

FROM MY JOURNALS

January–February 1969

Jan Palach and Jan Zajic, students, set themselves on fire to “wake up the nation from lethargy.”

1970

Větvicka, a fun guy and bass player, died of head injuries after the police beat him in the melee following the Beach Boys concert.

1971

My professor at the Academy of Applied Arts, Adolf Hoffmeister (who wrote *Brundibár*), is stripped of his professorship. Anyone considered progressive is replaced.

1972

The border has closed again. Travel is impossible. Goodbye, swinging London!

June 8, 1972

A group of young people with long hair—I know them well—hijack a plane to West Germany. They shoot the pilot with a gun hidden in a baby’s diaper.

February 1973

Every one of us in the academy has to create a piece of art celebrating the Soviet Army. I’m glad I’m in the animation department! I’ll just paint the backgrounds and explain that the tanks are coming later.

1974

Graduation... We’re told that our

generation is not to be trusted and has no future because we are “tainted” by the events of 1968.

To get a permit to have a studio in my own house, I have to prove that I am an artist in good “social standing,” that is, a member of the Communist Party. The curious thing is that I have just been offered a position as an assistant professor in the academy. I am told I am the youngest ever to be considered. I am elated, but then comes the condition: I must join the Party. They promise me that no one has to know about it! Thanks, but no thanks. I draw small pictures. I do not need a studio.

1975

My first professional assignment—an album cover for Karel Černoch’s *Letiště (Airport)*. I paint a little airport with a red-and-white wind sock blowing in the wind. “Did you check which direction the wind sock is blowing?” the art director asks. I laugh, thinking he’s joking. “It’s very important,” he says, “an ideological issue.” If the wind is blowing from west to east, it could be read as coming from West Germany to the Soviet Union. Ideological diversion. Infiltration. He calls the Ministries of Culture and the Interior. We wait for them to call back. “You’re in luck!” says the art director. “Your wind is blowing in the right direction.”

1975-76

Army service.

Rock bands can no longer perform without a permit.

All artists now have to prove their social and political qualifications.

1976

The Plastic People of the Universe rock band are in prison. I used to argue with them, and do not care for their music—but prison?

January 1977

Dissidents formed an organization called Charter 77. As a result, some of them are in prison. Some have been threatened and tortured, stripped of citizenship, and driven with their families to the western border and kicked out of the country.

January 28, 1977

Prominent artists, writers, film directors, actors, and musicians were invited to the National Theater for a “celebration.” When they were all in the theater, the doors were locked, and they were instructed to sign a document supporting the “fraternal help of the Soviet Army” in 1968 (that is, the invasion). Most signed.

Bad news/good news—my dad is in the hospital. He couldn’t attend. I’m almost sure he wouldn’t have signed... What would I have done?

May 1977

Finally, my first professional film:

an animated fairy tale, *Island for 6,000 Alarm Clocks* by Miloš Macourek. The story:

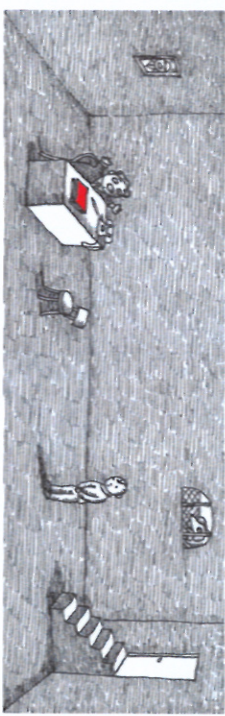
6,000 alarm clocks feel beaten down and unappreciated and walk off the job. They walk and walk until they get to a little island where they can ring as they please.

I spend a year painting, cutting, animating. The film looks great, all ten minutes of it. Everyone congratulates me. Then the censors decide that the film gives the wrong message by suggesting that you can walk away if you don’t like something. Was I telling people to emigrate? People are always looking for hidden messages. There is a whole science to learn about dealing with censors. You have to give them something to change. For instance, if you’re making a film or a painting, or writing a book or a song, you put in a big church.

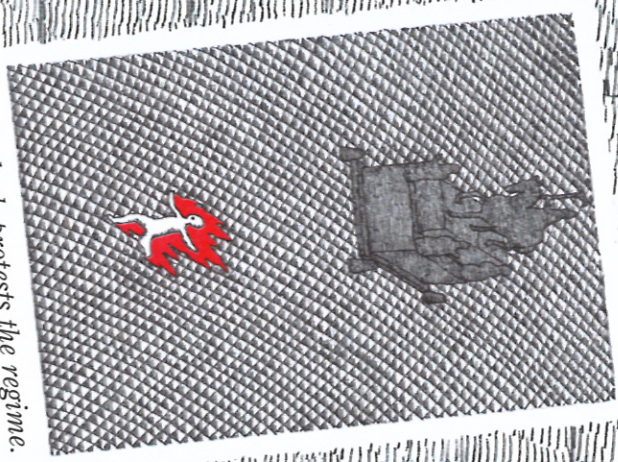
You can be sure the censors will tell you to take it out, and perhaps they won’t notice the smaller, important things. Theater people have the “little white dog” theory. If you let a little white dog parade across the front of the stage, the censors won’t notice what is happening in the background.

June 1977

Rumors, rumors, rumors. Everyone suspects everyone else of being an informer. Can we hope things are ever going to get better?



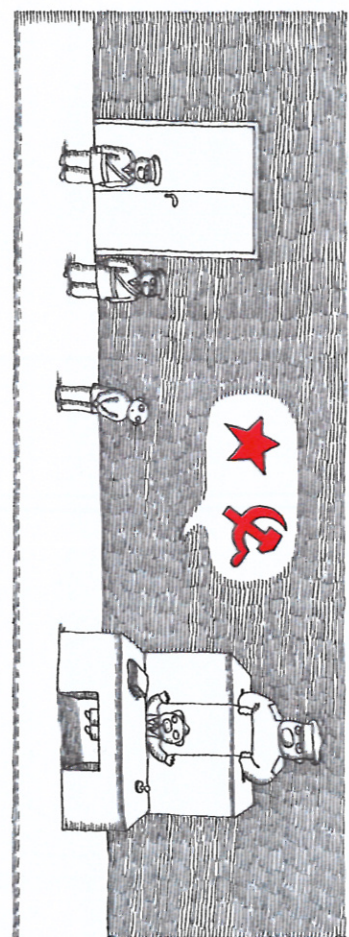
Very few dare to stand up and criticize the government.



