



Lily Blanchard

CLEANING SUBURBIA

Deconstructing the paradigm of hygiene and the avoidance of dirt in Geneva's grands ensembles.

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Abstract

The research part of this project will discuss how the avoidance of dirt and disorder in the grands ensembles, built in the suburbs of Geneva from the 1960s-70s, was materialized. By exposing the construction of this paradigm in our built environment, I question the supposed objectivity of cleanliness and expose how the rules to manage dirt are used as a pretext for social control and marginalization. A precise documentation of these mechanisms will serve as a catalog in the future design process, not to envision the opposite, but something beyond the hygienist binary between cleanliness and dirt.

Taking inspiration from feminist science fiction, this project designs a speculative architectural fiction, allowing us to imagine spaces that incorporate the existence of dirt and place the perpetual cycles of maintenance outside of stigmatization and control.

4	Reasearch
8	Disorder and Filth
17	Waste
21	Bodily Fluids
25	Epilogue
26	Details
36	What if Dirt came back?
40	Phytofiltration
42	Compost
44	Pavilions
51	Bibliographie

« If we were to remove the cleanliness, we would see what it covers, what it protects. What if dirt came back? That would be the revolution.»
Geneviève Heller, *propre en ordre*, 230¹

Within the clogged bath of dirt and pristine cleanliness, we're confronted with our personal tolerances of dirt. It's crucial to acknowledge that our own disgust reflex dictates the narrative, as an inner voice of order frantically cleans and reestablishes the frontier with dirt. Yet, our tolerance is constrained when an external judgment deems us dirty.

Dirt is matter that crosses the limit of a system, transgresses established borders, messes with order, and disrupts dominant belief systems.² The avoidance of dirt, dictated by societal norms, goes beyond pathogenicity or health concern, it's rather about enabling distinction, between cleanliness and dirt, high and low morality. Here, morality is understood as the legitimate value system defined by the ruling class. In 1981, Geneviève Heller explained that this idea of morality is imposed upon the rest of the population, and cleanliness acts as a tool of control.³ This perpetuates discrimination and constructs cleanliness as a virtue, forced upon the most precaritized class. This research focuses on the materialisation of the control, canalization, and expulsion of dirtiness in the sense of disorder, waste, and bodily fluid, but also by extension poverty or sickness.

¹ Geneviève Heller, *propre en ordre*, (Lausanne: Edition d'En Bas, 1980), 230:

« Si on enlevait la propreté, on verrait ce qu'elle recouvre, ce qu'elle protège. Si la saleté revenait ? Ce serait la révolution.» (translation by me).

²As Mary Douglas explains « If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place. (...) It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. (...) Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.» Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1966), 36.

³Geneviève Heller questions the cleanliness paradigm and its bourgeois values: "The bourgeoisie, which leads the society, imposes its ideology. Feeling both threatened and attacked by the masses, and claiming to be responsible for the fate of the collectivity, it finds in cleanliness an ideal instrument of domestication, which can be named a soft tyranny. Motivations, however legitimate, made it possible to justify domestic surveillance, to impose a strict and all-consuming ritual, to organise the intimate life of the population, and thus to tend towards a certain "positive" uniformity." (my translation).

Geneviève Heller, *propre en ordre*. (Lausanne: Edition d'En Bas, 1980), 125.

The avoidance of dirt has played a significant role throughout the history of architecture, especially since the 1880s, that brought a new understanding of microbes and contagion, as well as the tuberculosis epidemic.¹ The architectural paradigm of hygiene was spread further by the ideas of Henri Sauvage, Le Corbusier and the CIAM, amongst others:

“Whitewash is extremely moral. Suppose there were a decree requiring all rooms in Paris to be given a coat of whitewash. I maintain that that would be a police task of real stature and a manifestation of high morality, the sign of a great people.»

le Corbusier in *l'art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* (1925)

Dirtiness passes from materiality to morality when Le Corbusier links disinfection to high morality. He condemns as immoral those who don't follow this cleansing treatment and proposes a coat of whitewash as a tool to control who is part of the “great people”. Architectural hygienist measures also consist in the clear separation of functions in urban planning, sleek or tiled surfaces, air circulation inside and outside of the building; through systems of ventilation, distance from the ground and other buildings, new systems of waste management, sewage plants, and the mechanisation of bathing, laundry or cleaning.

This paradigm of hygiene is still present in the grands ensembles in Geneva, built between 1960 and 1980. The planning of most of these suburban, low cost housing developments happened simultaneously to the development of various waste management and sewage plants to answer the supposed unhealthiness of certain areas of the core city and the housing crisis lasting since 1940.² Developed at the time of the popularisation of most cleaning devices and the adoption of modernist thinking about the avoidance of dirt and advertised at the time with pure air and clean new apartments, modern and low cost, the grands ensembles follow similar schemes.³ Built on the edge of suburbia, they displace low-income populations out of the center.

I will study the grand ensembles through the lens of dirt management and enforcement of order. How is this paradigm of hygiene materialised in the built environment of the grands ensembles? Le Grand-Montfleury in Versoix, built between 1962 and 1983 will be used as a specific case study to explore what architectural methods were deployed to maintain order and cleanliness.

¹ Hermenjat Renée, “habitation et vie domestique de 1850 à 1930” *Habitation : revue trimestrielle de la section romande de l'Association Suisse pour l'Habitat* n°53 (1980) <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-128256>.

² The sewage plant of la Villette (GE-FR) was built in 1962, the one from Aire(GE) was built in 1967. In 1966 the incineration plant from Genevrier was inaugurated. They follow the sanitation plan of M. François Perrault, following the expertise of Yves Mesytre, exposed in the *the Journal de Genève* (No 83 6-7 april 1962) www.letempsarchives.ch This report mention from water treatment to waste disposal, the relationship between wastewater treatment and town planning, legislation on water, and the demographic growth of the canton.

³ The organisation of each grands ensemble is slightly different but the elements are the same: a large parc, parkings, schools and a mall. The main dwellings, subsidised and free rent are in blocks, while some towers welcome property per level.

Entering into dirty territory, most stories are intertwined and sometimes contradictory. To ease comprehension and make connections visible, an order has been set. Starting with the notion of disorder and filth, then following the paths of waste, and bodily fluids, the narrative sometimes passes between time and space to keep up with different flows and networks. We will follow the paths of dirt through the built environment, crossing the binary between cleanliness and filth, mapping its trajectory from the city to the suburb, navigating through the territory and the tiles. Tracing the dirt will reveal where it leads, seeking leaks into alternatives of normality and less restrictive notions of cleanliness. Mapping the multiscale network of infrastructure, architectural elements, and people, we will narrate the story of maintenance and understand the functioning of the limits set in place to control dirt and morality.

To understand the implications of the hygiene paradigm in the architecture of the grands ensembles, I meet with maintenance workers, caregivers, and inhabitants. Alongside archival research on Le bureau de la Salubrité Publique (office for public hygiene), regional news, architectural reviews, and construction documents related to the ensembles, these conversations will frame how dirt is perceived, where it accumulates, and how it is managed.¹ This documentation is further discussed in the annex.

In the first chapter the story follows the treatment of disorder and filth, from the demolition of popular neighbourhoods deemed unhealthy, over the laws that regulate the construction of the grands ensembles, to the routine of inhabitants and caretakers. Disorder is understood as a condition that allows filth to gather and alter the functions, the view or the idea legitimised by societal norms and the ruling class or management. Filth is dust, hair, mould, foetid smell, stickiness and things that linger outside of their set limits.

The modernist architecture of the grand ensemble with its clear boundaries and pure shapes renders visible every corner and entrance, preventing the lingering and accumulation of undesired people or filth.

Each building is taken care of by a caretaker, responsible for cleaning the alley, small maintenance tasks, and ensuring overall cohesion among the inhabitants. The alleys also serve as the primary limits between the inhabitants and the immediate environment, preventing dirt from lingering or entering the private units.

Personal dirt, like dust or residue of cooking is to be taken care of in private within each apartment.² Thought of as completely separate units, the apartments are linked not only by staircases but also by water and air circulation that flow and leak between each apartment, crossing through the floors and lives of the inhabitants.

¹ The Archive of Le bureau de la Salubrité Publique, the office of public healthiness of Geneva, has recently been made available to the public, uncovering the hygienist politics that have infused urban Geneva development. The bureau's role, from 1865 to 1957, extended far beyond sanitation, overseeing residency permits, building regulations, air quality, and carrying out sanitary inspections in marginalised communities (stated as "children, sick, strangers, and prostitutes"). The inventory consists of documents on the demolition of supposedly filthy neighbourhoods, sanitation laws, together with reports on unhealthy apartments, and the education of the population. Inventory of the Archives of the Bureau de salubrité publique, Les Archives d'état de Genève, as of the 31st March, 2024, <https://archives-etat-ge.ch/actualite/exposition/>.

² As exposed by Mierle Ukeles or Malgorzata Markiewicz: "Housework never comes to an end, it starts over each day. As such, it is ritualised. It is repetition with a vanishing margin of difference. No amount of scrubbing, wiping, brushing, sweeping or mopping will be enough. A perpetual motion machine of women the world over. Women and minorities and those judged forever unclean." *Dirty Theory: Troubling Architecture*, Hélène Frichot, page 75.

The second chapter will be focused on waste. Waste is, rather than matter out of place, matter that is not wanted anymore, only dirty when it escapes the path set for its management. Here we will focus on non recyclable waste and its paths through the territory.

We will follow waste from the creation of it within the domestic, through its canalisation through the city, until it reaches its final destination. Since 1963, Geneva has a cantonal network of waste management, from the collection to the burning factory to prevent water pollution and the proliferation of landfills.

The last chapter is concerned with bodily fluids. Historically, the hygiene of the body has followed complete mechanisation: the bathroom cell, its clinical appearance and complex plumbing and standardised equipment, is to be used by oneself. The technological evolution of body fluids management created a clear separation between clinical and efficient baths and toilets and luxurious relaxation baths, related with the social aspect of body regeneration of sauna or roman bath. We clean our bodies like we do the dishes, following a precise and efficient routine.

The story starts within a bathroom, on the gliding surfaces that leads our dirt away from sight or smell. For bodies, that for any reason don't fit the bathroom, washing oneself takes other routes and the stories adapt to space available, staying as close as possible to the societal norms of bathing. The use of modern bathrooms and the correct way to shower seems now to be a matter of course however, in between the 1880 and the 1930, showering and the proper routine to follow was taught in Swiss public schools. In this final chapter, exploring various rituals of body care, the water network will conclude our washing cycle with the canalization of filth out of the city, getting ready for the next cycle.

Drawing from the narrative of comics and the precision of architectural drawings, these stories combine the abstraction of architectural representations with the subjective storytelling of comics. By superimposing architectural details onto the retelling of everyday maintenance rituals, this approach aims to dismantle the supposed objectivity of cleanliness, the underlying violence in the determination of dirt as a social marker, synonymous with disrespect of certain bodies, workers, and territories.

¹ Yves Mestre, *Le Programme d'Assainissement du Canton de Genève*, Genève, Département des travaux publics, 1962.

² Siegfried Gideon, *Mechanisation Takes Command: a contribution to anonymous history*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948.

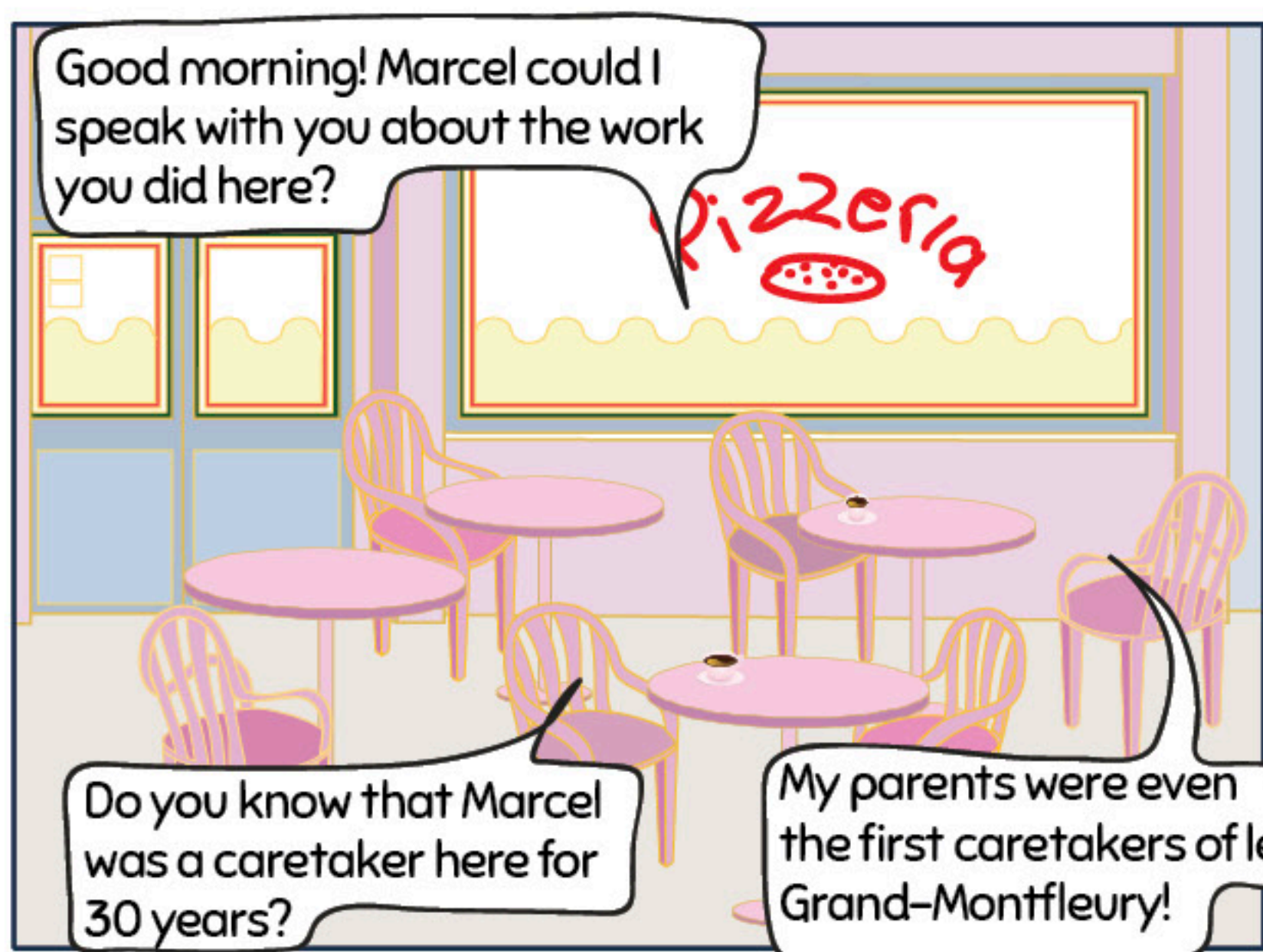




Disorder

and

Fifth



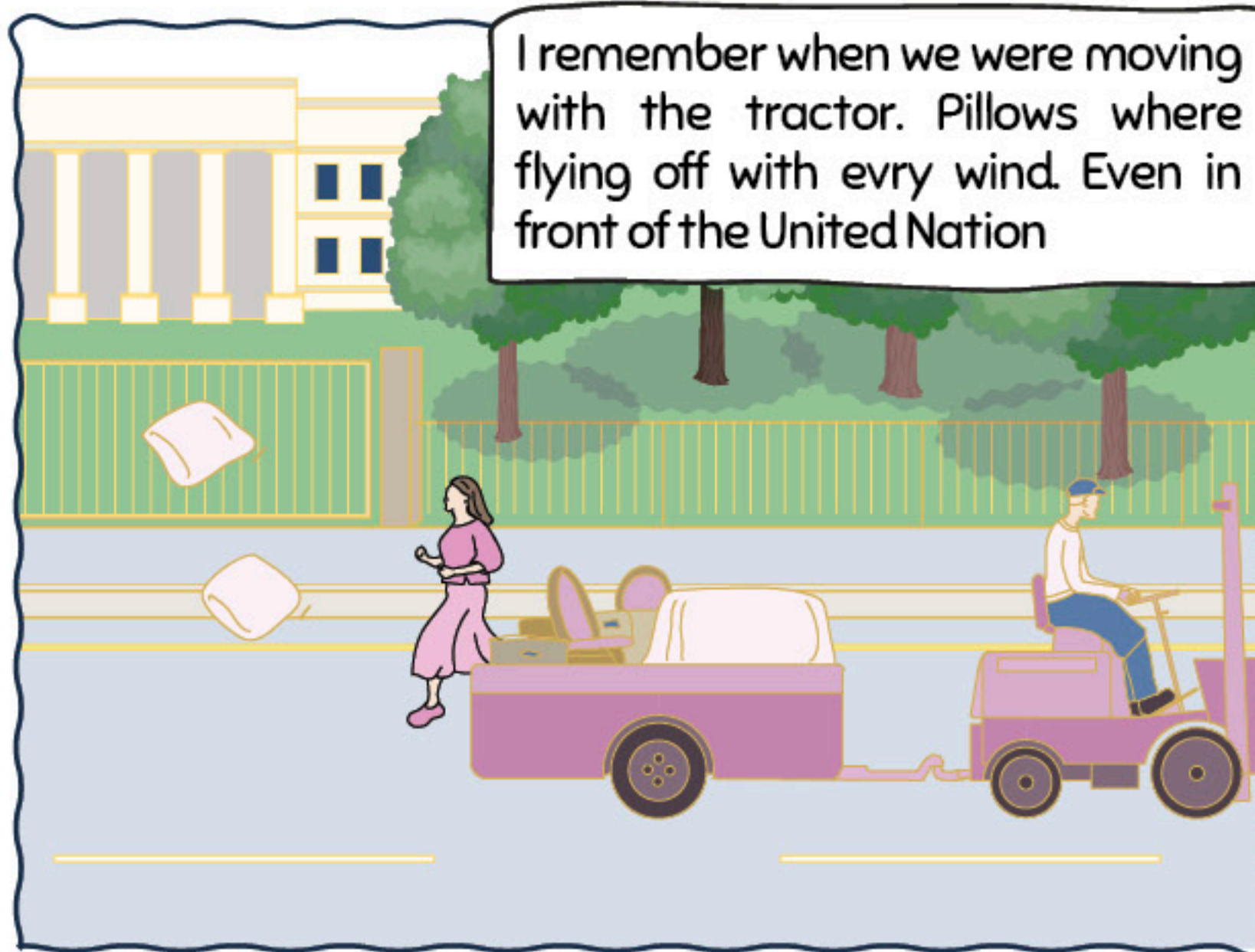
Good morning! Marcel could I speak with you about the work you did here?

Do you know that Marcel was a caretaker here for 30 years?

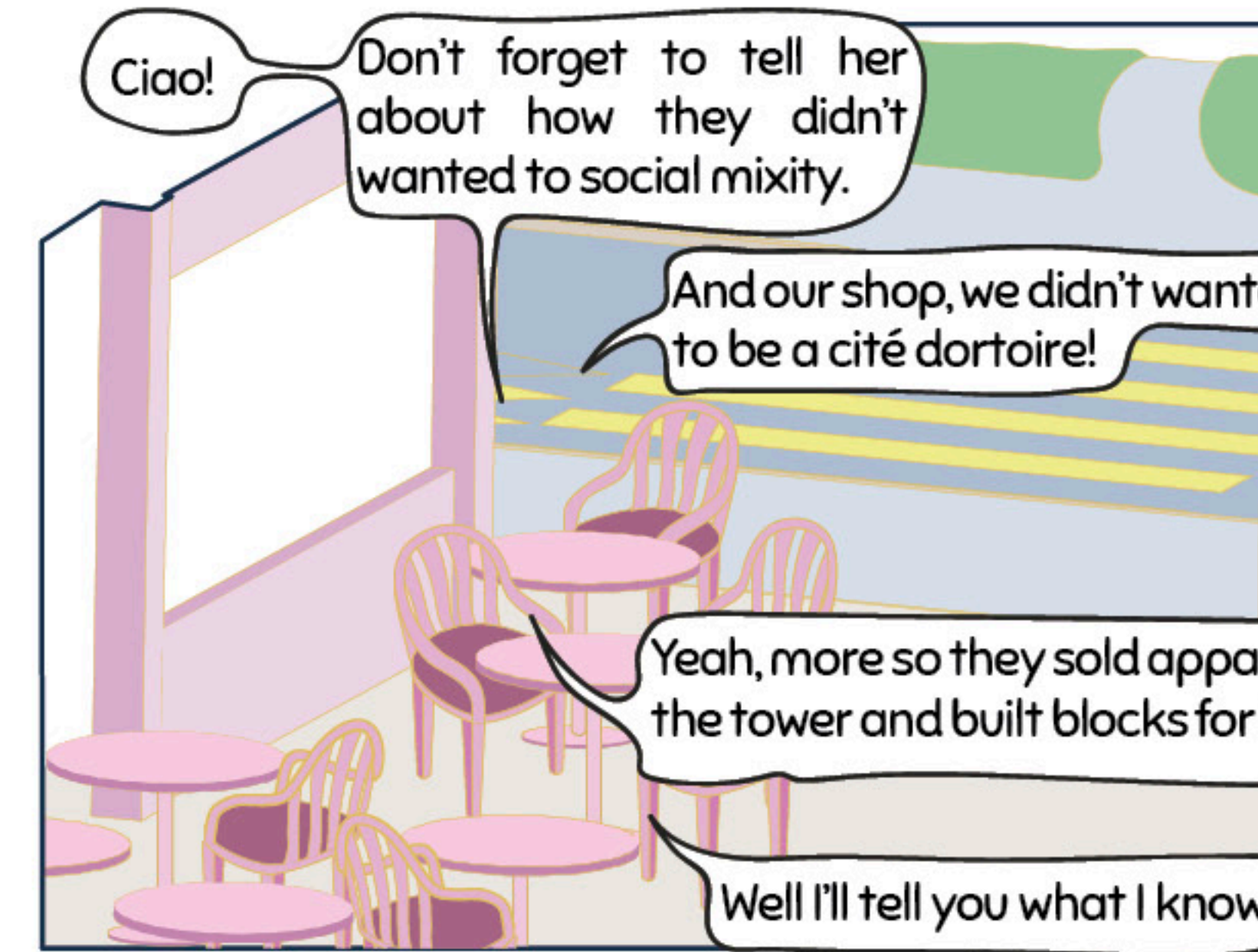
My parents were even the first caretakers of le Grand-Montfleury!



Sartorio, the architect, and my father met at the caves ouvertes. He happened to be looking for someone to take care of the building and the gardening.



I remember when we were moving with the tractor. Pillows were flying off with every wind. Even in front of the United Nation



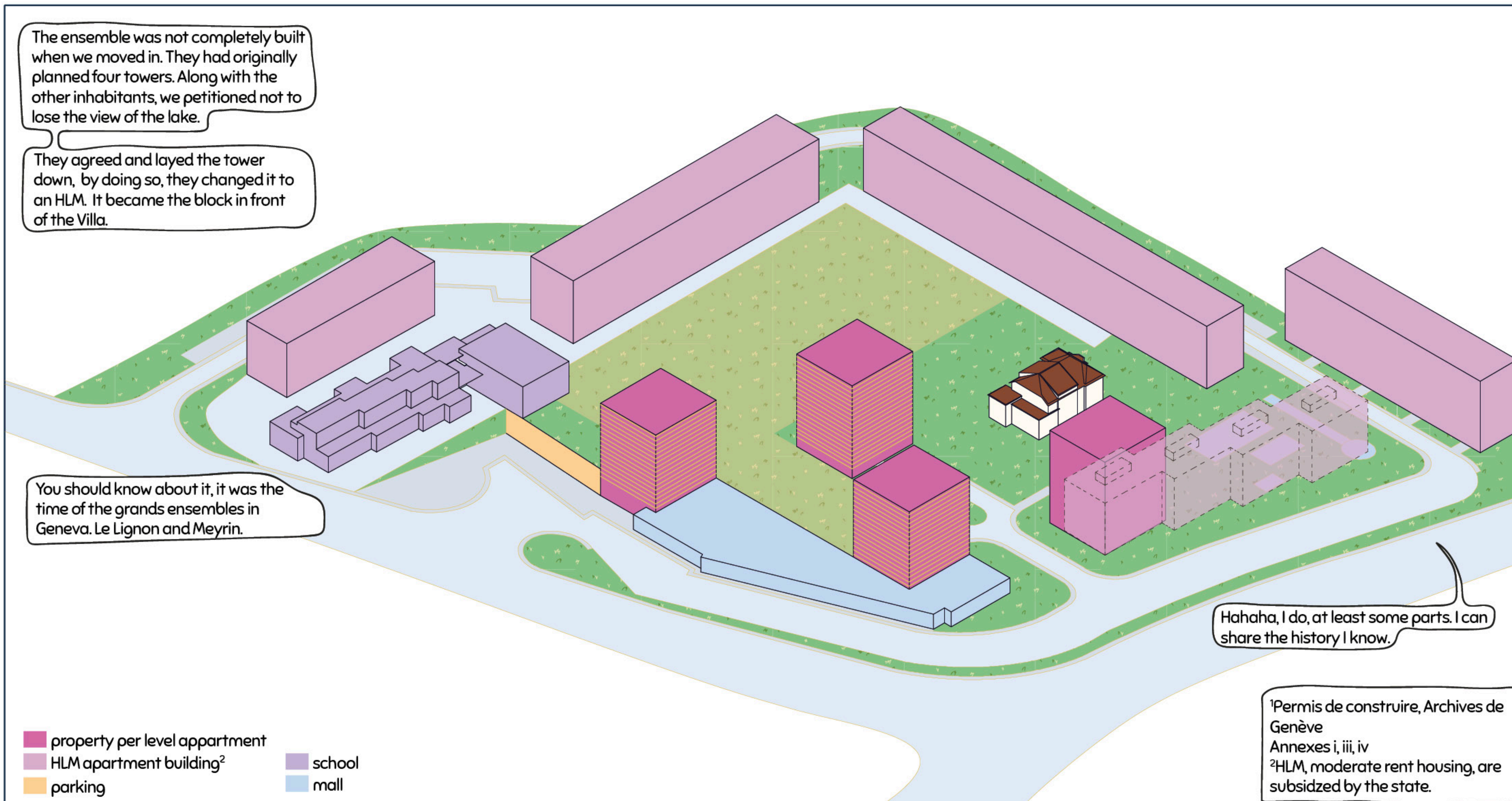
Ciao!

Don't forget to tell her about how they didn't wanted to social mixity.

And our shop, we didn't wanted to be a cité dortoire!

Yeah, more so they sold apartment in the tower and built blocks for the HLM.

Well I'll tell you what I know.



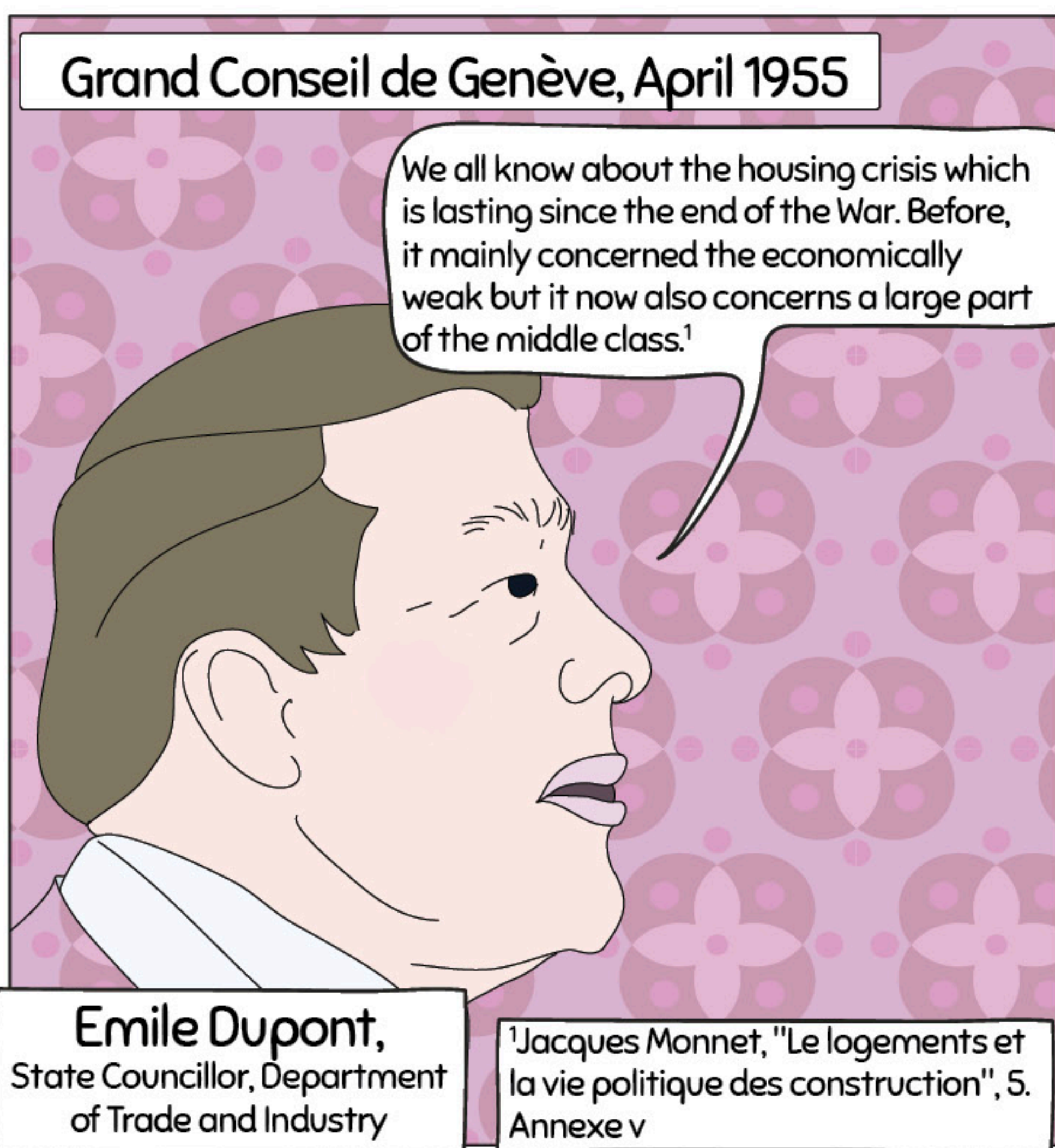
The ensemble was not completely built when we moved in. They had originally planned four towers. Along with the other inhabitants, we petitioned not to lose the view of the lake.

They agreed and layed the tower down, by doing so, they changed it to an HLM. It became the block in front of the Villa.

You should know about it, it was the time of the grands ensembles in Geneva. Le Lignon and Meyrin.

Hahaha, I do, at least some parts. I can share the history I know.

¹Permis de construire, Archives de Genève Annexes i, iii, iv
²HLM, moderate rent housing, are subsidized by the state.



Grand Conseil de Genève, April 1955

We all know about the housing crisis which is lasting since the end of the War. Before, it mainly concerned the economically weak but it now also concerns a large part of the middle class.¹

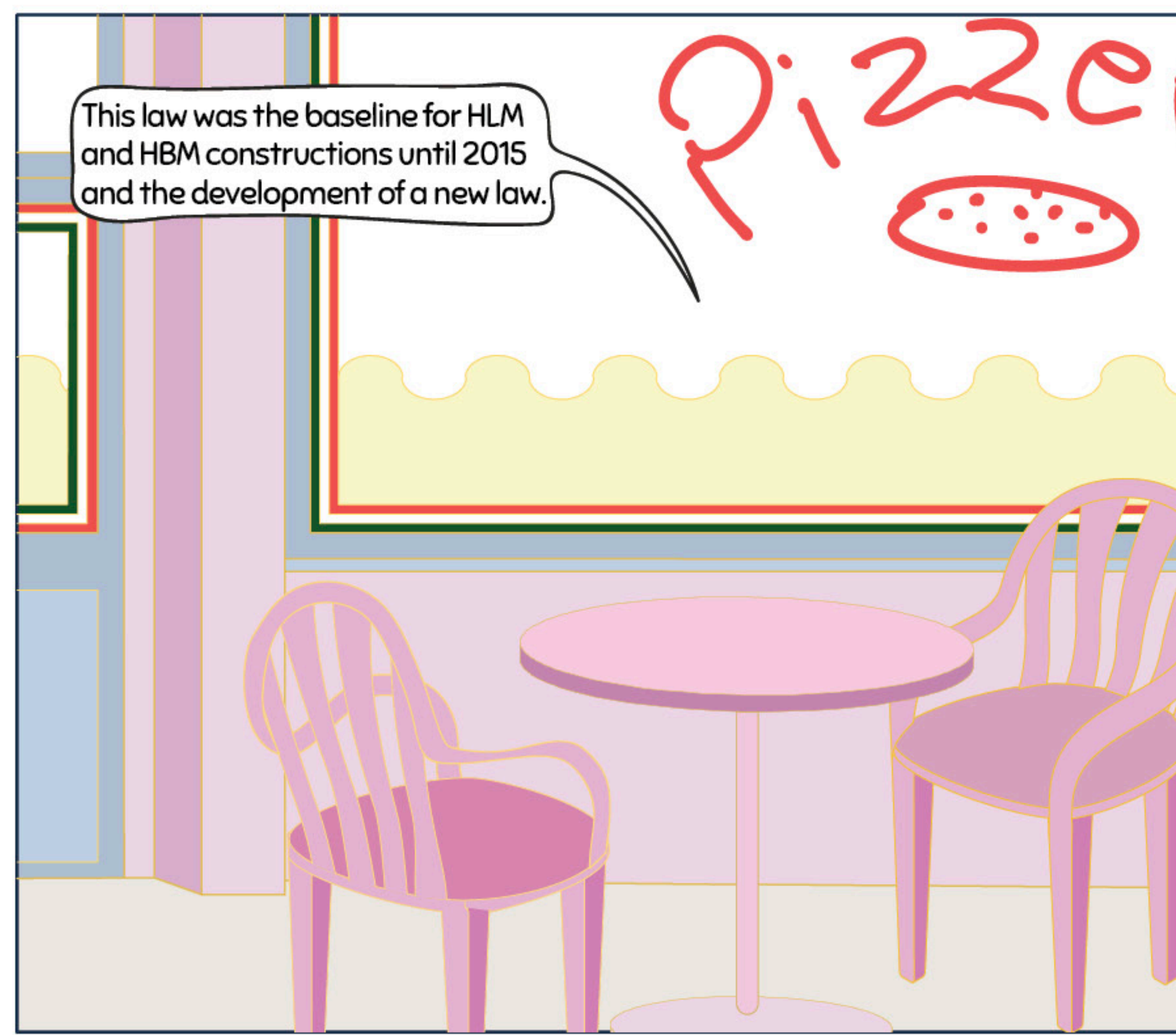
Emile Dupont, State Councillor, Department of Trade and Industry

¹Jacques Monnet, "Le logements et la vie politique des construction", 5. Annexe v

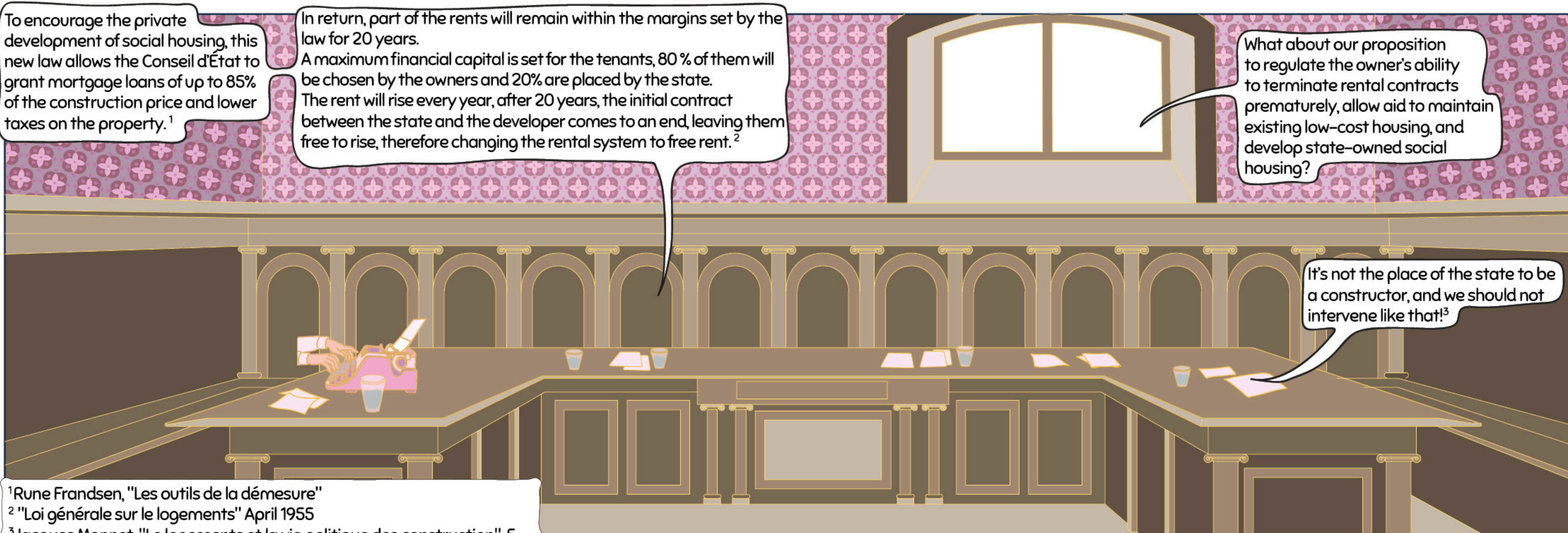


The law Dupont will promote the private development of social housing.

¹Annexe vi, Archives d'Etat, 2185



This law was the baseline for HLM and HBM constructions until 2015 and the development of a new law.



To encourage the private development of social housing, this new law allows the Conseil d'Etat to grant mortgage loans of up to 85% of the construction price and lower taxes on the property.¹

In return, part of the rents will remain within the margins set by the law for 20 years. A maximum financial capital is set for the tenants, 80% of them will be chosen by the owners and 20% are placed by the state. The rent will rise every year, after 20 years, the initial contract between the state and the developer comes to an end, leaving them free to rise, therefore changing the rental system to free rent.²

What about our proposition to regulate the owner's ability to terminate rental contracts prematurely, allow aid to maintain existing low-cost housing, and develop state-owned social housing?

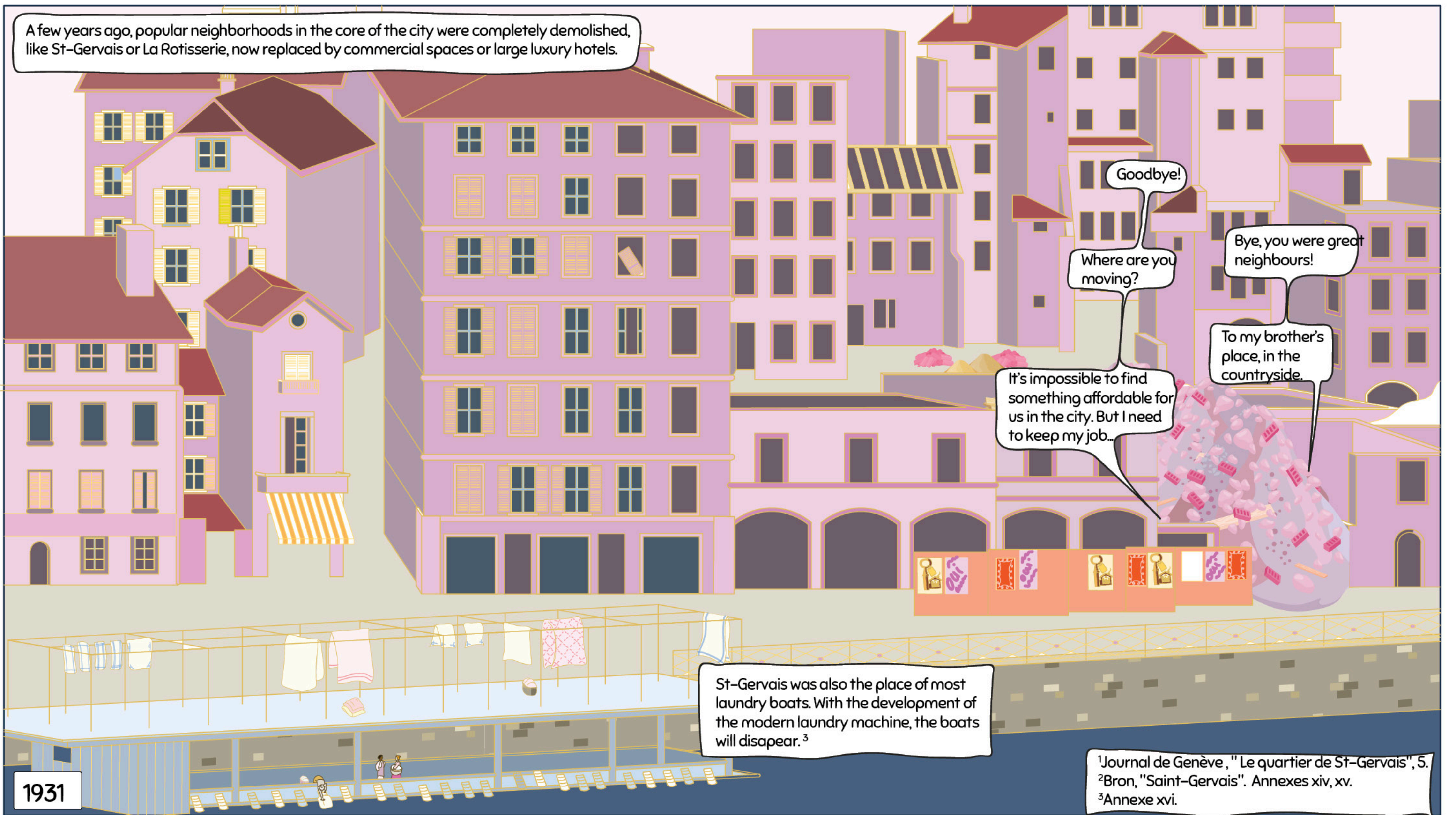
It's not the place of the state to be a constructor, and we should not intervene like that!³

¹Rune Frandsen, "Les outils de la démesure"

²"Loi générale sur le logements" April 1955

³Jacques Monnet, "Le logements et la vie politique des construction", 5.

A few years ago, popular neighborhoods in the core of the city were completely demolished, like St-Gervais or La Rotisserie, now replaced by commercial spaces or large luxury hotels.



Goodbye!

Where are you moving?

Bye, you were great neighbours!

To my brother's place, in the countryside.

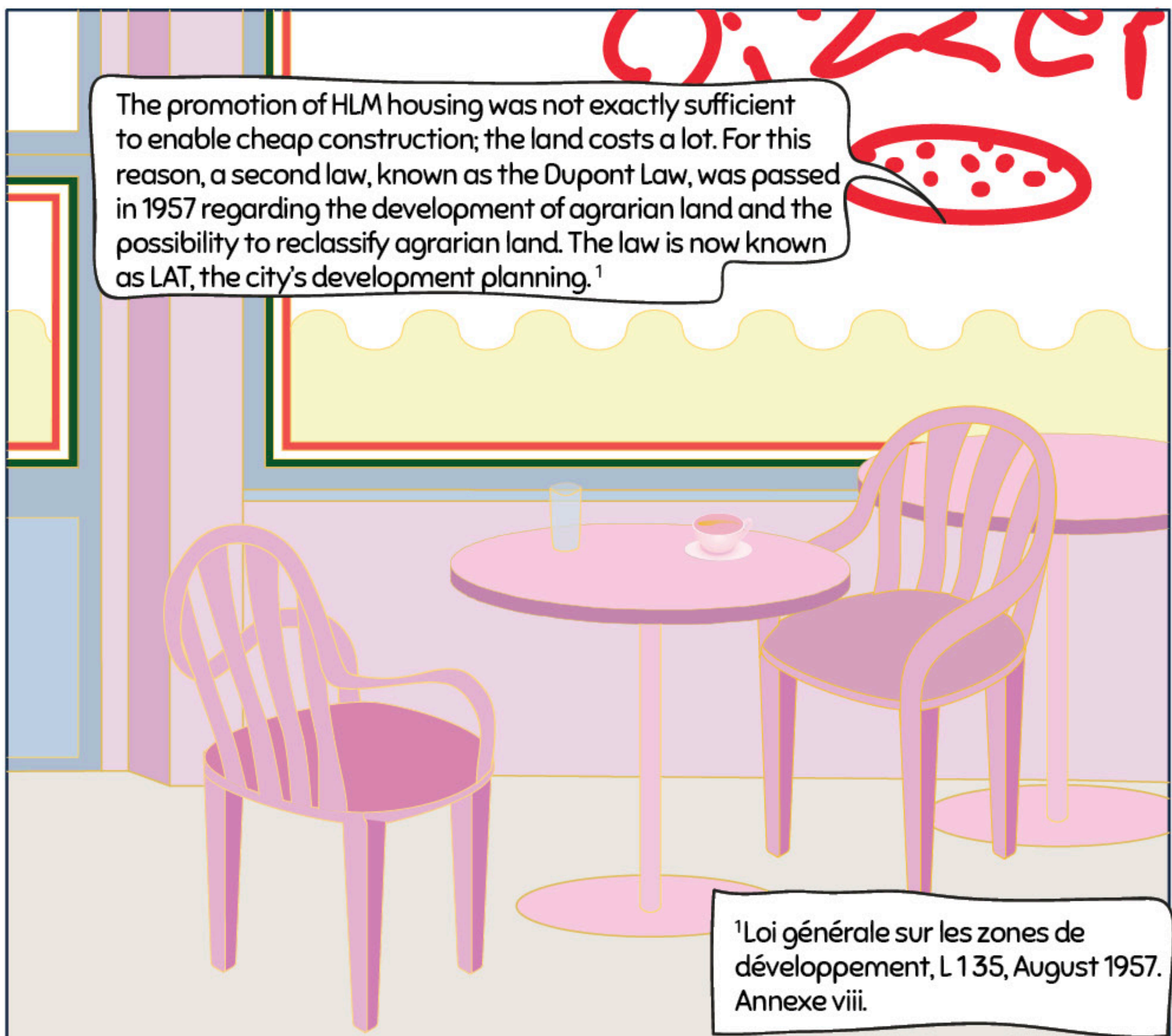
It's impossible to find something affordable for us in the city. But I need to keep my job...

St-Gervais was also the place of most laundry boats. With the development of the modern laundry machine, the boats will disappear.³

1931

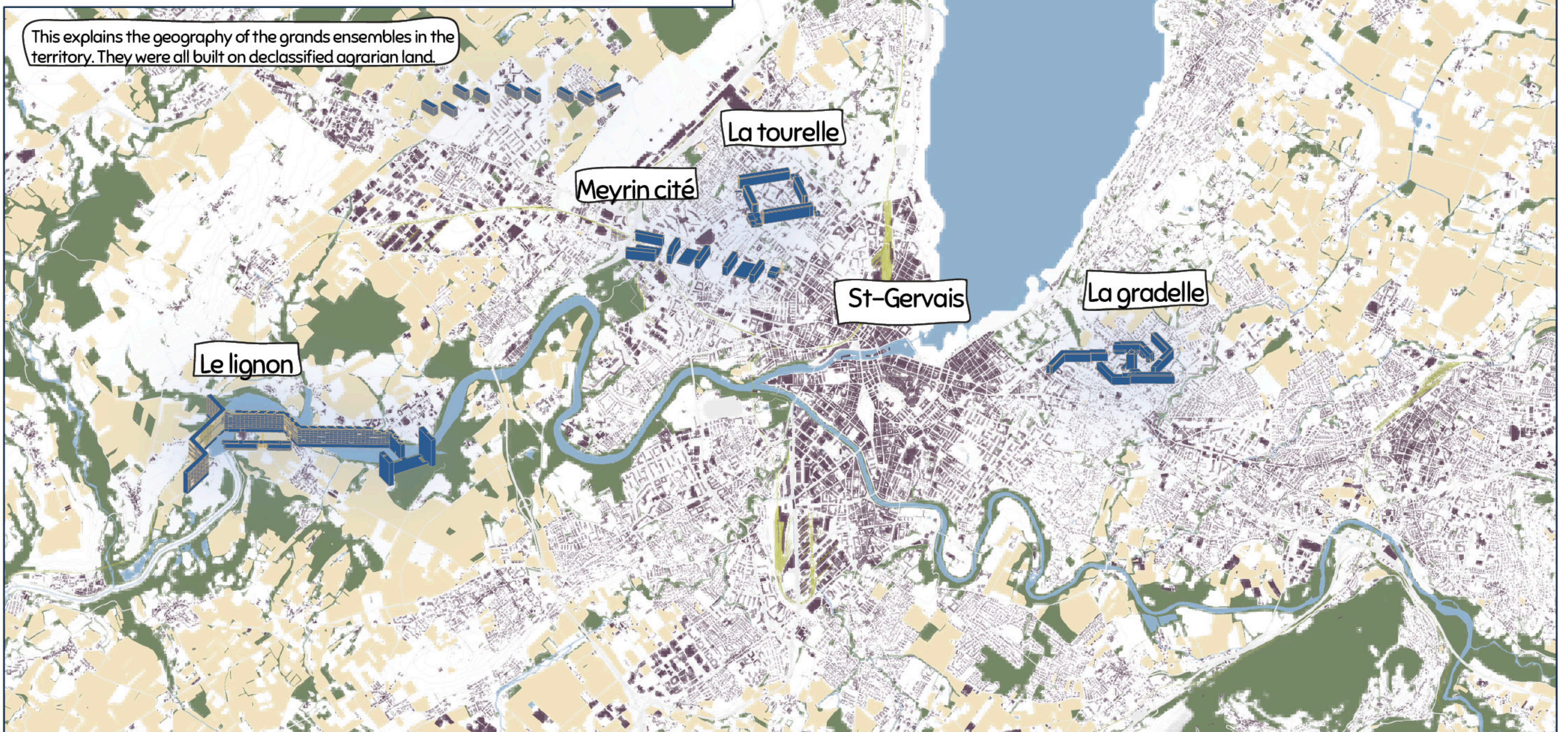
¹Journal de Genève, "Le quartier de St-Gervais", 5.
²Bron, "Saint-Gervais". Annexes xiv, xv.
³Annexe xvi.

The promotion of HLM housing was not exactly sufficient to enable cheap construction; the land costs a lot. For this reason, a second law, known as the Dupont Law, was passed in 1957 regarding the development of agrarian land and the possibility to reclassify agrarian land. The law is now known as LAT, the city's development planning.¹



¹Loi générale sur les zones de développement, L 135, August 1957. Annexe viii.

This explains the geography of the grands ensembles in the territory. They were all built on declassified agrarian land.



