TU Delft

Marina Kathidjiotis

Research Aleksandar Stanicic
Design Joris Lüchinger
BT Rufus Van Der Ban

in the fold

The following unfoldings all begin with a story. A story that listens to the memories of Nicosia, of coexistence, of homes once lived in, of courtyards shaded by trees, of neighbours whose lives once touched. Through these recollections, the city begins to reappear in fragments: its folded past, its unfolding future.

The work begins with listening, to past inhabitants, to the small traces that remain in the everyday fabric of the city. Through interviews and recollections, short stories attempt to trace how life was once shared between the communities of Nicosia. They try to gather what has been scattered, the worn texture of floors, the scent of gardens, the sound of lace being folded.

From these memories, the work moves toward imagining. It looks to the disused and overlooked spaces of the city, courtyards, gardens, ruins, as grounds for renewal. Rather than seeking to rebuild what was lost, it explores how the city might open itself again through acts of care, reuse, and encounter.

Through these layered narratives, the thesis unfolds as both storytelling and design. It asks how listening, making, and remembering can become a form of mending, how the stories that shaped Nicosia might, in other forms, shape it again.

preface

The thesis began with a strong desire to explore how one might build common spaces for the two main communities of Cyprus, communities now separated across the island, yet once lived side by side. Looking at Nicosia, a city long marked by division yet rich with a history of coexistence, I asked how its past might inform a shared future. From literature and poetry, fragments of that life emerged: the old churches, the ruined palaces, the minarets and kiosks, they all painted a picture of a multicultural city. But I was more interested in how everyday people experienced the city, their homes, their interactions with their neighbours, and what it all felt like
.
To find this out, I interviewed people who lived through those times. They described their homes by the textures of their floors, their rooms by the crafted objects that filled them, their gardens through their smells. These recollections allowed me to reimagine Nicosia alongside them and storytelling became a tool of research. Through their words, I inhabited the past as an occupant of the city myself. I began rewriting the stories I heard in detail, noting every texture, every glance, every surface. Materiality emerged as a central thread in these narratives: yellow limestone walls, stucco facades, colourful wooden doors chipped by time. The city revealed its past like an open book.

But through these interviews, it became clear that this book was slowly being rewritten. The city's past occupants explained in dissatisfaction how political narratives continue to erase physical traces of the "other" community, how commercialisation has opened the ground to sterile developments, and how ruins of war have been left to decay, hidden behind walls. It became clear that the city itself could act as a catalyst for cooperation, and that the material of its ruins could play a central role. The common purpose would not be to erase these scars, but to reclaim the city's fabric and restore the labour that binds people to their surroundings, working with what is already there, embracing what was once shared, and refusing to conceal the past.

This first-person perspective of storytelling bled into my design process. It allowed me to explore materiality, gardens, and surrounding spaces at the scale of the occupant, giving weight to every texture and pattern one comes across in the design. Care became the operative word: care for what once existed on the site but is now unseen, care for what still remains, care in each stroke of the hand drawings that explored the site's potential, and care in the details of each proposed surface. Storytelling became not only a research method but a mode of design.

Once I chose my site, I began to imagine a series of gardens that could weave its disused terrain, filled with rubble and half-standing walls, back into its surroundings. For each I compiled stories that described each garden on site, through the eyes of the visitor, the building's worker, the plants themselves. The imagined gardens and their stories were a reaction to their immediate surroundings and sought to restore fragments of Nicosia's old life.

Through this, I came to see design as a space of negotiation with its context open and adaptive, like the city itself. Engaging so closely with material raised new questions: How can visible care embedded in place become a force of attraction? How can the reuse of ruin be reimagined as desirable?

Gardens proved fertile ground as a design exercise, as they allowed life's messiness to coexist with intention. Each had a purpose, yet all were designed with flexibility and reclaimed material at their core. They functioned as collages of the city's fragments, and this sensibility bled into the architectural design. The different gardens along the site's edges allowed the building to grow organically between them, forming a fragmented whole that stayed true to the city's nature. Reclaimed material, care, and the occupant's perspective remained central to the design of the building. The design's purpose became not about what it is, but what it allows. The building itself became a composition of functions, material storage, workshops, an archive, and a public library, each developed with the same sensitivity to material that they seek to foster.

The stories of lace, baskets, ruined houses, and enduring trees all pointed to the same truth: care is what binds people to place and to one another. Sometimes it appears in stitches or woven strands, sometimes in growing roots, sometimes in walls laid and re-laid. Whether such spaces can truly act as catalysts for confronting a shared past and heritage cannot be answered with certainty. But they can at least offer a common purpose: the act of caring for what is shared once again, and through that care, the possibility of meaningful coexistence may begin to take root.

introduction

There is a woman known in Nicosia's history as the woman of the Green Line, the only to remain in her house during the war, when the rest of the city deserted. Her daughter, one of the few original inhabitants of Nicosia's old city, took on her mother's house. Though altered over decades, it still carried traces of its former life: the facade, a long corridor, and a small, enclosed garden, a threshold between the private home and the wider city. In the back of the garden, behind its enclosing walls, a door led to a neighbouring garden. It was added during the curfew imposed by the British, the woman says, to still be able to visit each others garden. Moving through the space, I noticed a knitted lace throw draped across her bed. When asked about it, her eyes softened. Her mother had made it, along with many others, each stitch a testament to care and labor. She brought me a pile, and I traced the delicate patterns: the turns, the craftsmanship, the time embedded in thread. This was not the first time I witnessed the deep affection Nicosians held for these handcrafted goods. I visited other, former inhabitants of the city, not in the homes where they had grown up this time, but in the new houses they had built for themselves outside the city's walls. They all left when the troubles began, some in haste, others with the luxury of returning a few times to ensure nothing was left behind. Yet all of them carried with them the laced knits, the ones their mothers, aunts, sisters, or neighbours had handcrafted. Each displayed it to me proudly, and seemed intent on making sure I noticed the detail, and that I understood the time, care, and devotion embedded in them. In these unassuming objects, the ways in which they were once cared for were preserved, and
In What's in a Home?, Handel presents these acts of domesticity through an appropriate lens, quoting a displaced Palestinian mother: "I rarely leave the home [..], because the home is clean and beautiful, and we invested a lot in it." Investment here being the operative word. Investment is seen not as capital, but accumulated effort, labor and attention rendered visible. Like knitted lace, what we notice isn't the object itself but the time and care woven into it. Arranging objects just so, stone steps worn smooth by years of sweeping, hand-embroidered linens softened through generations of use, and handwoven baskets whose every strand bears the hours of weaving, all render domestic labour visible, folding care into physical space. Time spent to make spaces not only habitable, but meaningful. Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis helps make sense of this: these everyday gestures create cyclical patterns, revealing time not as linear but as lived, repeated, and sustained, and through these cycles, time invested becomes visible. Yet Handel reminds us how fragile this is. Displacement disrupts exactly those accumulations of care that root people to place. At the same time, it also intensifies the desire to invest in the home as a site of stability against instability.

