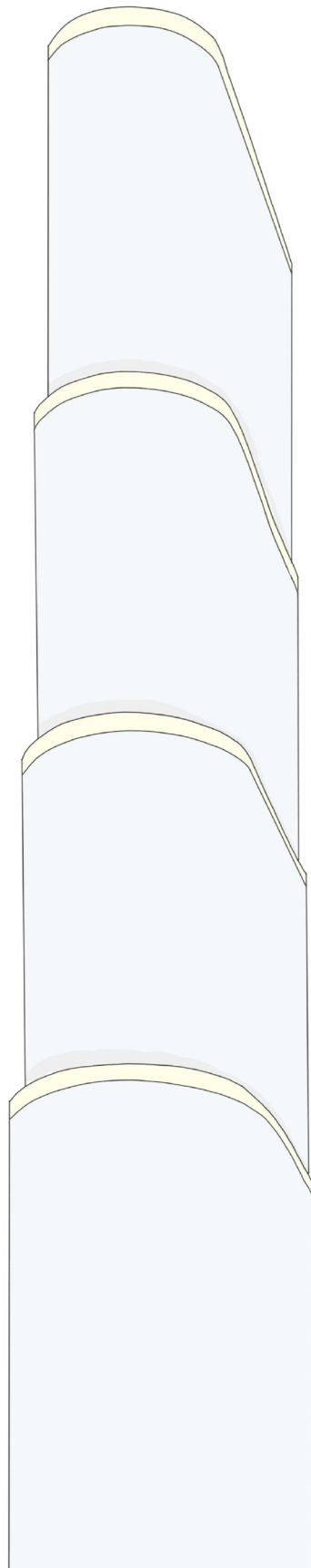








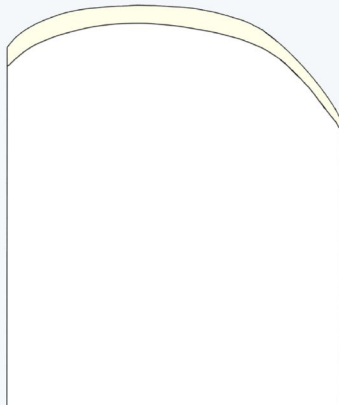
I get off the train and get to my office in Pixar Animation studios in the “Ared Beirut” compound. We resume work on a new upcoming project that we are producing in collaboration with a local studio in Tyre.

