

# Invisible Boundaries

by

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## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.





## ABSTRACT

Within Buenos Aires there exists a boundary between the formal, planned developments of the middle class and the informal, organically-developed self-built housing of the poor. Villa 31, an informal settlement located near the heart of the city, contrasts directly with the skyscrapers of the Argentinean capital's financial and political centre. The tension between the formal and informal cities creates a stigmatization of the residents of Villa 31, essentially barring the possibility of its integration into the city. The boundary between Villa 31 and Buenos Aires exists not only in the physical space between the two, but more importantly in the collective imagination of the city's inhabitants.

This is a story of the space between Villa 31 and Buenos Aires. It chronicles the attempts at crossing that boundary and the obstacles encountered. As a means of presenting the work to a broad audience, the story was written as a comic book. The first-person narrative helps to immerse the reader in the story while presenting the full complexity of the problem through a personal account. The story reveals the complex relationship between Villa 31 and Buenos Aires as a means of understanding the invisible boundary between the two.

The core of the research consists of two months of field work in Buenos Aires conducted through October and November of 2009. Journal entries, photographs, conversations and first-hand experiences were transformed into a comic book that tells a story of the invisible boundary between Villa 31 and Buenos Aires.



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Committee Members: Rick Andrighetti and Marie-Paule Macdonald

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A very special thank you to my family. To my parents, Ruben and Silvia, for their immeasurable support, dedication and encouragement through all these years.

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For my parents.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Author's Declaration	iii
Abstract	v
Acknowledgements	vii
Declaration	ix
Table of Contents	xi
List of Illustrations	xiii
Foreword	1
Invisible Boundaries: A Comic Book	11
Epilogue	93
References	101





## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1.1	Eddie Adams' Pulitzer Prize winning photograph. [ <a href="http://frgdr.com/blog/wp-content/gallery/renditions-saigon-execution/rse_eddie-adams_saigon-execution_1968_vietnam_v3.jpg">http://frgdr.com/blog/wp-content/gallery/renditions-saigon-execution/rse_eddie-adams_saigon-execution_1968_vietnam_v3.jpg</a> ]	5
1.2	Francisco Goya's <i>The Third of May 1808</i> . [ <a href="http://www.artchive.com/artchive/g/goya/may_3rd.jpg">http://www.artchive.com/artchive/g/goya/may_3rd.jpg</a> ]	5
1.3	Joe Sacco – <i>Safe Area Goražde</i> . Sacco, Joe. <i>Safe Area Goražde: [The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992-95]</i> . Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 2000. 63. Print.	6
2.1	Aerial photograph of Villa 31 in <i>El País</i> . [ <a href="http://www.elpais.com/fotografia/economia/global/Vista/poblado/Villa/31/Buenos/Aires/elpdiaeco/20110320elpnegeco_1/les/">http://www.elpais.com/fotografia/economia/global/Vista/poblado/Villa/31/Buenos/Aires/elpdiaeco/20110320elpnegeco_1/les/</a> ]	95
2.2	Opening a new soccer field in Villa 31. [ <a href="http://www.mundovilla.com/index.php?iSection=2&amp;iCategory=1&amp;iArticle=302">http://www.mundovilla.com/index.php?iSection=2&amp;iCategory=1&amp;iArticle=302</a> ]	96
2.3	Brightly painted buildings in Villa 31. [ <a href="http://www.mundovilla.com/index.php?iCategory=1&amp;iArticle=332">http://www.mundovilla.com/index.php?iCategory=1&amp;iArticle=332</a> ]	96



## FOREWORD

My first trip to Buenos Aires in May of 1997 was a family affair. I was thirteen. I went with my dad, my little brother, and my grandparents who were going to celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary in their hometown. We stayed with Tia Helida, my grandmother's sister, in Burzaco, a suburb of Buenos Aires. Tia Helida lived in a small one-storey white stucco house near Burzaco's centre. Almost every day during that month my dad took my brother and I into Buenos Aires. I remember taking the train to Plaza Constitución, the capital's southernmost train terminal, and catching a subway or walking from there. I remember passing through Lanús on the way, with its late 19th century centre of cafes serving *café con leche* and *churros*. I remember passing through Avellaneda too, home to the Independiente and Racing football clubs; my dad is an ardent supporter of Racing. And I remember passing over the Riachuelo, the smell of the rotting river below letting us know that we are nearly at Plaza Constitución.

From Plaza Constitución we travelled everywhere. We would ride the C line to the Plaza de Mayo and the obelisk, walk to the historic neighbourhoods of La Boca or San Telmo, or zip right across the city's centre to Retiro. On one particular day we ventured a four hour drive from Buenos Aires to the small coastal resort town of Pinamar. Almost every bus leaving Buenos Aires departed from the Retiro Bus Terminal. We took the usual route from Burzaco to Constitución, and then to the Retiro Subway Station. From there we made the short walk to the bus terminal that runs alongside the early twentieth century train station. We sat inside the bus terminal waiting for our departure; my dad, my little brother, and myself, each with his bag between his feet, anticipating a short bus ride and an exciting beach

vacation.

Sitting on that bench waiting for the bus, I was completely oblivious to the sprawling display of poverty just metres away from one of the busiest public transit hubs in Argentina. Directly north-west of the Retiro Bus Terminal lies Villa 31, a squatter community of 15 hectares. In 2009, *The Economist*<sup>1</sup> estimated it housed 40,000 people. Like many such communities around the world, Villa 31 has been since its foundation during the great depression the subject of repeated eradication efforts. The military government of the 1970s almost eradicated the site when forty-six families refused to leave and eventually won court orders preventing their removal<sup>2</sup>. Since then, fuelled by the poverty caused by Argentina's 2001 economic crisis, the community has grown to unprecedented numbers. Today, Villa 31 remains a contentious issue in city politics. Wedged between a major intermodal public transit hub, the city's port, and the city's financial district, it occupies some of the city's prime real estate.

As I pursued my interest in the phenomenon of squatter communities in the third world, I was naturally drawn to the city my family migrated from to Canada. Buenos Aires also happened to be one of the few third world cities I had experienced first-hand. My early investigations into the squatter communities of Buenos Aires took me to that day in May, ten years earlier. Here begins my story; back at the Retiro Bus Terminal, ready to embark on a two month investigation of Villa 31 and its relationship to the Buenos Aires I remembered.

I arrived in Buenos Aires on a Wednesday afternoon in early October, 2009. I had two months to photograph, sketch, and study the squatter community and its relationship with the city. Claudio, a family friend, picked me up at the airport. We took a taxi back to his apartment, where I would stay for the next few weeks. From his apartment on Calle Lima, running parallel to the exceptionally wide Avenida 9 de Julio, I would conduct my research into Villa 31.

Over the first few weeks I tried my luck with people I already knew in Buenos Aires: an old friend from high school, some friends of my dad's, and my second-cousins living in the city. The common concern was the imminent danger of visiting a *villa miseria*, or misery town, like Villa 31. They all warned me of the threats of kidnapping, armed robbery, and escalating dangers all brought on by lawlessness and the drug trade. The newspapers and television only reinforced these concerns, on an almost daily basis; headlines including '*Kidnapping for Ransom Networks Operating Out of Villa 1-11-14*', '*Armed Robbery at Retiro Ends in Stabbing*.' I noticed some projects involving Villa 31 on the University of Buenos

Aires' website. After several attempts, getting through to someone there seemed unlikely. I eventually found a guide. Claudia was a friend of my dad's, whose student, Julia, was from González Catán, an established informal community on the city's south-western edge. One month after embarking on my research trip, I found myself in a car with Julia heading towards González Catán. We made the one hour drive out along Avenida Independencia and Ruta 3. In my two months in Buenos Aires, that day in November would be the closest I would get to entering a place like Villa 31. With the exception of the view from a train, I was unable to see Villa 31 with my own eyes. All I had was a sum of personal accounts and opinions regarding the place.

In 1965 Gay Talese's first assignment with *Esquire* was to profile Frank Sinatra. Talese spent three months trying to speak with Sinatra. Countless hours of observing Sinatra's activities and speaking to his extensive entourage only lead to dead ends. At the end of his assignment, Talese wrote a letter to his editor, Harold Hayes, concluding that "I may not get the piece we'd hoped for — the real Frank Sinatra, but perhaps, by not getting it — and by getting rejected constantly and by seeing his flunkies protecting his flanks — we will be getting close to the truth about the man."<sup>3</sup> Talese's story, "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold", was published in the April 1966 issue of *Esquire* and has since been named the "Best Story *Esquire* Ever Published."

Visiting Villa 31 proved impossible. Although the experience, at the time, seemed unfruitful, it illuminated an invisible barrier separating the formal and informal cities on both social and physical levels. It became clear that a story of my personal experience of Villa 31 would constitute evidence of its relationship to Buenos Aires.

Working almost as a journalist on an architectural investigation, I asked myself how to tell the story. I recorded field notes every day throughout the trip, but had no idea how to turn those into a coherent body of work.

The comic book brings the reader into the story as I experienced it. During a March 2011 lecture at the University of Toronto Joe Sacco, an American Cartoonist/Journalist made the case for the medium. Sacco compared his preferred medium of comic books to a notable 1968 photograph by Eddie Adams and to Francisco Goya's iconic Third of May 1808, each relating to separate conflicts.

In a gruelling war, Eddie Adams' Pulitzer Prize winning photograph of South Vietnamese General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing a Vietcong prisoner was a game-changing image. It stirred contempt for the General, making him a cold-

blooded killer. That contempt followed the General for the rest of his life, haunting not only him, but Eddie Adams as well. After the photograph was taken, the AP assigned Adams to follow General Loan, where Adams learned that he was not a cold-blooded killer but rather a hero in Vietnam. Adams later expressed regret at having taken the photograph, writing “The general killed the Viet Cong; I killed the general with my camera. Still photographs are the most powerful weapon in the world. People believe them, but photographs do lie, even without manipulation. They are only half-truths. What the photograph didn’t say was, ‘What would you do if you were the general at that time and place on that hot day, and you caught the so-called bad guy after he blew away one, two or three American soldiers?’”<sup>4</sup> Photographs catch a fraction of a second, and sometimes that moment, frozen in time, misleads viewers. Photographs lack subjectivity.

Francisco Goya’s *Third of May 1808* captures the Spanish resistance to the Napoleonic army’s invasion of Madrid. Contrary to Adams’ photograph of the General, Goya painted this image over six years, not completing it until 1814; Goya had control over the composition of the image that simply is not available to a photographer in 1/500th of a second. Goya’s painting leaves little objectivity. He tells us, by lighting and the orientation of rifles, to look at the victim. He hides the soldiers’ faces, keeping them as anonymous figures. And Goya places us in the victim’s position, showing us despair in his face and his posture.

Comparing these two very different pieces, Joe Sacco explained the advantage of non-objective journalism. In his cartoons, Sacco places himself directly in his story. *Safe Area Goražde* follows Sacco’s experience with Bosniaks trapped in the town of Goražde towards the end of the Bosnian War. Creating a narrative, he interviews several people, letting them tell their stories while keeping the main cast of characters rather concise. He also records his own observations, and at moments, becomes part of the story itself. Sacco is in a privileged position: as a journalist he can travel between Goražde and Sarajevo, a privilege not granted to the Bosniaks at the time. Sacco becomes a sort of messenger; people in Goražde give him packages to send to their relatives in Sarajevo and vice versa. With the comic book, Sacco is able to place himself in the story and clearly state his position, a privilege not easily granted to other journalists. The reader is able to experience the conflict through Sacco’s story.

Much like Joe Sacco, my story takes the form of a comic book. There was no doubt that there is an inherent subjectivity in my findings. I arrived in Buenos Aires with a set of biases. As you read, you will be subjected to my experiences

Facing page:

1.1 Eddie Adams’ Pulitzer Prize winning photograph depicts General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing a Vietcong prisoner.

1.2 Francisco Goya’s *Third of May 1808* iconically depicts the Napoleonic Army’s invasion of Madrid.



1.1



1.2







throughout those two months in Buenos Aires. The images record real places, while the conversations are all based on my field notes. In this comic book, I record my experience of the barrier between the city and the squatter community.

Facing page:

1.3 An excerpt from Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Gorazde*.

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1. "Misery in their Midst." *The Economist*, January 8, 2009, [http://www.economist.com/node/12891027?story\\_id=12891027](http://www.economist.com/node/12891027?story_id=12891027)
  2. IBID.
  3. Talese, Gay. "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold." *Esquire*, April, 1966, [http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ1003-OCT\\_SINATRA\\_rev\\_](http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ1003-OCT_SINATRA_rev_)
  4. Adams, Eddie. "Eulogy: GENERAL NGUYEN NGOC LOAN." *Time Magazine*, July 27, 1998, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,988783,00.html>





INVISIBLE BOUNDARIES: A Comic Book



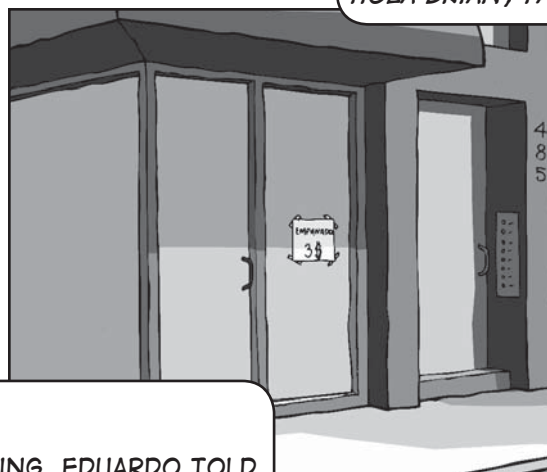


I ARRIVE IN BUENOS AIRES ON A WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON IN EARLY OCTOBER. A FAMILY FRIEND, CLAUDIO, PICKS ME UP AT THE AIRPORT AND WE TAKE A CAB BACK TO HIS APARTMENT ON AVENIDA 9 DE JULIO, WHERE I WILL BE STAYING FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS.

THE NEXT DAY I CALL DANIEL....



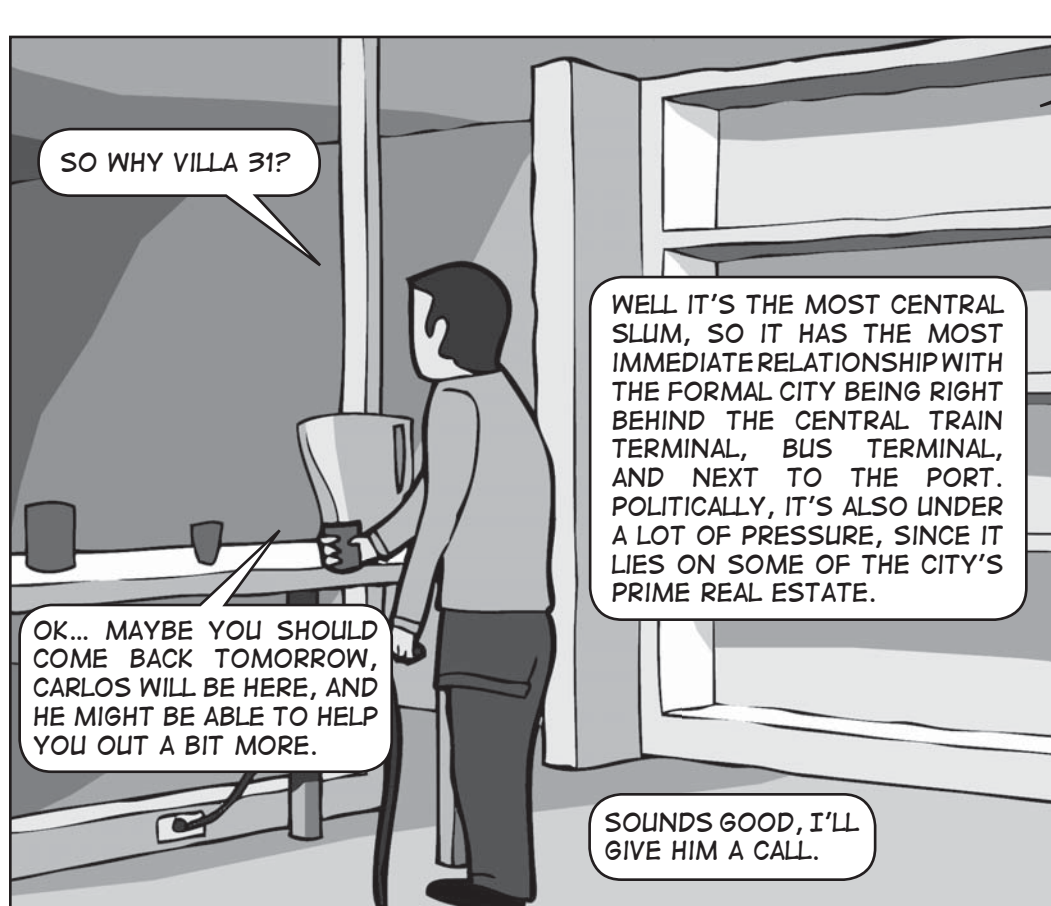
HOLA BRIAN, TANTO TIEMPO....



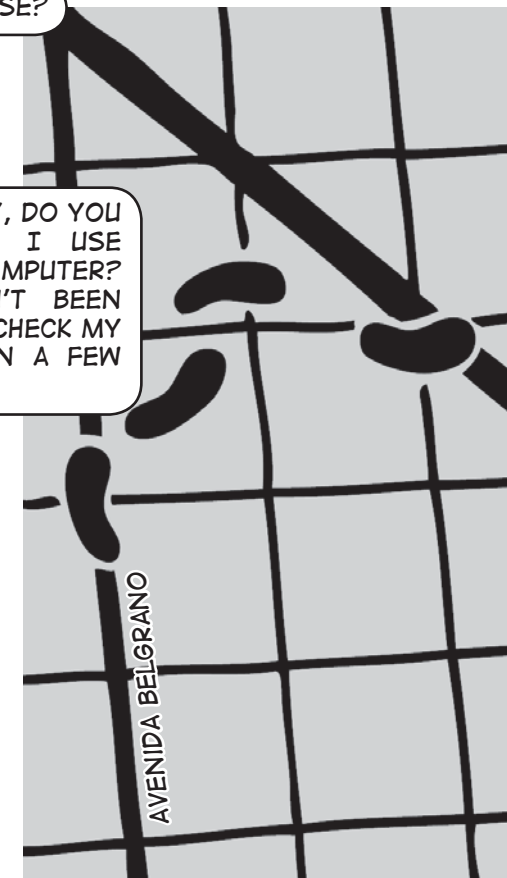
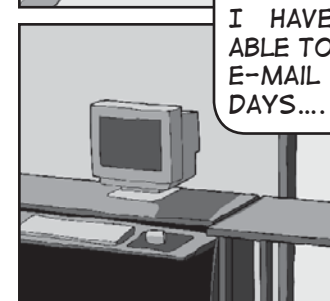
HELLO? DANIEL?  
YES?  
THIS IS BRIAN CALLING, EDUARDO TOLD  
YOU I WAS COMING?  
OH YES! BRIAN! ARE YOU IN BUENOS  
AIRES?  
YEA I GOT IN YESTERDAY, I'M  
ACTUALLY NEAR YOUR OFFICE, DO YOU  
HAVE SOME TIME FOR ME TO COME  
BY?  
YES YES, OF COURSE, I'LL BE HERE  
FOR ANOTHER HOUR OR SO, COME  
OVER...  
OK SEE YOU SOON.







IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE?

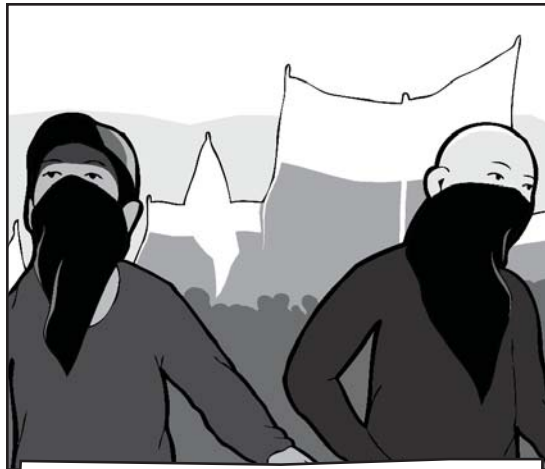




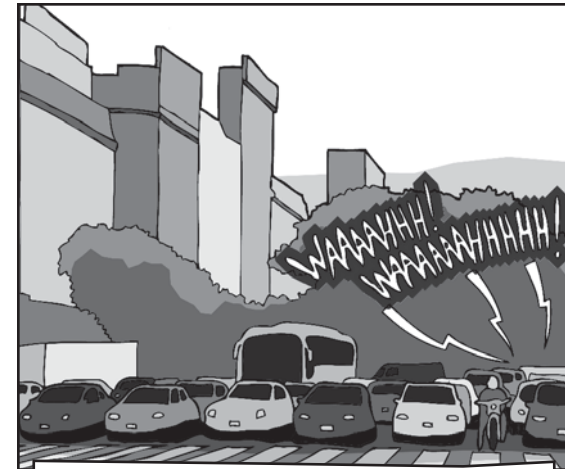
I LEAVE DANIEL'S OFFICE AND WALK TOWARDS THE CENTRE OF THE CITY ALONG FLORIDA STREET, ORIENTING MYSELF AMONG THE BANKS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, SHOPS AND INFORMAL VENDORS, ALL JUST A FIFTEEN MINUTE WALK SOUTH OF VILLA 31.



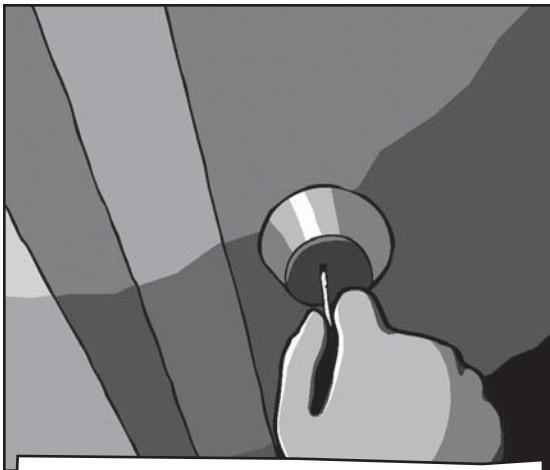
AS I WALK ACROSS AVENIDA 9 DE JULIO, A PROTEST BEGINS TO ASSEMBLE IN THE AVENUE'S CENTRAL PLAZA.



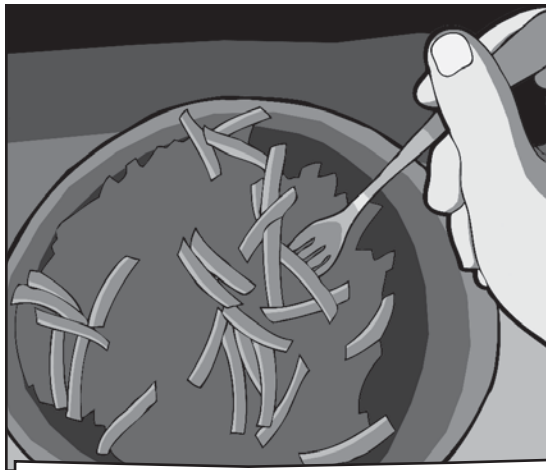
A GROUP OF MASKED BOYS APPEAR AND BLOCK BOTH PEDESTRIAN AND VEHICULAR TRAFFIC ACROSS THE WIDE AVENUE.



NOT EVEN BUDGING FOR THE BLARING SIREN OF AN AMBULANCE STUCK IN TRAFFIC.



AFTER TWO MORE PROTESTS, I FINALLY  
MAKE IT BACK TO THE APARTMENT.



OVER DINNER, CLAUDIO EXPLAINS THAT  
THE PROTESTS ARE LEADING UP TO A  
LARGER PROTEST TOMORROW NIGHT IN  
SUPPORT OF A PROPOSED MEDIA LAW.





THE NEXT DAY, I WAKE UP AND GO BACK TO THE OFFICE TO MEET CARLOS.



HOLA BRIAN COMO TE VA?

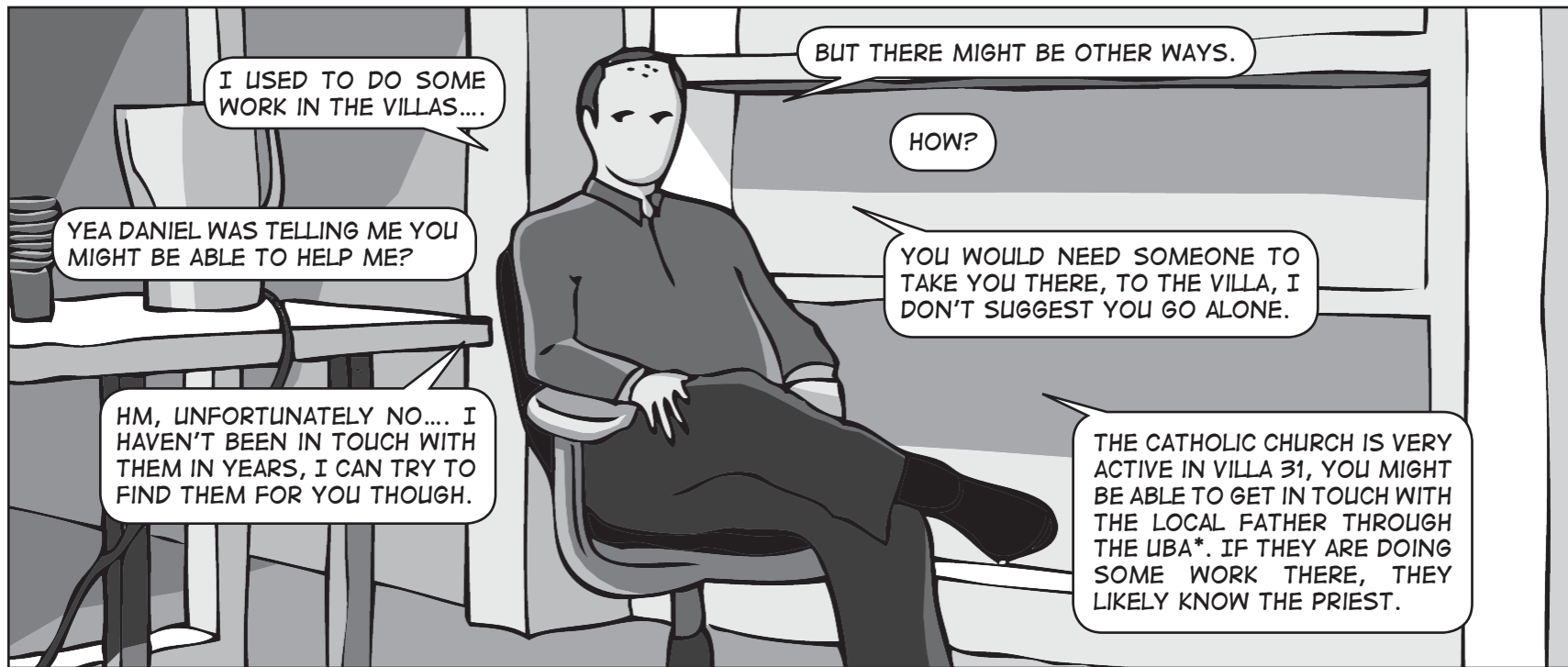
BIEN, BIEN Y VOS?

BUENO, BUENO.



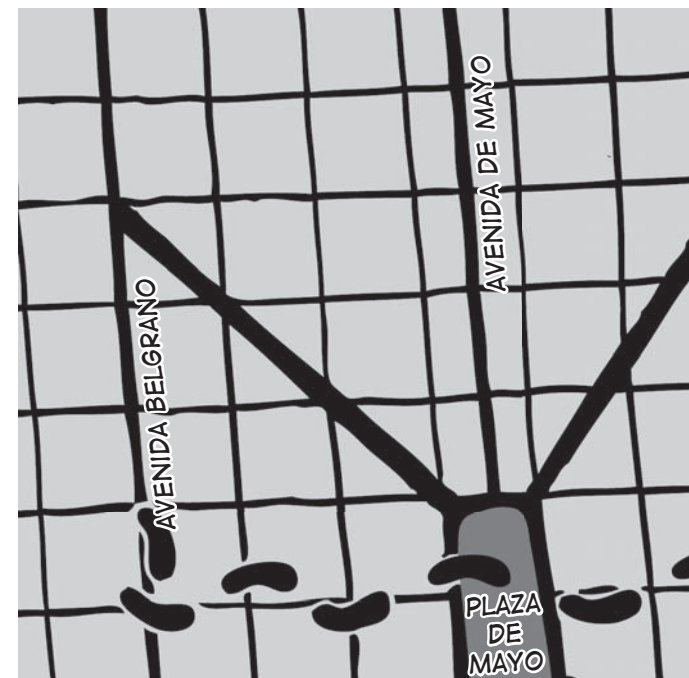
SO CARLOS MENTIONED YOU'RE STUDYING VILLA 31?

YEP, THAT'S RIGHT.



\*UBA: UNIVERSITY OF BUENOS AIRES

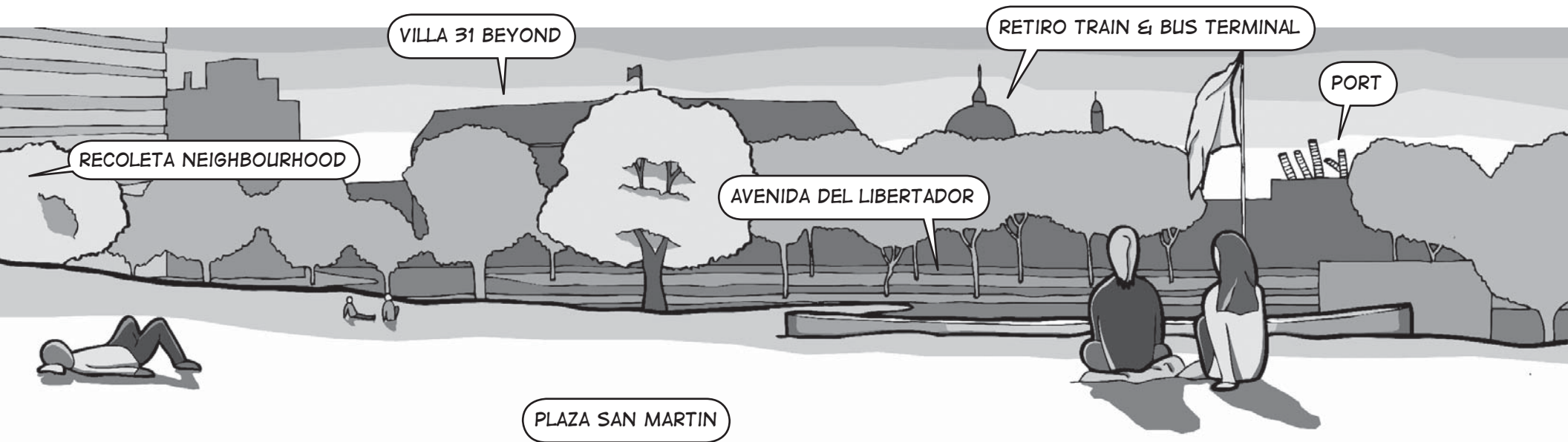








I LEAVE THE OFFICE AND WALK NORTH ALONG RECONQUISTA STREET THROUGH PLAZA DE MAYO AND THE CITY'S FINANCIAL CENTRE, ENDING AT PLAZA SAN MARTIN.





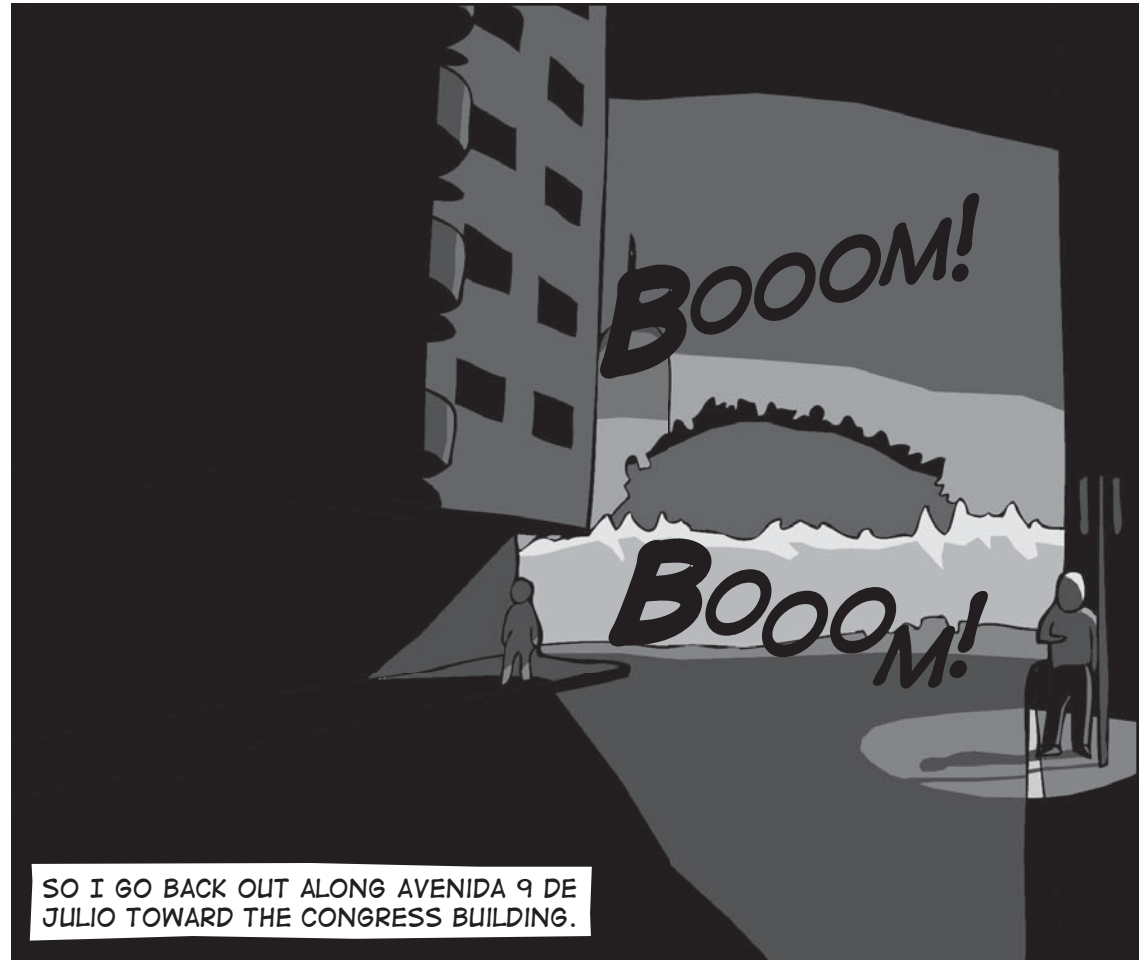
AS I TURN BACK TOWARDS MY APARTMENT ON AVENIDA 9 DE JULIO, ANOTHER PROTEST BLOCKS TRAFFIC.



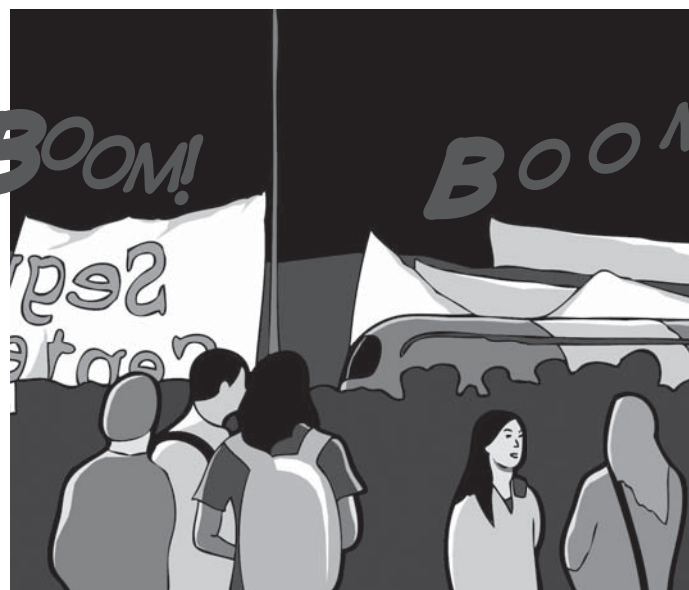
WHEN I GET HOME I RECEIVE A TEXT MESSAGE FROM CLAUDIO.