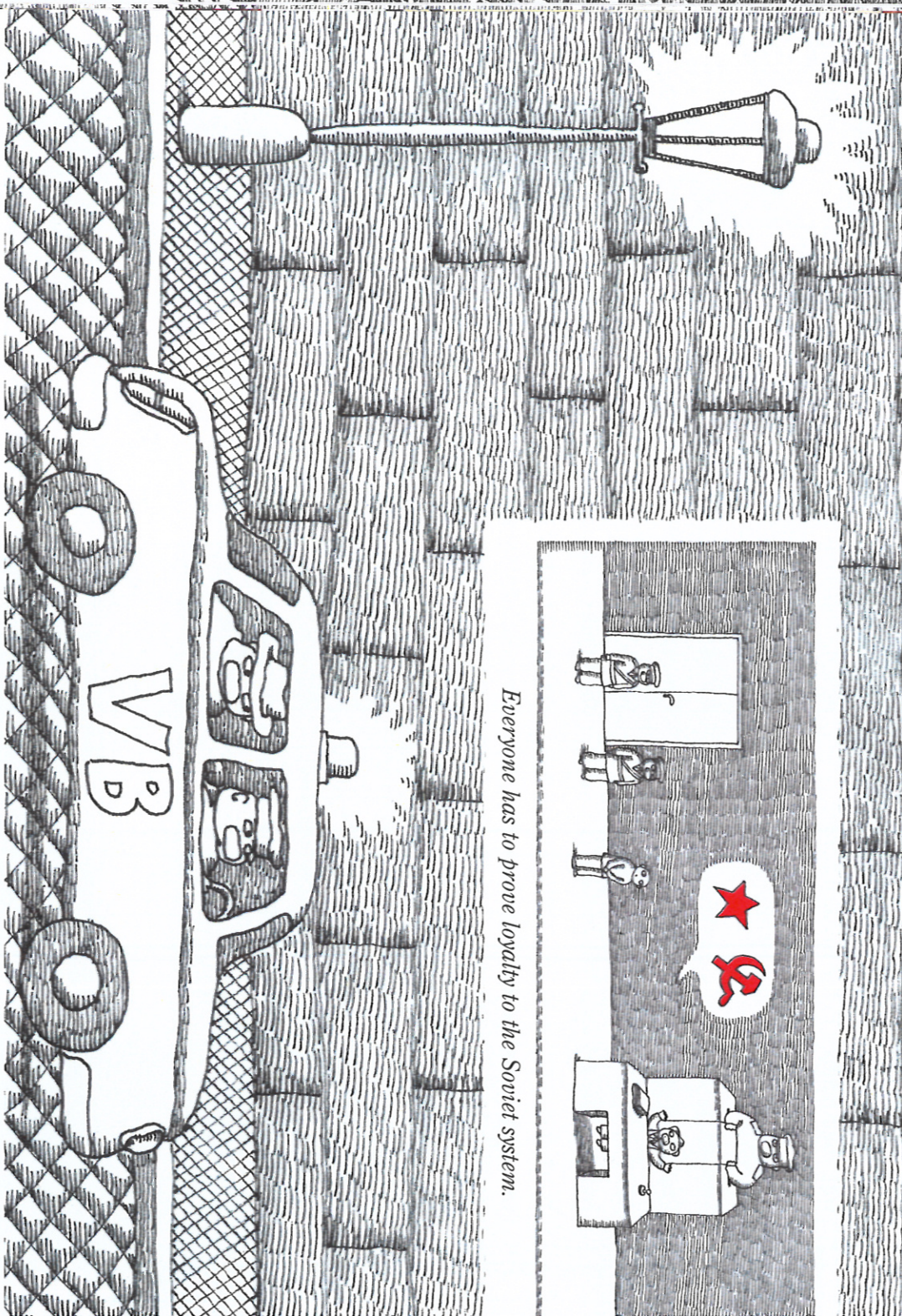
Jan Palach protests the regime.



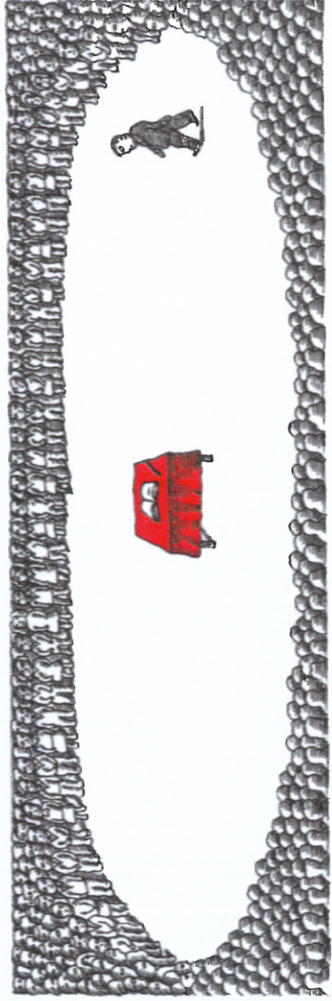
Dissident playwright Václav Havel is jailed.



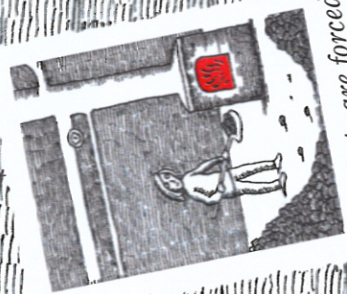
Everyone has to prove loyalty to the Soviet system.



