



4-2009

Dream of a City

Emma Saunders
University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.upenn.edu/showcase_comics

Recommended Citation

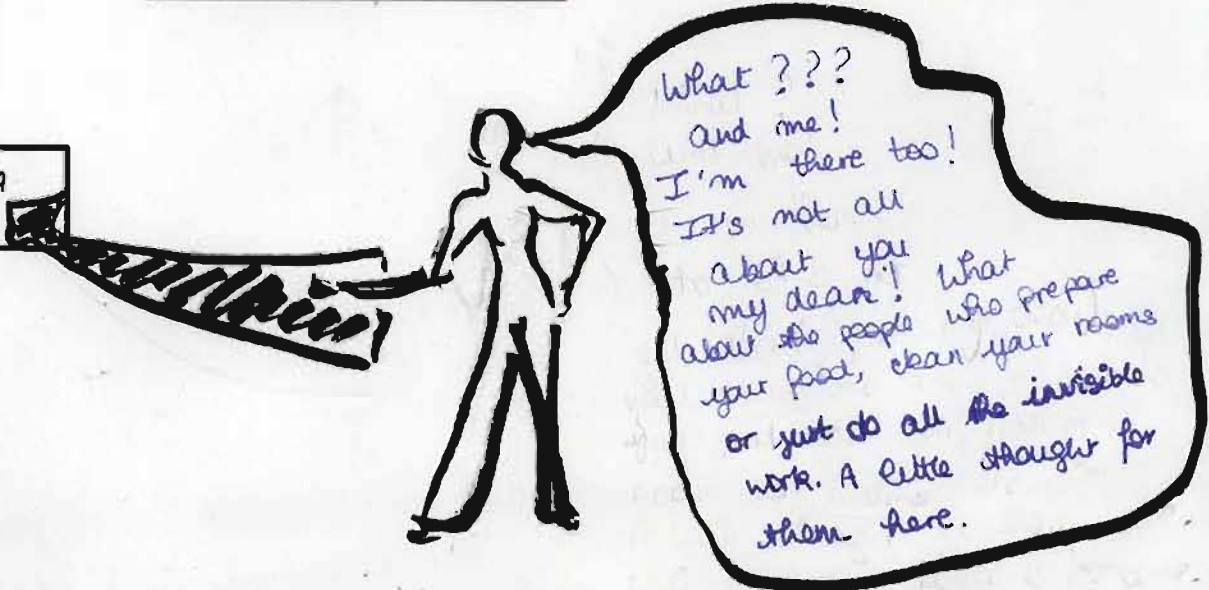
Saunders, E. (2009, April 01). Dream of a City. Retrieved from https://repository.upenn.edu/showcase_comics/7

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. https://repository.upenn.edu/showcase_comics/7
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

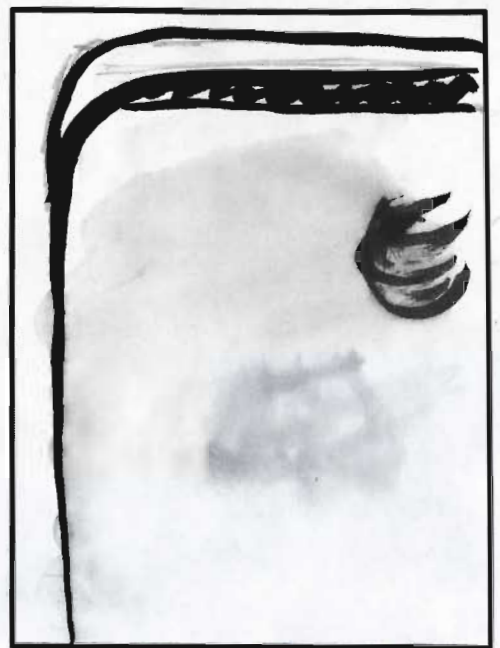


DREAM
OF A CITY.

DESIGNED BY EMMA
SAUNDERS



What ???
And me!
I'm there too!
It's not all
about you
my dear!
What
about the people who prepare
your food, clean your rooms
or just do all the invisible
work. A little thought for
them here.



Hmm
humm

Sorry to be such in a hurry but I just can't find the texts I want to share with you... So today we are going to talk about the evolution of the city as an entity. Many myths exist about how the first city appeared and its creation always seems like to an overarching communal project, though this shared space soon turns out to be oppressive... Many express that discontent we have, such as Tolstoy: "He [the human being] was conscious that, beside the good spiritual force which governed his soul, there existed a coarse power which would not grant him the humble peace he desired (-). It in direct opposition to his inward mood, dominated his life and demanded fulfilment of its decrees. All this was arousing a feeling of animosity in his soul, spoiling his peace and depriving its achievements of value." (1)

This discontent that Freud later on tries to treat, I believe is deeply rooted in our peace and role in the city. How we live together and how we see this union is essential to how we feel about society. For me cities symbolize society at the highest point of achievement since they are the sign that the cohesive power of society is maximum.

So I'm going to show you some text to start thinking of the city. If I could only find them...!



Let us see

flap flap

SCRATCH SCRATCH

HA!
haha

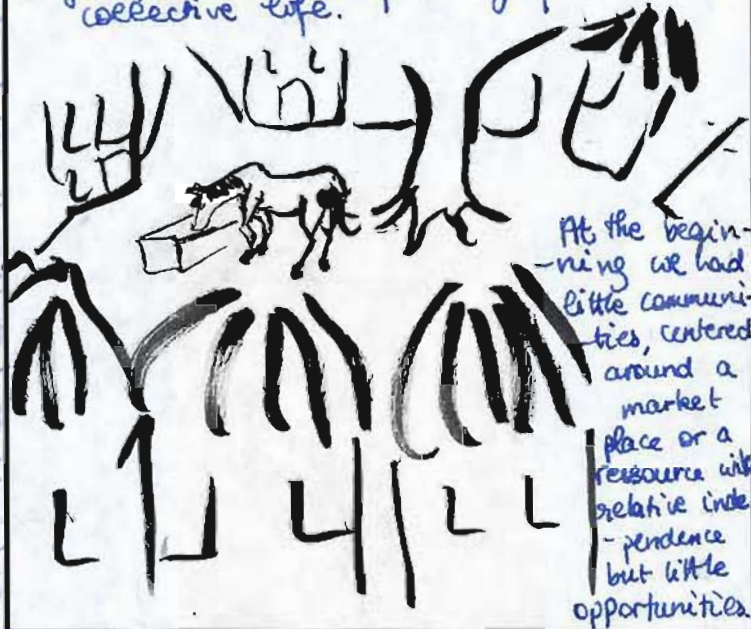
There we go

Zoom

humpf
no, not here...