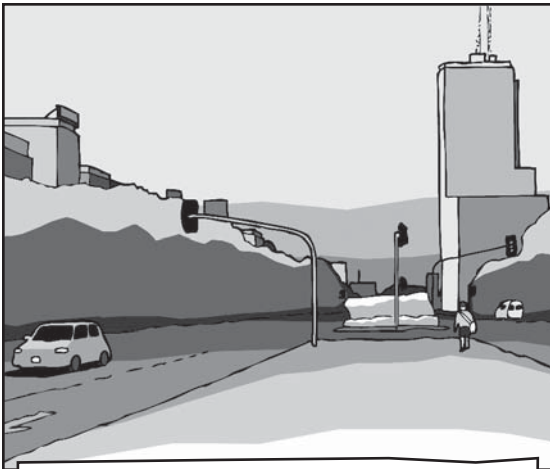


I'm going to Congress  
to a march in favour of  
the media law... if you  
also want to come.

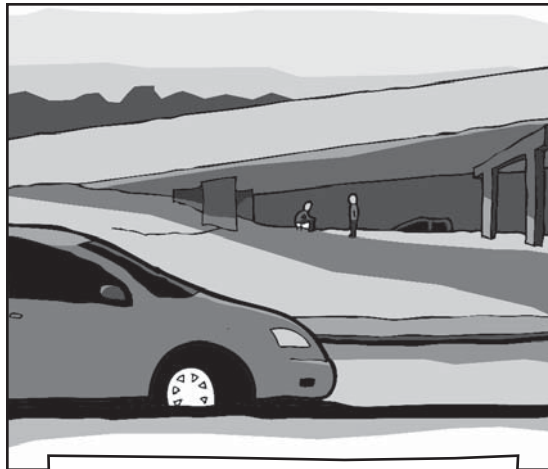


SO I GO BACK OUT ALONG AVENIDA 9 DE JULIO TOWARD THE CONGRESS BUILDING.





SATURDAY MORNING AND AVENIDA 9 DE JULIO IS EERILY QUIET. THE ABSENCE OF BUSINESS PEOPLE, STUDENTS, AND TOURISTS ON WEEKENDS MAKE THE WIDE CENTRAL AVENUE DESERTED.



I ALSO NOTICE A COUPLE OF MEN WHO HAVE TAKEN SHELTER UNDER A HIGHWAY OVERPASS ACROSS THE STREET FROM MY FRONT DOOR.



A FEW DOORS DOWN, IN A FENCED-OFF ABANDONED LOT ON THE CORNER, ANOTHER GROUP BREAKS THROUGH THE FENCE AND ERECTS SOME MAKESHIFT SHELTERS.



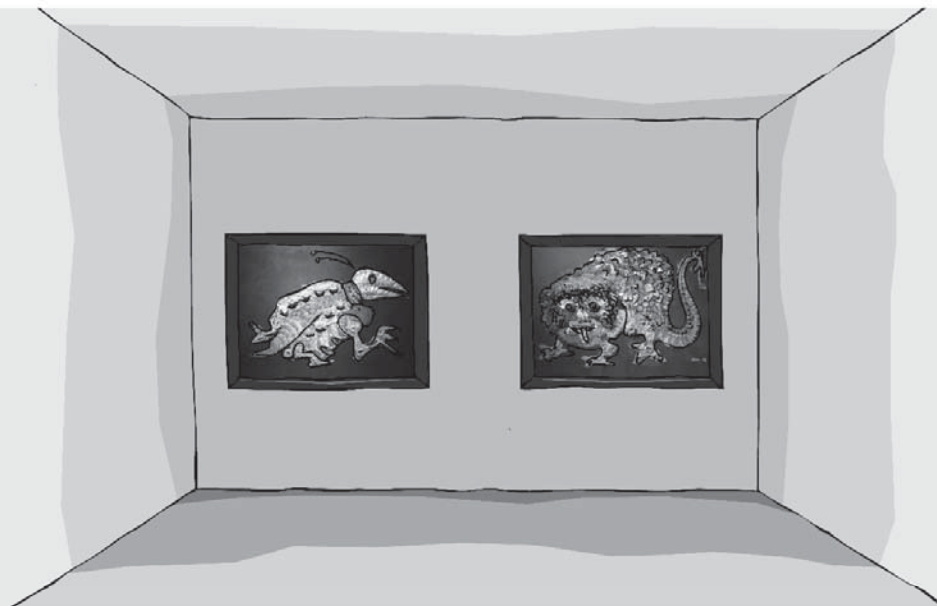
ON SUNDAY MORNING, CLAUDIO AND I WALK THROUGH THE SAN TELMO MARKET ON OUR WAY TO A BUS STOP IN LA BOCA.

ON A QUIET RESIDENTIAL STREET IN LA BOCA WE WAIT FOR THE BUS TO THE MALBA\*, WHOSE COLLECTION INCLUDES THE WORK OF ANTONIO BERNI.



One cold, cloudy night, while passing through the miserable city of Juanito a radical change in my vision of reality and its interpretation occurred.... I had just discovered, in the unpaved streets and the waste ground, scattered, abandoned materials which composed the authentic surroundings of Juanito Laguna – old wood, empty bottles, iron, cardboard boxes, metal sheets, etc., which were the elements used for the construction of shacks in misery city.<sup>1</sup>

\*MALBA: MUSEUM OF LATIN AMERICAN ART OF BUENOS AIRES





A COUPLE OF DAYS LATER I WALK  
OVER TO AVENIDA CORRIENTES TO  
MEET AN OLD FRIEND.



JON, QUE TAL?

BIEN, TANTO TIEMPO.

VILLA 31? THE ONE  
AT RETIRO?

YEA, WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I THINK YOU'RE NUTS.

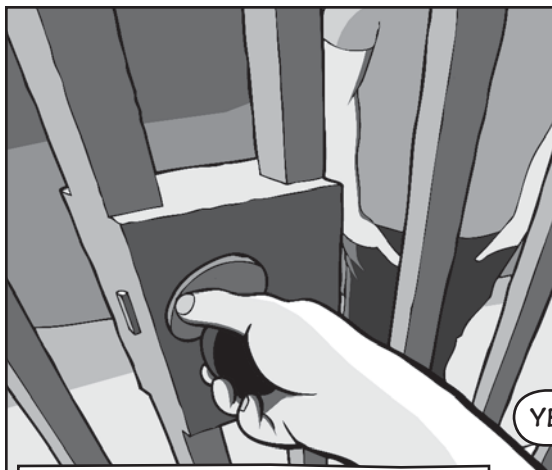


I DON'T KNOW MAN... I CAN JUST SAY, FROM MY EXPERIENCE, BE CAREFUL. YOU KNOW I WAS ROBBED THERE? THEY PUT A KNIFE UNDER MY ARM AND HELD ME UP WHILE THEY TOOK ALL MY THINGS.



YEA IT SEEMS LIKE EVERYONE IS TELLING ME THE SAME THING.





THE NEXT DAY, MY COUSIN MARTIN COMES IN FROM BURZACO TO MEET ME OVER A COFFEE.

THE FAMILY IN BURZACO WOULD REALLY LIKE TO SEE YOU, DO YOU THINK YOU CAN MAKE IT OUT ON THE WEEKEND?

YEA, DEFINITELY.

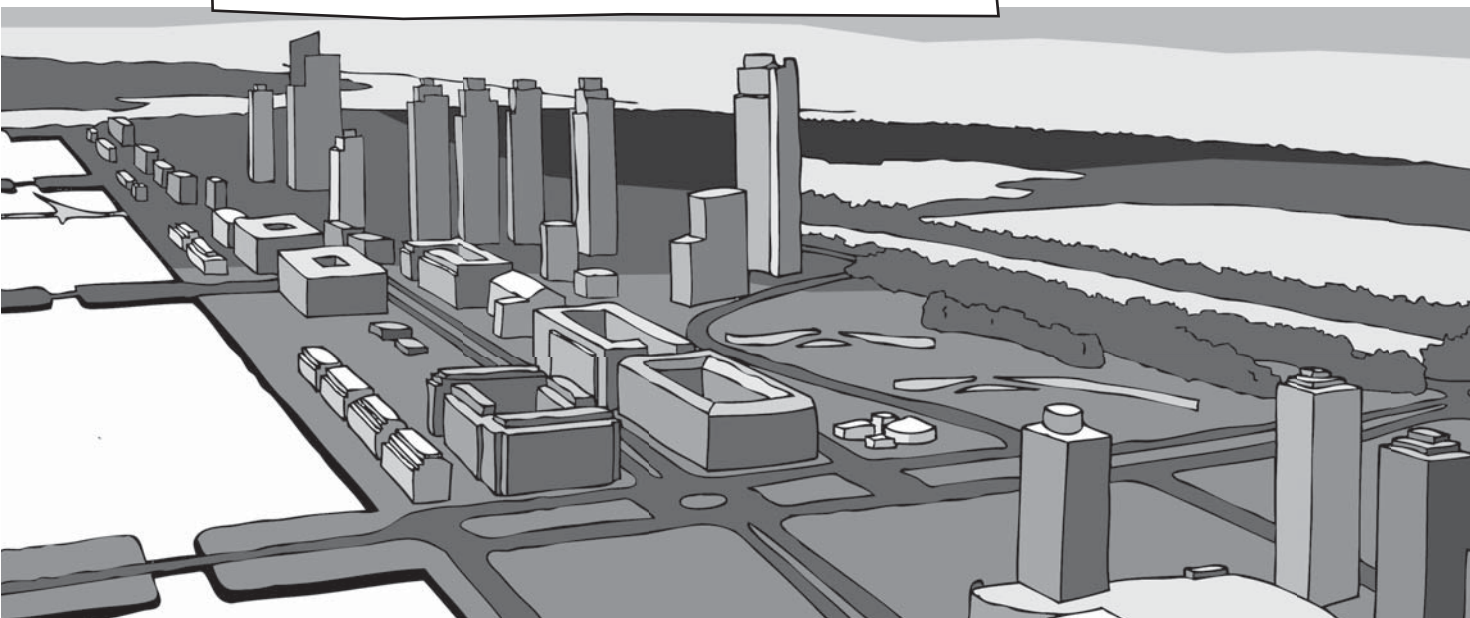


GREAT, SO I'LL COME PICK YOU UP ON SUNDAY AND WE'LL TAKE THE TRAIN OUT... IT'S ABOUT A 40 MINUTE RIDE.



SOUNDS GOOD, I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.

A COUPLE DAYS LATER I'M TAKING A WALK THROUGH PUERTO  
MADERO, THE FORMER INDUSTRIAL PORT OF BUENOS AIRES  
AND THE CITY'S NEWEST URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT.



AS I WALK AROUND PUERTO  
MADERO, I RECEIVE A PHONE  
CALL FROM A FAMILY FRIEND....



HOLA BRIAN

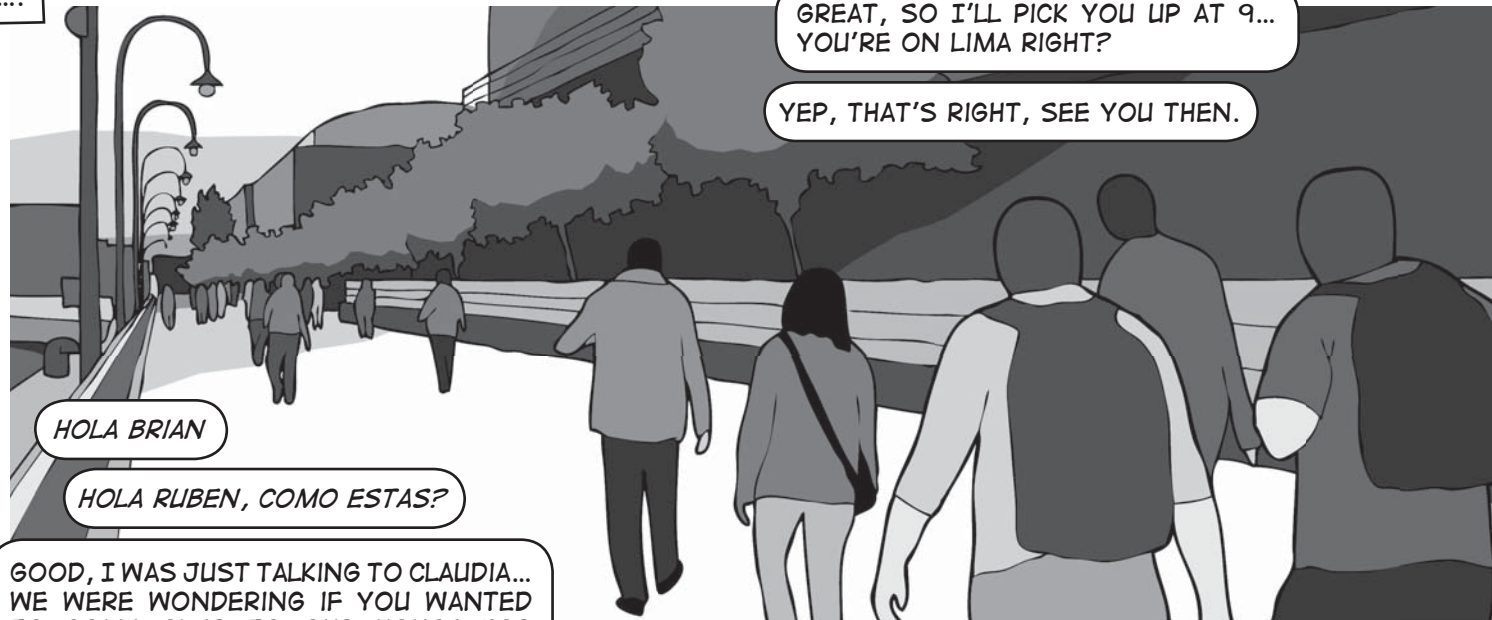
HOLA RUBEN, COMO ESTAS?

GOOD, I WAS JUST TALKING TO CLAUDIA...  
WE WERE WONDERING IF YOU WANTED  
TO COME OVER TO OUR HOUSE FOR  
DINNER TONIGHT?

I'D LOVE TO.

GREAT, SO I'LL PICK YOU UP AT 9...  
YOU'RE ON LIMA RIGHT?

YEP, THAT'S RIGHT, SEE YOU THEN.



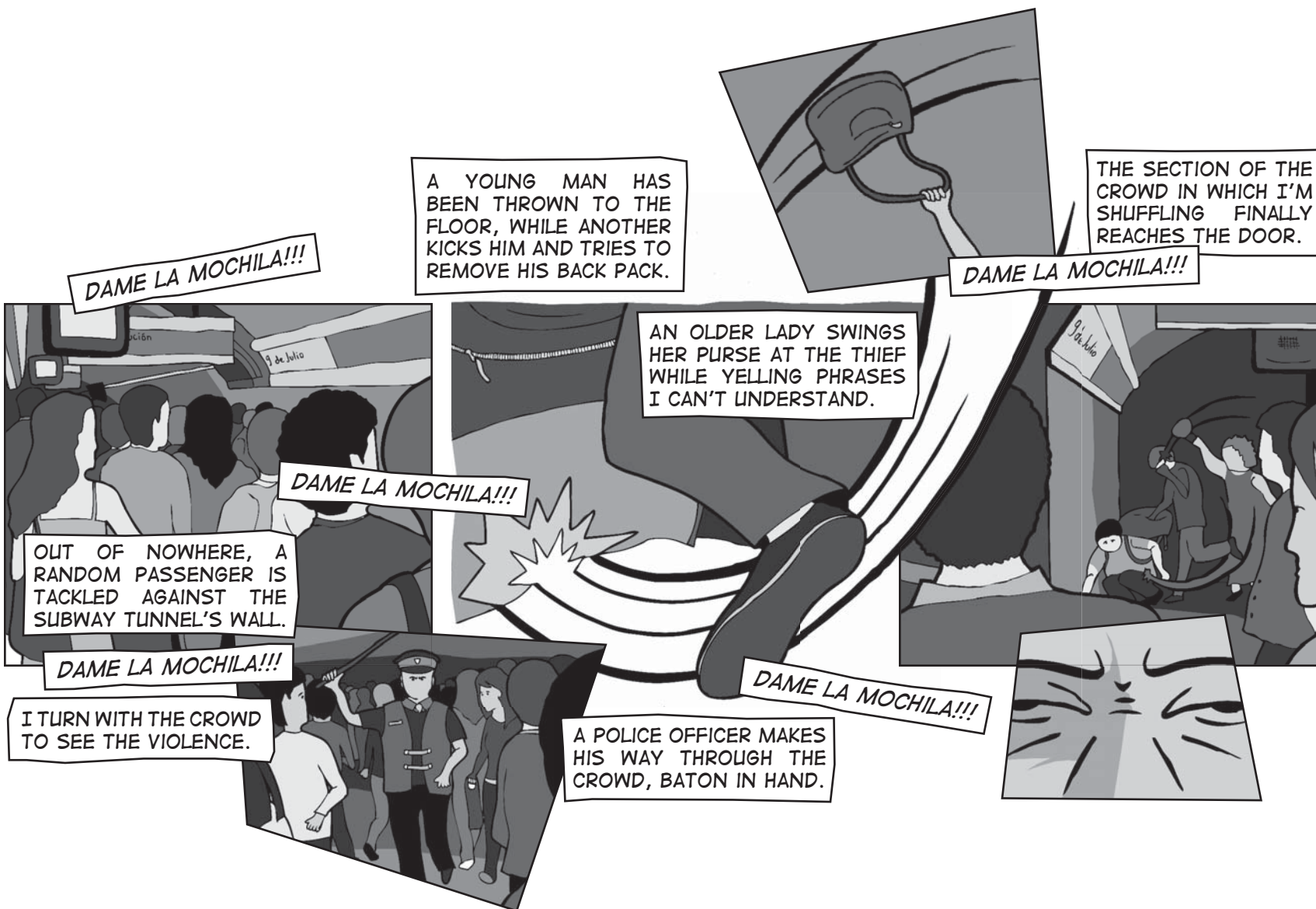


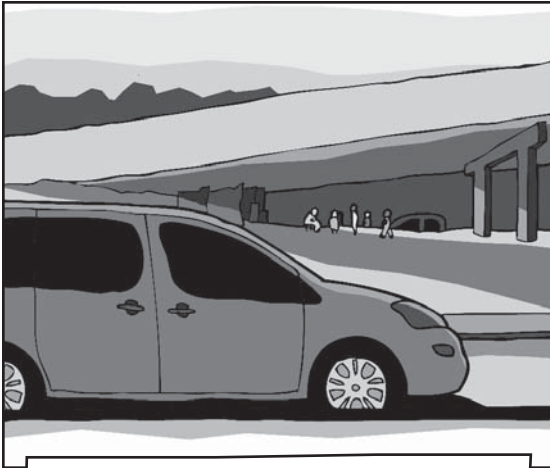
I MAKE MY WAY TO THE SUBWAY AS THE EVENING APPROACHES. IT'S RUSH HOUR AND 9 DE JULIO STATION, WHERE THREE OF THE CITY'S SIX LINES MEET, IS JUST AS BUSY AS YOU'D EXPECT FOR A CITY OF 13 MILLION.