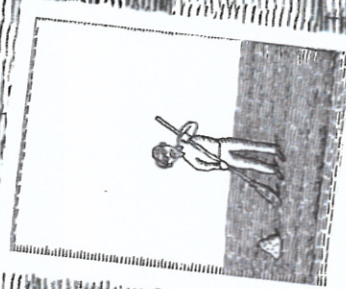
Things got worse...



Artists are brought to the National Theater under false pretenses.



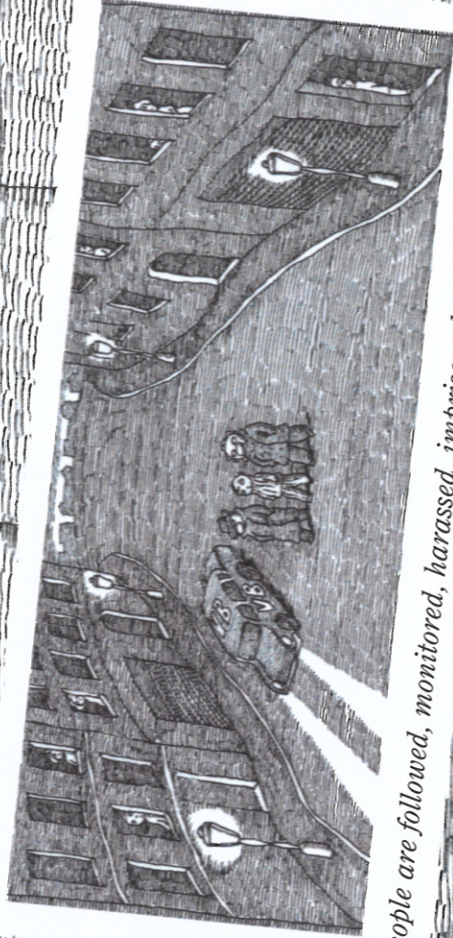
Dissidents are forced to do menial jobs.