© Tolstoy,
Anna Karenina
Part IV, chapter XX

So first, let's do a brief history of human's collective life.



At the beginning we had little communities, centered around a market place or a resource with relative independence but little opportunities.

Then the need to protect oneself against the other communities was given the technological means to be fulfilled. Walls were build enclosing more fluid identities. However the central community space still remained.



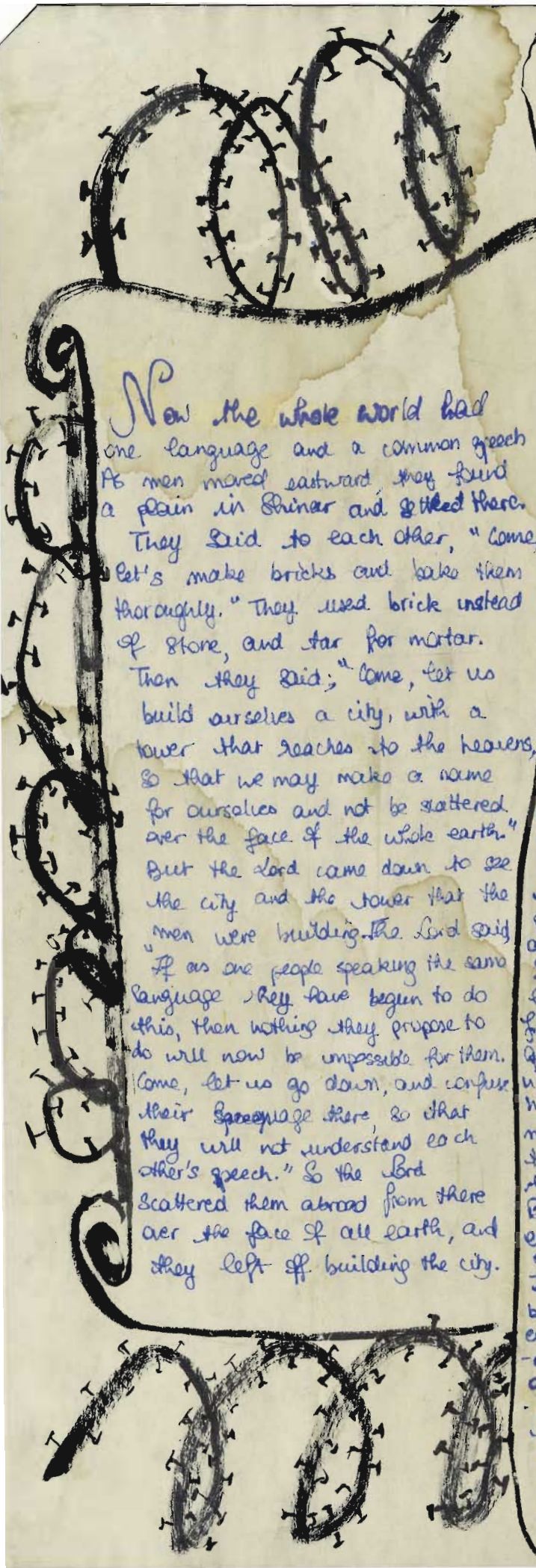
And there came the city, the megalopolis, juxtaposition of different individual bubbles (car, work, house), next to each others but never interacting. Everyone tries to push the other out to get more space for themselves. However fantasy and imagination still had a food in this chaotic scramble in this modern jungle. Everyone tries to differentiate themselves and mark the city.

AVERAGE SUBURB:

- * CAR (SUV, preferably 2 or 3)
- * GARDEN (grass closely mowed, average 2320 sq feet backyard for the dog)
- * POOL (whenever possible)
- * US flag (to fit in)
- * DRIVEWAY
- * SUNDAY BARBECUE



But this brought hunger for land, and each one of us wanted our own house, our own private space over which we can finally have some authority. Land provides us the illusion of control to make us forget our frustration. But this idolatry for land brought to an end all community organization and the neighbor became the final enemy. Some people call this progress, I just refer to it as evolution... Anyways, let's look at some traditional myths about the city, its creation and the origin of our unhappiness with it.



Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand each other's speech." So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all earth, and they left off building the city.

At first all the arrangements for building the tower of Babel were characterized by fairly good order, indeed the order was perhaps too perfect, too much thought was taken for guides, interpreters, accommodation for the workmen and roads of communication as if it were centuries before one to do the work in. In fact, the general opinion at that time was that one simply could not build so slowly; a very little insistence on this would have sufficed to make one hesitate to lay the foundations at all. People argued in this way: The essential thing in the whole business is the idea of building a tower that will reach heaven. In comparison with that idea, everything else is secondary.

The idea, once sized in its magnitude, can never vanish again; so long as there are men on the earth there will be also the irresistible desire to complete the building. That being so, however, one need have no anxiety about the future: on the contrary, human knowledge is increasing, the art of building has made progress and will make further progress, a piece of work which takes us a year may perhaps be done in half the time in another hundred years, and better done, too, more enduringly.

So why exert oneself to the extreme limit of one's present power? There would be some sense in doing that only if it were likely that the tower would be completed in one generation. But that is beyond all hope. It is far more likely that the next generation with their perfected knowledge will find the work of their predecessors bad, and tear down what has been built so as to begin a new.

Such thoughts paralyzed people's powers, and so they talked less about the tower than the construction of a city for the workmen. Every nationality wanted the finest quarter for itself, and this gave rise to disputes, which developed into bloody conflicts. These conflicts never came to an end: to the leaders they were a new proof that, in the absence of the necessary unity, the building of the tower must be done very slowly, or indeed preferably postponed until universal peace was declared. But the time was spent not only in conflict; the town was embellished in the intervals and this unfortunately enough evoked fresh envy and fresh conflict.