AS I GET OFF THE TRAIN, I SHUFFLE SLOWLY WITH THE CROWD TO MAKE MY TRANSFER TO THE C LINE TOWARDS CONSTITUCION.







I TELL CLAUDIO ABOUT THE SUBWAY INCIDENT AND HE'S NOT SURPRISED. RUBEN PICKS ME UP, AND I DON'T BOTHER TO MENTION IT AGAIN.



SO HOW HAS YOUR VISIT BEEN SO FAR?

GOOD... I HAVEN'T HAD MUCH LUCK WITH MY WORK YET, BUT THERE'S TIME.



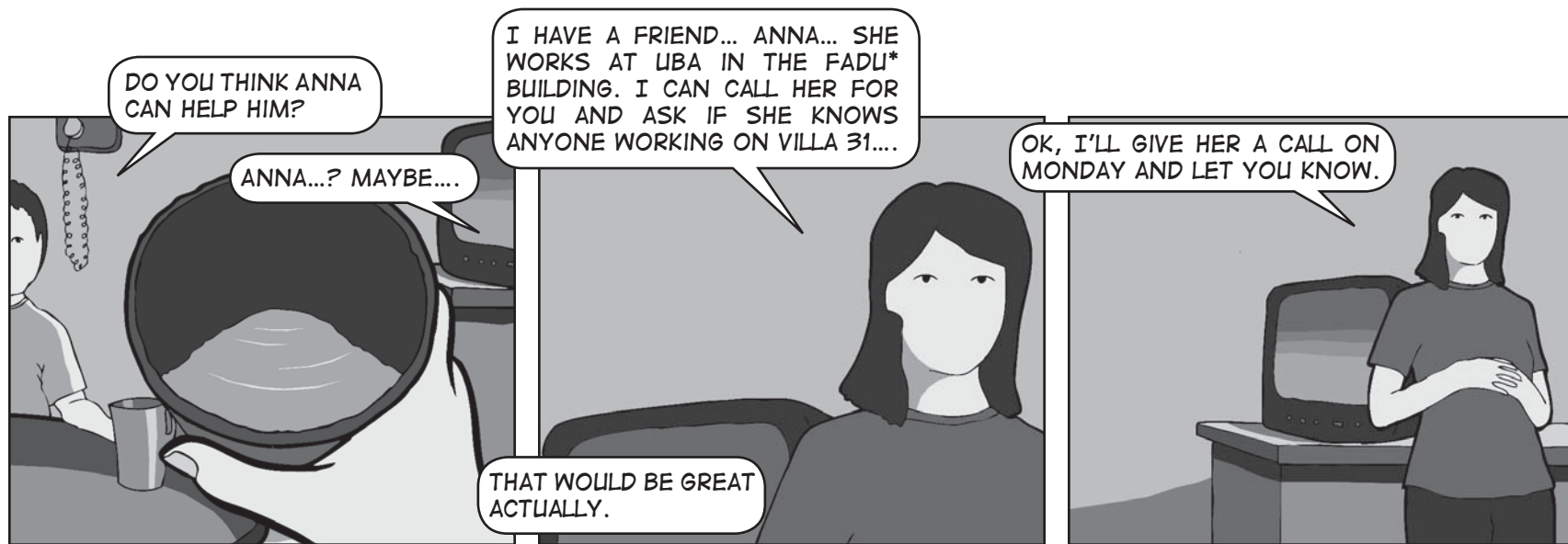
BRIAN, TANTO TIEMPO.





YEA, I'M WRITING A MASTER'S THESIS AND I WANTED TO STUDY THE INFORMAL CITIES OF THE THIRD WORLD. I'M FASCINATED BY THE DEVELOPMENT OF SLUMS; HOW THEY CONSTRUCT AND ORGANIZE THEMSELVES AND HOW THEY RELATE TO THE CITY, BOTH AS A SOURCE OF WORKERS AND AS AN ALMOST UNKNOWN TERRITORY TO THE FORMAL CITY DWELLERS.

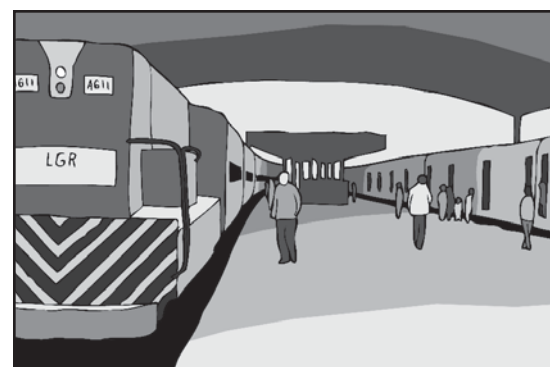
VILLA 31 IS SO CLOSE TO THE CENTRE OF BUENOS AIRES, AND YET SO LARGELY IGNORED BY THE GENERAL POPULATION. I'M VERY INTERESTED IN EXPLORING THAT BOUNDARY BETWEEN VILLA 31 AND THE REST OF THE CITY. I CAN HOPEFULLY GO TO VILLA 31 MYSELF AND GO HOME WITH ENOUGH FIELD WORK TO BE ABLE TO PRODUCE A PROJECT THAT EXPOSES AND BREAKS DOWN THAT BOUNDARY.



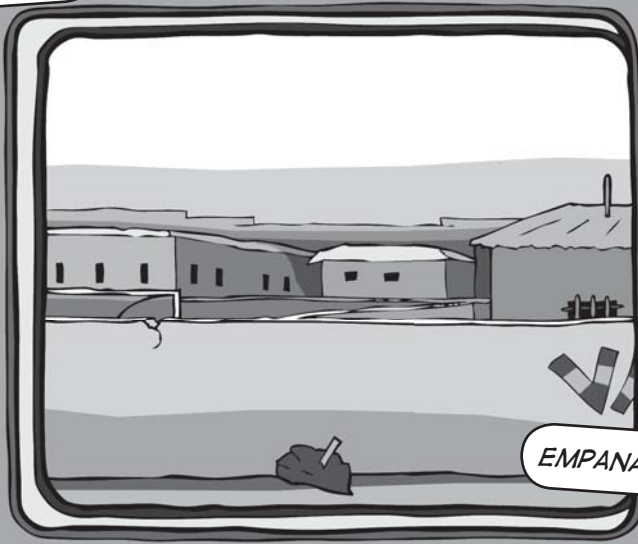
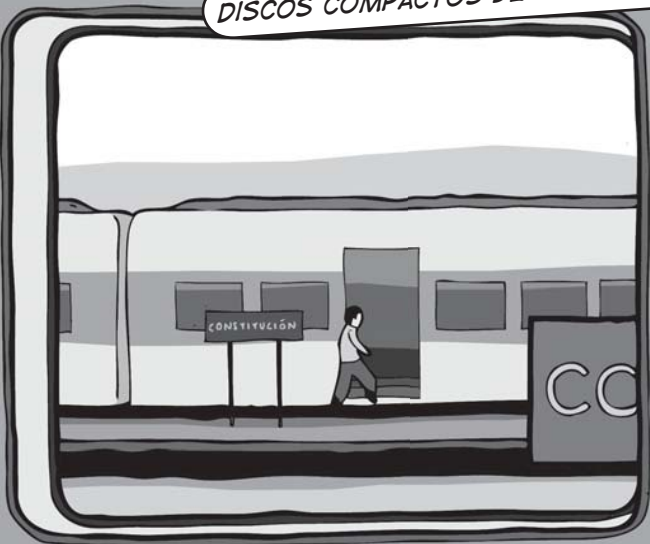
\*FADU: FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN & URBANISM



A COUPLE OF DAYS LATER MARTIN CAME TO PICK ME UP AND WE WENT TOGETHER TO TIA ELIDA'S HOUSE IN BURZACO.

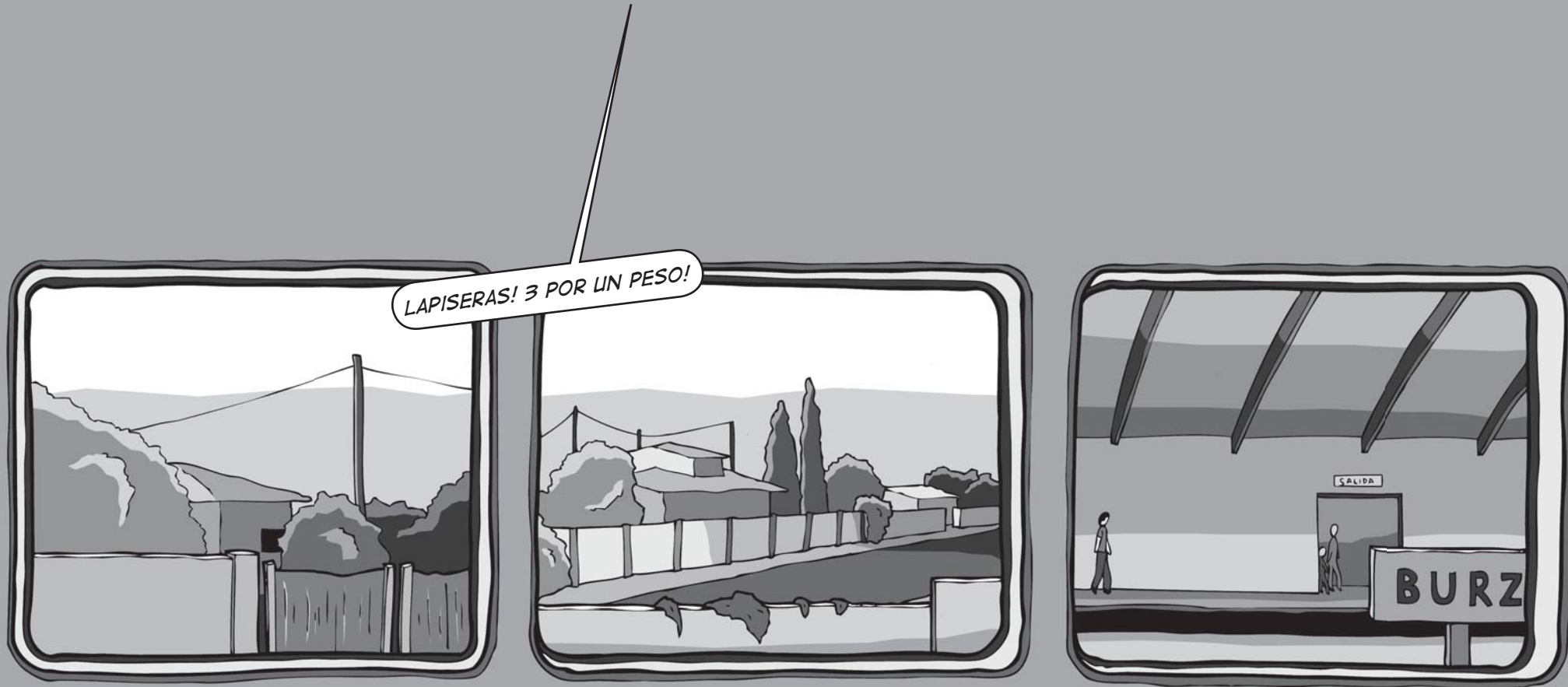


DISCOS COMPACTOS DE CUMBIA 3 PESOS!



EMPANADAS! MASITAS DE DULCE!





AS WE TAKE THE TRAIN SOUTH FROM CONSTITUCION, PASSING THROUGH THE SUBURBS OF AVELLANEDA, LANUS AND ADROGUE, THE CITY SLOWLY CHANGES FROM THE DENSE APARTMENT BUILDINGS OF THE CAPITAL TO THE LOW-RISE HOMES OF THE OUTLYING SUBURBS.

THE NEXT DAY, BACK IN BUENOS AIRES....



HOLA?

HOLA BRIAN HABLA CLAUDIA.

COMO ESTAS?

BIEN, Y VOS?

BIEN.

I JUST GOT OFF THE PHONE WITH ANNA... MY FRIEND AT UBA.

YEA?

SHE SAID THERE ARE ACTUALLY A FEW PROFESSORS DOING WORK ON VILLA 31. SHE DOESN'T KNOW ANY OF THEM BECAUSE SHE WORKS IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE, BUT SHE DID SAY YOU SHOULD GO TO FADU, IF YOU ASK AROUND, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO FIND SOMEONE TO HELP YOU....





OK, YEA I'M LIKELY GOING TO LBA TOMORROW.

OK GOOD. I WAS ALSO THINKING, IF YOU WANT, I CAN PICK YOU UP ONE DAY AND WE CAN GO DRIVE AROUND VILLA LUGANO\*, THAT WAY WE'LL PASS BY VILLA 1-11-14\* ON THE WAY....

YEA DEFINITELY THAT WOULD BE GREAT.

AND ONE MORE THING... RUBEN WANTS TO ASK IF YOU WANT TO GO OUT FOR DINNER ON SATURDAY NIGHT. ARE YOU FREE?

YEP.

OK, GREAT, THERE'S A LITTLE RESTAURANT NEAR OUR HOUSE, BUT RUBEN WILL CALL YOU LATER AND YOU GUYS CAN ARRANGE A TIME.

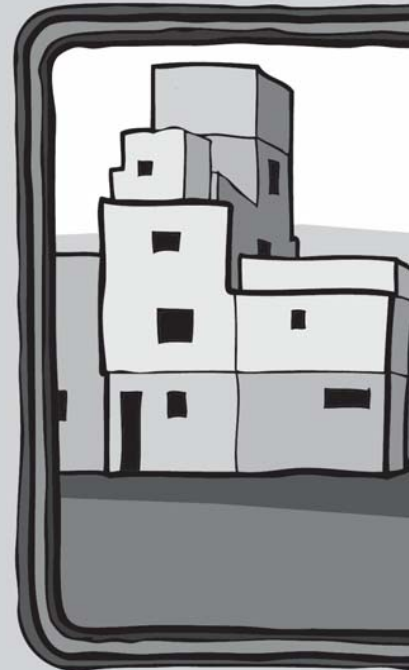
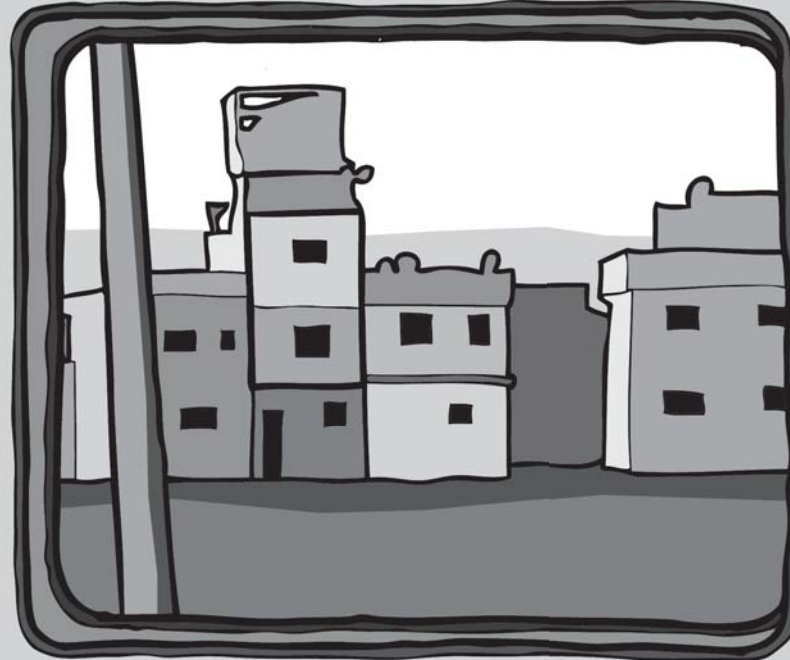
SOUNDS GOOD.

OK, SEE YOU LATER.

\*VILLA LUGANO: A HOUSING DEVELOPMENT BUILT DURING THE 1970'S IN A SOUTH-WESTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD; ORIGINALLY INTENDED TO HOUSE LOW-INCOME FAMILIES, IT IS NOW OCCUPIED BY THE MIDDLE-CLASS WHILE THE LOW-INCOME FAMILIES LIVE IN NEIGHBOURING SLUMS.