A doctor



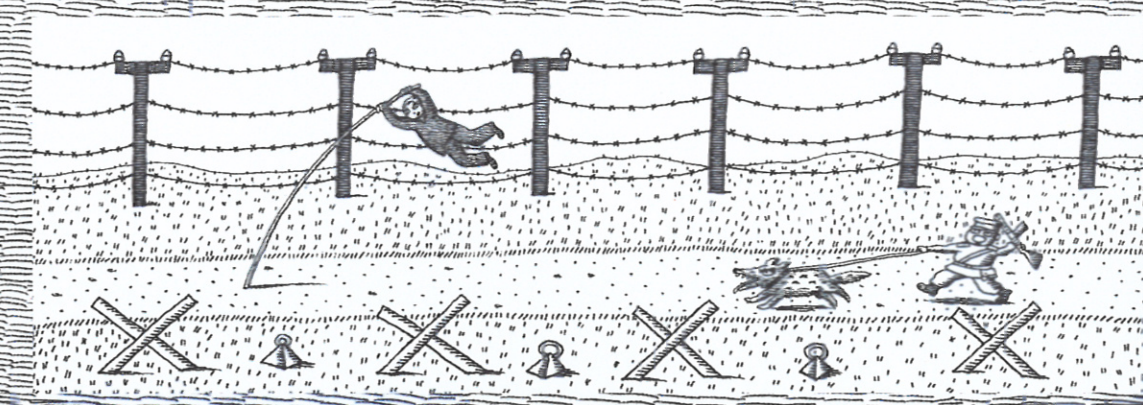
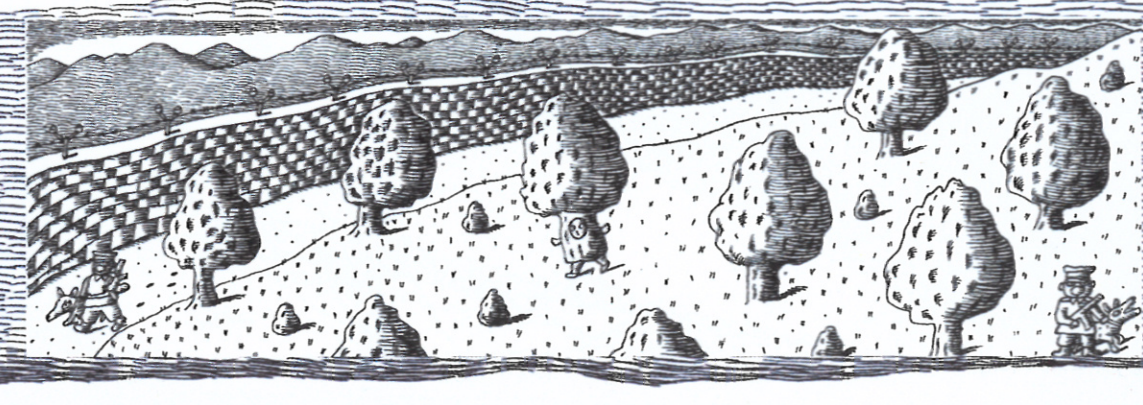
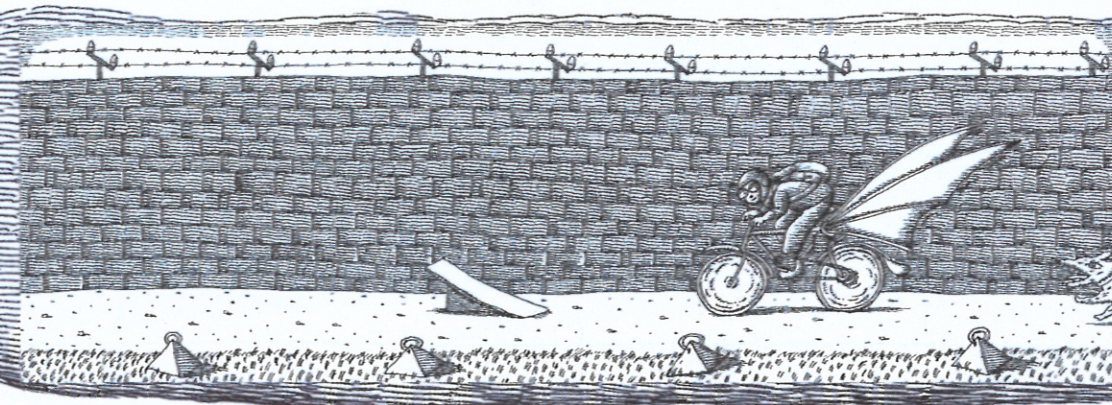
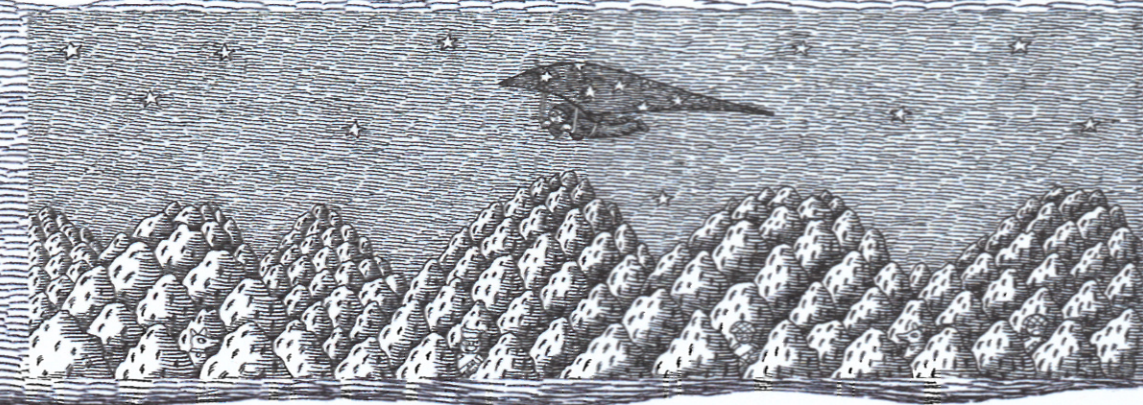
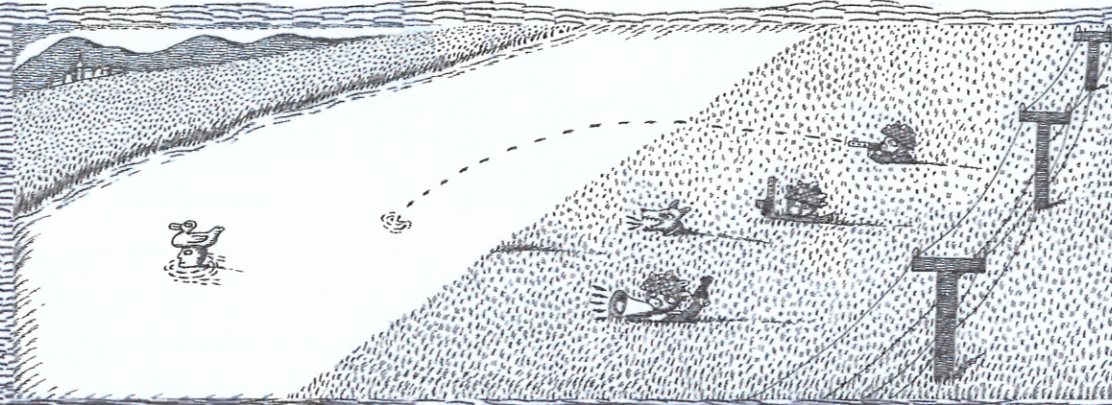
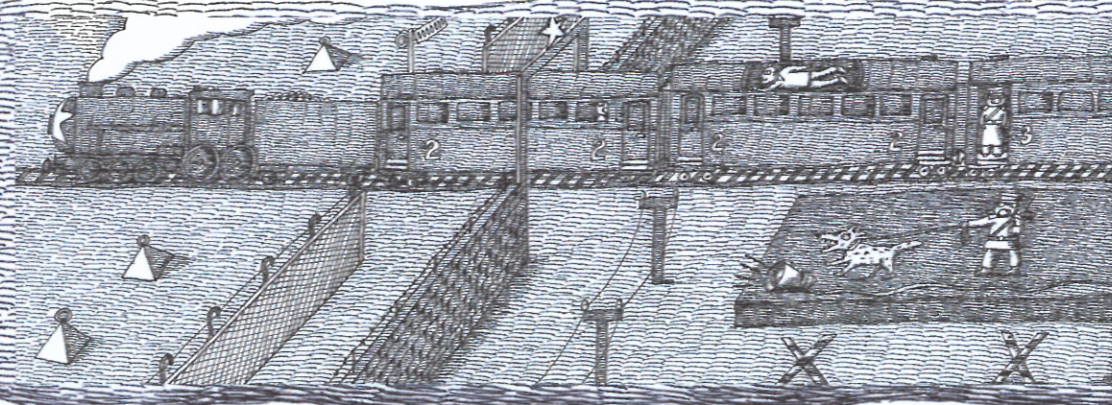
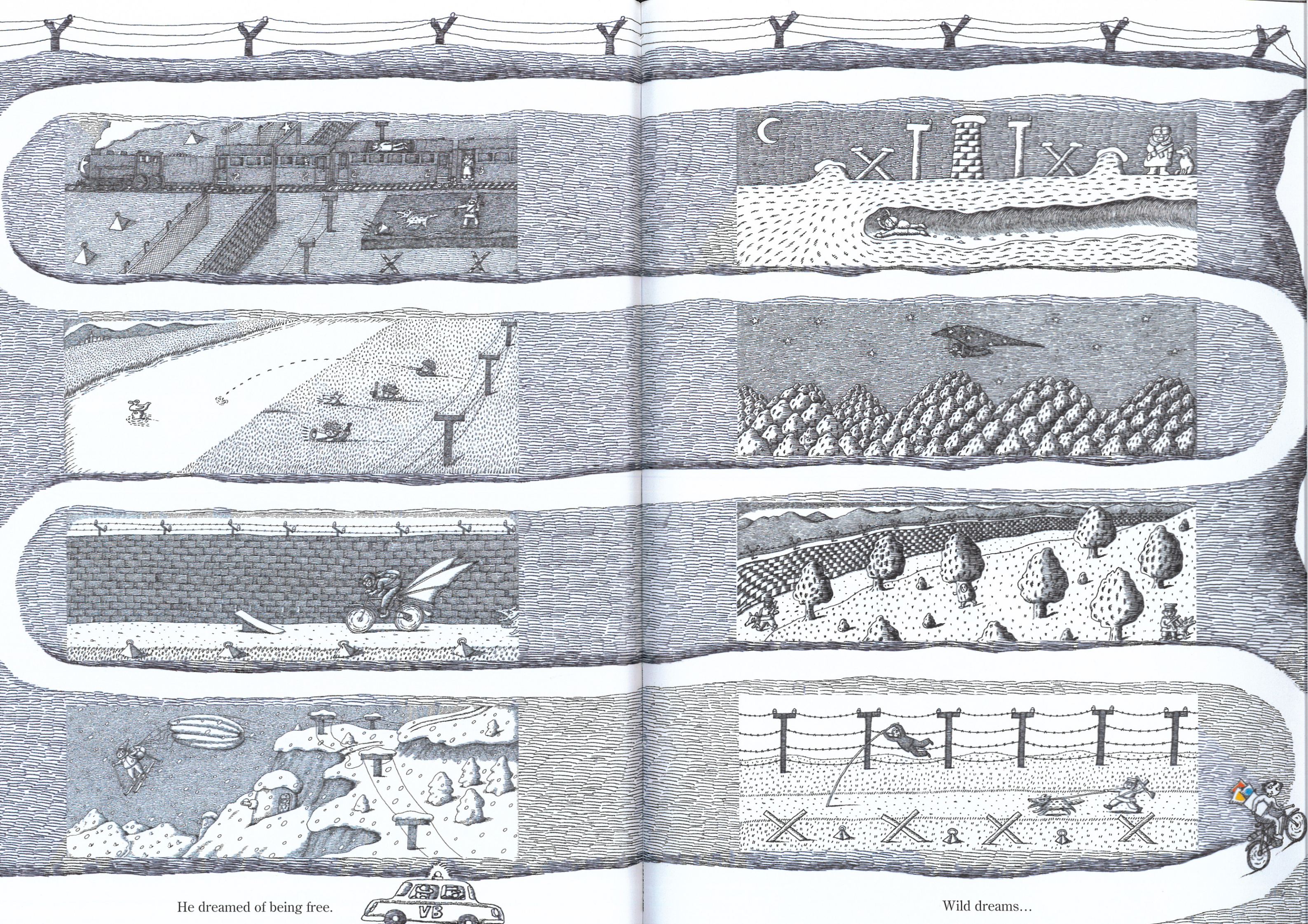
A professor