In this fashion the age of the first generation went past, but none of the succeeding ones showed any difference except that technical skills increased and with it occasion for conflict. To this must be added that the second or third generation had already recognized the senselessness of building a heaven-reaching tower; but by that time everybody was too deeply involved to leave the city. All the legends and songs that came to birth in that city are filled with longing for a prophesied day when the city would be destroyed by five successive blows from a gigantic fist...



Fascinating, no?
 One interesting point is this view of the city as a dream, a common project based on infinite possibilities and total freedom of imagination. But this identifying project which gives an identity, a "name" is perverted or by God or by the human's own defaults. Here we can see two tendencies: in the Bible, God is jealous and fears the humans because he has recognized the strength and power such a human organisation holds. Indeed they understand each others and listen to each other's propositions holding therefore a tremendous power and having infinite potential only bounded by the symbolic limit of the sky. In the Bible, God is responsible for our misery, our division and our unhappiness. Kafka on the contrary requires responsibilities to humans: we, our laziness, envy, aggressivity, procrastination keep us from fulfilling our dream.

The city here embodies the duality Freud recognized in human: the creation, unifying and constructive instinct he calls Eros and its opponent or partner, dividing, destructing, the death instinct. Indeed the city is both the open door to infinite possibilities, playground of the imagination and organ of communal life and achievement while also being the birthplace of our problems: the laws and the administrative institutions.

With the city as a symbol for civilization we can see our ambivalence towards culture. Kafka illustrates well the tension between our dream that seem so close we could almost touch them and swallow them and our dissatisfaction and resentment which prevent us from reaching our goal.

However the main idea is that whether God's or our own fault, we are left together in the city not by choice anymore but by habit.

Furthermore the institutions and coercive elements that were created as temporary and flexible tools to maintain unity are left without the previous unity and comprehension. But the workers in the tower still continue to show up every day and receive their salaries. Once the language has been diverted, the only mean of communication left is money which is based on common agreements and tradition and therefore allows basic exchanges and primary interaction. Now work resumes itself to the accumulation of money.

The money which previously was only a mean becomes an end. This leads to the glorification of the authority since it now concentrates the money, and the means to produce it. Its power which before was only for practical reason becomes legitimized because it is the source of the unique communicating system: money.

Now competition strives and more rules are needed to contain it. The infinite spiral towards evergrowing repression is started and no solution out seems possible.



Did someone say something??


No. That's what I thought.

So now, instead of a free dream, all the workers' got for motivation is money. Work became toil, forced and without enjoyment or meaning (except that of money). The city slowly became the negation of identity, of imagination, of hope, of pleasure at the workplace and of genuine community life. People feel oppressed in society and long for the relief of this tension by the destruction of the city that Kafka hunts at the end.



GIVE ME A VOICE!

You talk and talk but how about me, Cain? What about my story?

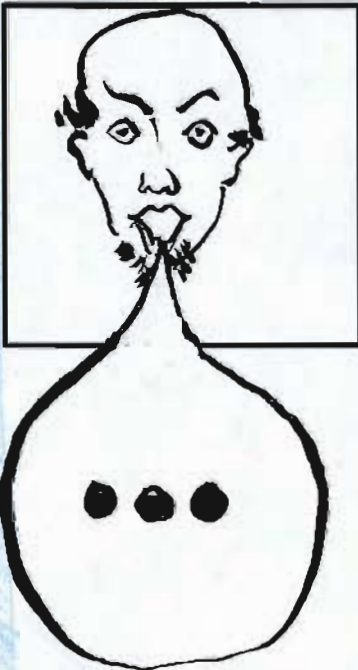



HEY!
What do you know about religions? What if I accept and appreciate the boundaries they provide? Society also constrains us and we live with these limitations... what if I need the hope? Who are you to judge?!

We can even extrapolate and imagine how this lack of expression, of voice led to the formation of religions. Our need for community, dream, higher aspiration, overarching goal, unity above our differences and unconditional love was fulfilled elsewhere. Religions provided the illusions and soothing people desired but also reinforced the frustration we have by enabling another set of rules. Religions worked to protect societies by channeling people's dream and instincts. The city therefore came to embody repression and isolation of the people into a system they no longer understood and in which they no longer had a voice.



aaaaa
CHARGE!
CHARGE
(battle... battle...
WIN)
☺

ENOUGH!
Listen to me! Please.
In your story of humanity you never talk of me, speak to me: the woman, the poor, the different, the queer, the unique, just the individual. You forget us behind a picture of a "typical" human being, hiding behind generalities. You forget that I want to be happy and fighting is hard, you forget that I have my own individual preferences, and that your theories aren't without prejudice. You impose me your conception of what life and liberty should be, you have beautiful theories but you always seem to forget me. You're scared of me. Go back to your nice and cozy reflections, your metaphysics and others, or come and see my day. My world.

Your safe, judging position doesn't have to ask you to fight, no just to speak. Why do you always have the authority figure? Why can't you trust me? Why don't you listen?

Frustration -
 from Wikipedia the free encyclopedia: "Frustration is an emotional response to circumstances where one is obstructed from arriving at a personal goal. The more important the goal the greater the frustration. It is comparable to anger and disappointment."
 Except maybe I can act and change.

Why are you silent? Are you ignoring me now?

... And really, I'm not mad at you at all, I appreciate your efforts. No, I am mad at myself and at my hopelessness. But I just can't see a way out...