Cité Balexert

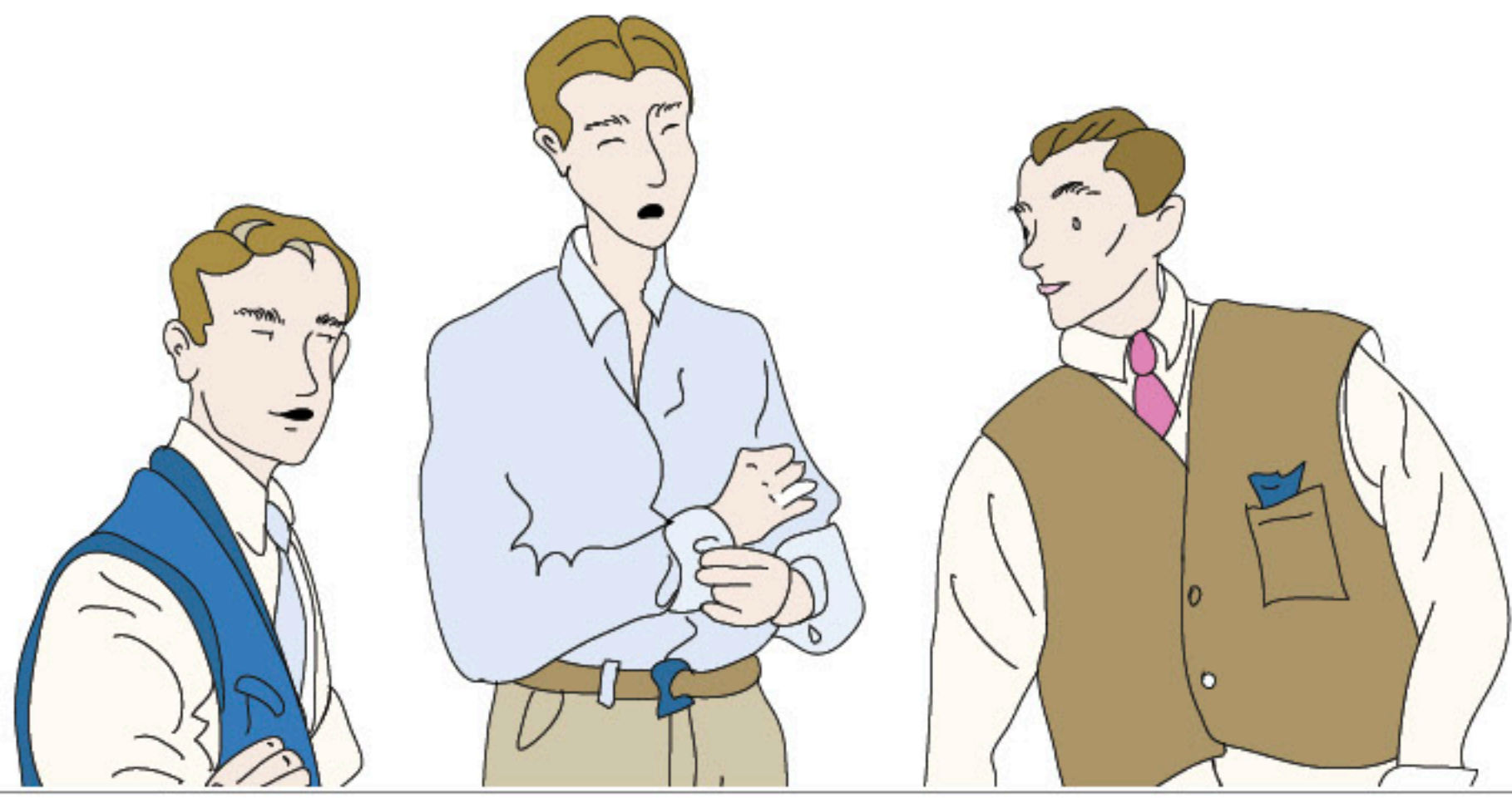
1957-1962

600 apartments

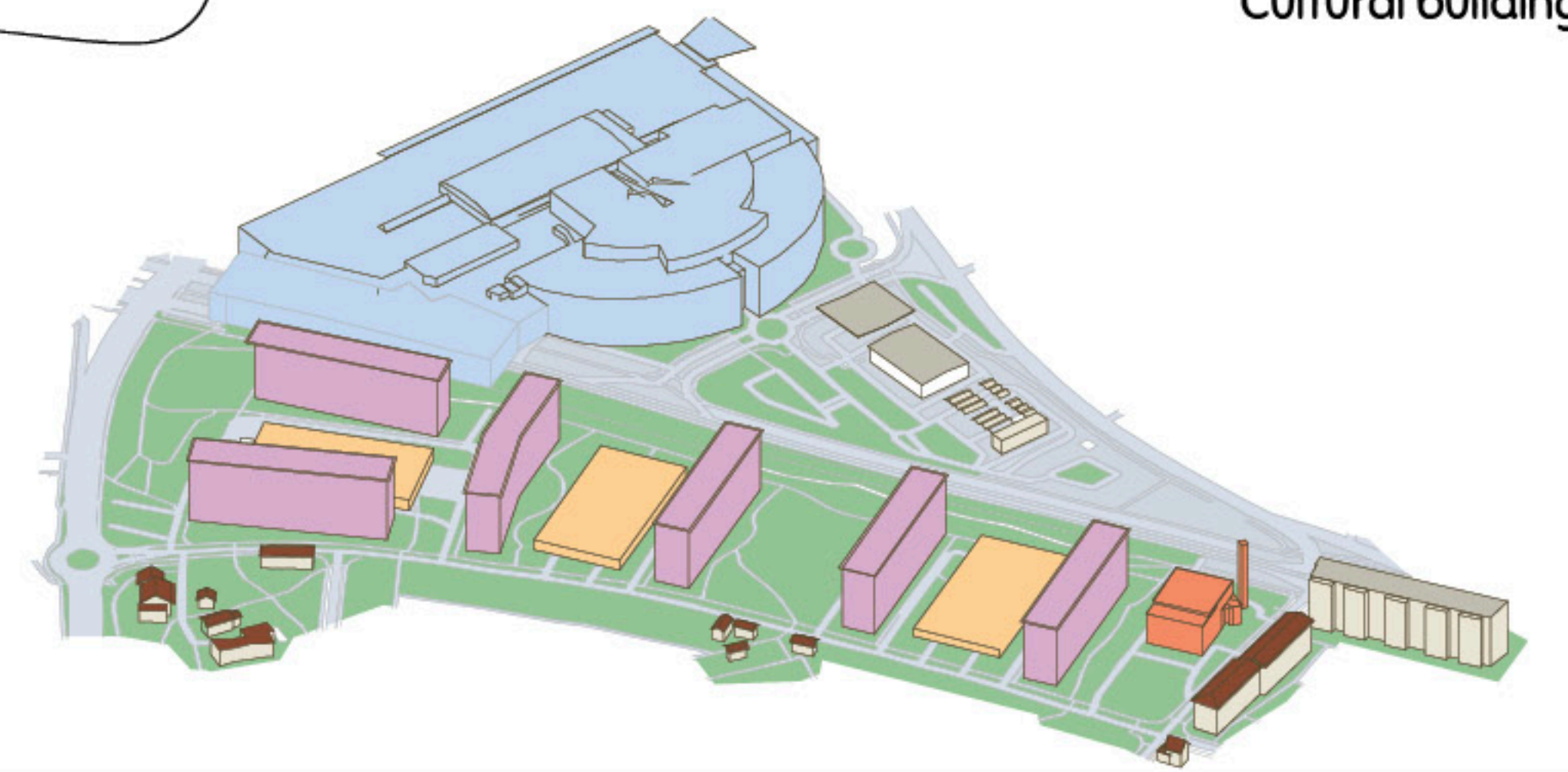
Architecte Honegger Frères¹

We developed the system of apartment HA in Morocco. There is not much adaptation to be done to Geneva's context.²

We are committing ourselves to the future for many decades, creating an environment that will be lived in for generations to come. These future inhabitants have a right to a happy, humane life, both physically and morally, and the neighbourhood must make this possible, even provide it.



We know that families have the right to exist, that little children have the right not to be crushed in front of the door of their home. We know that housewives have the right to live in a place open to the outside world, where chores do not absorb all their strength and good mood.



- Property per level apartment
- HLM apartment building
- HBM apartment building
- Parking
- School
- Mall
- Churches
- Cultural building

Meyrin Cité

1960-1964

600 apartments

Georges Addor

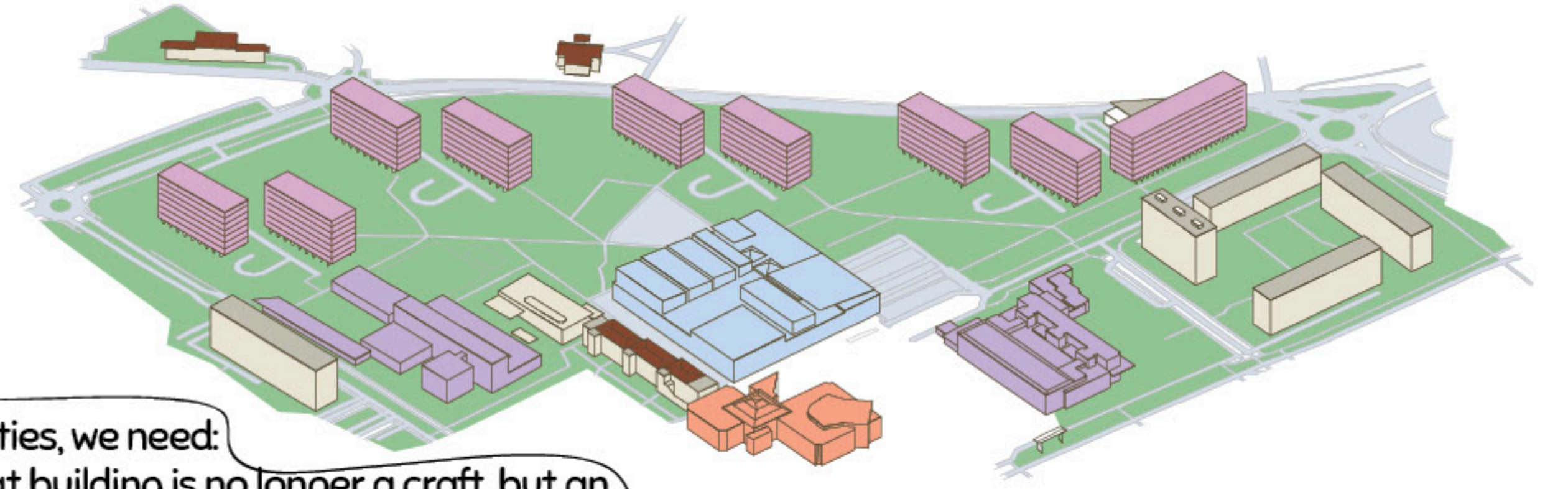
Dominique Julliard

Louis Payot and Jacques Bolliger

In the middle of the development, less than 500 m from the furthest buildings, a large area of public use has been set aside for schools, churches, public buildings, etc. It is in the centre of this area that the shopping centre has been built.

For such projects to become more than experiments, but concrete realities, we need:

1. Architects to admit that they are no longer artists, but technicians; that building is no longer a craft, but an industry; that a technical service must be part of a planned economy, with a precise budget and a cost price estimated in advance.
2. The government to understand that it has no interest in systematically attacking property developers.
3. The unions, which defend the standard of living of workers, not to lose sight of the fact that the improvement of the social standard of workers, if it is to be assured, should be done in parallel with an improvement in the means of production and not to its detriment.



Le Lignon

1963-1971

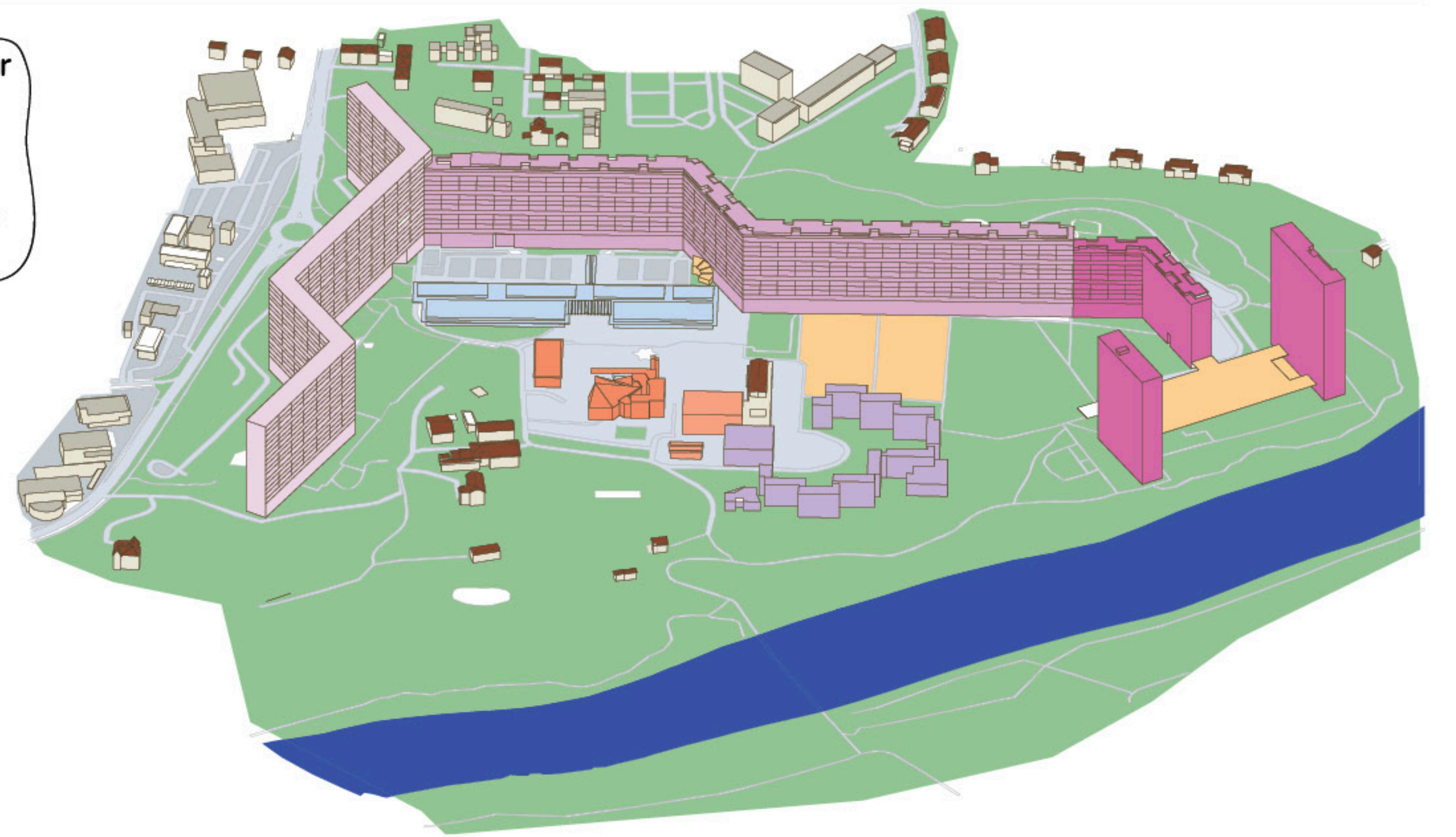
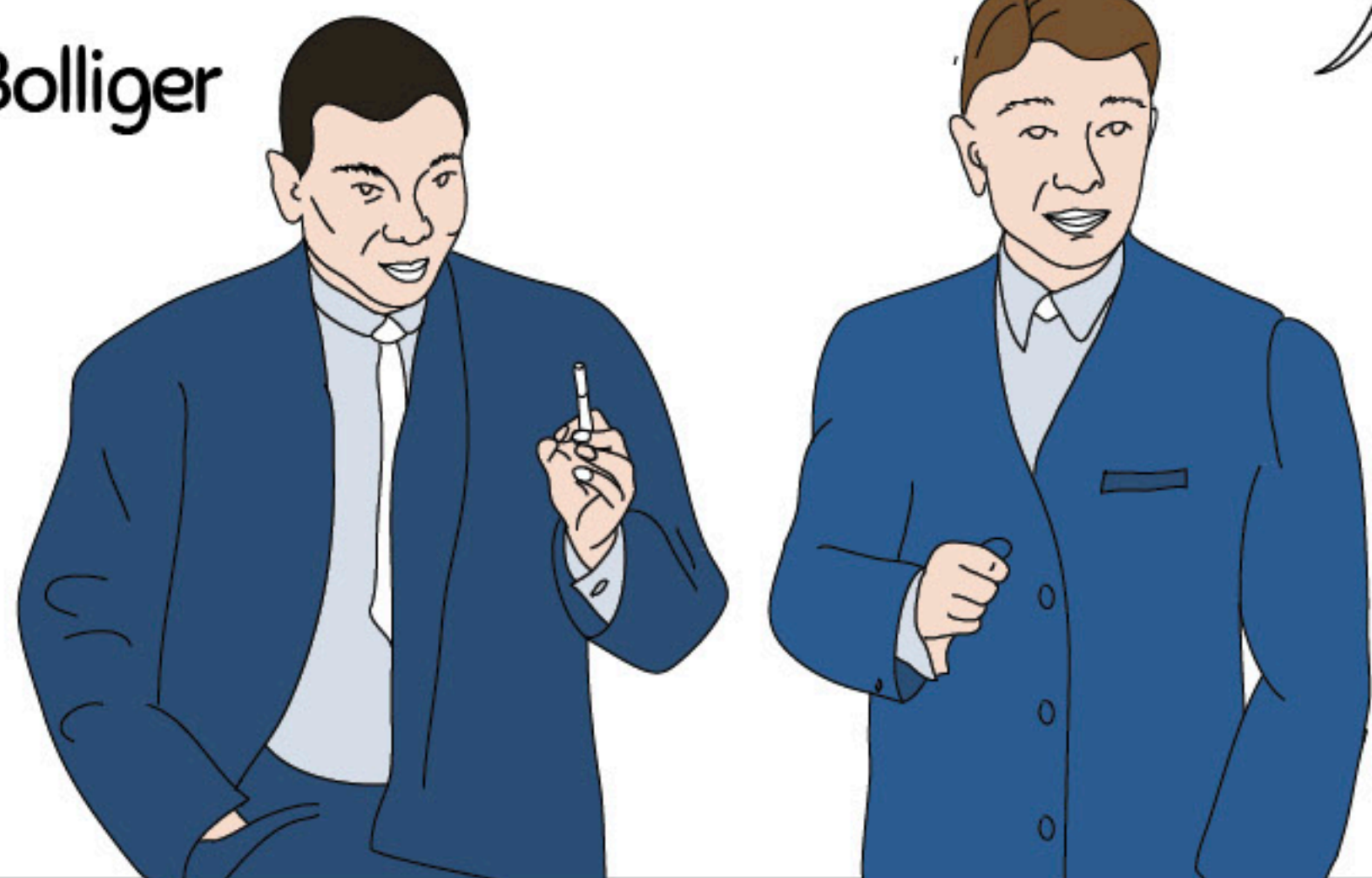
2700 apartments

Georges Addor

Dominique Julliard

Louis Payot and Jacques Bolliger

Housing becomes more than a roof over a family's head, it's proof that you're finally capable of taking your place in society, of giving your family comfort and happiness, of appreciating the new goods advertised as much as anyone else.⁴



La Gradelle

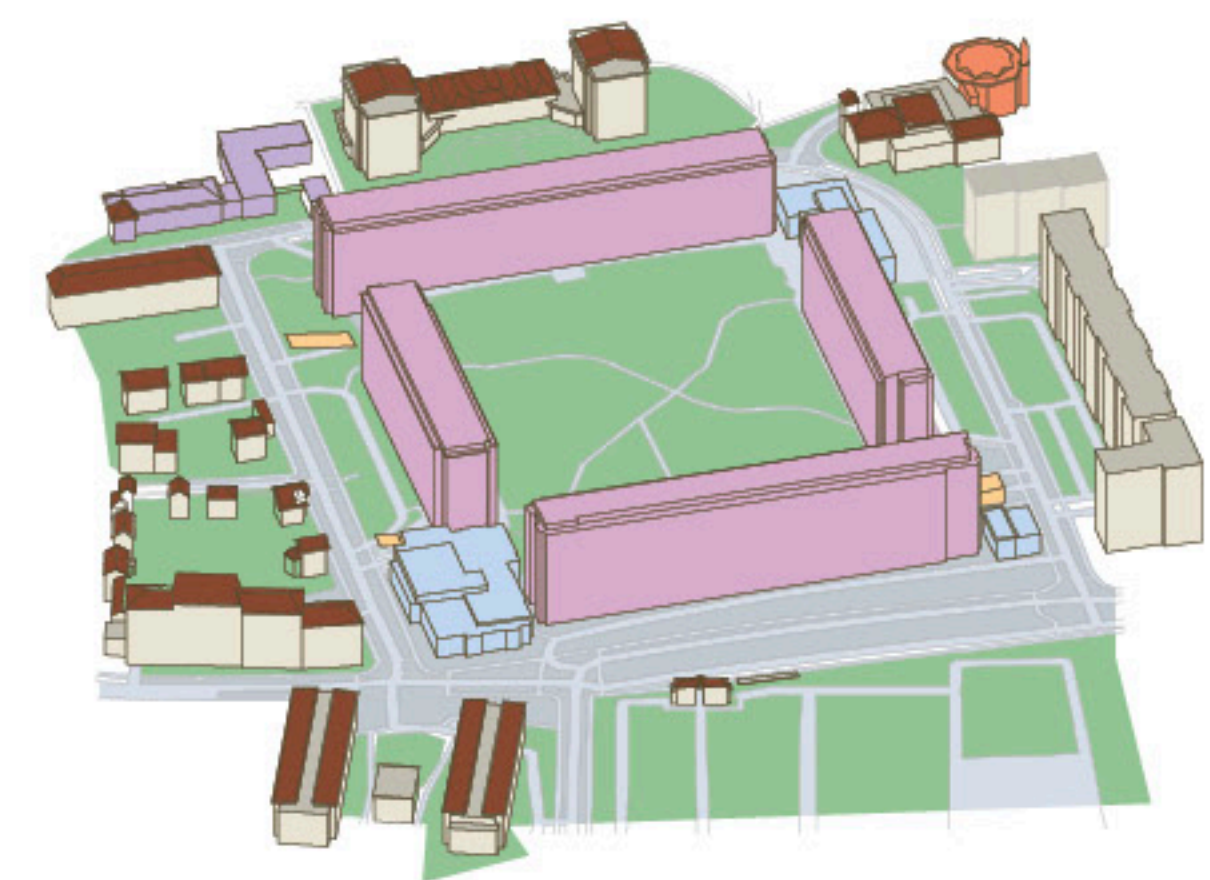
1963-1968

960 apartments

Jan Hentsch and Jacques Zbinden

The Gradelle development is comprised 36 buildings With 7 or 8 storeys and a 16-storey tower block, the complex is centred around the shopping street and the square. These two spaces, each with its own character, are connected via a number of passageways.

The square, which faces the main green area, houses churches, restaurants, and possibly a public hall with all the facilities: like youth functions. A large part of the common grounds is allocated for schools, a leisure and play centre and a nursery.



La Tourelle

1963-1972

960 apartments

Georges Brera

Paul Waltenspühl

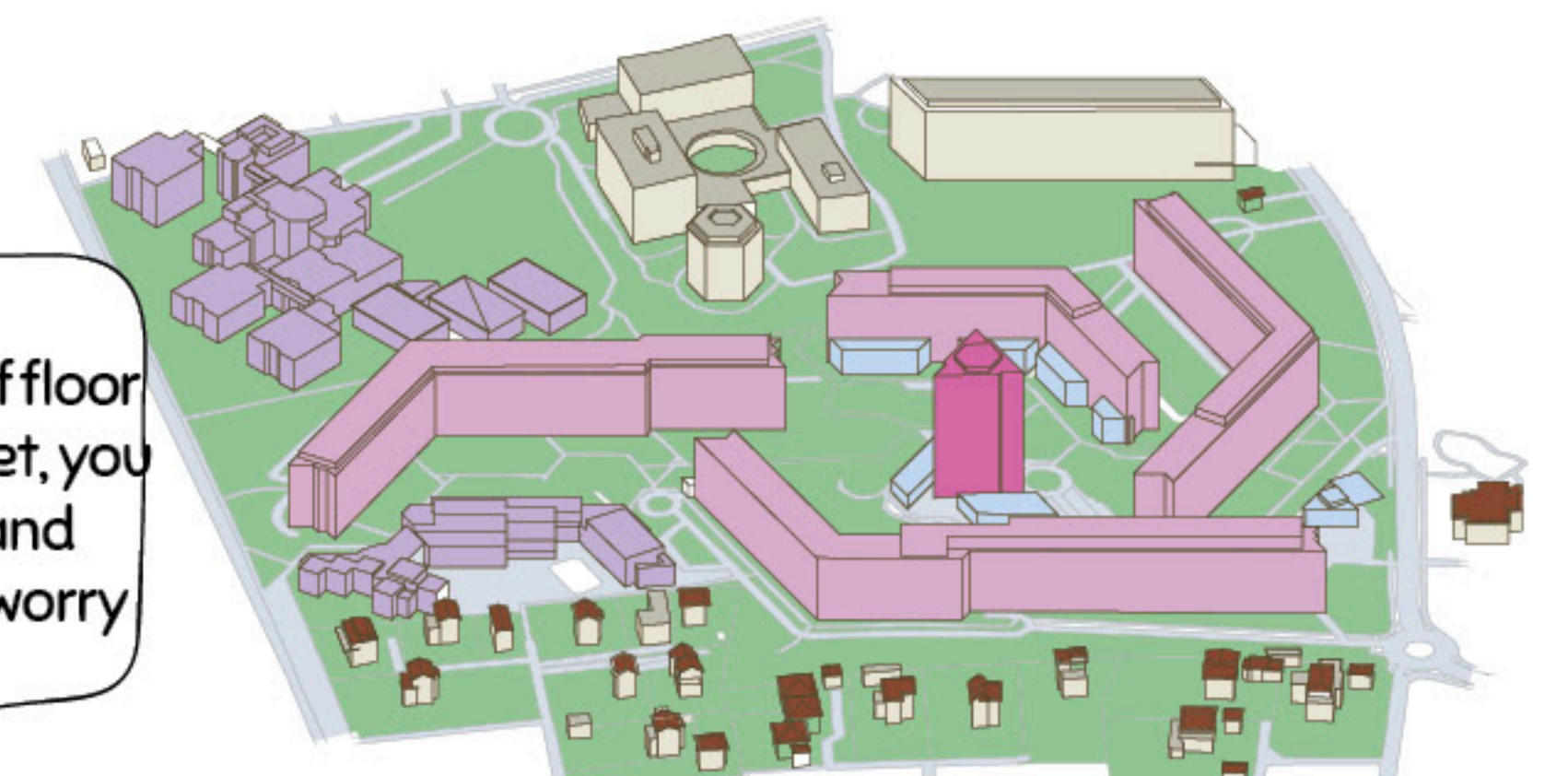
Georges Berthoud

Claire and Oscar Rufer

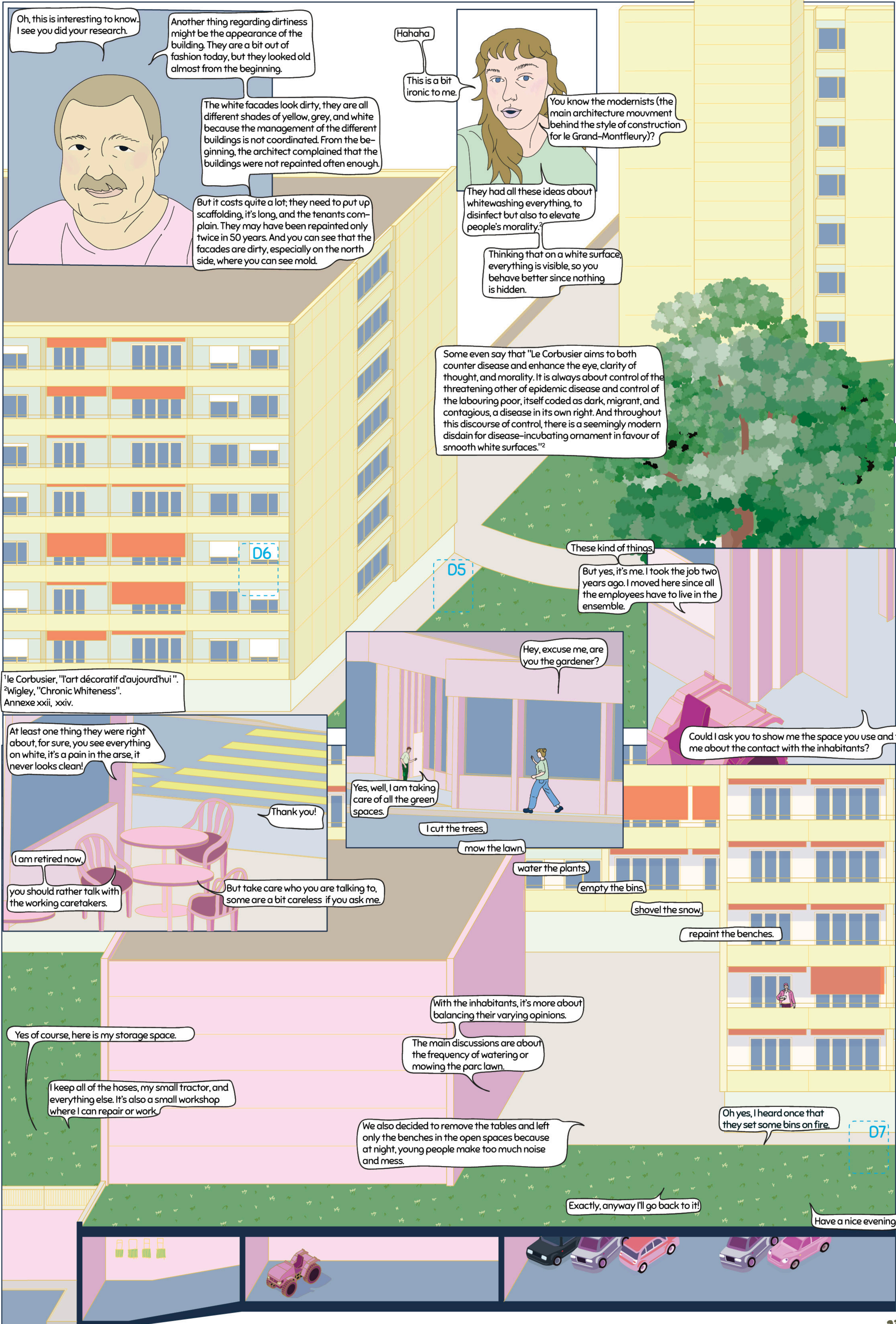
Here and there, voices are being raised to give opinions on the design of our homes. As an architect, I've recently had the opportunity to discuss this problem with a number of housewives.

A detached house is more suitable for raising children and having a family as it offers more space, not only in terms of floor area but also in terms of height. If you need peace and quiet, you can retreat to another floor. You can let the children play and even make noise without having to live with the constant worry of disturbing the neighbours.

As a woman and an architect, I feel it is my duty to try to raise the quality of flats in collective housing by bringing them closer to the quality of individual homes.



¹Comité FAS, "Cité Balexert" ²Graf, "Honegger Freres: Architectes et constructeurs" ³Comité FAS, "Meyrin Parc" ⁴Habitation, "Cité satellite de Meyrin", 1965, 40. ⁵Habitation, "Nouvelles expérience de préfabrication à la cité satellite de Meyrin", 1965, 41 ⁶Vallette, "Le Lignon: quartier invivable?", 25. ⁷Comité FAS, "La Tourelle". ⁸Comité FAS, "La Gradelle". ⁹Claire Rufe, Habitation, "Maison individuelle, ou appartement collectif: le point de vue de la femme". Annexe xx.



Oh, this is interesting to know. I see you did your research.

Another thing regarding dirtiness might be the appearance of the building. They are a bit out of fashion today, but they looked old almost from the beginning.

The white facades look dirty, they are all different shades of yellow, grey, and white because the management of the different buildings is not coordinated. From the beginning, the architect complained that the buildings were not repainted often enough.

But it costs quite a lot; they need to put up scaffolding, it's long, and the tenants complain. They may have been repainted only twice in 50 years. And you can see that the facades are dirty, especially on the north side, where you can see mold.

Hahaha

This is a bit ironic to me.

You know the modernists (the main architecture movement behind the style of construction for le Grand-Montfleury)?

They had all these ideas about whitewashing everything, to disinfect but also to elevate people's morality?

Thinking that on a white surface, everything is visible, so you behave better since nothing is hidden.

Some even say that "Le Corbusier aims to both counter disease and enhance the eye, clarity of thought, and morality. It is always about control of the threatening other of epidemic disease and control of the labouring poor, itself coded as dark, migrant, and contagious, a disease in its own right. And throughout this discourse of control, there is a seemingly modern disdain for disease-incubating ornament in favour of smooth white surfaces."²

These kind of things

But yes, it's me. I took the job two years ago. I moved here since all the employees have to live in the ensemble.

Hey, excuse me, are you the gardener?

Yes, well, I am taking care of all the green spaces.

I cut the trees,

mow the lawn,

water the plants,

empty the bins,

shovel the snow,

repaint the benches.

Could I ask you to show me the space you use and tell me about the contact with the inhabitants?

At least one thing they were right about, for sure, you see everything on white, it's a pain in the arse, it never looks clean!

Thank you!

I am retired now,

you should rather talk with the working caretakers.

But take care who you are talking to, some are a bit careless if you ask me.

With the inhabitants, it's more about balancing their varying opinions.

The main discussions are about the frequency of watering or mowing the parc lawn.

Yes of course, here is my storage space.

I keep all of the hoses, my small tractor, and everything else. It's also a small workshop where I can repair or work.

We also decided to remove the tables and left only the benches in the open spaces because at night, young people make too much noise and mess.

Oh yes, I heard once that they set some bins on fire.

Exactly, anyway I'll go back to it!

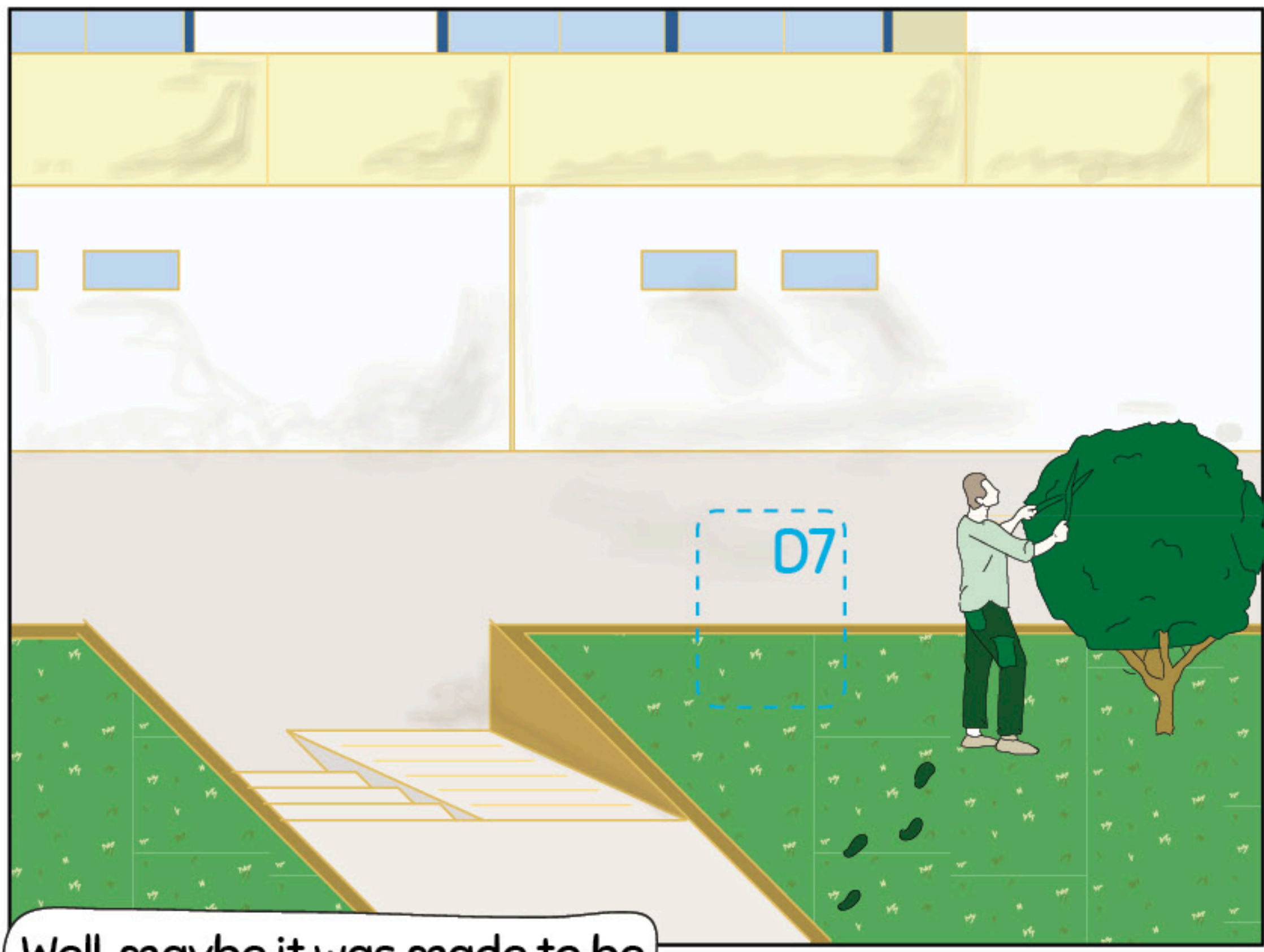
Have a nice evening!

¹Le Corbusier, "l'art décoratif d'aujourd'hui".
²Wigley, "Chronic Whiteness".
Annexe xxii, xxiv.

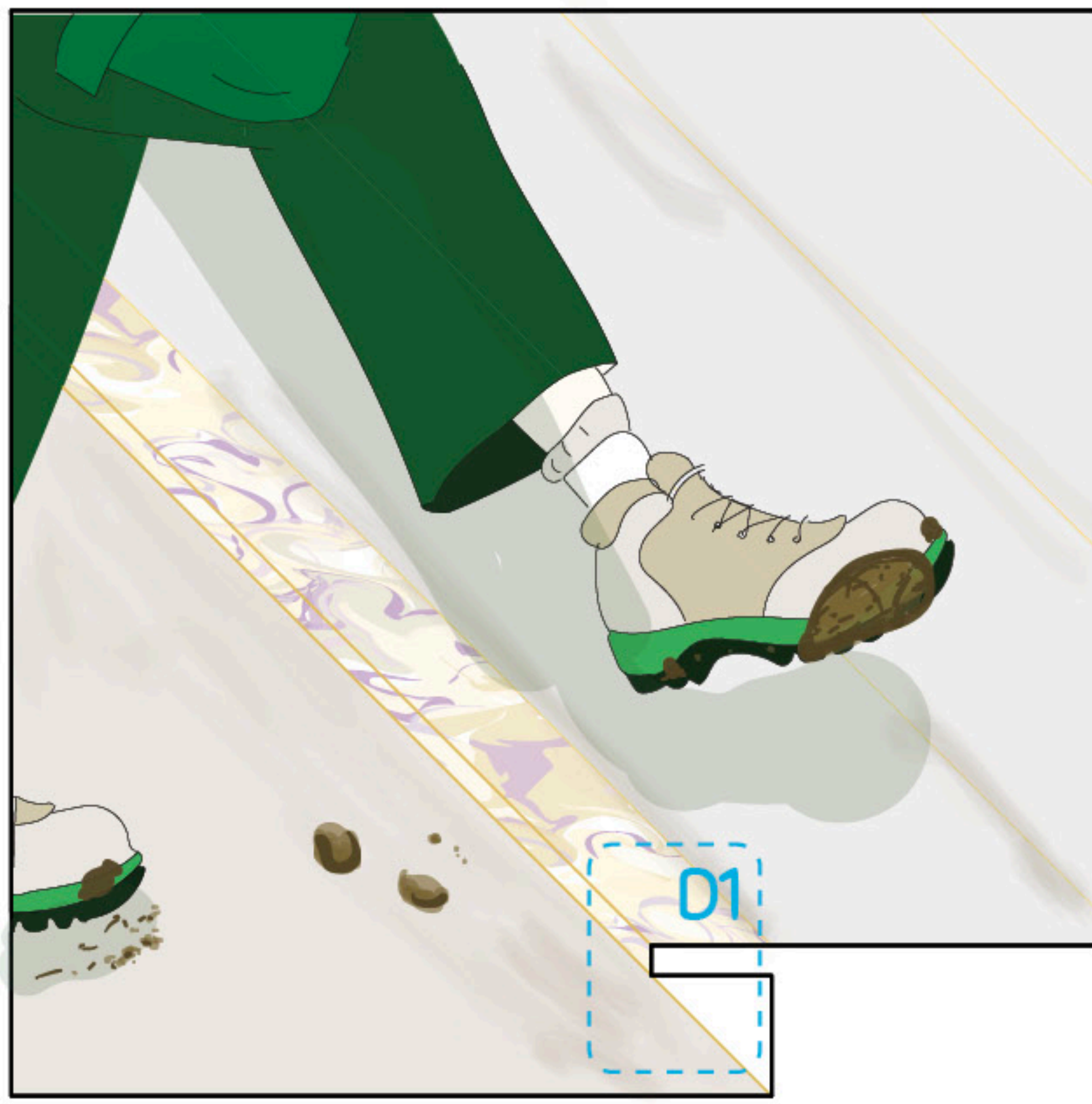
D6

D5

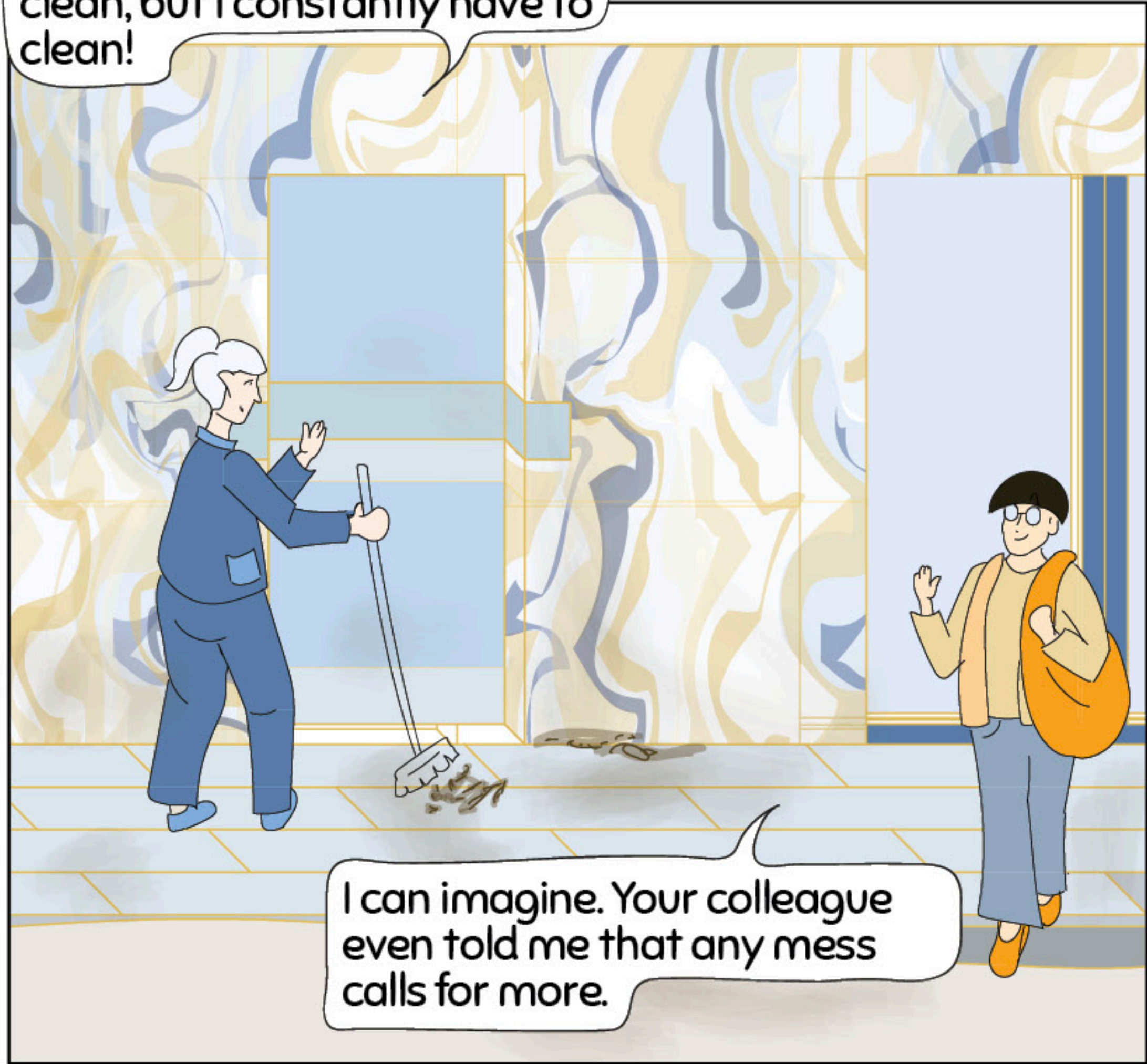
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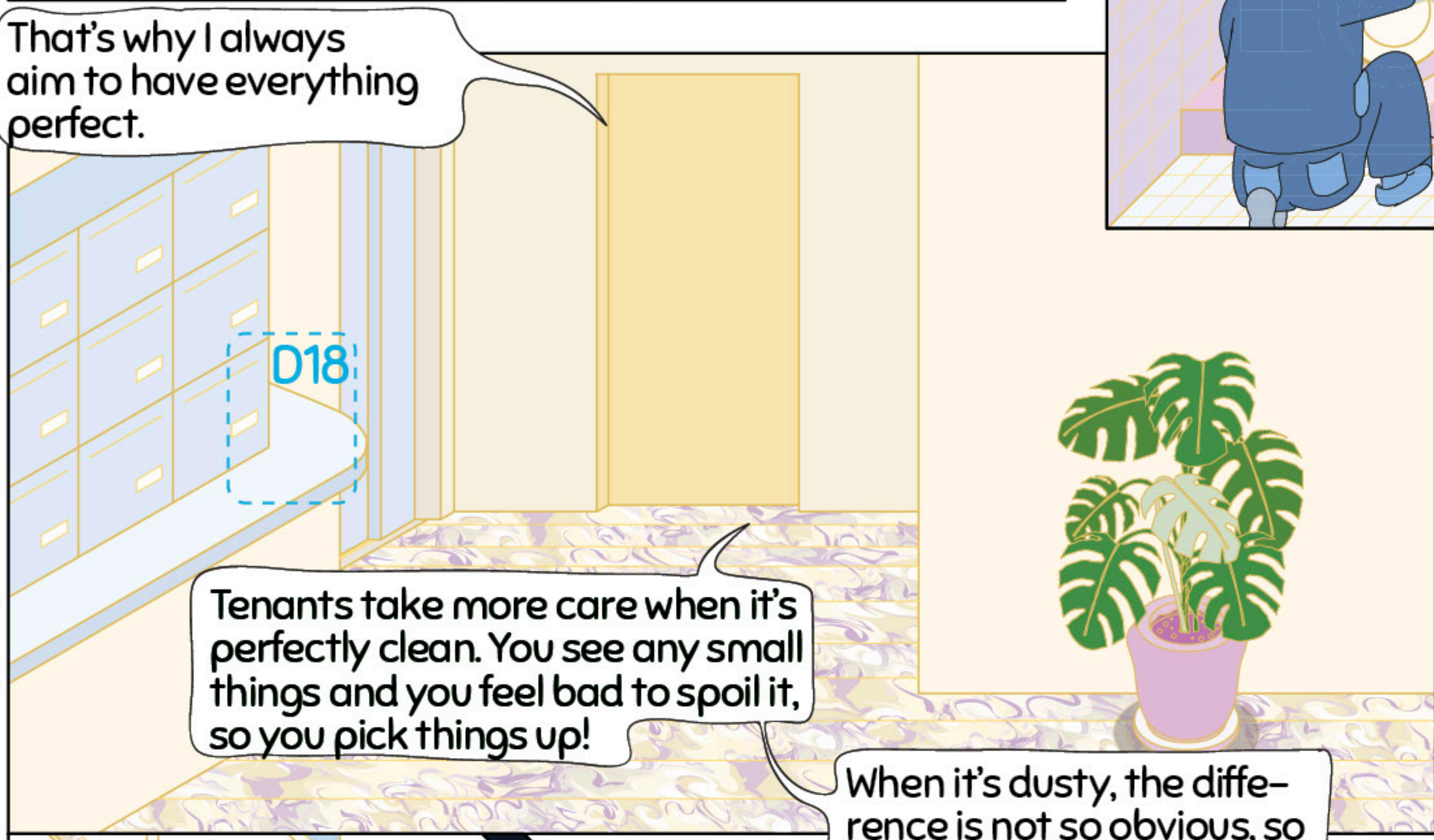
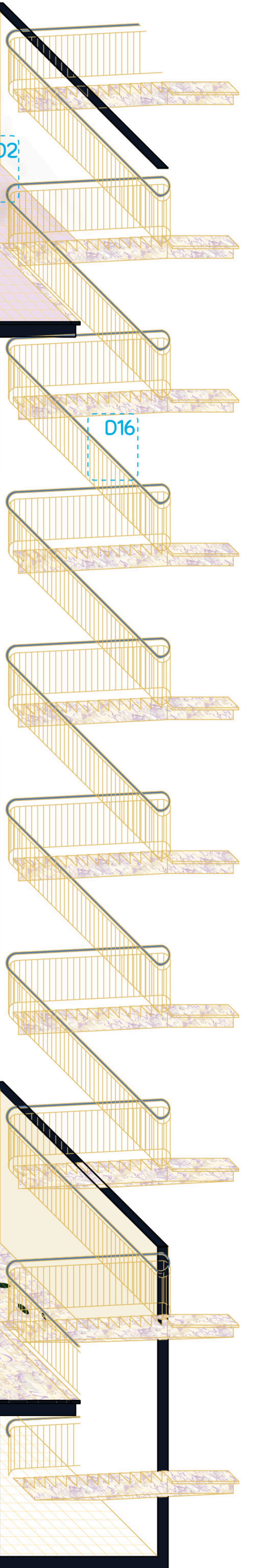
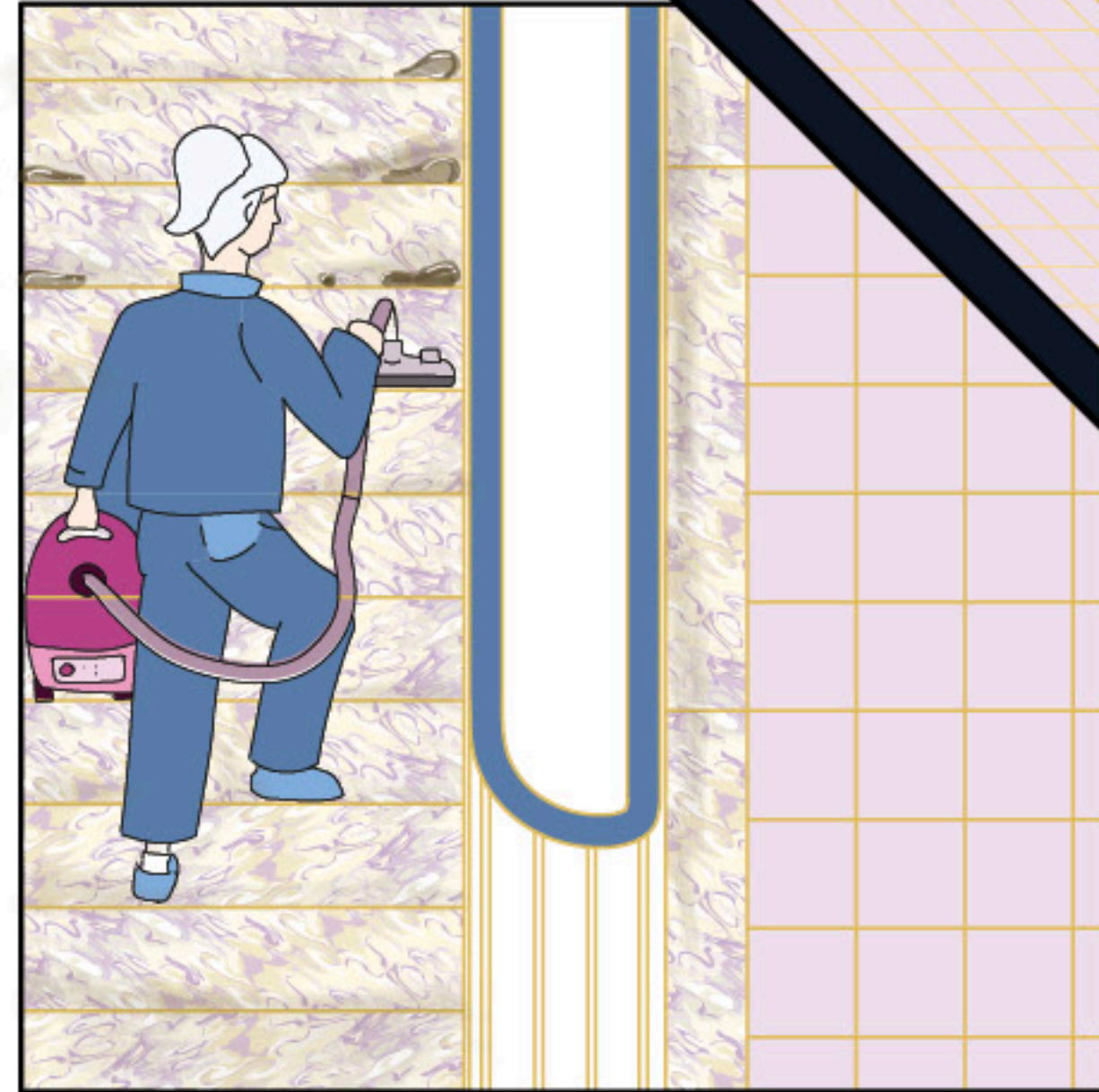
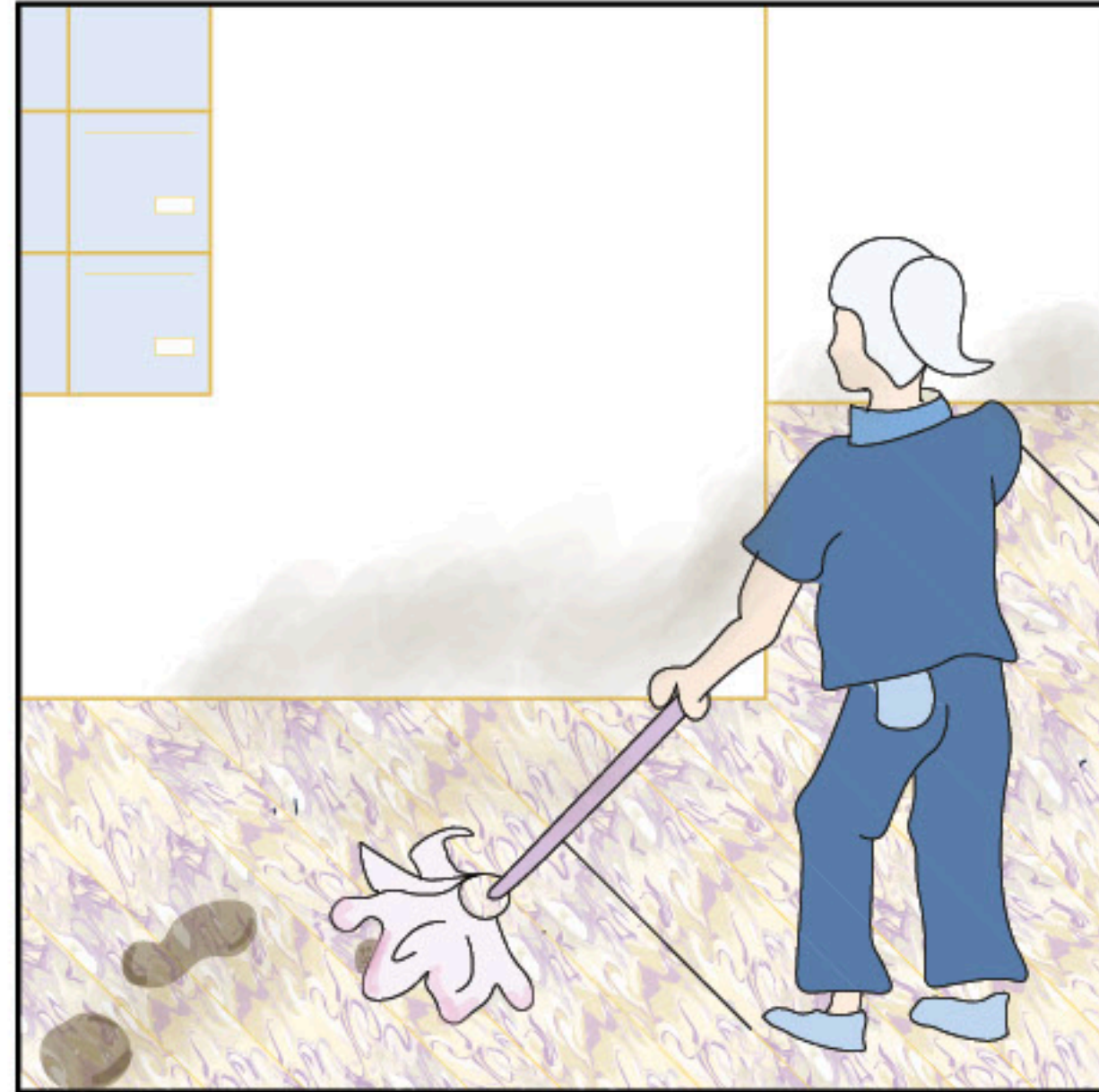
Well, maybe it was made to be clean, but I constantly have to clean!