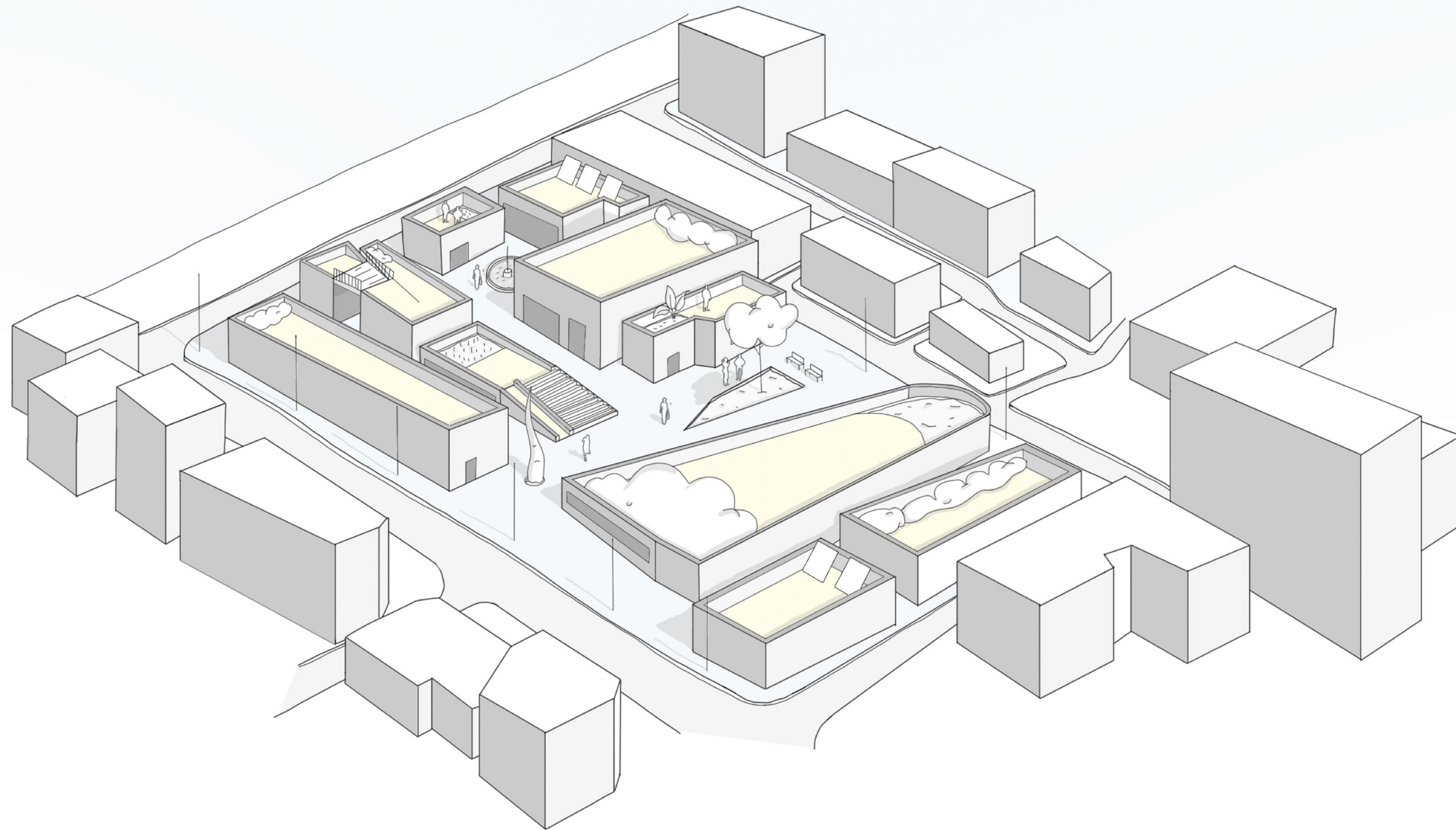




# سما بیروت

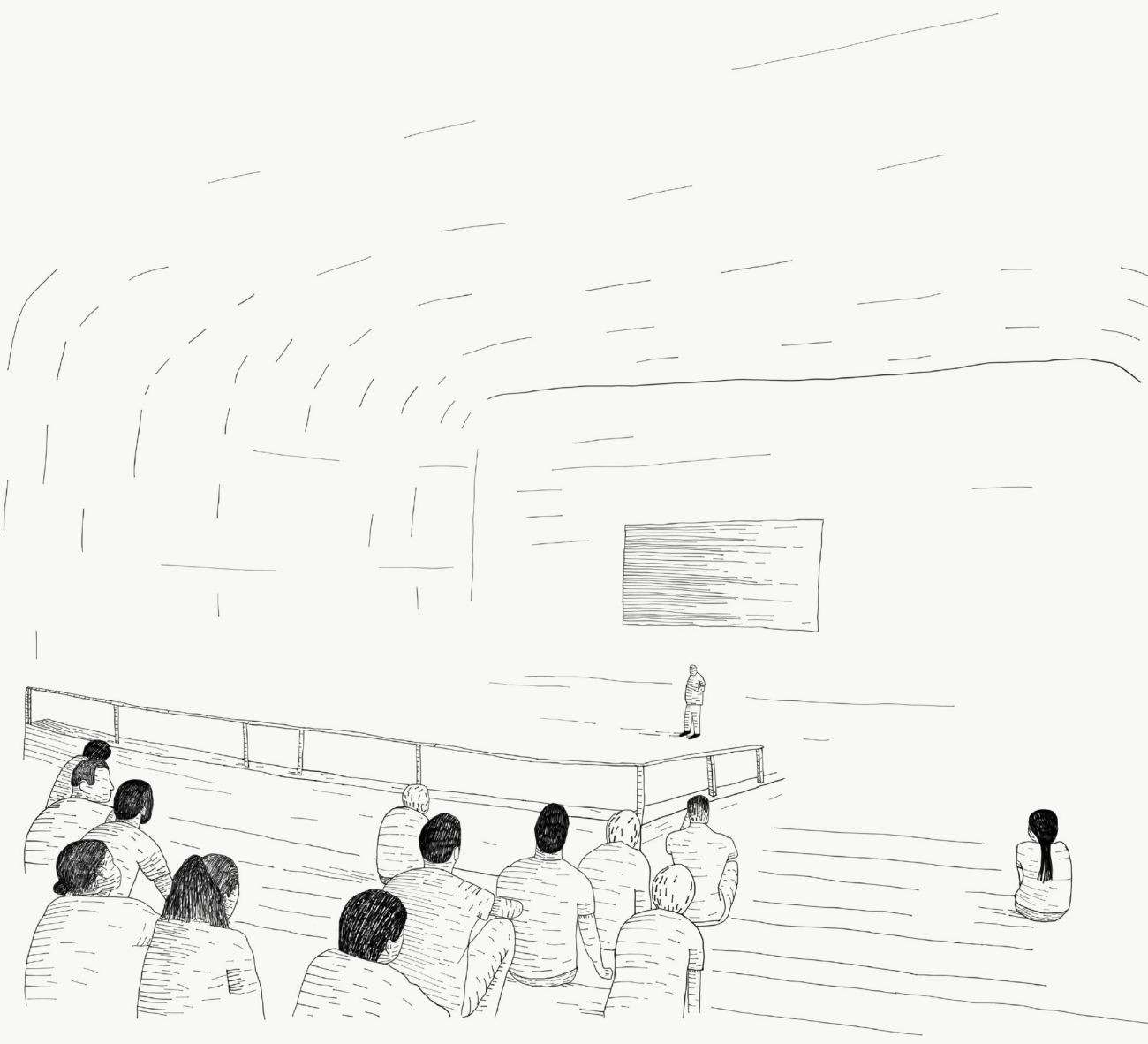
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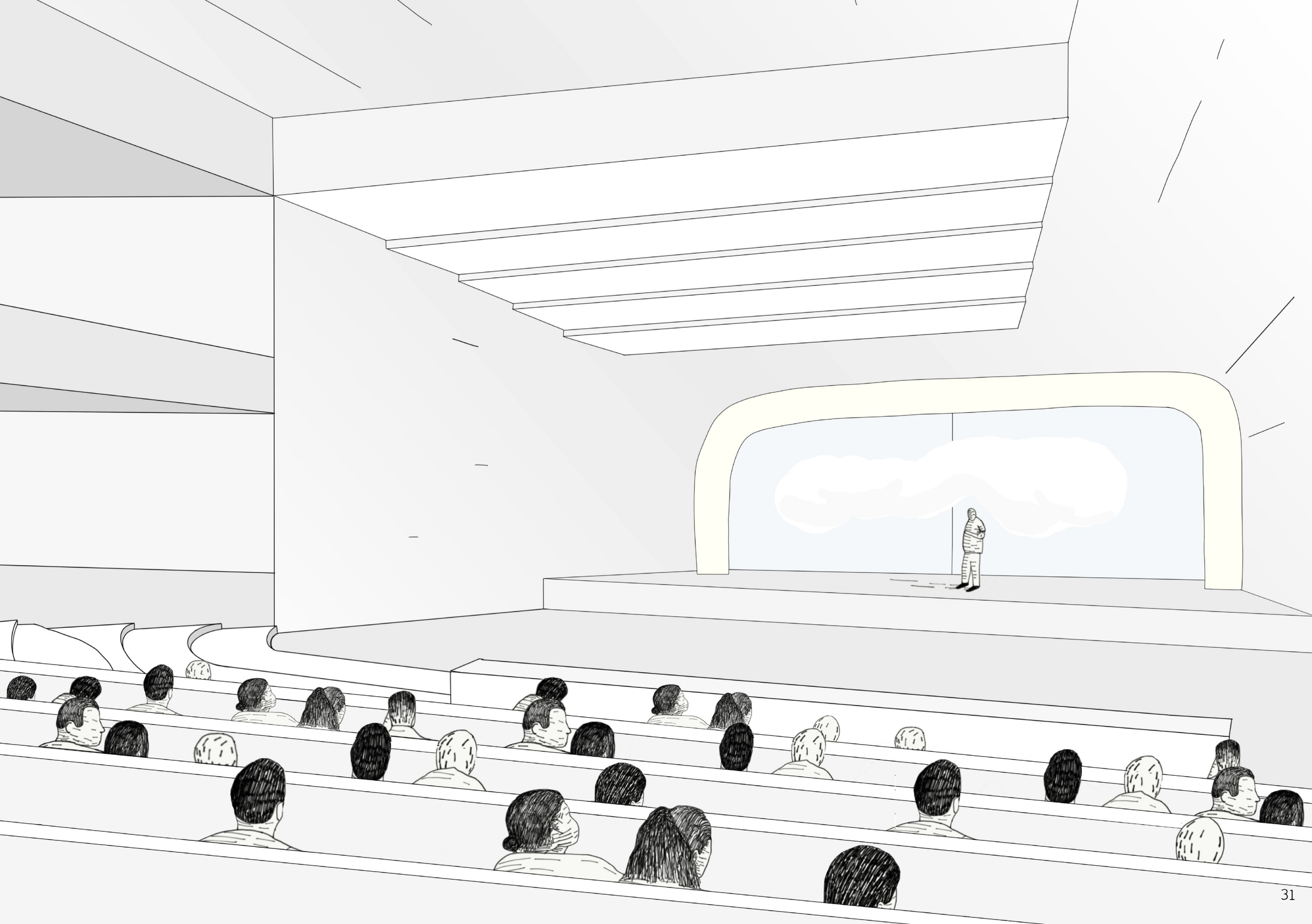