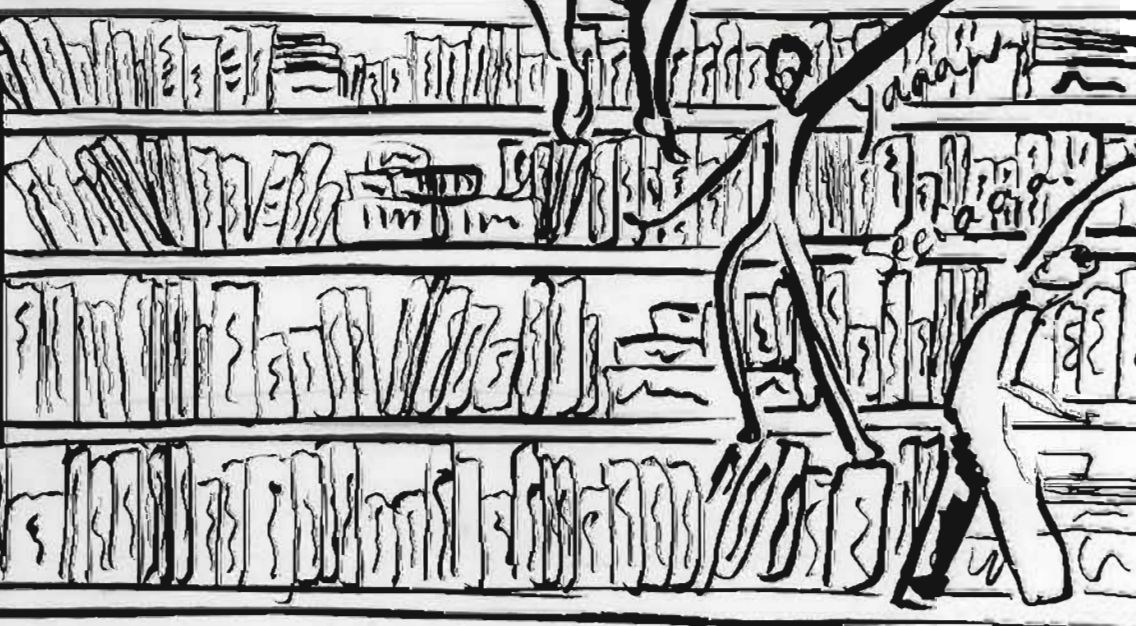
Maybe it is my time to listen

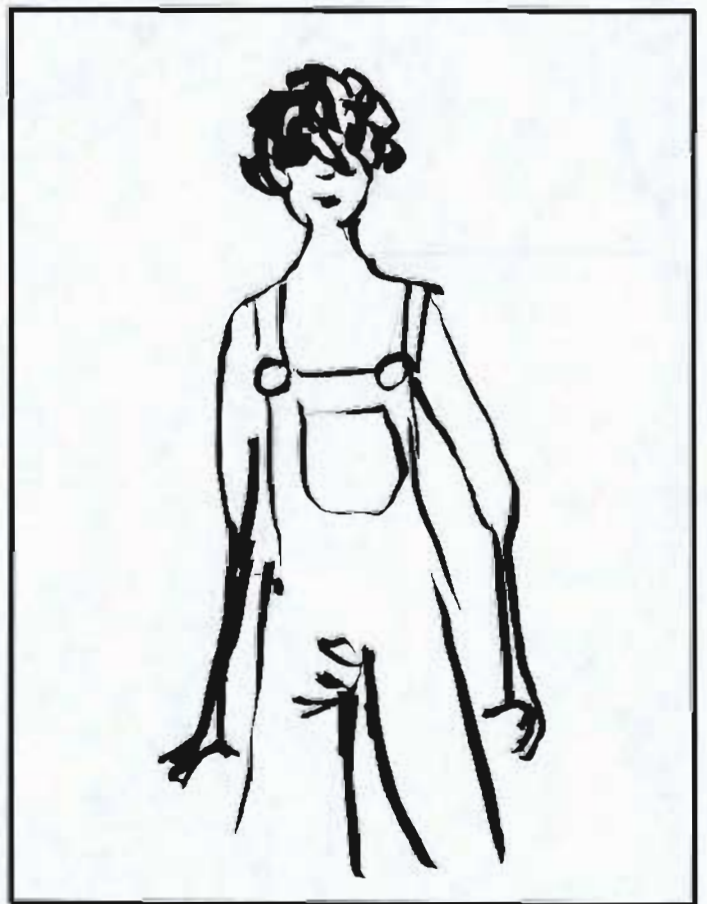
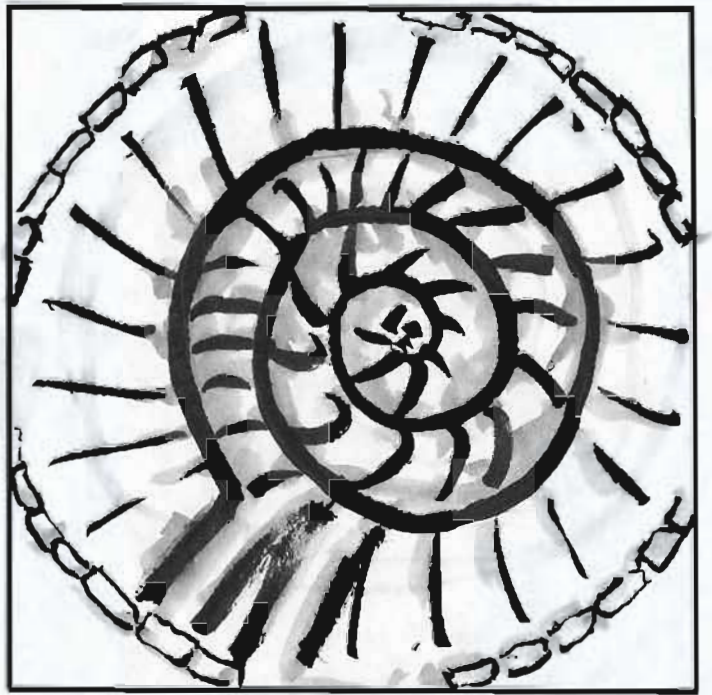
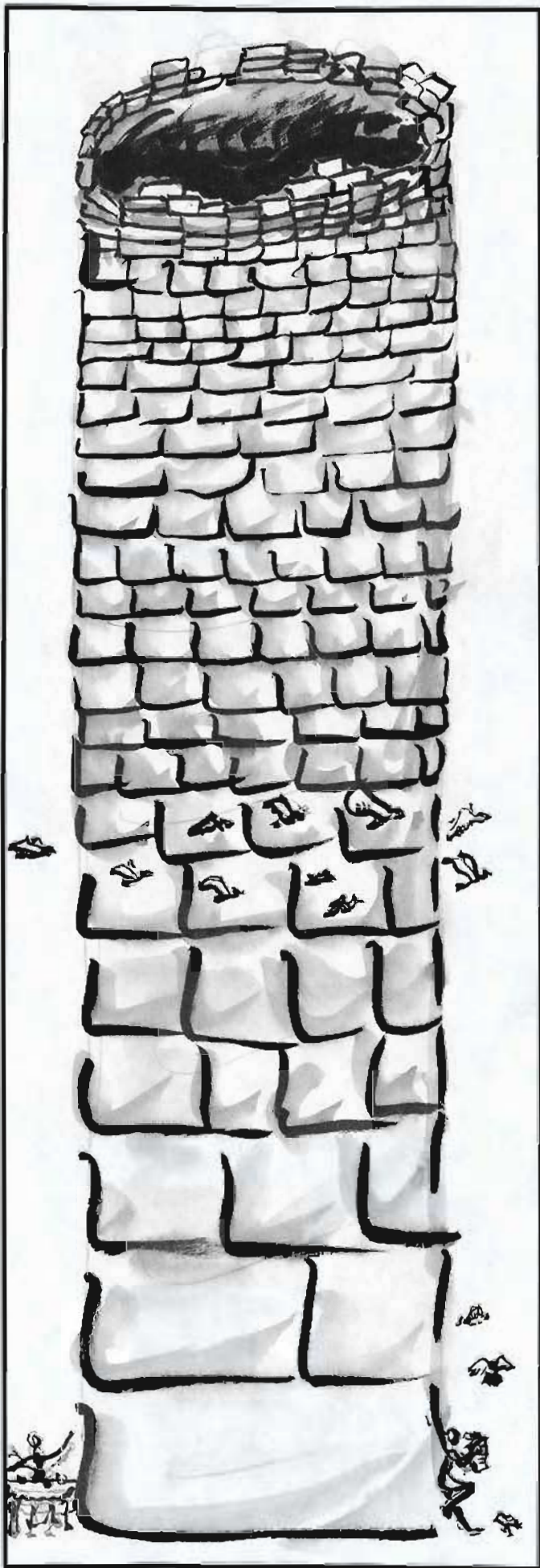
Hin hin King-Gniark

