

gardening, not architecture
oblique strategies

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g a r d e n i n g

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o b l i q u e s t r a t e g i e s

n o t a r c h i t e c t u r e

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*“Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That’s how the light gets in”*

-Leonard Cohen

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Abstract

Four of Architecture's prevailing mythologies.

One ghost town.

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Ou la aeyilte, la kil shee.

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*We begin with a momentary
look back in time. We go
to Varosha, a suburb of the
city of Famagusta on the
Mediterranean island of
Cyprus. Specifically, to the
summer of '74.*

*It seems, up until that point,
the image of this town was
one revolving around its
golden coast. Or the tourists
that would flock from
everywhere.*



Demir, Mutlu. *Ne Yerde Ne Gokte*. October 25, 2018.

Along the three-mile coastline was an uninterrupted streak of tall hotels.

— In its heyday, the small southern quarter was known to have hotel rooms that could house a capacity of about ten thousand people, a hundred entertainment venues that included bars and nightclubs, dozens of theaters and museums, and almost five thousand privately-owned houses.¹

¹ Murat Sofuoglu, "Cypriot Turks Open a Ghost Town to Tourism to Increase Stake in Cyprus" (TRT World, June 21, 2019), <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/cypriot-turks-open-a-ghost-town-to-tourism-to-increase-stake-in-cyprus-27679>.



Northern Cyprus's Ghost City. August 5, 2019. Gezi Tavsiyem.



Whitehead, Sophie. *Varosha: The Famagusta Ghost Town*. June 2, 2018.

For a while, a much longed-for seaside retreat that was tied to images of modernity and celebrity. All of this, however, only exists in memory. For others, only in stories passed down.

The image of the town was associated with the likes of Elizabeth Taylor, Brigitte Bardot, and Burt Reynolds who were known to frequent the beach.¹

Merely sixty miles from Lebanon and Syria, the eleven kilometer Varoshan coast's shelter from harsh winds and its gentle waters made it an ideal location for a modern retreat.^{2,3}

¹ Nick Squires, "High Stakes in Cyprus as Turkish North Bids to Turn Bardot's Beloved Resort into New Las Vegas," *The Telegraph* (Telegraph Media Group, October 6, 2019), <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/10/06/turkish-cypriot-plan-revive-beach-ghost-town-could-kill-hopes/>.

² Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us* (London: Virgin Digital, 2012), 93.

³ *Ibid.*, 96.



Yiallouridou, Penelope. *Iceland Supports the Termination of the Turkish Occupation*. April 6, 2016. *SigmaLive*.

The picturesque ambitions of Varosha were never the same after July 20th of that year. Of all of Cyprus for the matter. On that day, a Turkish retaliation to a Greek-led coup five days earlier sparked a month-long conflict between both sides.

aircraft guns sitting on top of one of the town's seaside resorts was a foreboding warning of what was to come.³

—
Ethnic and religious divisions between the island's two most prominent communities were ramping up in the decades before the summer of '74, with centuries of Enosis - a move towards uniting Greek-dominated territories with Greece itself - coming to the forefront of Greko-Turkish relations on the island.¹

The Greek-led coup aimed at annexing Cyprus took place on July 15th of that year, with Turkey responding five days later on July 20th. After a temporary cease-fire, Turkey launched another attack in August, stopping on August 16th after annexing over one-third of Cyprus.²

In the process, civilians from both communities were attacked by each side. In Varosha, the image of anti-

¹ Şevki Kıralp, "Cyprus between Enosis, Partition and Independence: Domestic Politics, Diplomacy and External Interventions (1967–74)," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 19, no. 6 (February 2017): p. 591, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2017.1328883>.

² Ibid., 602.

³ Weisman, 93.



Lindh, Willy. UN Troops in Cyprus in 1964. n.d. Shorthand.

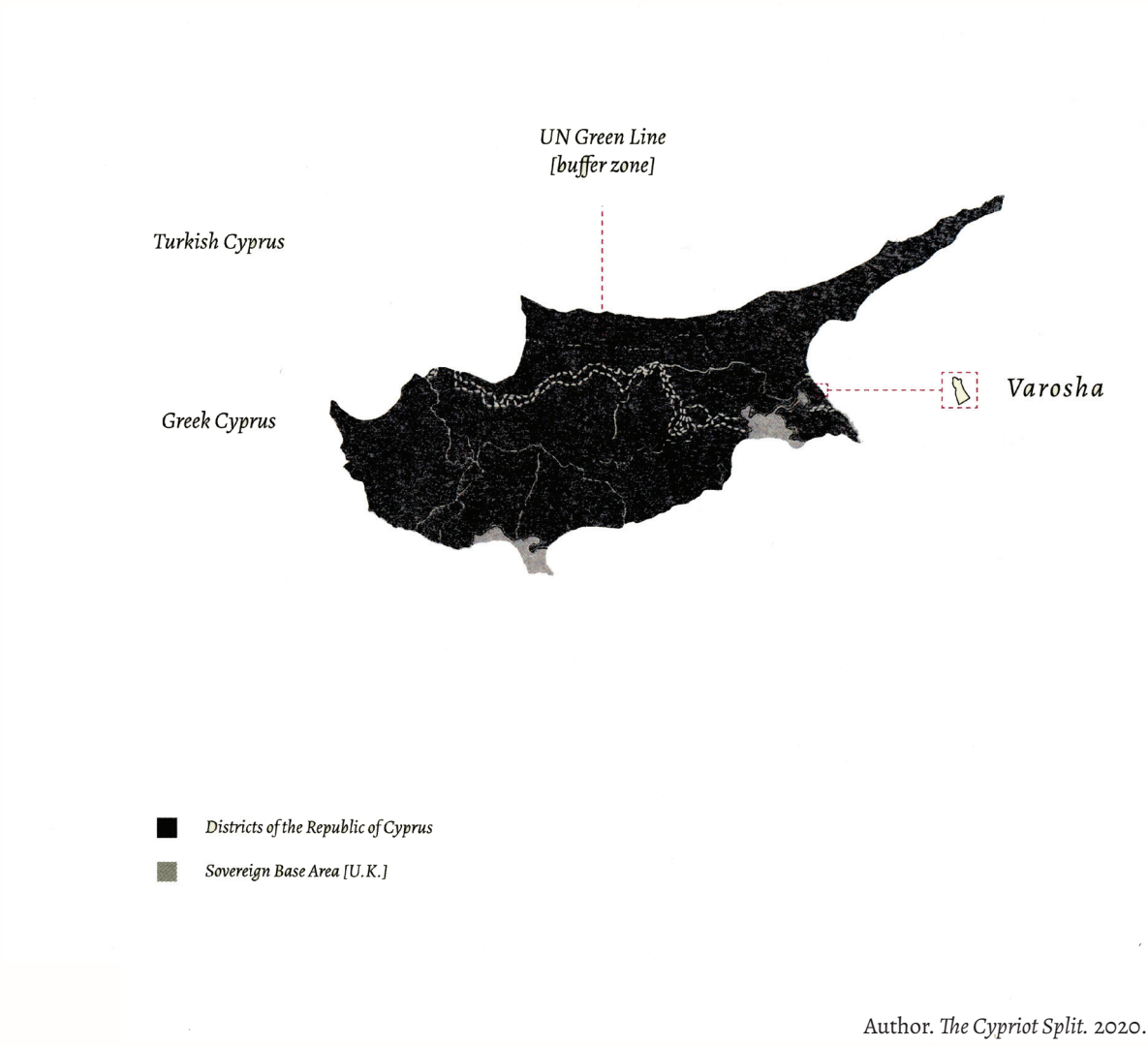
Military tanks raided towns all over the country trying to stake claim. The war ended with a UN intervention that split Cyprus in two, a Turkish-Cypriot North, a Greek-Cypriot South, and a buffer in between.

This meant a line in the sand between the island's Greek Orthodox majority and Turkish Muslim minority.

The buffer is referred to as the Green Line and has been patrolled by the United Nations since its existence.¹

Interestingly enough, the buffer ranges anywhere from a few meters to several kilometers, with upwards of 10,000 people working and living in towns that found themselves smack in the middle of the conflict.²

¹ Weisman, 91.
² "About the Buffer Zone," UNFICYP, June 21, 2019, <https://unficy.org/about-buffer-zone>.