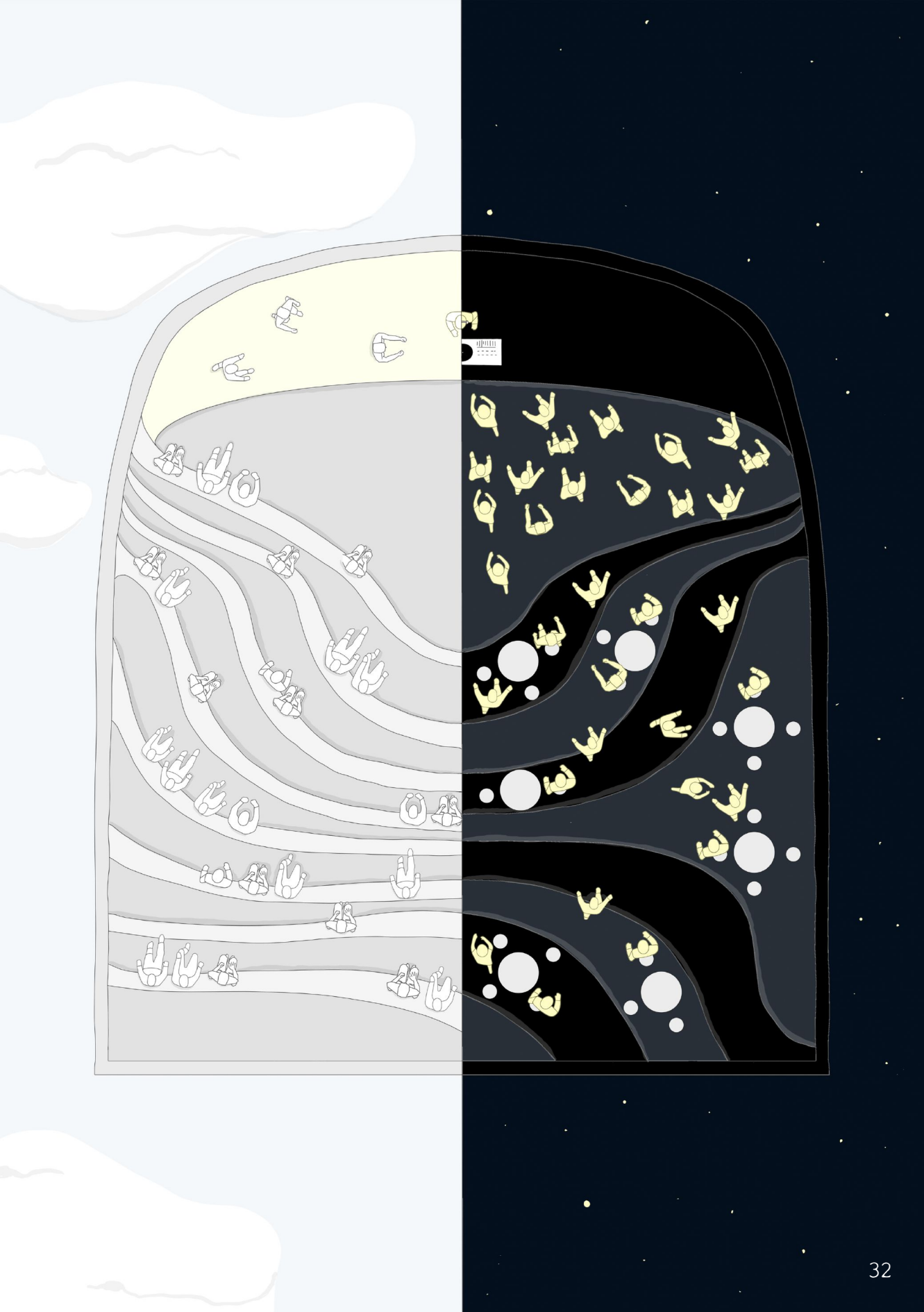


After work, I go back home. My kid wants to go to the theatre, so we head to 'The Egg Theatre' riding our bicycles. We get there, the hall is full on the first and roof floors. We watch a play about the 17 October revolution. Beautiful times!

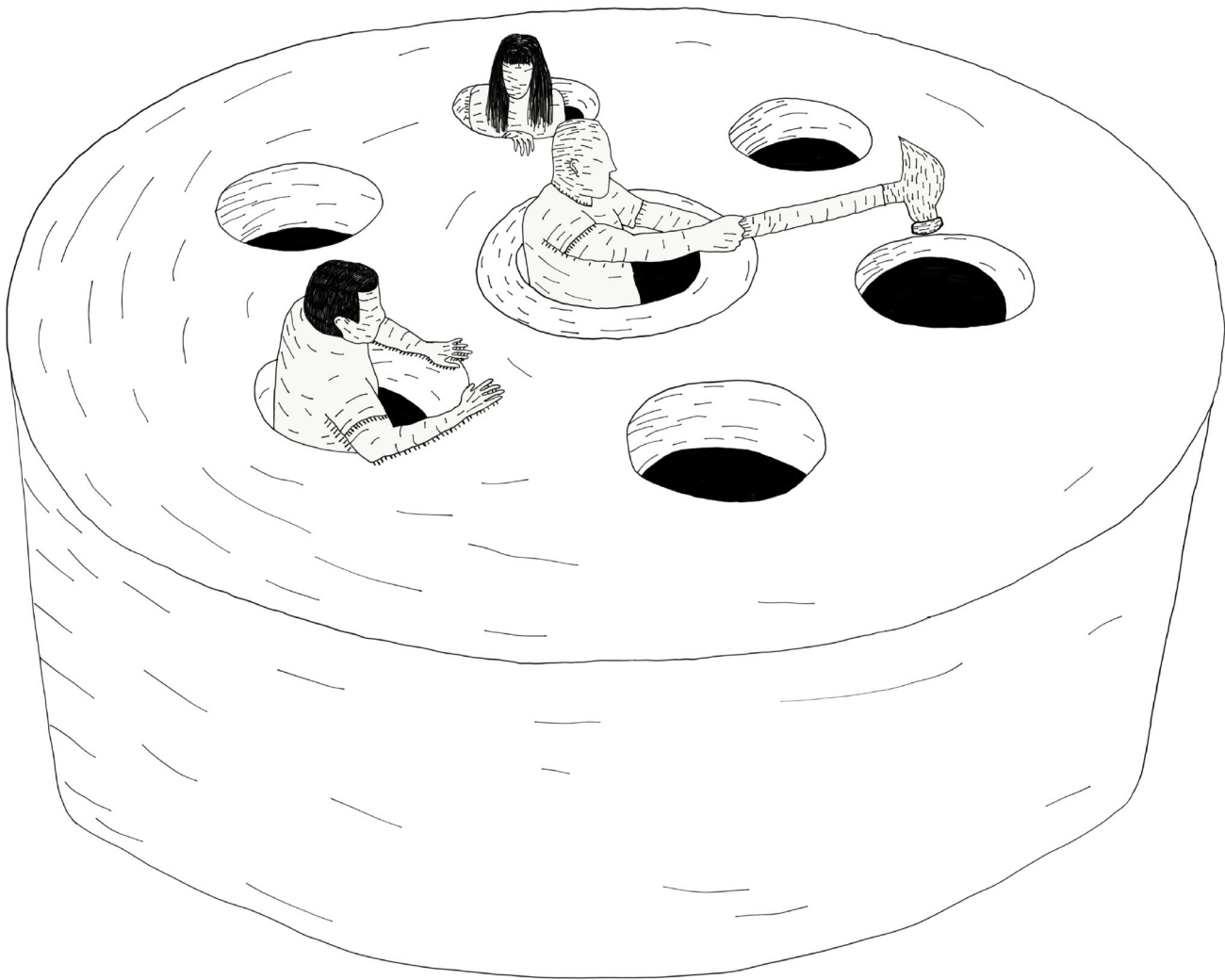
We must leave before they start preparing to turn the Egg into a picturesque night club.