Remove your shoes BEFORE coming in, I just mopped the floors!



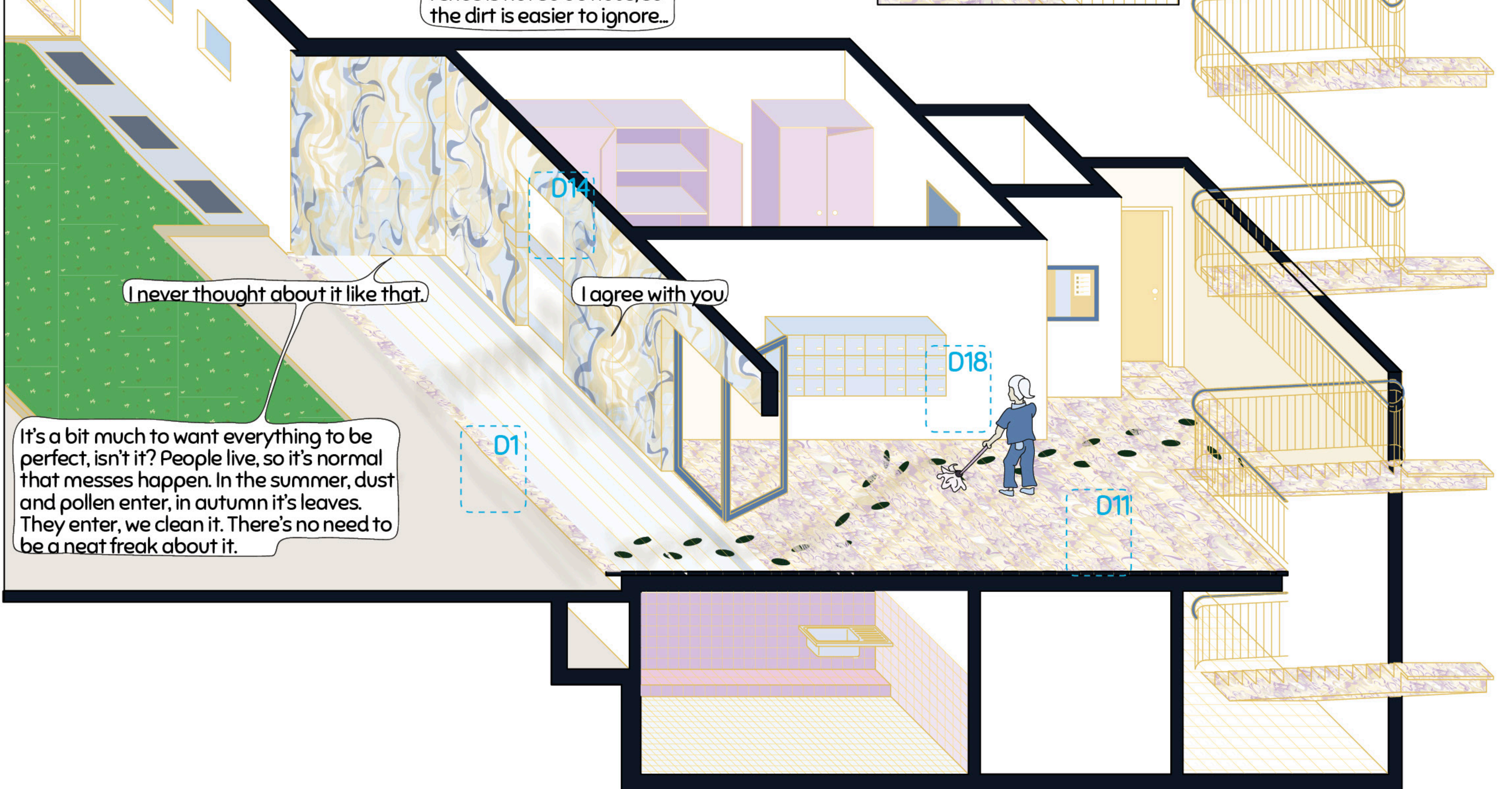
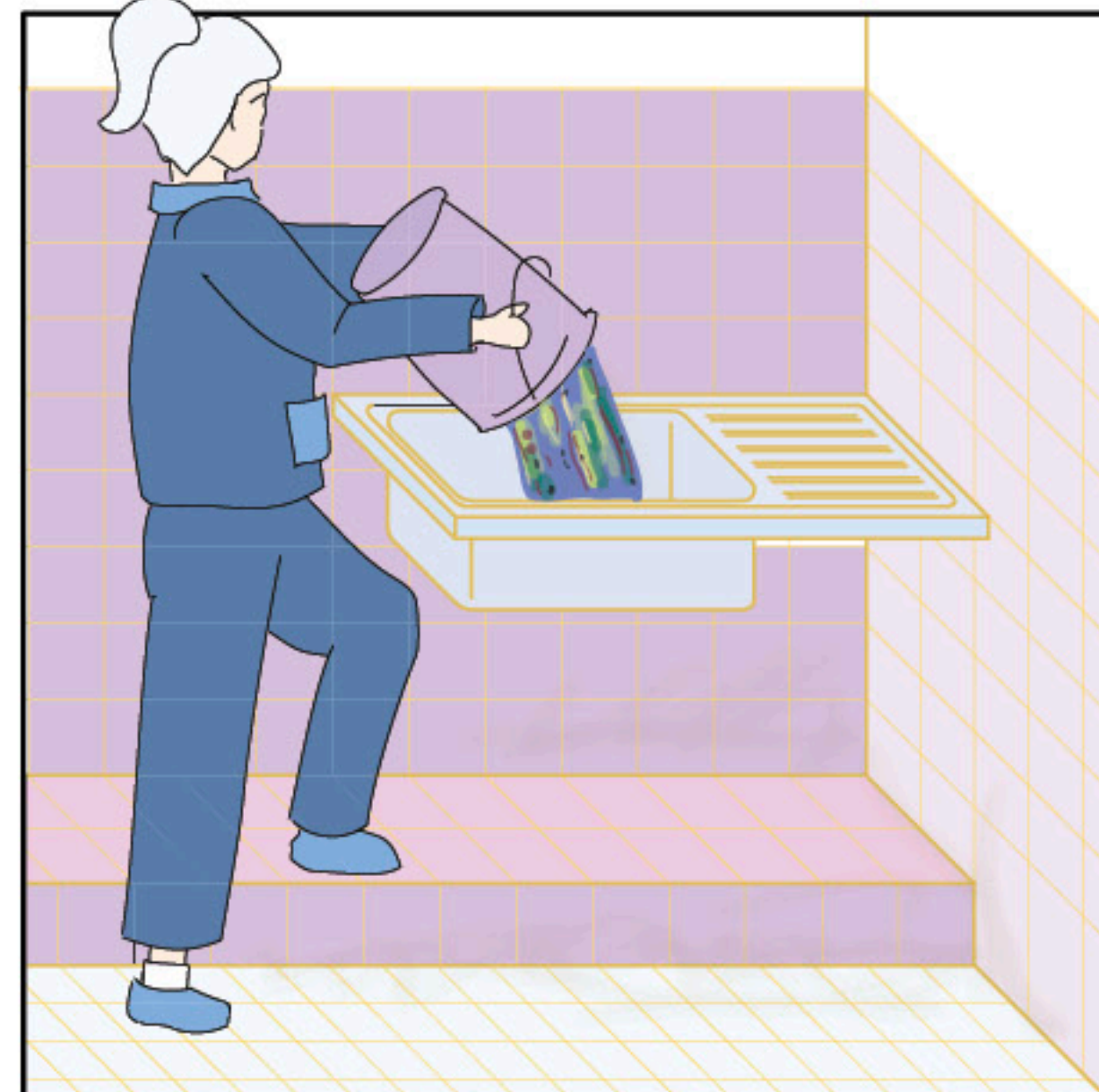
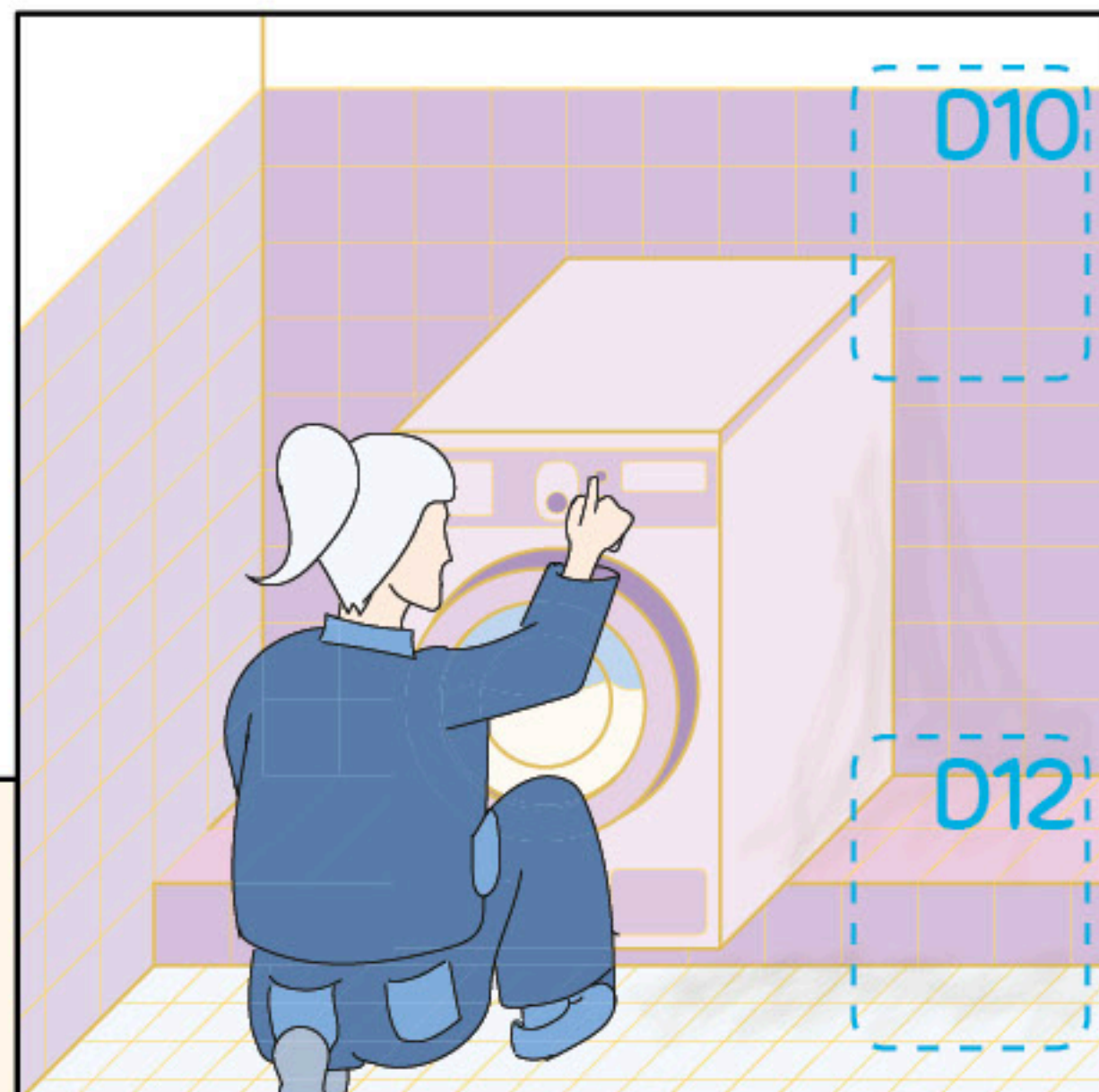
I can imagine. Your colleague even told me that any mess calls for more.



That's why I always aim to have everything perfect.

Tenants take more care when it's perfectly clean. You see any small things and you feel bad to spoil it, so you pick things up!

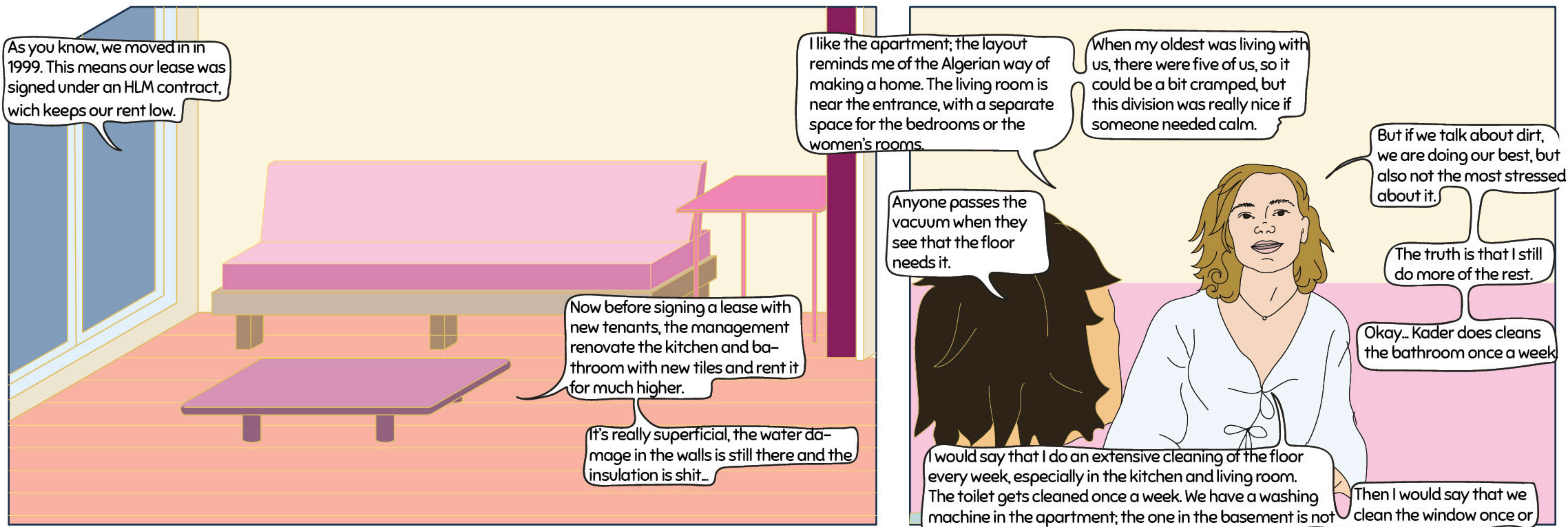
When it's dusty, the difference is not so obvious, so the dirt is easier to ignore...



I never thought about it like that.

I agree with you

It's a bit much to want everything to be perfect, isn't it? People live, so it's normal that messes happen. In the summer, dust and pollen enter, in autumn it's leaves. They enter, we clean it. There's no need to be a neat freak about it.



As you know, we moved in in 1999. This means our lease was signed under an HLM contract, which keeps our rent low.

I like the apartment; the layout reminds me of the Algerian way of making a home. The living room is near the entrance, with a separate space for the bedrooms or the women's rooms.

When my oldest was living with us, there were five of us, so it could be a bit cramped, but this division was really nice if someone needed calm.

But if we talk about dirt, we are doing our best, but also not the most stressed about it.

The truth is that I still do more of the rest.

Okay... Kader does clean the bathroom once a week

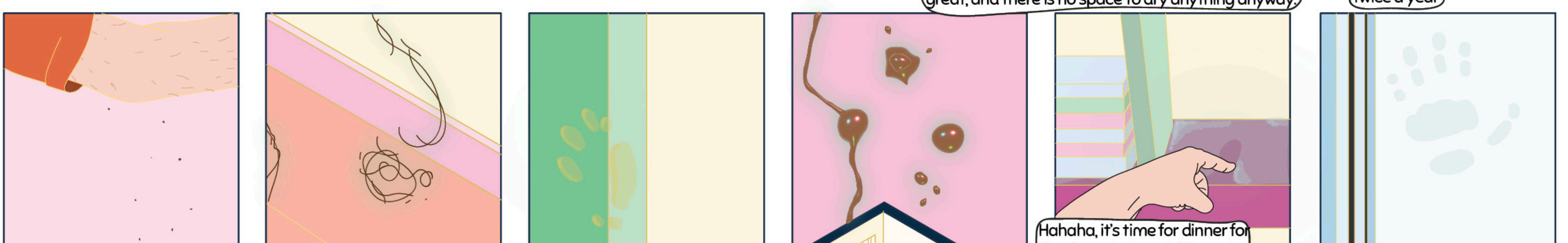
Anyone passes the vacuum when they see that the floor needs it.

Now before signing a lease with new tenants, the management renovate the kitchen and bathroom with new tiles and rent it for much higher.

It's really superficial, the water damage in the walls is still there and the insulation is shit...

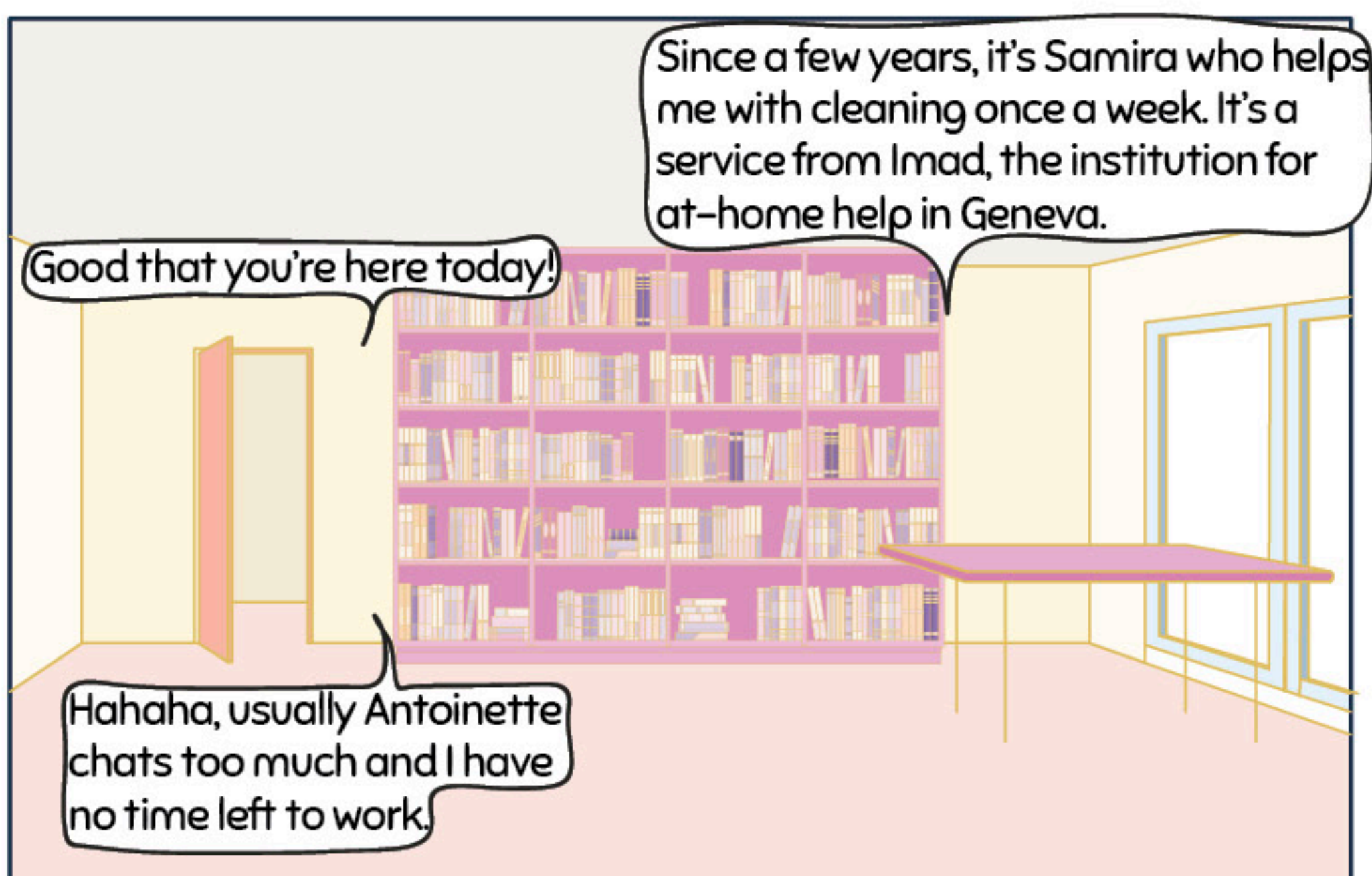
I would say that I do an extensive cleaning of the floor every week, especially in the kitchen and living room. The toilet gets cleaned once a week. We have a washing machine in the apartment; the one in the basement is not great, and there is no space to dry anything anyway.

Then I would say that we clean the window once or twice a year



Hahaha, it's time for dinner for the downstairs neighbour. Let me close the kitchen door.

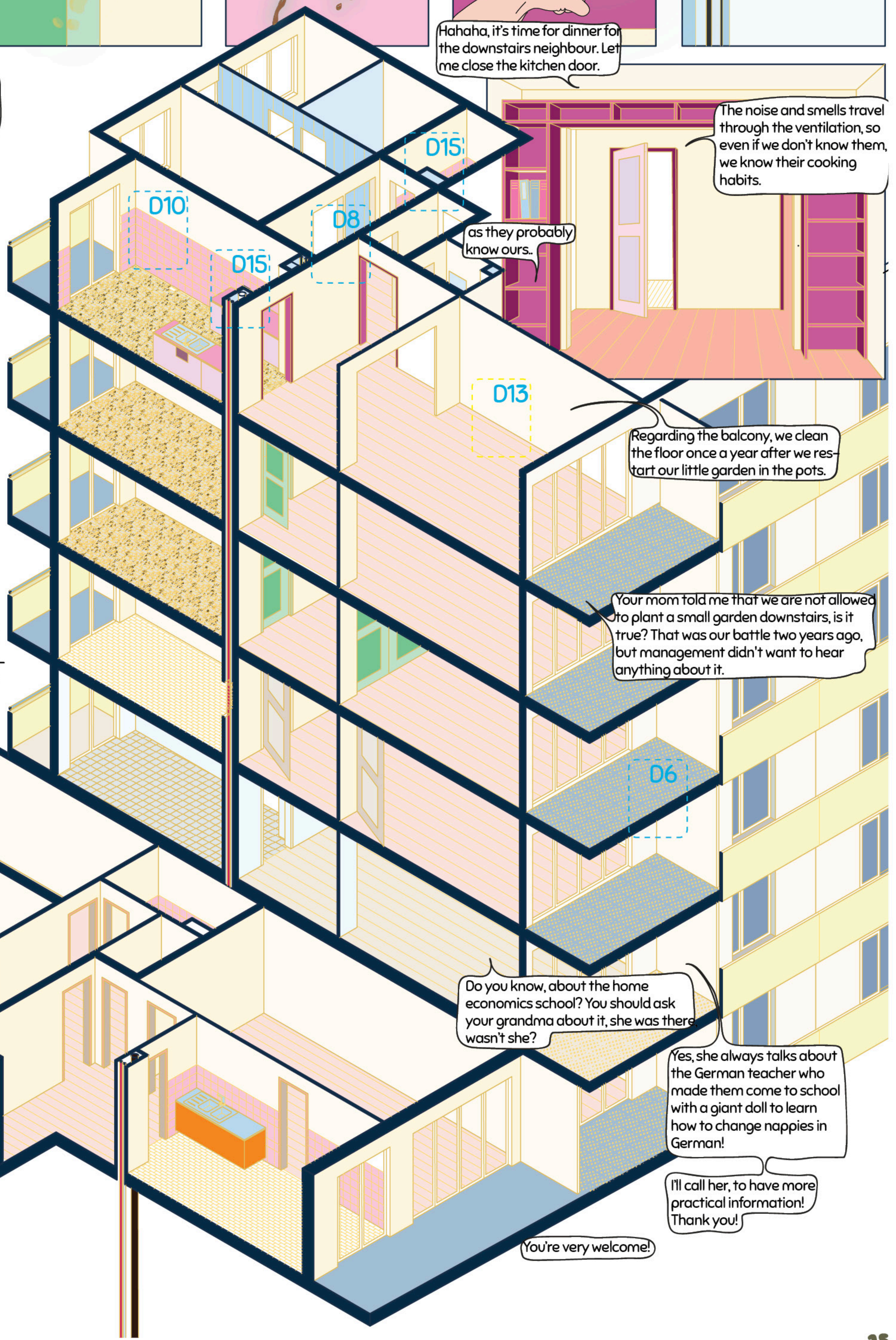
The noise and smells travel through the ventilation, so even if we don't know them, we know their cooking habits.



Since a few years, it's Samira who helps me with cleaning once a week. It's a service from Imad, the institution for at-home help in Geneva.

Good that you're here today!

Hahaha, usually Antoinette chats too much and I have no time left to work.



as they probably know ours.

Regarding the balcony, we clean the floor once a year after we restart our little garden in the pots.

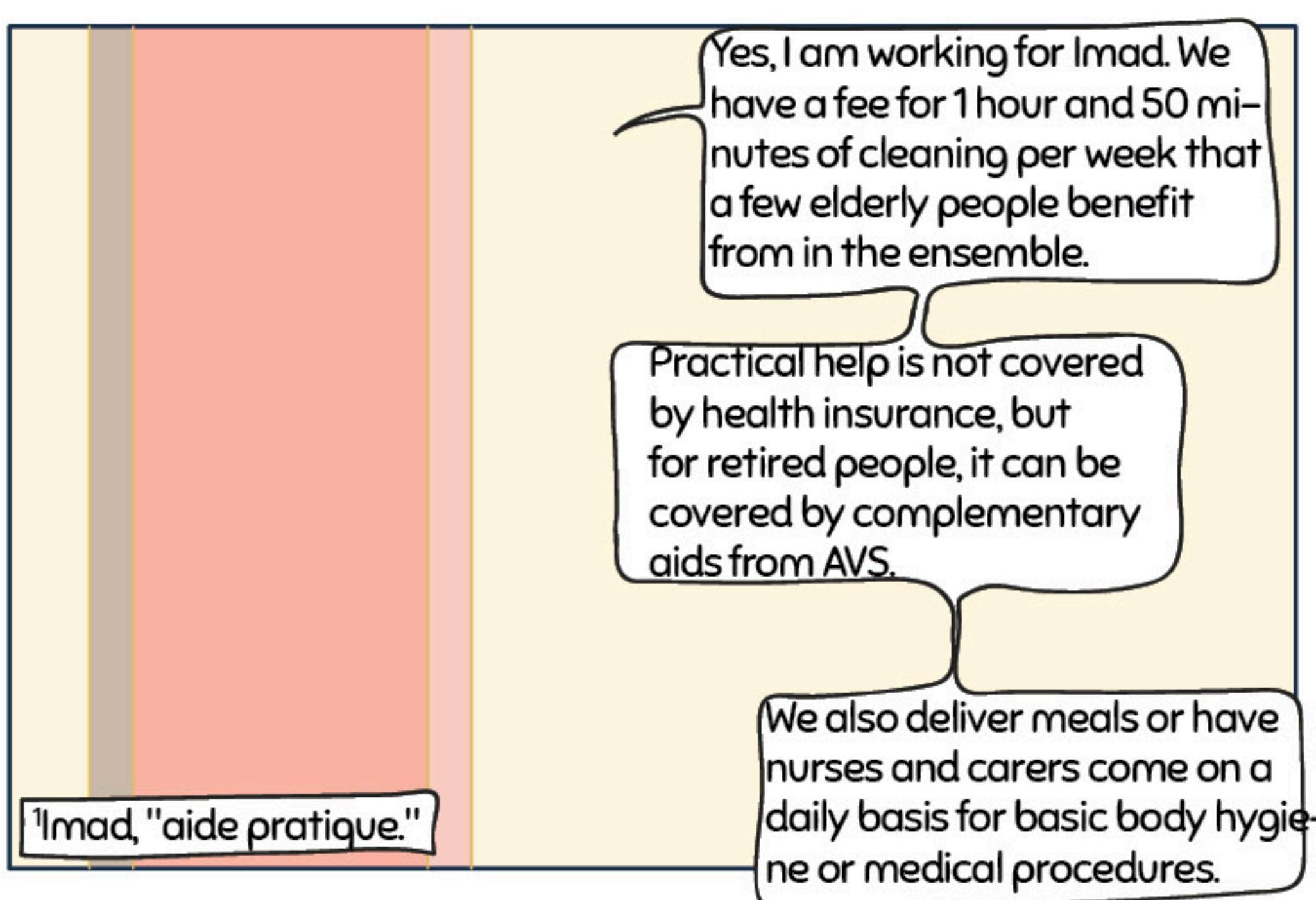
Your mom told me that we are not allowed to plant a small garden downstairs, is it true? That was our battle two years ago, but management didn't want to hear anything about it.

Do you know, about the home economics school? You should ask your grandma about it, she was there wasn't she?

Yes, she always talks about the German teacher who made them come to school with a giant doll to learn how to change nappies in German!

I'll call her, to have more practical information! Thank you!

You're very welcome!



Yes, I am working for Imad. We have a fee for 1 hour and 50 minutes of cleaning per week that a few elderly people benefit from in the ensemble.

Practical help is not covered by health insurance, but for retired people, it can be covered by complementary aids from AVS.

We also deliver meals or have nurses and carers come on a daily basis for basic body hygiene or medical procedures.

"Imad, 'aide pratique'."



Hello?

Yes of course, my parents wanted me to study at the *l'école supérieur pour jeune fille*, I hated it and was asked to leave after one semester. So I went to *l'école ménagère*, home economic school.

The school was more oriented for working class and countryside girl - only girls, we HAD to wear skirt!

To give you an idea, I can explain you the schedule we were taught?

I am taking notes!

Good, you'll learn a bit at the same time!

7:00 get children up. have breakfast. dress them. send them to school.

8:00 Air the beds, tidy the rooms, clean the bathroom. Prepare shopping list for meals.

9:30 Shopping at the market or the mall.

10:00 Start preparing the meal.

10:30 Clean the dining room windows. First the frame the the glass. Dust off from the furniture.

10:50 Vacuum the floors.

11:15 Continue preparing the meal, which will be served at 12:00, for the whole family.

12:45 Wash the dishes and clean the stove. Sweeping and mopping.

13:10 Send the children to school. Get the laundry ready.

13:30 Read the latest news.

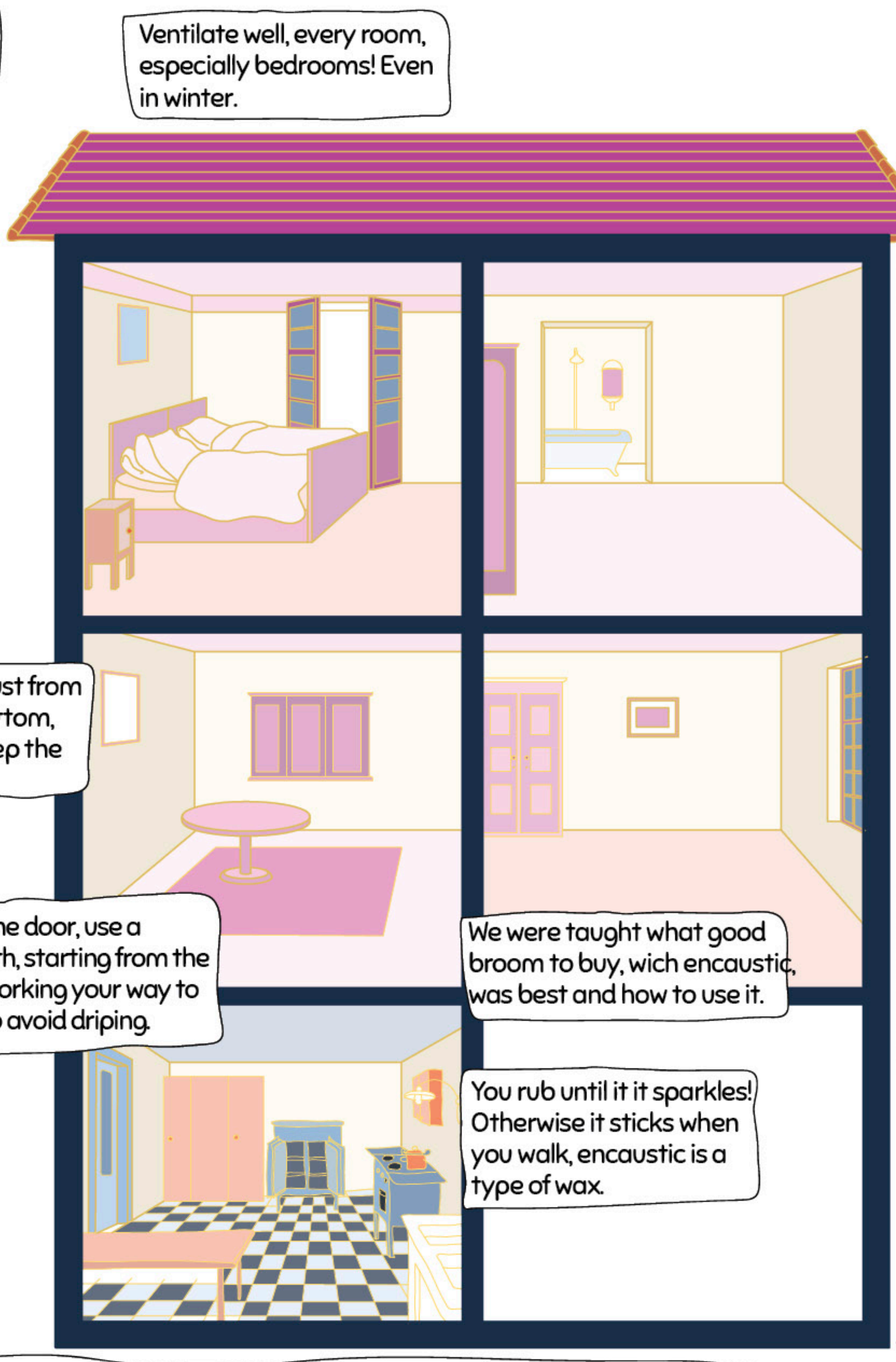
14:00 Mending and sewing or knitting. Hang the washing.

16:15 Prepare snacks for children coming home from school.

16:45 Supervise homework. Fetch vegetables from the garden to make the evening meal.

18:45 Supper

20:00 Put the children to bed. And clean off the kitchen.



Ventilate well, every room, especially bedrooms! Even in winter.

Always dust from top to bottom, then sweep the floor!

To wash the door, use a damp cloth, starting from the bottom working your way to the top, to avoid dripping.

We were taught what good broom to buy, wich encaustic, was best and how to use it.

You rub until it it sparkles! Otherwise it sticks when you walk, encaustic is a type of wax.

Lily, are you still here? I just found our school books.

Yes?

The history of *l'école ménagère* is exposed, you will not believe it! The author starts by telling that in 1867, founding date of the school, Geneva was lacking a school to teach the the art of domesticity! But it gets better, let me read it to you.

"Above all, the aim was to teach the girls of the people the rudiments that would make them good servants, thrifty with their masters' money and capable of practising a trade that would keep them out of the brothel."²

I am not even supriessed anymore.

I've also read "as the guardian of the home, women were the architects of cleanliness. She was given a decisive role in the 19th-century project for social upliftment. Of course, women had to return to the healthiest traditions, but they also had to get rid of prejudices and outdated habits."⁴

The housewife was to be 'the indispensable auxiliary in the fight against social misery (...) domestic education (was to) give us mothers who knew how to make their homes attractive, how to dispute with their husbands to the cabaret, how to combat alcoholism, infant mortality and tuberculosis, and, by bringing peace to the domestic home, how to spread it throughout the country."⁵

It was quite a programme!

¹Heller, "Propre en ordre", 201. ²Renevey-Fry, "En attendant le prince charmant", 146-147. ³Inventaire d'archives du bureau de salubrité public. ⁴Moll-Weiss, 1908, 5 (translated by me). ⁵J.S.V.U.P., "Des écoles ménagères" 256. Annexe xxvi, xxix,

Do you know that until the 1960, there was an office for public sanitation in Geneva?

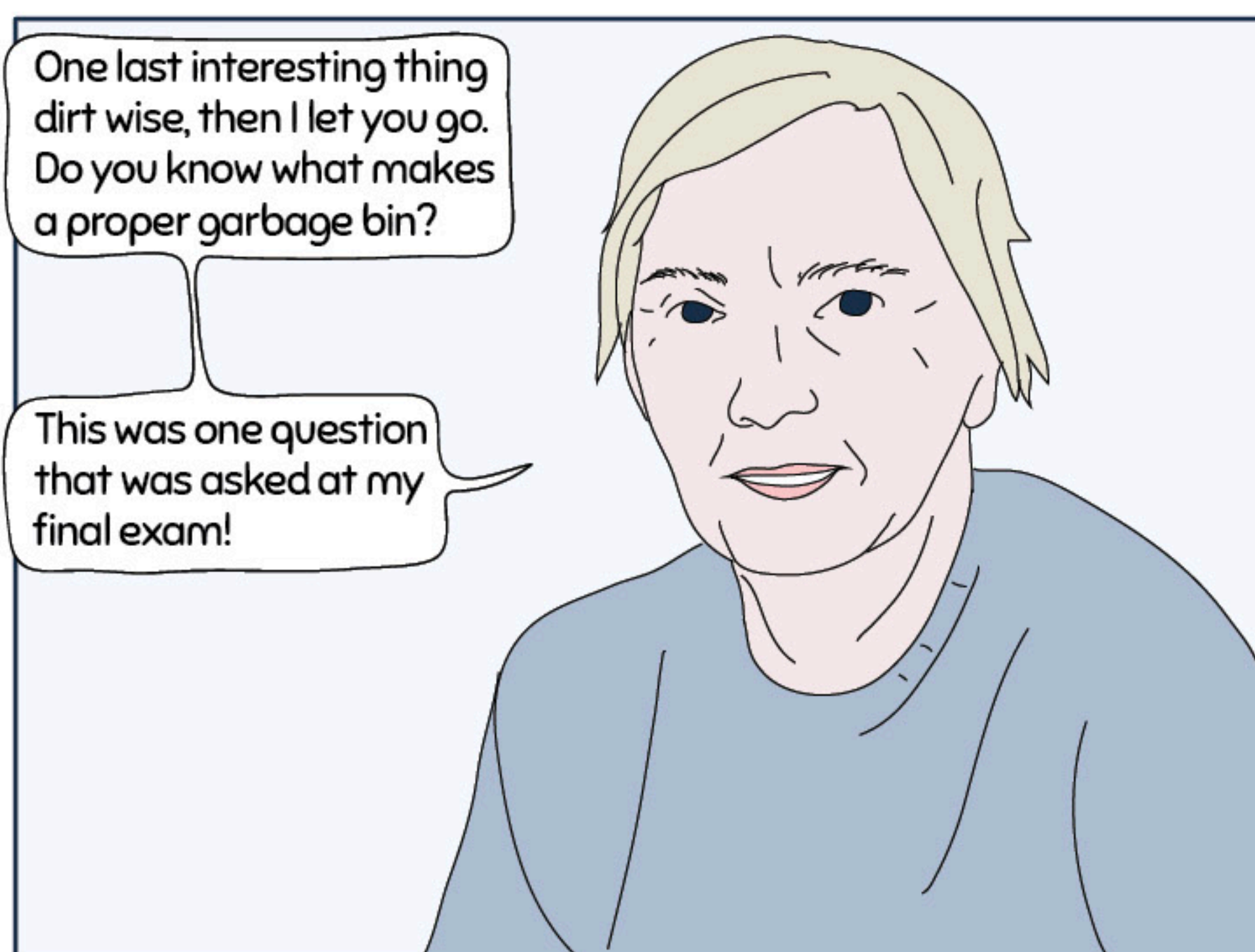
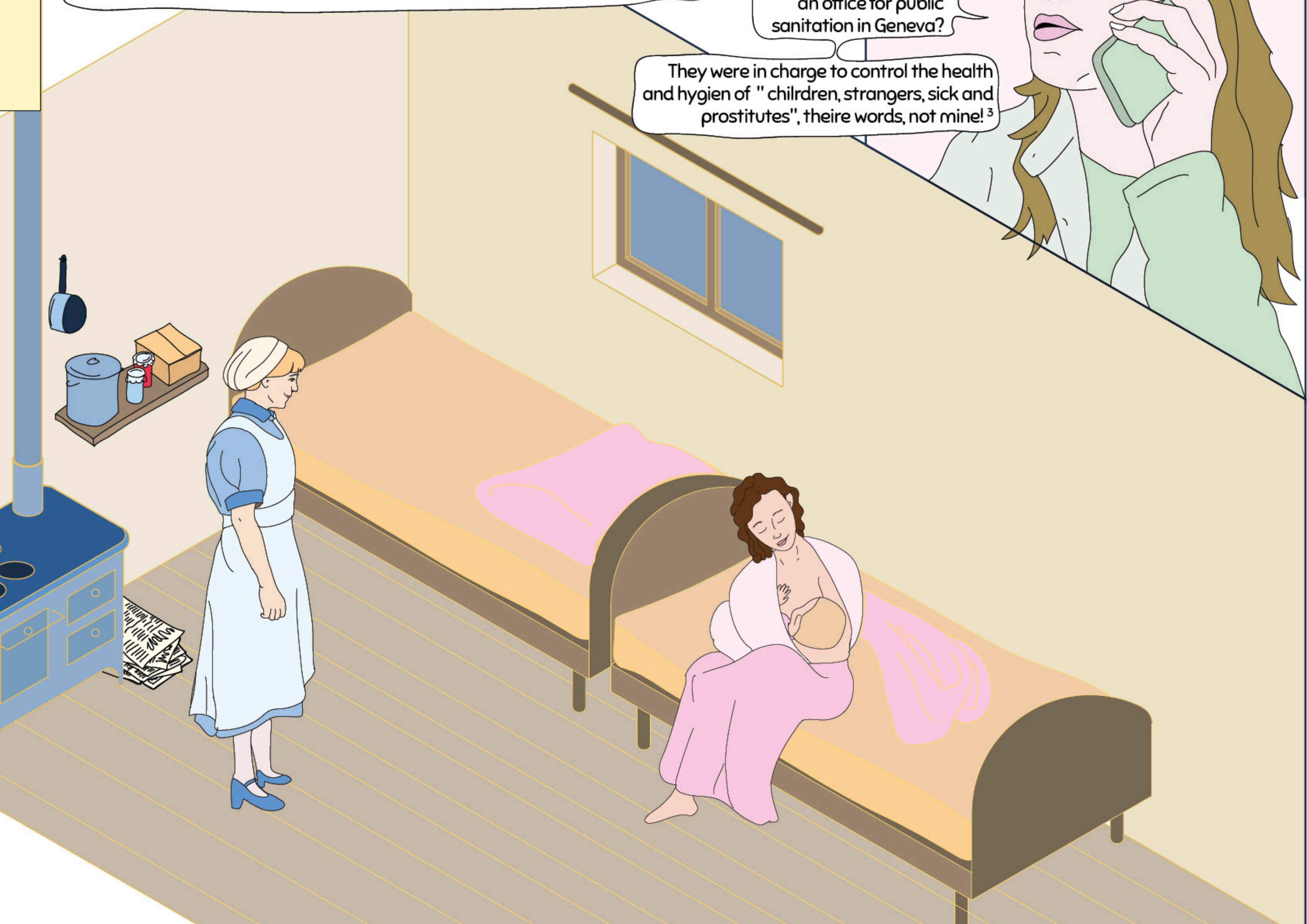
They were in charge to control the health and hygien of " children, strangers, sick and prostitutes", their words, not mine!³



Until the 1950, nurses would visits dwelling judged unsanitary, not well taken care of, or the houses of kids noticed in school for their bad hygiene. They would teach how to clean properly and then come back to control the improvments.¹

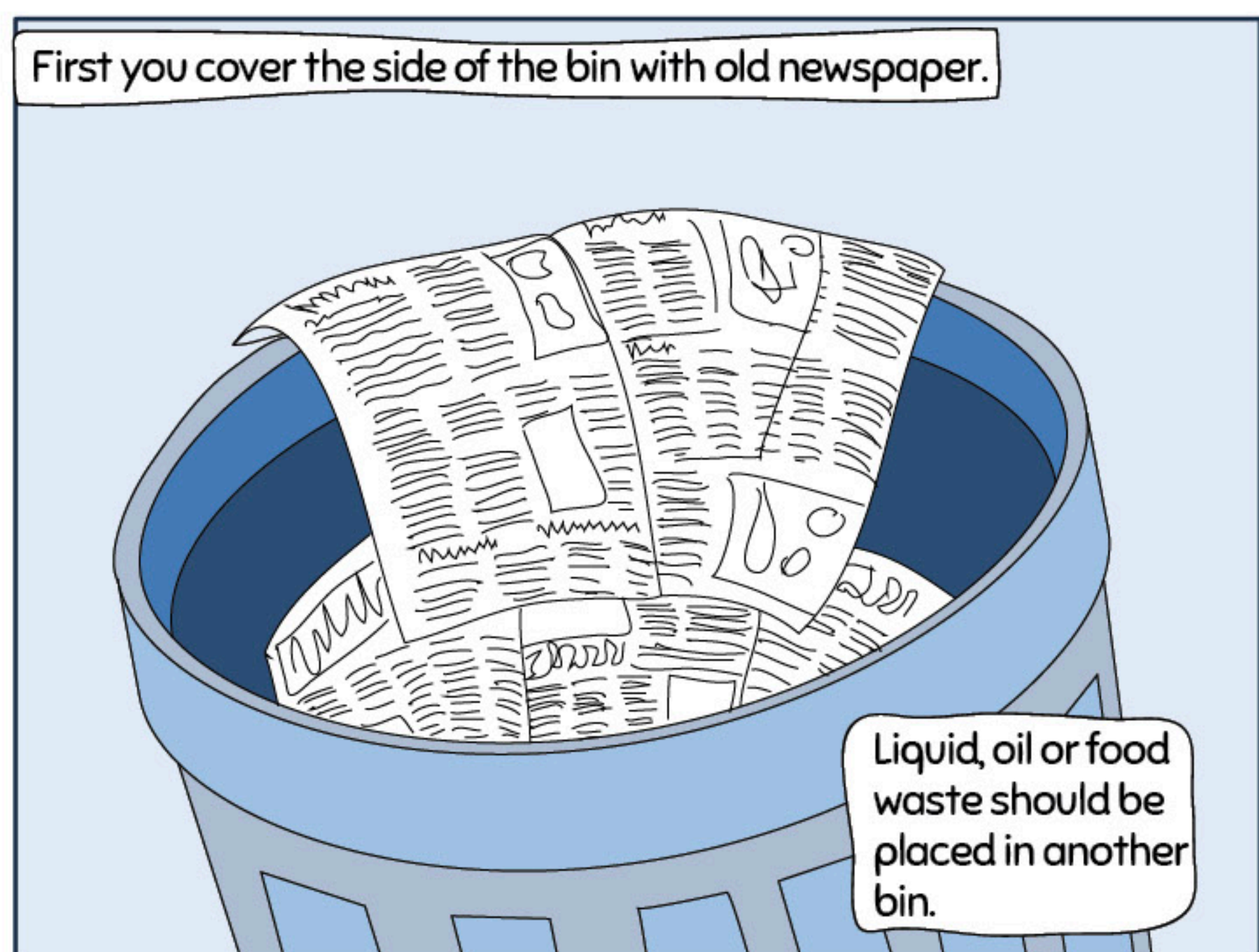
I guess they would also leave her a few flyer about the hygienic kitchen or how to ventilate properly! They distributed plenty of instruction manuals at the time.²

¹Heller, "Propre en ordre", 225 and Annexe xxxi. ²Annexe xxxiii, xxxiv, xxxv.



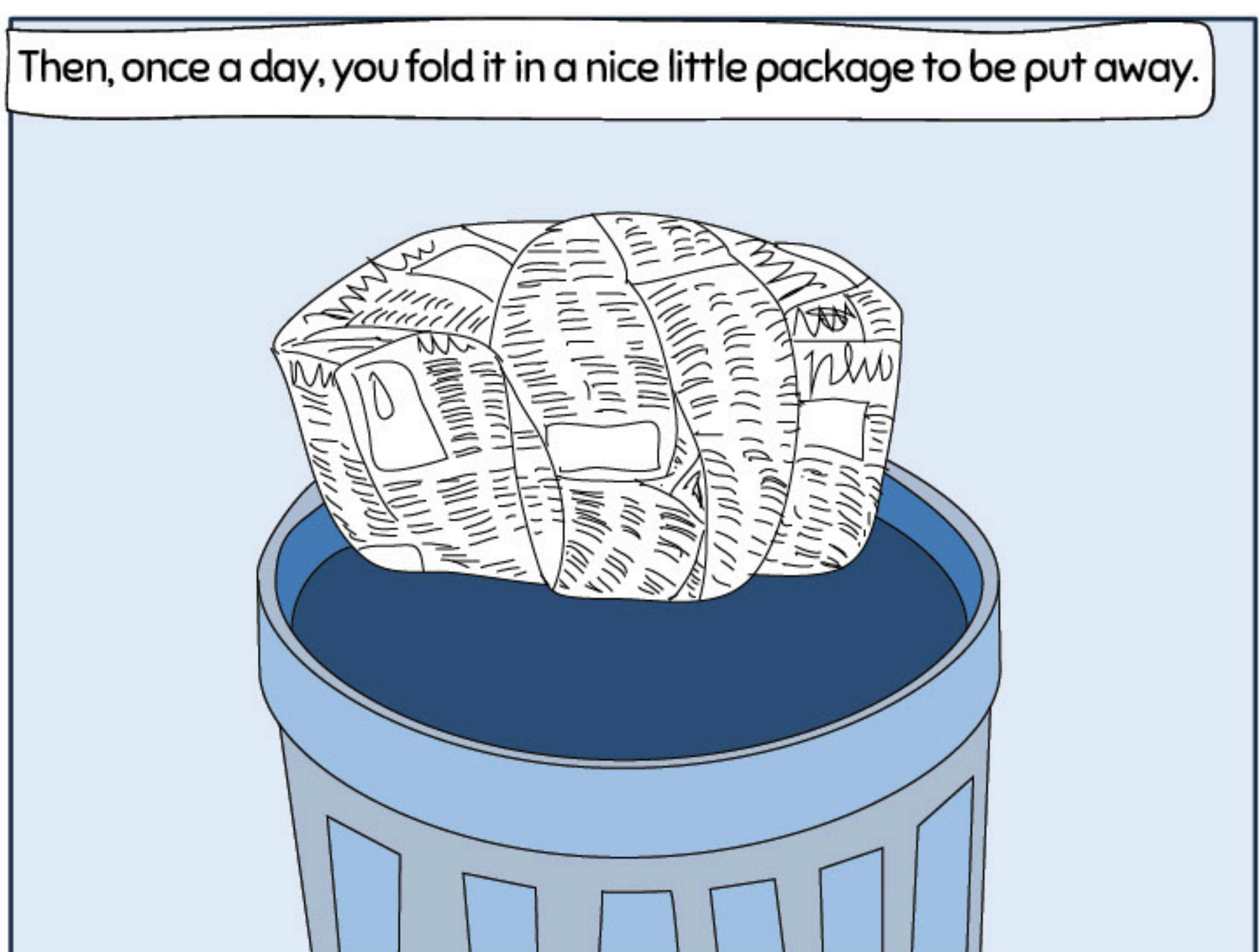
One last interesting thing dirt wise, then I let you go. Do you know what makes a proper garbage bin?