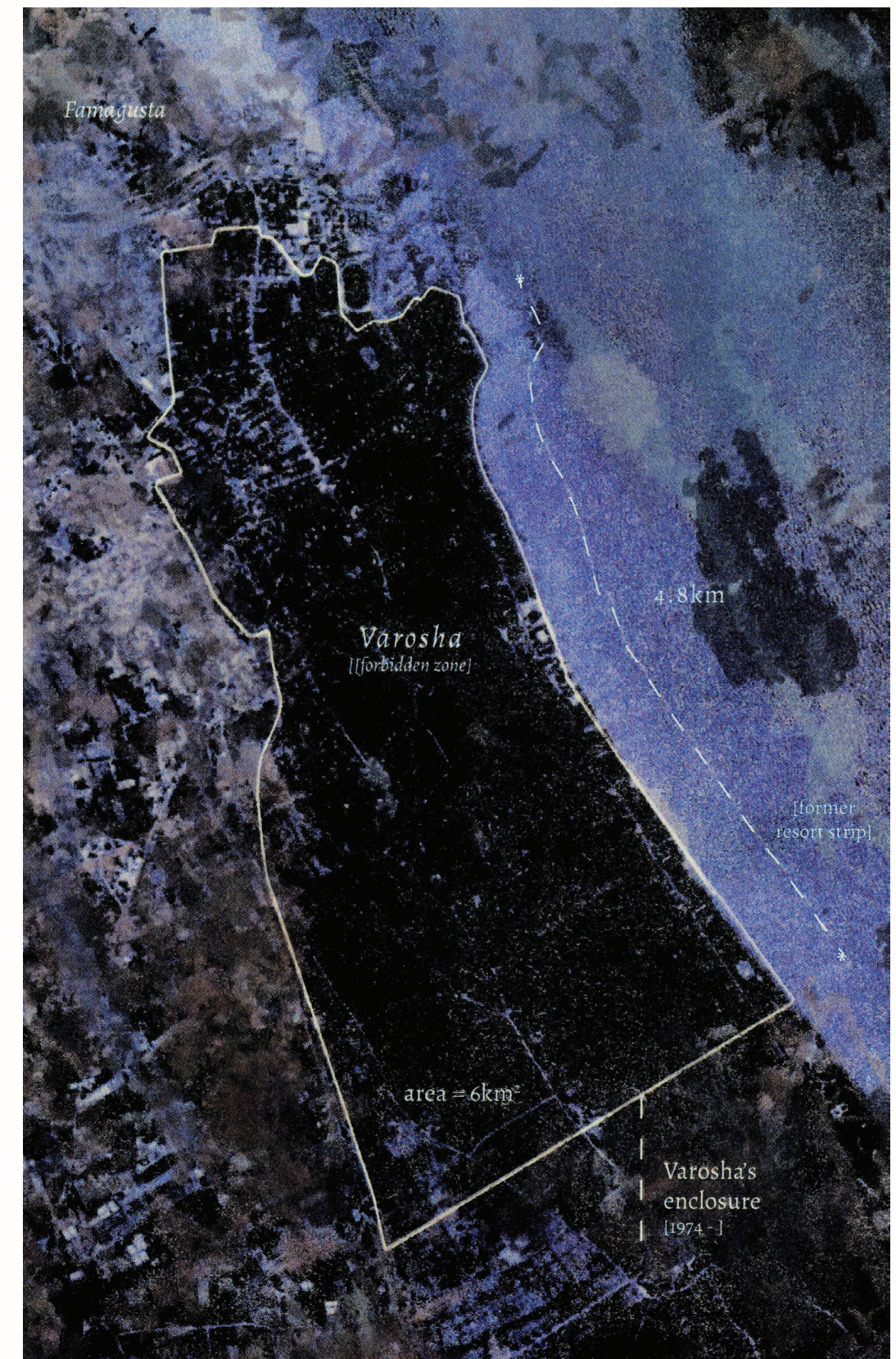


Author. *The Cypriot Split*. 2020.

*This was not the end,
though. The Turkish
occupation went one step
further in Varosha - it was
occupied and fenced off.*

Varosha in all of its glory was less than
two years old at the time of the attack
of '74.¹

¹ Weisman, 92.



Author. Varosha's Enclosure. 2020.

And guarded by military posts.

Signs that straddle along the perimeter fencing make clear to all passer-byers that Varosha is a 'Forbidden Zone', one where documentation of any kind is strictly prohibited. The inside of the perimeter is dotted with military posts, occupied by Turkish military personnel, known to enforce a wide range of penalties on those failing to abide.¹ Taken to greater extreme, passer-byers have reported being reprimanded for even looking at the town.²

¹ Dobraszczyk, "Into the Forbidden Zone".
² Arsoy and Basarir, 61.



Barry, David. *Varosha's Military Post*. April 12, 2014, *Flickr*.



Partasides, Doros. *British Troops Hand out Food Rations to Cypriot Refugees during the Crisis*. July 12, 2014. *Daily Mail*.

The town's roughly thirty-five thousand residents were forced to flee for their lives. Stove-tops were still on, clothes were drying from hangers, and toys were scattered across apartments. No one could have expected that they would be out this long.

Varosha's residents, mostly Greek Cypriots, are believed to have resettled in Limassol, a coastal town in the southern part of Cyprus.¹

¹ Aysu Arsoy and Hacer Basarir, "Post-War Re-Settlements in Varosha: Paradise to Ghetto," *Open House International* 44, no. 2 (June 2019): p. 52.

This was intended to be temporary, with the hopes of Varosha being used as a bargaining chip in larger reunification talks. Still, an agreement has yet to be reached to this day between both sides, which means Varosha has yet to be resettled in almost five decades. No one has been allowed back since.

—

Varosha in particular, and the promise of its return to its former glory, continues to be a crucial bargaining chip by the Turks in negotiations with the South.¹

The prospect of a possible return to Varosha is unsurprisingly riddled with conflicting property claims at a personal level, and entangled in larger global efforts around which communities have the legal right to return.

The United Nations Resolution 550 “considers...any attempts to install in any part of Varosha other than its inhabitants [to be] unacceptable”², legally regulating that only Varoshans and their descendants may return and rightfully occupy Varosha. This is unsurprisingly at odds with Turkish interests and occupation of the region, a key reason for its ongoing dispute to this day.



Kirian, Michael. *Turkey Has Occupied the Northern Part of Cyprus since 1974*. October 2014. *EU Observer*.

1 Paul Dobraszczyk, “Into the Forbidden Zone: Varosha, Ghost City of Cyprus,” August 31, 2015, <https://ragpickinghistory.co.uk/2013/03/30/into-the-forbidden-zone-varosha-ghost-city-of-cyprus/>
2 “UN: Attempts to Settle in Varosha Are Unacceptable,” CNN Greece, September 17, 2019, <https://www.cnn.gr/news/kosmos/story/190875/ohe-oi-apopeires-gia-egkatastasi-sta-varosia-plin-ton-katoikon-toys-den-einai-apodektes>

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In truth, little is known about the state of the town today. All we do know is thanks to those that have briefly hopped the fence and brought back their recordings.

My accumulated knowledge of the town was the result of extended periods of times spent piecing together any documentation I could come across, ranging from photographs people posted of their time spent breaking into Varosha, lurking over Cypriot Facebook groups dedicated to Varoshans aiming to return, listening to podcasts by those descending from former residents of Varosha, present-day news articles revolving around the politics of its reopening, as well as Alan Weisman's recounting of a sanctioned trip to the town in *The World Without Us*.

In a lot of ways, this fragmented approach reflects the incomplete understanding that any one person can have of Varosha today. At this moment, Varosha is, in itself, drenched in mythology.

Fence hoppers do not cross what would be considered a formidable barrier, which in reality is made of a combination of corrugated iron, oil drums, signs, metal bars, and the nature that has reclaimed those boundaries.

To anyone paying attention past the watchtowers patrolled by guards, the hastily erected fencing surrounding the town appears to be falling apart; holes and gaps are now present all around, making it easy to sneak in and out without notice.¹

Little scholarly attention has been given to Varosha, with the limited access likely being a large hindrance.²

Josev, Franz.
*Breaking Into the
Forbidden Zone.*
September 22,
2010, Flickr.



¹ Dobraszczyk, "The Forbidden Zone".

² Paul Dobraszczyk, "Traversing the Fantasies of Urban Destruction: Ruin Gazing in Varosha," *City* 19, no. 1 (April 2014): p. 45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2014.962877>



Passport, Daniel. *Maras / Varosha (North Cyprus) - Abandoned Street*. March 31, 2008. Flickr.

*As we can see, the
flourishing of vegetation
across the streets brings
to mind images of time
passed.*

Slabs of cement roads and sidewalks
are displaced by the growth of
wild vegetation, with seeds having
managed to break into the cracks
that have revealed themselves.¹

¹ Weisman, 96.

*We've learned that the
hardy bougainvillea has
ravaged buildings all across
town. Its pink flowers billow
effortlessly where inside
now becomes out.*



Author. *Inside Out*. 2020.



Dobraszczyk, Paul. *Ermou St, Varosha (Bougainvillea)*. March 26, 2013. Flickr.

*The beach is now taken over
by the hardy marram grass.*



Demetriou, Vassos. *Beach Grass*. February 6, 2014. *Facebook*.



Katsantonis, Lefteris. *Adobe Homes*. March 15, 2014. *Facebook*.

*The town's adobe homes
succumb to decades of
damage from water.*

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*Yellow yarrow has taken
over abandoned plots of
land.*

Guerrero, Santiago Cordero. *Varosha, El Barrio Fantasma*. March 10, 2017. *Flickr*.

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*Nature's reclamation project
extends to homes that dot
the region.*



Dobraszczyk, Paul. *House, Irakleos St, Varosha*. March 26, 2013. *Flickr*.

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This includes resort pools.



Arslan, Muhammet Ikbal. *Kapalı Maraş*. AA, August 29, 2018.

*One bar's roof has even
fallen in and made way for
the growth of new life.*

—
It is prudent to ask, to whom, or to what, is Varosha considered a ghost town? The area serves as a prime example of the thriving of all forms of natural life in a world without human interference.

Apart from its regular patrol by officers, a community of fence hoppers has been created in response to its closing off, who also occupy parts of the town on occasion. It seems, the image of a ghost town, with its desolate associations, to be incomplete in understanding the conditions of life in Varosha today.

Cooper, Paul. *Varosha Bar*. March 29, 2018. *Threader*.



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*And just outside the fenced
off Varosha...*

Hankewitz, Sten. A Greek Orthodox Church in Varosha. Hankewitz, October 23, 2011.



*...the attempt at reclaiming
some sort of life in the region
continues.*

*Meanwhile, hotels
outwardly display the
aftershock of the bombing
that plagued the summer of
'74. A bleak reminder of a
history unforgotten.*

— The rooms that tourists once occupied
are now filled with rats consuming
the lemons and oranges grown in the
town's nearby citrus groves.¹

The beach where tourists and
Varoshans alike once laid on is now
the home of loggerhead sea turtles.²

¹ Weisman, 93.
² Ibid.



Fieber, Marco. Ghost Town Varosha (Famagusta). June 20, 2016. Flickr.

the future?

The future of Varosha is currently opaque, with uncertainties playing out around when it will open, how it factors into larger reunification talks, and who it will be opened to.

Some suggestions currently under review, from a range of government and non-government stakeholders, include the following: the ‘RECoder’ project that plans for its return to Greek Cypriots and a desire to prioritize the history of the town during its occupation, the ‘Famagusta Initiative’ the makes Varosha a part of a larger plan for Cypriot reunification, as well as the Famagusta Ecocity Project that envisions Varosha as a model ecocity.¹

¹ Dobraszczyk, “Traversing”, 57-58.