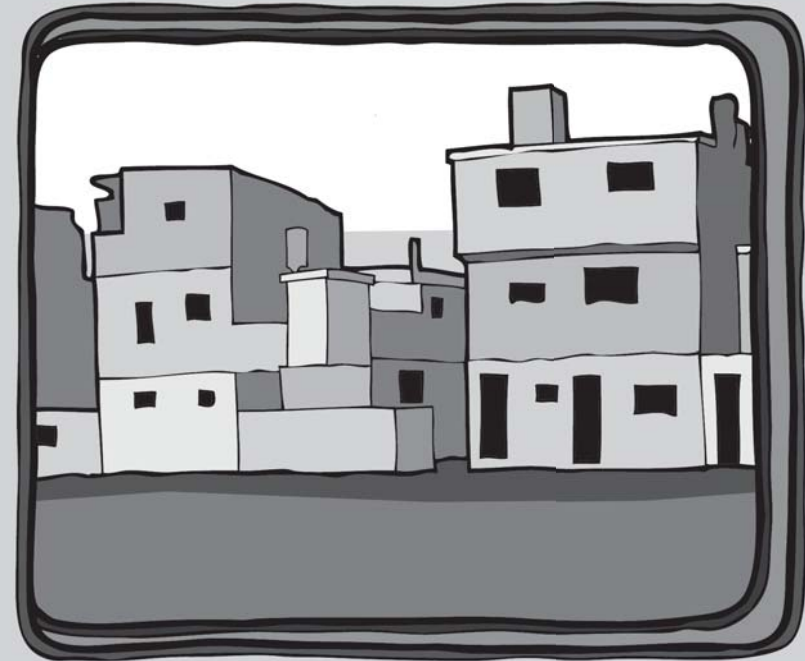
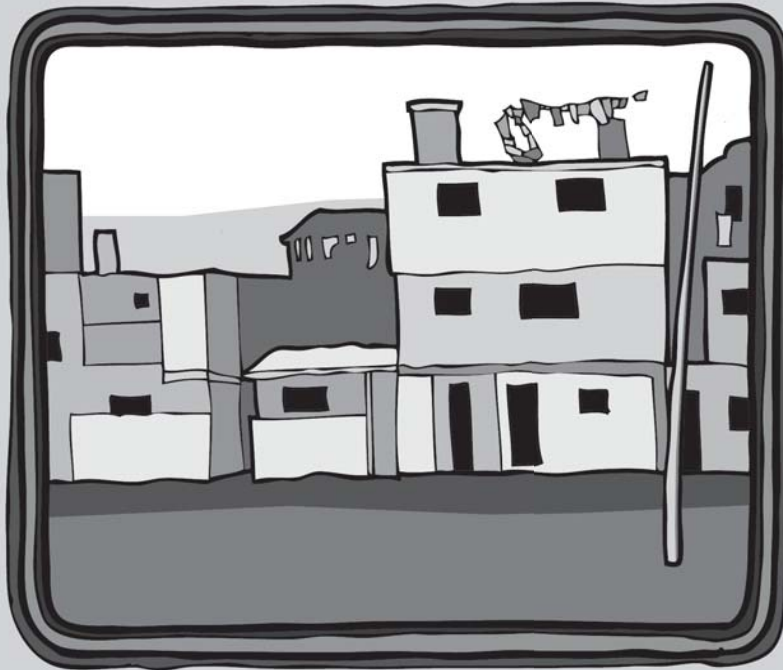
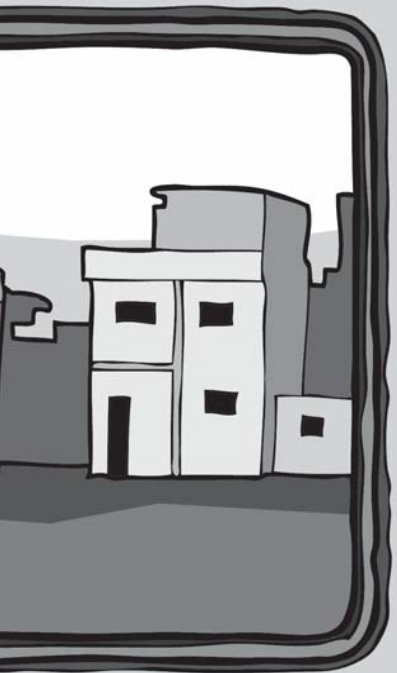
\*VILLA 1-11-14: A SLUM NEIGHBOURING VILLA LUGANO. COMPOSED OF VILLA 1, VILLA 11, AND VILLA 14, IT IS ONE OF THE CITY'S LARGEST AND MOST DANGEROUS INFORMAL COMMUNITIES.

THE NEXT DAY, I TAKE THE NORTHBOUND TRAIN  
OUT OF RETIRO STATION ON MY WAY TO UBA.  
FROM THE TRAIN'S WINDOW, I GET A CLEAR VIEW  
OF VILLA 31 AS IT SPRAWLS ALONG THE TRACKS.





They clustered in the liminal zones or “in-between” spaces: between the Riachuelo and the railroad lines leaving Estacion Buenos Aires; between Avenida Coronel Cruz and Avenida Roca, major thoroughfares running southwest to Avenida General Paz; between the Autopista General Dellepiane running southwest to the airport, Avenida del Trabajo, and railway offshoots from the Buenos Aires line; and between the multiple railroad lines leading



west out of Retiro Station and Avenida Juan B. Justo that crosses them. Situated far away from subway lines leading to the downtown area, the villas in the Federal Capital provided little access to other parts of the city, except on circuitous bus lines. Their location within the Federal Capital underlined the relationship of their residents to the larger society. Living in the middle of the city proper, these *villeros* were isolated and immobilized despite their proximity to multiple transportation arteries.<sup>2</sup>

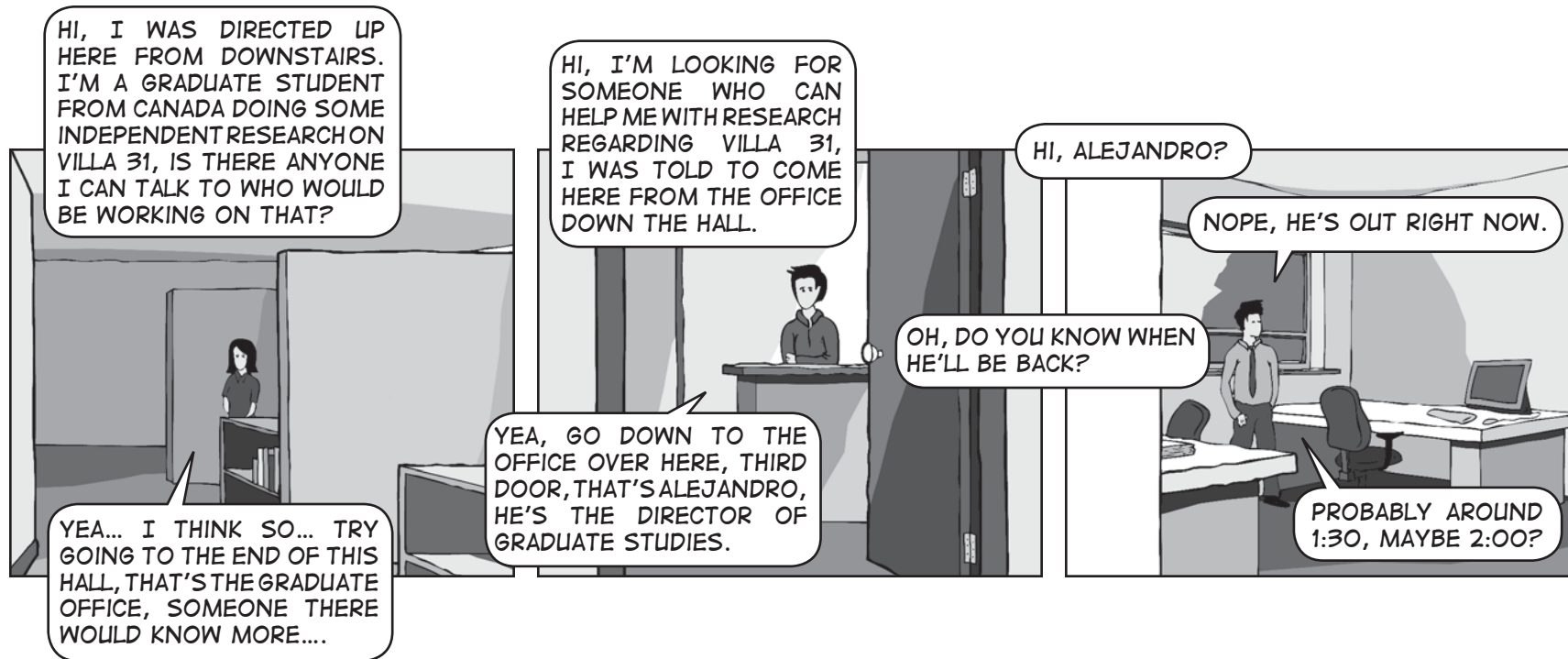
I ARRIVE AT THE UBA'S CIUDAD UNIVERSITARIA BY BUS.



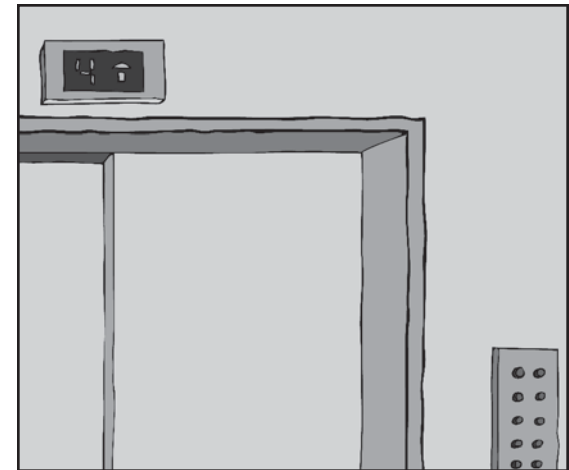
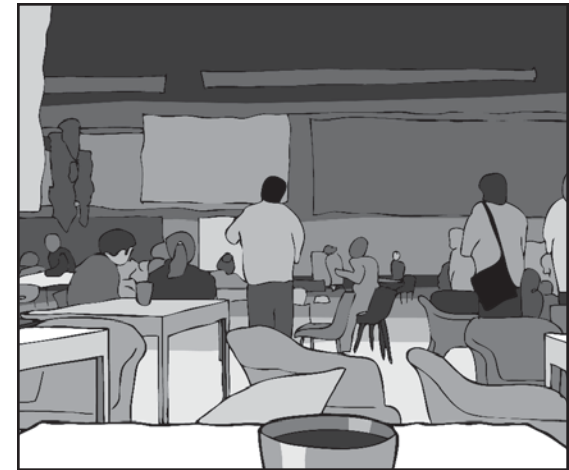
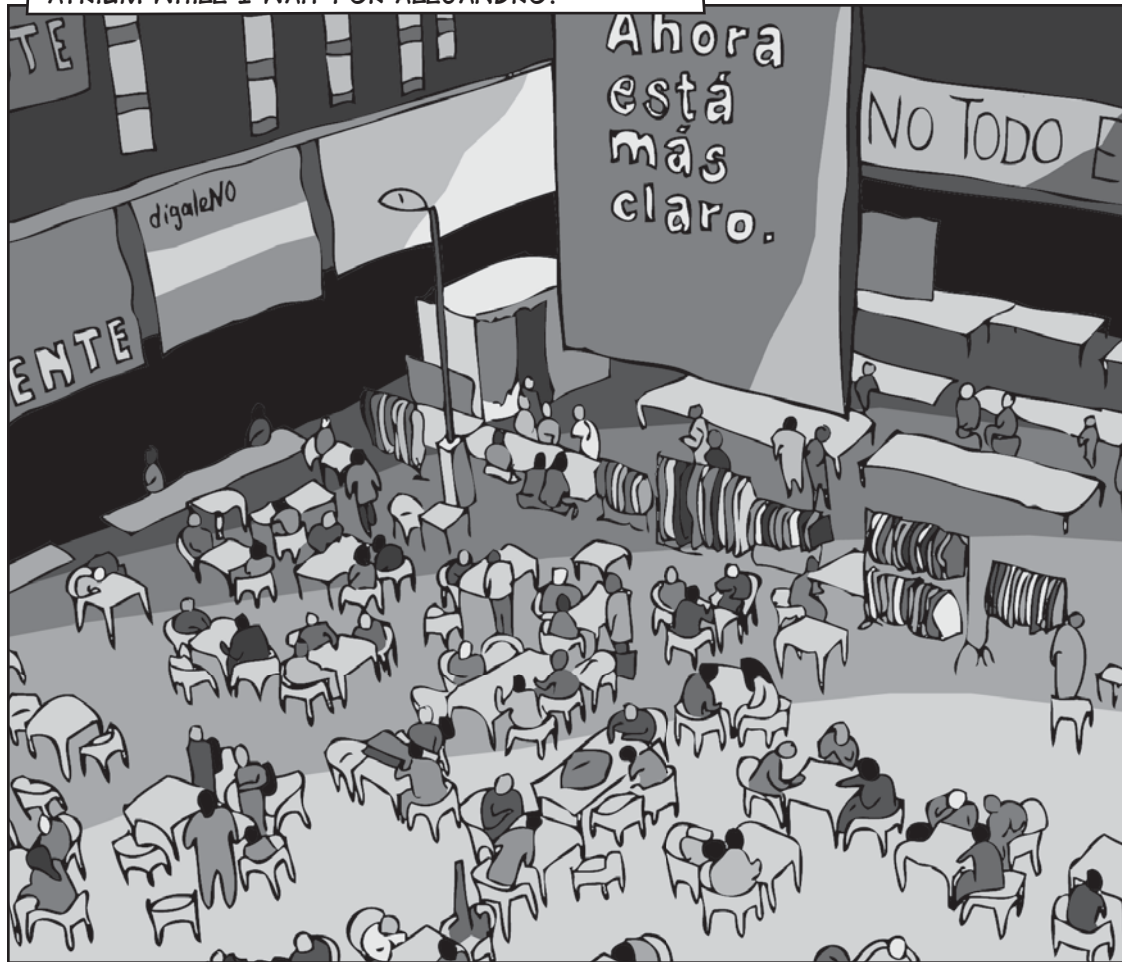
HI I WAS WONDERING IF YOU CAN HELP ME OUT... I'M A GRADUATE STUDENT IN ARCHITECTURE FROM CANADA, AND I'M HERE DOING SOME INDEPENDENT RESEARCH ON VILLA 31, IS THERE ANYONE I CAN TALK TO WHO WOULD BE WORKING ON THAT?

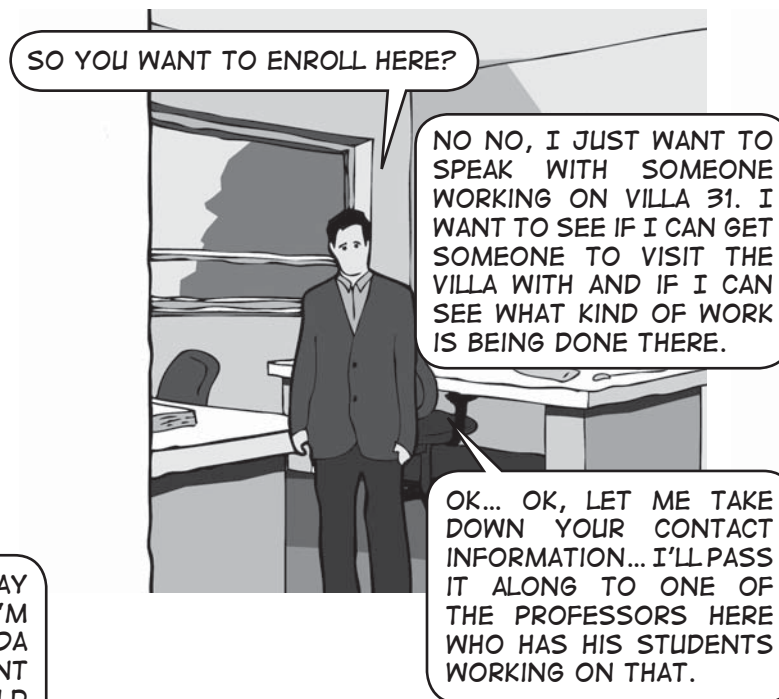


YOU'D HAVE TO GO UP TO THE FOURTH FLOOR, GET OFF THE ELEVATOR AND GO LEFT, THEN RIGHT, AND YOU'LL SEE THE FOREIGN GRADUATE STUDENTS OFFICE.



IT'S ONLY NOON, SO I GO BACK DOWNSTAIRS AND GRAB A COFFEE AND A SANDWICH IN THE BUILDING'S ATRIUM WHILE I WAIT FOR ALEJANDRO.







THE FOLLOWING EVENING, AS I WAIT  
FOR A CAB IN THE POURING RAIN....











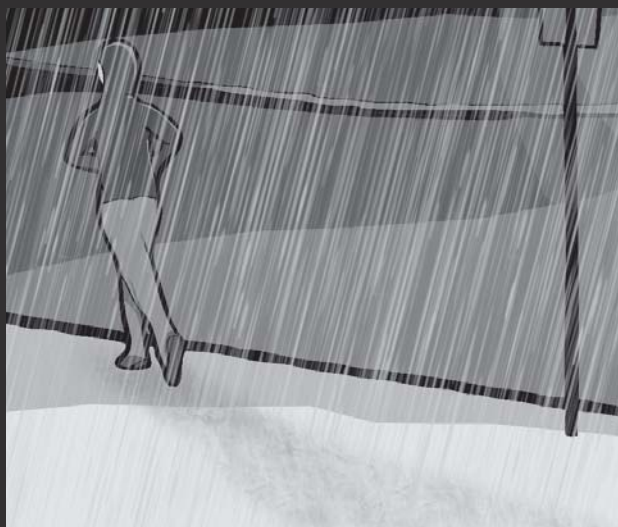
BOY: Do you have any change?  
ME: No I don't.



BOY: Are you sure? Do you have any change?  
ME: No, no I don't.

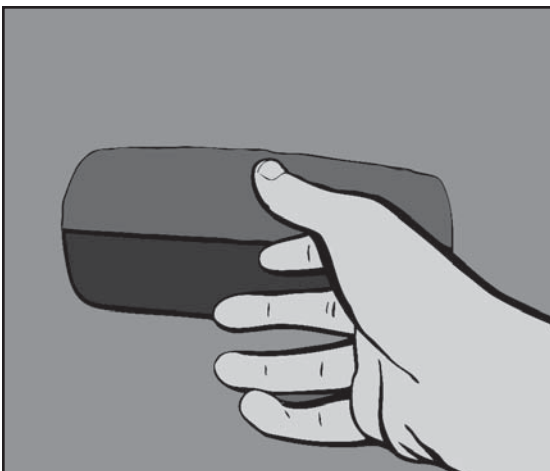
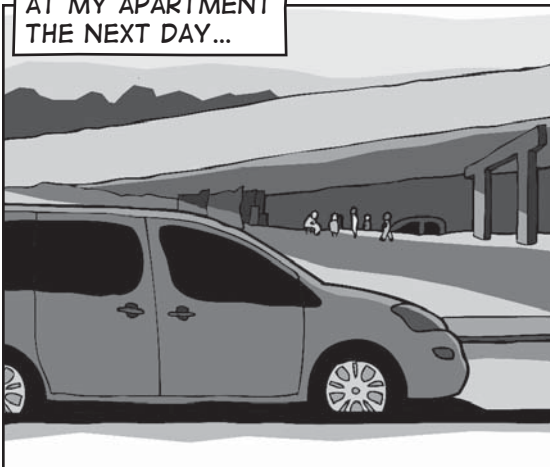


BOY: OK, this is a robbery, I have a hammer so give me your wallet or I'll break your head.