This was one question that was asked at my final exam!



First you cover the side of the bin with old newspaper.

Liquid, oil or food waste should be placed in another bin.



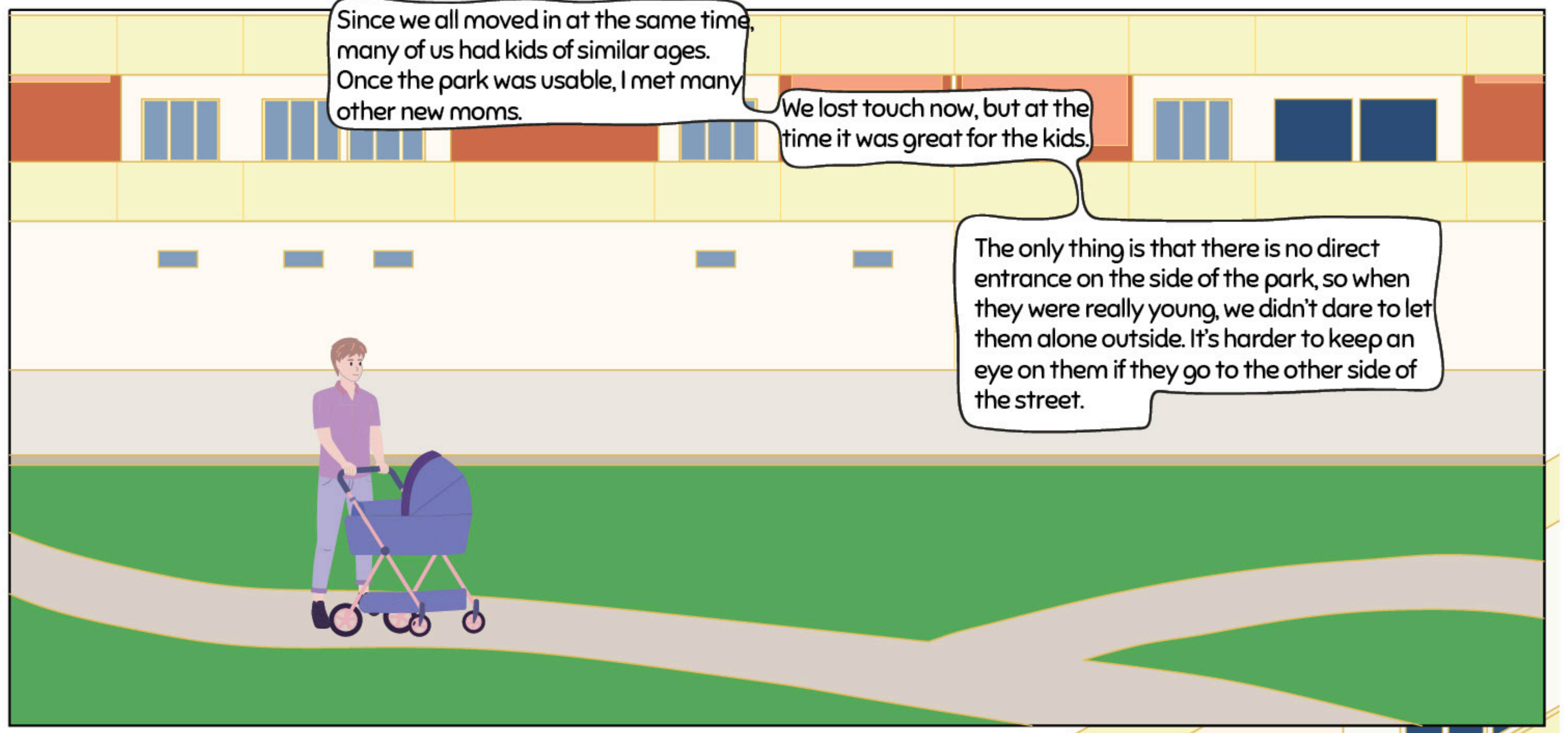
Then, once a day, you fold it in a nice little package to be put away.

waste





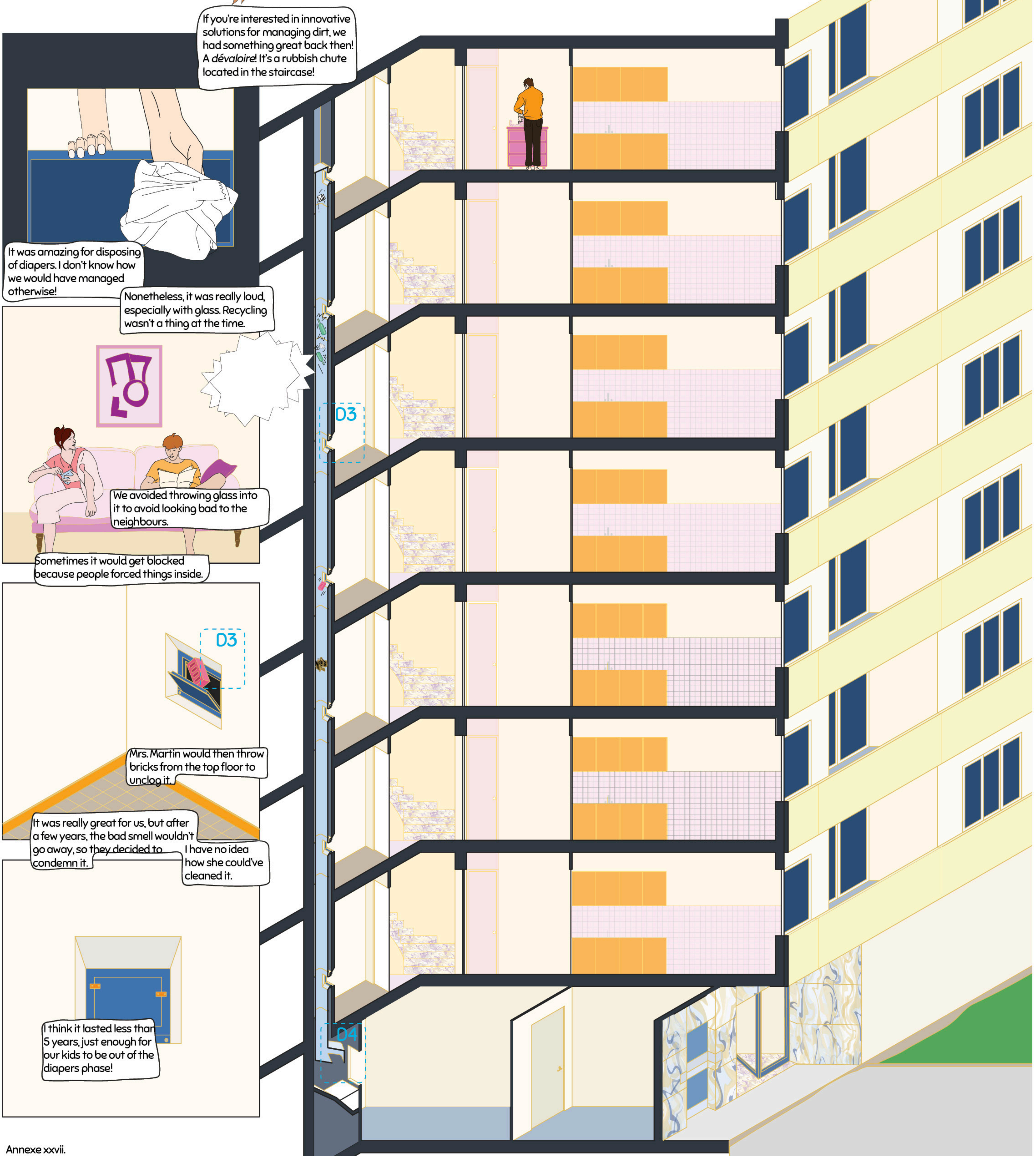
When we first moved in, the building was complete, but everything else was still under construction for a few years!



Since we all moved in at the same time, many of us had kids of similar ages. Once the park was usable, I met many other new moms.

We lost touch now, but at the time it was great for the kids.

The only thing is that there is no direct entrance on the side of the park, so when they were really young, we didn't dare to let them alone outside. It's harder to keep an eye on them if they go to the other side of the street.



If you're interested in innovative solutions for managing dirt, we had something great back then! A *dévaloire*! It's a rubbish chute located in the staircase!



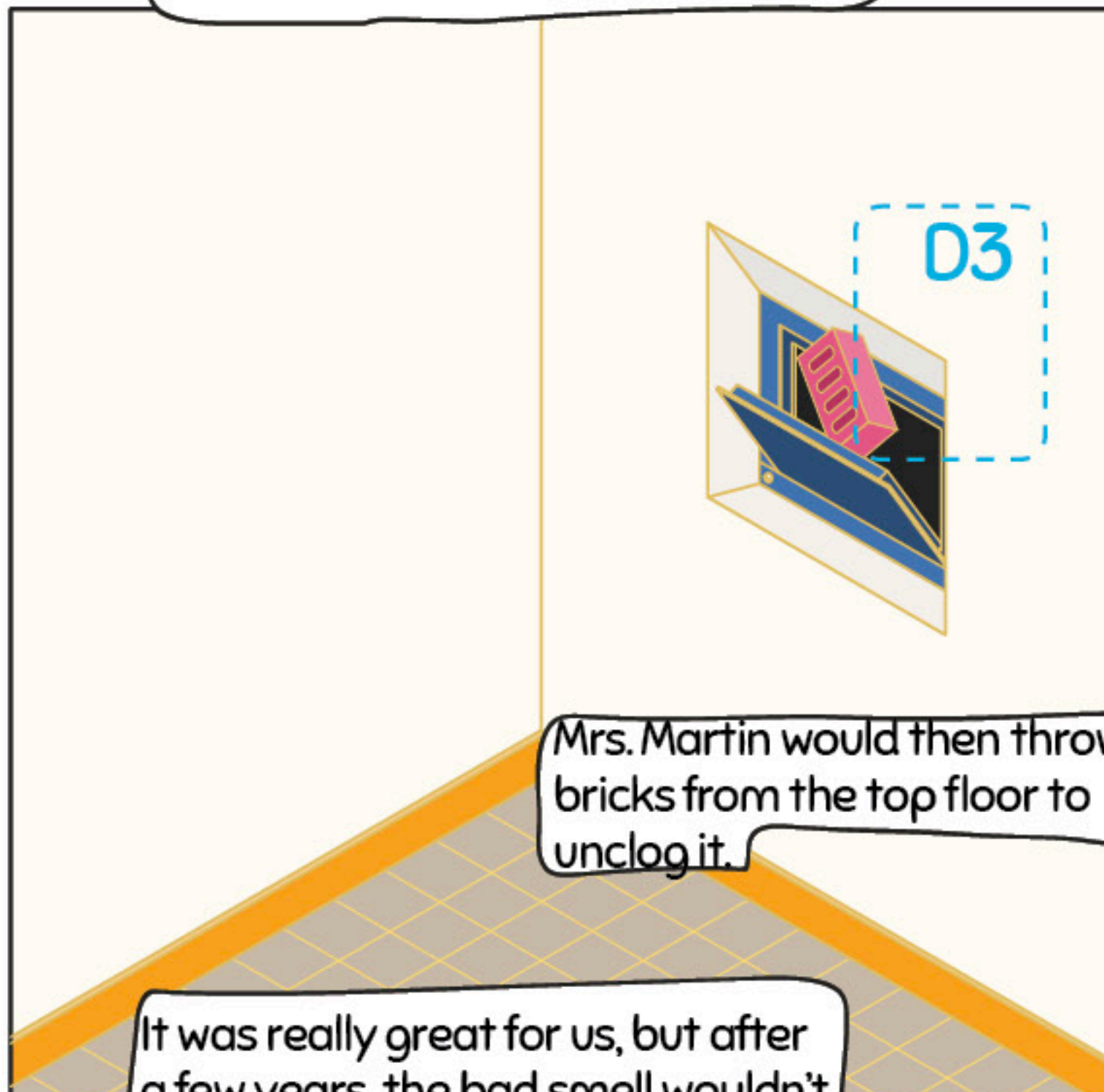
It was amazing for disposing of diapers. I don't know how we would have managed otherwise!

Nonetheless, it was really loud, especially with glass. Recycling wasn't a thing at the time.



We avoided throwing glass into it to avoid looking bad to the neighbours.

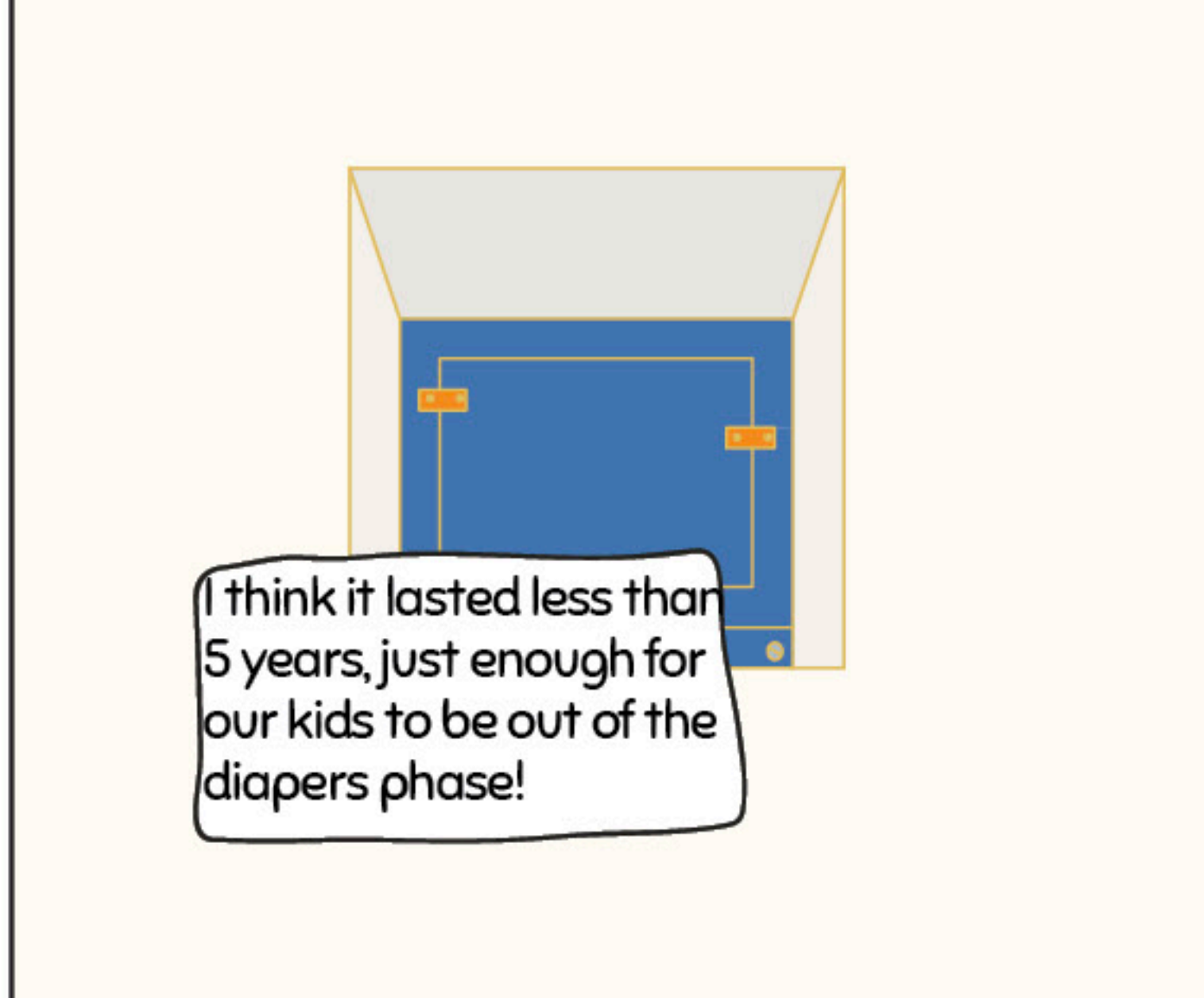
Sometimes it would get blocked because people forced things inside.



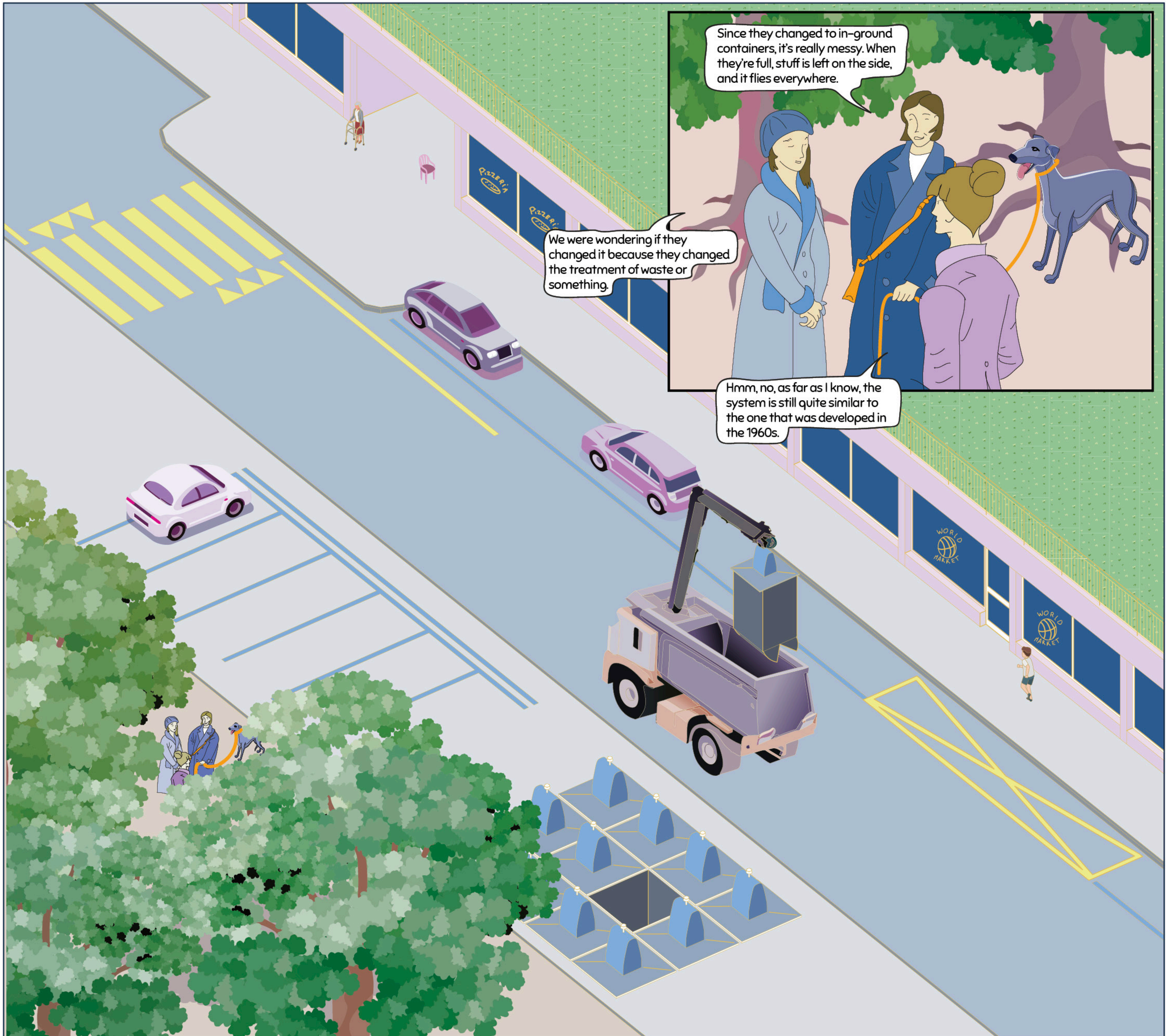
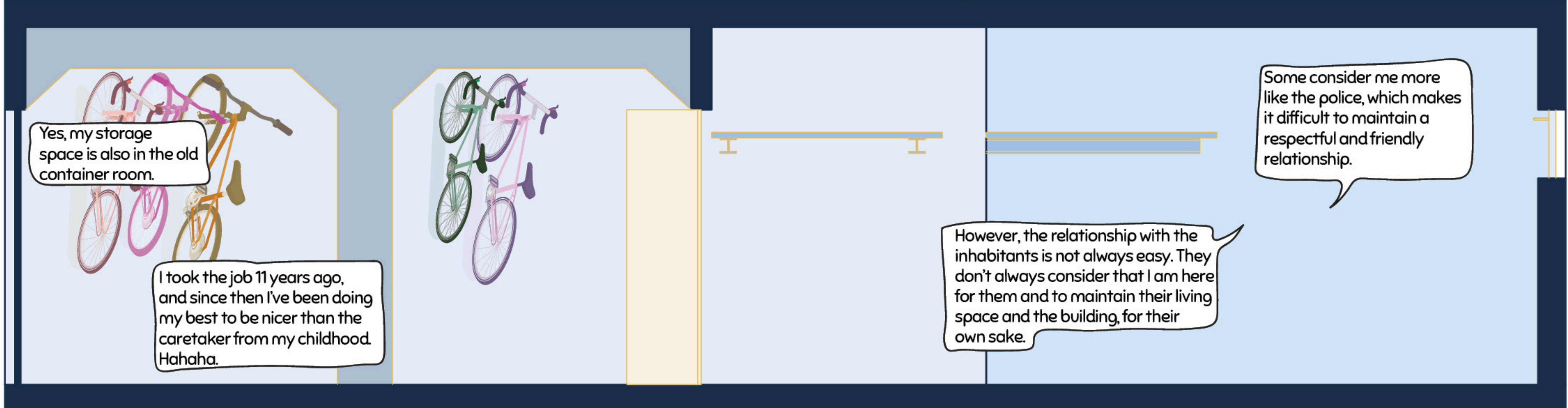
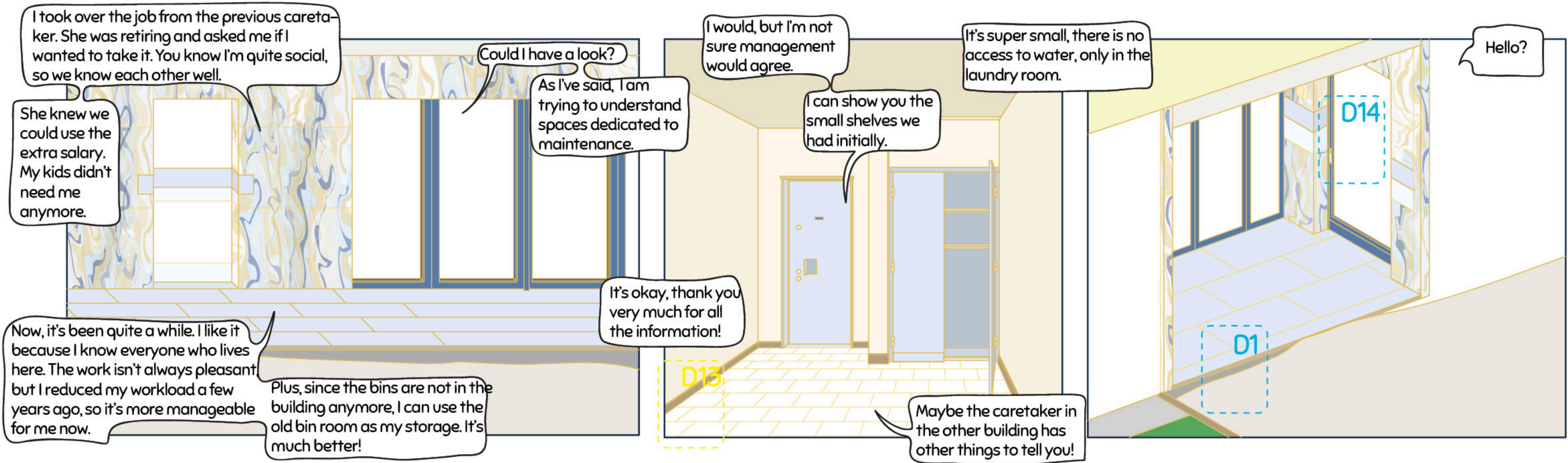
Mrs. Martin would then throw bricks from the top floor to unblock it.

It was really great for us, but after a few years, the bad smell wouldn't go away, so they decided to condemn it.

I have no idea how she could've cleaned it.



I think it lasted less than 5 years, just enough for our kids to be out of the diapers phase!



The burning factory has been renewed a few times, and recycling has been developed, but the principles remain the same since for the sanitation plan for Geneva by Yves Mestres, in 1962. It was commissioned by Franck Peyrot, the head of the public works department at the time.



Like all organisms, the city discharges what it no longer needs: domestic wastewater, with all its fecal matter, which is dumped in rivers and lakes.

Rubbish that forms unsanitary and dangerous clumps in the surrounding countryside.

Industrial waste that spreads like leprosy around the city.

¹Maystre, "Le programme d'assainissement du canton de Genève", 9. Annexe xiv, xlvii, l.
²Tribune de Genève, "Cheneviers IV, Le chantier du siècle".

Dealing with all the solid waste of a large agglomeration requires flexibility of operation which can only be achieved by juxtaposing different treatment processes.

In the both the case of waste and wastewater disposal, it is important to take into account the general urban planning situation. The size of the central waste plant, the need to reserve a sufficiently large site for future extensions.

The Cheneviers site, just upstream of the dam, was chosen because it met a number of requirements: it could convert the heat produced by the waste into electricity. Located in an agricultural area, so that the compost produced can be easily disposed of. Easy coupling with the wastewater treatment plant.

The Rhone, a navigable waterway between Geneva and Verbois, provides the major advantage here in an economic analysis, since transporting waste by water is infinitely more economical than transporting it by road.¹

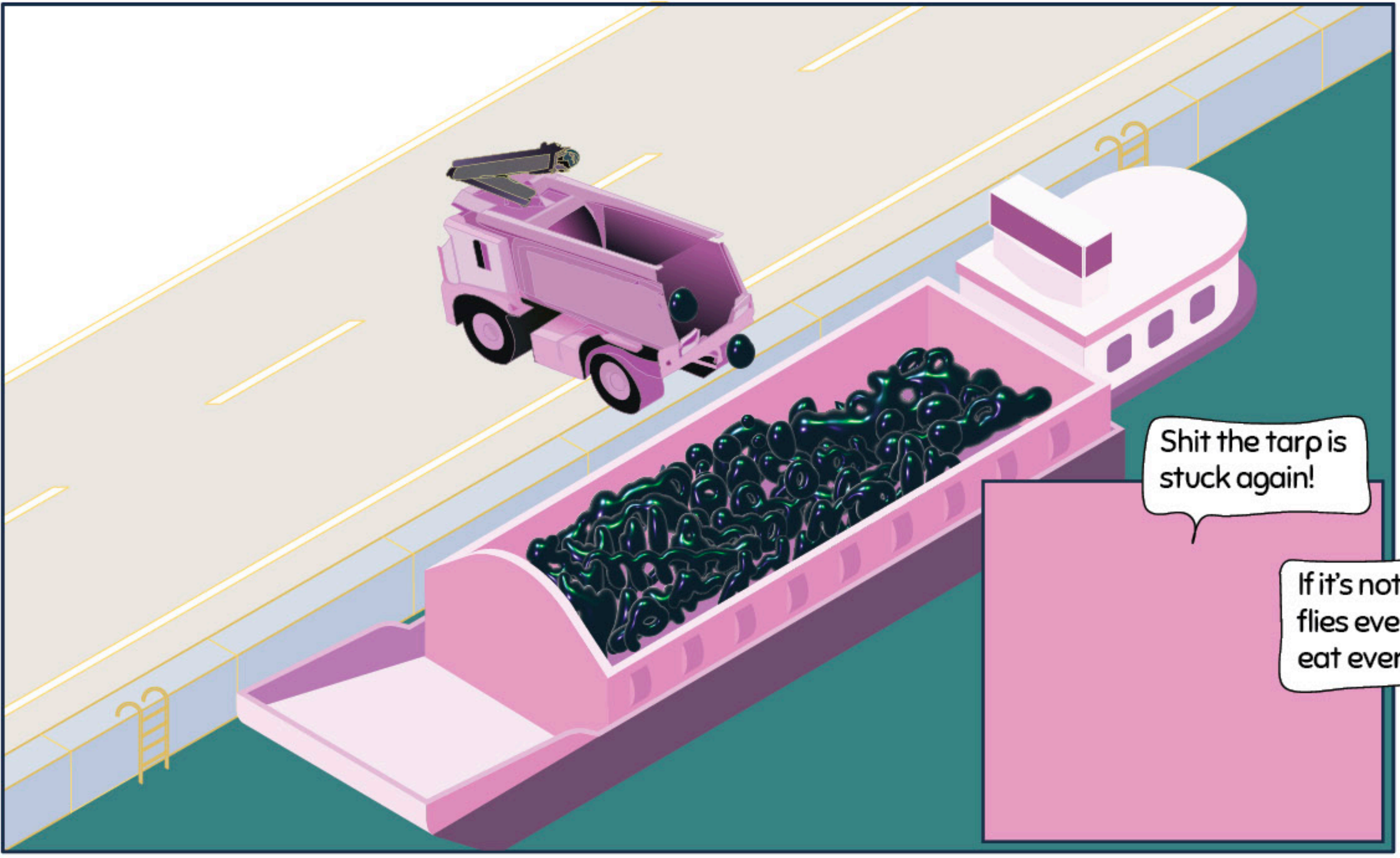
¹Maystre, "Le programme d'assainissement du canton de Genève", 34-37 (my translation)

But that's not the whole story. Once the appropriate facilities have been made available to the population, they need to be educated.¹

This is a long and difficult task, which should begin at home and at school. It is precisely with a view to informing and educating the public that we have published this report.²

May all its readers understand that the beautiful maxim: **A HEALTHY MIND IN A HEALTHY BODY** is also true at city level.³

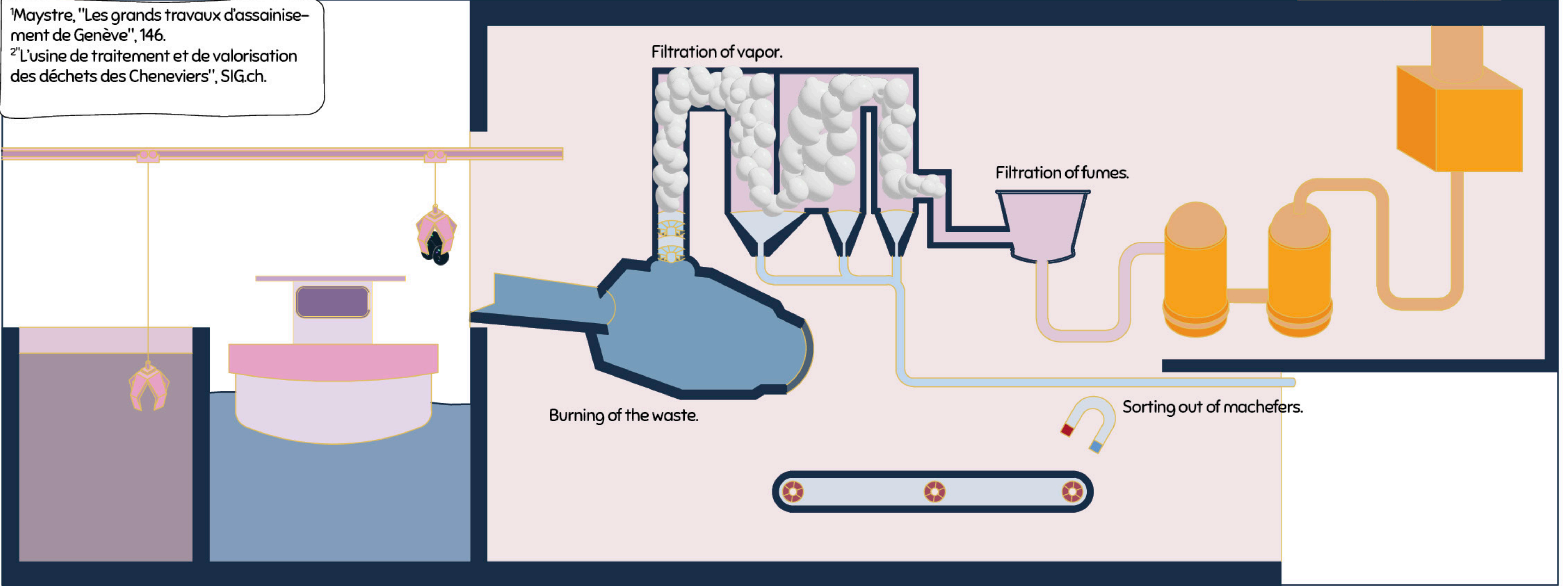
¹Maystre, "Le programme d'assainissement du canton de Genève", 47 (my translation).
²Ibid.
³Ibid.



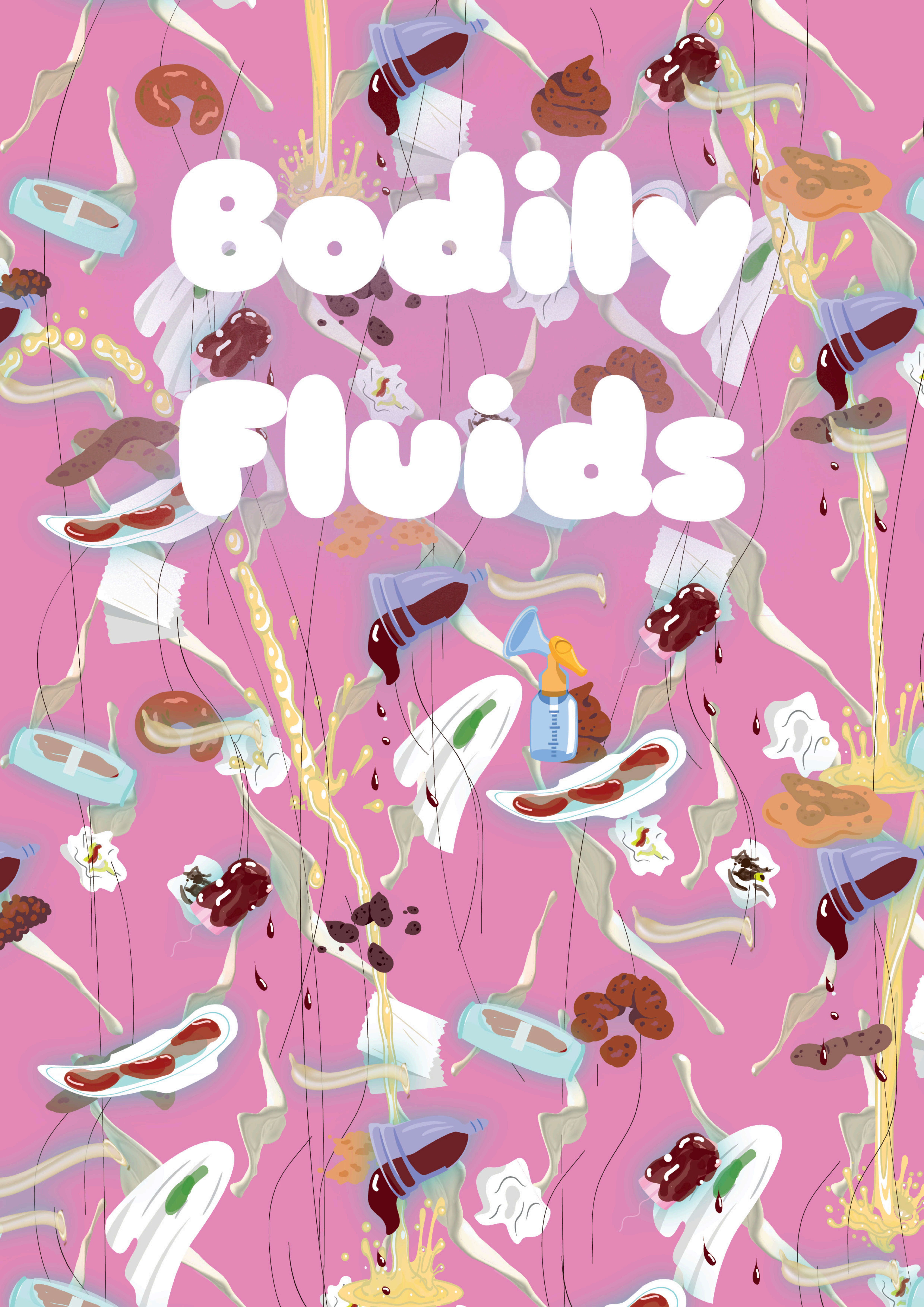
If it's not securely in place, rubbish flies everywhere, and birds try to eat everything.

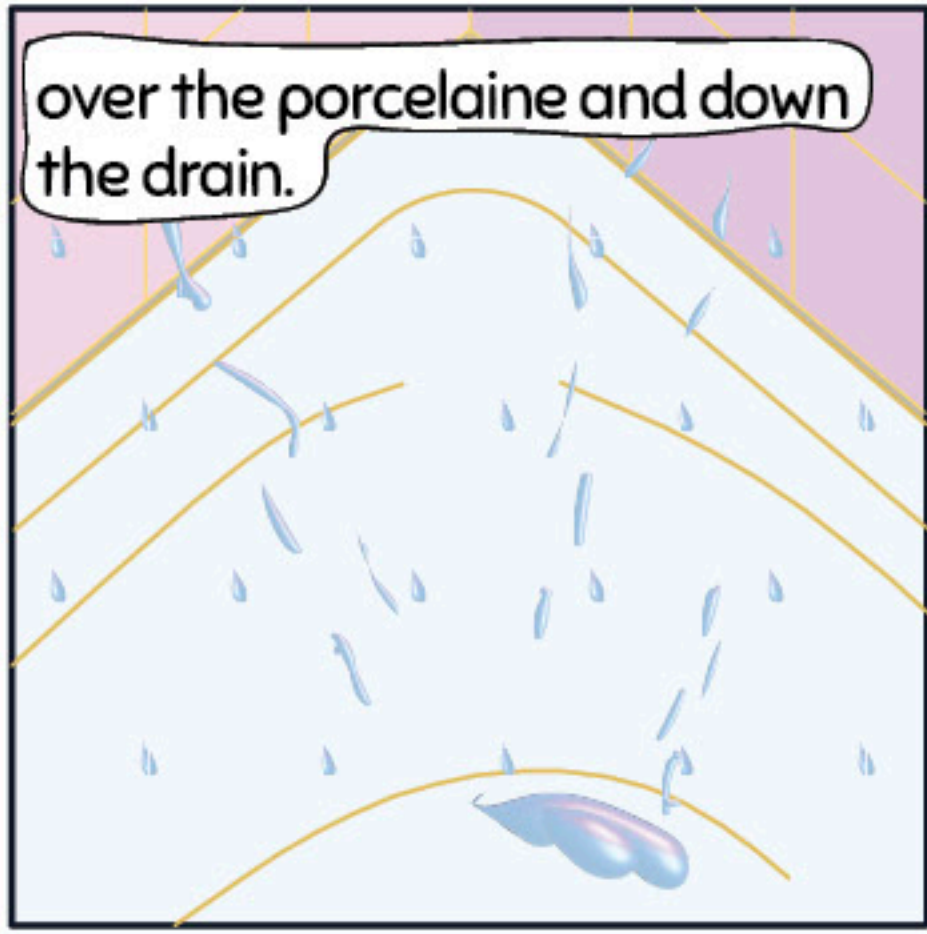
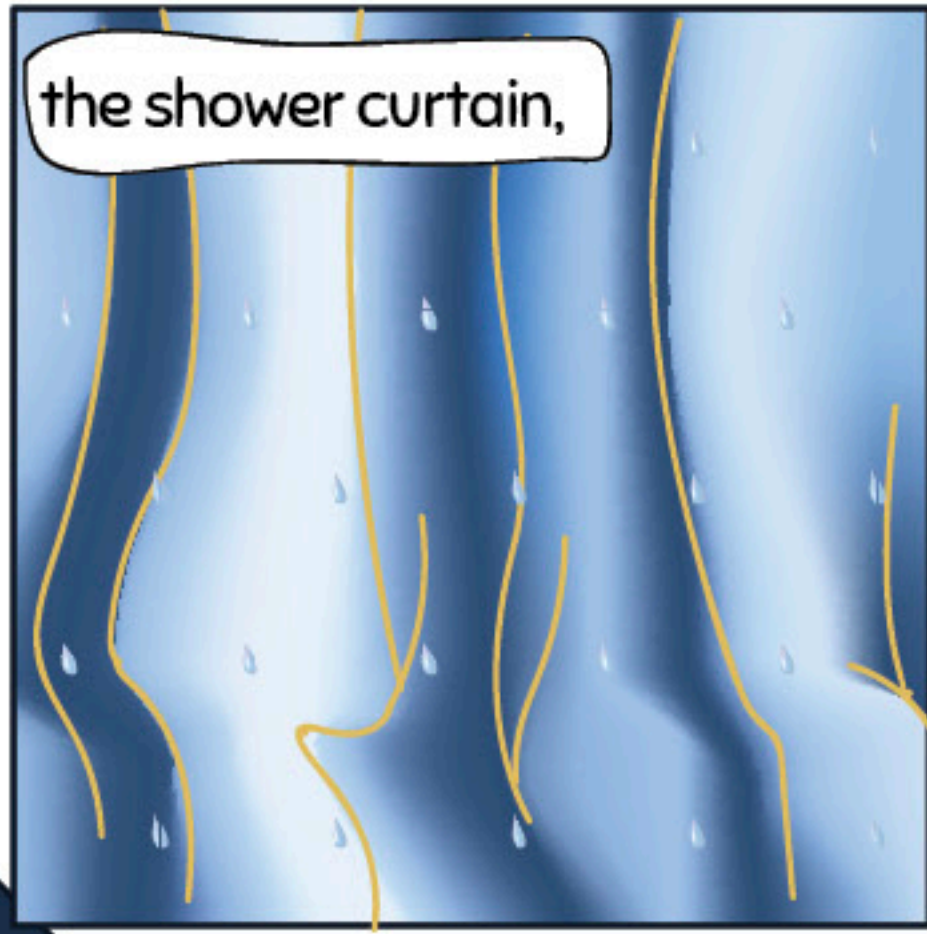
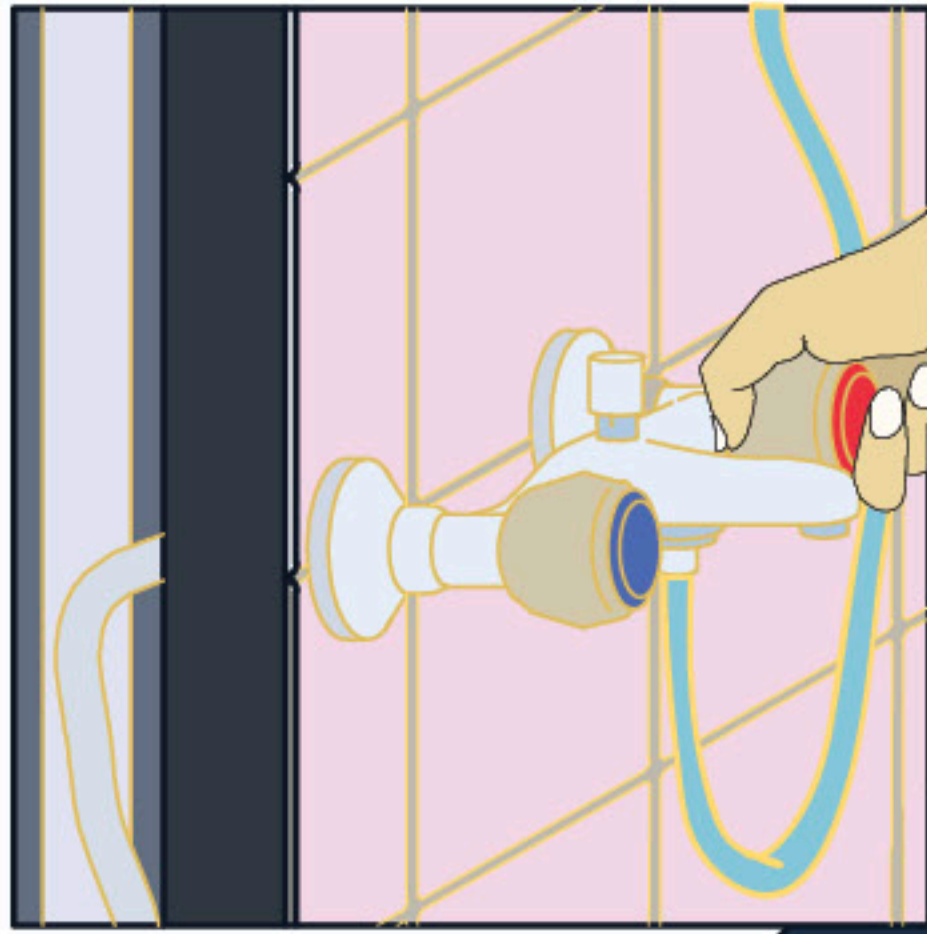
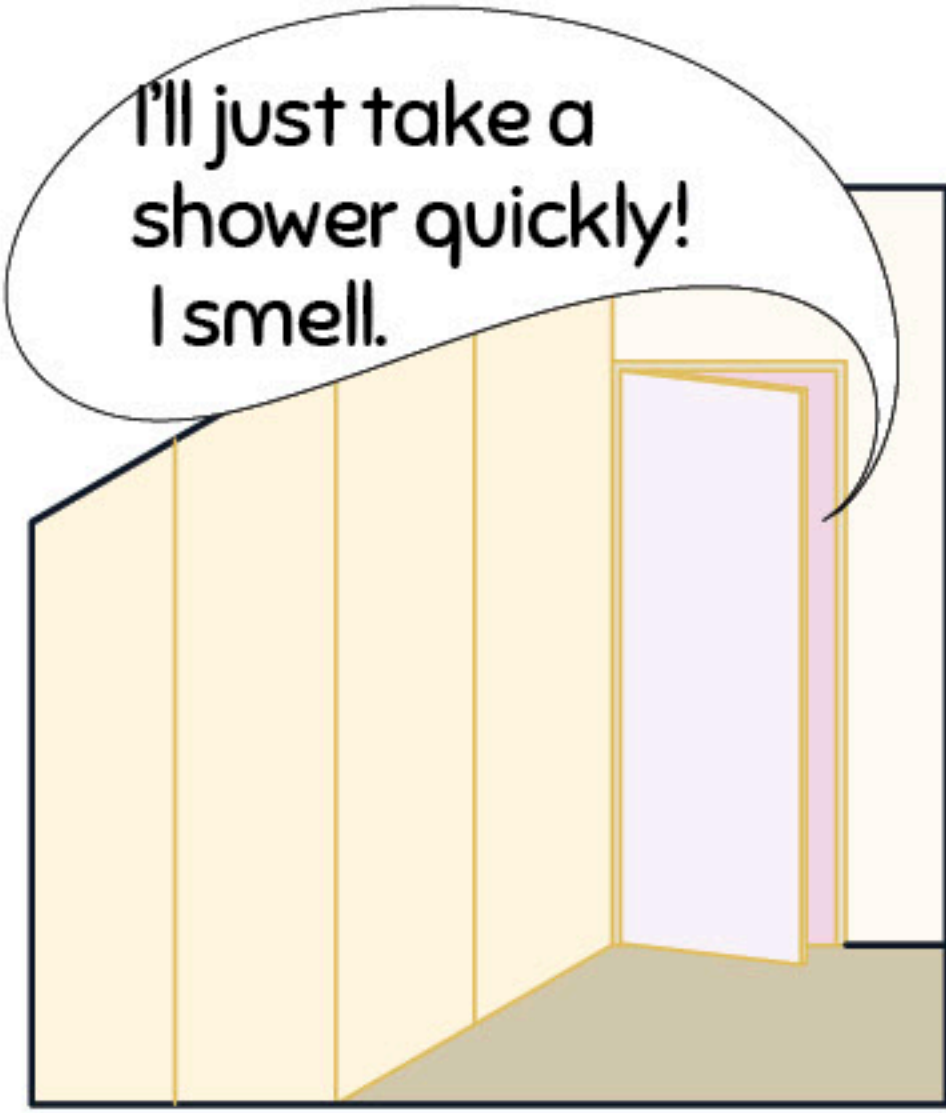


¹Maystre, "Les grands travaux d'assainissement de Genève", 146.
²L'usine de traitement et de valorisation des déchets des Cheneviers", SIG.ch.