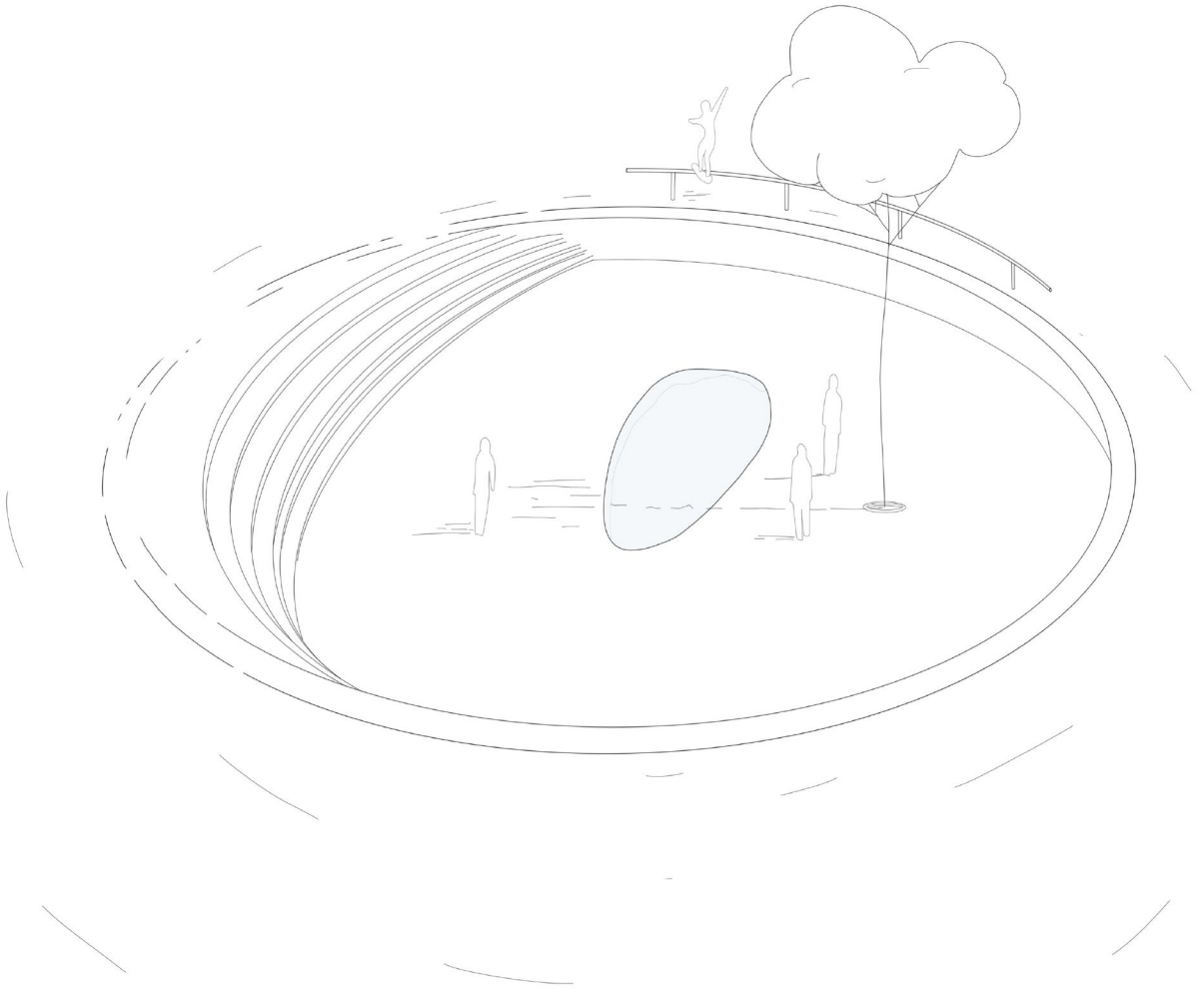


Next, we walk to Riad el Solh market where we get food.  
The wooden stands are many and carry lots of colors.  
Everything looks fresh and delicious. I hear music coming from  
Capitole's rooftop.