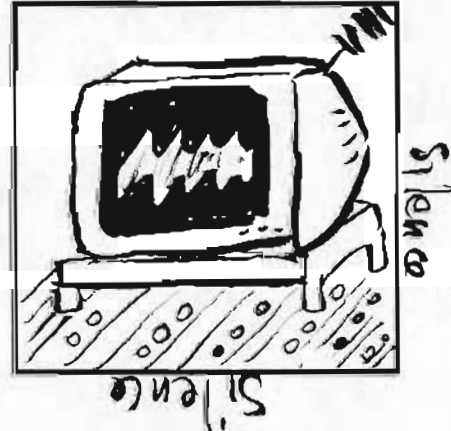
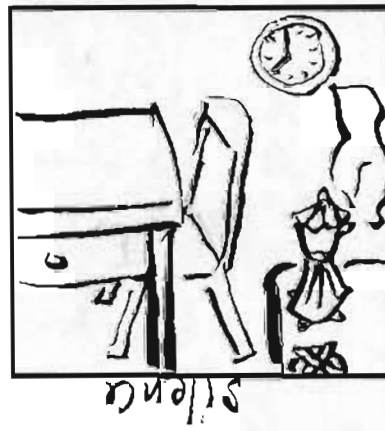
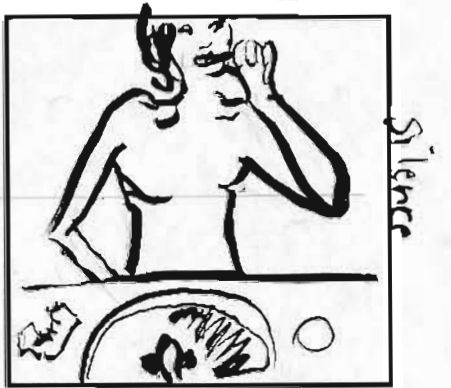
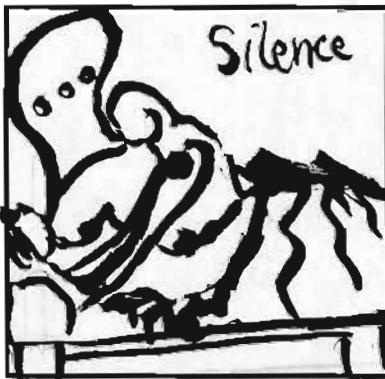
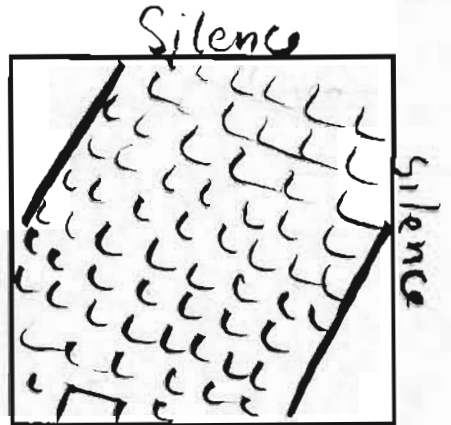
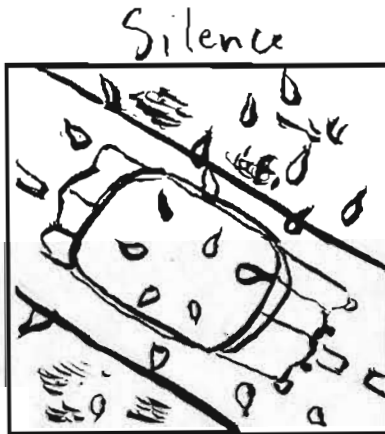
leaf