Bodily Fluids



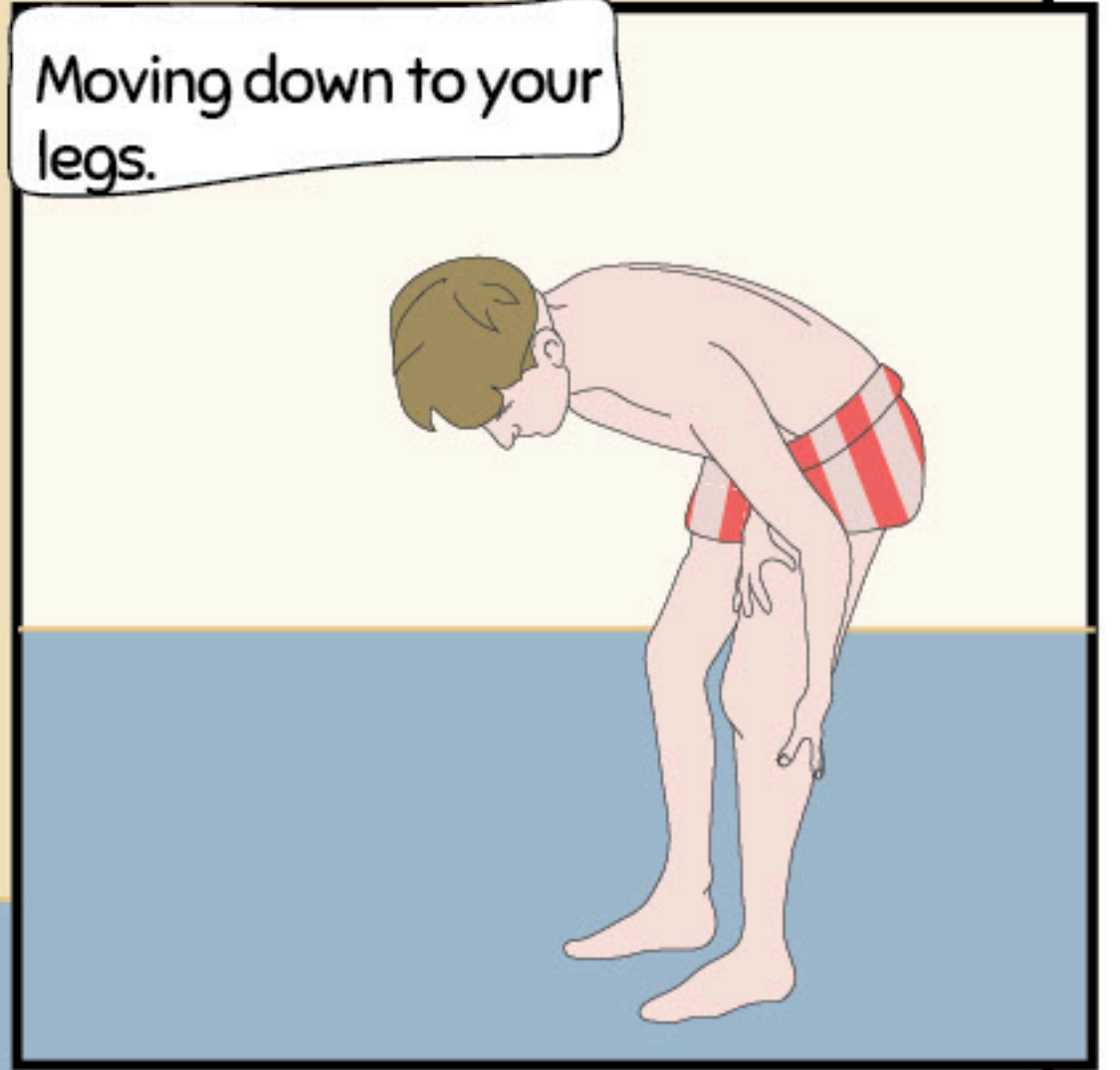
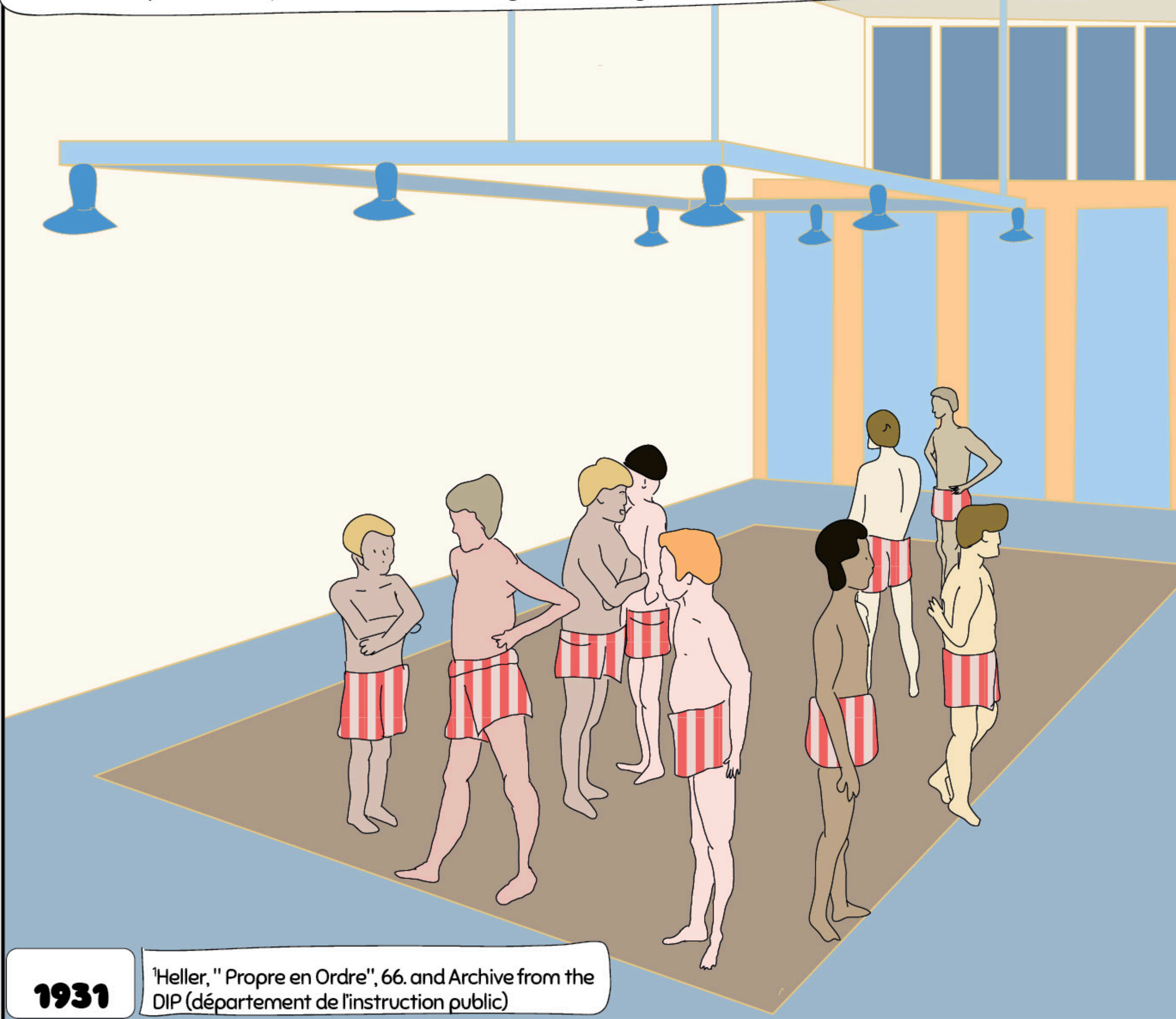


It's more complicated to approach the subject of body dirt. The private nature of the bathroom, here secluded at the core of the apartment, overlaid with the polite discretion of bodily fluids, such as sweat, semen, discharge, urine, menstrual blood, makes it a deeply private subject.



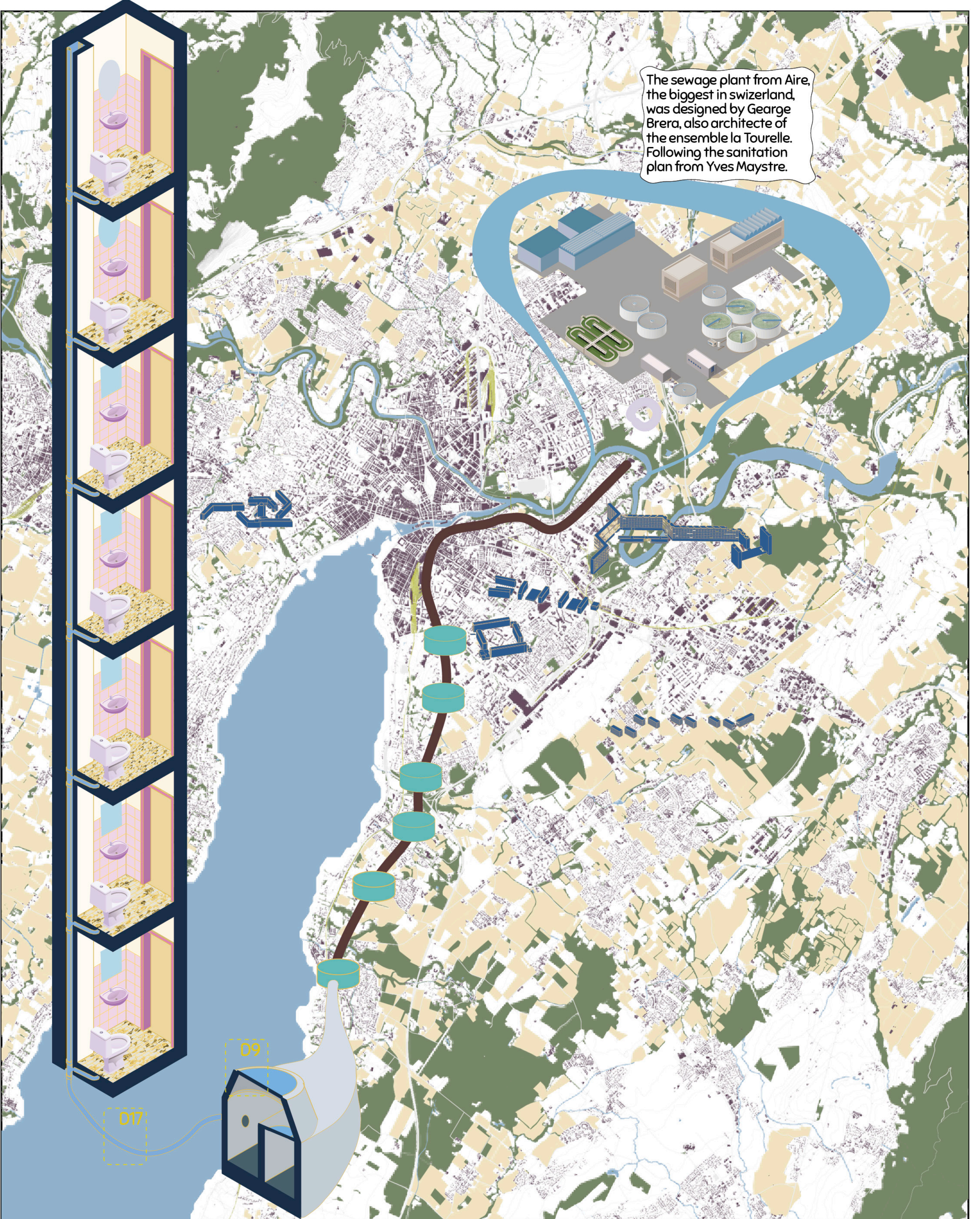
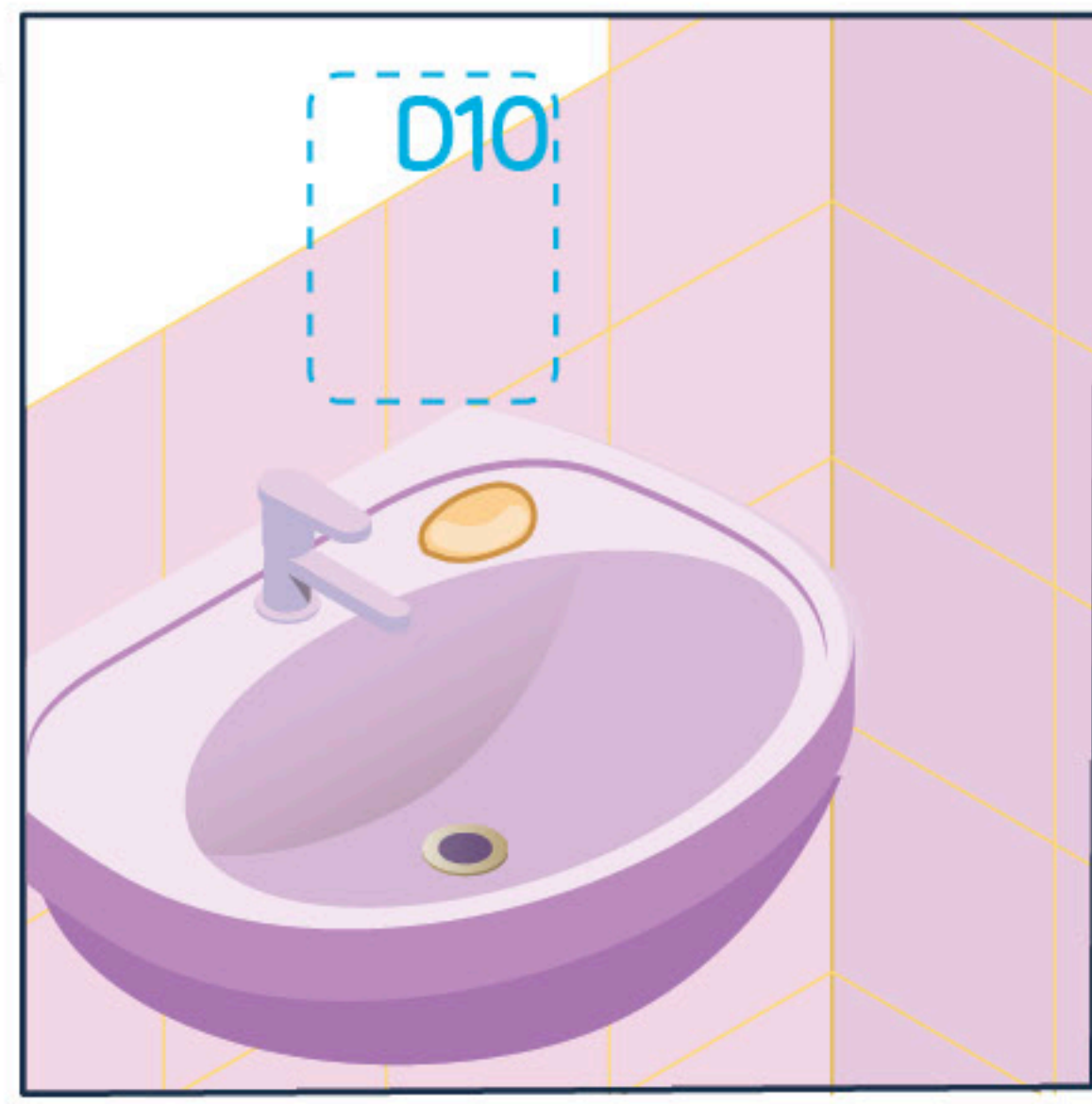
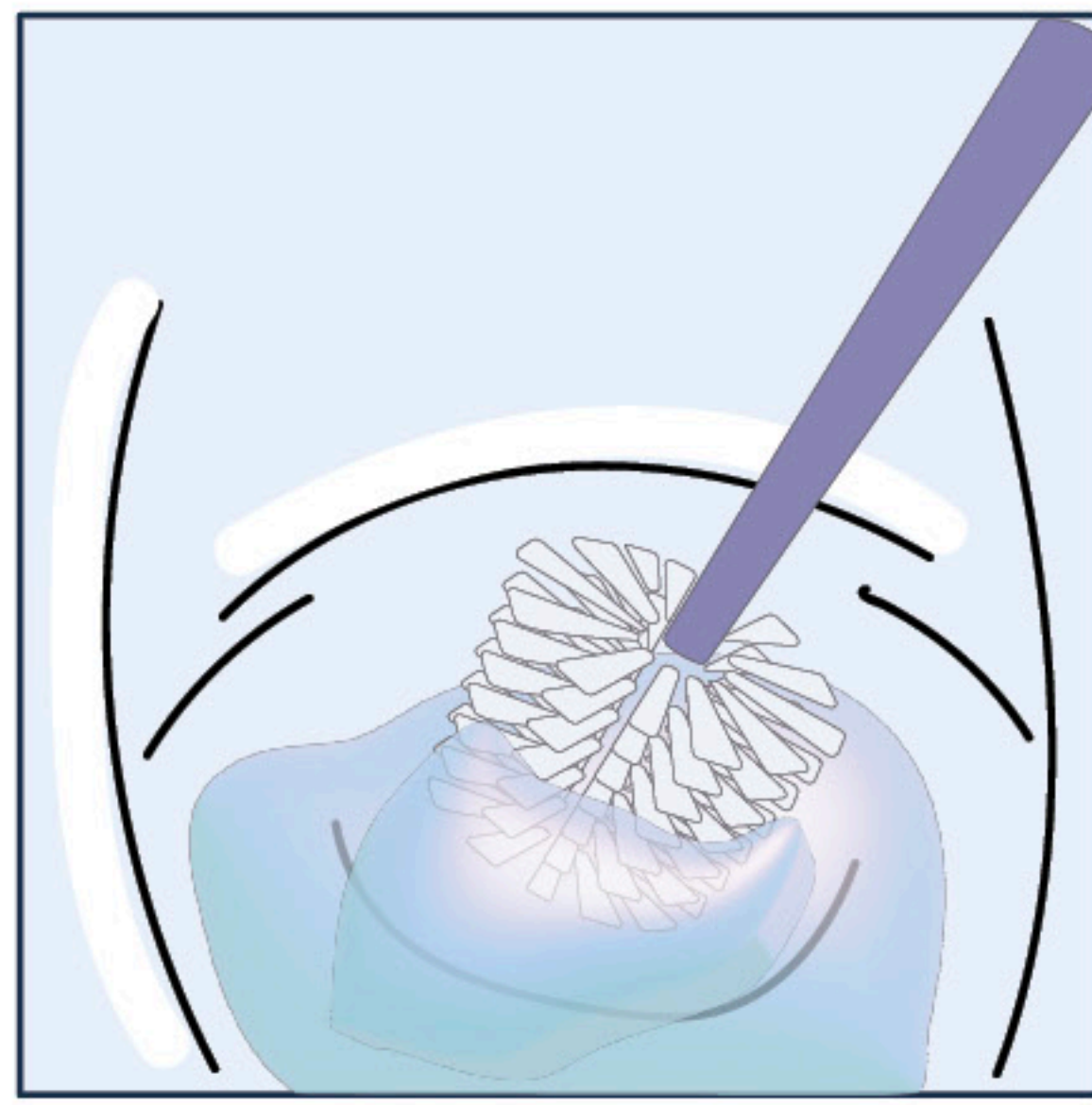
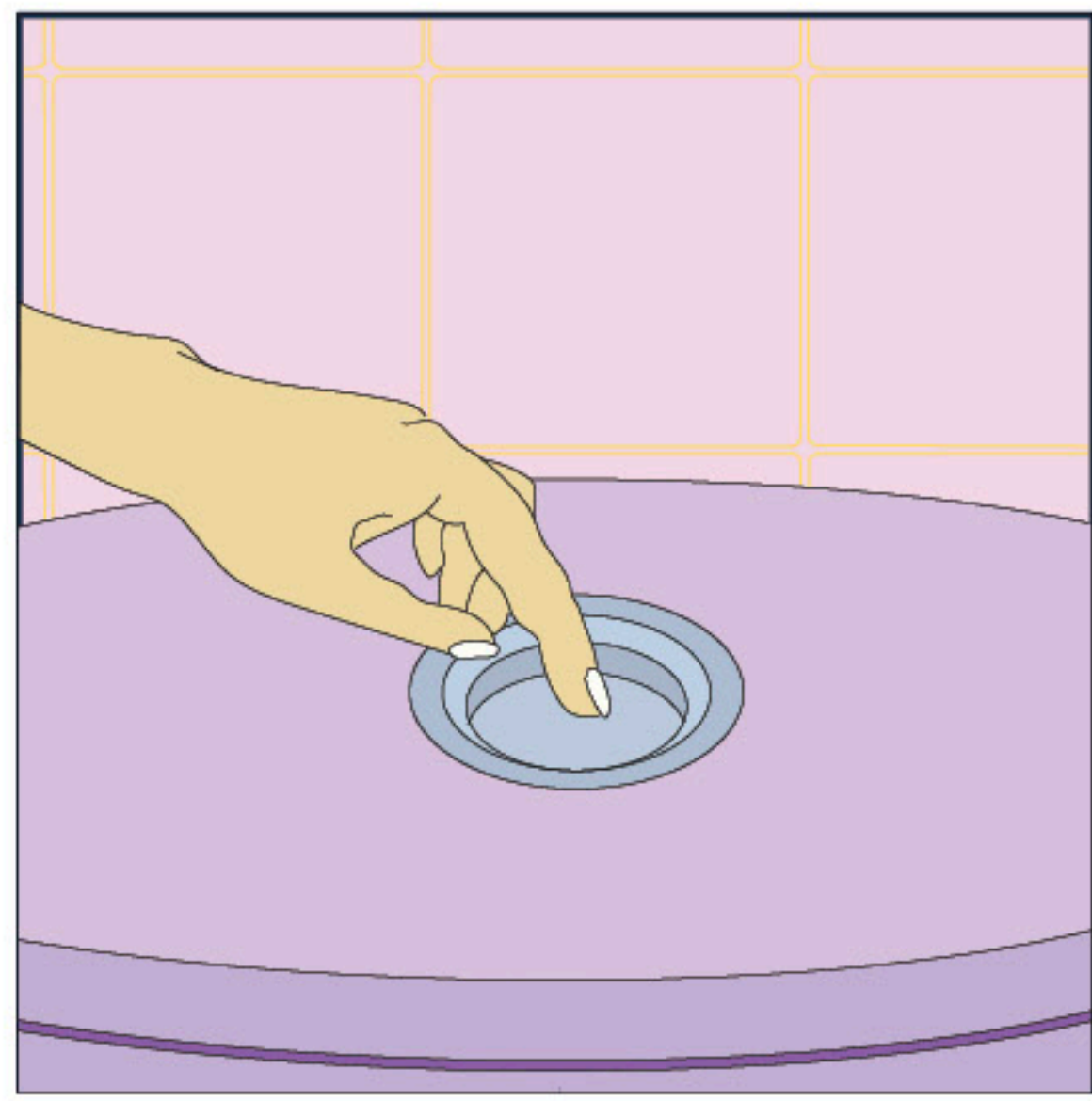
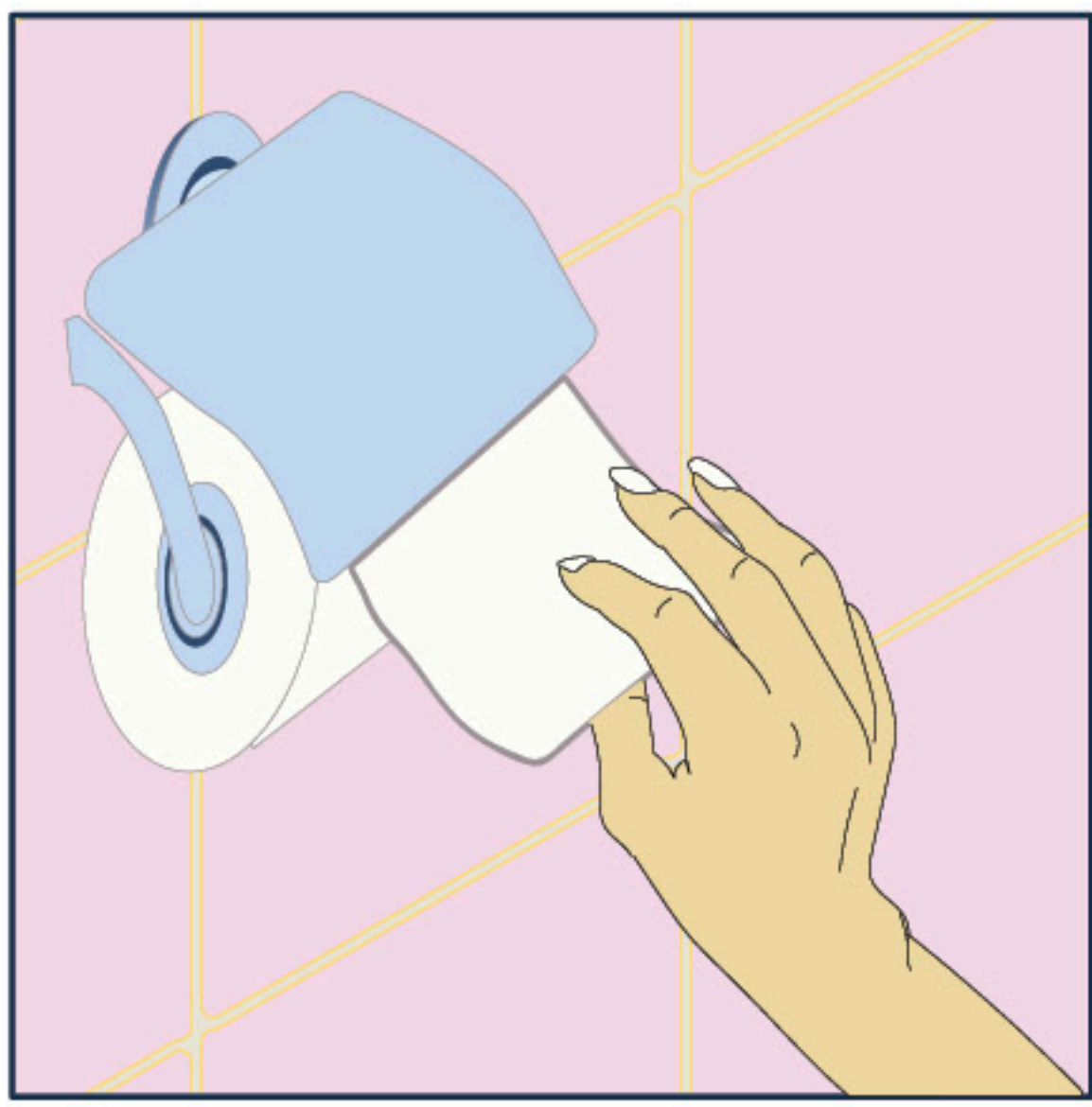
In the bathroom, everything slides down the drain; our ablutions disappear quickly. Every surface is covered in enamel, keeping the user focused on maintaining their equilibrium, in order to avoid sliding down like the rest.

The development of the private bathroom within the household, also called for the need to teach the population how to wash their bodies, in a proper manner. In between the 1870 and the first world war, showering was taught in some schools. The teacher states the rules and turns on the water. This practice ensures that the children get at least one shower a week and allow the professor to check his students and controls the outbreak of disease in the classroom. These shower classes are particularly common in working-class neighbourhoods.¹



1931

Heller, "Propre en Ordre", 66. and Archive from the DIP (département de l'instruction public)



Epilogue

Since the 70s, the societal conception of dirt has become more ambiguous. The invisibilization of cycles of maintenance maintains dirty workers in a precarious state.¹² Simultaneously, the aestheticization of dirt prevents a critique of the value system behind the good clean and the bad filth.

Potential dirt glides down on sleek surfaces or is to be carefully scrubbed and collected to be taken out of sight, treated or exported. Cleanliness is built as a standard where dirt is treated as the deviation, however this does not correspond to daily experience where the process of dirtying starts right after any cleaning. Rituals of cleaning prevent outburst of dirt and the visceral reaction of disgust that follows.

« Dirt avoidance is a process of tidying up, ensuring that the order in external physical events conforms to the structure of ideas. Pollution rules can thus be seen as an extension of the perceptual process: insofar as they impose order on experience, they support clarification of forms and thus reduce dissonance. »

Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (1996), page 140.

This process is discrete and insidious, dirt accumulates fast and work must be done constantly to control it. Technologies developed before and after the time of the grands ensembles reduce parts of dirty work but makes us wonder why complete annihilation of dirt could be desired.

In the following phase, this project will explore potential answers to Genevève Heller's question "If we were to remove the cleanliness (...) What if dirt came back?" I will design in accord with the presence of dirt and its perpetual cycle of maintenance, laying aside the fear of moral disorder. Feminist science fiction allows to design in an imaginary that isn't grounded in moral surveillance or fear of dirt but instead imagines an architecture outside of the binary scope between dirtiness and purity.¹²

In a similar manner of this research, I would design in a multiscalar manner, from possible networks or ecosystems, to architectural details and maintenance options, within the framework of large collective dwelling.

To counter the negative moral implication of dirty thinking and designing, this project will be designed as a speculative architectural fiction, allowing alternative forms of housing to take shape. Starting from spatial, material, and historically real contexts and enriching them with alternative moral or social values.

I see the use of science fiction as a possibility for architecture not to reproduce systematic oppression, in this case, mostly that of gendered and racialised maintenance and domestic workers, and therefore designing spaces to deal with filth and counter the stigmatisation of dirt and the people dealing with it.

¹² The term dirty workers includes: garbage disposal workers, carers, cleaning staff and other forgotten job dealing with the materiality cleaning and dealing with dirt.

¹² We can for exemple think about Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) Where the character Shevek evolves in Anarres, a planet where spaces are connected by uses. The city is thought like an organism with networks of shared facilities, no intention of center or clear frontier. The trilogy *le satellite de l'amande* (Paris, Edition des Femmes) written by Françoise d'Audoubert also serve as inspiration as well as the recent short story by Lauren Bastide, *2060* (Paris: Nouvelles Lunes, 2023).

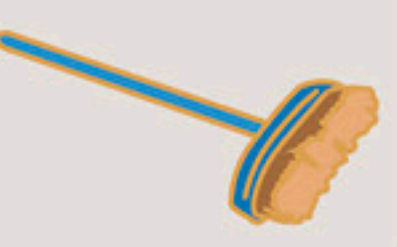
o e t o i l s



ENTRANCE STEP

1/10

10 cm



Caretaker



Daily



Filth and Disorder

Stone tiles
Cement
Concrete

The small step prevents most leaves, dust or pollen to be carried into the entrance by the wind. It also limits the amount of dirt carried by people coming in.

D1

Seen on page 14, 19.

TILES WITH GAP

10/4

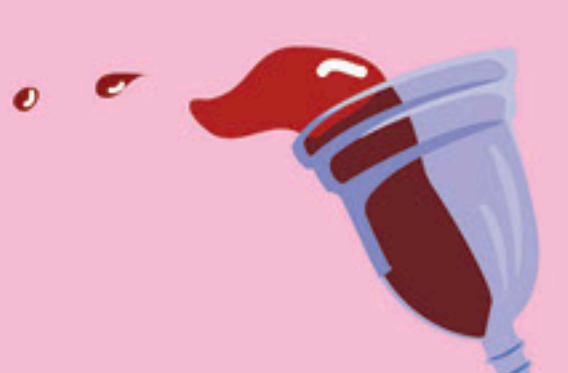
2.5 cm



Inhabitant



Weekly



Bodily fluids

Ceramic tiles
Cement
Plaster panel

The gap between the tiles is difficult to clean if not cared for regularly.

D10

Seen on page 14, 15, 22, 24.

STEP LAUNDRY ROOM

1/10

10 cm



Caretaker

Weekly

Filth and Disorder



TILES WITHOUT GAP

1/10

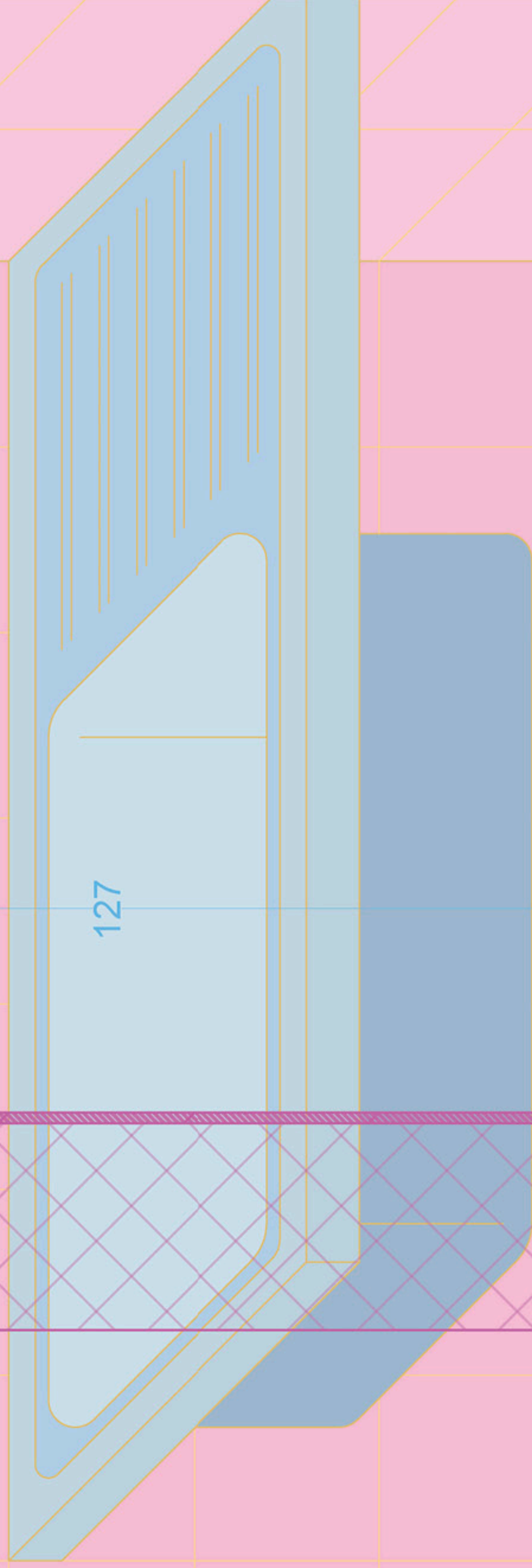
10 cm



Caretaker

Daily

Filth and Disorder



The step in the laundry room prevents water to spread to the whole floor in case of leakage or overflow.

45

15

Stone tiles

Cement

Concrete

Having a minimal gap between the stones and tiles prevents dirt from accumulating and makes for a cleaner appearance.

Seen on page 14

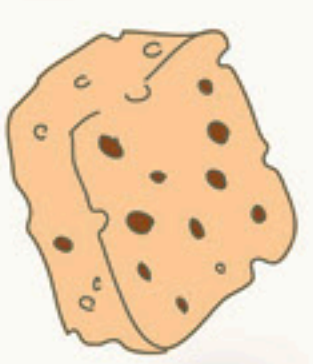
D12

Seen on page 14, 18, 19.

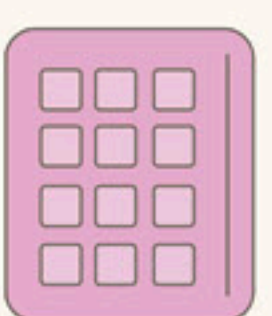
D11

PLINTS

1/10



Inhabitants



Monthly
Seasonally



Filth and
Disorder

The plints protect the base of the wall, especially from cleaning devices, like wet mops or shocks from sweeping or vacuum cleaners.

Wood parquet
Acoustic insulation
Concrete

Wooden plint
Plaster panel
Bricks

Seen on page 14, 15.

D13

CONTAINER ROOM DOOR

1/15



Caretaker

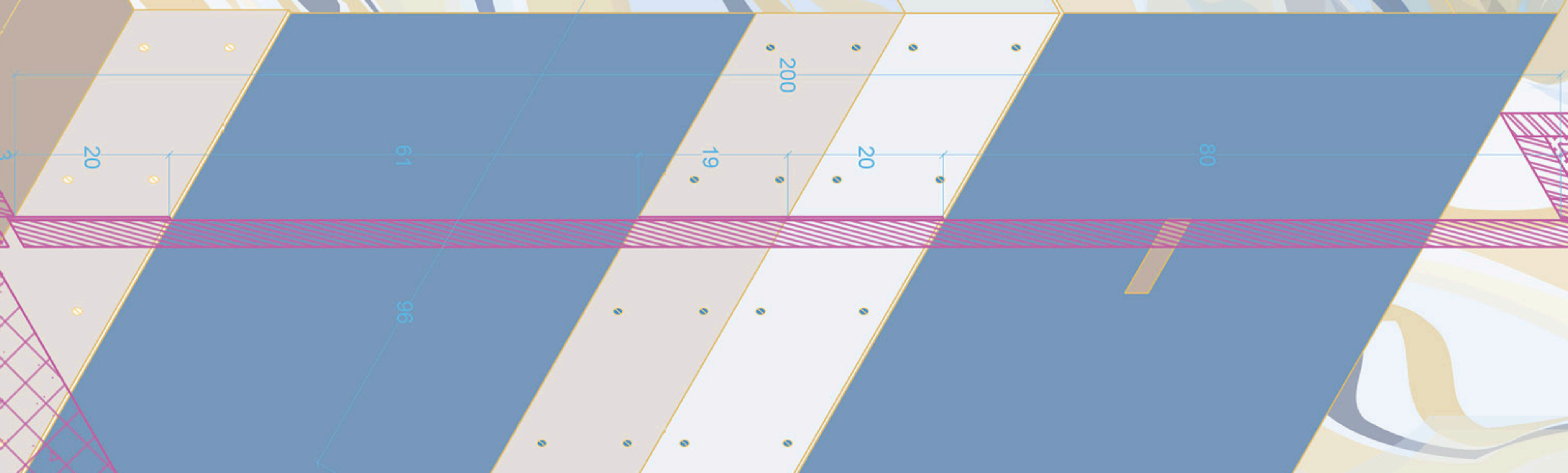


Weekly



Filth and
Disorder

The doors from the containers room are lined with aluminum sheets, protecting the doors from repetitive friction or shocks from the containers.



Seen on page 14.

D14

HANDRAIL VINYL

10/4

2.5 cm



Caretaker



Weekly

Filth and Disorder



The vinyl covered handrails are easy to clean as there is no joint and the surface is resistant to cleaning products.

7

7

10

2

1

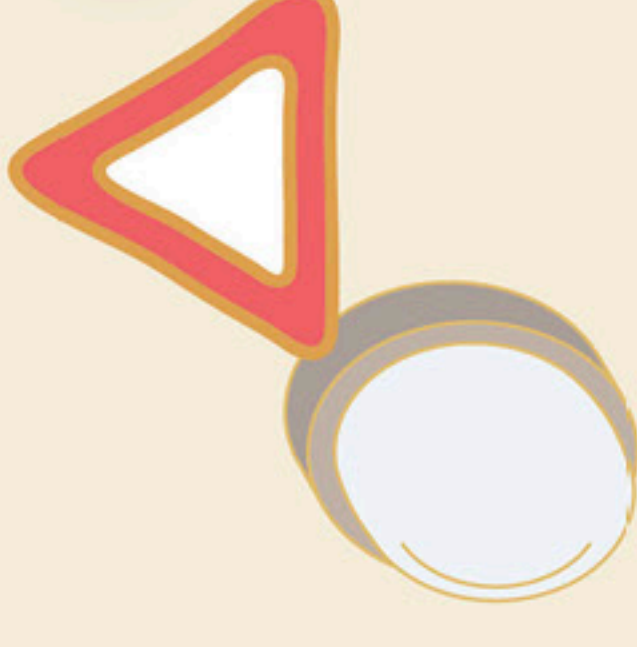
D16

Seen on page 14.

VENTILATION SHAFT

1/10

10 cm

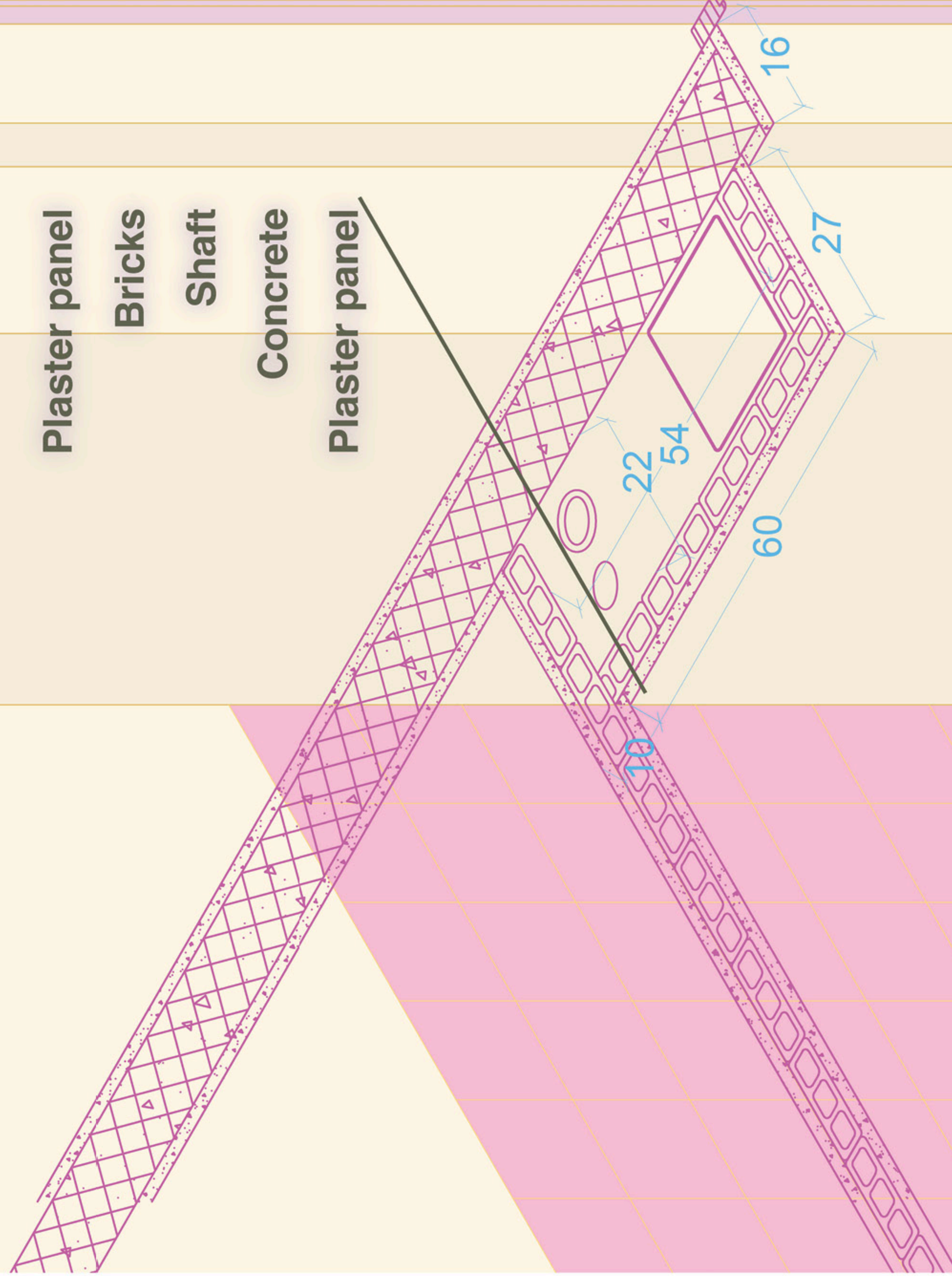


Emergency



Filth and Disorder

Plaster panel
Bricks
Shaft
Concrete
Plaster panel



The ventilation connects all the apartments vertically. Its lightweight construction allows odors and sounds to travel through the floors.

Seen on page 15

D15

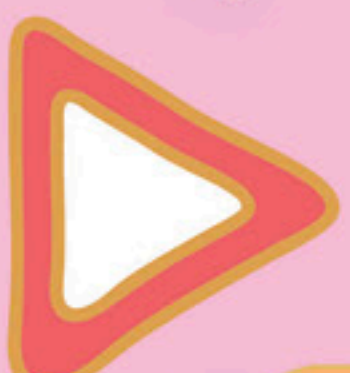
SEWAGE TUBES

1/10

TU cm



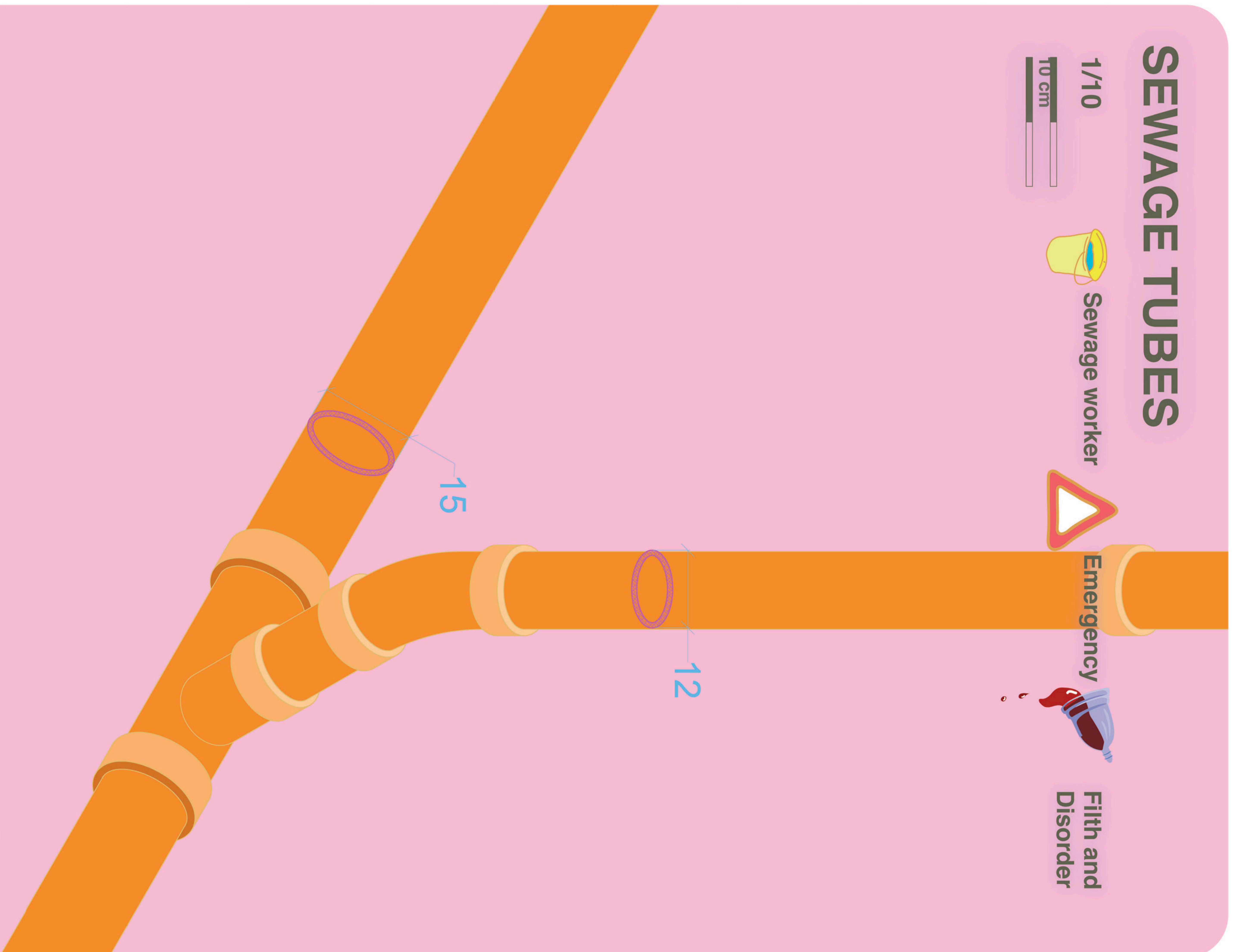
Sewage worker



Emergency



Filth and Disorder



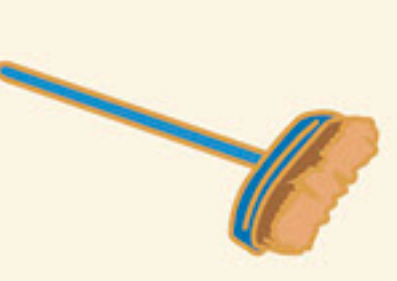
D17

Seen on page 17, 24.

LETTER BOX TABLET

1/15

10 cm



Caretaker

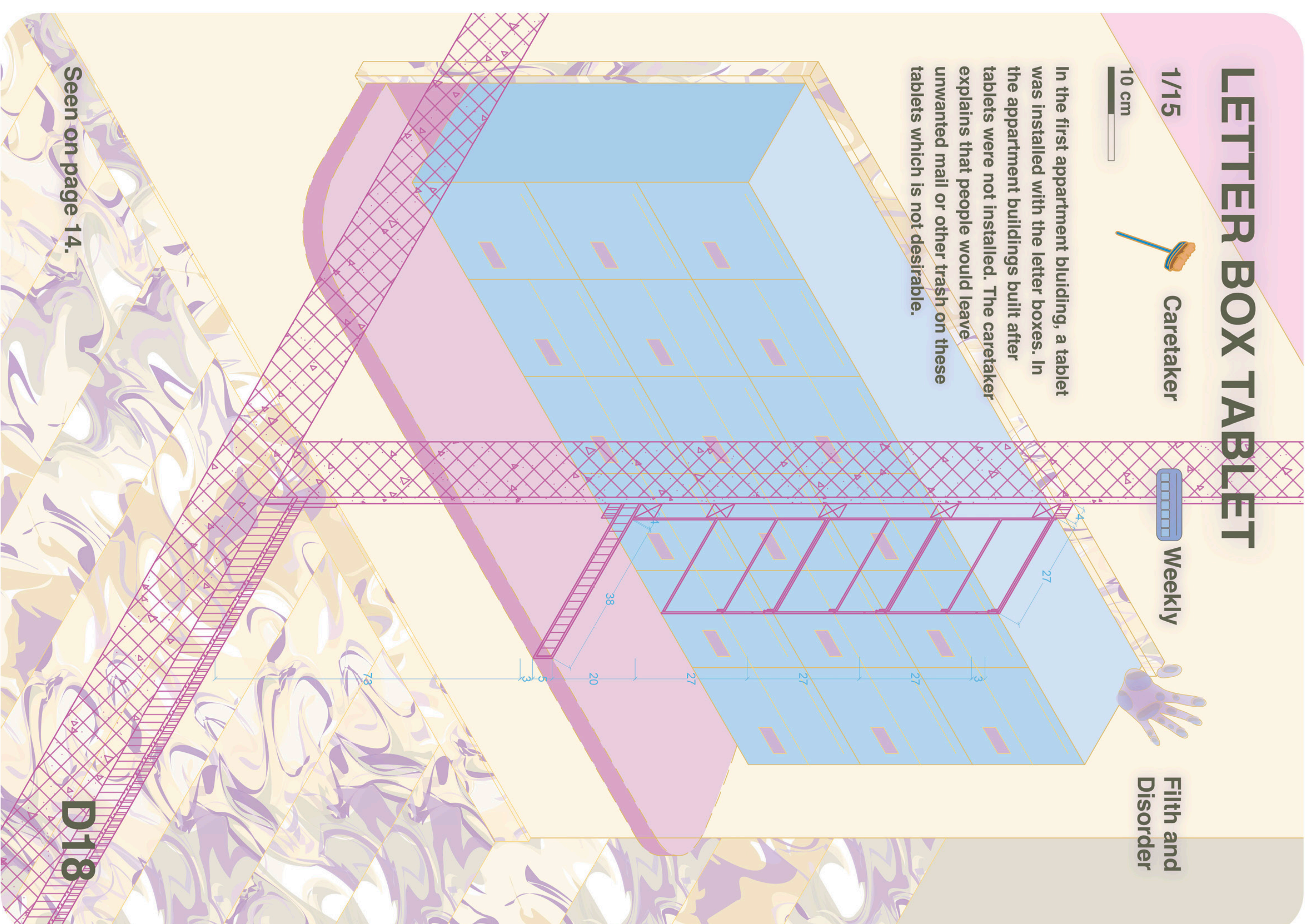


Weekly



Filth and Disorder

In the first apartment building, a tablet was installed with the letter boxes. In the apartment buildings built after tablets were not installed. The caretaker explains that people would leave unwanted mail or other trash on these tablets which is not desirable.



D18

Seen on page 14.

DEVALOIRE TOP

1/10

10 cm



Caretaker



Weekly



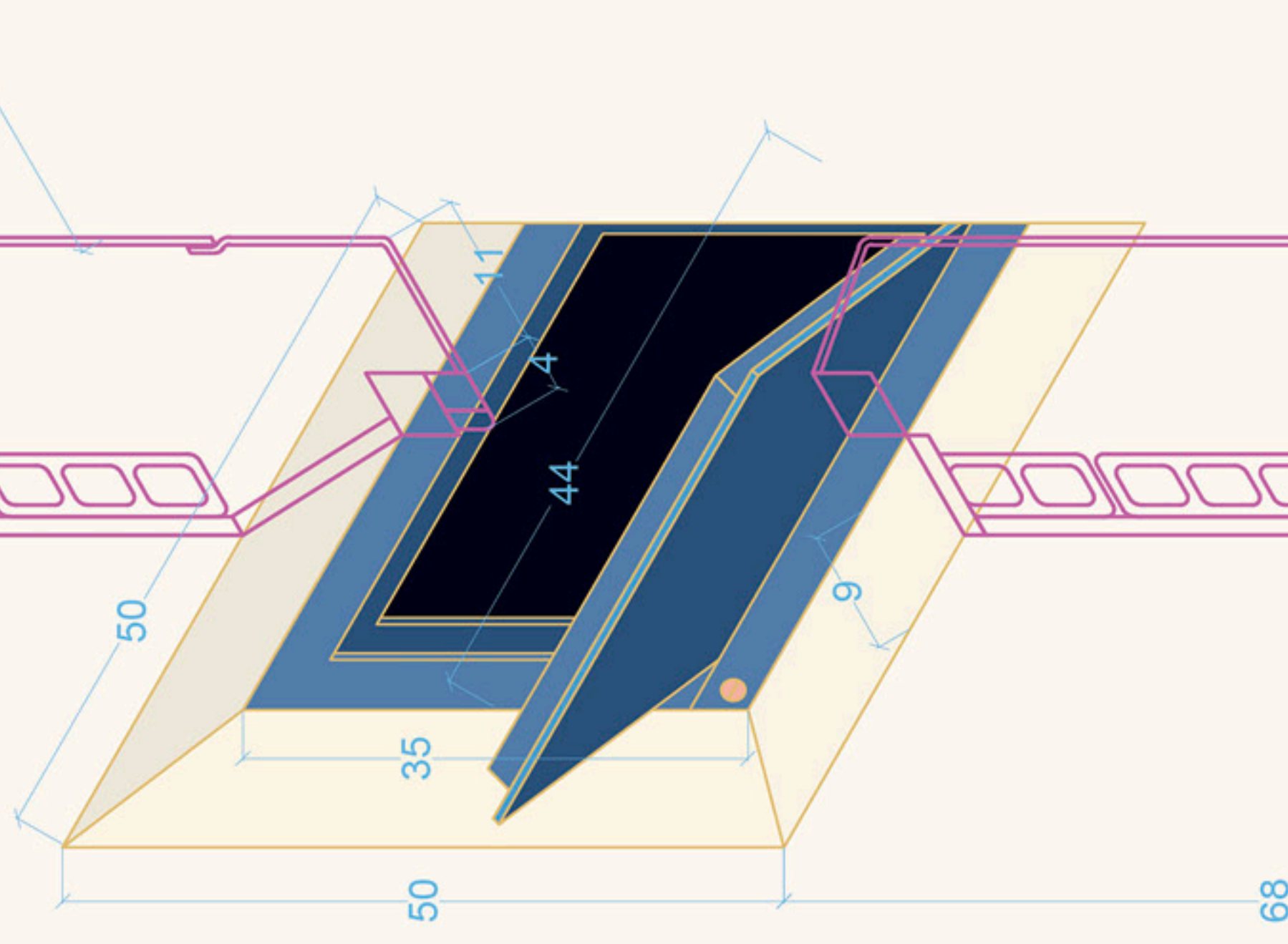
Filth and Disorder

Plaster

Light brick

Rubbish chute tube

Concrete



The door to the rubbish chute is now locked.