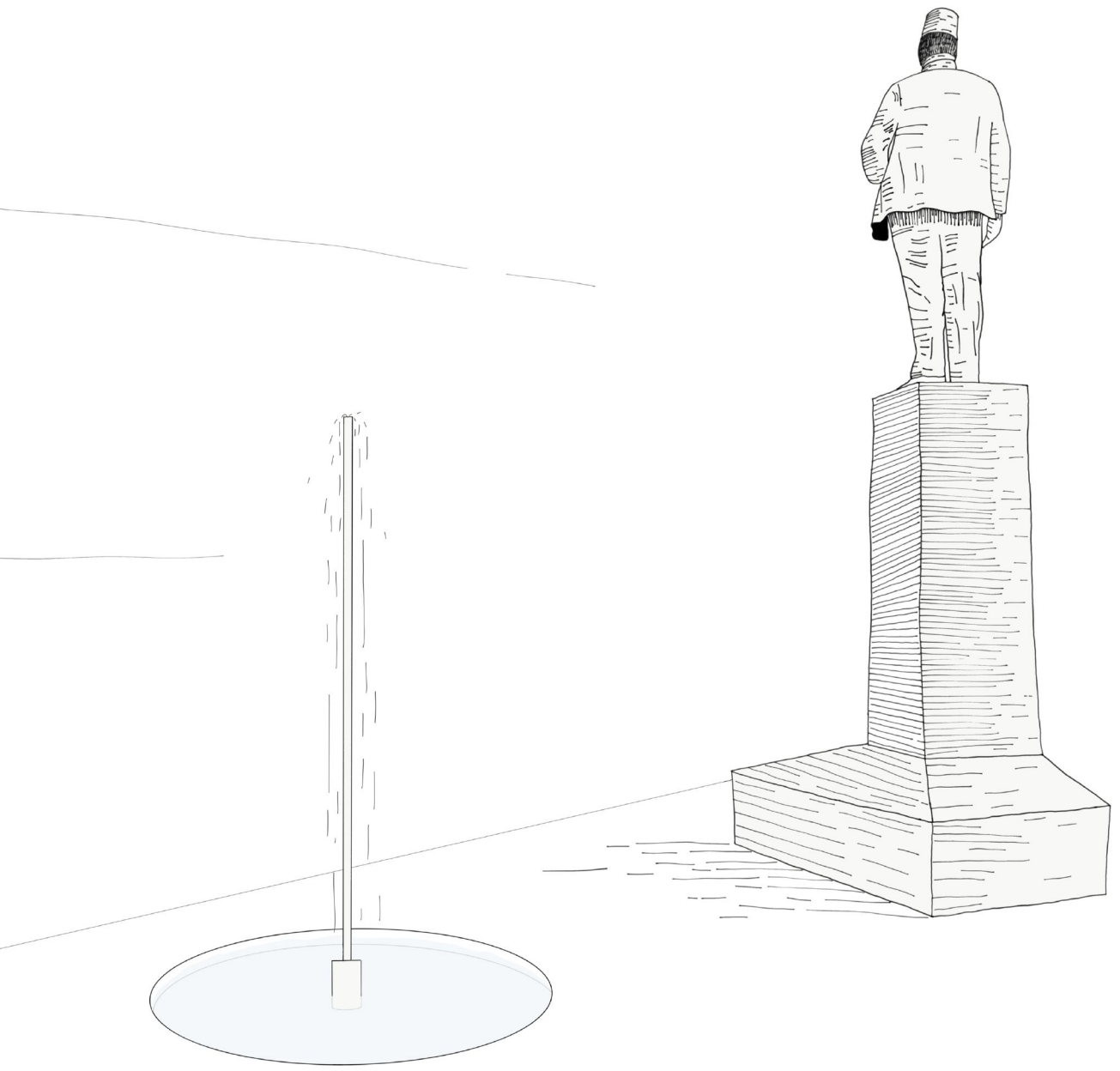


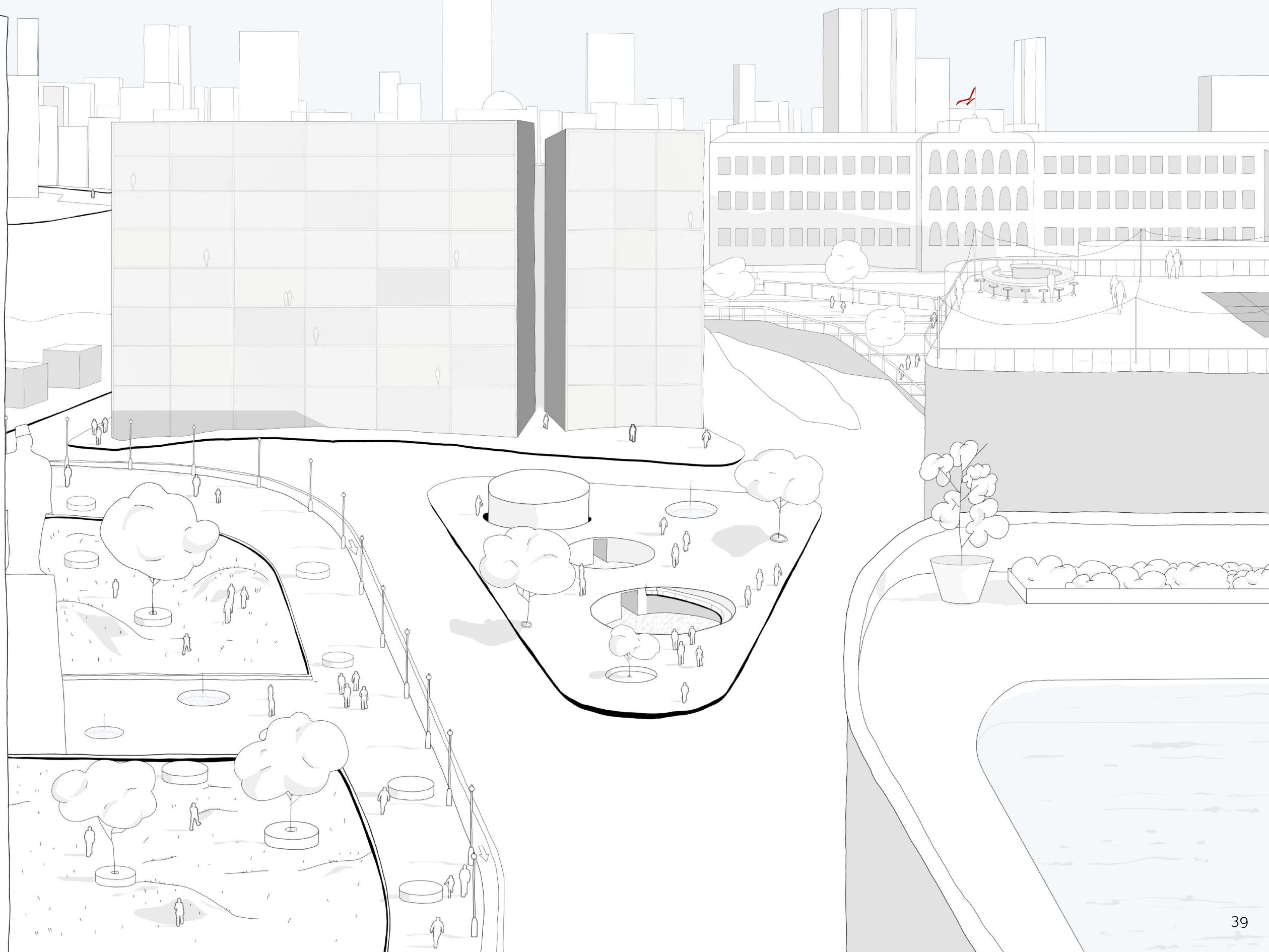










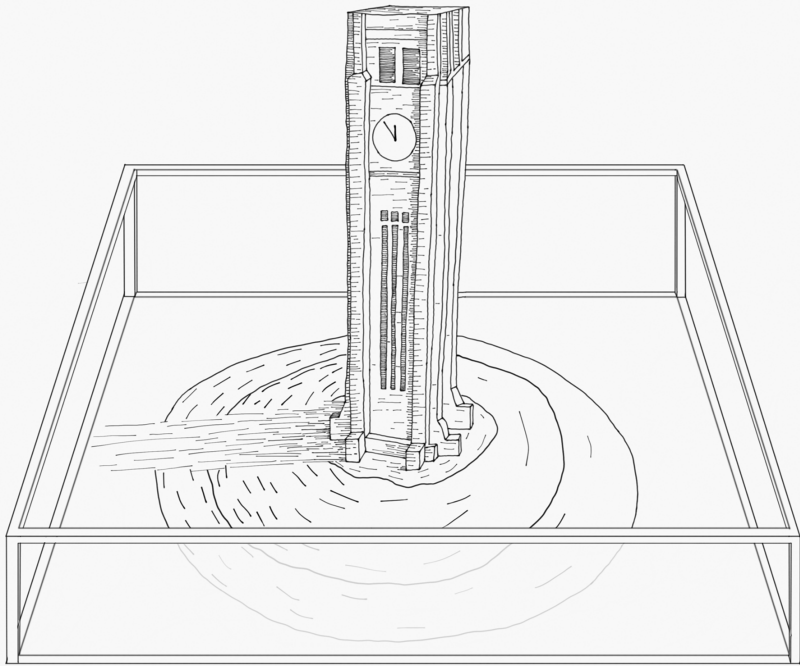


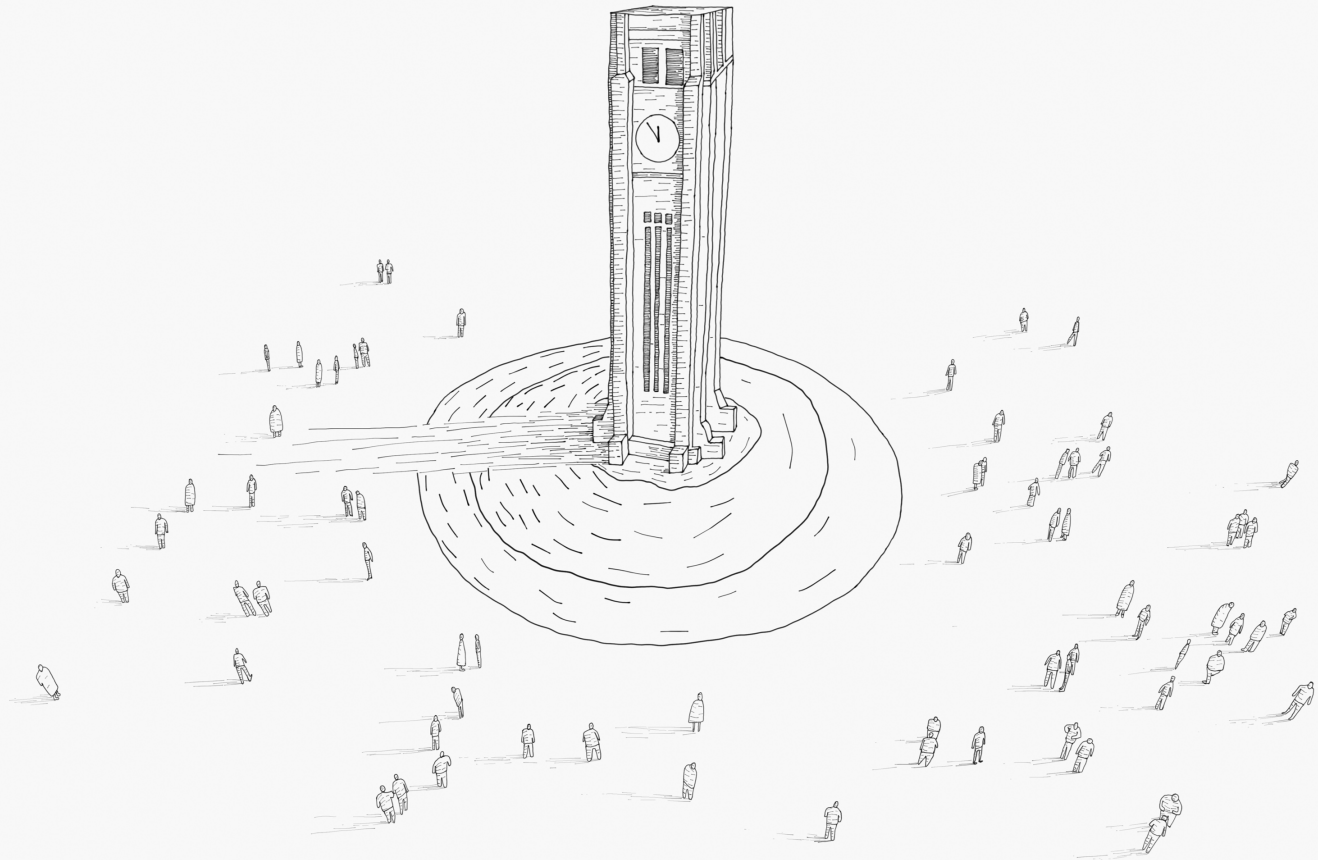
We decide to continue into Place de L'Etoile. If I look up or down, right or left, all I can see is people invading the buildings and the shops.