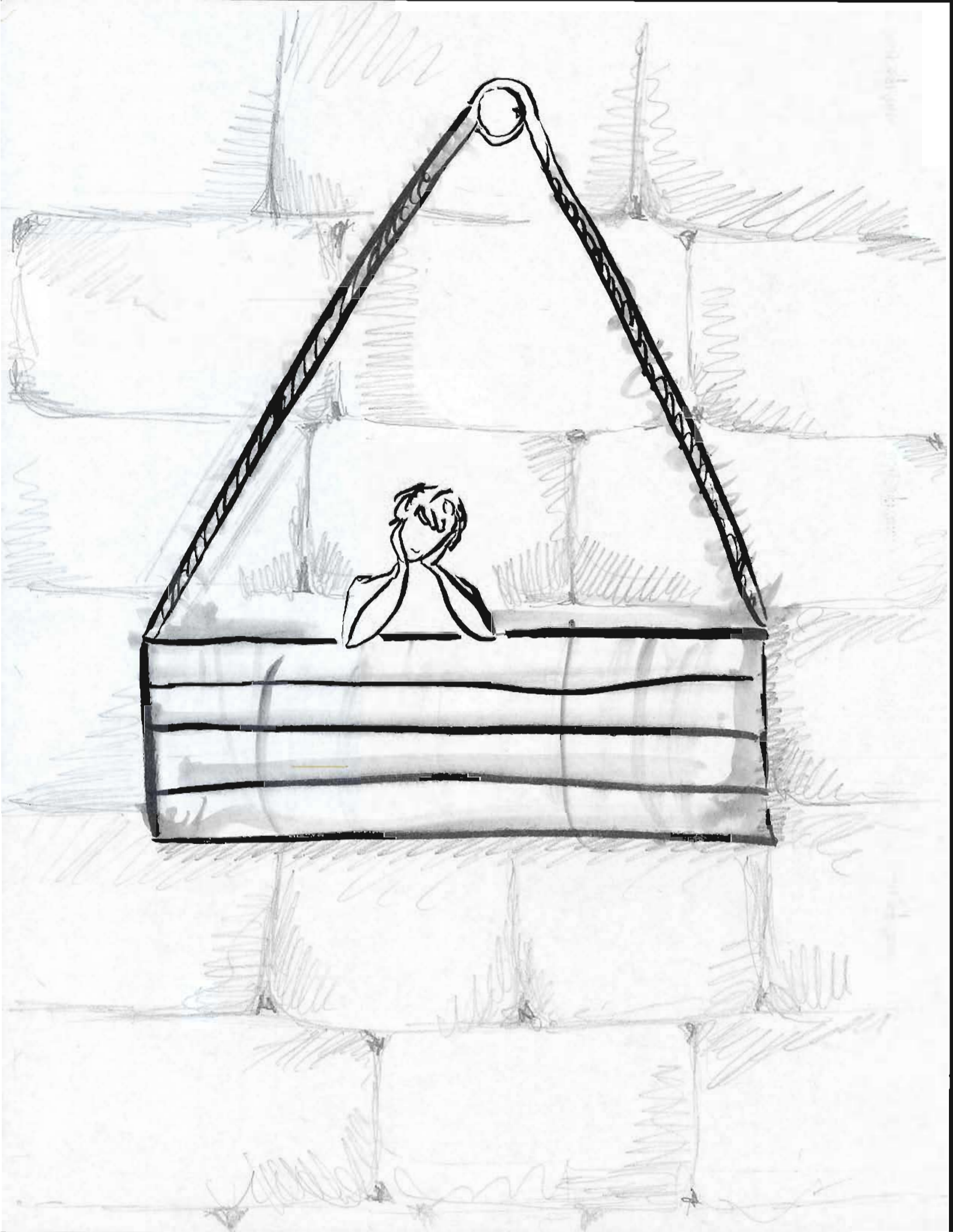
It is nice to have all those solutions, theories in a pretty little book but how am I supposed to feel better in this society which ignores me? And what can I change when I have everything that crushes me, all the daily duties rushing on me and keeping me so busy... And you make fun of my religion but what if I need the rope...? Because your consciousness is painful, it is hard work, and is it worth it?

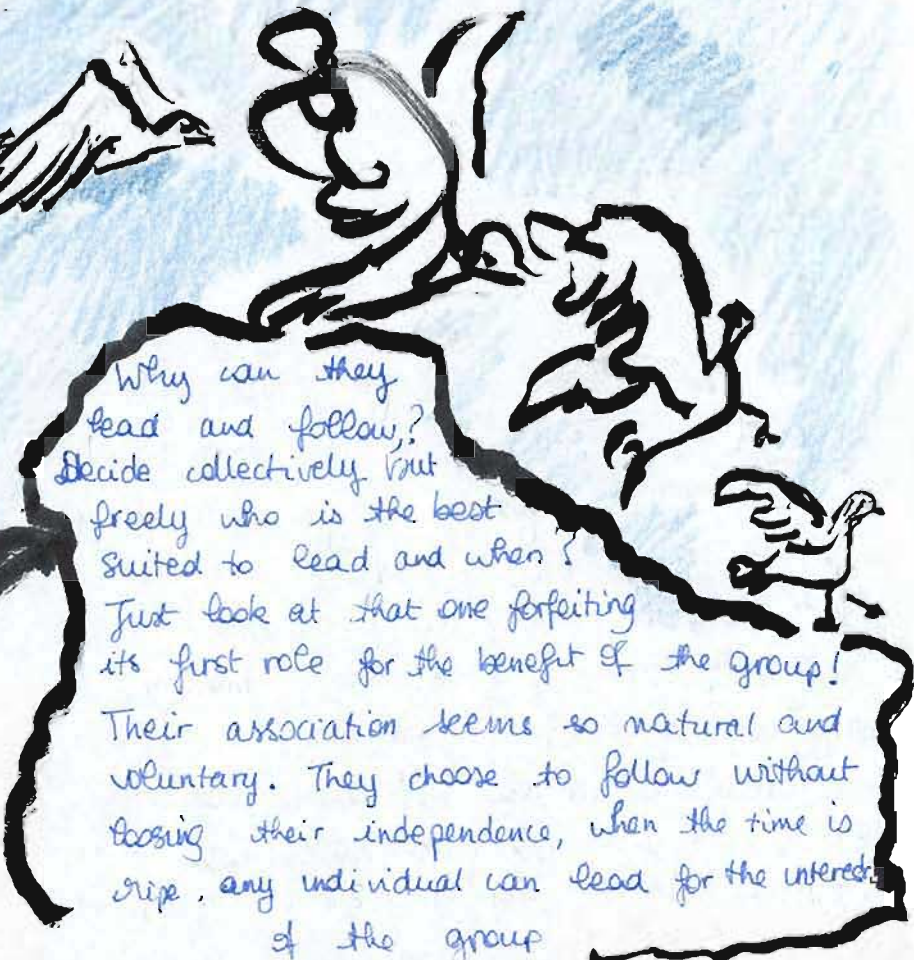






o o o
etc
o o o
etc
o o o
etc
o o o





Why can they lead and follow?
Decide collectively but freely who is the best suited to lead and when?
Just look at that one forfeiting its first role for the benefit of the group!
Their association seems so natural and voluntary. They choose to follow without losing their independence, when the time is ripe, any individual can lead for the interest of the group