Seen on page 18.

D3

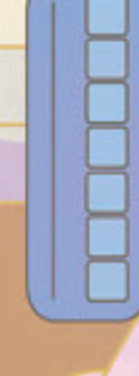
DOORMAT RECESS

1/10

10 cm



Caretaker



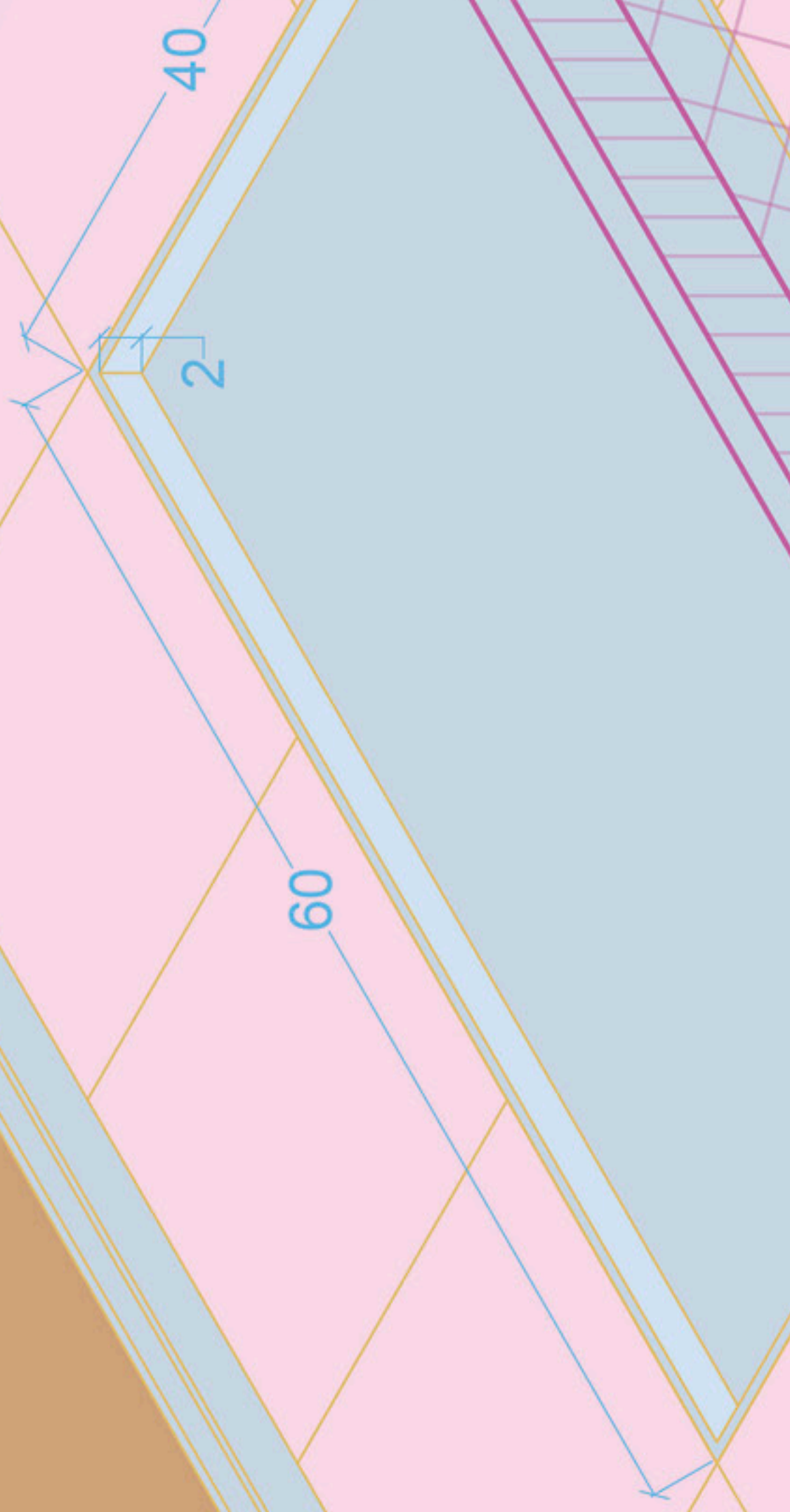
Weekly



Filth and Disorder

Ceramic tiles
Cement
Acoustic insulation
Concrete

The space for the door mat is recessed in the floor to ensure easy cleaning for the caretaker and prevent it from moving around.



It's prohibited to leave anything else in the entrance or circulation space.

Seen on page 14.

D2

DEVALOIRE BOTTOM

1/15

10 cm

Caretaker

Daily

Filth and Disorder

Prefabricated concrete

The caretaker would change the bin under the rubbish chute often, especially as it would overflow regularly. Liquid waste flows directly into the sewage system.

Seen on page 18.

D4

BUILDING BASE

1/20

10 cm

Gardener

Seasonally

Filth and Disorder

When it's raining, the concrete tiles prevent the dirtying of the wall. The splash of water is reduced by the texture of the washed concrete pavements. It prevents the rebound of dirt droplets from the rain and mowing.

Seen on page 13, 18.

D5

Washed concrete stone Drainage

LOW WALL PARC

1/10

10 cm

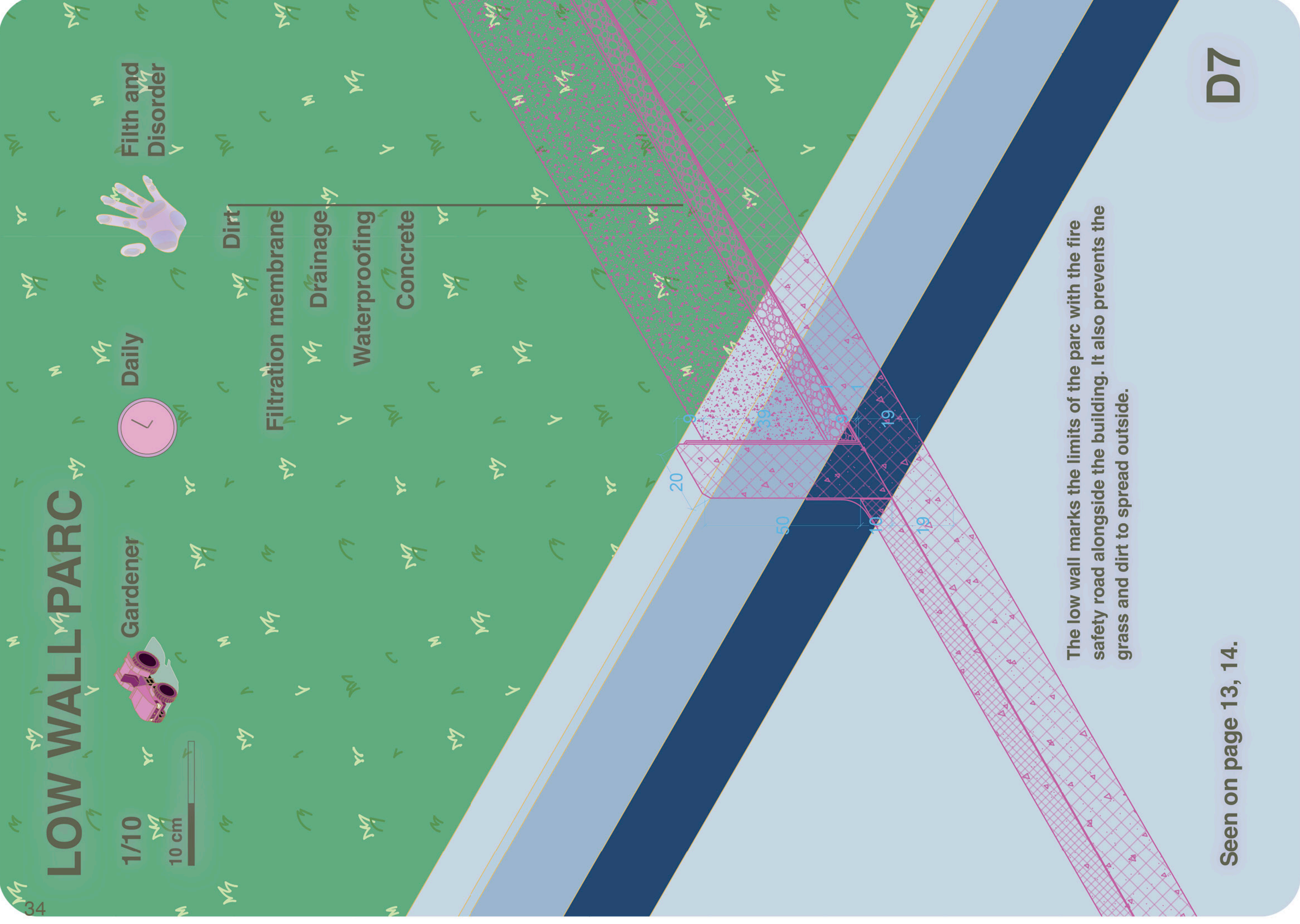
Gardener

Daily

Filth and Disorder



Dirt
Filtration membrane
Drainage
Waterproofing
Concrete



The low wall marks the limits of the parc with the fire safety road alongside the building. It also prevents the grass and dirt to spread outside.

Seen on page 13, 14.

D7

DRAINAGE BALCONY

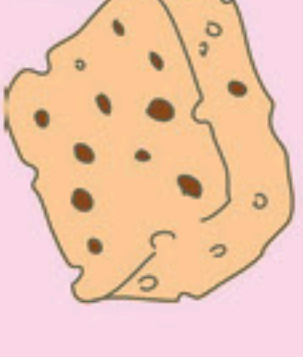
1/20

10 cm

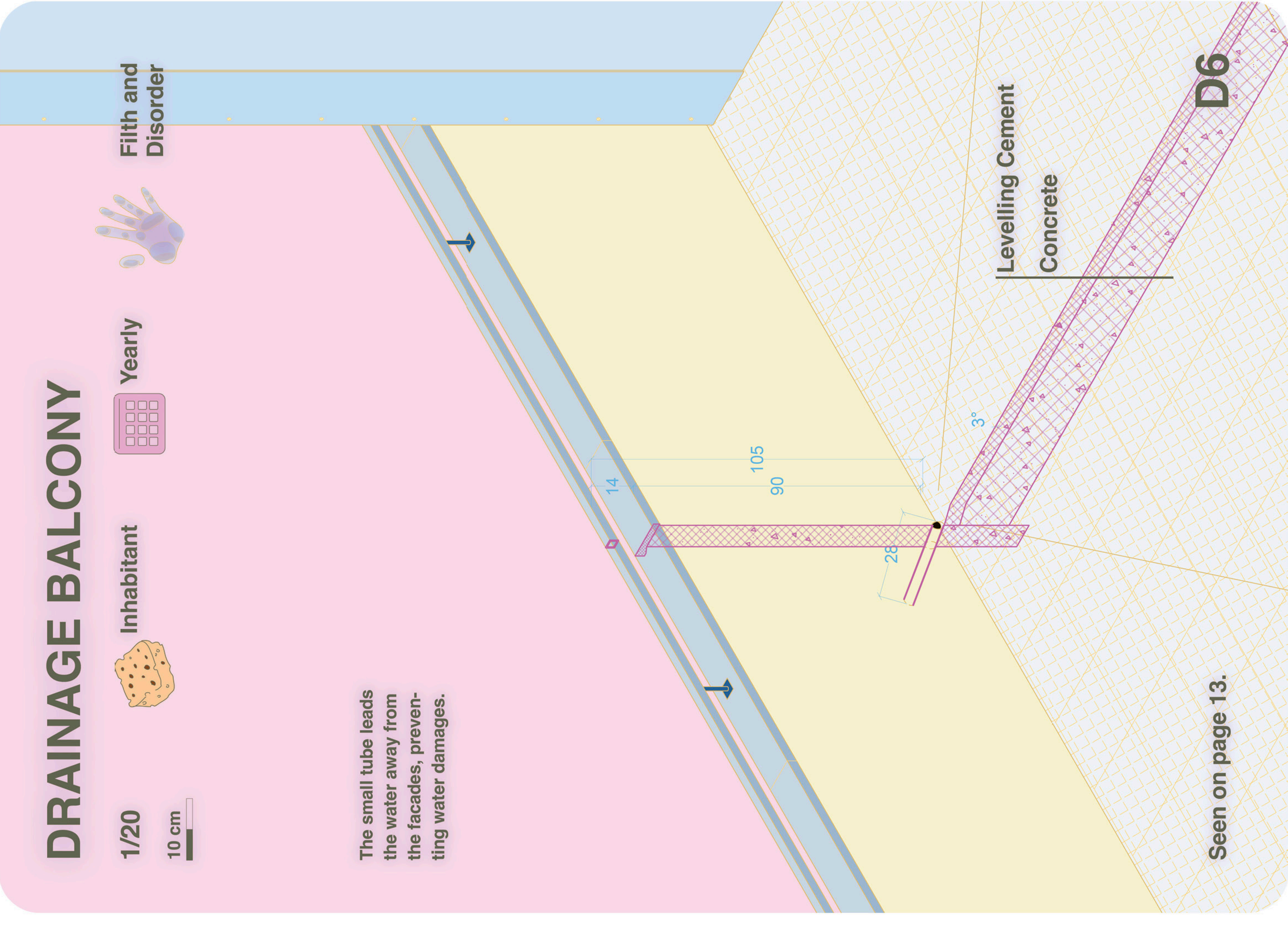
Inhabitant

Yearly

Filth and Disorder



The small tube leads the water away from the facades, preventing water damages.



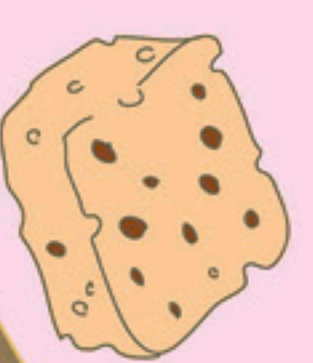
Seen on page 13.

D6

SHELVES

1/20

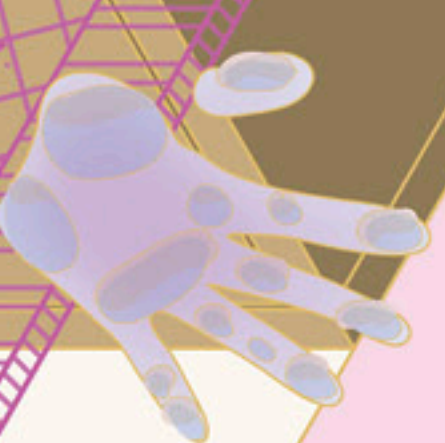
10 cm



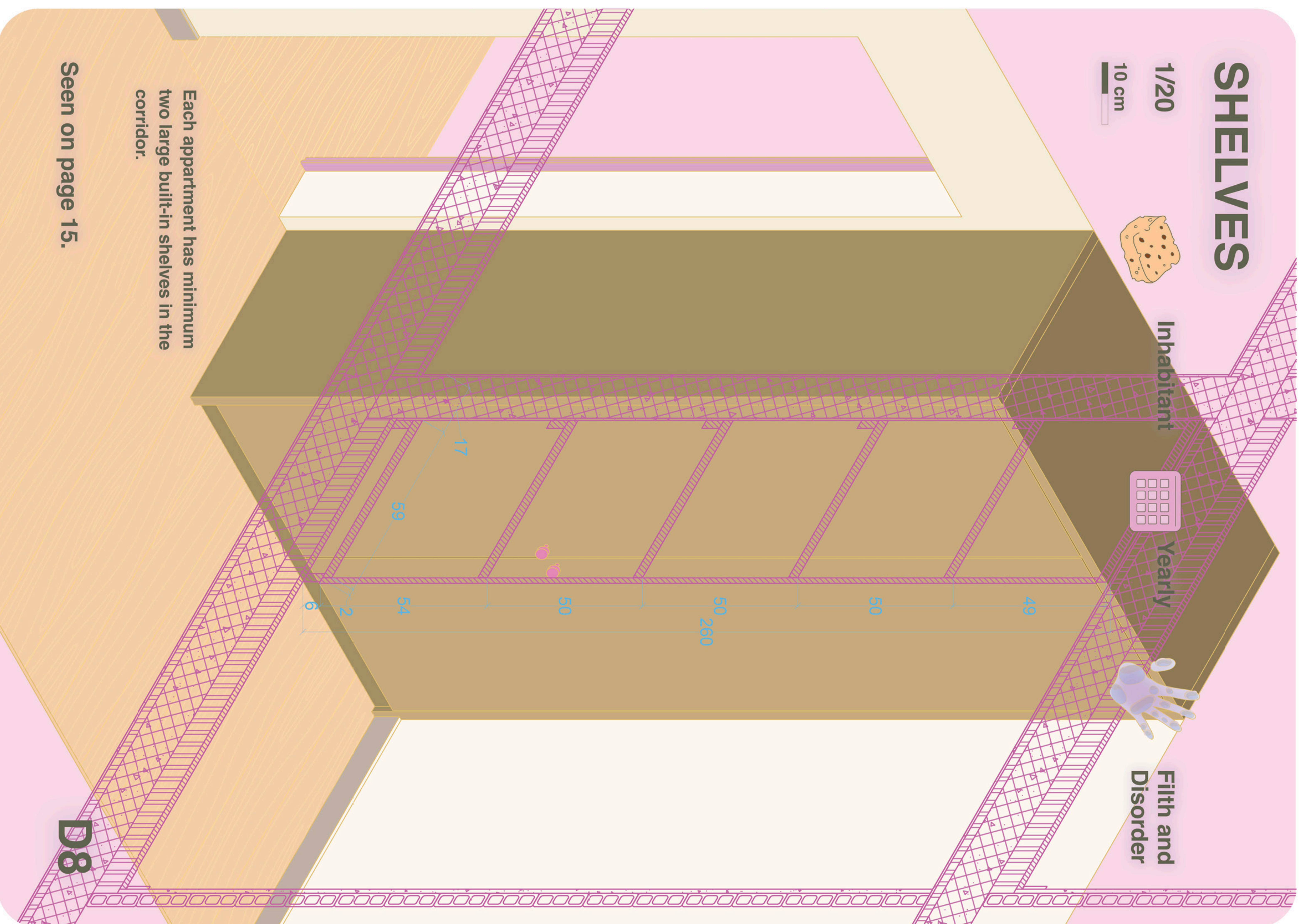
Inhabitant



Yearly



Filth and Disorder



D8

Each apartment has minimum two large built-in shelves in the corridor.

Seen on page 15.

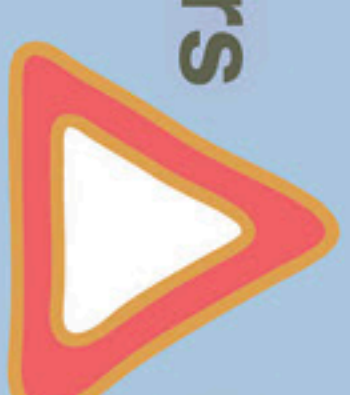
SEWAGE MANNHOLE

1/20

10 cm



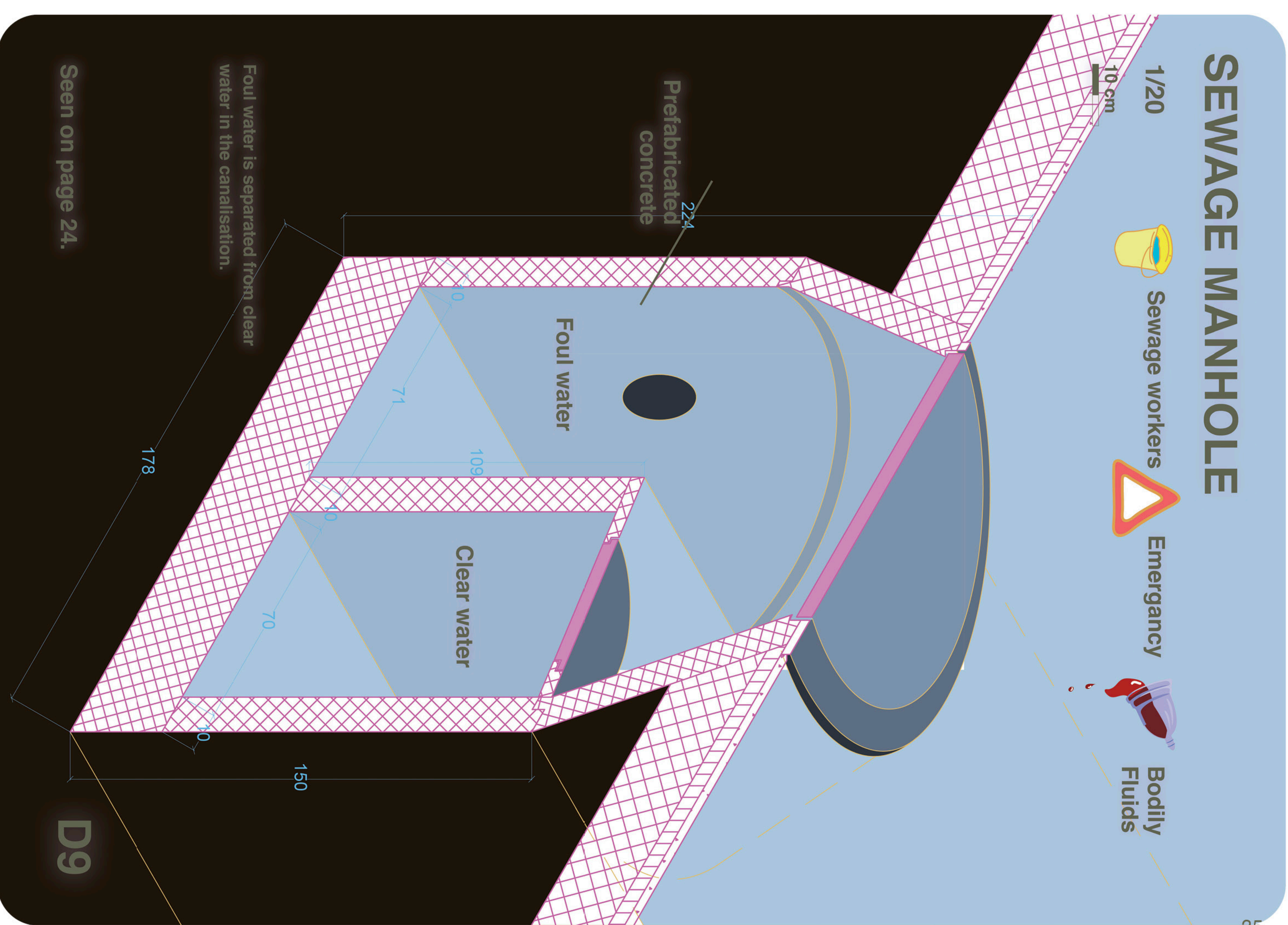
Sewage workers



Emergency



Bodily Fluids



Foul water is separated from clear water in the canalisation.

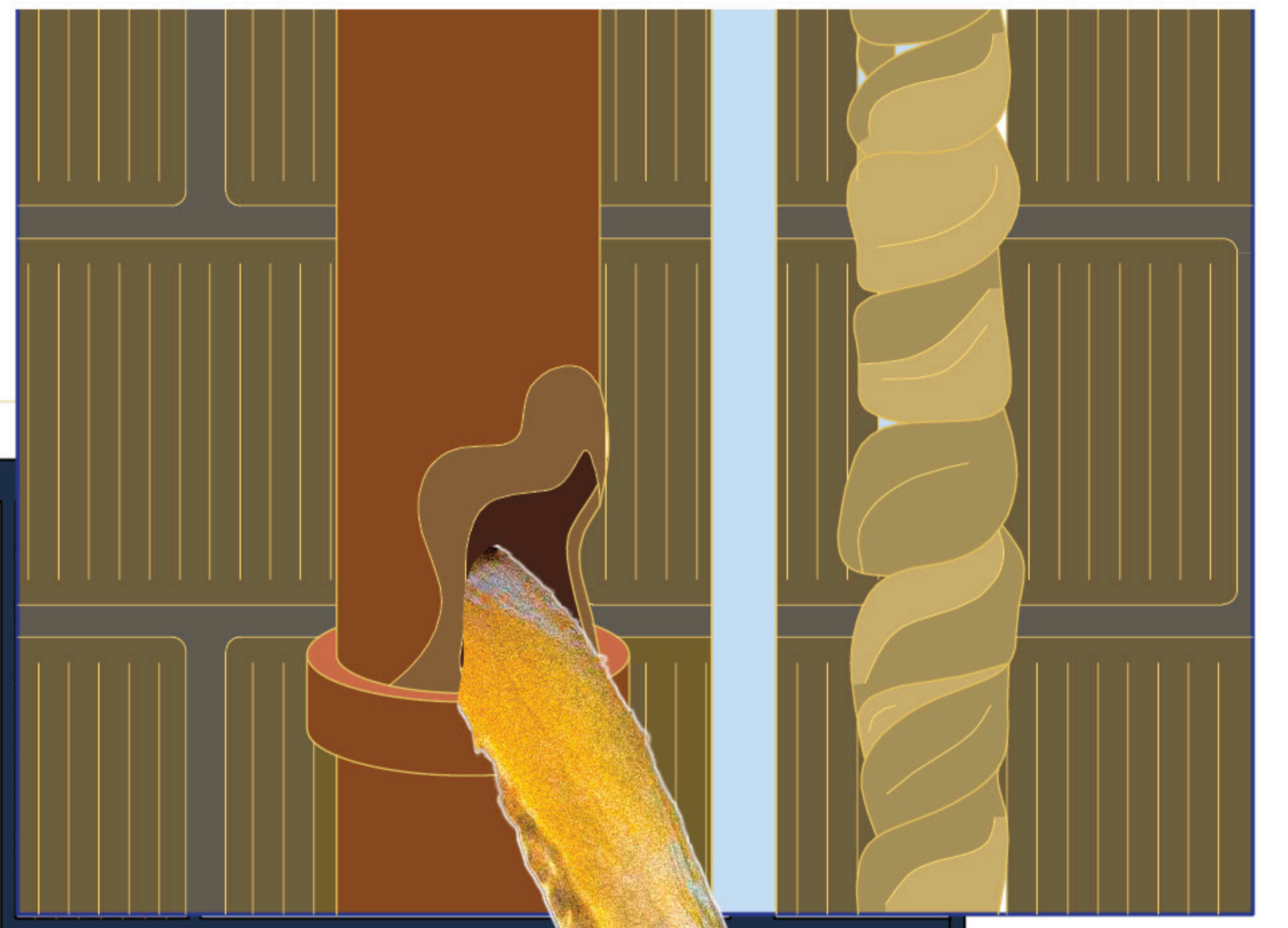
Seen on page 24.

D9





without
if diet
come
back?



Monday

Come to the kitchen!

What did you do to the garbage? It's leaking!

Tuesday

Nothing! for real.

Wednesday

Thursday

I've tried to call management again but no answer!

If it continues, I'll stop paying rent!

Hello, I am calling from the cantonal doctor office.

Friday

To prevent spreading of the bacteria, all waste is locked in the Ensemble.

Saturday

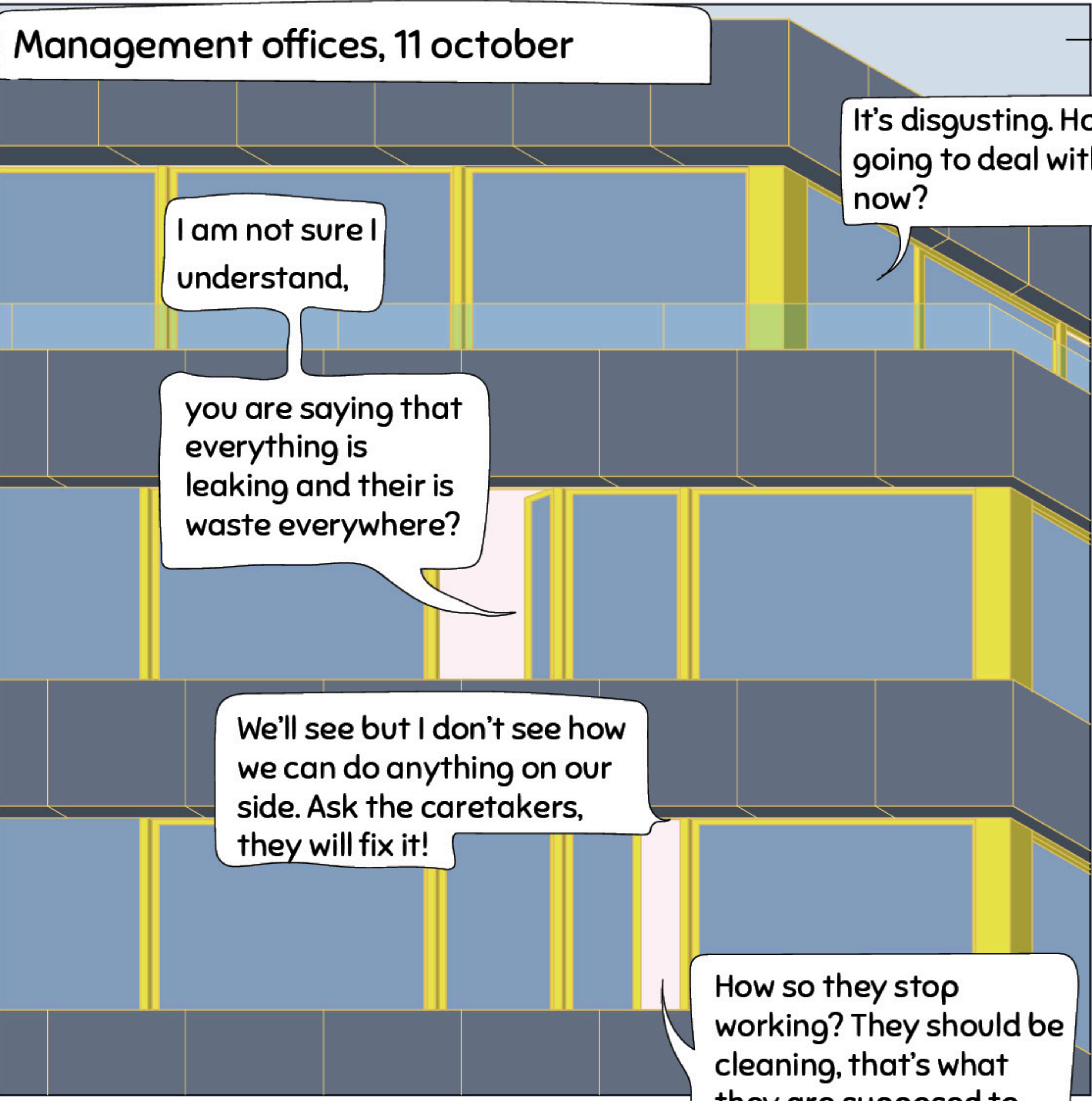
Sunday

Please excuse us about the mess in the hallway, we don't know what to do with all these garbage!

It's impossible to work in these conditions.

Alongside the other worker of the ensemble, we decided to strike until the management acts!

DIRT EMBARGO



Management offices, 11 October

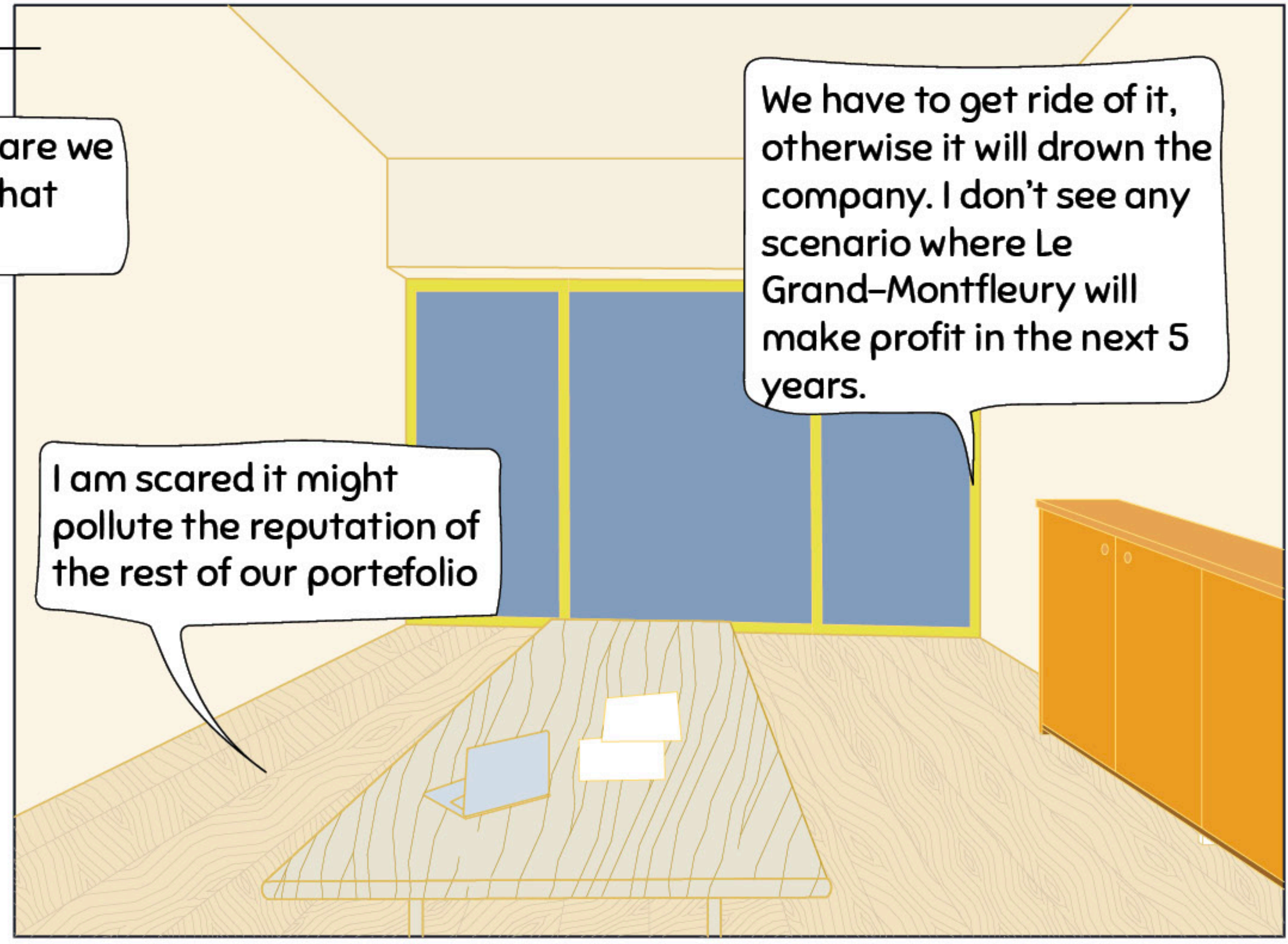
I am not sure I understand,

you are saying that everything is leaking and their is waste everywhere?

We'll see but I don't see how we can do anything on our side. Ask the caretakers, they will fix it!

How so they stop working? They should be cleaning, that's what they are supposed to do!

It's disgusting. How are we going to deal with that now?



We have to get ride of it, otherwise it will drown the company. I don't see any scenario where Le Grand-Montfleury will make profit in the next 5 years.

I am scared it might pollute the reputation of the rest of our portefolio



We don't want to move out, but I am not sure to see to possibility

Could we organise ourself as a non profit to buy back the ensemble?

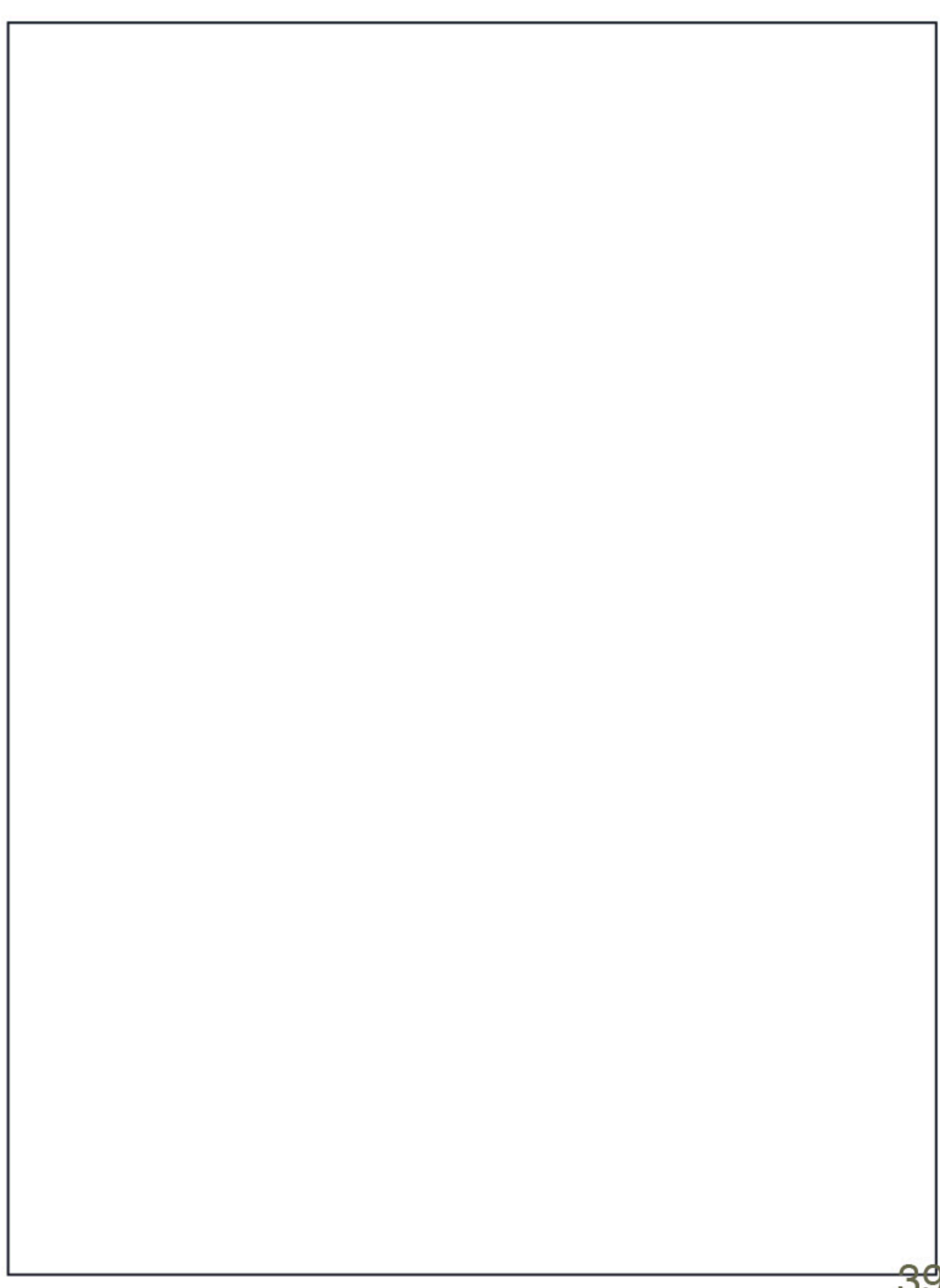


Tribune de Genève, 15 October

Filthy Grand Montfleury to be sold

Versoix (GE) - It's the end of an era at Grand Montfleury. After unsuccessful attempts to stem the tide of filth accumulating on all sides, the company owning the complex is forced to sell the buildings. Faced with clogged pipes and numerous foul-smelling leaks, the maintenance workers went on strike last month. Together with tenants who supported the strike, they will be able to buy back the Ensemble at an attractive price, with the county guaranteeing financial assistance for a major conversion. Residents will play an active part in the project, which will begin in the autumn.

Free Zones and

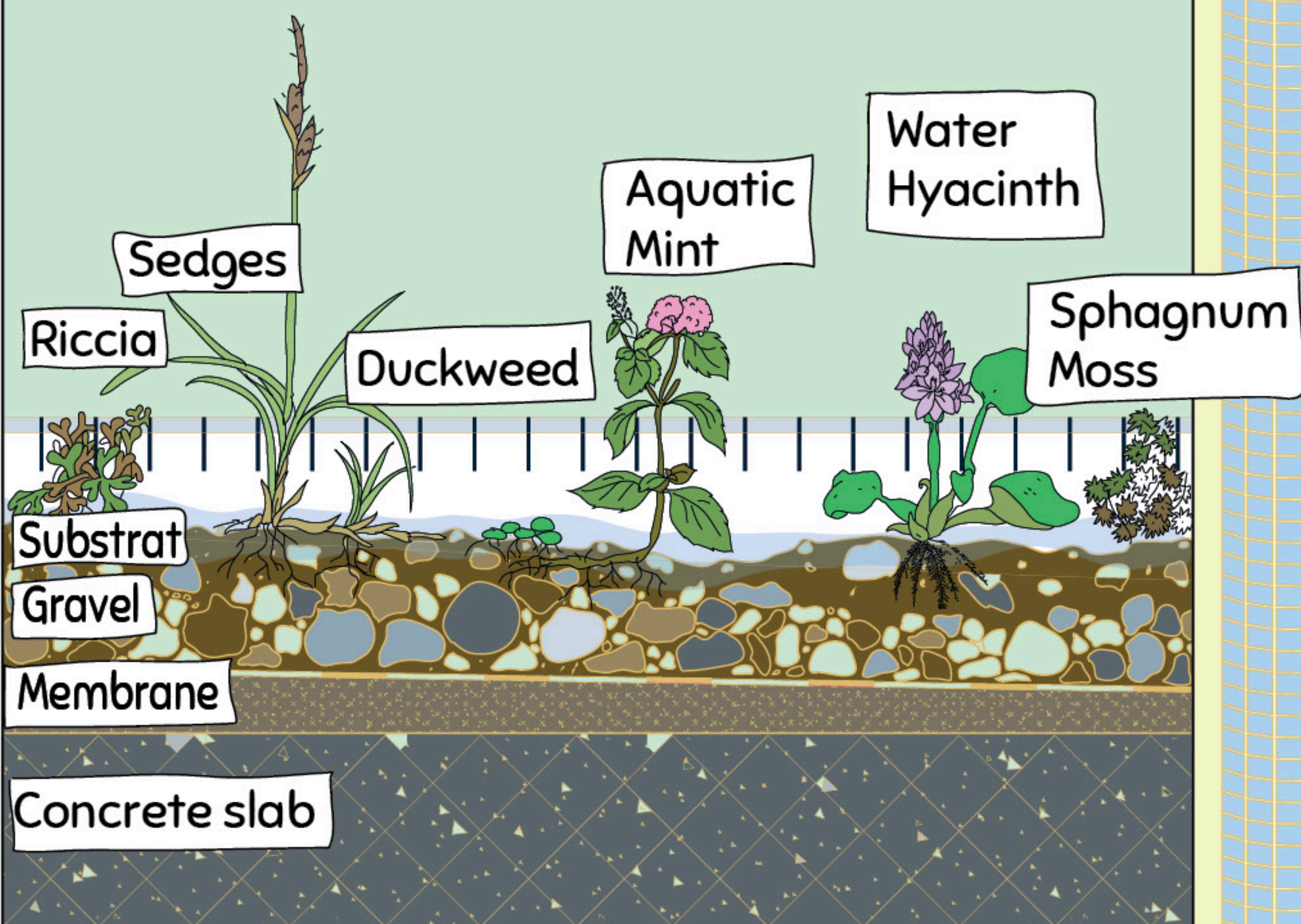


Phytofiltration

Twice a year workers prune the plants and compost them to make room for new growth and allow an unrestricted phytoepuration.

1

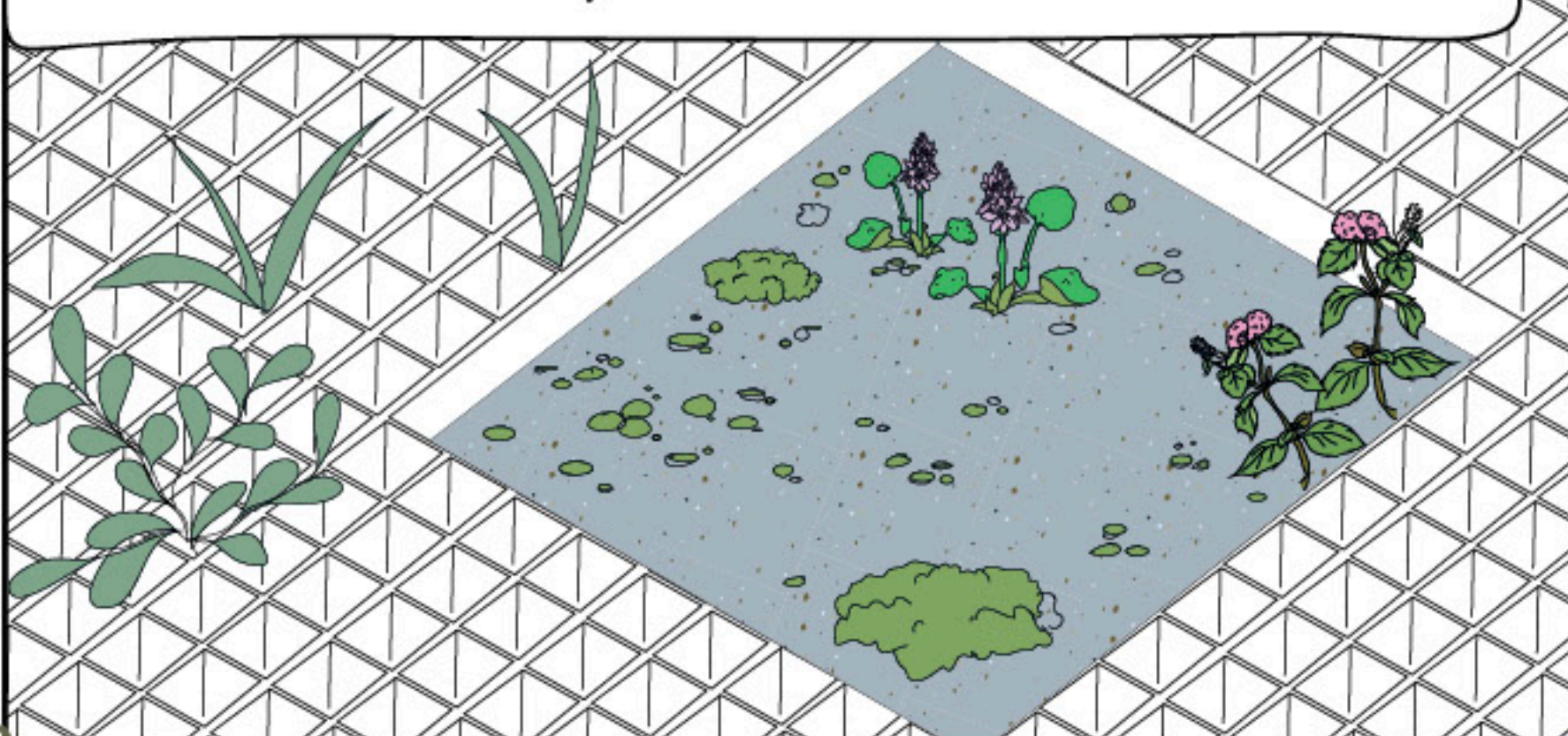
The inside water garden initiates filtration by allowing sediments to settle and reducing the load of suspended solids. Beneficial bacteria begin breaking down organic matter even when the outside temperature goes below 0°.



Bacteria and microorganisms break down organic matter into nitrates and phosphates, making them available for plant uptake.

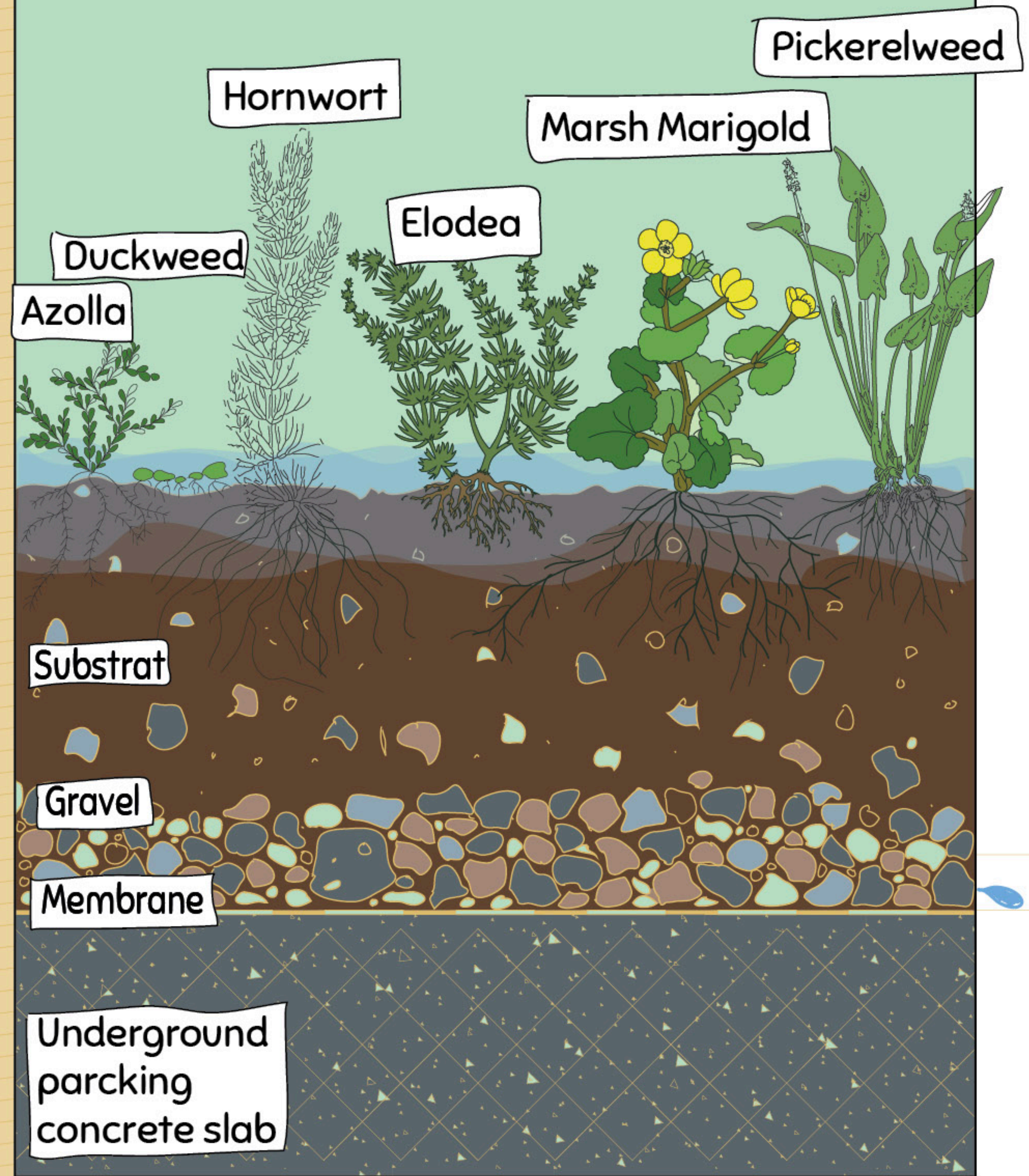


Workers, assisted by inhabitants remove excess organic matter once or twice a year. They also cut and manage overgrowing plants to ensure diversity.