People are followed, monitored, harassed, imprisoned, deported, and tortured.



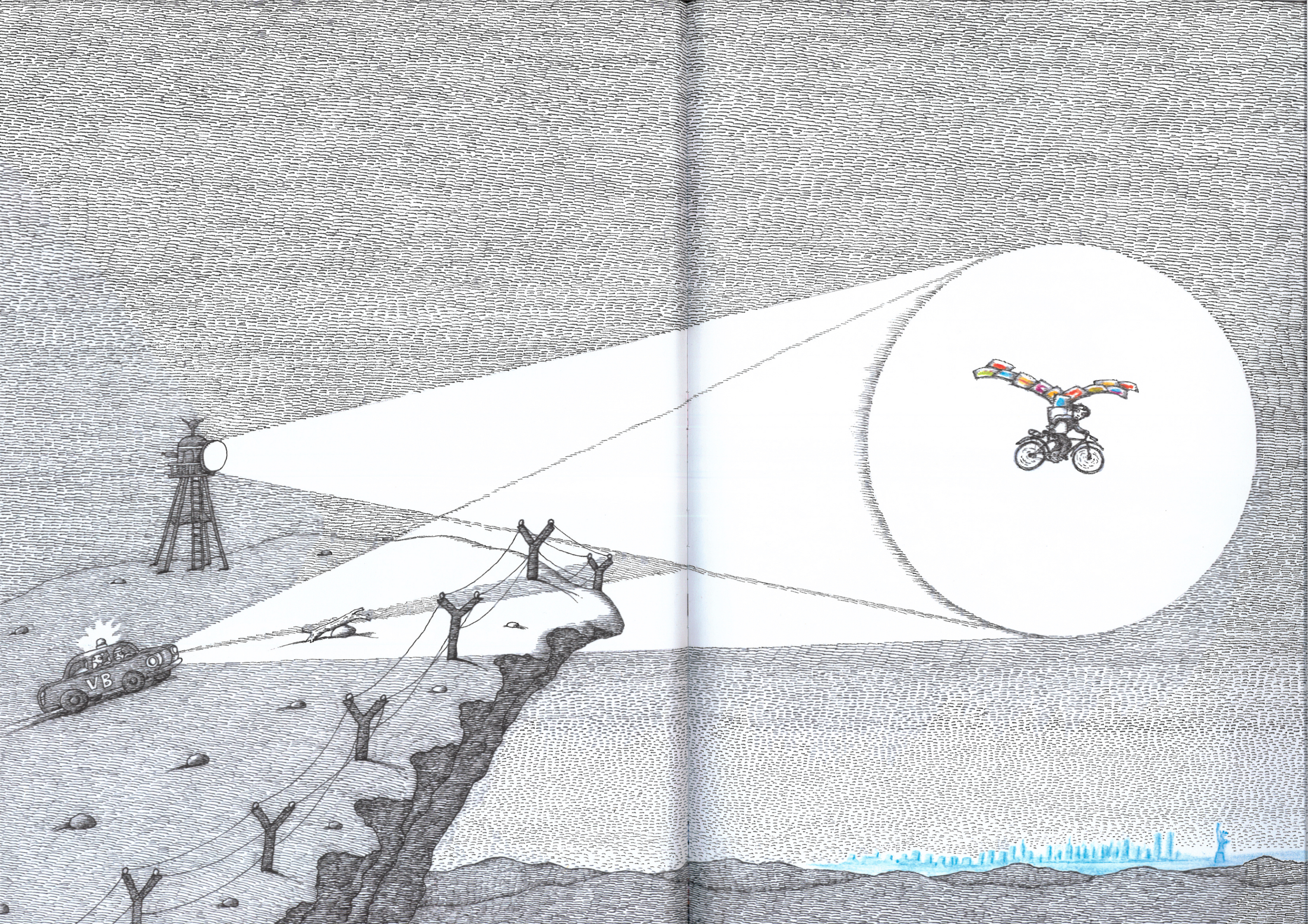
and worse.