Nicosia offers a striking context for such reflections. A fragmented city, now long marked by division, it was once mostly revolved around the private sphere. With the public realm often shaped or constrained by foreign authorities, the domestic domain became the site where Nicosians asserted cultural agency and made care visible. As the outside world grew uncertain, the home assumed a heightened role: a place of privacy and safety, nurtured, adorned, and safeguarded for what was most valuable. When conflict began, these dynamics fractured. Neighbourly bonds were broken, residents displaced, and the city centre emptied. As Handel observes, this displacement disrupted those accumulations of care that once rooted the people of Nicosia to the city.
Repopulation came slowly, and the city changed in its process. Decayed empty plots were left , and private life gave way to an abruptly publicised terrain, and the layered fabric of the city was stripped flat. Heritage sites and fragments of the "other" community were erased on both sides with political narratives continue to fragment this history, pulling apart what was once shared.

Amid this fragmented landscape, Christos Papastergiou's Garden Travelogues proposes reclaiming Nicosia's under-utilised plots by stitching them into a network of semi-public gardens capable of revitalising the city and "triggering cooperation" across divides. He highlights these abandoned sites, often reduced to rubble and remnants, where roots creep and trees grow inside deserted houses, as spaces rich with potential for reconnection. For Papastergiou, gardens can transform these disused plots into common ground, allowing for a shared purpose to bring the communities together.

The choice of gardens is not incidental in the social life of Nicosia. Gardens extended domestic care outwards, where neighbours shared food, tended plants, and worked side by side. Low walls and shaded corridors kept these spaces porous, lived in and shared across the year. If the Nicosian home was a unit of care, the garden was its threshold: turning the domestic outward, making care both social and collective.

Papastergiou situates this within a longer history. He turns to travel narratives from the 14th to 20th centuries and their descriptions of Nicosia's enclosed gardens to reveal their shifting roles across periods. Under the Lusignans, gardens expressed production, ornament, and power; Venetian fortifications disrupted them, reducing their reach. Under Ottoman rule, they flourished as communal spaces for food, neighbourly exchange, and shared ritual. Despite colonial planning in the British period,

private gardens largely retained these traditions. Oral histories from residents who lived through the end of British rule recall them with vivid detail, children leaping over walls to visit friends, evenings of lace-making in shaded courtyards, women laying dough for bread together, neighbours watering plants or tending vegetable patches. Gardens blurred private and public life, becoming a threshold where care spilled into the social fabric. Even aristocratic gardens, with their luxuries, often spilled into the city as communal amenities, wood-fired ovens, baths, and other facilities used across communities. Gardens blurred private and public life, becoming a threshold where care spilled into the social fabric.

Yet, while the nature of gardens offers opportunities to use such plots to reconnect the city, the domestic ruins scattered across them cannot be overlooked. These are not monumental heritage sites but fragments of daily life, left to decay after war and division. Walls of houses, half standing, half destroyed, are discarded behind walls, too worn to be easily cared for, too distant from the materiality of new development to be of any use. This disuse contradicts the very character of Nicosia: a patchwork city that has always reassembled and reclaimed its past. Lusignan and Frankish rulers set Roman and Byzantine columns into their facades; Venetians tore down houses and churches to build new fortifications; Byzantine churches became mosques. Nicosia has always been layered, shared, and carried its material forward.

Following this lineage, reclaiming the ruins of Nicosia's disused plots could be central to their development and "triggering coexistence." The common purpose would no longer be only the tending of gardens, but the restoration of the city's own material and the labour that binds people to their surroundings. Reintroducing vernacular building practices offers not just sustainable reuse but also forms of care: working with what is already there, reclaiming what was once shared, and refusing to conceal the scars of the past. In this attempt to confront these ruined structures and incorporate them into daily life, gardens could serve as a means of reclaiming, weaving the ruins and their materials back into the fabric of Nicosia. More than metaphor, gardens embody gestures of visible care, and the persistence of these gestures could begin to anchor the city as a site of stability against instability. As spaces where social life has always unfolded within Nicosia's fragmented context, gardens hold the capacity to soften the harshness of ruin, symbolically and materially, and to reintroduce care as a shared practice within the city.

Eva Keller, "Looking at the House from Inside: The Processes of Constructing Group Identity amongst Greek-Cypriots," The Cyprus Review 9, no. 2 (January 1, 1997): 41–56.
Papastergiou, Christos. "Garden Travelogues." FOOTPRINT 18, no. 1 (September 30, 2024). https://doi.org/10.59490/footprint.18.1.6943.
Dēmētrēs Michaēlidēs, Historic Nicosia, 2012.
Handel, Ariel. "What's in a Home? Toward a Critical Theory of Housing/Dwelling." Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space 37, no. 6 (January 8, 2019): 1045–62. https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654418819104.
Henri Lefebvre, Rhythmanalysis (A&C Black, 2004).

the courtyards of Arab Ahmed

Both nature and ruin make time visible, one through decay, the other through growth. This duality of ruin and nature can be read together not through romanticisation, which risks rendering them static, but by assuming responsibility for their care. Through the reclamation of both, where nature becomes garden and ruin becomes reclaimed material, the intertwined timelines of decay and growth are maintained and read, but this time creating space to reconnect the past and the present, rather than viewing them as a static remnant of the past.

The following four gardens in the Arab Ahmed neighbourhood of Nicosia attempt to materialise this approach. Imagined around a proposed material-reuse storage and workshop complex, they tie buildings to their surroundings and connect visitors with the life cycles of matter itself. Their stories are narrated through the perspective of the observer, whether worker or visitor, who confronts the past they carry, and the present they allow.

Each garden attempts to embody a different aspect of engaging with the timeline of the ruin and the garden. The reed garden emphasises cyclical rhythms of cultivation and the new cycles that emerge within them; the woven garden explores the integration of the garden produce into the reclamation of space; the jasmine garden recalls past domesticities, suggesting their presence in its absece; and the fig-tree garden demonstrates how nature and material can act as a markers of time. Each garden hopes to serve as a space of reconnection, where past and present is shared.

Marc Pimlott, The Public Interior as Idea and Project (Heijningen: Jap Sam Books, 2016).
Tim Edensor, Industrial Ruins Spaces, Aesthetics and Materiality (London Bloomsbury Publishing (Uk) Bloomsbury Academic, 2005).

Courtyard 1

Of Ochre Giants and Steppings Stones

*The **Reed** Havli*

"…bursting from a clump of fallen masonry, cracking the rock triumphantly, the very plumes of yellow… It likes old ruins best, growing there more freely than on the natural rock. In the hollow tube of its long dry cane, which remains stiffly standing when the flowers and leaves have perished, Aeschylus says Prometheus brought down the fire from heaven…"

Durrell, in his description of the Abbey ruins of Famagusta, captures what makes reed so bound to Cyprus, its resilience, its ability to crack stone and to resist erasure, much like the ruin it inhabits.

If you walk by the Pediaios river in late summer, you will see them rise, tall, hollow, swaying and rustling like a whisper. Reed lies in abundance across the Cypriot landscape, in ponds, along groves, edging fields, at once ordinary and essential. It shaded citrus orchards, sheltered homes, and, at dawn, was cut and carried, softened, split, and woven into mats. Families worked together: men harvesting, women weaving, children watching and learning.