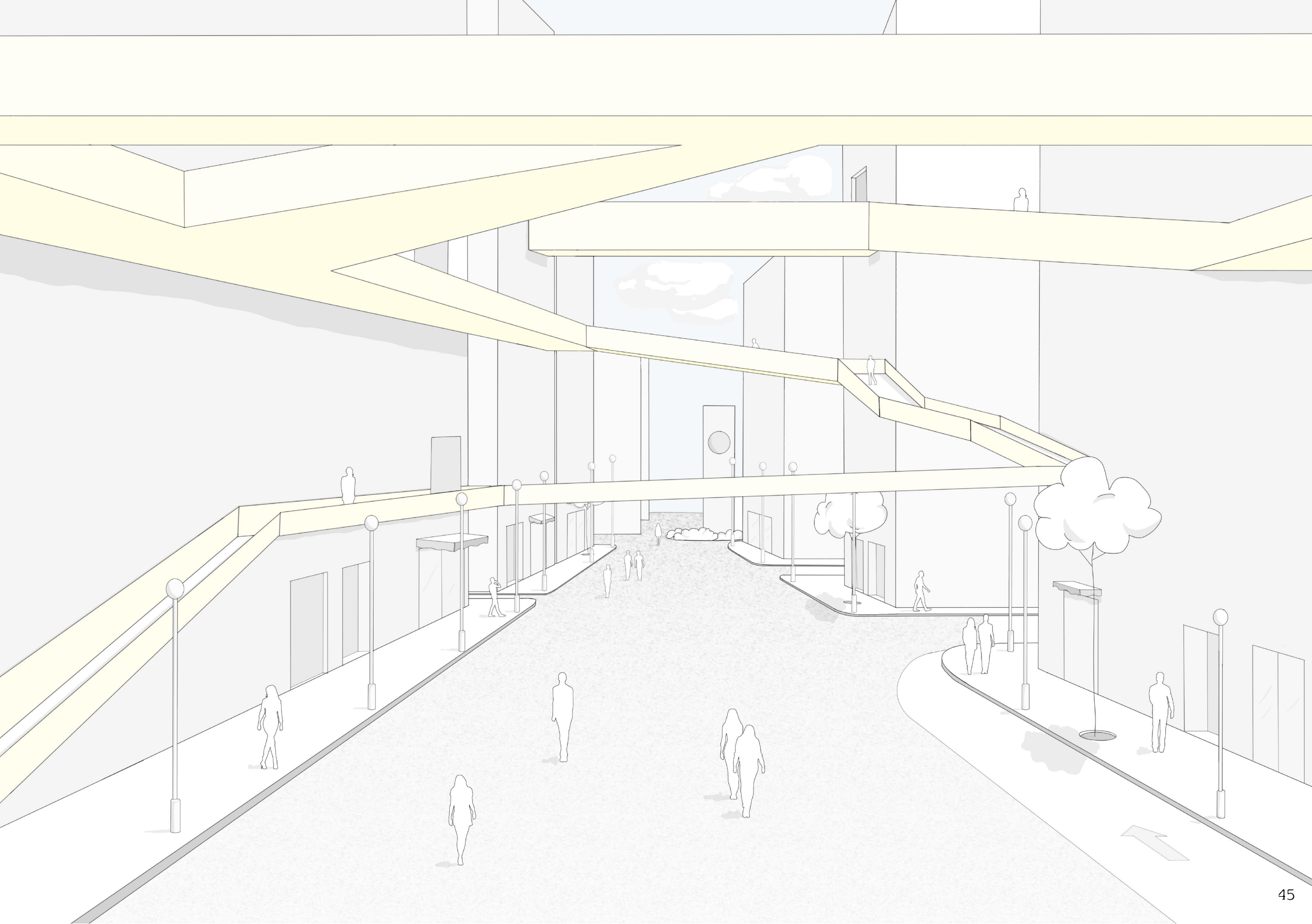








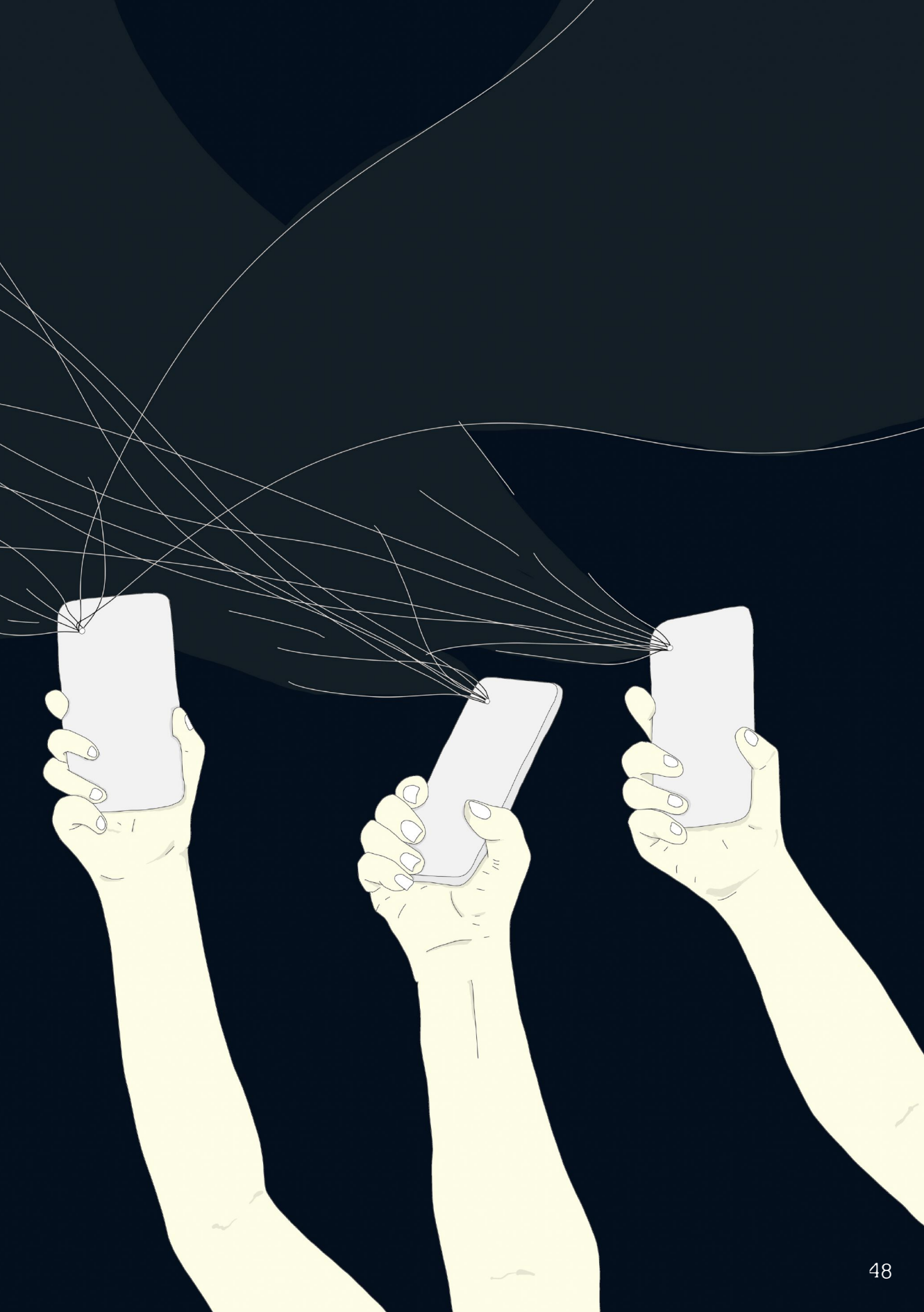




Before returning home, one thing I like  
to do is to visit the Roman baths' remains.

I walk the streets shining with yellow  
lights before I arrive; the archaeological site looks alive  
and every room has a story to tell. Resting there helps clear  
my mind off after a long day.