*Regardless of which path the region takes, the one thing “all parties agree on is that **nothing is salvageable. Nothing is.** To someday once again lure tourists, Varosha will have to be bulldozed and begun anew.”*

*-Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us**

Weisman captures the existing attitudes of the future of Varosha no better than in the quote above. The reopening of Varosha, and any larger Turko-Greko reconciliation, is dependent upon the demolition of the town and its complete rebuilding. Weisman projects it to cost more than any reconstruction project in Europe post World War II, with it hovering around one hundred billion Euros.¹

¹ Weisman, 97.

*Rather than completely
changing the existing
conditions, what would
a proposal look like
for Varosha's future
reopening that challenged
Architecture's prevailing
mythologies that are
likely to play out in the
reinhabitation of the town?*

*"Modern architecture has been anything
but permissive: Architects have preferred
to change the existing environment rather
than enhance what is there."¹*

*-Denise Scott Brown, Robert Venturi,
and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las
Vegas**

—
The project rubs against plans of
reclamation that are birthed from
the top, that operate at scales so
large they loom over the spirit of the
minor. The individual's memories,
the unwanted 'weed', the fallen brick
- these will be the materials used
to propose a series of situations for
living for the reclamation of Varosha.

¹ Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 3.

With this, the myth is used as a medium to understand what propels ways of dealing with existing spaces, making explicit the ways of ordering our worlds. Using Roland Barthe's definition of a myth as a type of messaging, the project proposes an alternative set of myths or discourses that enhance what is there, to deal with the future of Varosha.

Barthes explains, "but what must be firmly established at the start is that myth is a system of communication, that it is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form."¹

The conception of mythologies brings to mind ancient Greek tales of superhuman entities that are largely agreed to be fables today. According to

Roland Barthes, a myth at its core serves as a form of messaging that acts as a medium in which something is communicated. On its own, a myth is not an idea, concept, or object, but rather is a language-based form used to communicate said ideas, concepts, and objects.²

Put clearly, a myth is the actual messaging something takes on - the discourse around said thing. Based on this premise, just about anything can be viewed as a myth. An 'autonomous' object can be opened up and drenched in oral appropriation that makes it mythological.³

You could argue that the object (digital screen) or material (paper) you are reading this report on is not mythological - its objectality is tangible and immediate, therefore it does not open itself up to being disputed. Yet, if we were to factor in that mythologies are rooted in a form of language, the discourse around the object could make it mythological. If the digital screen becomes a symbol of twenty-first century technological development and

modernity more generally, the 'objective' object suddenly finds itself entangled in a language-based narrative that supersedes its objectality. Here, where the screen becomes 'modern', the object becomes mythical.

Myths provide language to the way we order our worlds, exemplifying attitudes that are otherwise inexplicable. A collection of tales, they are birthed from stories and other forms, complexly intertwined into our psyches, difficult to take apart.¹

There are a few things that are important to note about the characteristics that myths adopt. Firstly, since mythological status is subject to language-based discourse, it is important to recognize that a myth is by no means constant - the messaging around ideas, concepts, and objects are subject to perpetual evolution based on the messaging that surrounds them. Roland Barthes notes that even ancient mythologies are not inherently eternal.²

Secondly, if we were to accept that a myth is inherently a form of communication, the 'language' that is used to perpetuate these myths are not strictly written or spoken - myths can be perpetuated in various forms of digital and non-digital media (photography, videos, drawings, reports, et cetera). This form of mythical communication is not rooted in the actual mode or material that the media adopts, since even its mode is subject to mythological interpretation.

We should avoid being complicit in the urge to disprove myths as objectively 'false', since a myth exists in its 'truest' form as a mode of speech above all else. Thus, a subversion of myth is not the act of discrediting an idea, concept, or object as inherently incorrect, but rather the provision of an alternative type of discourse that evolves the way these ideas, concepts, and objects are absorbed.³

¹ Barthes, 107.

² Rolande Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1972), 106.

³ Ibid.

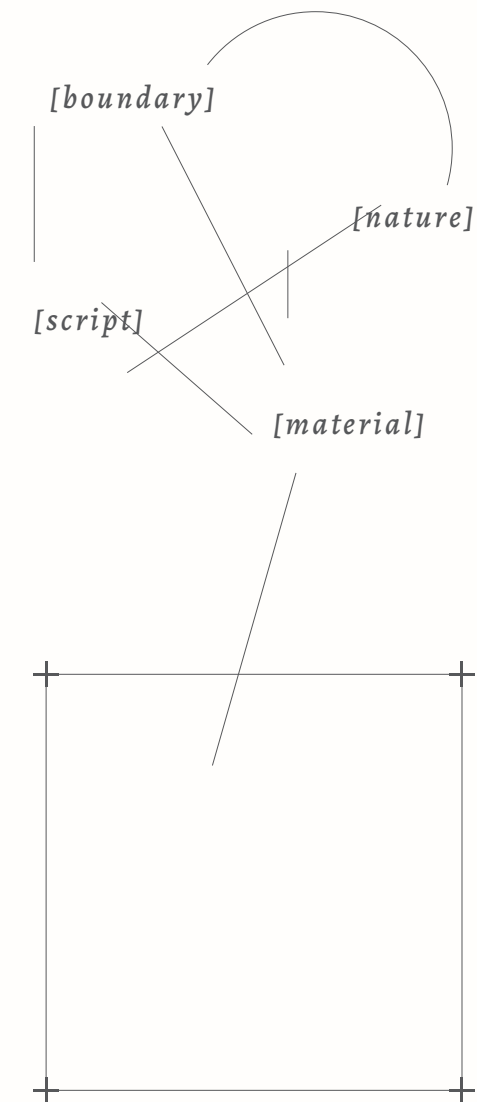
¹ Zachary Angles, "Thresholds 45: Myth," *Architect*, February 20, 2016, <https://architect.com/mitar-chitecture/release/call-for-submissions-thresholds-45-myth>).

² Barthes, 106.

³ Barthes, 106.

*Four of Architecture's
existing mythologies that
see themselves play out in
Varosha are as follows:*

*_the myth of the **boundary**,
_the myth of the **material**,
_the myth of the **script**,
_and the myth of **nature**.*



Author. *The Four Myths*. 2020.

boundary

(n.) Human-made attempts at order; these attempts manifest as enclosures, grids, gates, borders, and fences, amongst other things, that present themselves as objective

pronunciation | bown-de-ree

Boundaries manifest in a wide variety of forms, ranging from the tangible (a wall) to the intangible (the wall as a representational image that separates architecture from the surrounding environment). The projections of these boundaries as holding up universal divisions are often more potent than the boundary itself.

Henri Lefebvre is critical of seemingly artificial boundaries that get assigned to spaces like towns and countries, centres and peripheries, as well as suburbs and city centres.¹ These divisions serve as seemingly artificial constructions to try to divide, label, and understand spaces that, more appropriately, exist as thresholds.

If we were to view objects, beings, situations, et cetera as a simple result of an organization of energy in a particular way, at a particular time, in a particular space, then deceptively obvious divisions of inside/outside cannot be applied, given that all things are created similarly and exist temporarily. Here, authorship becomes irrelevant.²

¹ Lefebvre, Henri, and Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), 97.

² Lefebvre, 172-173.

material

(n.) A concern for aging, particularly a resistance to decayed materiality and a desire for permanent solutions

pronunciation | muh-tee-ree-uhl

“All things go somewhere: they evolve, with or without us, into new forms...We can embrace this process of devolution: embellish it when strength avails, learn to love it.”¹

-Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia*

Discourse (and mythologies) around materiality and its relation to the built environment stems from a long history of trying to control naturally occurring processes, with its association with terms like ‘decay’ and ‘deterioration’. The connotations of these attributions implicitly reveal underlying attitudes, inevitably shaping what is believed to be possible when intervening in and around spaces that have succumbed to the passage of time.

Caitlin Desilvey’s *Curated Decay* serves as a thought-provoking exemplar on how interventions across a variety of vulnerable sites actually embrace - instead of prevent - these naturally occurring processes. She refutes existing desires that go to great lengths to find permanent solutions for conditions that inevitably age.²

Challenging the notions of decay, deterioration, and any number of associations to material that has not been suspended in time, according to Desilvey, requires a challenging of the very identities we attach to materials; she makes a case for “remain[ing] open to their continual material

becoming.”³ Preserving materials speaks to attempts at erasing time from built forms, presenting building as static objects that somehow can escape the inevitable.⁴

1 Caitlin DeSilvey, *Curated Decay: Heritage Beyond Saving* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 16.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., 30.
4 Ibid., 131.

script

(n.) Attempts at controlling *how* space is used and appropriated, with concern for what ‘should’ and ‘should not’ take place within the confines of a piece of architecture.

pronunciation | skrɪpt

Much theoretical architectural discourse has concerned itself with philosophizing on the relationship between object (conventionally buildings) and subject (conventionally humans), and the muddy dynamic that reveals both to be mutually inclusive and exclusive depending on whose theory is being considered. In this vein, the following section will recognize some of these prominent theories that have come to define the field’s discourse, with the intention of positioning the project within these existing frameworks.

Smooth & striated spaces

The first theory examined is Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s concept of smooth and striated spaces, which appears to have framed much of the latter half of the twentieth-century discourse around the subject matter.

Striated spaces are understood to be those spaces in which order (both metaphorically and literally) is prioritized above all else. In contrast, smooth space exists in opposition to this order, a force that aims to disrupt the laws of the spatial universe created by striation. The built environment is theorized to exist somewhere in-between in this continuum of smoothness and striation, perpetually evolving based on its appropriation.¹

Behaviorology

Innate in the argument for behaviorology is the acceptance of the premise that the built environment plays, to arguably varying degrees, a direct role in shaping how space is inhabited, and therefore created. However, this notion is not met without some skepticism, given its role in excluding the agency that

subjects play in the creation of their spaces in the first place.¹

Subject versus collective

Architecture firm Atelier Bow-Wow argue that the creation of space is not the result of any individual subject’s act, nor is it the result of a collective expression of some kind of behaviour in space. Instead, it is actually between the individual and collective scales that space is created, where particular habits and norms are formed and shared.²

Object

Atelier Bow-Wow further argue that the building itself does not exist as an autonomous object, but instead only exists when factoring in other considerations that include human behaviour. Implicit in this logic is the belief that buildings are favourably tailored to allow the maximum expression of spatial occupation by humans.³

This belief can understandably be challenged when used as a blanket analysis to how all buildings operate, with the monumentality of building-objects that present themselves as autonomous prohibiting the formation of certain types of human relations.⁴

“For architects the question is: do buildings help towards emancipation of the people within? Or do they hinder because they solidify the way of life preferred by the architect?...We may reach a stage where this whole discussion seems academic because we shall all be much more relaxed about the choices we have and actually want a bit of abrasion in the way of bad buildings, but we are nowhere near that yet.”⁵

- Archigram, *A Guide to Archigram*

Nah.