Even as it changes form, its origin remains legible. Observing it you follow its possibility, seeing what it could become if shaped by hand, an image all too familiar. Its rough stalks, once woven, still read as riverbank and grove.

The garden below continues this lineage. Sitting between a cul-de-sac, a material-reuse yard, and the walls of neighbouring houses, reed here is again productive, protective, and public. It grows and is harvested in rhythm, its cycles a form of care that allow more cycles to grow around them. Each season the cut stalks return as woven panels, seating, shade, all to be absorbed by the building itself and remind that durability can be soft, that care is often patient, repeated labour, and that even in transformation, the past remains legible.

Lawrence Durrell, Bitter Lemons of Cyprus (Open Road Media, 2012).

Salih Gucel, "Arundo Donax L. (Giant Reed) Use by Turkish Cypriot," Ethnobotany Research and Applications 8 (August 30, 2010): 245, https://doi.org/10.17348/era.8.0.245-248.

Kapouti Community Council, "Reed-Mat Weaving from Kapouti," www.unesco.org.cy, 2015, https://www.unesco.org.cy/Programmes-Reedmat_weaving_from_Kapouti,EN-PROGRAMMES-04-02-03-08, EN.

Courtyard 2

Of Passing and stillness

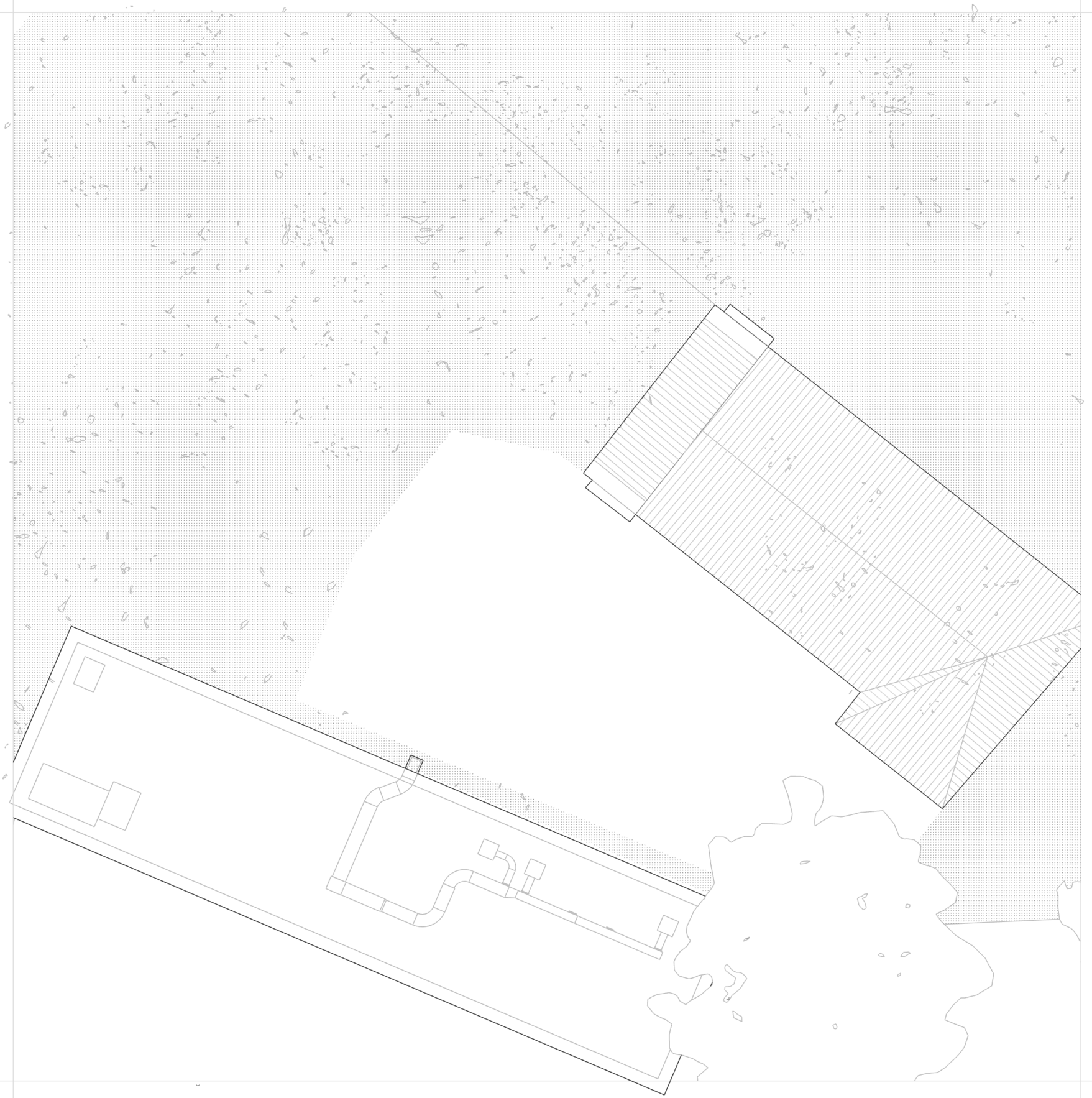
*The **Fig** Havli*

The Last Garden approaches nature through the lens of symbolism, the meanings carried by religion, myth, and poetry. At its heart stands the fig tree, a species of particular resonance in Cyprus. Its importance is written into the very map, with villages named after figs in both Greek and Turkish, a testament to how deeply the fruit has shaped cultural and social life across time.
Across the Eastern Mediterranean, the fig has long stood for life, fertility, and continuity. In Cyprus, these associations are reinforced by religion. The Quran opens Surah al-Tin with the words, “By the fig and the olive,” invoking them as emblems of creation and divine order. In the Gospels, the fig appears again with layered meaning: in Luke, its budding signals summer’s nearness and the passage of time; in Mark, the barren tree is cursed for its fruitlessness. Fertile yet fragile, the fig holds a symbolism of the intricacies as life itself.
But most importantly, the fig tree reveals its relation to time in ways few other trees do. Its growth is written openly with vertical roots rising above the soil and inscribing their own chronology. The urgent ripening of the fruits, turning sweet and then falling into decay almost as fast. To harvest a fig is to capture this short-lived moment before it eludes you. The leaves, dropping with the seasons, announcing transitions. In this way, the fig makes visible the cycles it the overlapping cycles of growth and decline it undergoes.

Here, a small garden is already formed on site. The space between a small chapel and a new metallic prefab construction. The existing garden remains untamed, and unassuming, showing only the marks of the old path to the chapel, and dry vegetation Once a centre for the Armenian community, later remade into a music school, it is now silent. Preserved yet obsolete, it inhabits another kind of time. It lacks the urgency of ruins that decay and crumble that act as reminders of a passing of the old ways of being. If the fig tree embraces time’s advance, the chapel seems to withhold it.