RUBEN PICKS ME UP  
AT MY APARTMENT  
THE NEXT DAY...



WE'RE GOING TO MEET CLAUDIA  
AND THE KIDS AT A RESTAURANT  
NEAR PARQUE CENTENARIO....



HOW IS YOUR  
STUFF GOING?



IT'S GOING OK... I'VE SEEN  
A FEW PLACES FROM THE  
TRAIN, INCLUDING VILLA 31  
WHEN I TOOK THE TRAIN  
TO UBA. I ALSO WENT  
TO BURZACO TO VISIT MY  
COUSINS A FEW DAYS AGO.

OH DID YOU?



YEA... I'M REALLY LOOKING  
FORWARD TO GOING TO  
VILLA LUGANO AND VILLA  
1-11-14 WITH CLAUDIA.

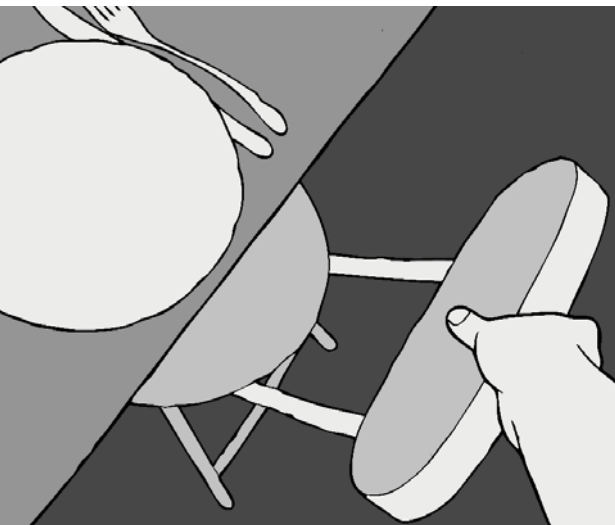
YEA, THAT SHOULD BE  
INTERESTING... OK, THE  
RESTAURANT IS JUST  
UP HERE.





OK, CAN WE JUST GET A PARILLA... DO YOU WANT ANY WINE? OK, A BOTTLE OF RED... AND MAYBE... WHAT'S YOUR SALAD? JUST A REGULAR HOUSE SALAD? YEA, OK, LET'S GET ONE OF THOSE....

SO HOW ARE THINGS GOING?



IT'S GOING OK, I WAS JUST TELLING RUBEN ON THE WAY HERE, I SAW VILLA 31 FROM THE TRAIN BUT THAT'S THE CLOSEST I'VE BEEN... AND I DIDN'T TELL HIM THIS, BUT I WAS ACTUALLY MUGGED LAST NIGHT, IT WAS PRETTY SCARY....

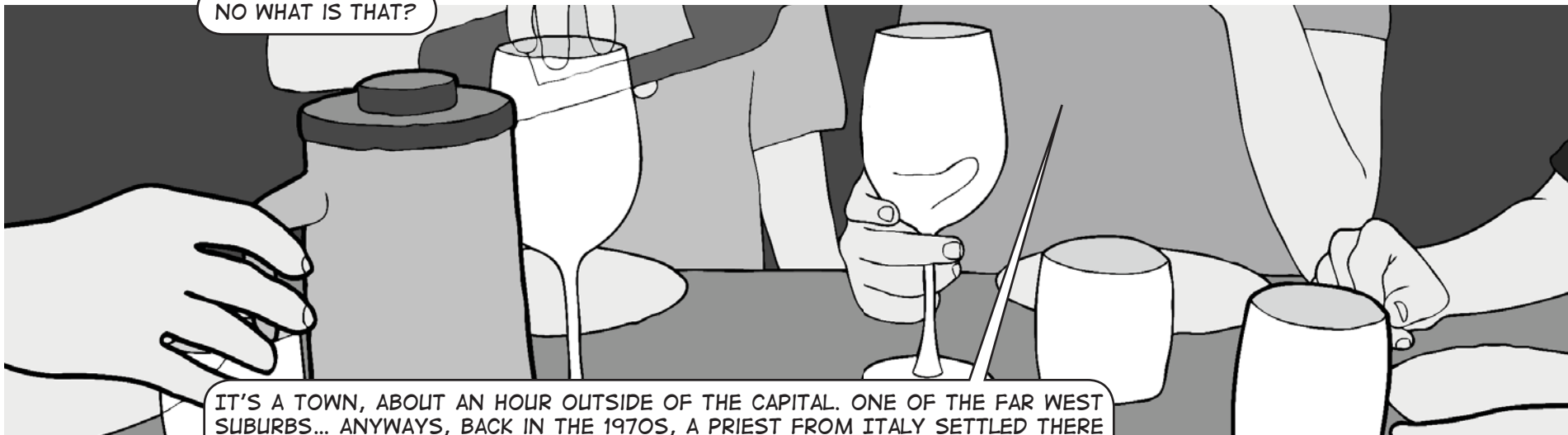
BAH! NOW YOU'RE A REAL PORTEÑO!

JULIAN! THAT'S TERRIBLE  
BRIAN, ARE YOU OK?

OH YEA, I'M OK, IT WASN'T ACTUALLY A BIG  
DEAL, I ONLY HAD ABOUT 90 PESOS ON ME....

OH, YEA THAT'S OK. I FORGOT  
TO ASK YOU THE OTHER DAY  
ACTUALLY... DO YOU KNOW  
ABOUT GONZALEZ CATAN?

NO WHAT IS THAT?



IT'S A TOWN, ABOUT AN HOUR OUTSIDE OF THE CAPITAL. ONE OF THE FAR WEST SUBURBS... ANYWAYS, BACK IN THE 1970S, A PRIEST FROM ITALY SETTLED THERE AND, BACK THEN, IT WAS A POOR AREA, ONE OF THESE INFORMAL PARTS OF THE CITY, LIKE VILLA 31 RIGHT? HE WANTED TO BUILD A CHURCH THERE, AND RAISED MONEY AND GOT THE HELP FROM MANY PEOPLE IN THE AREA TO BUILD IT. BUT ONCE IT WAS FINISHED HE WENT ON AND KEPT BUILDING OTHER PLACES IN THE COMMUNITY THAT HAVE TURNED THE PLACE AROUND. THEY ACTUALLY REALLY LEFT IT QUITE NICE, THERE IS AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, HIGH SCHOOL, AND THEY'RE BUILDING A POST-SECONDARY SCHOOL NOW, AND THERE ARE ALSO SEVERAL OFFICES AND A COMMUNAL KITCHEN... HIS NAME WAS PADRE MARIO, SO THE PLACE NOW IS CALLED THE FUNDACION PADRE MARIO. ALTHOUGH THE AREA IS STILL POOR, THEY MANAGED TO BRING IN SERVICES THAT OTHERWISE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN THERE.



BUT, ANYWAYS, ONE OF MY FORMER STUDENTS IS FROM GONZALEZ CATAN... SHE IS NOW GIVING BACK AND RUNNING SOME PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS THERE. I WAS THINKING WE CAN GO WITH HER ONE DAY SOON SO YOU CAN SEE THE PLACE.



OK, I'LL SEE WHAT HER SCHEDULE IS LIKE, AND I'LL LET YOU KNOW WHEN WE CAN GO.



HOW ABOUT WE GO TO SAN TELMO FOR A COUPLE DRINKS?

YEA THAT SOUNDS GREAT.



SO I WAS THINKING I MIGHT WANT TO MOVE TO ANOTHER PART OF THE CITY... I MIGHT START LOOKING FOR A TEMPORARY PLACE AND SEE IF ANYTHING COMES THROUGH.



OH YEA? I ACTUALLY HAVE ANOTHER APARTMENT THAT I STAY AT IN NUÑEZ... IT'S NEAR MY OFFICE, SO I STAY THERE WHEN I WORK LATE. BUT IT'S A NICE PLACE IN A GOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD, MAYBE WE CAN WORK SOMETHING OUT IF YOU WANT?

HM... OK LET ME THINK ABOUT IT, I'LL LET YOU KNOW.

A FEW DAYS LATER, CLAUDIA COMES TO PICK ME UP. SHE IS HELPING ME MOVE FROM MY APARTMENT ON CALLE LIMA TO RUBEN'S NUÑEZ APARTMENT.



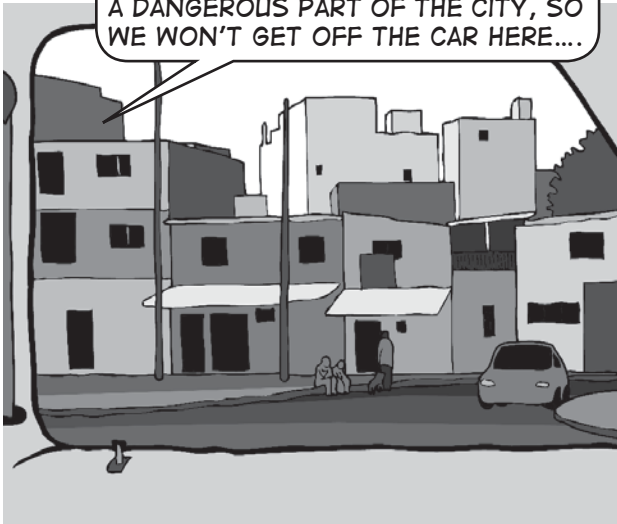
SO I WAS THINKING WE COULD DRIVE OVER TO VILLA LUGANO NOW, AND PASS BY VILLA 1-11-14 ON THE WAY....



OK, SOUNDS GOOD.



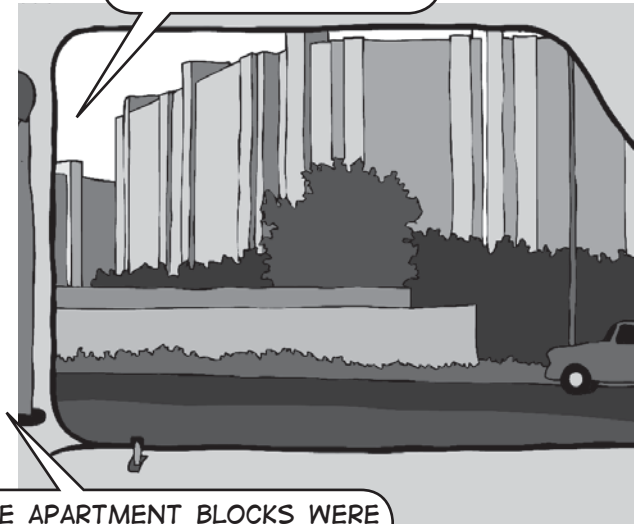
THIS ON YOUR RIGHT IS VILLA 1-11-14...  
WOW, IT HAS REALLY GROWN SINCE  
THE LAST TIME I'VE BEEN HERE. IT'S  
A DANGEROUS PART OF THE CITY, SO  
WE WON'T GET OFF THE CAR HERE....



AND COMING UP HERE  
IS VILLA LUGANO. THIS  
WHOLE NEIGHBOURHOOD  
IS CALLED VILLA LUGANO,  
BUT THE COMPLEX  
OF BUILDINGS HERE  
IS ACTUALLY BARRIO  
SAVIO, OR SOMETHING  
LIKE THAT.



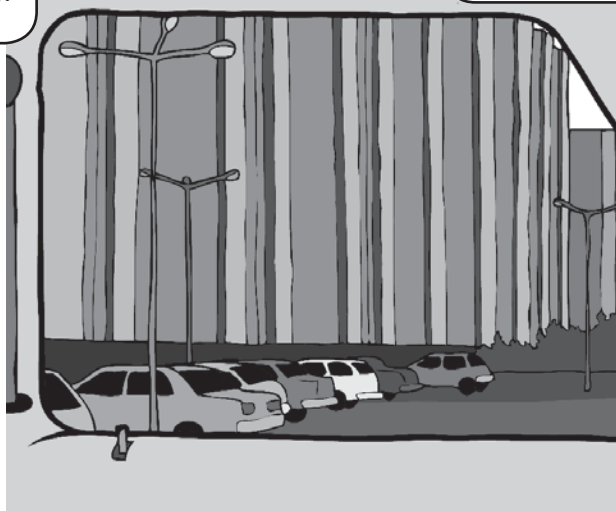
THE APARTMENT BLOCKS WERE  
BUILT THROUGHOUT THE 1970'S  
FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES,  
BUT IT'S MOSTLY MIDDLE-CLASS  
PEOPLE LIVING HERE....



SO YOU CAN SEE HOW MASSIVE  
THE BLOCKS ARE. OVER THERE,  
YOU SEE THE SECOND FLOOR?  
THAT'S ALL RETAIL SPACE.



AND THIS IS THE PREMETRO... IT'S AN LRT  
THAT CONNECTS TO THE SUBWAY, SO IT  
SERVICES THIS NEIGHBOURHOOD. OK, WE  
HAVE TO GO HOME AND PICK UP THE KIDS,  
THEY HAVE PRACTICE TONIGHT AT THE CLUB.

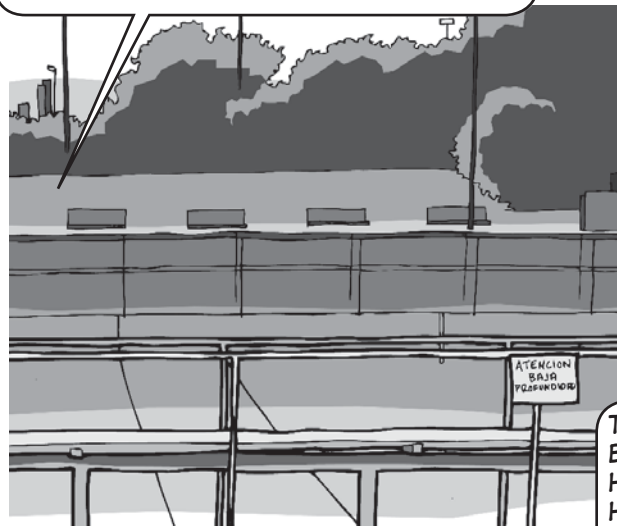




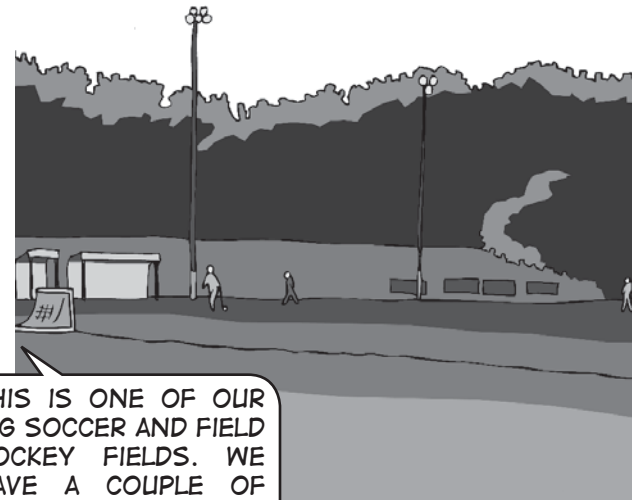
SO THIS IS THE ENTRANCE  
HERE... WE ACTUALLY HAVE  
ID'S TO GET IN, WE'LL  
JUST TELL THEM YOU'RE  
MY NEPHEW VISITING FROM  
CANADA AND THEN I'LL SHOW  
YOU AROUND A LITTLE BIT....



THIS IS OUR SWIMMING POOL. IT'S  
USED BY OUR SWIM TEAMS, BUT THERE  
ARE ALSO FREE TIMES FOR ALL OTHER  
MEMBERS... IT WILL BE FILLED NEXT  
WEEK FOR THE START OF THE SUMMER.



THIS IS ONE OF OUR  
BIG SOCCER AND FIELD  
HOCKEY FIELDS. WE  
HAVE A COUPLE OF  
THESE THROUGHOUT  
THE GROUNDS... ONE  
OF THE OTHER FIELDS  
IS WHERE WE HOST BIG  
CONCERTS, I THINK  
AC/DC WILL BE COMING  
IN A FEW MONTHS?







SHORTLY AFTER LEAVING THE CLUB, WE PASS THROUGH A PARK AS THE SUN BEGINS TO SET. THE STREET IS LINED WITH PROSTITUTES AND TRANSVESTITES. I'VE HEARD BUENOS AIRES HAS LIBERAL VIEWS TOWARDS SEXUALITY. AS IF THIS WAS EXPECTED, NOTHING IS MENTIONED IN THE CAR AND WE DRIVE OFF.

WE GET BACK TO THE APARTMENT AND RUBEN IS ALREADY HOME, SITTING ATTENTIVELY IN THE KITCHEN WITH THE TV TUNED TO THE MATCH BETWEEN INDEPENDIENTE AND COLON DE SANTA FE.

LINA SALIDA EMOCIONANTE...  
NATURALMENTE POR EL ESTADIO...  
PORQUE SALIERON...  
VARIOS IDOLOS HISTORICOS....

PEDIMOS UNA PIZZA?... QUE  
YA EMPIEZA EL PARTIDO.



TV: An emotional exit... naturally for the stadium... because we see... various historical idols....  
RUBEN: Shall we order a pizza?... The game is about to start.

EL CENTRO DE MAREQUE,  
ALLI ESTA SILVERAAAAA,  
GOOOOOLLLLLL!!!! INDEPENDIENTE  
LE ESTA GANANDO A COLON! 1 A  
0 EN 12 MINUTOS!



TV: The cross from Mareque, there is Silveraaaaa, goaaal!!!!!! Independiente is beating Colon! 1 to 0 in 12 minutes!

SE VIENE GOMEZ! SE VIENE  
GOMEZ! NIETO PARA EL EMPATE,  
NIETO PARA EL EMPATE! GOL!  
GOOOOOLLLLLL!!!!!!



TV: Here come Gomez! Here comes Gomez! Nieto for the tie, Nieto for the tie! Goal! Goaaal!!!!!!