In contrast to many of the architectural theorists and practitioners that have been recognized thus far, Bernard Tschumi in *Architecture and Disjunction* rejects all notions of a direct cause-and-effect synergy typically agreed upon between the creation of buildings and the creation of space inside of them, the creation of buildings and human circulation in them, or even the notion that conceptual and experiential aspects of space are connected at any level whatsoever.⁶ *Damn, Tschumi.*

1. Jill Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture* (Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press, 2012), 10.

1. Stoner, 16.

2. Yoshiharu Tsukamoto and Momoyo Kaijima, *Behaviorology* (New York: Rizzoli, 2010), 9.

3. Ibid., 10.

4. Stoner, 64.

5. Crompton, Dennis, Pamela Johnston, and Kunsthalle Wien. *A Guide to Archigram, Ein Archigram-Program, 1961-74*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012), 224.

6. Tschumi, Bernard, *Architecture and Disjunction*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996.), 16.

nature

(n.) Attempts at controlling nature itself, with it dictating entire architectures on one hand, while being fearfully kept out on the other.

pronunciation | nay-cher

Mythical ideation of an untouched, pre-existing form of nature are regularly embraced in Architecture.¹ Yet, these are typically done in a highly controlled and calculated manner, regularly factoring in an almost certainty regarding the vigour that these natural elements may play out in.

We have gone to great lengths to seal our buildings away from the uncertain and seemingly undesirable parts of nature, ranging from caulking all the way to protecting full building envelopes from reaping the downsides of serious temperature fluctuations. Yet, what happens to the parts of nature that manage to get past this, that according to David Gissen's *Subnature*, challenge the dominant social hierarchy of architecture?²

This dichotomy around the treatment of nature informs the last mythology. Nature which serves as a pre-existing 'other'. Nature which is simultaneously feared and embraced. This mythology has been perpetuated largely because of our belief that we can regulate nature, that we can somehow achieve mastery of it, and hence, understand larger natural processes that dictate the entire universe more generally. As Lévi-Strauss casually explains, "it is, of course, only an illusion."³

¹ Lefebvre, 172-173.

² David Gissen, *Subnature: Architecture's Other Environments* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009), 150.

³ Lévi-Strauss Claude, *Myth and Meaning* (London: Routledge, 2016), 7.

While these mythologies have been presented as four discrete classes, they are only ways at giving language to the different facets of the mythologies that are undoubtedly intertwined.

If we look at the pink bougainvilleas (*Nature*) that have ravaged enclosures across Varosha (*Boundary*), their presence (*Material*) challenges what 'should' and 'should not' take place (*Script*) within the dominant hierarchy of Architecture. As such, the task of unpacking any one of these mythologies will implicitly and/or explicitly tackle any number of the other ones.

*So, what would a proposal
that poked at, challenged,
and transgressed these four
mythologies, look like for
the future of Varosha? One
where fragments of the
town start to slowly become
reclaimed.*

—
In *Are We Human?*, Beatriz Colomina
and Mark Wigley proclaim,
“the spaces in which people and
resources are exploited have been
designed.”¹ If we accept this notion,
*then
they
can
be*

redesigned.

¹ Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley, *Are We Human?: Notes on an Archaeology of Design* (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers., 2016), 71.

Jill Stoner’s writings on ‘minor’ architecture was an important entry-point into the project. In her book *Toward A Minor Architecture*, Stoner presents a methodology more concerned with dismantling buildings that already exist rather than designing them in the first place; the methodology concerns itself with taking buildings apart through the ethos of a tinkerer and a hacker.

While Stoner refutes defining ‘minor’ architecture as a methodology, it ultimately provides new ways of creating space - it prioritizes space-making instead of form-making - and is based on the idea that structures adopt meaning based on how they become inhabited, instead of when they are built.¹ Through this process, Stoner reveals a series of architectural mythologies that Western Architecture has inexplicably adopted.

It is important to recognize that the ‘minor’ positions itself against the ‘major’ - what Stoner describes as a subversion of ‘major’ ways of doing things (systems, norms, practices, et cetera). She argues that buildings are regularly complicit and beholden to the economic and political forces that drove their creation (the ‘major’) above the agency afforded to individuals in those spaces (the ‘minor’).²

Stoner believes that minor architectures necessarily operate *within* existing major frameworks (i.e. corporations), though I have come to learn that these major frameworks are

not always seen similarly by everyone. The forces through which one person, plant, situation, intervention, et cetera operates and pushes against may not be considered ‘major’ by another. The systems that such interventions challenge are not predefined, nor are they necessarily universal. By definition, any intervention that yields a transgressive act against said mythologies is, in my opinion, an act of ‘minor’ architecture in its purest sense.

—
The project identifies fragments around Varosha that are either currently or likely to be dealt with in ways complicit with the four aforementioned mythologies, and dissects them to project a different way forward for Varosha.

¹ Stoner, 16.

² Stoner, 2.

The announcement is finally made: “Tear down the fence! Prosochi, Varosha is now open!” People waste no time making it over. Some ecstatic they finally get to return, others livid that it took this long. Fair enough.

—
Mamá, my yia-yia, and I pack our belongings in Nicosia and drive back to their old home, uncertain of what we’ll find upon our arrival.

—
It is believed that nothing in the town is salvageable. Nothing is.

A military post stands before us as we approach Varosha. “What was there to protect?” I ask my yia-yia. It was a watchtower... to scare us off, to stop us from trying to break in” she explains.

For decades, this perimeter outpost was the only mark of human life allowed in Varosha. Now it stands unguarded. A leftover sign reminds us that no documentation was allowed - not even from the outside.



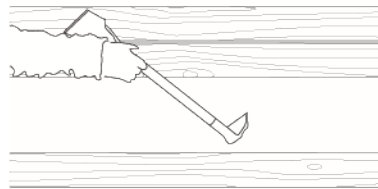
oblique strategies

Today, it's clear that's no longer the case.

The military shed's wooden slats have been removed; there's now a hole, an opening to the neighbouring meadow outside. The concrete sidewalk is drilled into.

And in the earth that has revealed itself, sweetly scented jasmine now blooms alongside others.

*Yia-yia breathes in deeply, "the jasmine here, it was always so fragrant."
It's hard to tell whether nostalgia has simply taken over. Though, does it matter?*





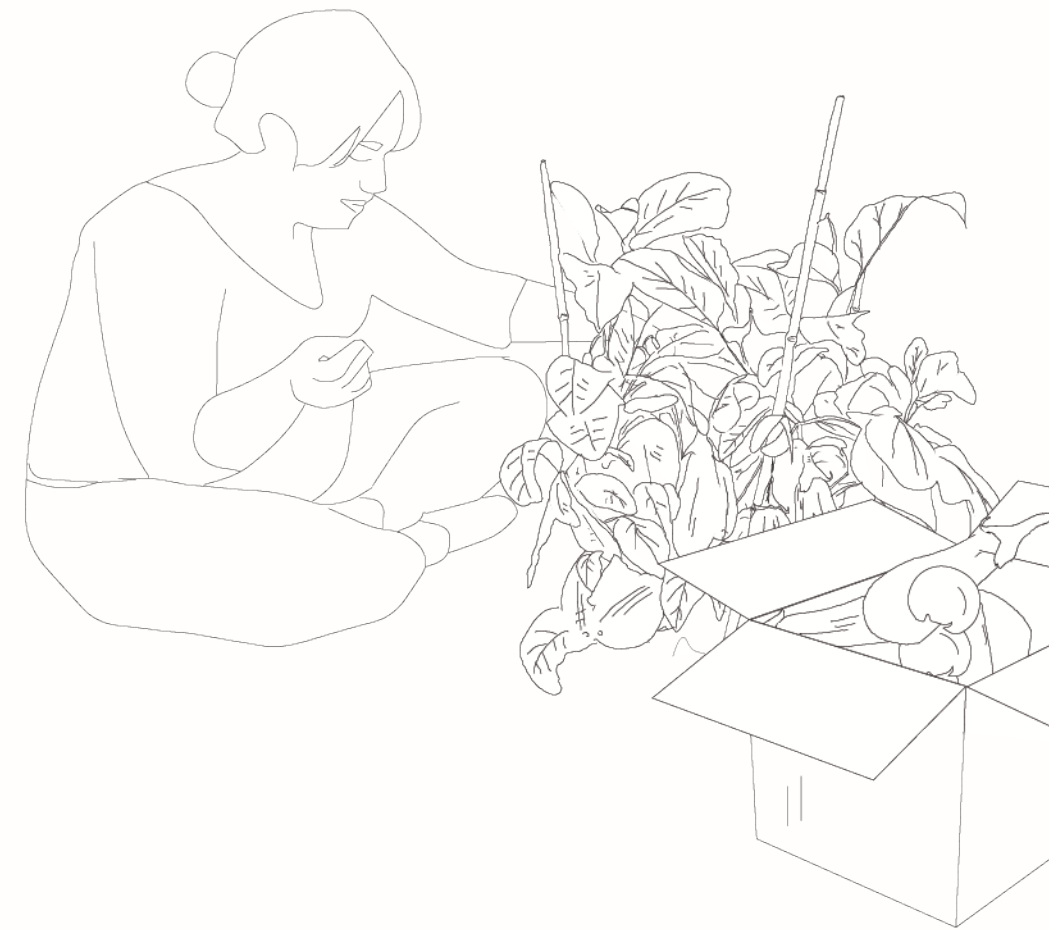
A stranger, Eulalia I believe, calls us over. She's sowing some seeds, pruning the flowers. She recalls the blisters on her hands as she would tirelessly prune her hedge of jasmine. She's not sure why this memory stands out more than others, but she's not alone. It seems that jasmine frames images of a lost home for generations of Varoshans. Such an everyday memory could become a great uniter.