Between these two conditions, the garden takes shape. The planting of the fig here is not merely horticultural but an act to begin a new cycle. As its roots will spread wide across the shallow soil, its fruits will ripen and fall, its leaves will signal each season as it passes. Around it, the tiled flooring will spread across the ground in porous clay, close to the place of planting. Their dislocation, and the marks left through cycles of fruition and shedding, become inscriptions of the fig’s rhythms, while all else remains suspended. The garden, framed by the fig and the chapel, will hold these two temporalities in contrast and contradistinction, as life around
it continues to unfold.

David C Sutton, Figs: A global history (Reaktion Books, 2014).
Lytton John Musselman, Figs, Dates, Laurel, and Myrrh (Timber Press, 2007)



Courtyard 3

Of thresholds and reclamations

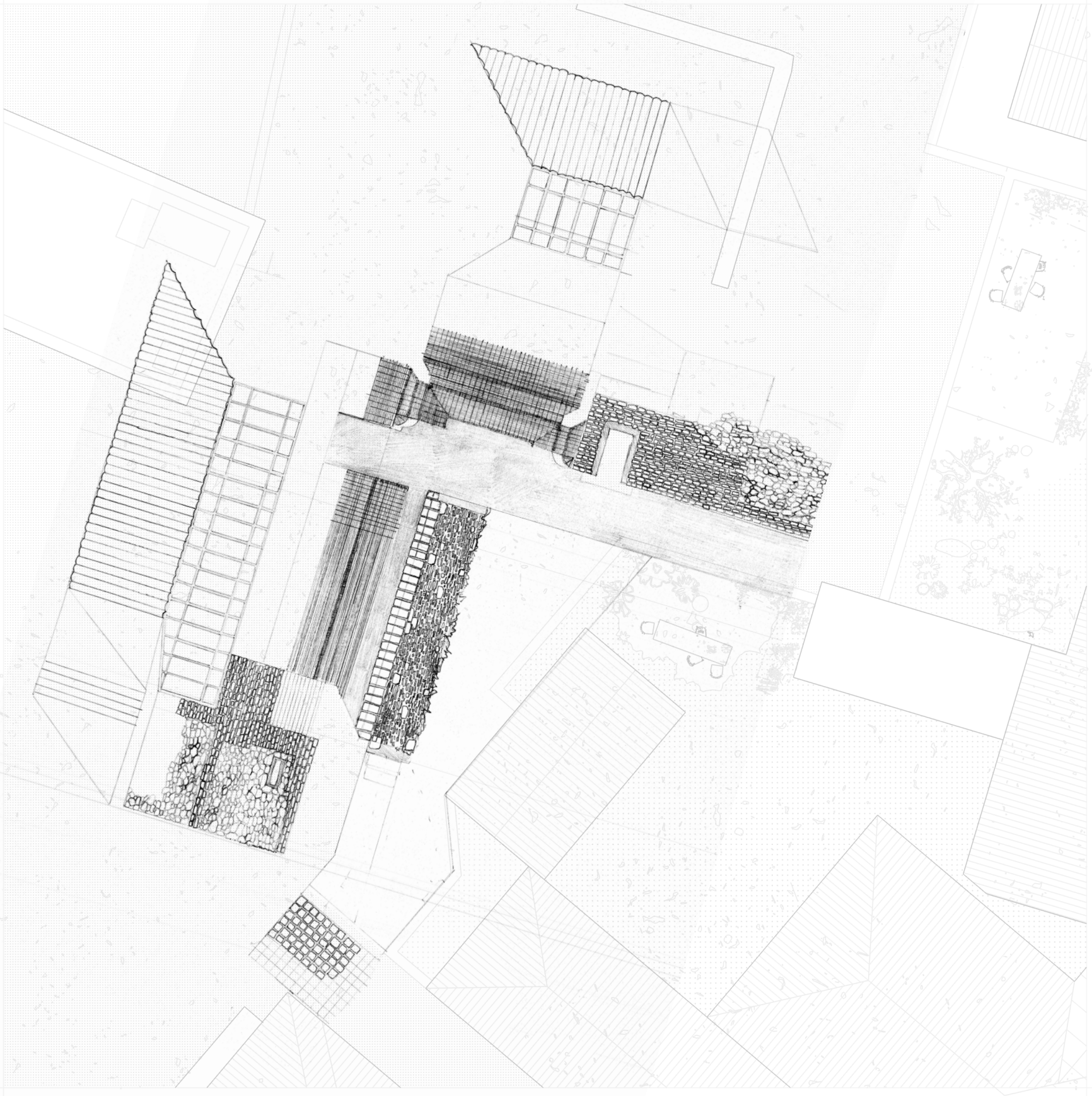
*The **Woven** Havli*

In the old city of Nicosia, two ethnographic museums stand on each side of the city, yet mirror one another. Each converts an old house to portray the domestic life of Greek and Turkish Cypriots, respectively. Yet the image is strikingly similar. Among other vernacular crafts, clay vessels, crocheted lace, metalwork, and textiles, crafted basketry appears in every room, courtyard, and iliakos. Though reed and willow were never cultivated within the walled city, their woven forms filled homes and markets, carrying the productivity of the countryside into urban life.

Reed threaded itself into the intimate material of daily existence: plaited into broad circular mats, tsestes, that replaced tables in modest homes; woven into baskets hanging from rafters, guarding food from mice and insects; stretched into seats; latticed across windows; even fashioned into makeshift sheets against sudden rain. In every form, reed softened the edges of Cypriot life, adapting seamlessly to both rural and urban contexts.

The garden emerges in the in-between, formed by the spaces that lie between the new building and the surrounding backyards. Conceived as an extension of these gardens, it is enclosed and shaded, defined by the wall of a neighbouring house on one side, and the loggia-like corridors of the new building on the other. It is a space waiting to be claimed, reached through passages that thread in from adjoining gardens. Built from reclaimed brick and stone, its rough surfaces softened with woven reed, carrying traces of handwork into the space. The canes remain visible, their transformation legible. In its simplicity, the garden recalls how craft always carried a bit of the outside inside, and how, in its rawness, reclamation can be both tangible and understood.

Ιωάννης Ιωνα, Παραδοσιακα Επαγγελματα της Κυπρου (Λευκωσία, 2001).



Courtyard 4

Of scents and continuities

*The **Jasmine** Havli*

"…enter homes, old mansions, pass through the handcrafted doors with intricate lintels, cross the open corridor with its saddle-shaped roof and finely chiseled beams, and step out into the courtyard: a courtyard of your own, completely hidden from the Turk's eye, with palm trees, prickly pears, olive trees, orange trees, geraniums, and jasmine. An unbelievable sense of things existing that you could never have imagined from the narrow facade, which kept silent, yet inside concealed treasures hidden away from grasping hands."

Agathi is framing the allure of the enclosed garden as its imposed secrecy, the journey through thresholds half-open and half-public that buffer the privacy of the house from the generosity of the garden. Yet Agathi's description speaks to something more: the very spatial order of the Nicosian house. However modest or grand, it followed the same tripartite rule: an entrance passage piercing the closed front façade and extending between the house and the garden, both informal and transitional, the private rooms of the house, and finally, the garden. With this tripartite rule in mind, walking the streets of the old city, one learns to read the ruins: to trace what once stood, to imagine how it was inhabited, how much life it contained. Even in fragments, the arches give away the stretched presence of the iliakos; one can almost place the plants, the jasmine by the doorway, pots of parsley along the corridor, lemon and olive trees in the garden.