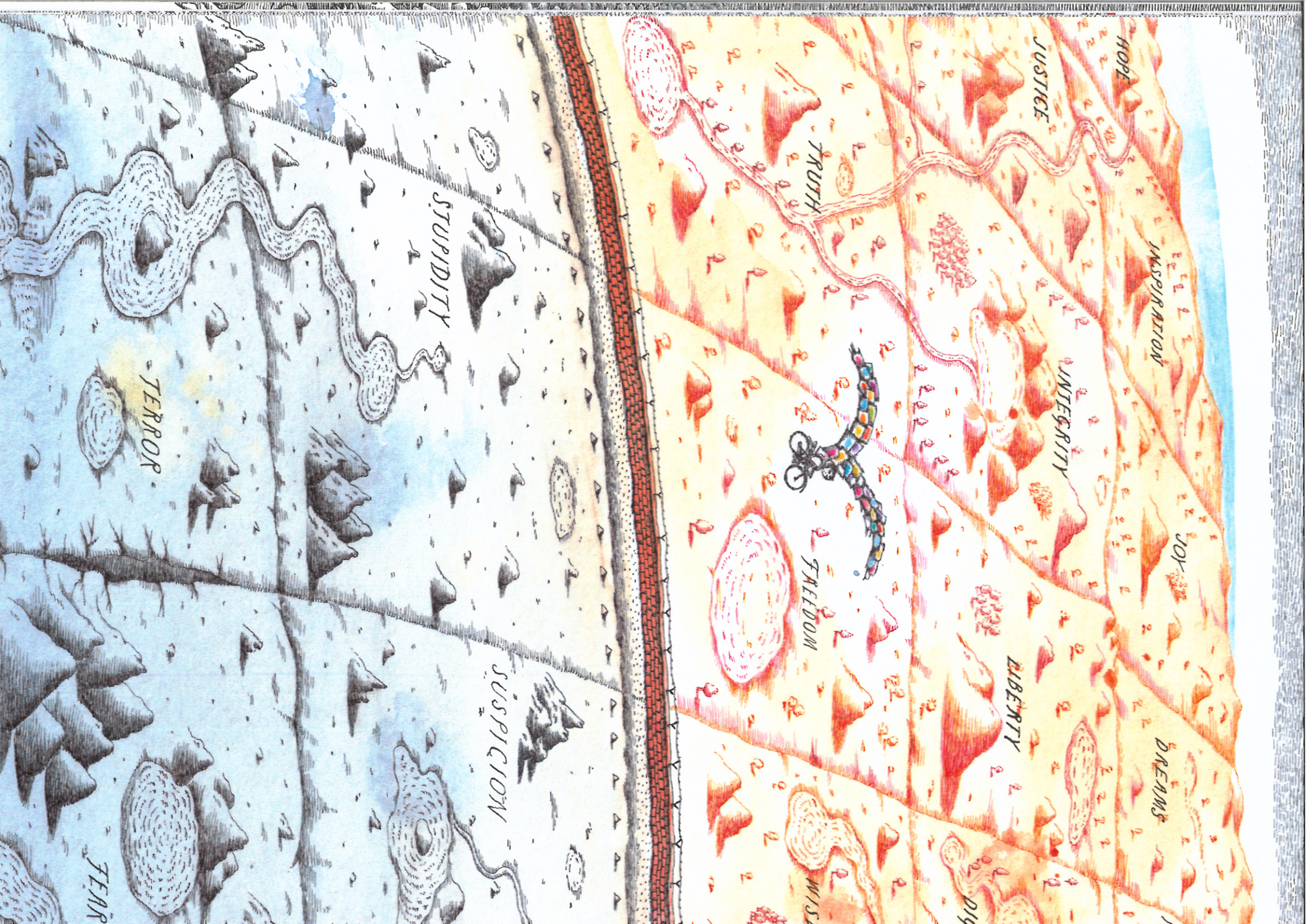


He dreamed of being free.



Wild dreams...





HOPE

JUSTICE

INSPIRATION

INTEGRITY

JOY

DREAMS

LIBERTY

TRUTH



FAITH

WISDOM

STUPIDITY

SUSPICION

TERROR

FEAR



LOVE

BENEVOLENCE

SPRIT

HONOR

VIRTUE

MORALITY

PRIDE

AJ

TRUST

HAPPINESS

EQUALITY

KNOWLEDGE

INJUSTICE

CORRUPTION

ENVY

LIES



FROM MY JOURNALS

March 2, 1978

Remek blasted off into space.
The first Czech astronaut.

Somebody from England saw my film about alarm clocks at the Krakow festival. I've been offered a scholarship to study at the Royal Academy of Arts. After days of visiting every office in town I finally get permission to go to London. I've been working on a new film for many months, I think I will call it "Heads".

October 1979

Václav Havel is sent to prison for four years for "subversion of the republic".

1980

Heads won best short film, the Golden Bear award, at the West Berlin film festival.

I am trying to get a two-day exit visa, and find myself promising some official that I'll buy hair clippers for her terrier. I end up running from one end of Berlin to the other, looking for the clippers, and therefore I miss my own screening. Nobody knows what happened to the Bear statue.

A letter arrived for me and it looked like it had been opened.

David is my brother. He's 13 years younger than me and goes to school just outside Prague. He's putting together an exhibition in the cellar of our house with some friends from school. They don't have official permission to do this. A special police unit arrives and arrests them.

I'm designing costumes for the opera "The Garrulous Snail".

I break up with Eva.

December 8, 1980

John Lennon has been shot.