— In *Injustice, Memory, and Faith in Human Rights*, the authors document interviews with descendants of Varoshans that speak lyrically about their family's memories with the plant. They transcribe, "Every time my mother talks about the jasmine outside her veranda...You know jasmine? She never went back to see her jasmine, she died."¹ The authors continue to explain that, "the plant is connected with Cypriot identity in popular discourse; its strong smell wafts across ethnic divisions, offering the possibility of unity."²

¹ Kalliopi Chainoglou et al., *Injustice, Memory and Faith in Human Rights* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018).

² Kalliopi Chainoglou et al.

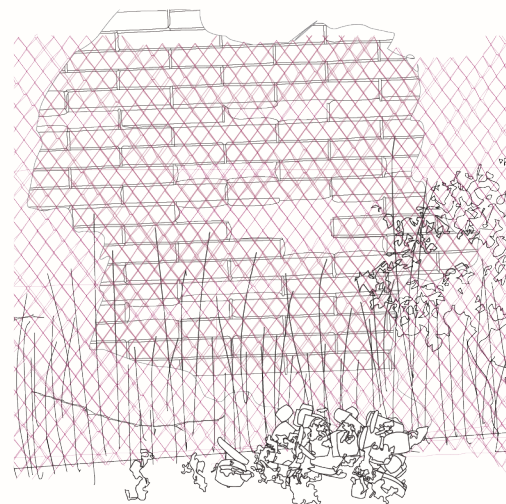
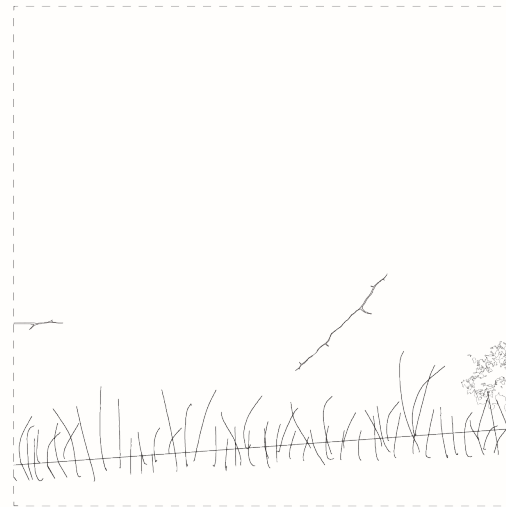
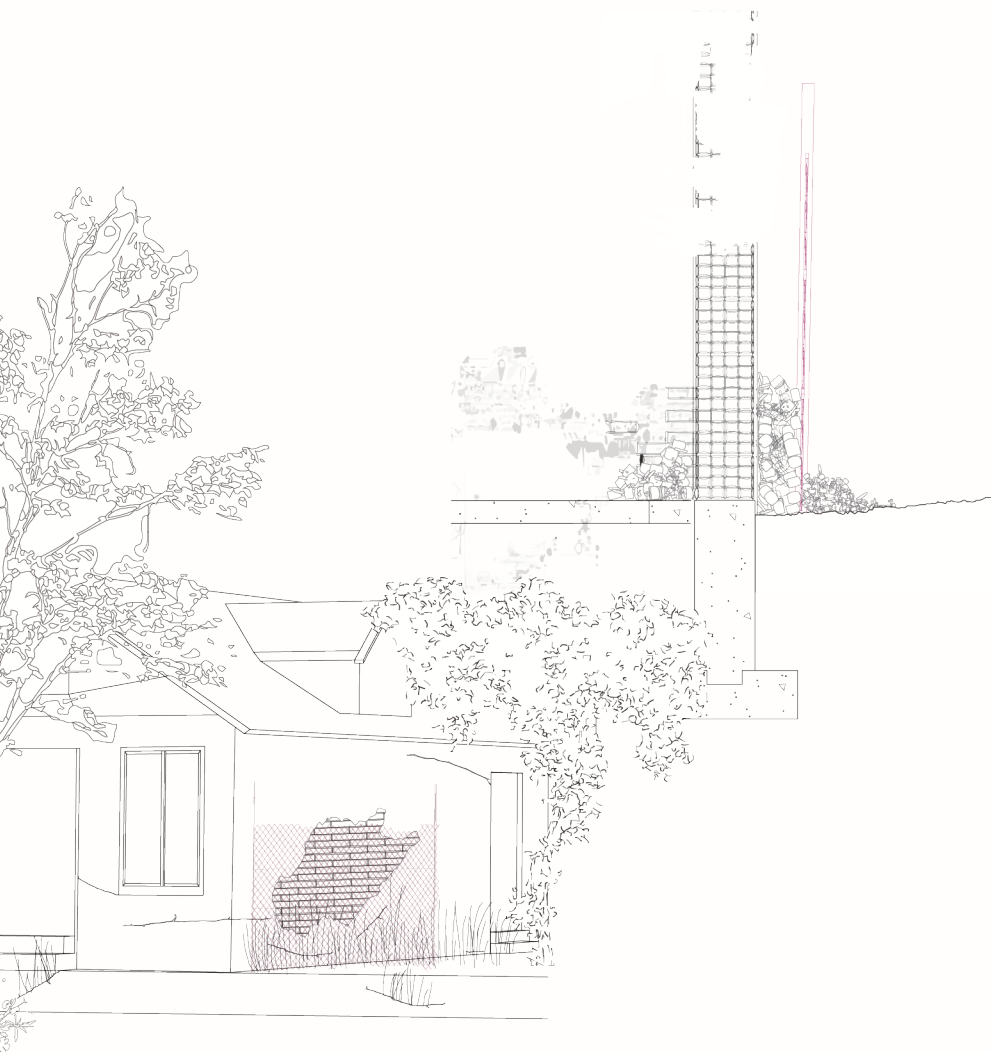
Varoshans long believed they'd soon be back. Now that they are, the desire to reclaim is apparent all around town. Just by the shed, a woman takes care of some vegetables on an unused piece of land. I could make out some okra, cabbage, tomatoes, and eggplant at least. Eulalia tells us people have been doing this all around town. We were free to glean if we ever need to.



Later on, we follow the road down to our house. It's no surprise the walls of homes around town are in particularly bad shape. Yia-yia explains that everyone used to help patch up the walls in the old days, covering the bricks of homes was an ongoing part of the everyday. Now, the result of decades of missed re-plastering. Nothing seems to have been suspended in time.

Varosha's existing structures appear to be almost entirely constructed out of either concrete, stone, or some form of adobe, with more modest homes in the region typically making use of the latter.



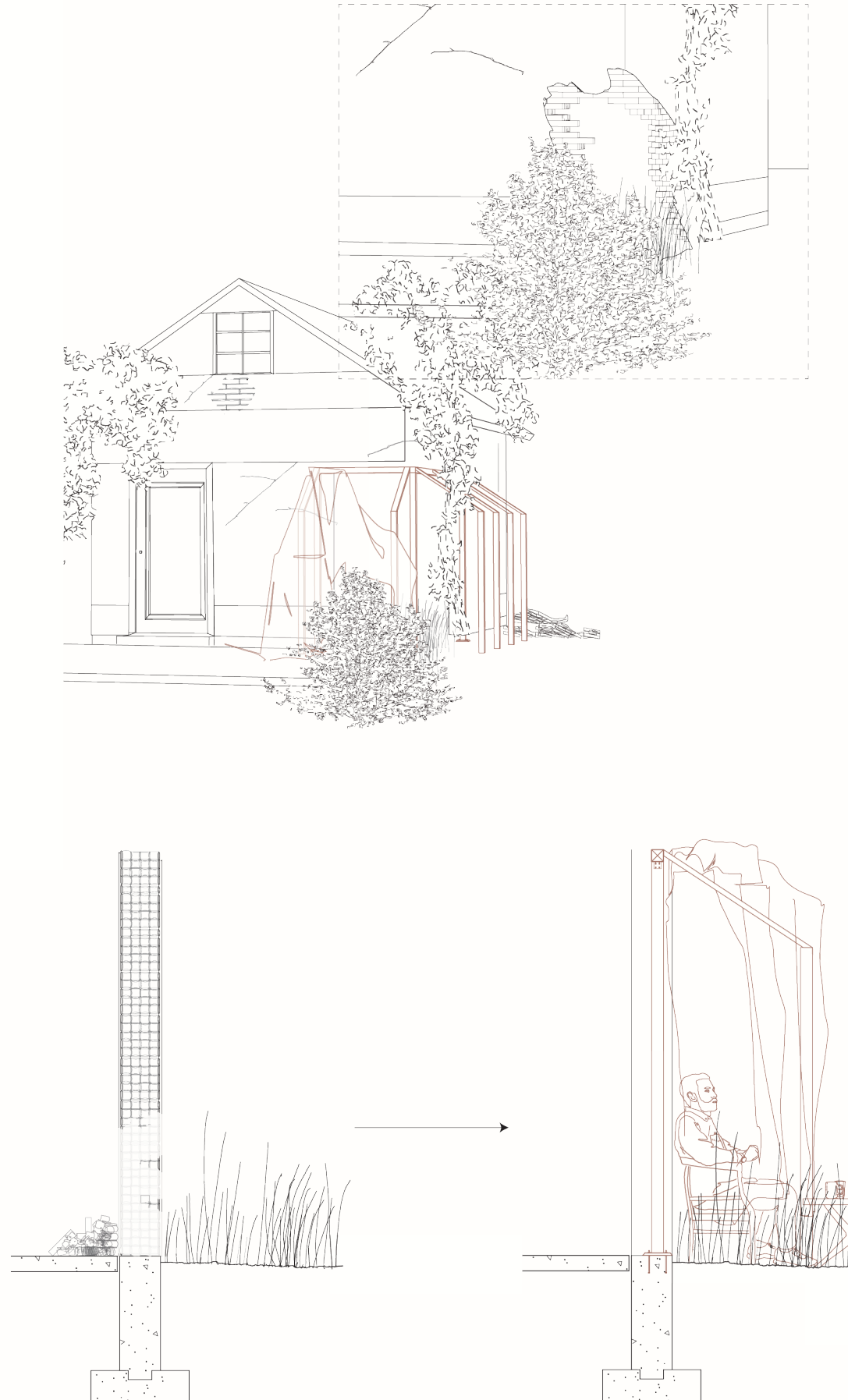


There are pieces of fencing that string up around parts of homes where the fading mortar has exposed the structures' mud bricks - you can't miss it. I get up close to one and notice that some mortar and bricks have fallen in the space between the wall and the fence. It seems, a momentary safeguard of sorts.