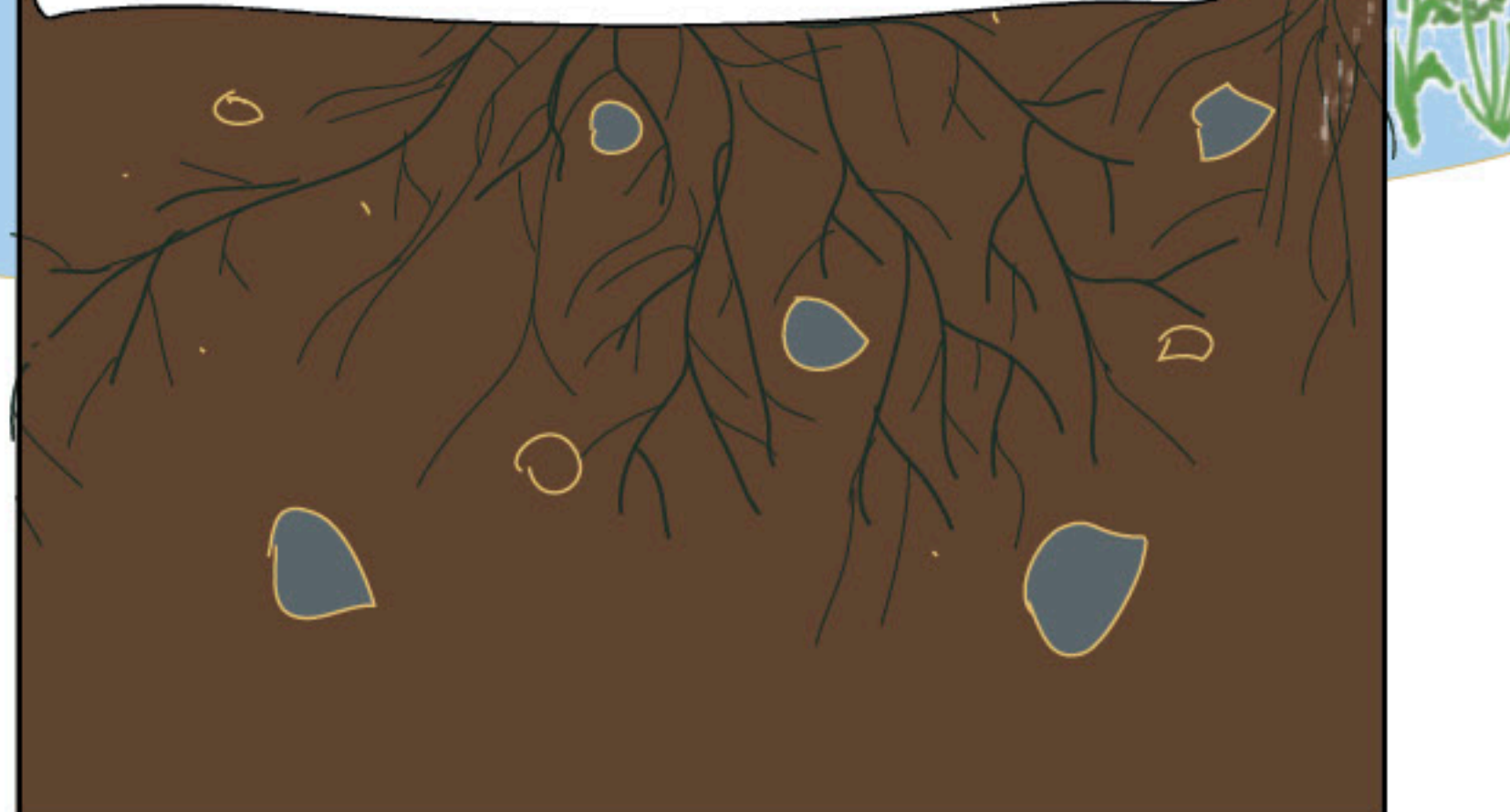


2

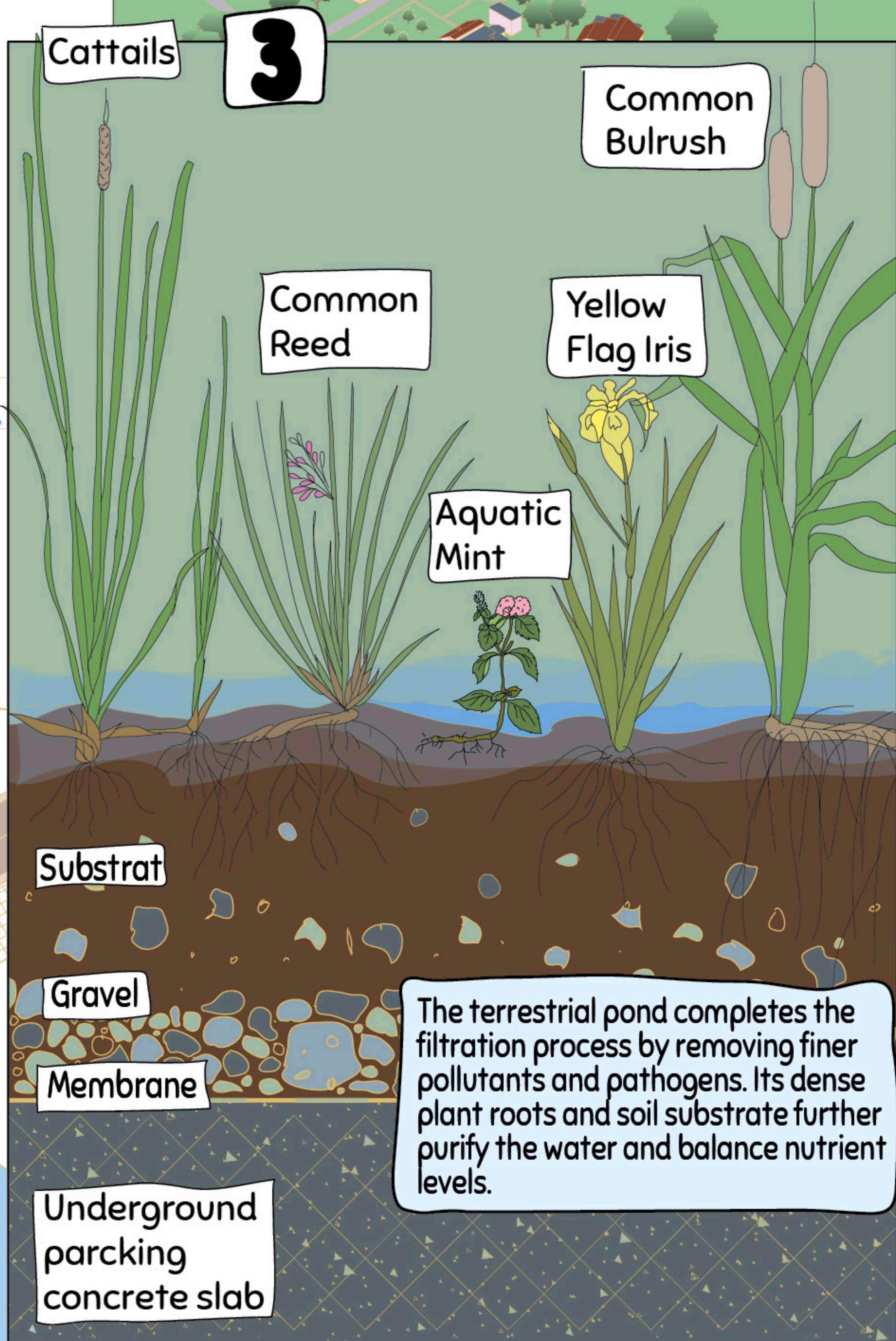
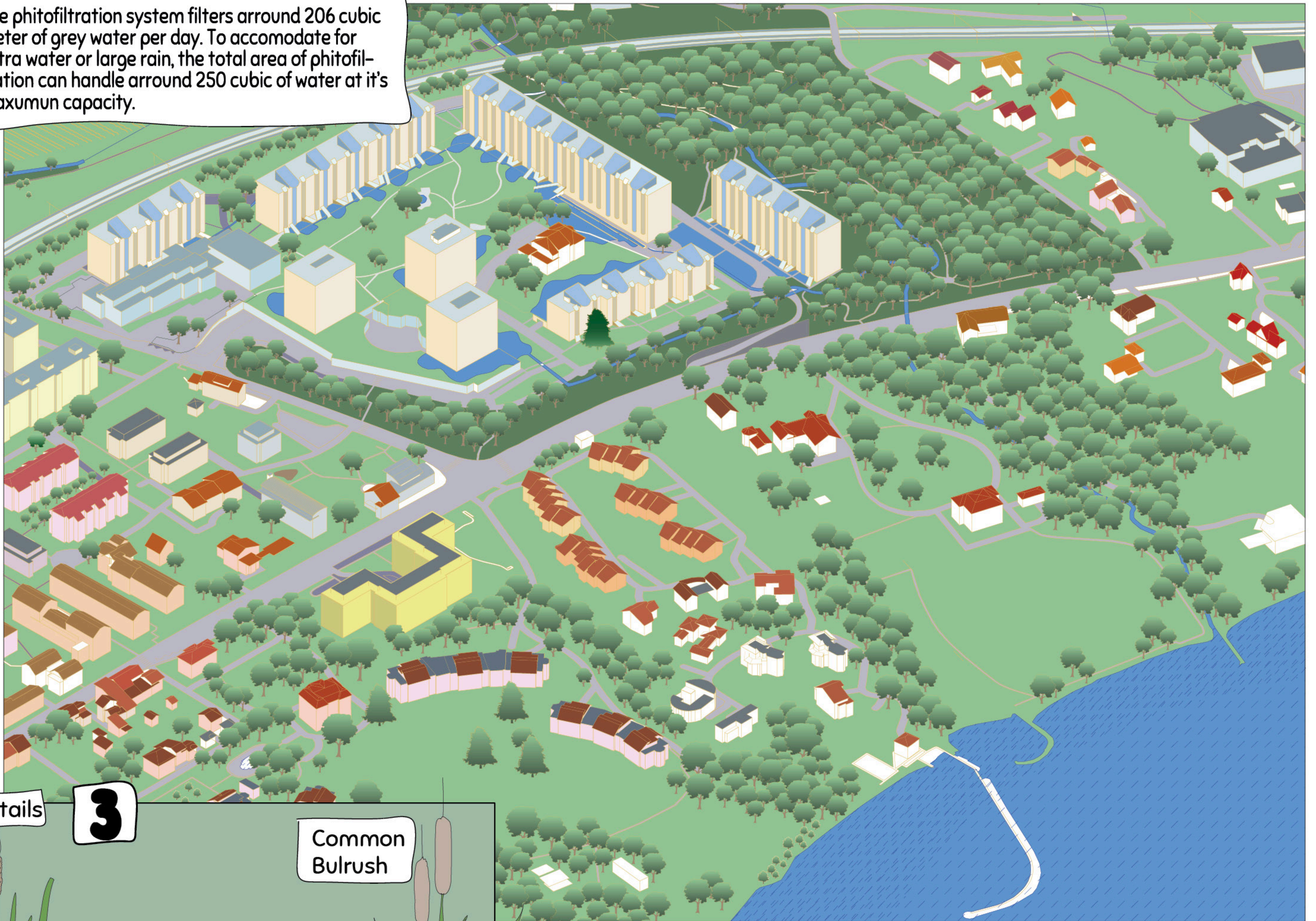
The aquatic pond removes nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus through absorption by aquatic plants. It also oxygenates the water and provides habitat for beneficial microorganisms.



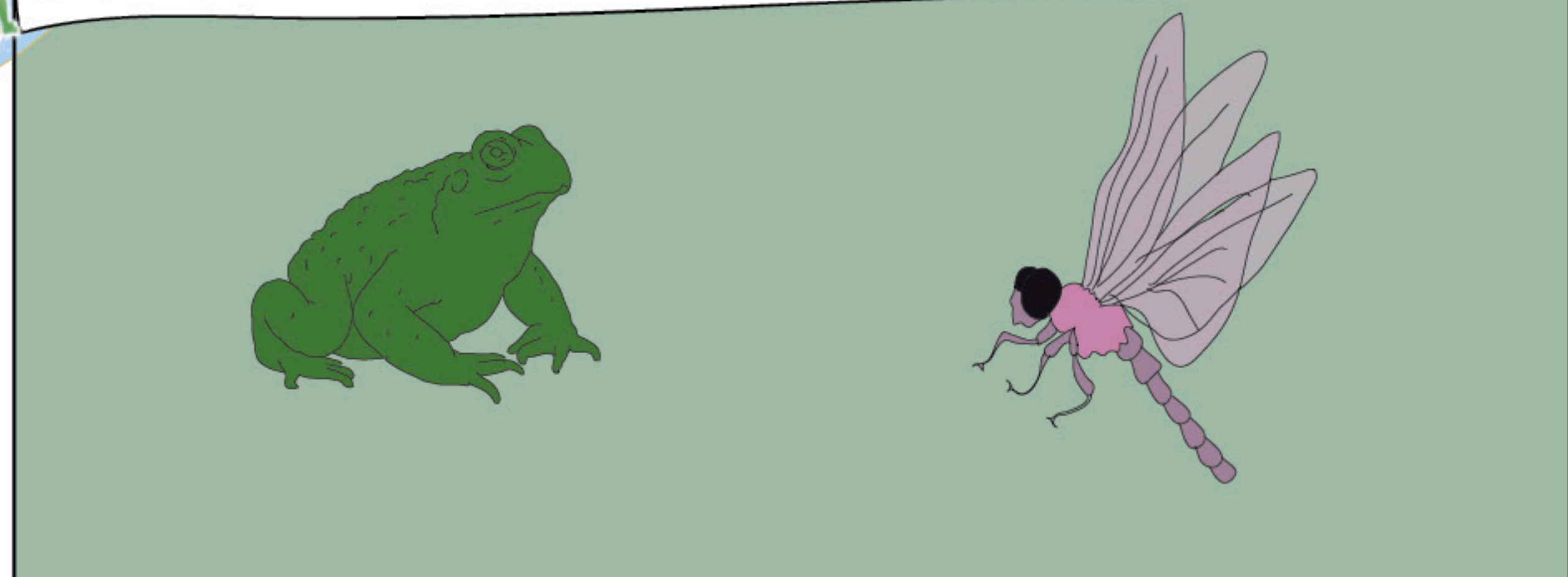
Plant roots trap suspended solids and absorb nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, and even heavy metals from the water.



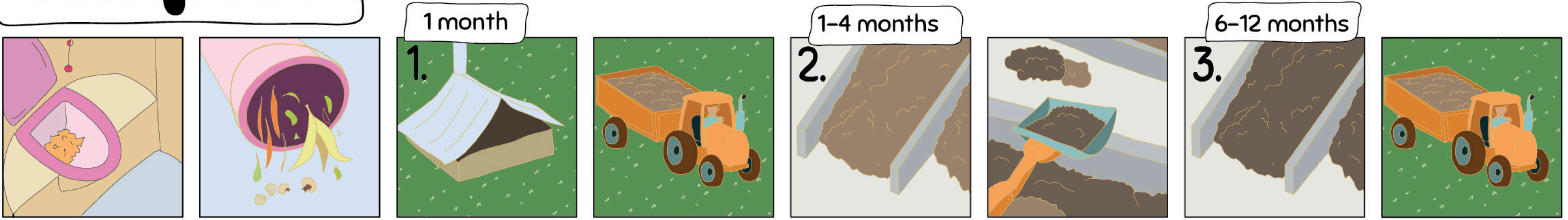
The phitofiltration system filters around 206 cubic meter of grey water per day. To accomodate for extra water or large rain, the total area of phitofiltration can handle around 250 cubic of water at it's maxumun capacity.



Frogs, dragonflies toad and other species will also inhabits the ponds, with diverse insects and larva they balance out the phytoepuration ecosystems.



Compost



A balanced composition is essential to guarantee the quality of the compost.

Material	Percentage
Cardboard and wood chips	38%
Biowaste from kitchen	29%
Human waste	38%

Every month, the compost accumulated at the foot of the buildings is moved to the second composting site.

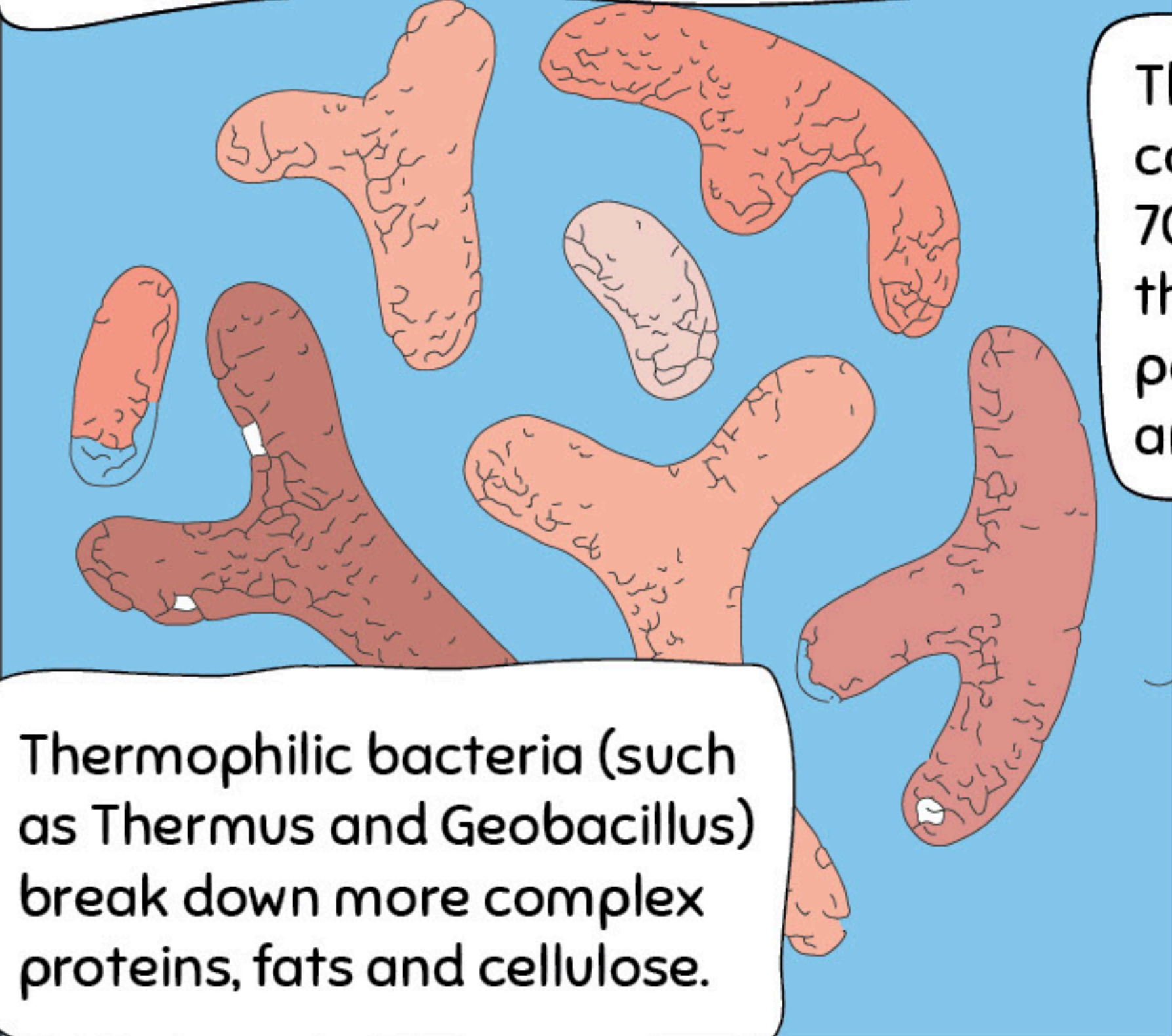
1. Mesophilic phase 40°-50°

Mesophilic bacteria initiate the decomposition of organic matter.

Filamentous fungi begin to break down the cellulose and lignin in wood chips and cardboard.

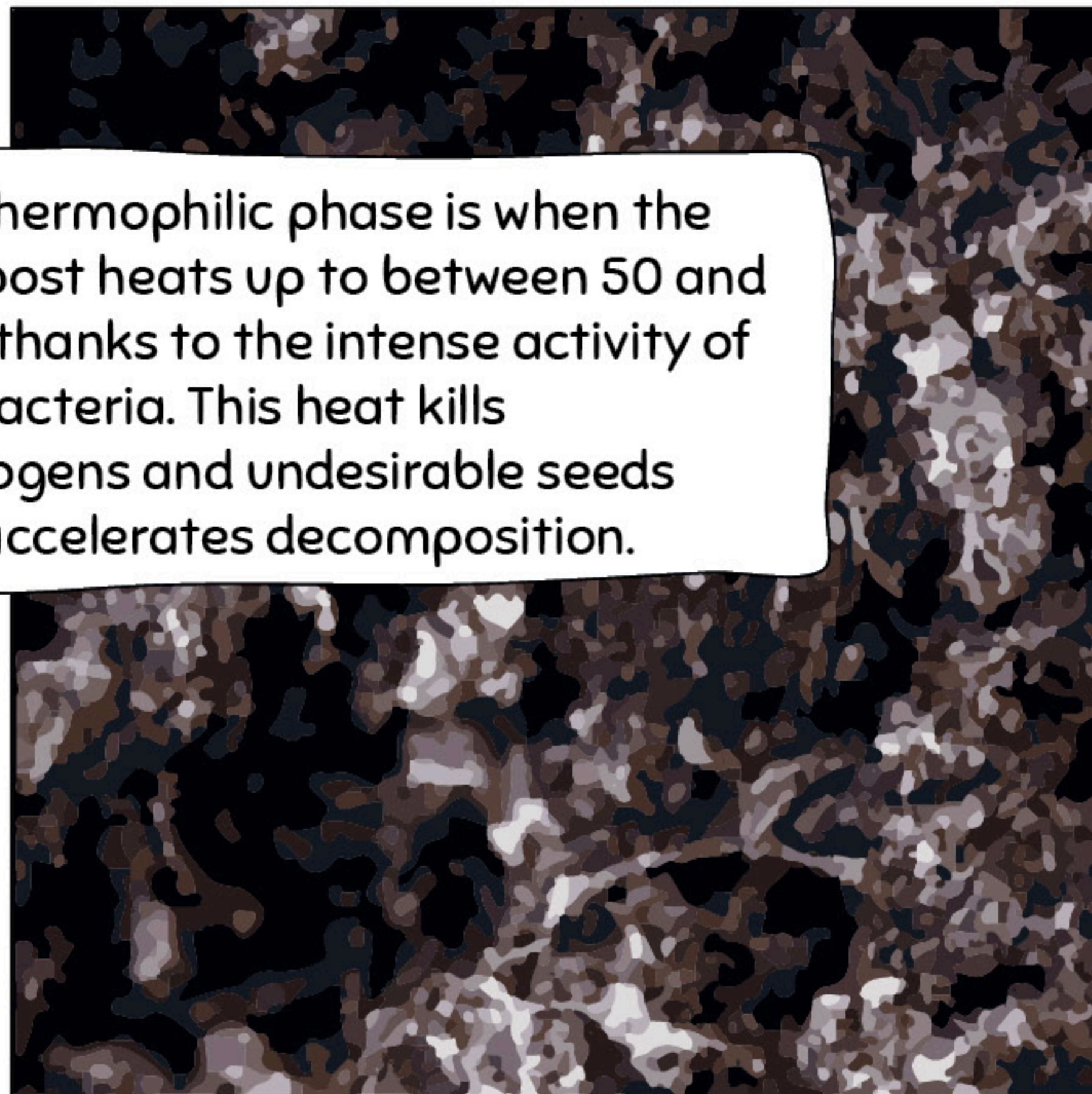
Protozoa and rotifers ingest bacteria to balance the compost microbiome.

2. Thermofilic phase 50°-70°

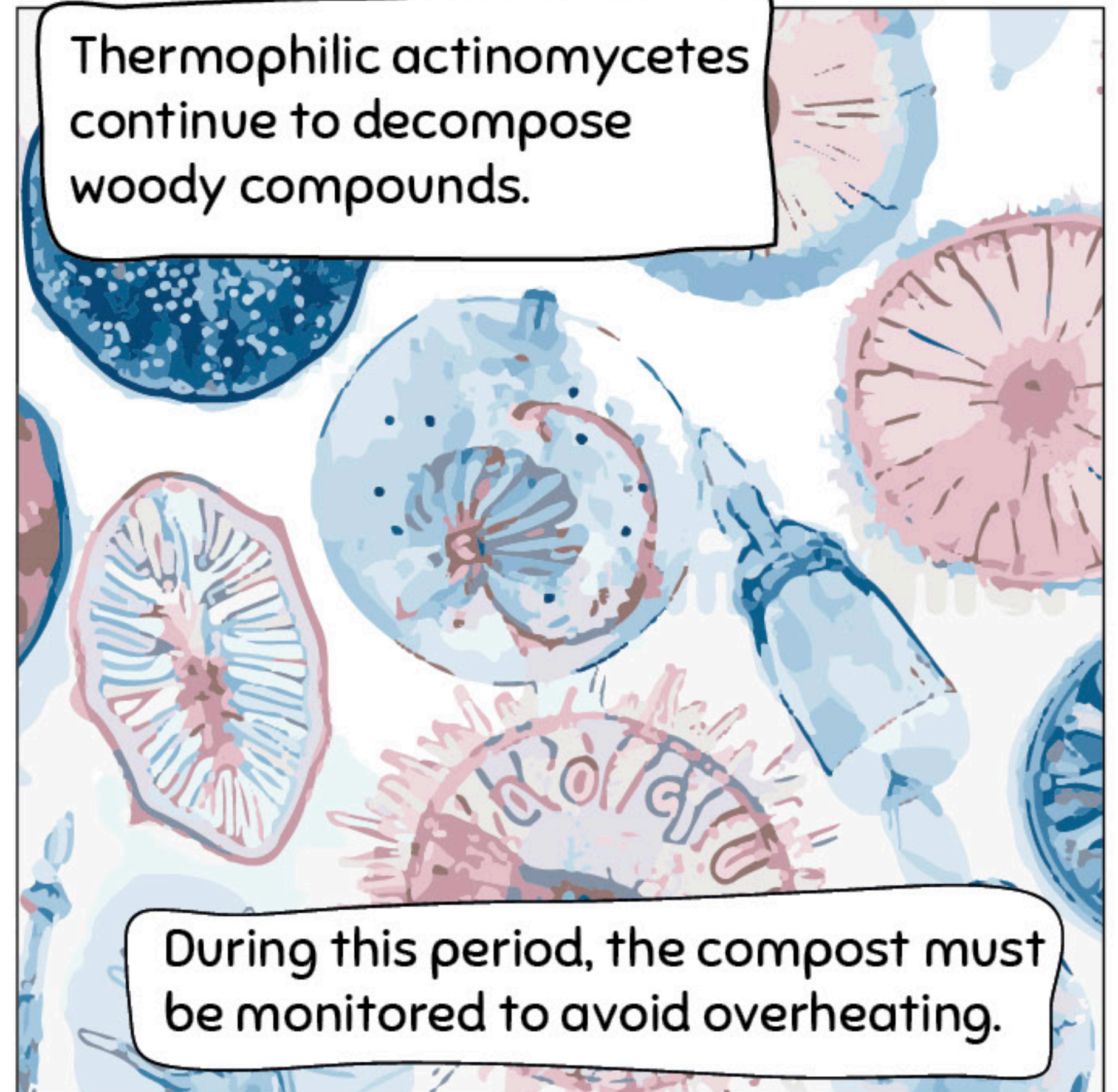


Thermophilic bacteria (such as *Thermus* and *Geobacillus*) break down more complex proteins, fats and cellulose.

The thermophilic phase is when the compost heats up to between 50 and 70°C thanks to the intense activity of the bacteria. This heat kills pathogens and undesirable seeds and accelerates decomposition.

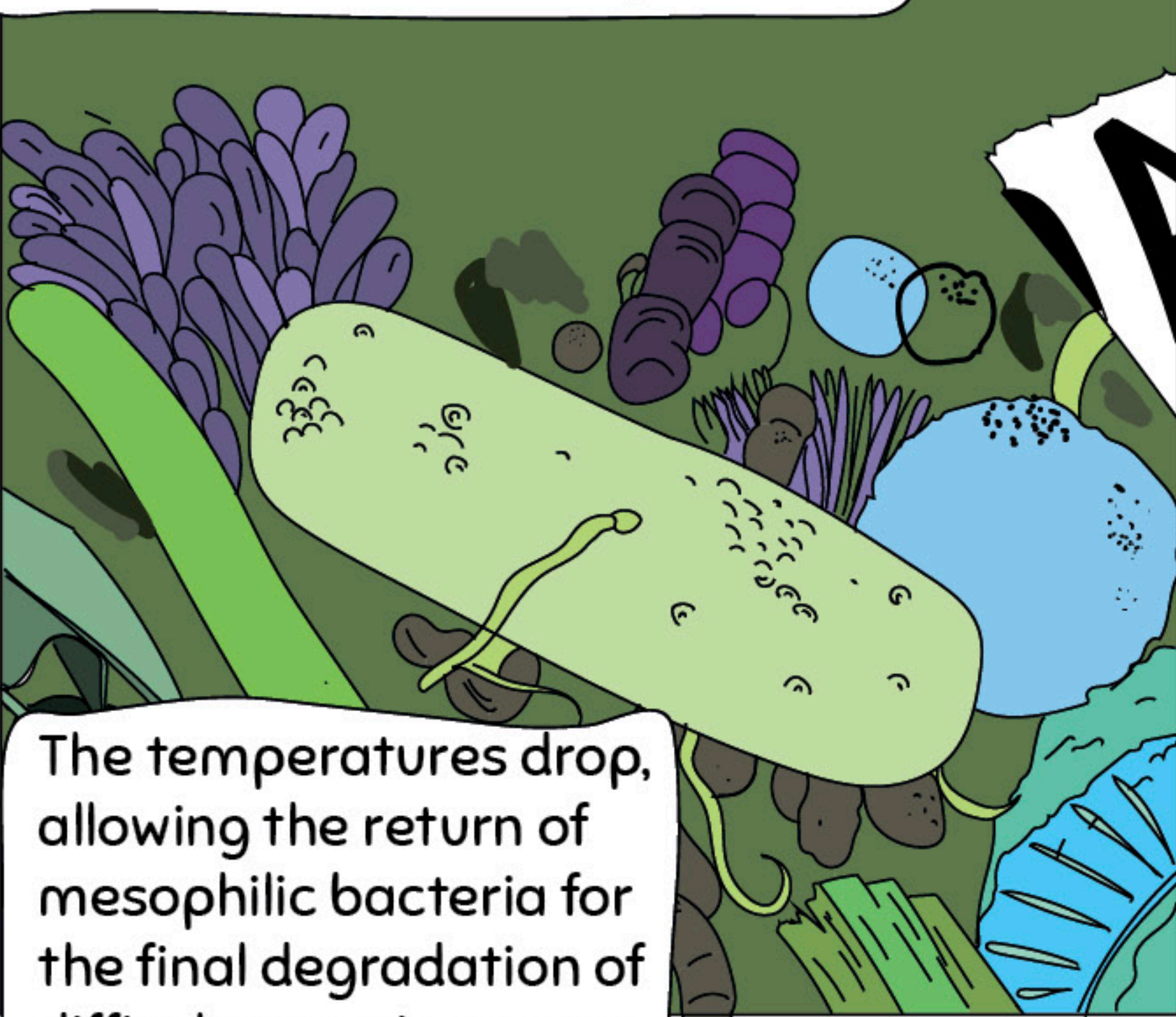


Thermophilic actinomycetes continue to decompose woody compounds.



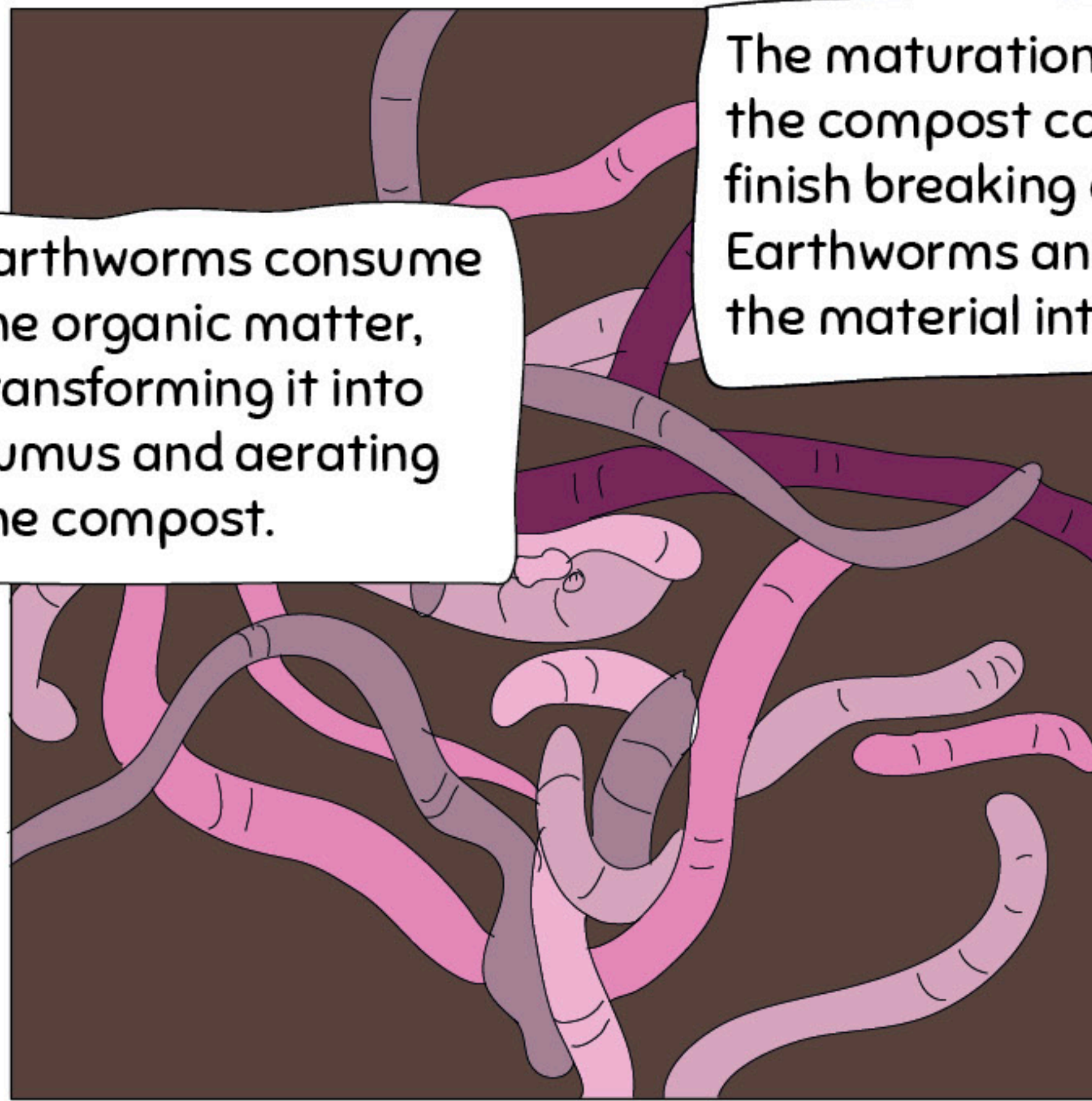
During this period, the compost must be monitored to avoid overheating.

3. Maturation phase

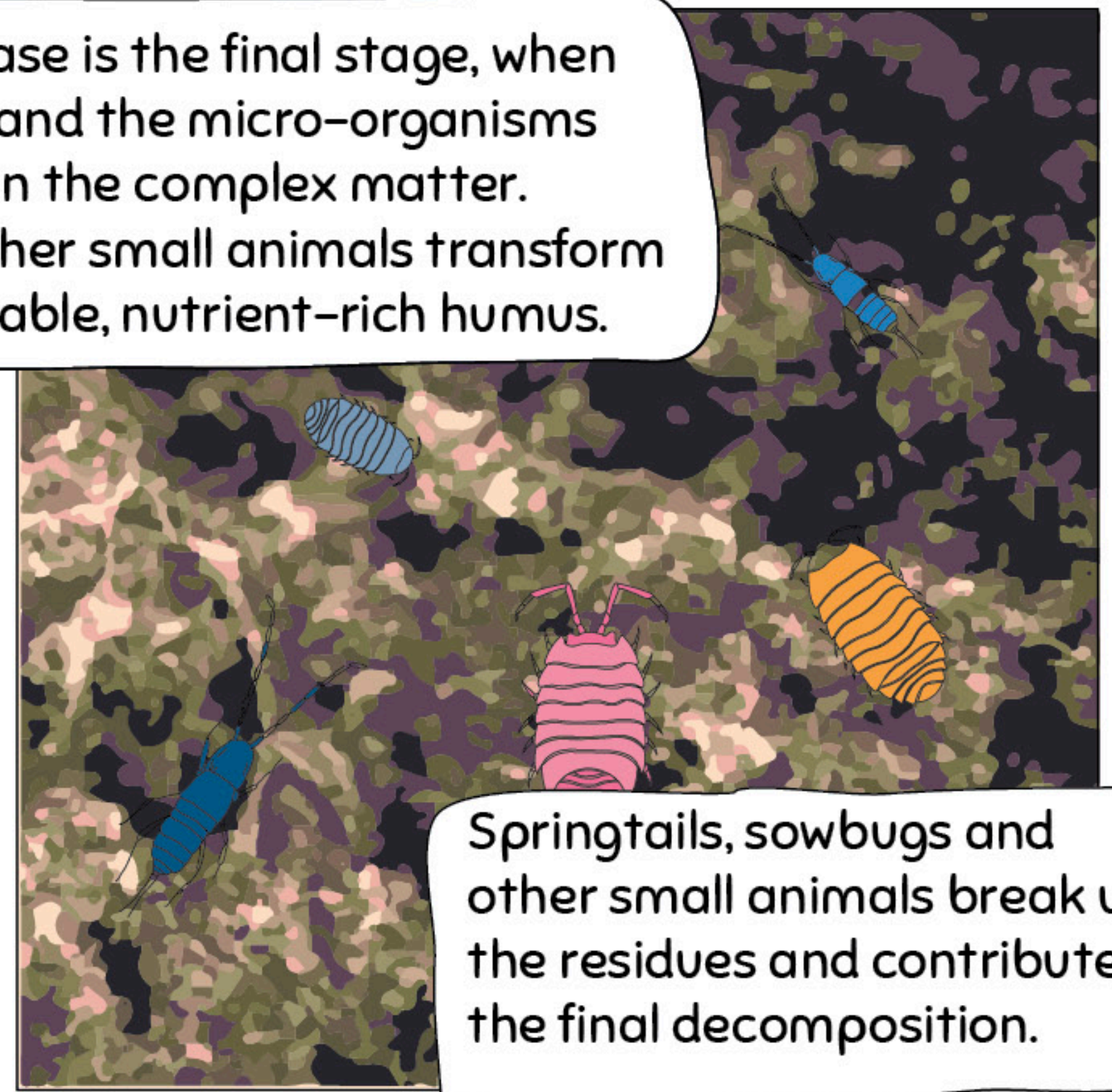


The temperatures drop, allowing the return of mesophilic bacteria for the final degradation of difficult organic matter.

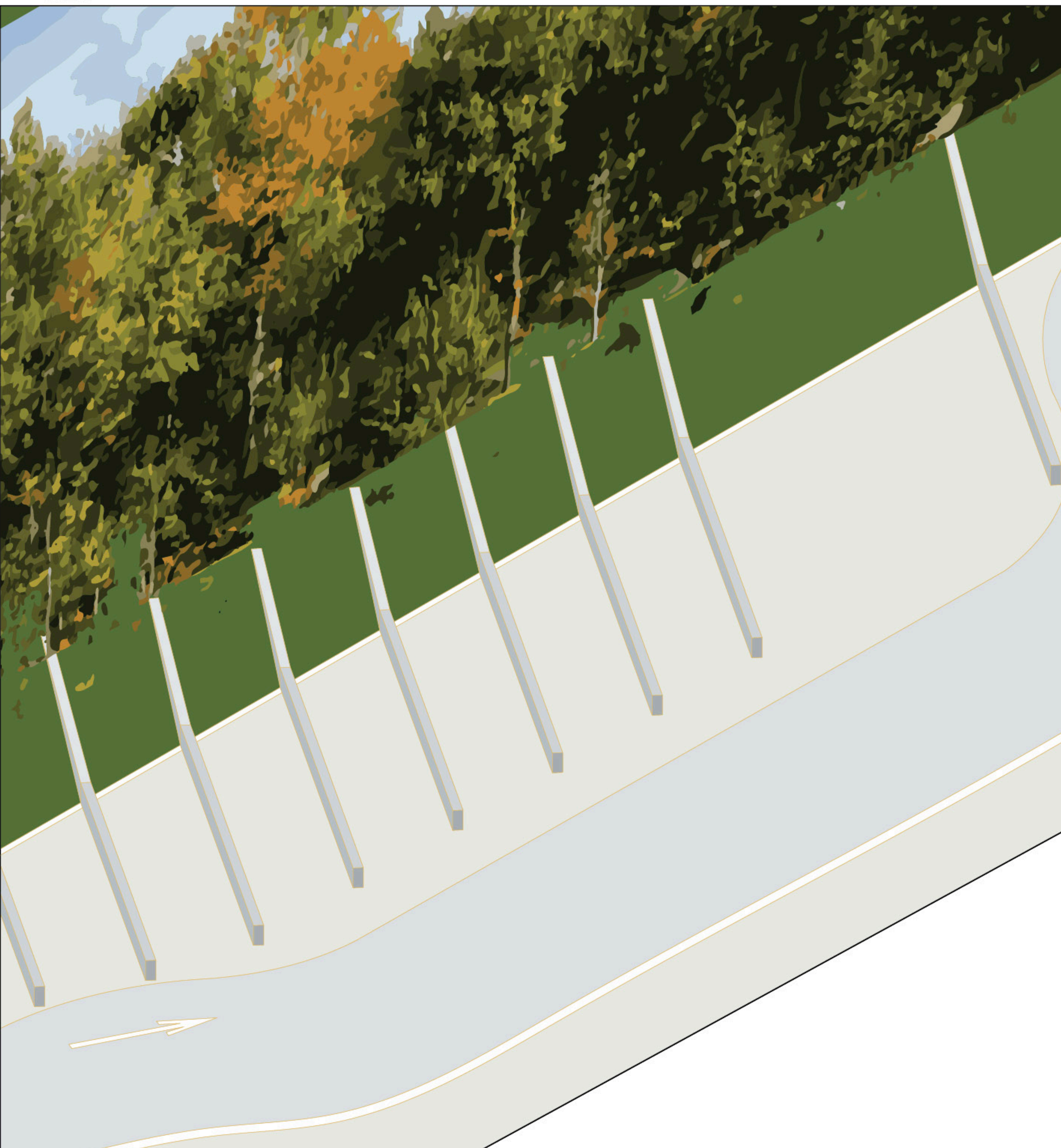
Earthworms consume the organic matter, transforming it into humus and aerating the compost.



The maturation phase is the final stage, when the compost cools and the micro-organisms finish breaking down the complex matter. Earthworms and other small animals transform the material into stable, nutrient-rich humus.



Springtails, sowbugs and other small animals break up the residues and contribute to the final decomposition.



On this second composting zone, the compost is to be turned every three months.

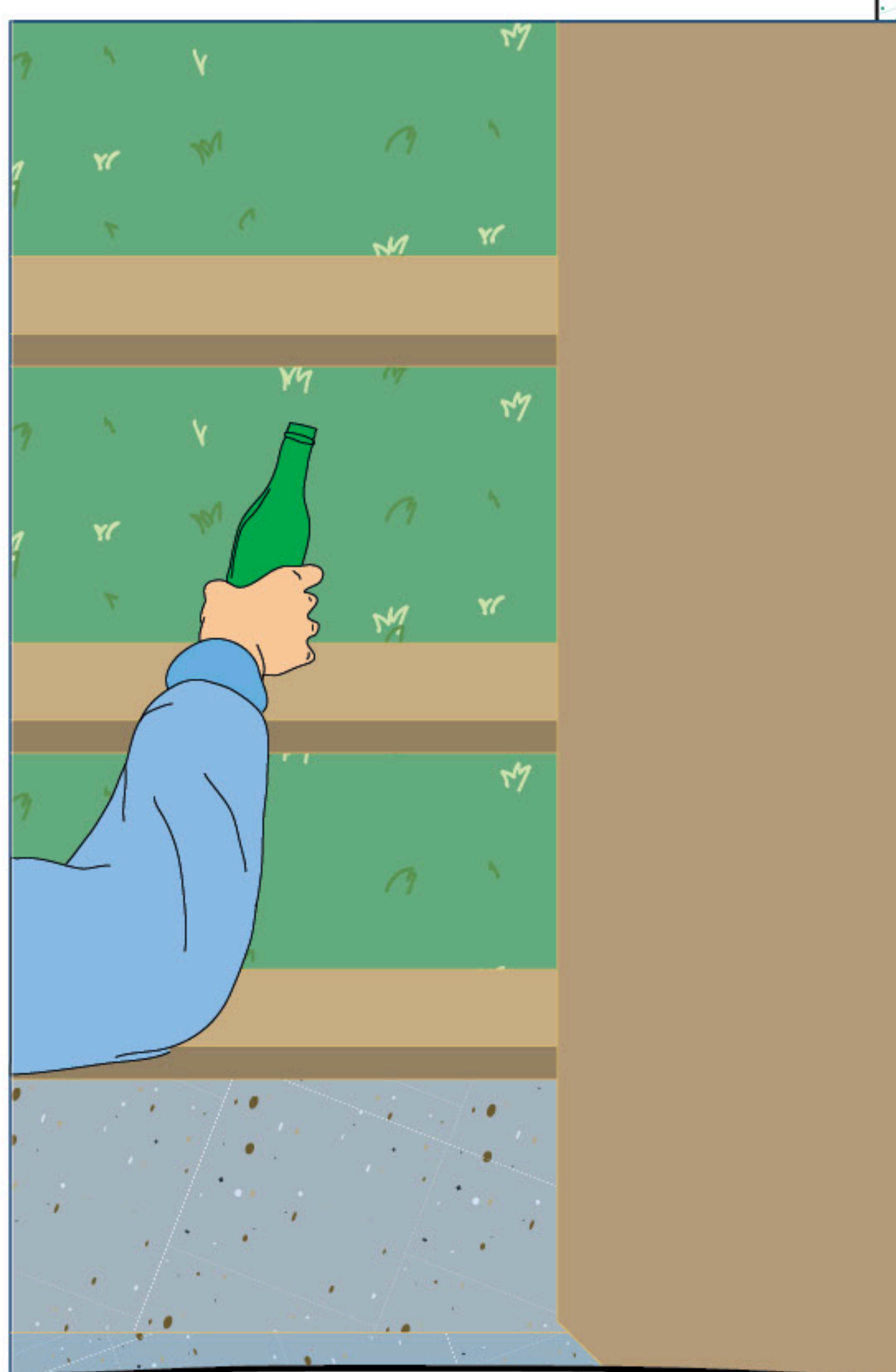
After a year of maturation, the compost is exchanged with the nearby farmer, to fertilise their fields.



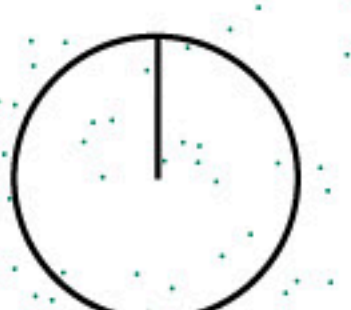
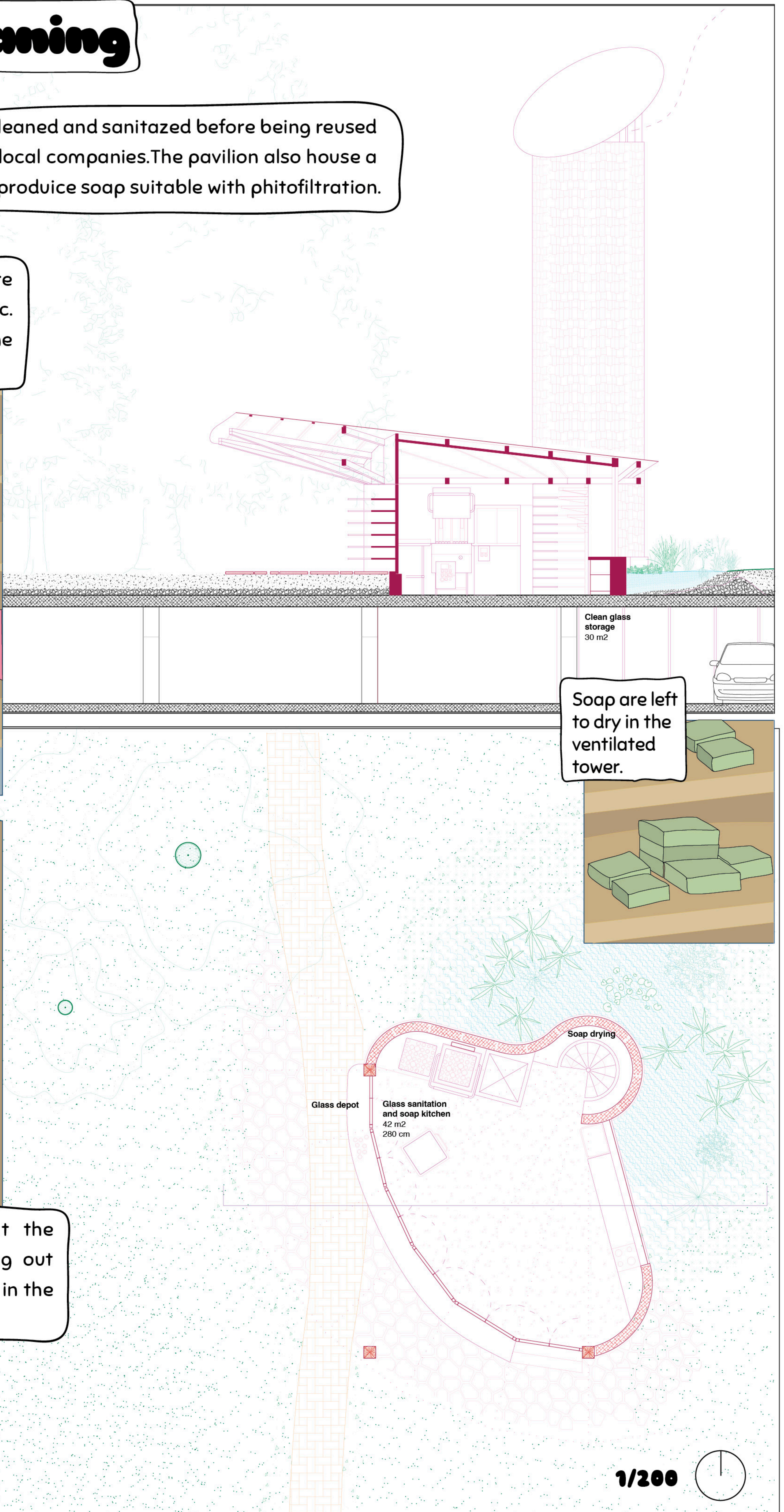
Glass cleaning

Glass bottle and Jars are cleaned and sanitized before being reused in the bulk shop or sold to local companies. The pavilion also house a soap making workshop to produce soap suitable with phitofiltration.

The inhabitants bring there used glass down to the parc. A large shelves makes one wall of the pavilion.