Why can't we do the same?
What would it mean for us?

if you can dream -- and
not make your dreams
your master;

If you can

bear to hear

the truth you've spoken,

twisted by knives to make
a trap for fools,

Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken

And stoop and

build 'em

up with worn-out
tools
the unforgiving
minute

If you can fall

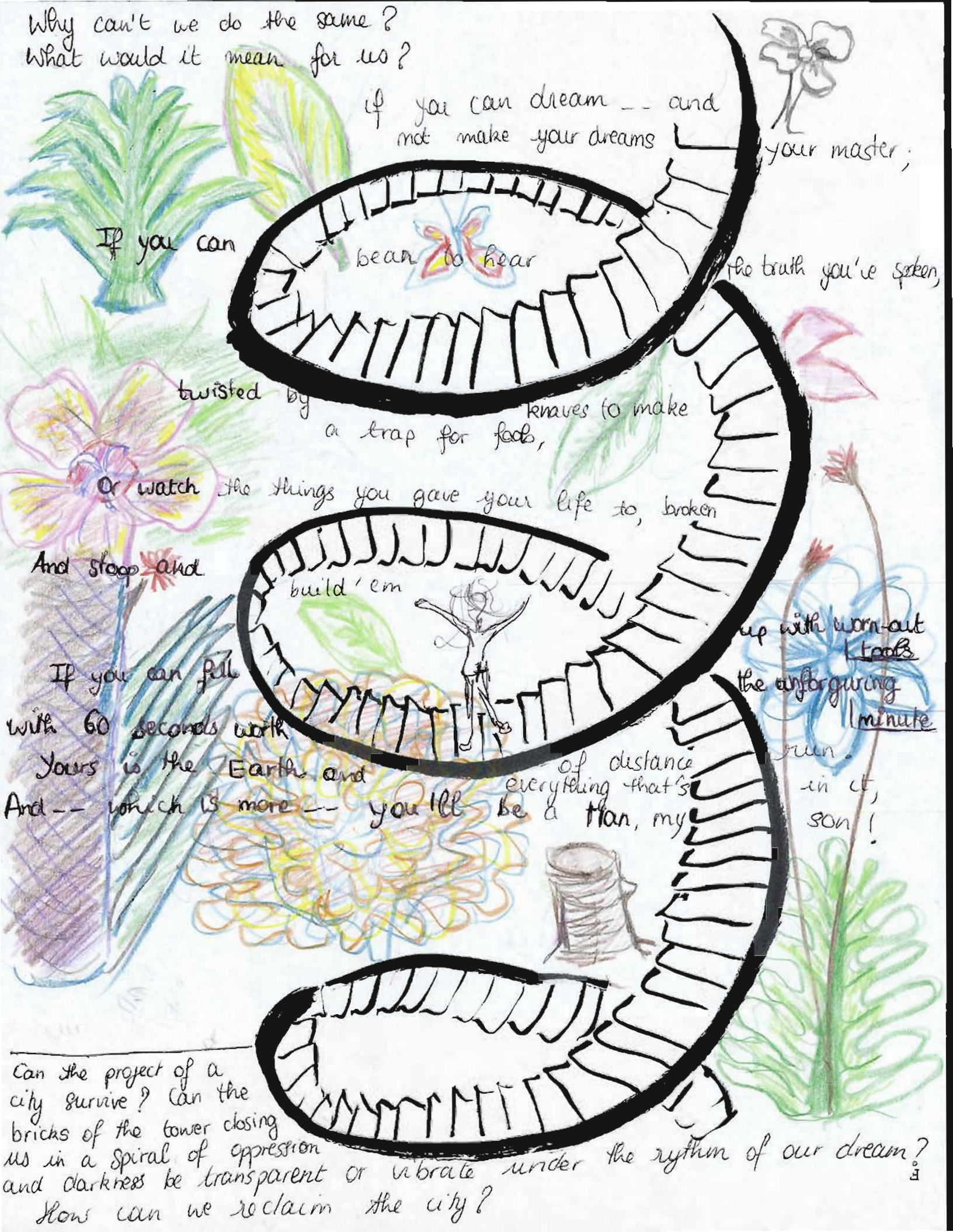
with 60 seconds work

Yours is the Earth and

And -- which is more -- you'll be a titan, my

of distance
everything that's
run in it,
son!

Can the project of a city survive? Can the bricks of the tower closing us in a spiral of oppression and darkness be transparent or vibrate under the rhythm of our dream?
How can we reclaim the city?



my bricks for a perfect or at least better city would be:



* Land marks
 * specialties
 * uniqueness
 that would make its inhabitants proud of their city. They would choose to live instead of surrendering to habit. those

land mark give an identity, a character, a taste instead of bland and mild uniformity.



We would live the city as a sharing place, live in the city, outside in the street, on the benches to be able to see the other instead of safely ignoring him or her, hiding in our cars, houses, workplaces...



The city would be somewhere where you wouldn't be afraid to walk outside. Somewhere you trusted your neighbors, where you wouldn't need guns, dogs or Burton allied guards. Somewhere where you would feel comfortable strolling around

The city would be somewhere colorful, inviting pleasure and play, putting you in a good mood, smacking an involuntary smile on your face



The city would be impregnated by your presence. Somewhere where you can have an impact. You can mark the city...

a city with community space: to interact and discover the others.



You would have
a
VOICE
in the
city.
You would
have
a
ROLE
in
the
city.



You can
dream
in your
city. Open
space to
the ima-
-gination.
Leaves some
empty spaces
abo to be
filled with
your wishes
and aspira-
-tions.

A city you
make home.



Let grow the weeds of imagination.




city where you can
play.

a city where you have
no limits; only possibilities.

What about you? What would you like for a city?

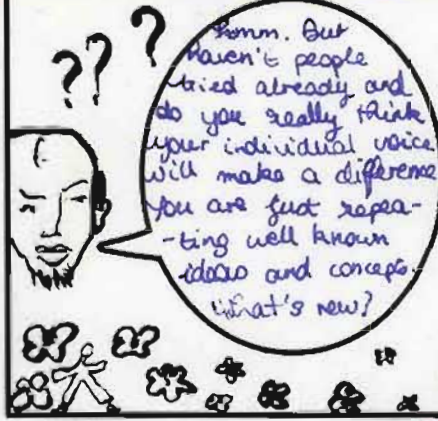
Hmmmm...