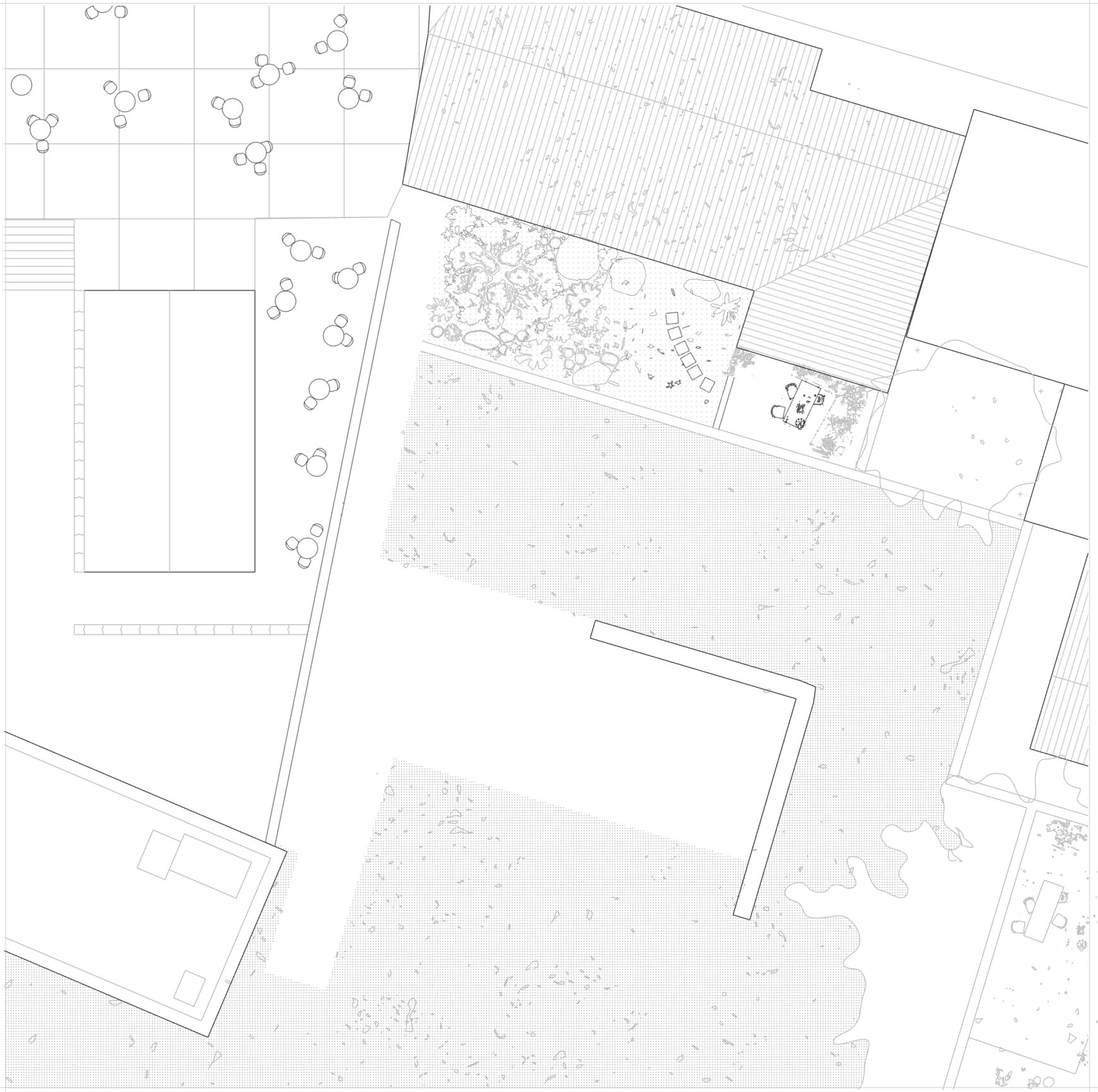
It is precisely this act of imagining, provoked by the ruin, that makes it more than a reminder of decay. As Pimlott observes, "We occupy the places of others who have gone before us; those who we have never known, those we have forgotten, and those who we half-remember. […] As much as the ruin has prompted contemplation of the demise, decay and degeneration of all things, it has been a spur to the imagination for interpretation, for construction and re-construction." He argues it is this trigger to imagine that makes the ruin so potent of a device in architecture, capable of liberating new builds rather than constraining them.

But it also allows the ruin's wholeness to be imagined again, not as a fixed lesson to be repeated, but as another layer in the city's continuum. The ruin does not seal the past away; it ties it to the present, where old and new are entangled in a play of time that keeps alive what once existed and what was shared. In the following imagined garden extract, the garden assumes this role. It occupies the footprint of a past house, of which only two corner walls remain, with the new building allowed to unfold around it. A long open corridor draws one inward from the crowded street, and the space opens into calm. Where the kitchen once stood, seating is arranged among plants. Along the surviving walls, jasmine climbs toward the empty windows, openings through which the bedrooms once looked onto the garden. With small gestures, the garden inscribes absence with presence, and loss with care.

Extract from the greek folk song "Ω γιασεμιν", believed to have been written by a Greek Cypriot man for a Turkish Cypriot woman, captures the deep and intricate bond between the two communities of Cyprus. The use of the word "γιαβρί" (yavrí), a tender term of endearment borrowed from Turkish, meaning "darling", serves as a reminder of the shared language, culture, and emotions that have long connected these neighbours. At its core, the song portrays the jasmine as a symbol of hospitality, intimacy, and love.

Lawrence Durrell, Bitter Lemons of Cyprus (Open Road Media, 2012).

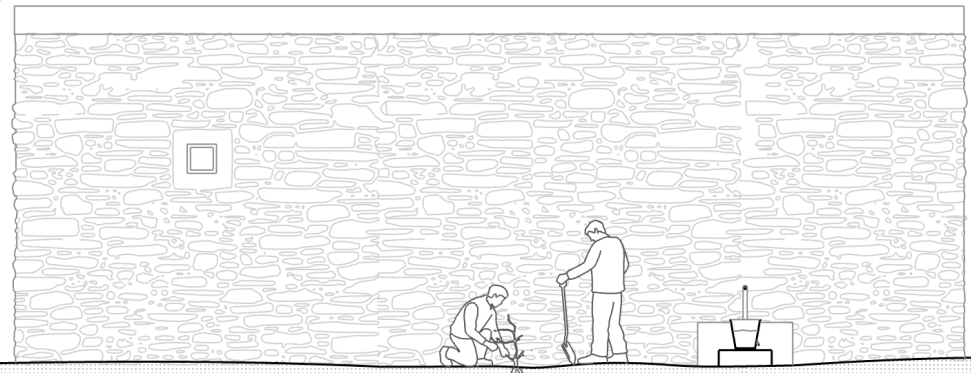
Μιχαηλίδη Αγνή Μ, Χώρα, η Παλιά Λευκωσία, 1977.