"Preservation of the material past and accommodation of natural processes are usually presumed to be incompatible aims."¹

-Caitlin Desilvey, Curated Decay

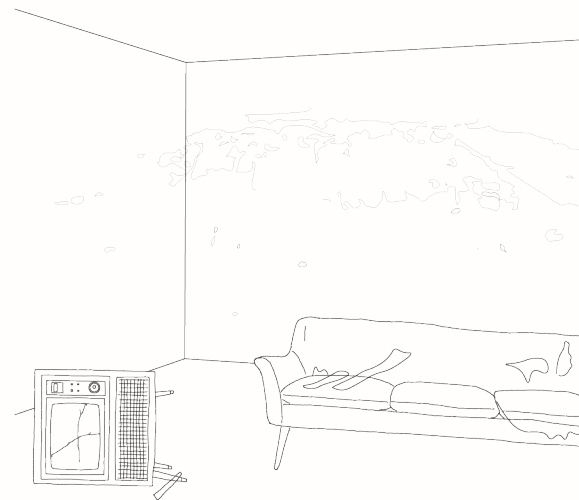
¹ DeSilvey, 30.



— An ancient construction technique, adobe is typically made with mixing water with some combination of mud, clay, silt, and sand to form the brick.¹ The bricks are typically supported with a plaster-based mortar on the inside and a lime-based plaster on the outside. Deterioration of adobe construction is largely attributed to unusual amounts of moisture.²

Next door, mama points out a wall that must had some of its bricks fallen out. “Probably damage from some water.” We see a wooden structure placed around where a hole must have been, between the inside and out. Covered with a tarp or table cloth. Some additional space that extends past the boundary of the house.

¹ R. Illampas, I. Ioannou, and D. C. Charmpis, “Adobe: an Environmentally Friendly Construction Material,” *Sustainable Development and Planning IV*, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.2495/sdp090241>, 246.
² Ibid., 249-250.



*We turn onto Etiler St.
and catch a glimpse of the
house my family once knew.
Mama and yia-yia fall
silent. As we approach the
house and prepare to go in,
both of them still keep quiet.*

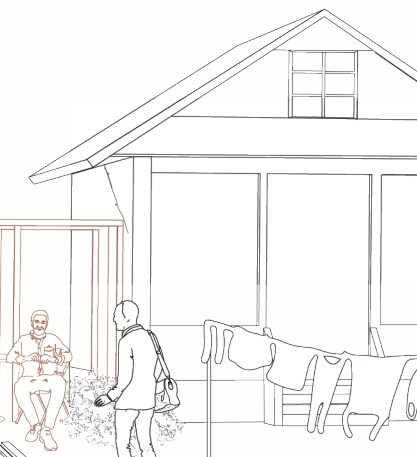
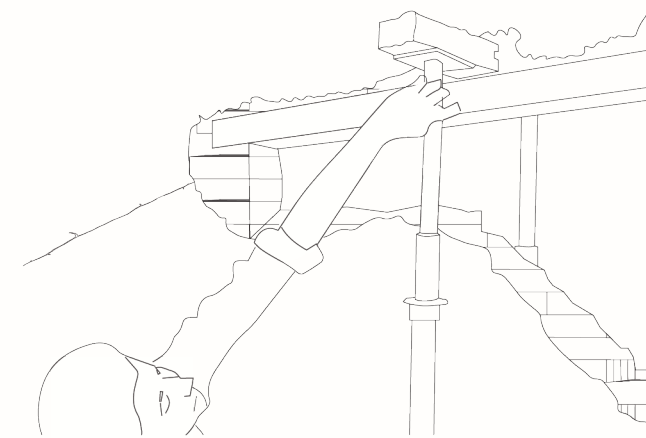
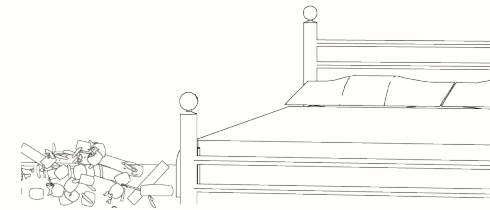
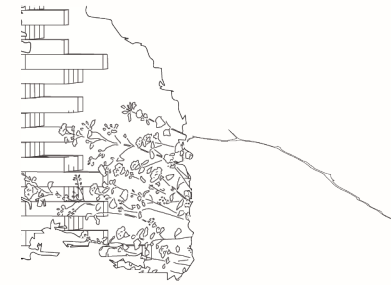
*It's hard to say what's been
nesting inside. Pigeons...
maybe crows? If not us, then
at least something was able
to make use of this while
we were away. Over the
following weeks, cleaning
and repairs are countless.*

The ideas of dirt and waste, what we consider to be matter 'in place' versus 'out of place', are pondered beautifully by Mary Douglas. Social systems and classifications ultimately determine what we consider to be dirty or requiring intervention - nothing is inherently either of these things.¹ If we extract this logic, these conditions are largely subject to the relative conditions they are understood in, which inevitably speak to ideas about what should be altered, what can and cannot be preserved, cared for, and maintained.

¹ Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 69.

We've been putting off repairing the hole in one of the bedrooms in yia-yia's house. Ale next door, whose house suffers a similar fate, shows me how to safely tear down the remaining bricks.

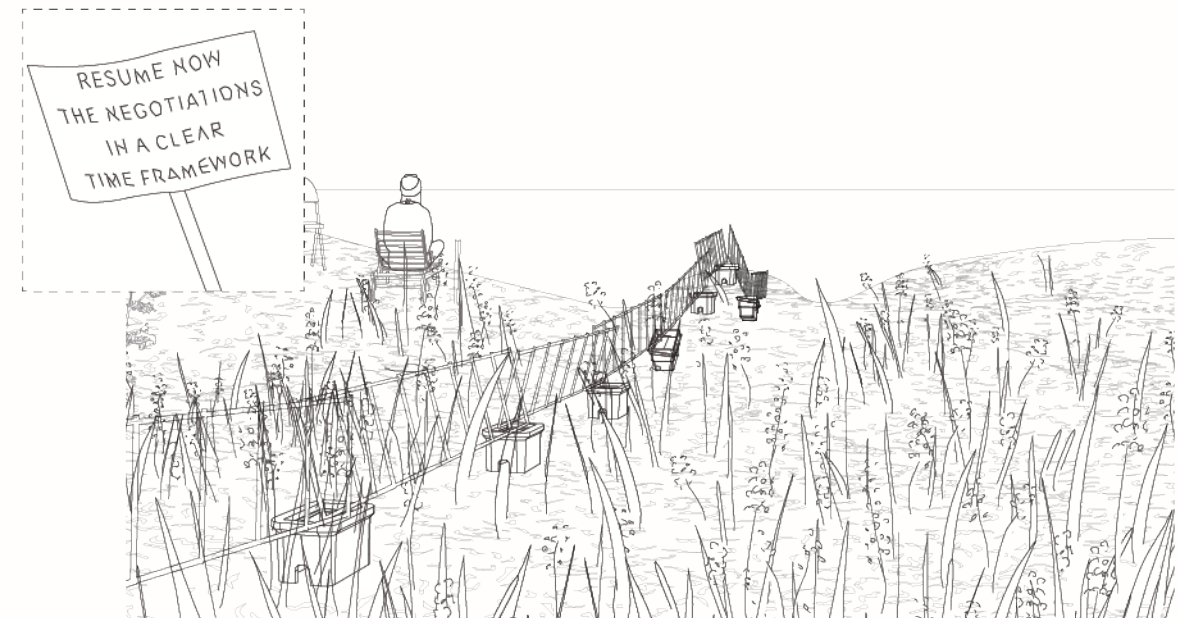
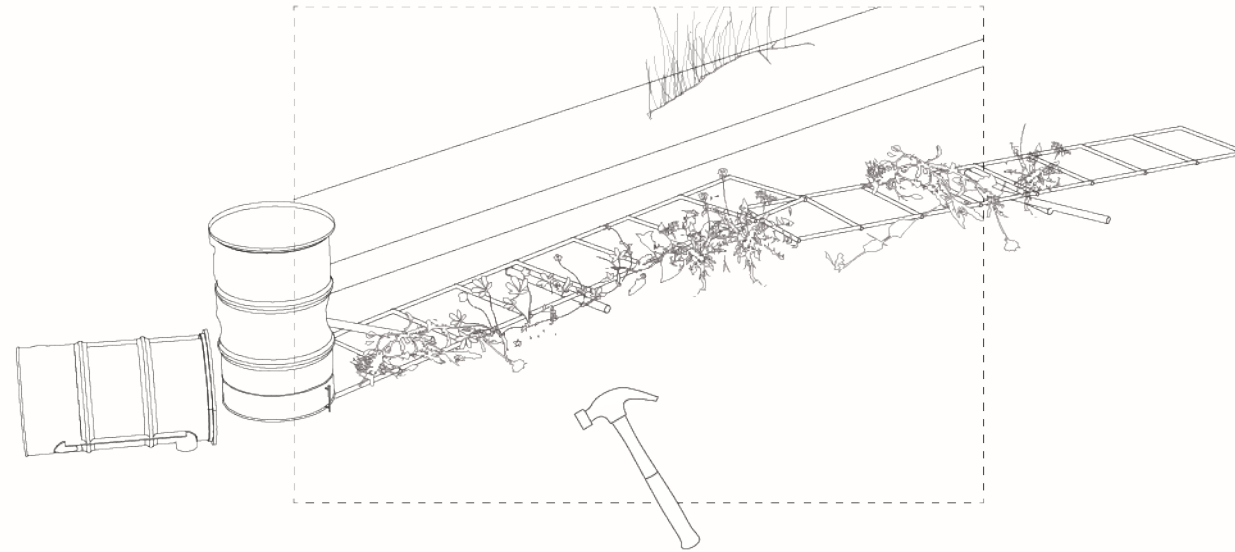
"Use a chisel on the mortar. And by all means, start at the top." We attach some wood pieces to each other, like the ones mama pointed out earlier. Then to our two houses where the walls used to sit. For now, some outdoor space. Who knows if it'll stay that way.