July 1982

I've been offered a job by the Olympic committee. Seeing as I am the new young hope of Czech animation, I've been given permission to leave the country for three months. They have invited animators from different countries to film animated promos for various sports. They give me Rowing.

I'm in America.

Hollywood. Palms and pools.

MTV heard that I won a prize. They want me to do a music video of Bob Dylan.

I can't believe it! I'm going to be working on two films at once.

Disaster. The Soviet Union and a few other socialist countries have decided to boycott the Los Angeles Olympics (in retaliation for the boycott of the Moscow Olympics four years earlier?). I got a telegram telling me I should return home IMMEDIATELY. What now? I have to finish the Dylan film, then I'll explain.

1983

The Czechoslovak embassy (comrade Slezáková) is URGING me to return immediately to Prague. If my film is a success, I'll be famous and maybe they won't lock me up.

They didn't like my clip at MTV at all!!
What now?



1984

I'm afraid to go home. I'm going around Hollywood showing people my films and drawings. Nobody is interested. Apparently I could illustrate children's books. I should go to New York, where all the publishers are. But how am I going to get there without any money?

Good fortune in the midst of misfortune.

Miloš Forman is finishing his film "Amadeus". He's a friend of my father's and he likes my drawings. He's letting me do the poster.

The film was shot in Prague and my house was used as the set for the mask rental store. I'm drawing Prague in Hollywood.

I buy an old car with money I get for the poster, and drive all the way across America without a map.

In Texas I ask a policeman the way to New York. I think I scared him.

New York looks menacing.

I'm staying with a friend of mine, Tomáš, in a one-room studio.

I won't leave Manhattan until I've found a job! I'm doing the rounds of all the editors here. So many editors. Day in and day out.

June 24, 1984

Good news! My first illustration came out today in the New York Times.

1986

My brother fell off the roof in Nerudova trying to look at Halley's comet. He had taken the telescope with him. He is in the hospital, badly hurt, and I can't go see him...



1987

After working intensively for weeks, I finished writing and illustrating my first book. It's called Rainbow Rhino. It is chosen as one the "ten best illustrated books" by the New York Times. I am ecstatic!!!

Finally I can go home with proof that I accomplished something!!!

But it's too late.

My mother informs me that two comrades came to confiscate my things. That means I'm considered a defector. An emigrant.

June 1987

President Reagan came to West Berlin and said, "Tear down this wall!"

1989

The whole of Eastern Europe is in revolt. The news from Malá Strana and Prague is about abandoned trabants and thousands of East Germans in the garden of the West German embassy. They have had enough.

November 17, 1989

Police and students clash on Narodní třída in Prague.

Demonstrations on Wenceslas square.

People jangling their keys.

Václav Havel.

The whole country is waking up.

I'm flying home.

We're finally going to be together again.

The whole family.



Games of the XXIIIrd Olympiad Los Angeles 1984

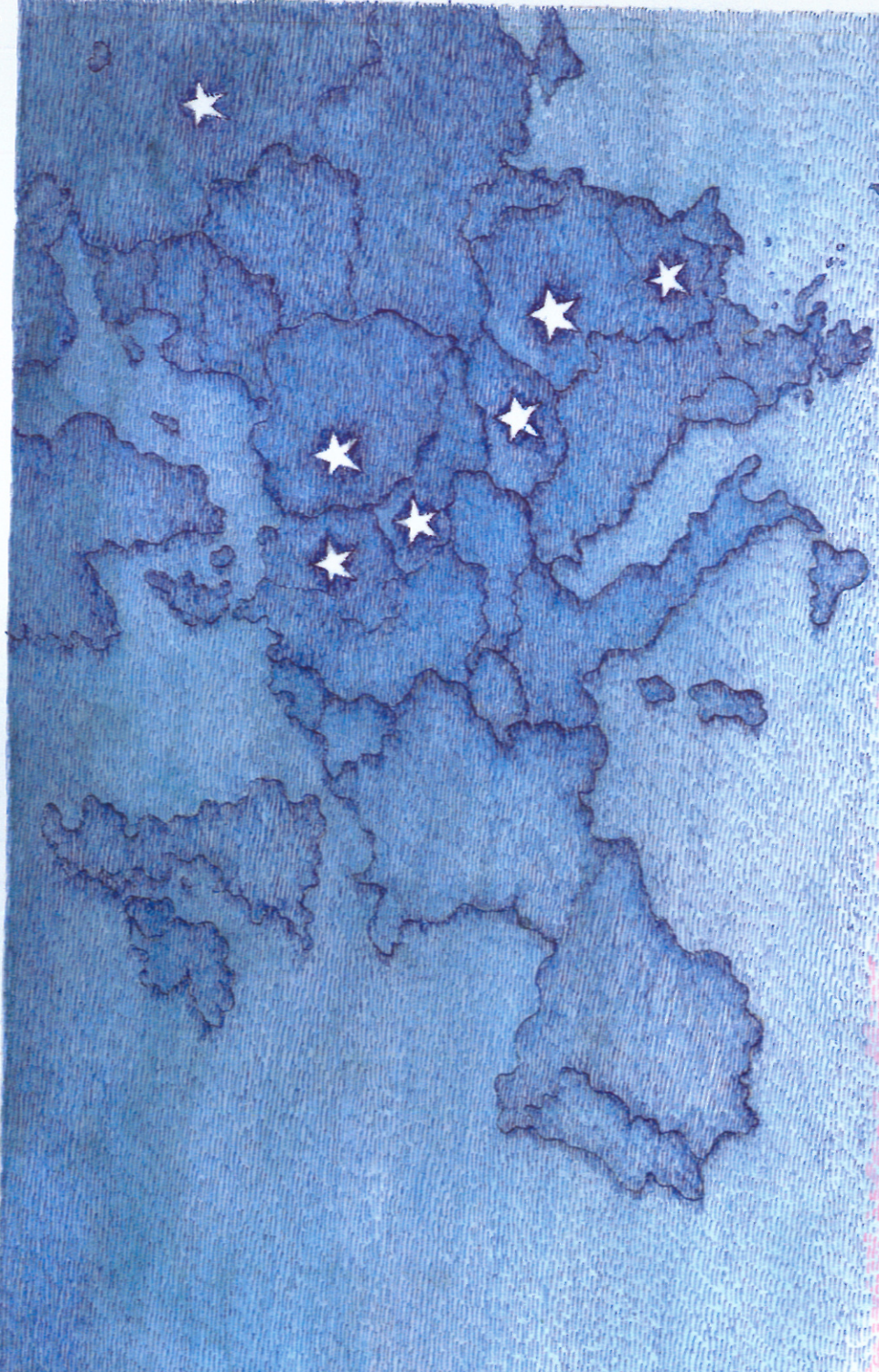


These ideas spread throughout Eastern Europe and lead to the fall of the Wall and the collapse of the Communist system.