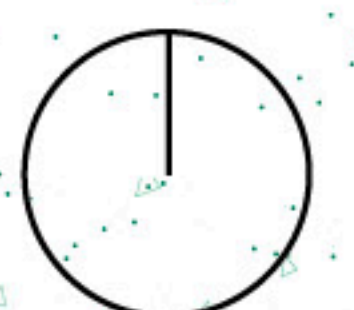
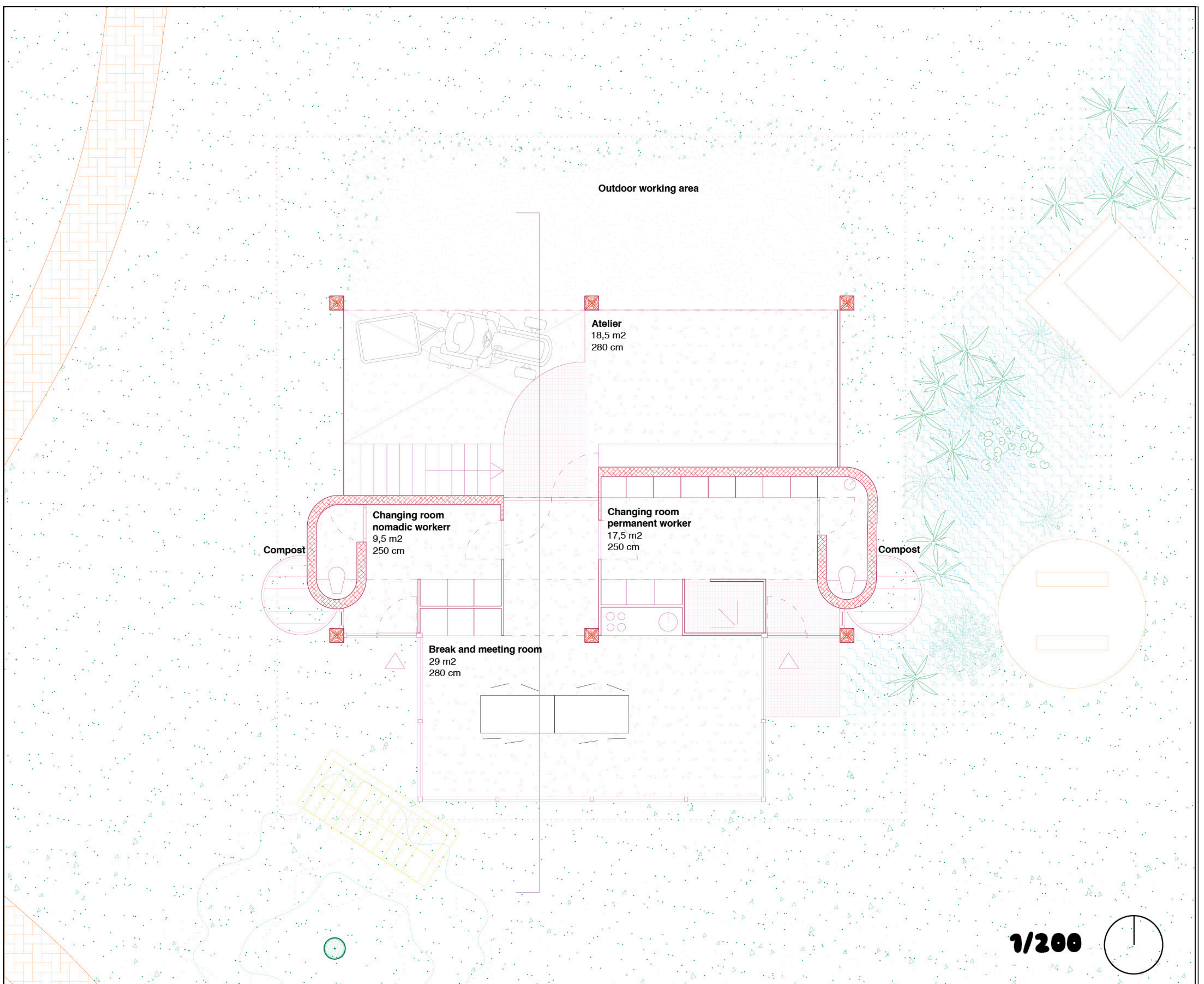
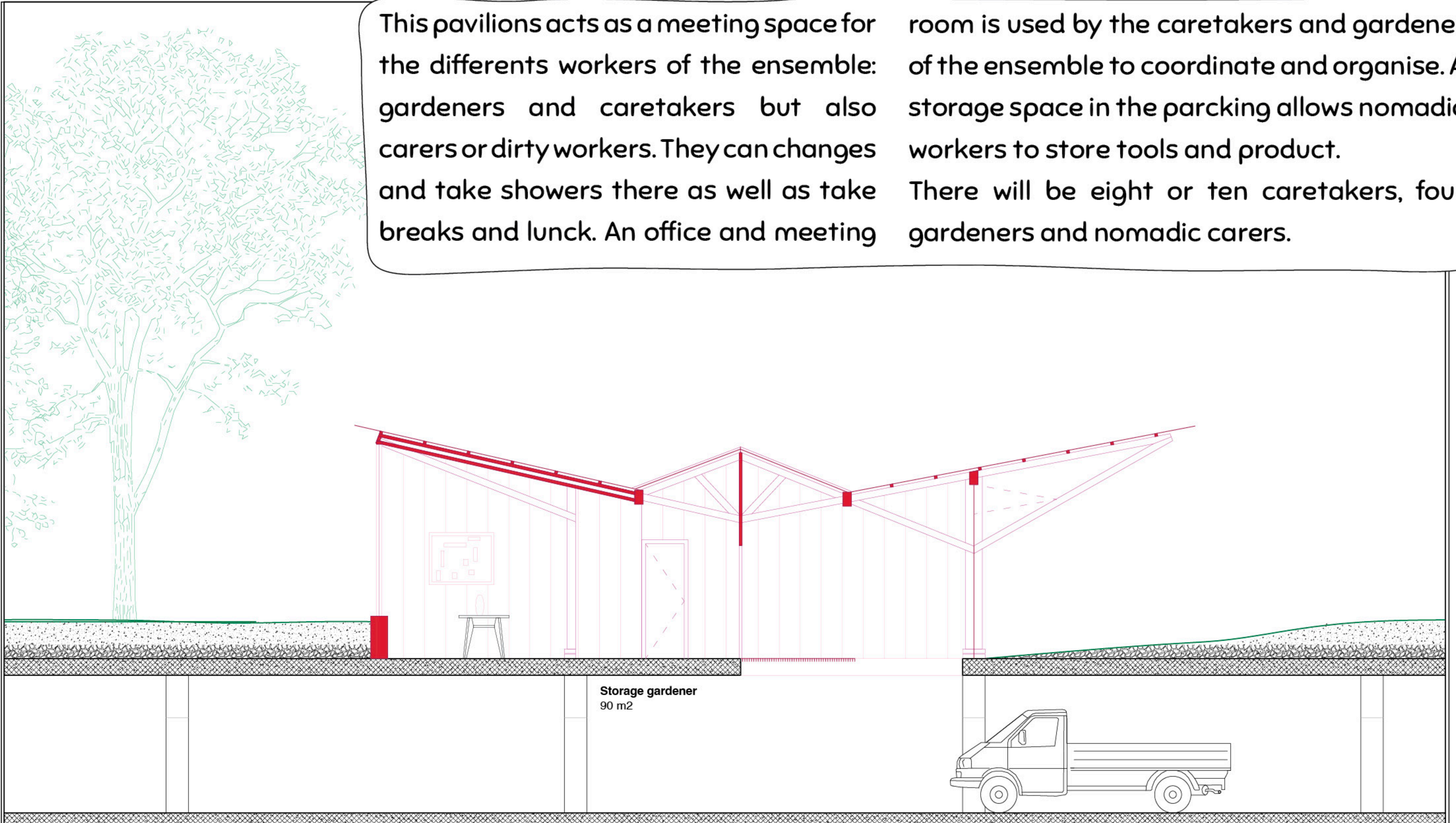
The cleaning happend at the parc level and the sorting out and storage is underneath in the parcking.



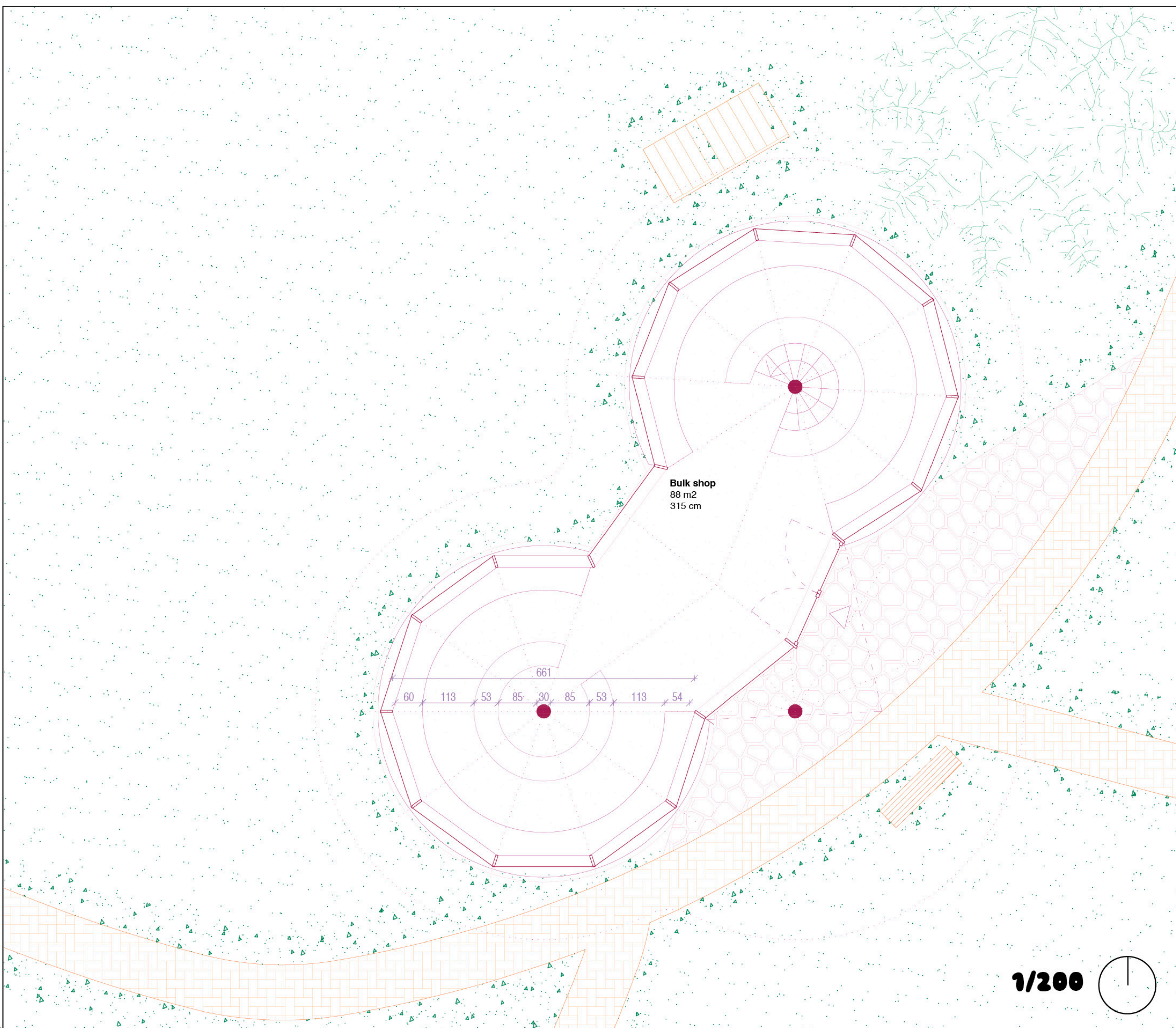
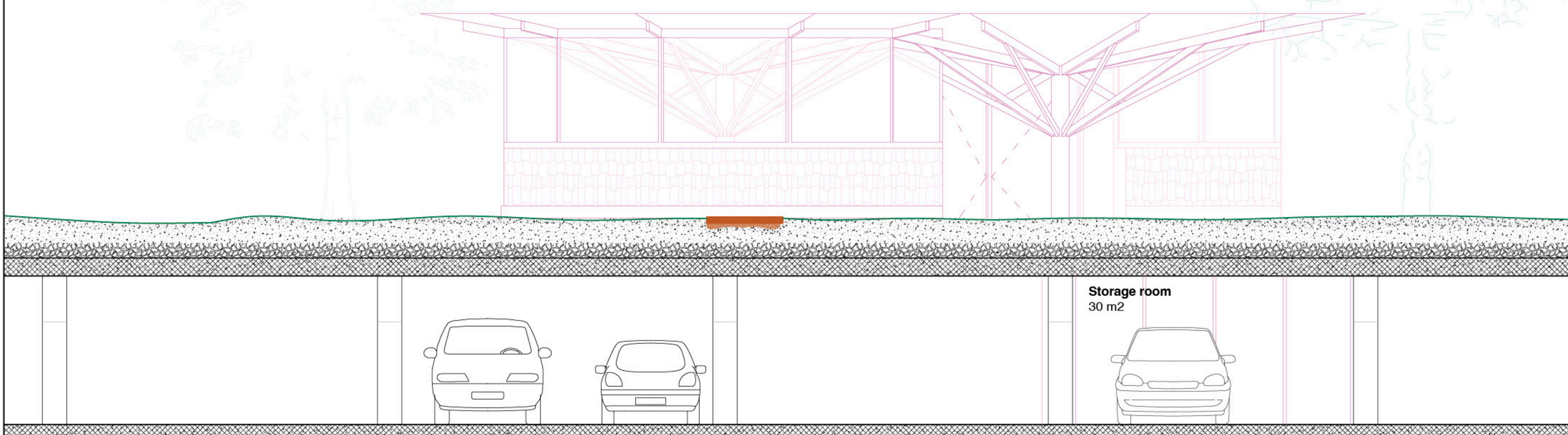
Workers pavilion

This pavilion acts as a meeting space for the different workers of the ensemble: gardeners and caretakers but also carers or dirty workers. They can change and take showers there as well as take breaks and lunch. An office and meeting

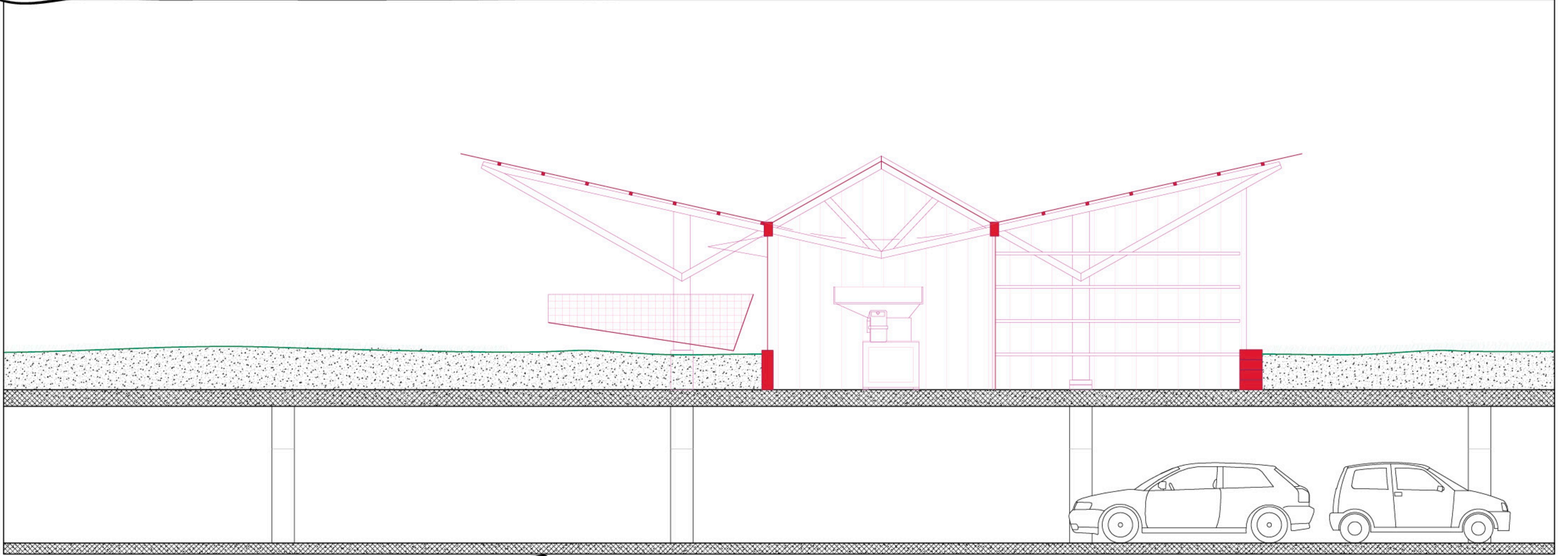
room is used by the caretakers and gardener of the ensemble to coordinate and organise. A storage space in the parking allows nomadic workers to store tools and product. There will be eight or ten caretakers, four gardeners and nomadic carers.



Bulk and second hand shop



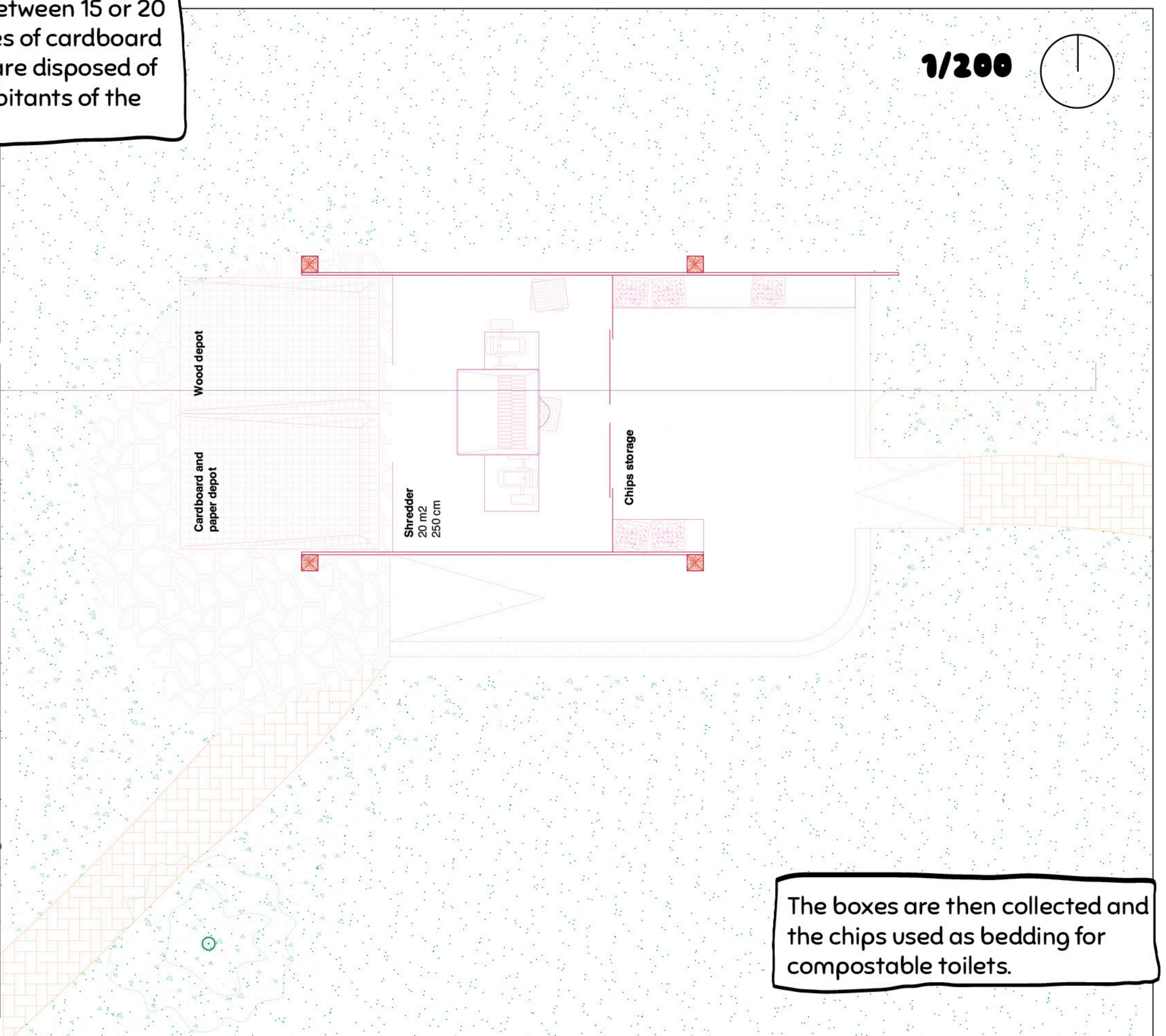
Cardboard and wood shred



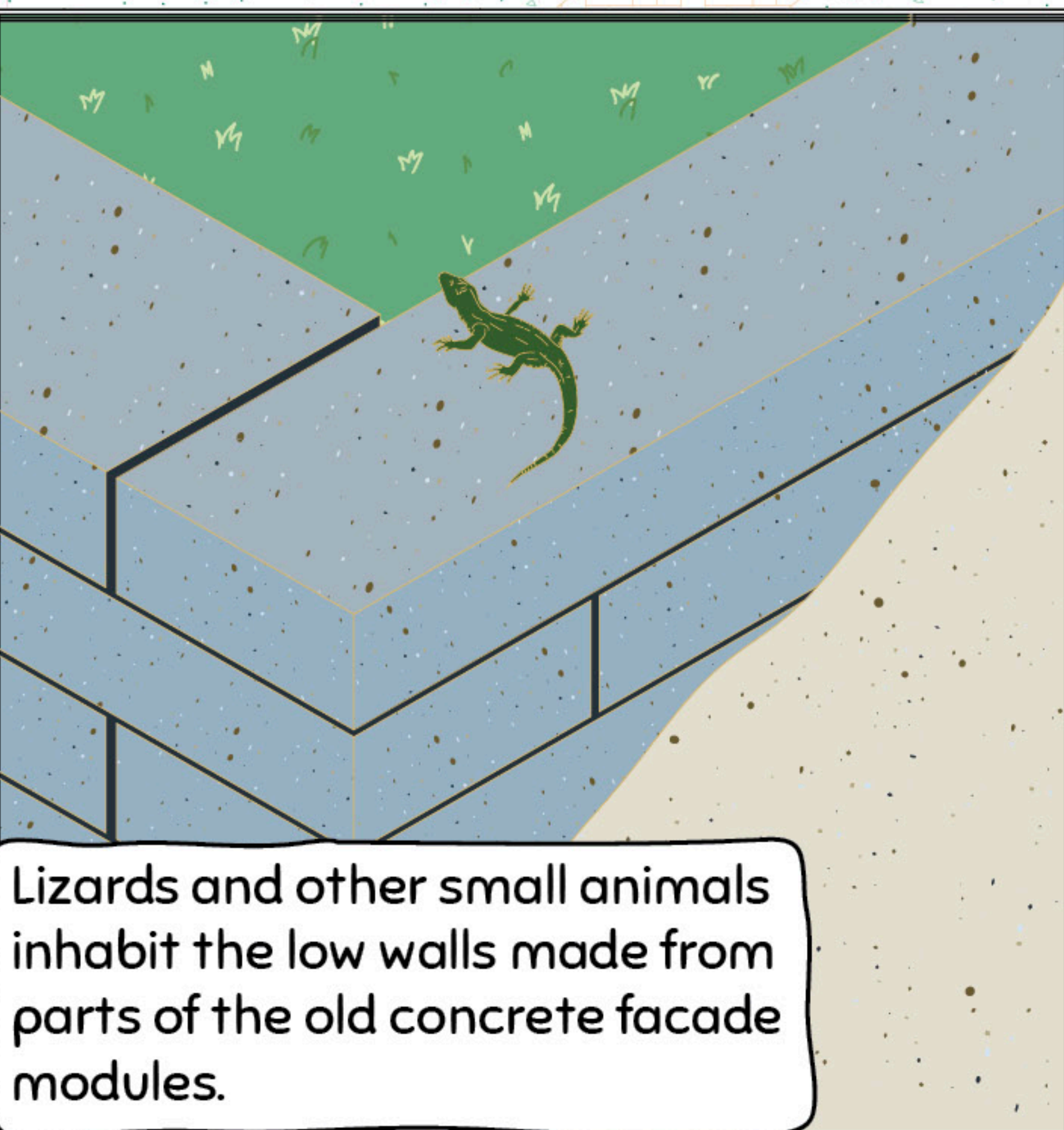
Per week, between 15 or 20 cubic metres of cardboard and paper are disposed of by the inhabitants of the ensemble.



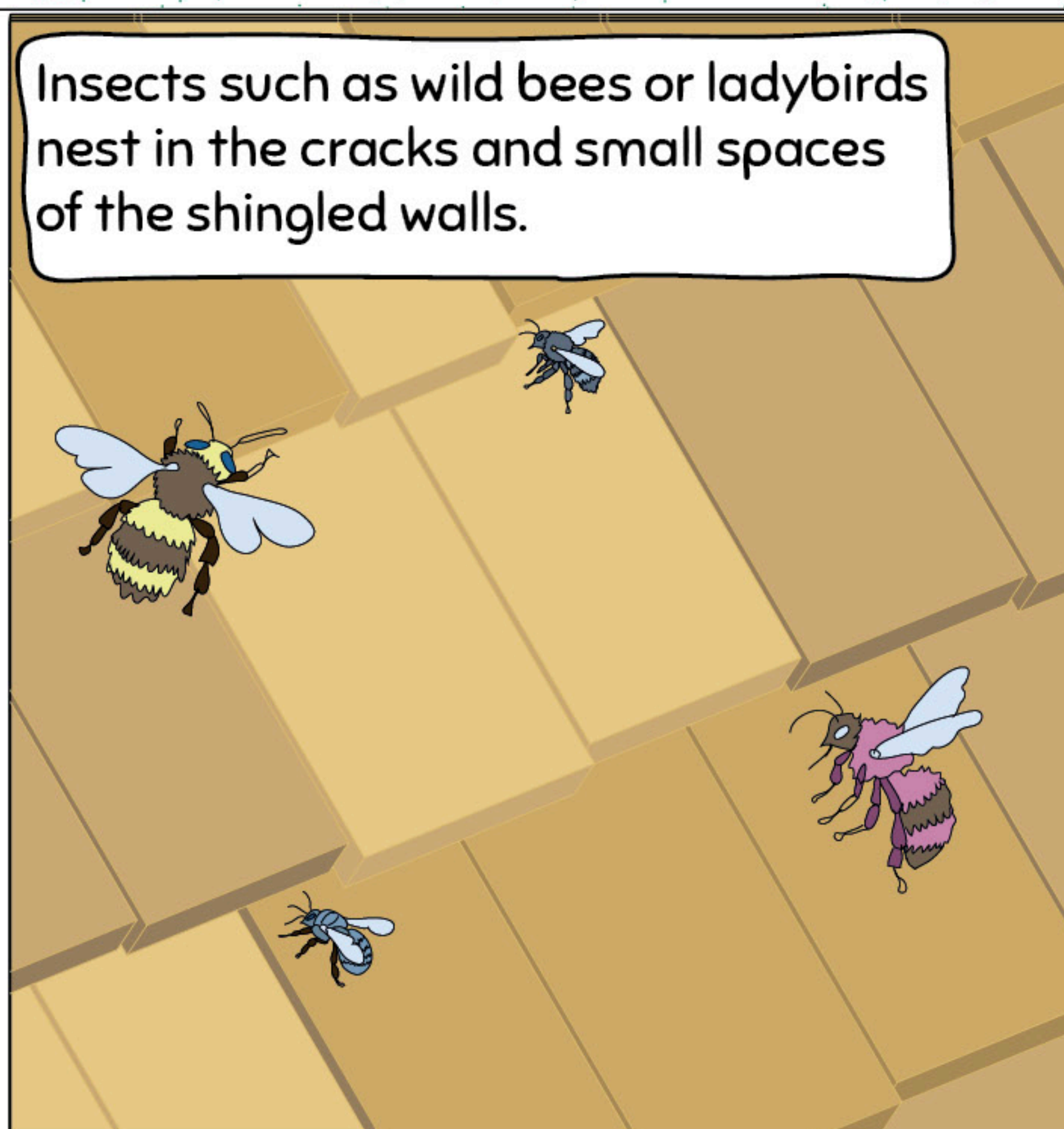
Mixed with wood scrap from the parc and the forest, they are shredded and put into boxes.



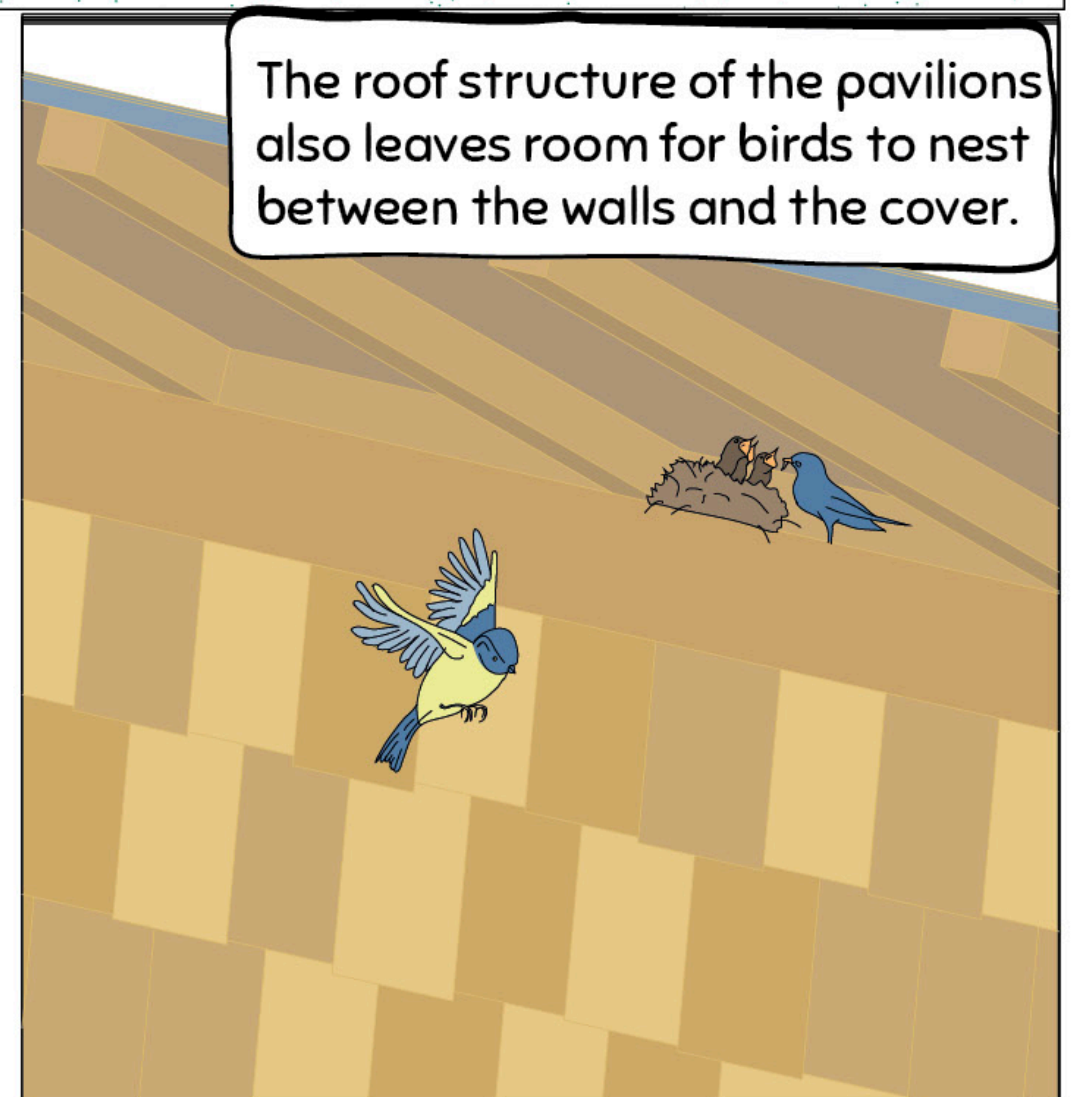
The boxes are then collected and the chips used as bedding for compostable toilets.



Lizards and other small animals inhabit the low walls made from parts of the old concrete facade modules.

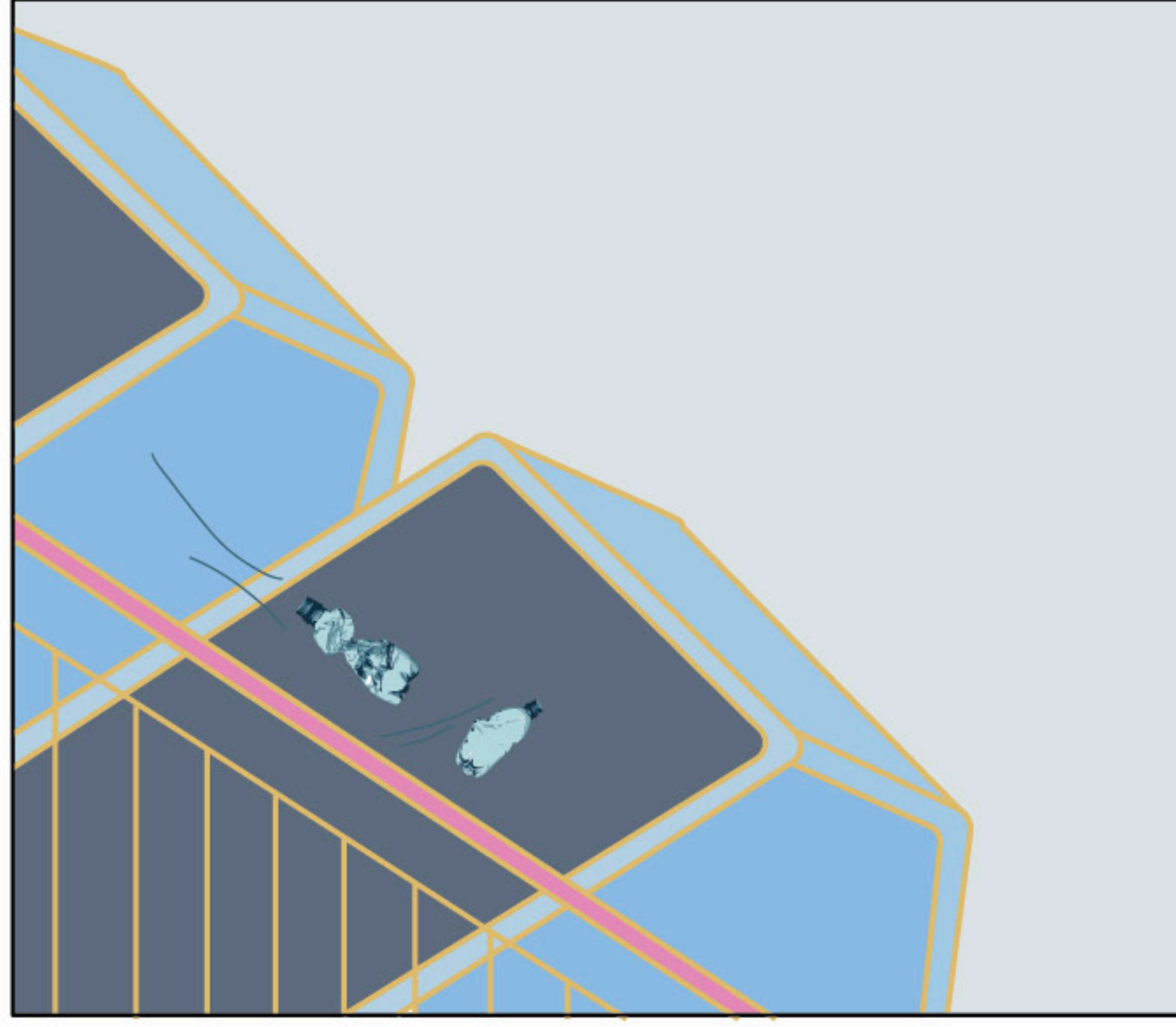


Insects such as wild bees or ladybirds nest in the cracks and small spaces of the shingled walls.



The roof structure of the pavilions also leaves room for birds to nest between the walls and the cover.

Recycling



For some waste it make more sens to include them in the usual waste system. Due to the lack of use for the ensemble, the infrastructure needed or the ammount produced. For exemple, broken glass, Pet bottle, Aluminium and other metals

PET
~ 8 m³ per months



Aluminium
~ 9 m³ per months



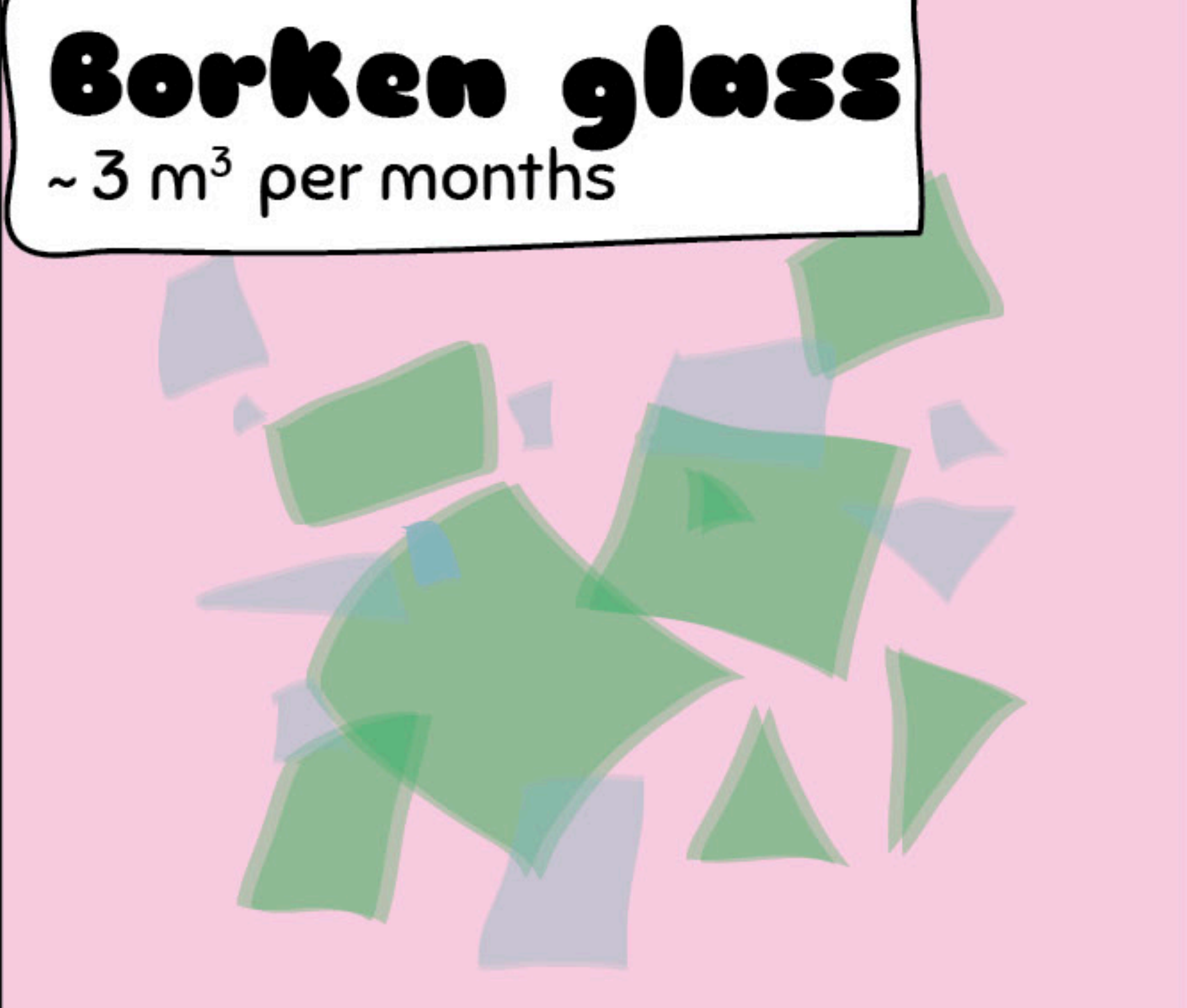
Metal scraps
~ 5 m³ per months



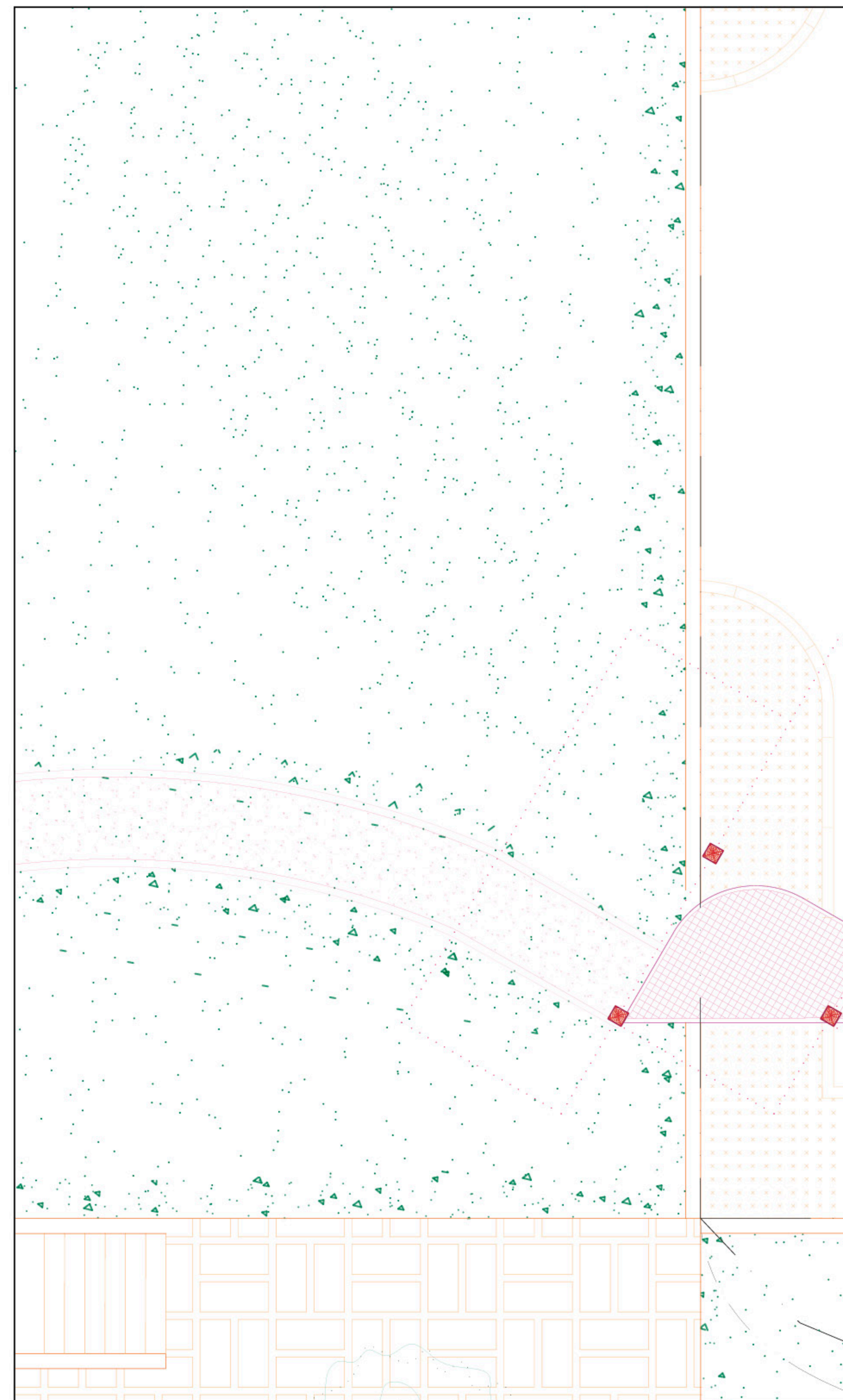
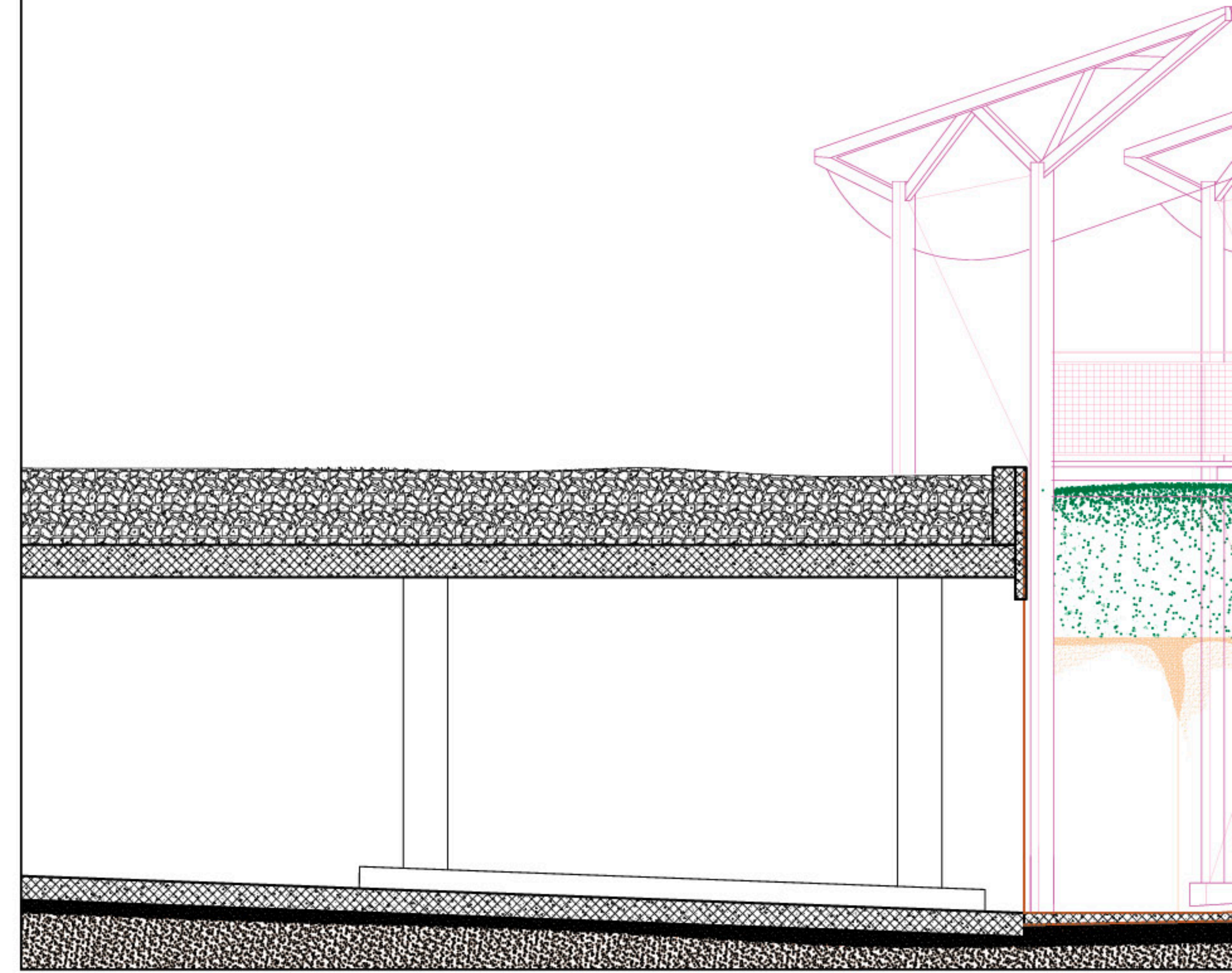
Garbage
~ 10 m³ per weeks

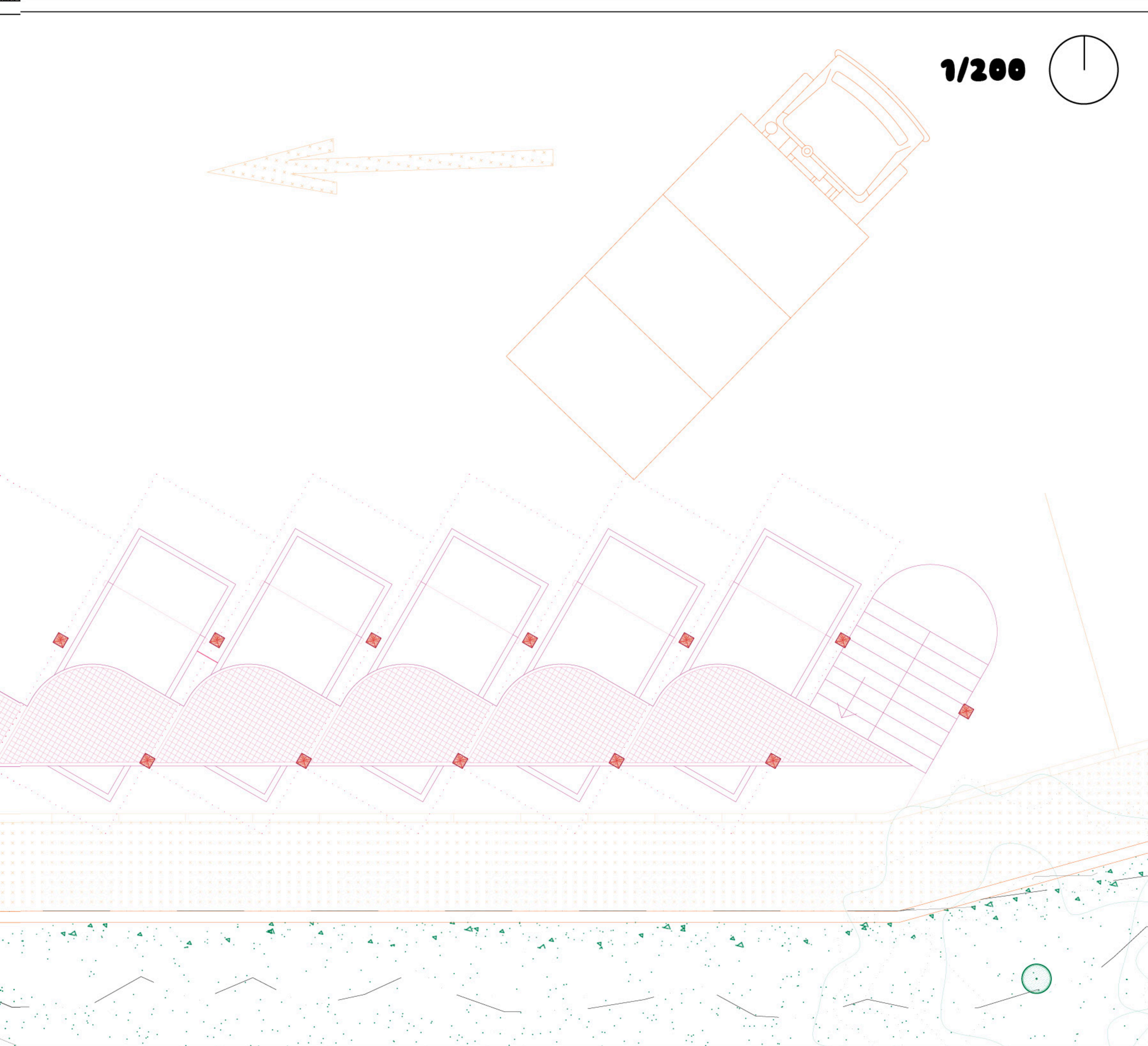
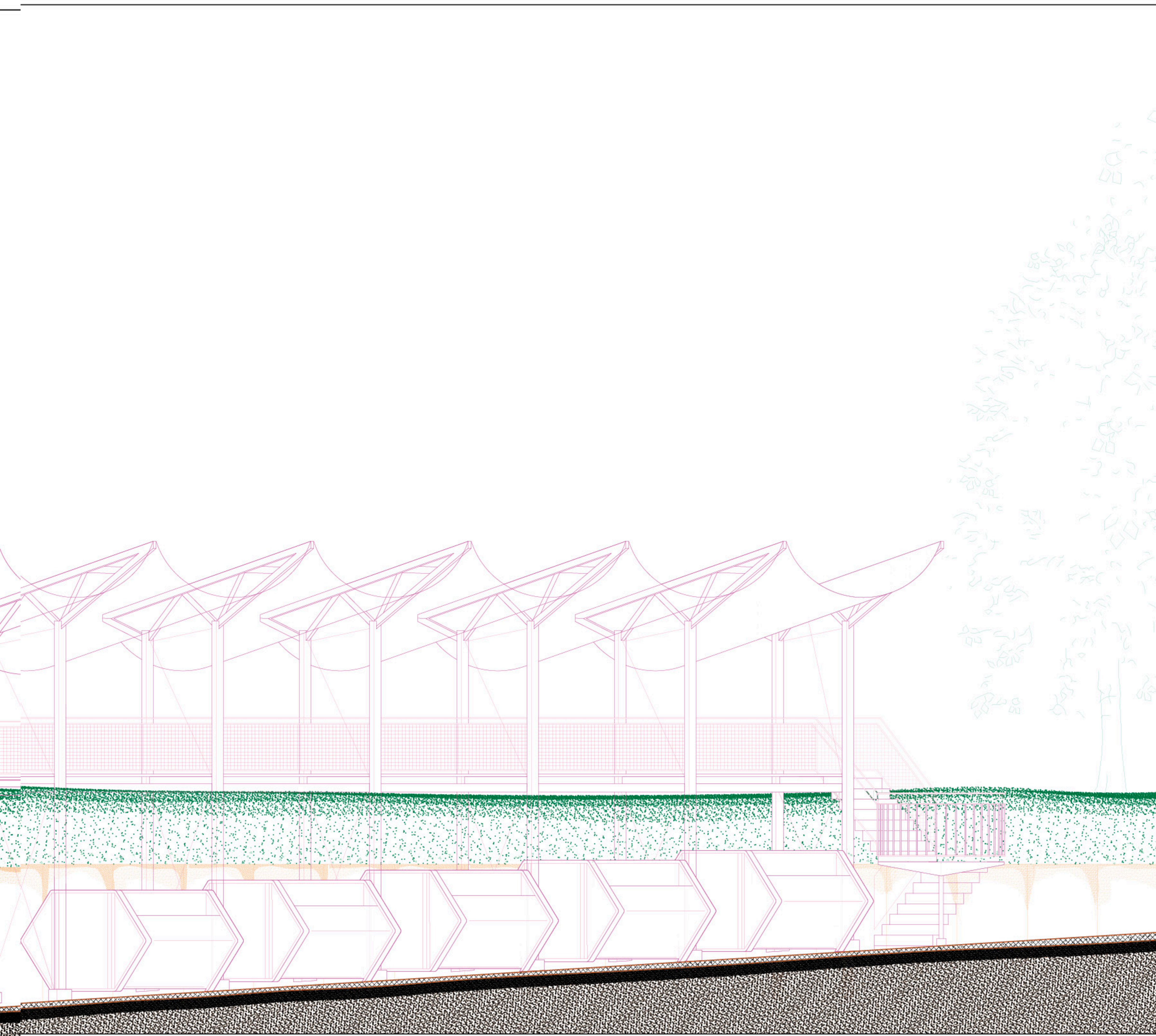


Borken glass
~ 3 m³ per months



Damaged electrnic
~ 2 m³ per months





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