Hmm I love when you get so, so


hopeful?
 Enthusiastic?

???

Hmm. But haven't people tried already and do you really think your individual voice will make a difference you are just repeating well known ideas and concepts.
 What's new?



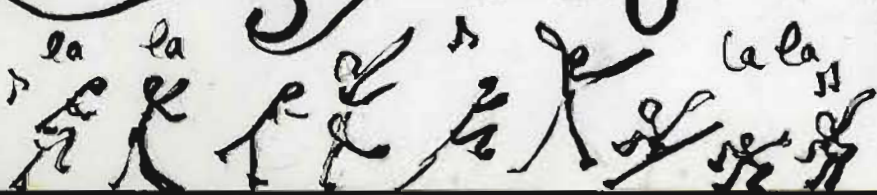
You know what? This isn't really for anyone, it is mostly for me. It's a corner stone, a work, a block that will prevent me from forgetting my dreams; from growing up and melting into compromises. I want to remember my genuine refusal, my adolescent revolt on what now is. I want to know it doesn't have to be.

aaa-
 ☉ Peace and Love ☉
 (me, a hippy? nussso...!)

emmh. Which it?

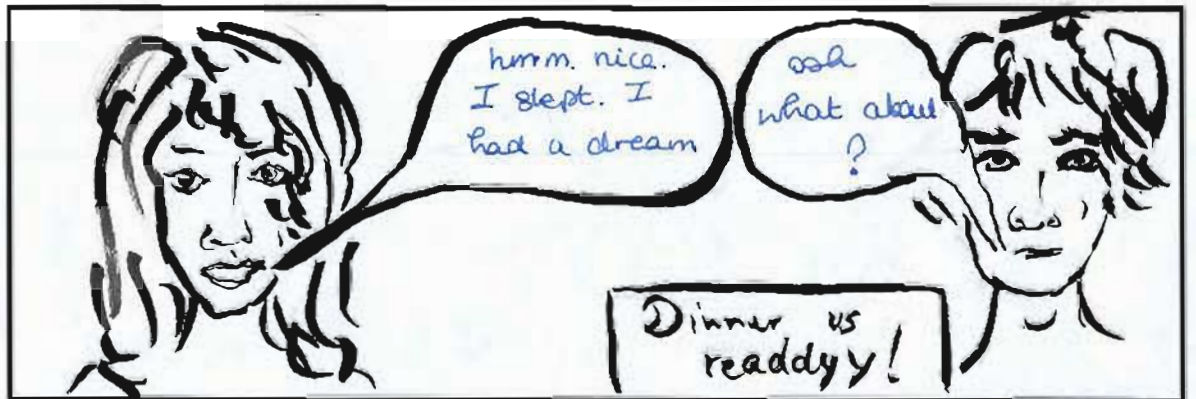
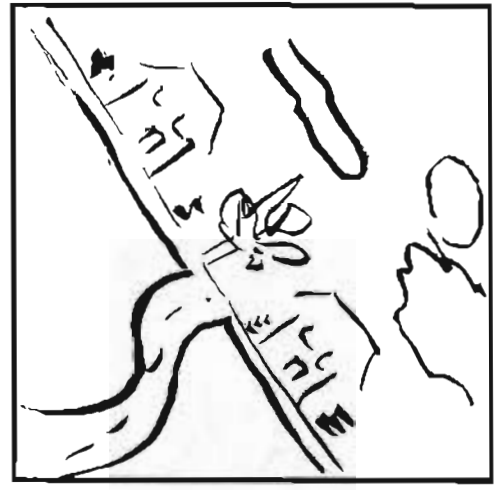
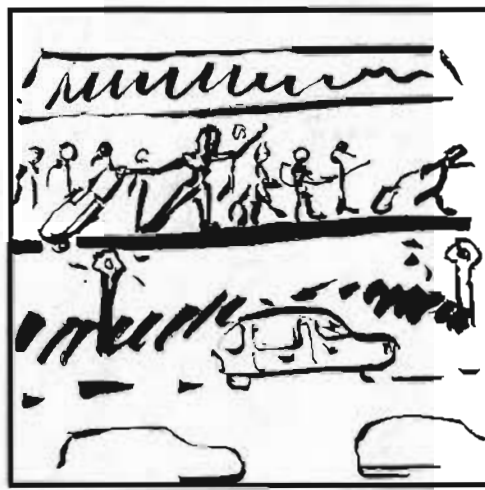


It? Can't you feel it? Can't you hear it? Our connections in and with the world; links that assure us that "we can never
 Can't you feel its pulsation when you are proud of your accomplishments as a group, when you are in front of a great drawing, fluid like water, when you hear a children laugh...? When you smile in the street, when you care but also more personally when in a hot bath the burning water penetrates your pores, making your nerves shiver and relieve the tension at last in one breath, one deep expiration, when you lean on the supple but firm, steady skin of your lover or friend... In a general burst of laugh, in a uncontrivable cheerfulness... Some call it erotic, and find it in the deepest sensual meaning of life, some find it through religion and community spirit, moral values and certainty provided, some find it in the sense of a global community, under the tag of humanity and universal rights... However approached, it is about consciousness and respect. Receptivity. Understanding or at least listening. I feel it is the capability to see all the offers even those that aren't proposed and then make a choice. Desire for the others. Appetite for life, love and sharing. If you can, if you try, they will too...



skip, skip jump

POP!



Bibliography:

Sigmund Freud , The Future of an Illusion (1927)
New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1989

Sigmund Freud , Civilization and Its Discontents (1930)
New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1989

Herbert Marcuse , Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud (1955)
Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1974

John Berger , Ways of Seeing
London: BBC / Penguin, 1972.
ISBN 0140135154 pbk.

Georgette Chapman Poindexter, Land Hungry
Journal of Law and Politics , Spring-Summer 2005
Copyright (c) 2005 Journal of Law and Politics, Inc.; Georgette Chapman Poindexter

The Christian Bible, Genesis, 11:1-9, New International Version

Franz Kafka, The City Coat of Arms (1920)

Rudyard Kipling, If (1895)

Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina (1873-1877)

Max Ehrmann, Desiderata (1927)