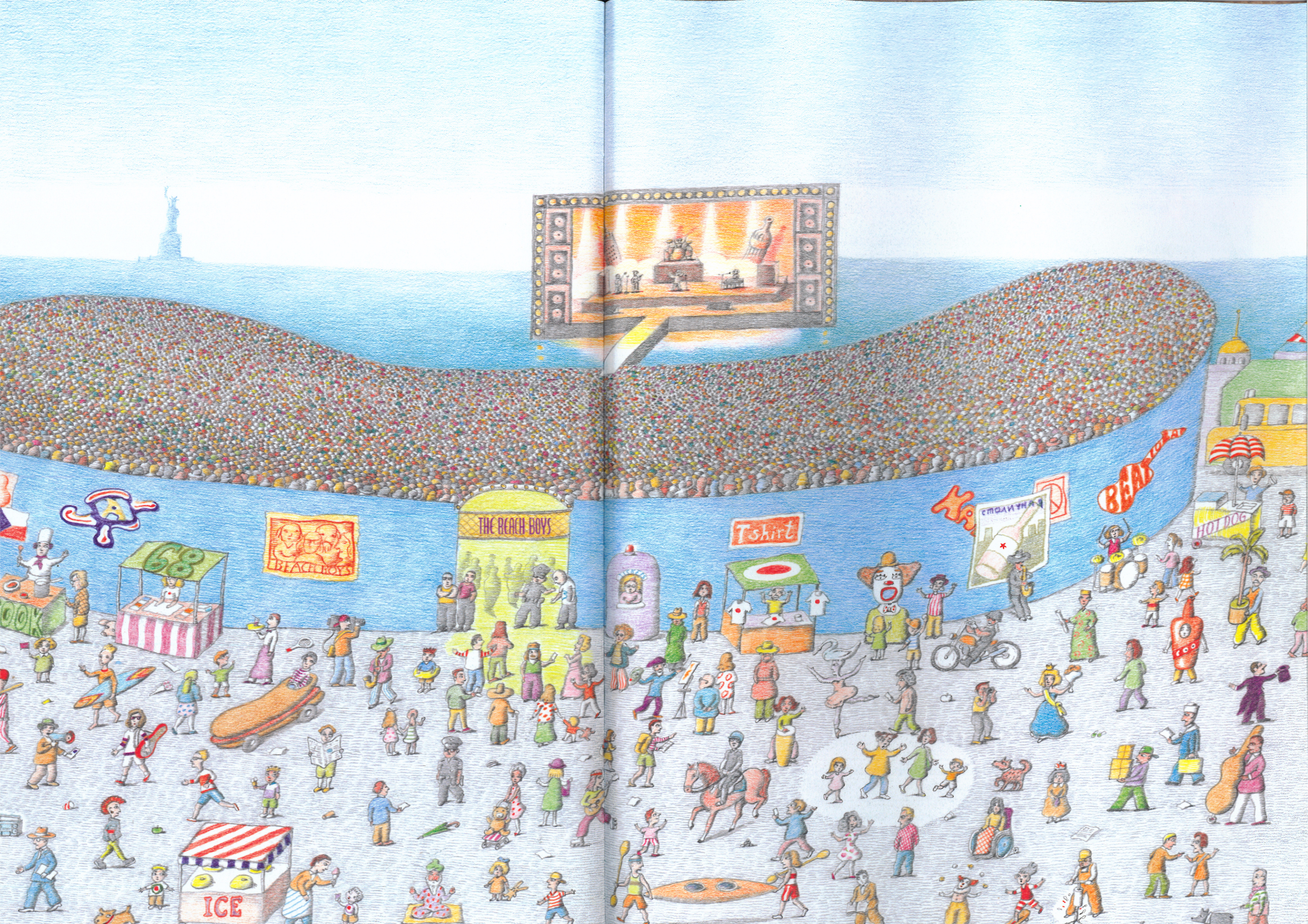
SOMETIMES DREAMS COME TRUE

One country after another becomes free: Poland (1989), Czechoslovakia (1989), Hungary (1989–1990), East Germany



ON NOVEMBER 9, 1989, THE WALL FELL.

1989–1990), Romania (1989–1990), and Bulgaria (1989–1990). East and West Germany reunite (1990), and the Soviet Union breaks up (1991). The Cold War is over.





“Dad, so what happened to that boy?”



“I think he’s still drawing... Now let’s go home and we’ll paint music...
music full of colors.”

There are some things you can experience only once.

The first Beach Boys concert was a wonderful promise of freedom, a taste of America in occupied Prague in 1969. The second time, we left before the end.

The music was different. The magic was gone.

We are, after all, free to decide what we like and what we don’t.

My ten-year old son Matěj came home from school and told me what he had been learning about American ‘settlers’. He asked me how I came to be a settler, and whether I was one of the good settlers or the bad ones.

I tried to explain with the help of some drawings...

The wall which for many years divided Berlin and the whole of Europe is now, fortunately, only a memory. But some memories need to be preserved. As a message about the past. As a warning to the future. Even though one wall has fallen, others remain and more are being built. All over the world. In Israel, Korea, or on the Mexican border. Symbolic walls, ideological walls and real walls. Walls of fear, confinement and suspicion. Walls without which our lives could be freer and happier.