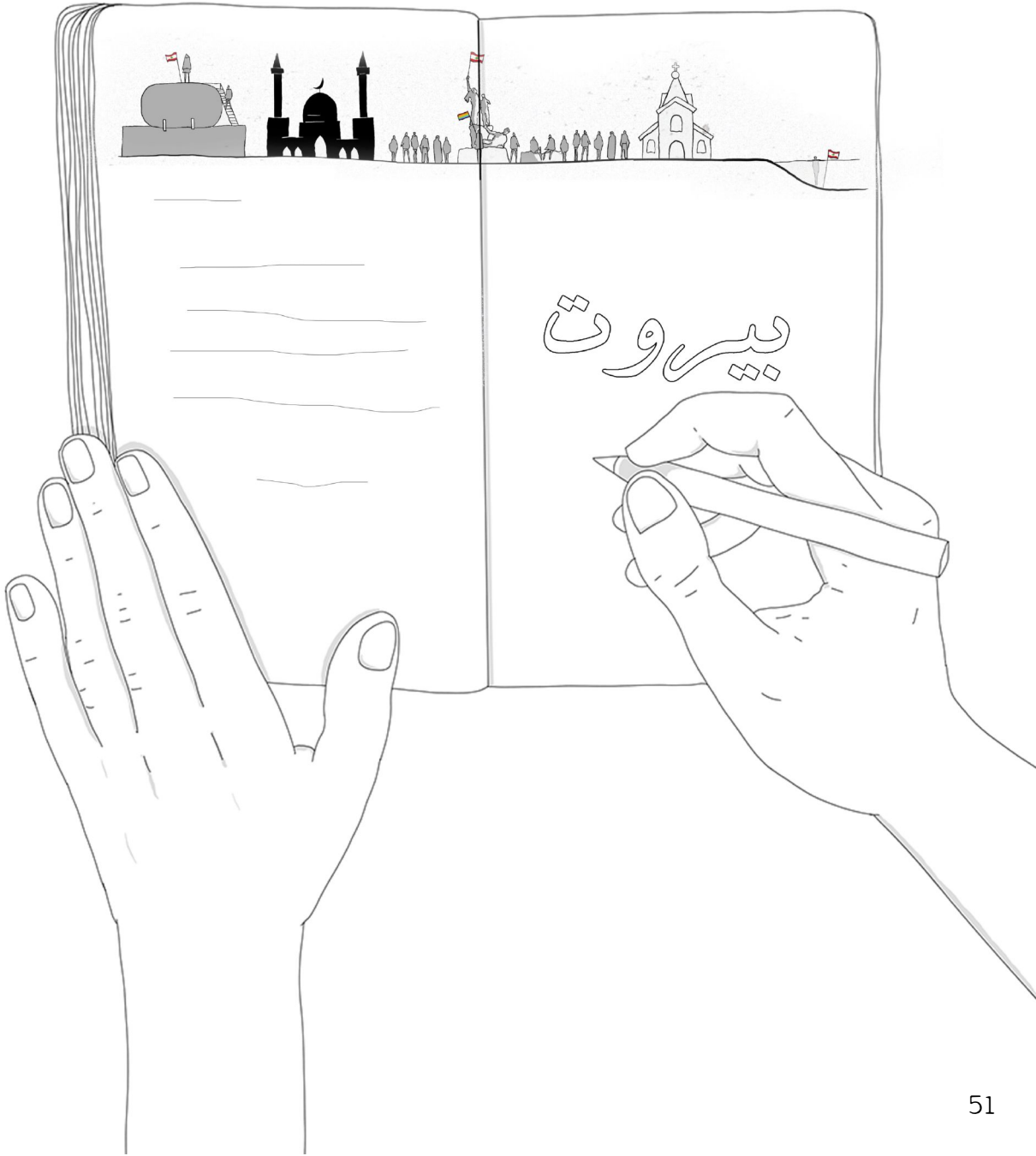


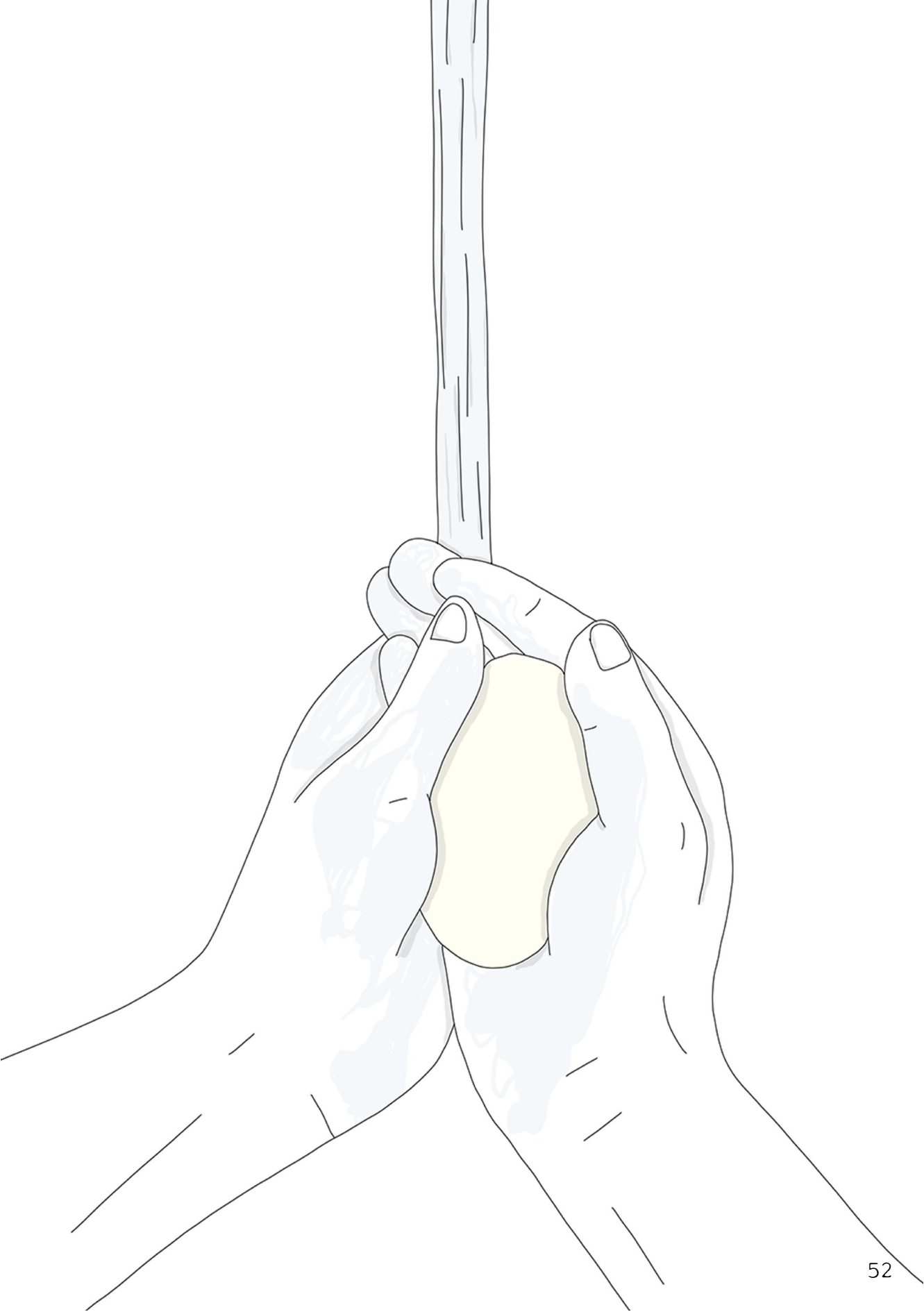




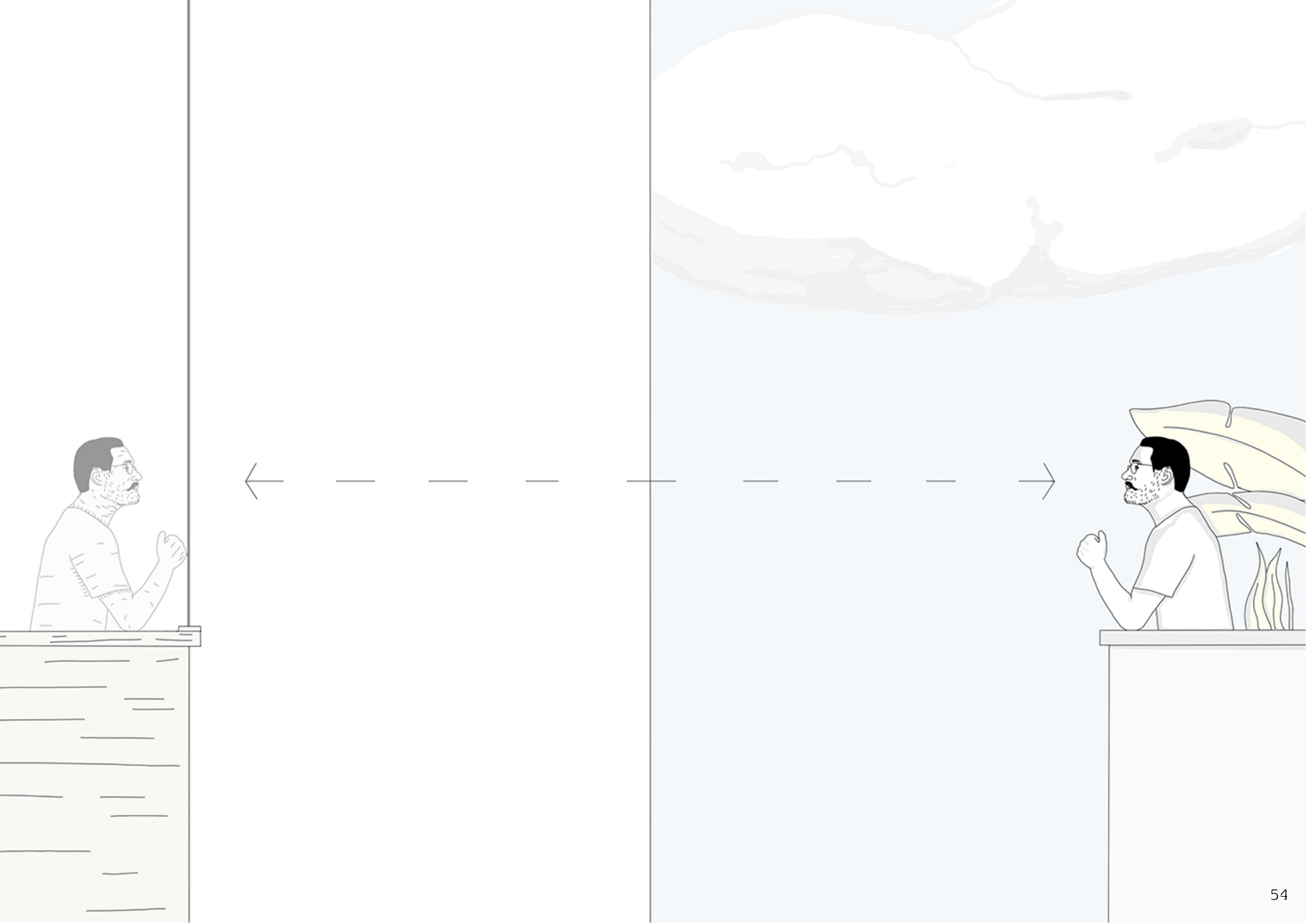












Finally, I get home and sleep.

It is 7 am, I am still up.

I resume working on my architecture project, locked in my room.



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Hull, J. M., & Sacks, O. (2016). *Touching the rock: an experience of blindness*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

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