*For years, life and non-life
was governed by the fences
that wrapped and contained
our town. Staked in the land
that humans once roamed.*

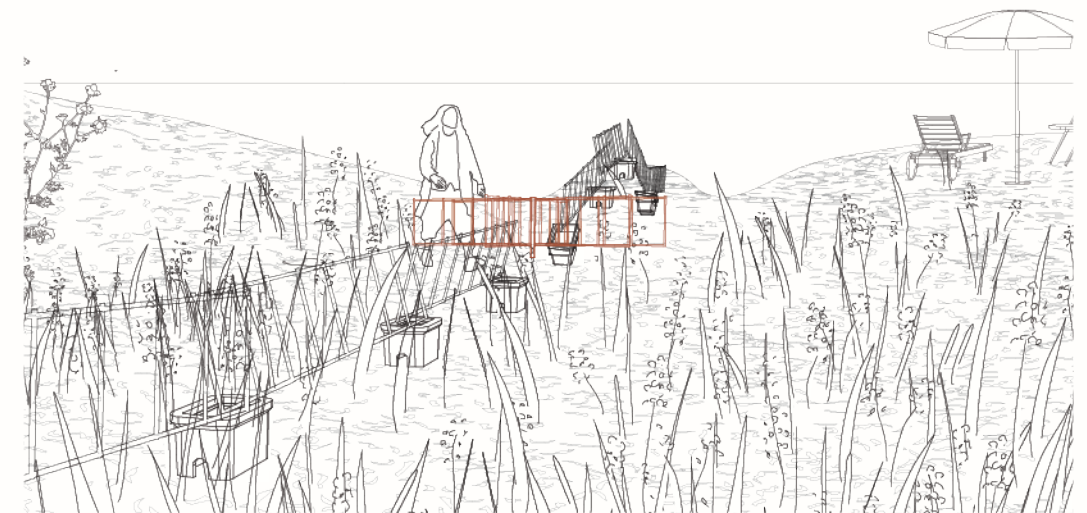
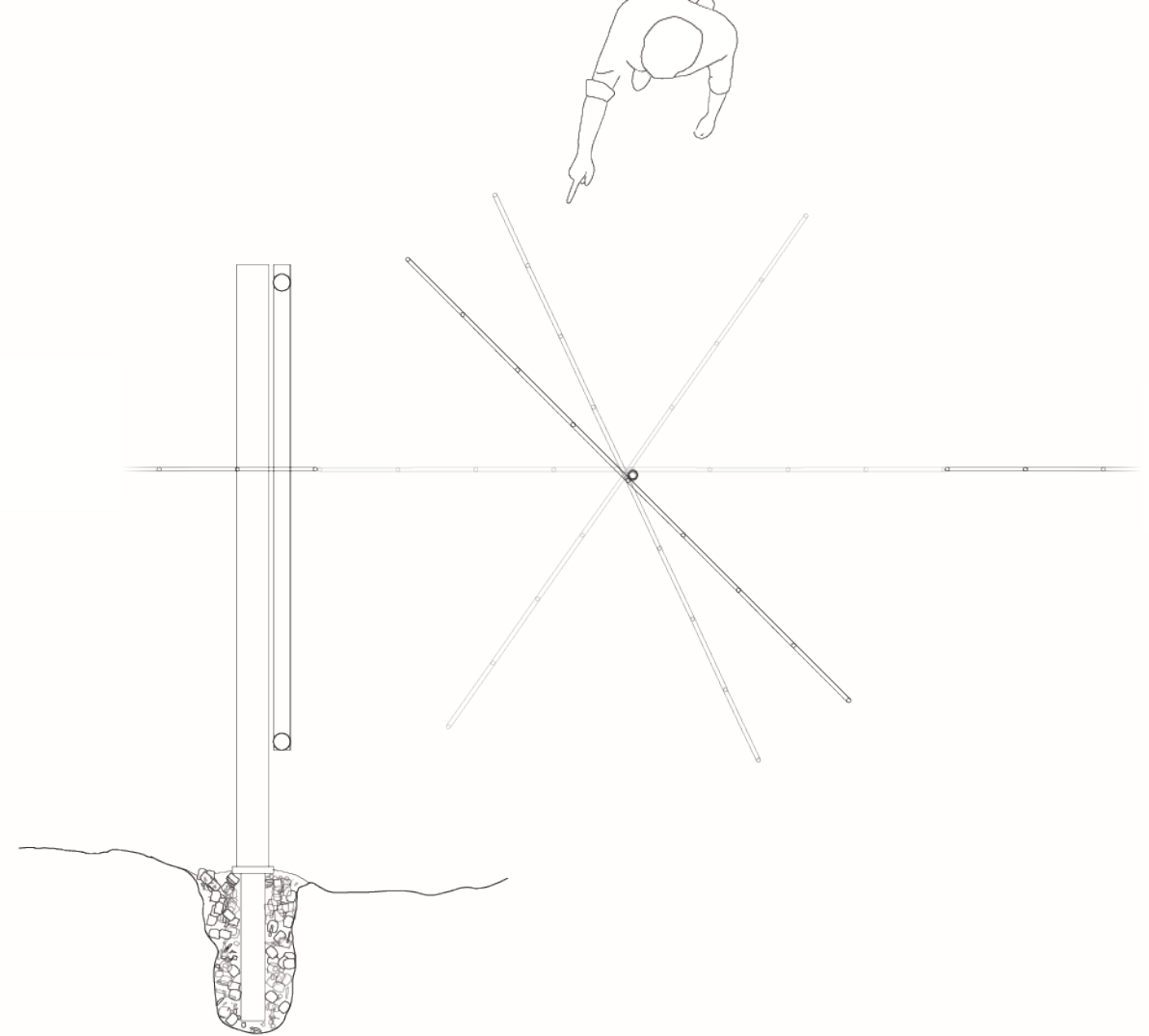
*When the announcement
was made the Varosha was
open, the fences start to fall
across town.*

*With one exception: the
string of barred fences on
the beach are momentarily
maintained. This is where
Varoshans came to protest,
time and time again.
Symbolic of the occupation,
many around town agree
this one has to be dealt with
differently.*



*We finally make our way
back to the infamous beach,
the one that's been at the
heart of so many of the
images yia-yia and mama
would dream up. It's much
smaller than I remember",
mama explains.*

*To go in from the north side,
one segment of the fence is
hooked to a column that
allows it to pivot. With this,
the boundary is broken and
restored with each turn. I
witness an older man move
in and out, pausing in-
between to take it in.*



A weed called marram grass has completely taken over the beach. I think they're beautiful - totally unassuming. "I remember hanging out by little patches of this grass. Now, it's completely taken a life of its own", says mama. We put our stuff down close to the water. Where the marram doesn't grow due to the salinity.

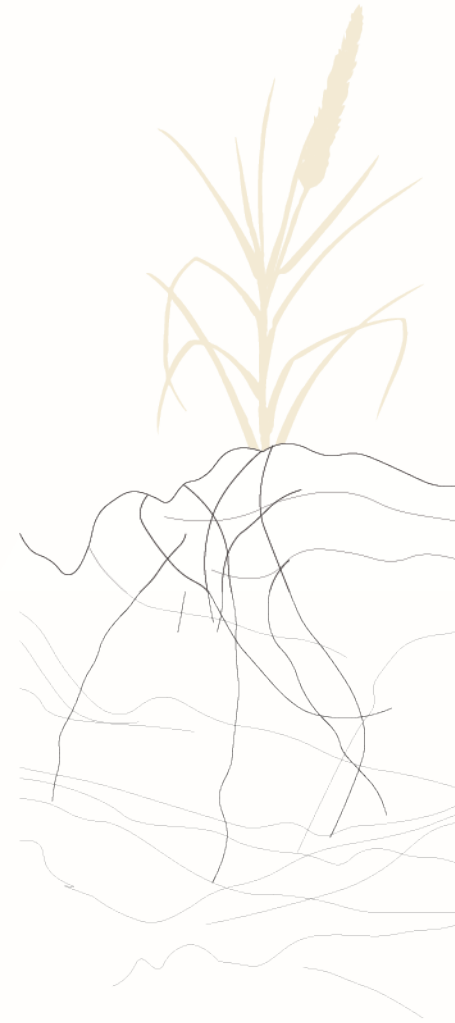
—
"At base, as Michael Pollan explores in his book *Second Nature*, the story that people tell about the plants they share their space with is a story about control, about different levels of willingness to accept vegetative autonomy."¹

—Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends*

The marram grass' position amongst other 'weeds' is highly contentious. On one hand, it grows rapidly and outcompetes native grasses. On the other, its hardy root system allows it to thrive in coastal conditions where other plants fail to. It traps sand, leading to the formation of sand dunes over time. These dunes are critical to sustaining coastal habitats and species more generally.²

¹ Till, 101.

² Alicia Acosta et al., "Classification of European and Mediterranean Coastal Dune Vegetation," *Applied Vegetation Science*, April 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1111/avsc.12379>.