systems of
care

and it begins, with the first shed

bare stone, gravel underfoot
whatever could be found from the city's remains
easy material, already shaped by time
each piece carried by hand
each placed with
patience
repair



The carob tree is planted
a sapling, thin, uncertain

when we dig, the soil breaks in dry chunks
pale and heavy with lime
deeper, it darkens, softens
faint smells of salt and metal
its roots touch the soil, warm from the days heat
it will be a shock for the young tree, but it will learn
this place

we set the drainage
the handle moves stiffly
It comes slow, then

Around it, reed placed
Its roots catch fast in the loose soil,
the stalks already reaching for light

The carob waits, its work is slower
Between them
soft where we water
their race of time begins
Its wall leaning slightly
but from our side

the first foot pump
pulling water from below
steady,
honest
It only gives what you draw
no rush, just the weight of a foot
the lift of water

effort made visible

The carob has taken root
its trunk has thickened

its leaves hold the shade below close
beneath it, the ground has settled
darkened with years of watering

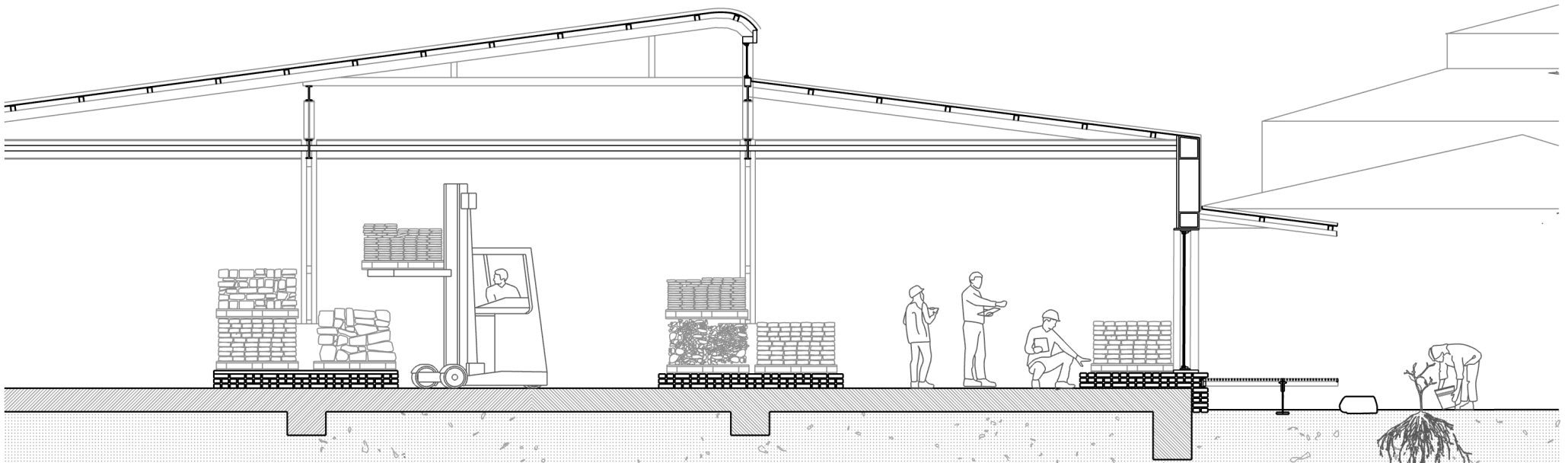
The reeds beside it still rise and fall with the wind,
come and go with the seasons

the garden asks for the
same care it always did
the slow turning of soil,
the touch of water,
the watching

the care has not changed,
only what surrounds it

Next to the garden,
built from what the city

deeper
the ground changes
cracked where we don't
and neighbouring courtyard stays still
worn smooth where the sun hits longest
we can't see much



the new warehouse stands light and open
no longer needed

stones that once framed windows
bricks that once held walls
tiles that once shed rain

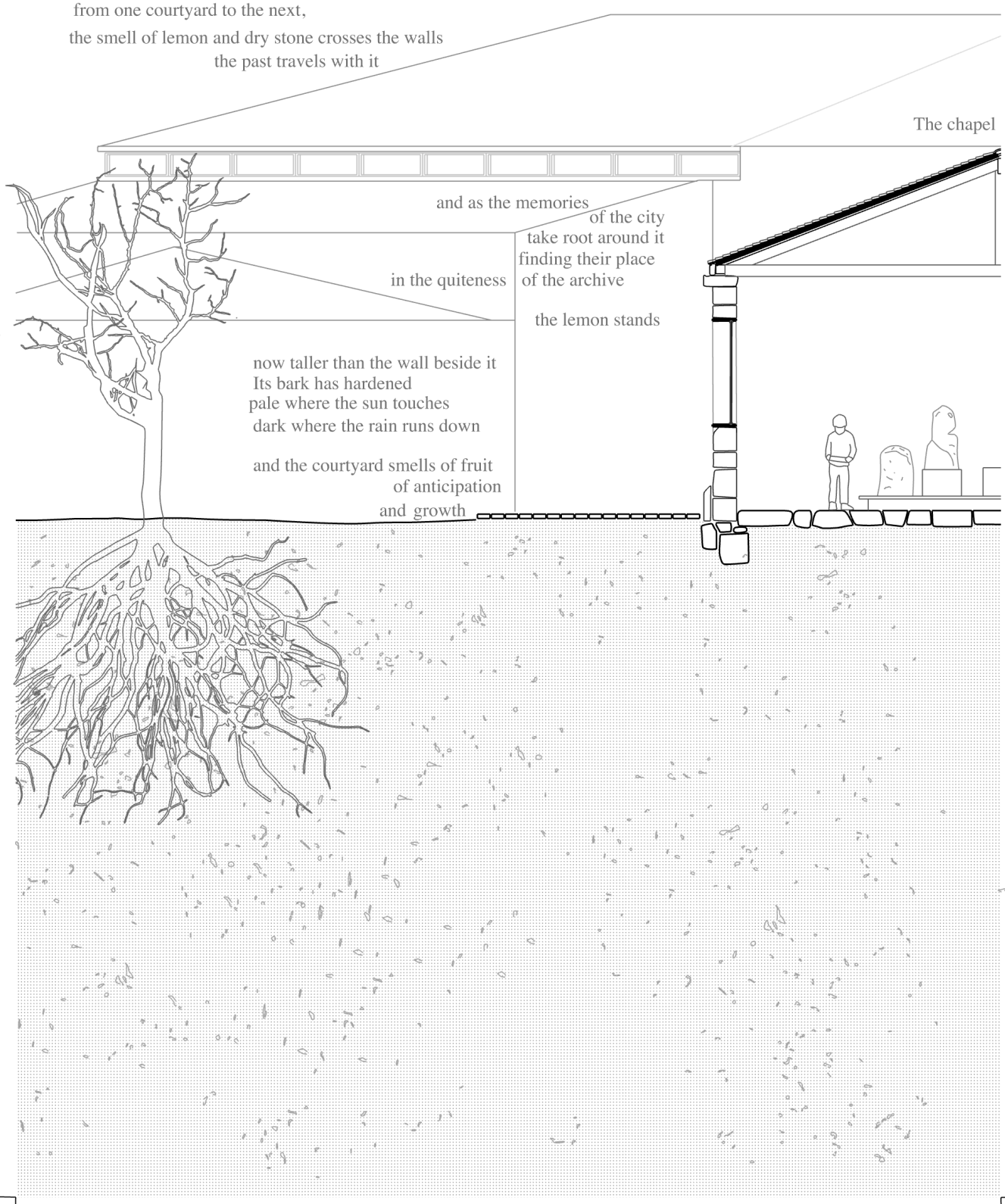
each piece is carried here, set down
and then, just as quietly, they leave again
to rebuild somewhere else
fragments breathed in, then exhaled