*ESTA ESPERANDO SILVERA, SE  
LA LLEVA EL 22 PIATTI, SERA EL  
SEGUNDO? SI! GOOOOLLLLLLLL!!!!  
INDEPENDIENTE!!!*



TV: Silvera is waiting, number 22 Piatti takes it, will it be the second? Yes! Goaaaaa!!!!!!!!!!!! Indep-  
diente!!!

*SEÑORAS Y SEÑORES SE  
VIENE PIATTI! SE VIENE EL  
TERCERO! GOOOOLLLLLLLL!!!!  
INDEPENDIENTE 3 COLON 1!*



TV: Ladies and Gentlemen here comes Piatti! Here comes the third! Goaaal!!!!!!!!!!!! Independiente 3  
Colon 1!

*SEÑORAS Y SEÑORES ACABA  
DE GANAR INDEPENDIENTE!!!*



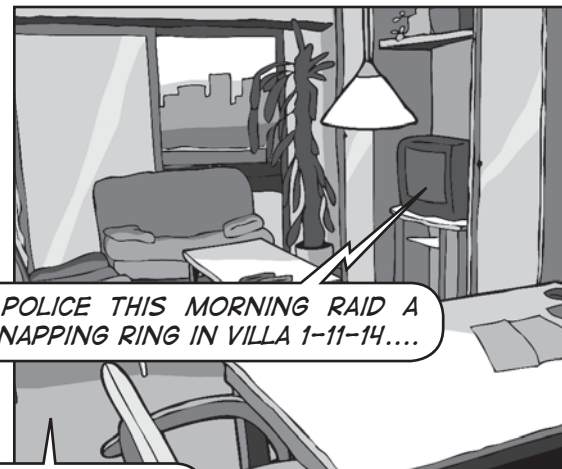
TV: Ladies and Gentlemen Independiente has just  
won!!!





DID YOU SLEEP WELL?

YEA I DID.

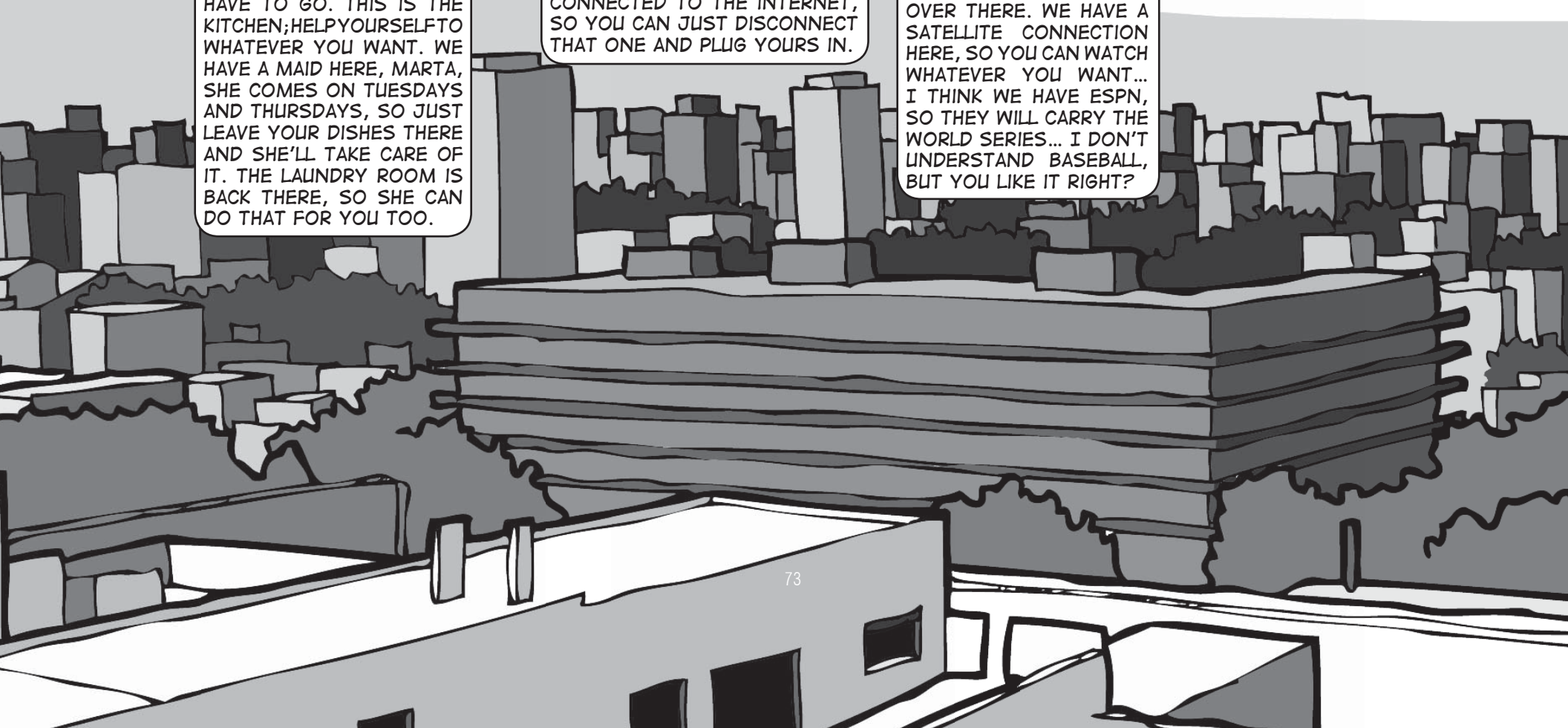


... POLICE THIS MORNING RAID A KIDNAPPING RING IN VILLA 1-11-14....

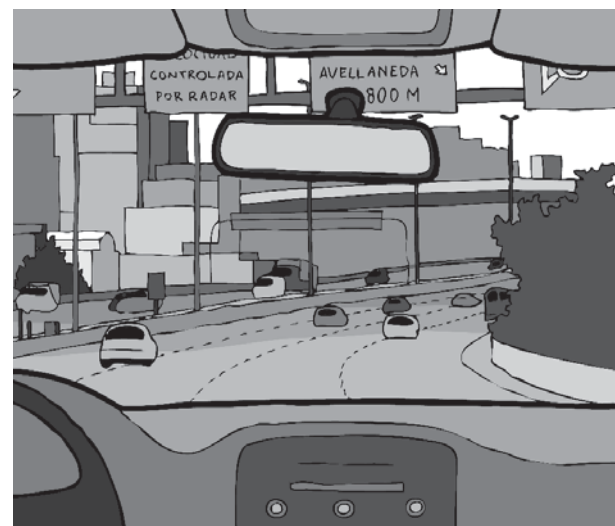
HERE LET ME SHOW YOU AROUND QUICKLY, THEN I HAVE TO GO. THIS IS THE KITCHEN; HELPYOURSELFTO WHATEVER YOU WANT. WE HAVE A MAID HERE, MARTA, SHE COMES ON TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS, SO JUST LEAVE YOUR DISHES THERE AND SHE'LL TAKE CARE OF IT. THE LAUNDRY ROOM IS BACK THERE, SO SHE CAN DO THAT FOR YOU TOO.

YOU CAN SET UP YOUR COMPUTER HERE... MINE IS THERE AND IT'S CONNECTED TO THE INTERNET, SO YOU CAN JUST DISCONNECT THAT ONE AND PLUG YOURS IN.

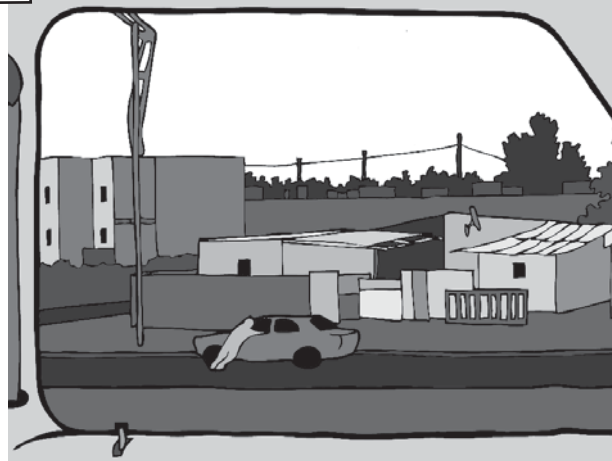
THIS IS THE LIVING ROOM. THE BALCONY DOOR IS OVER THERE. WE HAVE A SATELLITE CONNECTION HERE, SO YOU CAN WATCH WHATEVER YOU WANT... I THINK WE HAVE ESPN, SO THEY WILL CARRY THE WORLD SERIES... I DON'T UNDERSTAND BASEBALL, BUT YOU LIKE IT RIGHT?



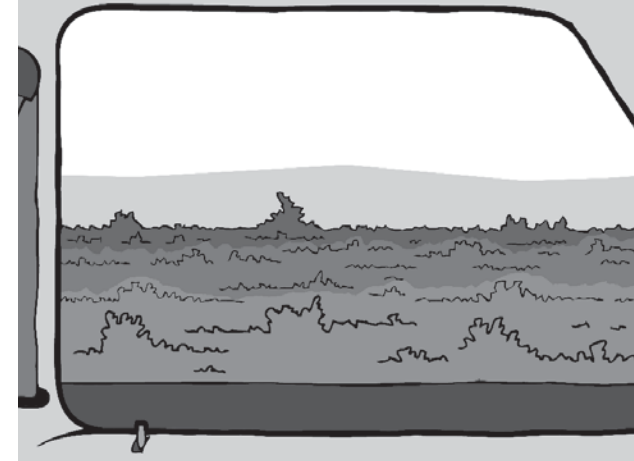
RUBEN AND CLAUDIA ARE TAKING ME FOR A DAY TRIP TO LA PLATA TODAY. LA PLATA IS THE PROVINCIAL CAPITAL, ABOUT AN HOUR DRIVE EAST OF BUENOS AIRES.



FOR NEARLY THE ENTIRE DRIVE TO LA PLATA THE CITY APPEARS ALONGSIDE THE HIGHWAY AS SMALL POCKETS OF INFORMAL COMMUNITIES.

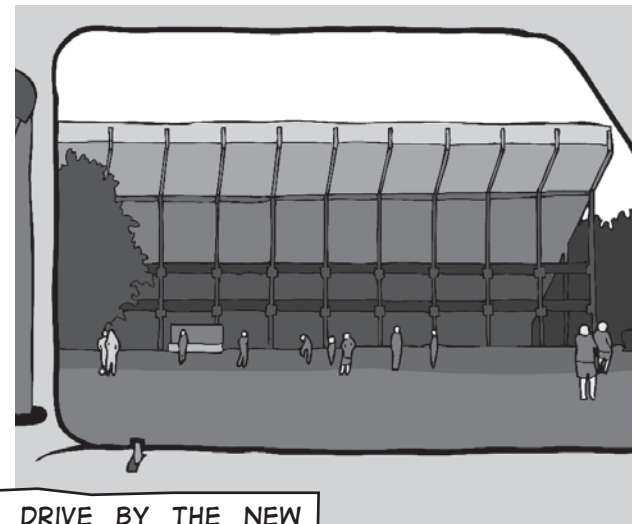
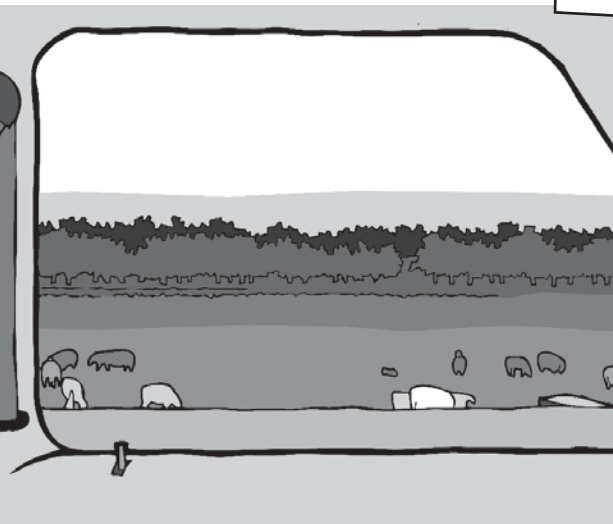


SOMETIMES YOU SEE NEWLY CONSTRUCTED FORMAL HOUSING DIRECTLY BEHIND THEM; PERHAPS INTENDED TO RE-HOUSE THE SLUM DWELLERS?



FINALLY AFTER ABOUT 45 MINUTES ON THE HIGHWAY WE REACH OPEN PAMPAS LAND.

AFTER ABOUT AN HOUR LONG  
DRIVE, WE ENTER LA PLATA.



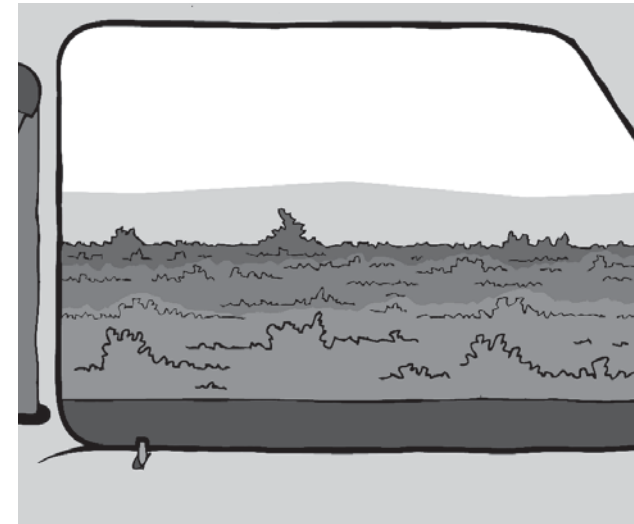
WE DRIVE BY THE NEW  
ESTUDIANTES DE LA PLATA  
STADIUM AS A GROUP OF  
YOUNG MEN ARE ABOUT TO  
START A MATCH OUTSIDE.



THEN WE BRIEFLY GET LOST. LA PLATA IS LAID OUT IN A SQUARE GRID WITH DIAGONAL STREETS CROSSING HERE AND THERE. IT SOUNDS SIMPLE ENOUGH IN PLAN, BUT GETS VERY DISORIENTING ON THE GROUND.



FINALLY, WE FIND THE CENTRAL SQUARE WITH ITS CATHEDRAL. BY THIS TIME IT IS STARTING TO RAIN AND GETTING QUITE LATE, SO WE MAKE OUR WAY BACK TO THE CAPITAL.



A COUPLE DAYS LATER I HOP ON THE BUS AND GO BACK TO THE UBA TO TRY MY LUCK AT THEIR LIBRARY.





I SIGN OUT A FEW BOOKS ON VILLA 31....



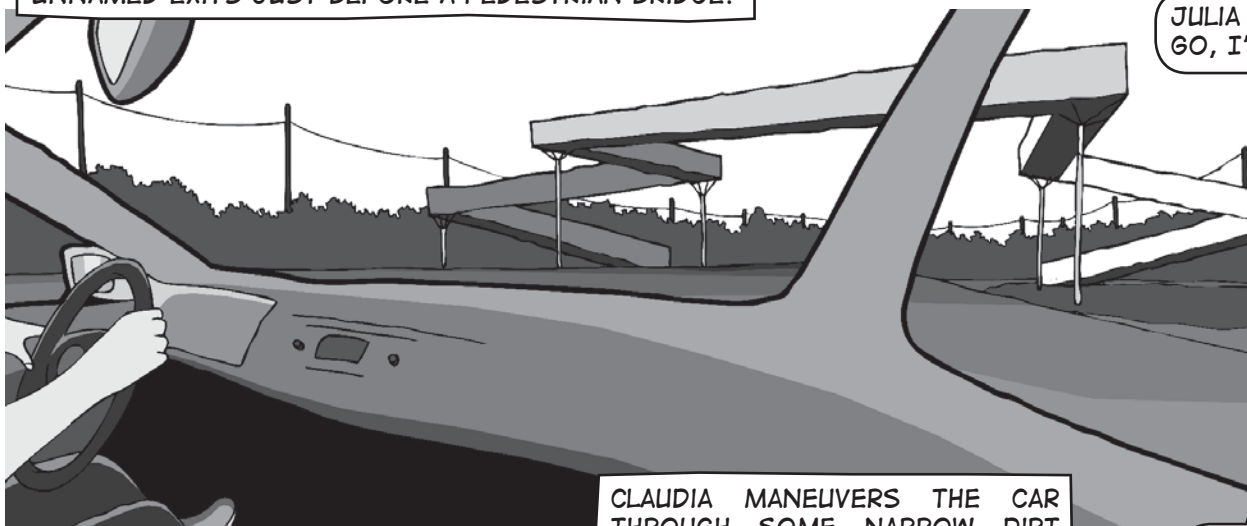
BUT NO LUCK HERE.

THIS IS THE DAY I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR. I'M GOING TO MEET CLAUDIA AT HER APARTMENT, AND WE'RE DRIVING OUT TO GONZALEZ CATAN.



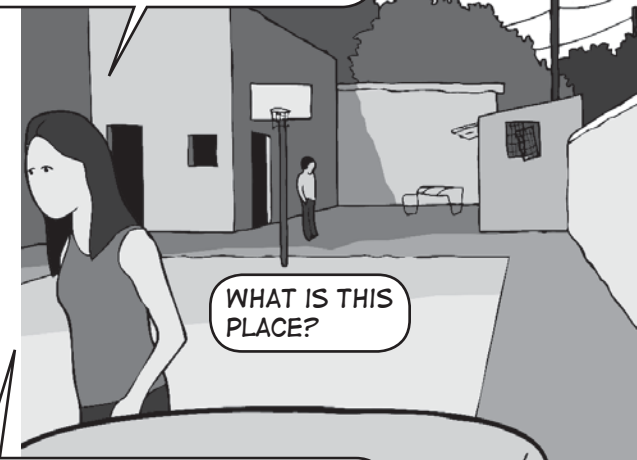
WE STOP BY THE UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE LA MATANZA ON THE WAY TO PICK UP JULIA, CLAUDIA'S STUDENT.

AFTER ABOUT AN HOUR DRIVE WEST, JULIA DIRECTS US TO TURN OFF THE HIGHWAY AT ONE OF THE MANY UNNAMED EXITS JUST BEFORE A PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE.



CLAUDIA MANEUVERS THE CAR THROUGH SOME NARROW DIRT ROADS AND WE PARK JUST IN FRONT OF A BASKETBALL COURT IN SOME SORT OF FENCED COMPOUND.

JULIA HAS TO GO SET UP, SO LET'S GO, I'LL SHOW YOU AROUND.



WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

THIS IS A SOCIEDAD DE FOMENTO, WE'LL COME BACK HERE SOON.

NOW WE'RE AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE FUNDACION PADRE MARIO. WHEN HE PASSED AWAY, THEY BUILT A SMALL MAUSOLEUM AND HE'S NOW BURIED THERE... HE IS CONSIDERED SOMEWHAT OF A SAINT IN THIS COMMUNITY. AND BACK THERE YOU CAN SEE THE ORIGINAL CHURCH THAT HE BUILT.



THIS IS THE SECONDARY SCHOOL... APPARENTLY THEY'RE JUST LETTING OUT CLASS RIGHT NOW.



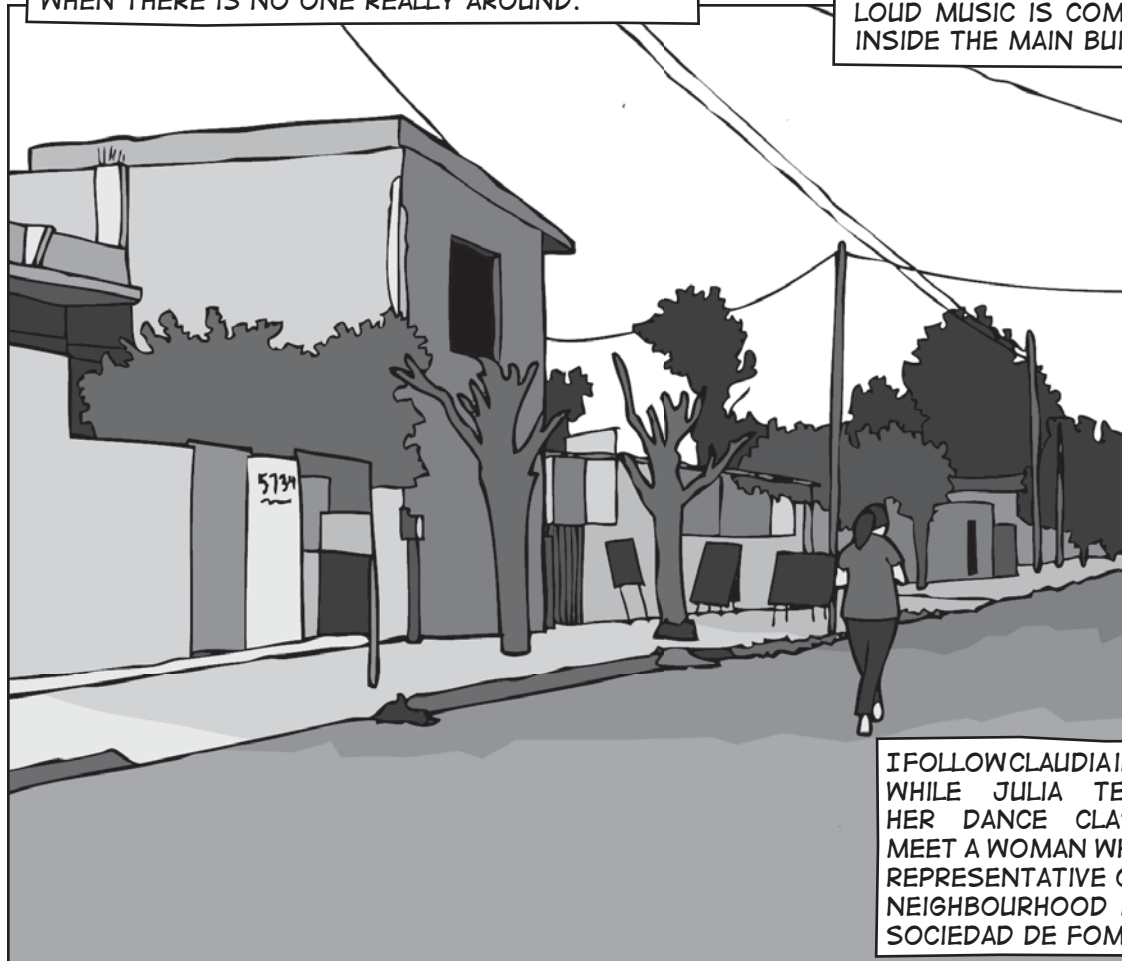
AND THESE ARE THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES AND PRIMARY SCHOOL....

WE GET TO THE POST-SECONDARY SCHOOL BUILDING THAT IS UNDER CONSTRUCTION. A LADY TELLS ME I CAN CLIMB UP TO THE SECOND FLOOR IF I'D LIKE A VIEW OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD.



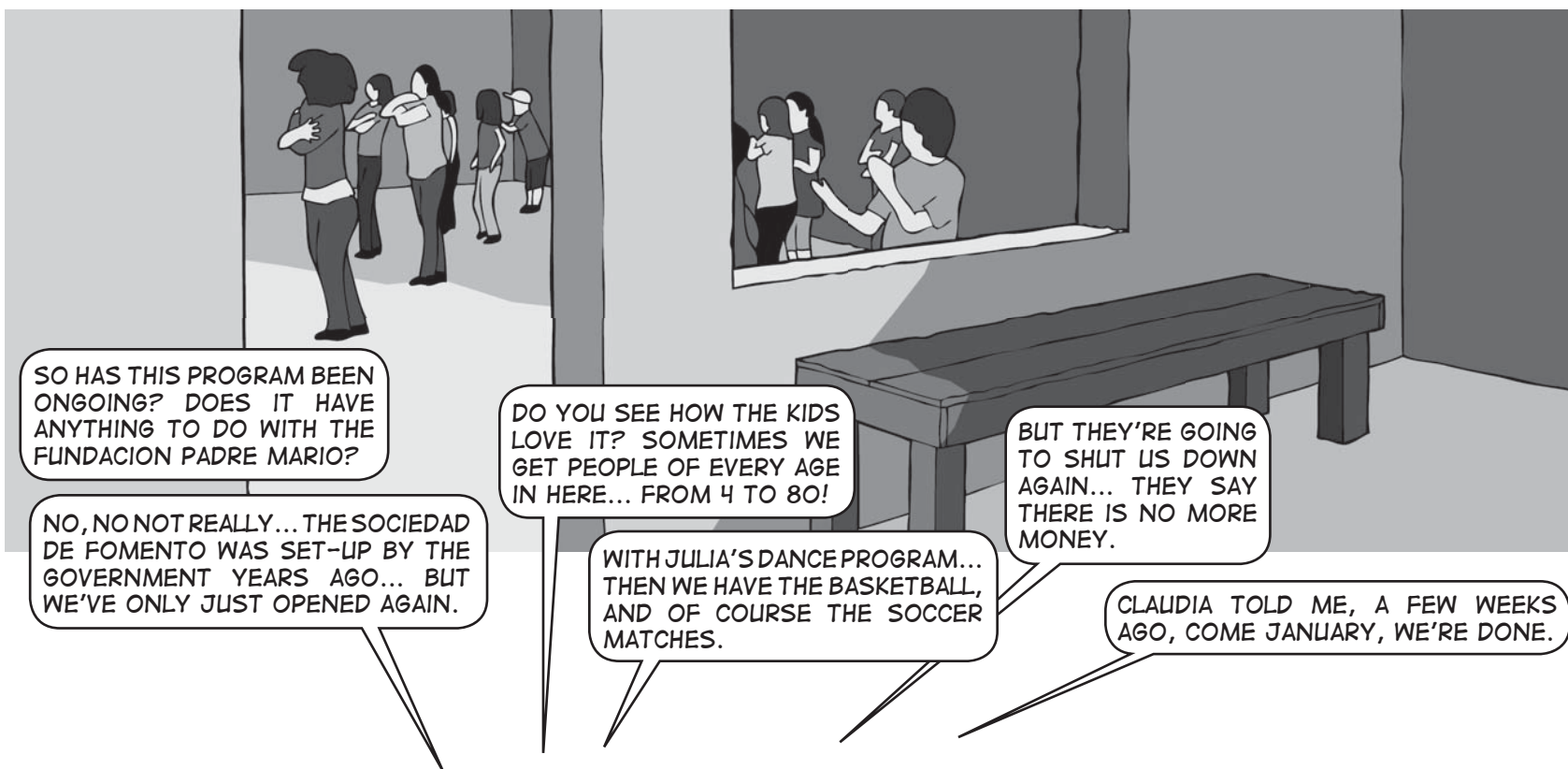
AS WE WALK BACK TO THE SOCIEDAD DE FOMENTO, CLAUDIA ADVISES ME TO ONLY SNAP PHOTOS WHEN THERE IS NO ONE REALLY AROUND.

BY THE TIME WE GET BACK THERE ARE CHILDREN PLAYING ON THE BASKETBALL COURT AND LOUD MUSIC IS COMING FROM INSIDE THE MAIN BUILDING.



IFOLLOWCLAUDIAINSIDE. WHILE JULIA TEACHES HER DANCE CLASS, I MEET A WOMAN WHO IS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD IN THE SOCIEDAD DE FOMENTO.





YOUKNOW...IT'SA SHAME. SO MANY PEOPLE IN THIS NEIGHBOURHOOD HAVE NO WORK.

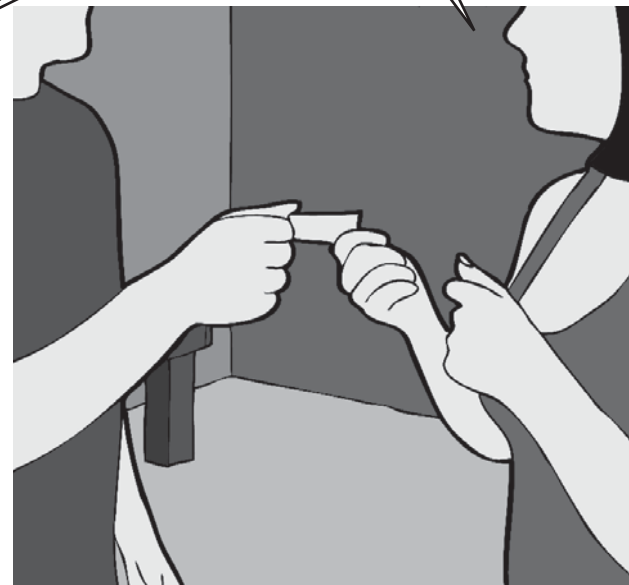
THE MEN CAN'T WORK, THEY HAVE TO SUPPORT THE KIDS.

BUT THEY TURN TO THE ALCOHOL ANDTHE DRUGS... YOU KNOW?

BUT THIS PROGRAM, IT'S INCREDIBLE, IT JUST GETS PEOPLE AWAY FROM THEIR TROUBLE.

AND IT GETS THE KIDS OFF THE DRUGS... THAT'S A BIG PROBLEM, YOU KNOW?

BUT I KNOW YOU'RE INTERESTED IN THE FUNDACION PADRE MARIO... HERE IS YOLANDA'S CARD, SHE'S THE ARCHITECT AT THE MOMENT. YOU CAN GIVE HER A CALL....





AFTER THE WEEKEND, I CALL YOLANDA.

OK, YOUR PROJECT SOUNDS REALLY INTERESTING... I'M ACTUALLY IN ROSARIO, WHERE MY OFFICE IS. LET'S SEE MY SCHEDULE... YEA I WON'T BE BACK IN BUENOS AIRES FOR ANOTHER TWO WEEKS, THE WEEKEND OF THE 28TH.

OH YEA?... HM, OK, I'M ACTUALLY GOING BACK TO CANADA AT THE END OF THIS WEEK....

OH NO THAT'S TOO BAD. EITHER WAY, I CAN HELP YOU LEARN MORE ABOUT GONZALEZ CATAN, BUT WITH VILLA 31 I CAN'T DO TOO MUCH. FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, IT IS A TRICKY SITE, YOU KNOW, BECAUSE OF IT'S CENTRALITY.

YEA I'VE HAD A LOT OF DIFFICULTY WITH IT.

OK, WELL I WISH YOU LUCK BRIAN, AND HAVE A SAFE TRIP HOME.



I LEAVE BUENOS AIRES ON A WARM NOVEMBER MORNING. AFTER TWO MONTHS OF FAILED ATTEMPTS, I LEAVE WITHOUT MAKING IT INTO VILLA 31.



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1. Podalsky, Laura. *Specular City: Transforming Culture, Consumption, and Space in Buenos Aires, 1955-1973*. (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2004), 108.

2. IBID, 104-5.





## EPILOGUE

When Maria saw the man, her broad smile immediately contracted into an expression of distress. “Did you see them?” she whispered as she dragged me inside her gate and quickly locked it behind us. Rumor had it that the condominium next to hers was housing a group of squatters. “Seven men,” she added. “All *ladrones* (thieves) who just came out of a penitentiary. All Paraguayans and Bolivians of the worst kind, didn’t you see their faces?” I asked her how she knew, and she replied that her neighbor had heard it from the owner of the small grocery shop across the street.<sup>1</sup>

Emanuela Guano made the above observation during her field work in Buenos Aires in the late 1990s, and it has hardly lost relevance in the decade since. The once largely middle class society of Buenos Aires, unwilling to let go of its European identity, has had difficulty accepting the new influx of immigrants at a time when the country’s economic failures have driven large numbers of the city’s population below the poverty line. Looking back on my first visit to the Retiro Bus Terminal, at around the same time as Guano’s visit to the city, I can now understand why it was that Villa 31, only a few metres from where I would have been standing, went completely unnoticed. I was standing at the edge of a social boundary, where the vacationing ‘middle class’ *porteños* (as Buenos Aires residents are known) would turn a blind eye to the urban blight that formed a largely unknown part of their city.

For me, Villa 31 represented a fascination for the unknown, marginal parts of the city. Villa 31 was a community stigmatized by the crimes committed by just a few. It provided me the opportunity to reach the community, and to try and break



down the boundaries that bar them from enjoying the full urban experience.

My original intention was to dissect the boundary between Villa 31 and Buenos Aires, exposing its social infrastructure. I intended to produce a design project that would help to create an awareness of Villa 31; not only connecting it to the city through a social infrastructure, connecting the villa residents themselves to the social networks of the formal inhabitants of Buenos Aires. By designing a new football club to be based in Villa 31, and to play in the amateur football network of Buenos Aires football clubs, the invisible boundary might erode. It quickly became evident that in order to truly understand Villa 31's place in the city, I would have to spend some time in Buenos Aires observing and documenting the presence of that invisible boundary.

After two months of field work, trying to cross over that boundary into Villa 31, I returned home with empty hands. It was at this point that I realized that I had neither the knowledge nor understanding of Villa 31 to create an informed design. But I had newfound knowledge of the public's perception of the slum, and that perception in turn gave me an understanding of the boundary that kept me from entering the slum, and sent me home with empty hands.

However, each day throughout those two months I had kept a journal of my activities. On my return, I set out to write a comic book to find out what prevented me from crossing over to Villa 31. The comic book converted my journal into something my audience, and I, could understand. It provided an opportunity to re-live the experience and, while meticulously composing each image, examine each aspect of the story. It was where the tension between the chaotic scenes of violence and the mundane scenes of everyday life became more apparent. The story of attempted robbery on a crowded subway platform or the story of the thief who stole my wallet, once illustrated, proved to be more than just another part of the story; they demonstrated the recurring tension within the city. Writing in first person, as the protagonist, also allowed me to remember the experience. This first person narrative seemed to be called for in order to grasp the situation of Villa 31 in Buenos Aires. The comic book provided not only a clear avenue for investigating the invisible boundary between Villa 31 and Buenos Aires, but a clear and consuming way of conveying that story to a larger audience.

Going to Buenos Aires in order to understand that invisible boundary was not enough. In order to offer a more informed opinion of the complexity of Villa 31's relationship to the city I had to re-live the experience detail by detail. Looking back

Facing page:

2.1 A view of Villa 31 with Buenos Aires in the background.



2.1



2.2



2.3

now, it is clear to me that the initial impulse – design a football club – is one of many possible interventions that could bridge the gap between the city centre and the urban slum. The football club would have provided not only the amenities of sport, whose benefits should by no means be downplayed, but would also have served as a beacon in the community. When *porteños* think of Villa 31, the images of police raids, delinquents, and crumbling buildings with inadequate services come to mind. An intervention would have to invite the city into Villa 31, with no fear. One of Emanuela Guano's interviewee's represents the general feeling towards these marginal areas: “if you stop at a traffic light [near a villa], they'll come and mug you'.... 'If you walk into a villa... you will never be able to walk out. It's too dangerous for you to go there.'”<sup>2</sup> Time and again, I heard this, as I discovered the full complexity of the relationship between the slum and the city.

Since I began this investigation, the city of Buenos Aires has taken more of an interest in the wellbeing of Villa 31. Recently completed projects include a new soccer field, opened by the mayor himself in January of 2011<sup>3</sup>, as well as an ongoing project, painting the facades of the makeshift dwellings in bright colours<sup>4</sup>. As much as these projects may provide new services and improved appearances, they fail to sufficiently address one of the main issues that prohibits Villa 31 from becoming an accepted part of the city, and bars its residents from full urban citizenship. The current projects do not address the issue of that invisible boundary, the one that prevents interaction between the formal and informal city, that bars integration of the slum into the urban arena.

In order to do anything to include Villa 31 in city life, you must address its current integration within the city. The invisible boundary lies not in the space behind the Retiro train terminal, but rather in the collective mentality of *porteños*. The stigmatization of Villa 31's residents is the biggest obstacle to the redevelopment of Villa 31 into a legitimate city neighbourhood.

Facing page:

2.2 A new soccer field is opened in Villa 31.

2.3 The makeshift dwellings of Villa 31 are brightly painted.

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1. Guano, Emanuela. "The Denial of Citizenship: 'barbaric' Buenos Aires and the Middle-class Imaginary." *City & Society*, Vol. 16, Issue 1 (2004): 69-97. doi: 10.1525/city.2004.16.1.69.
  2. IBID.
  3. "La Villa 31 de Retiro, Estrena Cancha Nueva!" *Mundo Villa*, January 1, 2011, <http://www.mundovilla.com/index.php?iSection=2&iCategory=1&iArticle=302>
  4. "La pintura y el arenero no tapan la pobreza." *Mundo Villa*, February 13, 2011, <http://www.mundovilla.com/index.php?iCategory=1&iArticle=332>







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