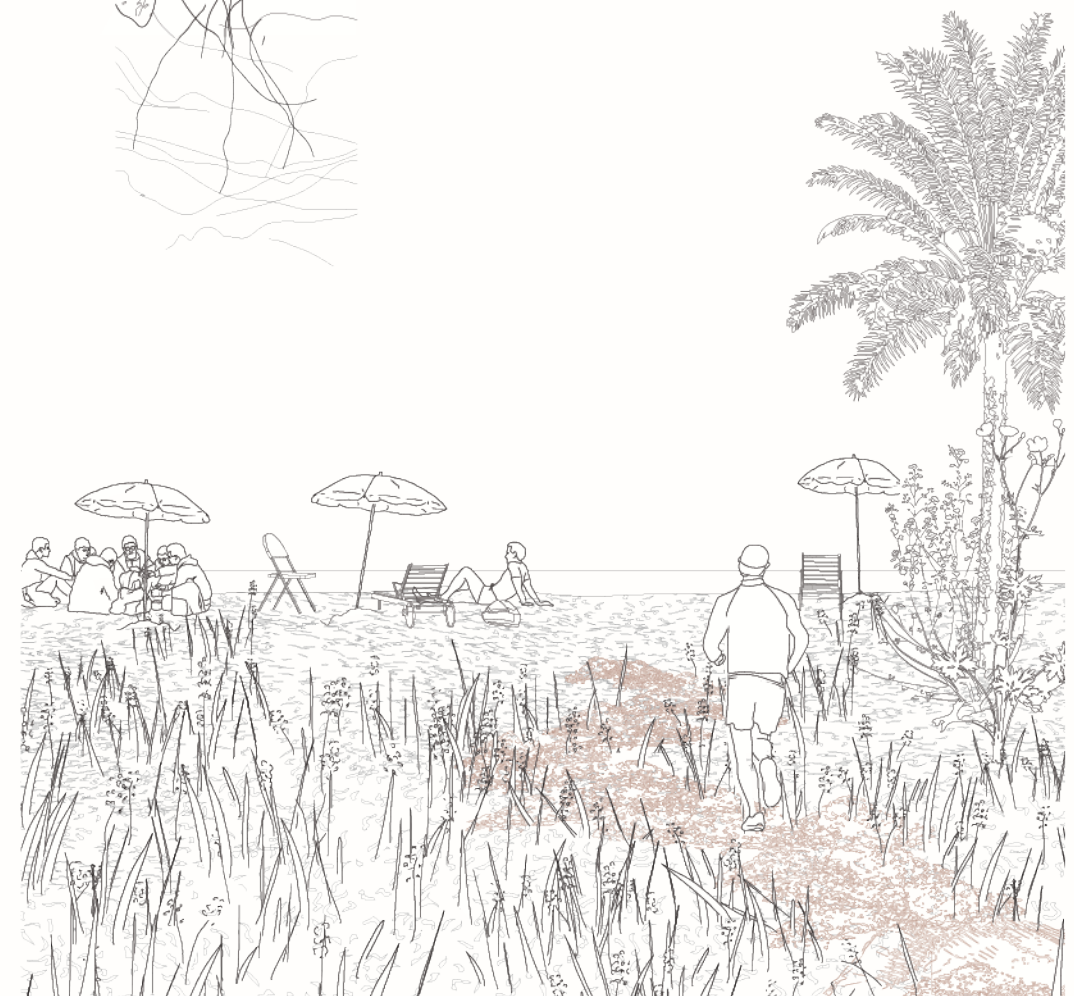
The beach comes up in conversation with people around town, time and time again. “What do we do with this grass? How do we restore the beach?”

Rather than weeding it out, we create paths across the beach to the parts that remain unclaimed by the marram. A group of locals end piling sand over the existing patches of grass. Funnily enough, the marram is actually rejuvenated by being buried in the sand through its hardy root system.

The marram grass loses its ability to buffer when it is either disturbed by human activity or outcompeted by another species.¹ It does, however, respond positively to being buried in sand, creating dunes more vigorously in the process.²

¹ Acosta, n.p.

² Corjan Van Nolet et al., “UAV-Imaging to Model Growth Response of Marram Grass to Sand Burial: Implications for Coastal Dune Development,” *Aeolian Research* 31 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aeolia.2017.08.006>.

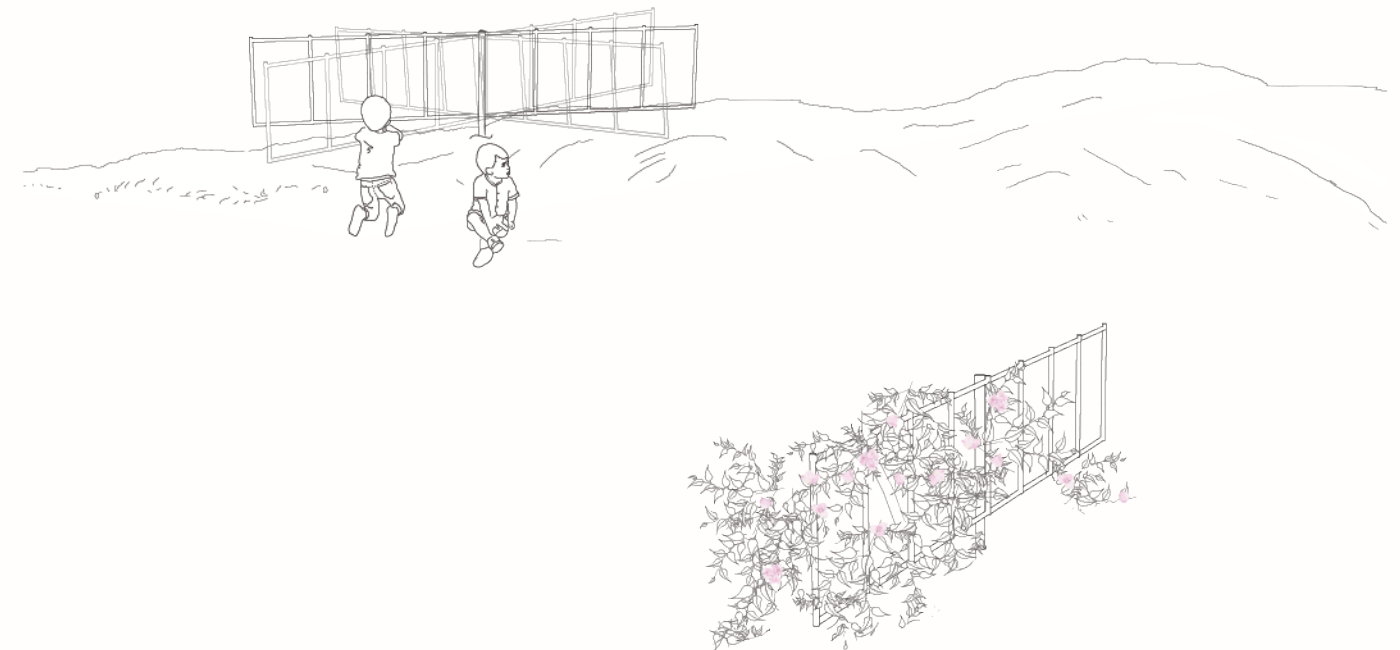




Over the first summer back, the line of fences at the beach that was initially maintained has slowly been taking on a new life. A series of follies have started to emerge.

It's a nod to the follies that used to be here. Mama remembers screaming with excitement as she hung tight to the spinning wheel as a kid. Now, the new follies are brimming with groups of children clamoring over, below, and around them.

Another supports the growth of clusters of pink bougainvillea.





A few weeks later, I make my way back to the very thing that would keep us out - the military post. Only this time, the shed's been modified with some tarp and found pieces of wood. Someone thought that the shed could perhaps be the start of a new structure, whatever we want it to be." We're told that we're free to continue adding to it as we pleased.

"The determination of your environment need no longer be left in the hands of the designer of the building; it can be turned over to yourself... The building is reduced to the role of carcass - or less."¹

-Archigram, A Guide to Archigram

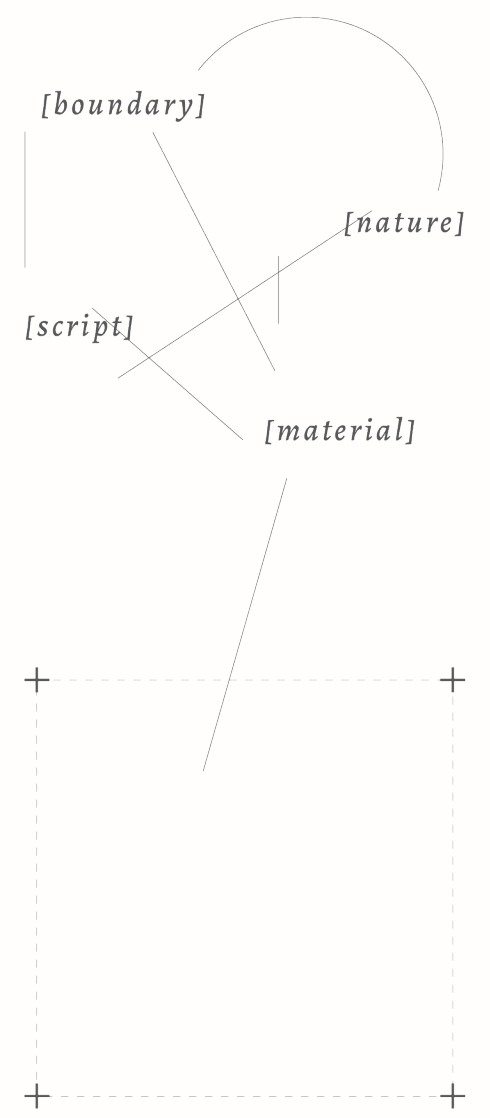
¹ Crompton, 205.

The first summer back starts to come to a close. At least we're here. At least we're back. Finally.

It's been a few months since the fence has come down. Tons of people have made it back, at least momentarily. Signs of the occupation start to slowly fade. Repairs to water systems continue across town. I look up across the sky and see a large crane about to tear down one of the hotels punctured with bullet wounds. After all, would you stay in one of those?

*People once believed that **nothing** in the town was salvageable. **Nothing was.** No one really knows how long we can sustain this, or what comes next.*

For now, this is Varosha.



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