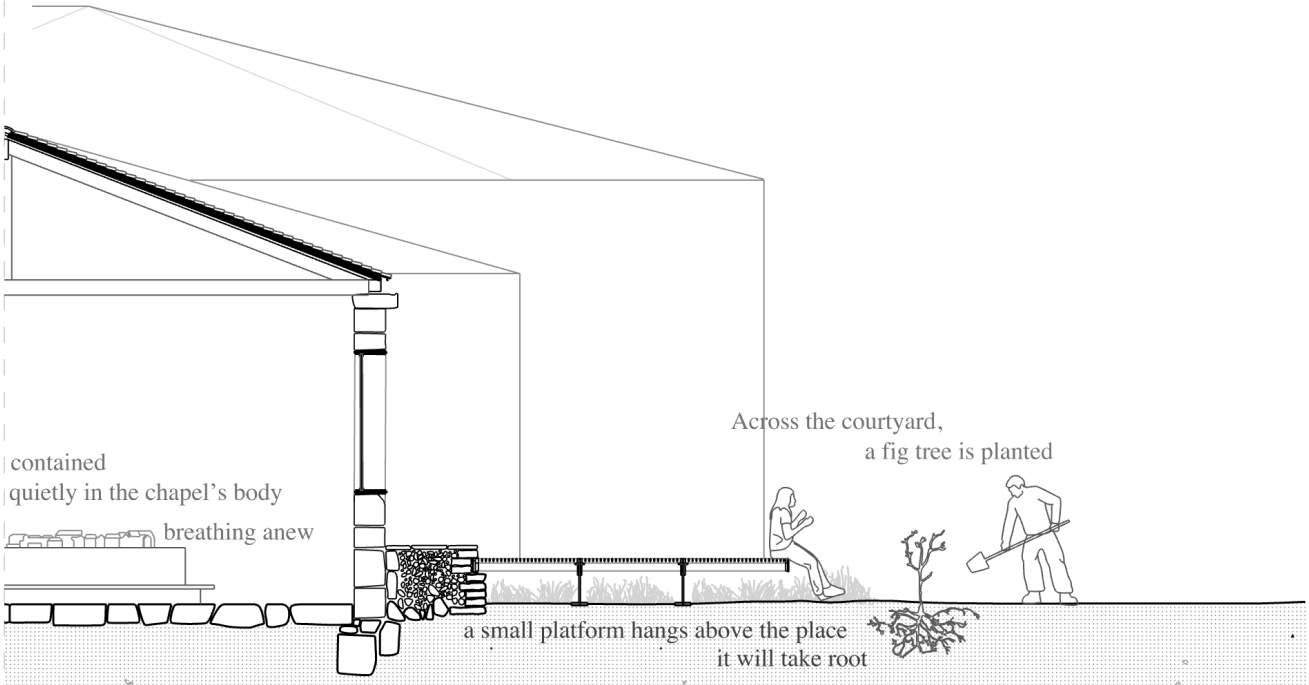
never full, never empty

the young lemon was planted in the early heat of spring
the soil loose, newly turned, still smelling of dust and lime
its roots were small, its trunk soft enough to bend with a hand

at the back, the archive
boxes and fragments, papers, stones, tiles
a handful of earth from each place of the city

the things best remembered in the flesh more than in words
some evenings
when the wind moves
from one courtyard to the next,
the smell of lemon and dry stone crosses the walls
the past travels with it





contained
quietly in the chapel's body

breathing anew

Across the courtyard,
a fig tree is planted

a small platform hangs above the place
it will take root

when the sapling is placed
its roots are thin, searching

figs like to move close to the surface
to lift through cracks and find air

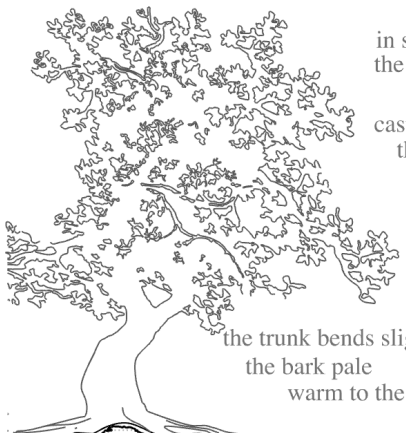
this space allows it
the way it insists on growing outward,
the way the ground must learn to hold it
the way we learn to hold it

the fig has grown
its roots trace the surface
reading the ground as if remembering it

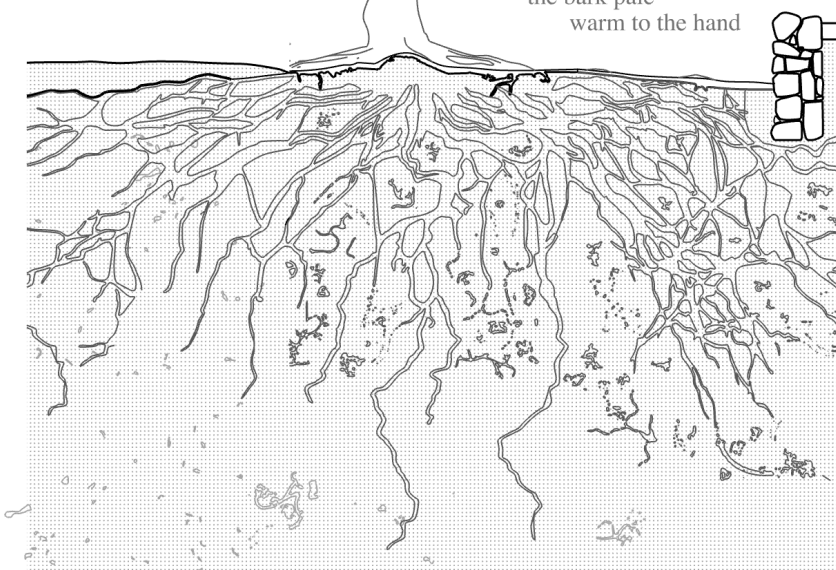
left to roam, to find their own pattern through the soil
and stone

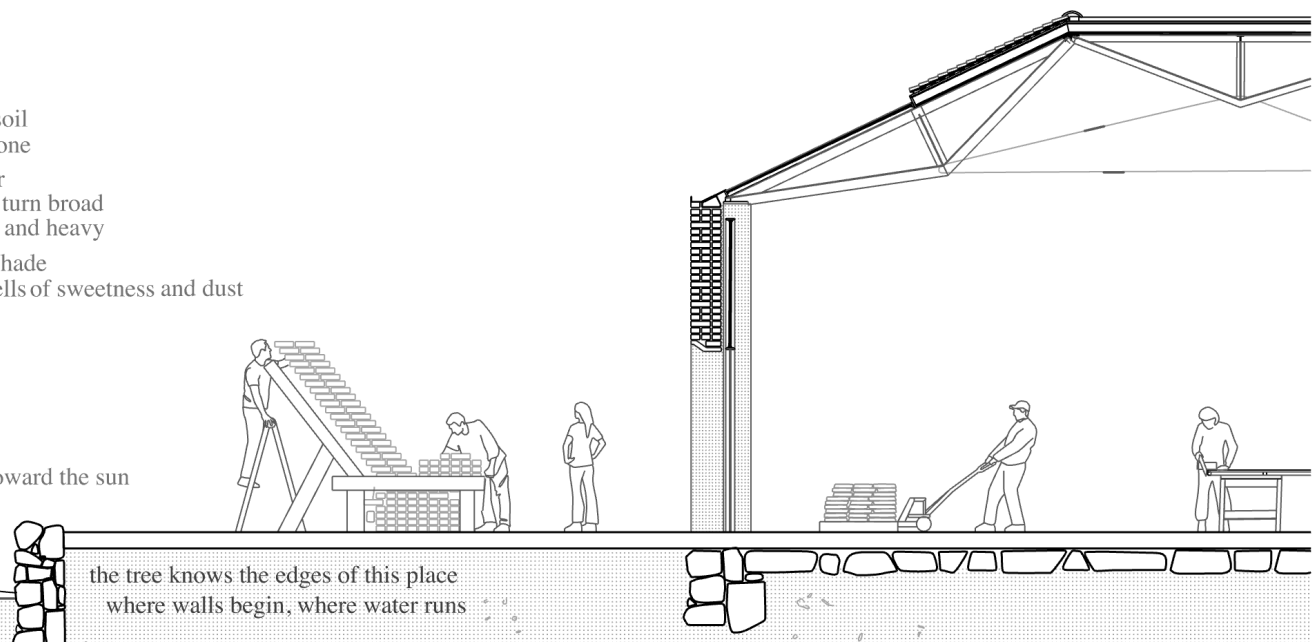
in summer
the leaves turn broad
and heavy

casting a shade
that smells of sweetness and dust



the trunk bends slightly toward the sun
the bark pale
warm to the hand





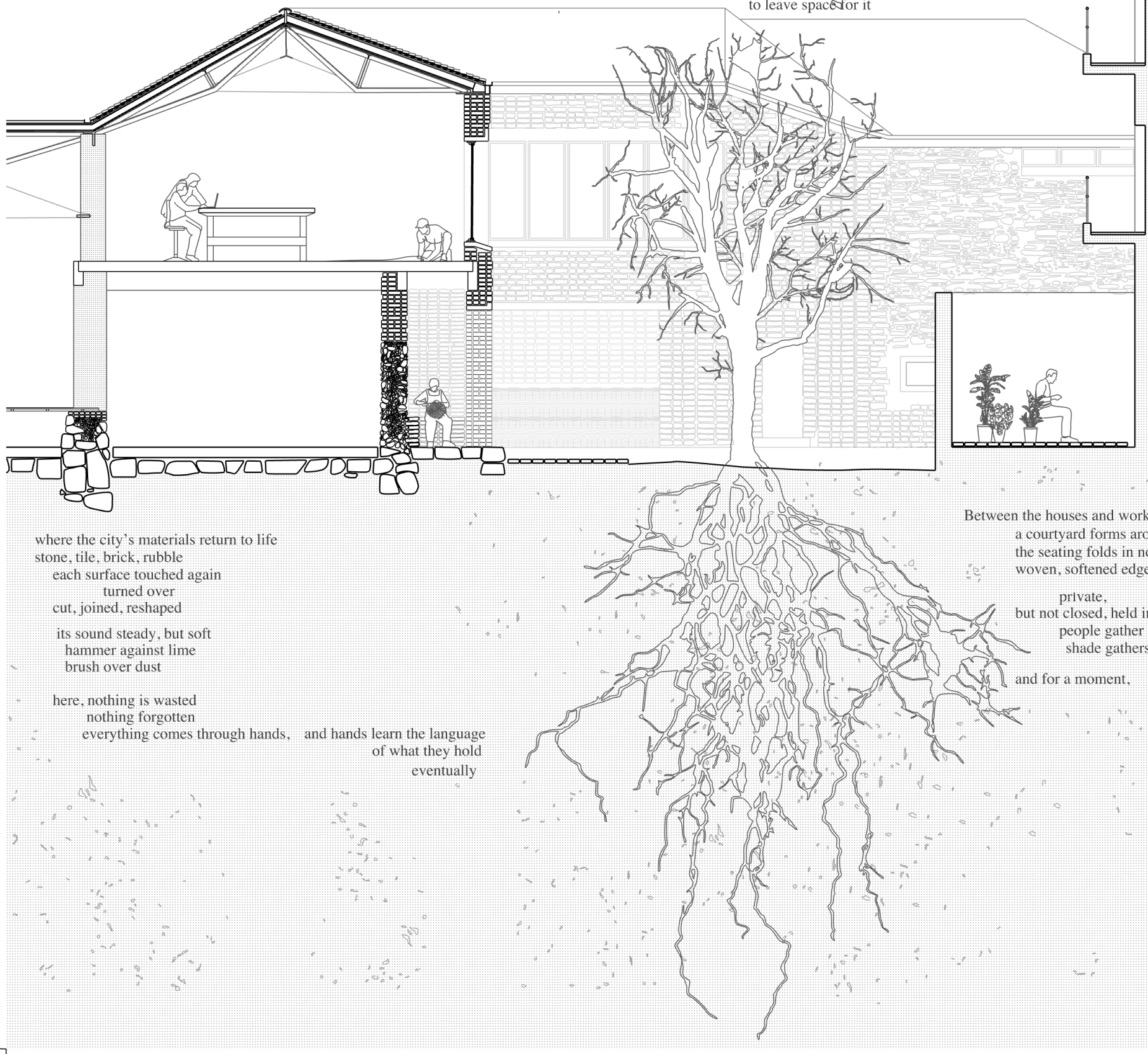
the tree knows the edges of this place
where walls begin, where water runs

where its roots can
breathe

beside the fig,
the workshops stand open

in the other corner
an older tree already stands
It has seen more seasons
than any wall around it

The workshops and the neighbouring houses
curve gently
to leave space for it



where the city's materials return to life
stone, tile, brick, rubble
each surface touched again
turned over
cut, joined, reshaped

its sound steady, but soft
hammer against lime
brush over dust

here, nothing is wasted
nothing forgotten
everything comes through hands, and hands learn the language
of what they hold
eventually

Between the houses and workshops
a courtyard forms around it
the seating folds in nooks
woven, softened edges

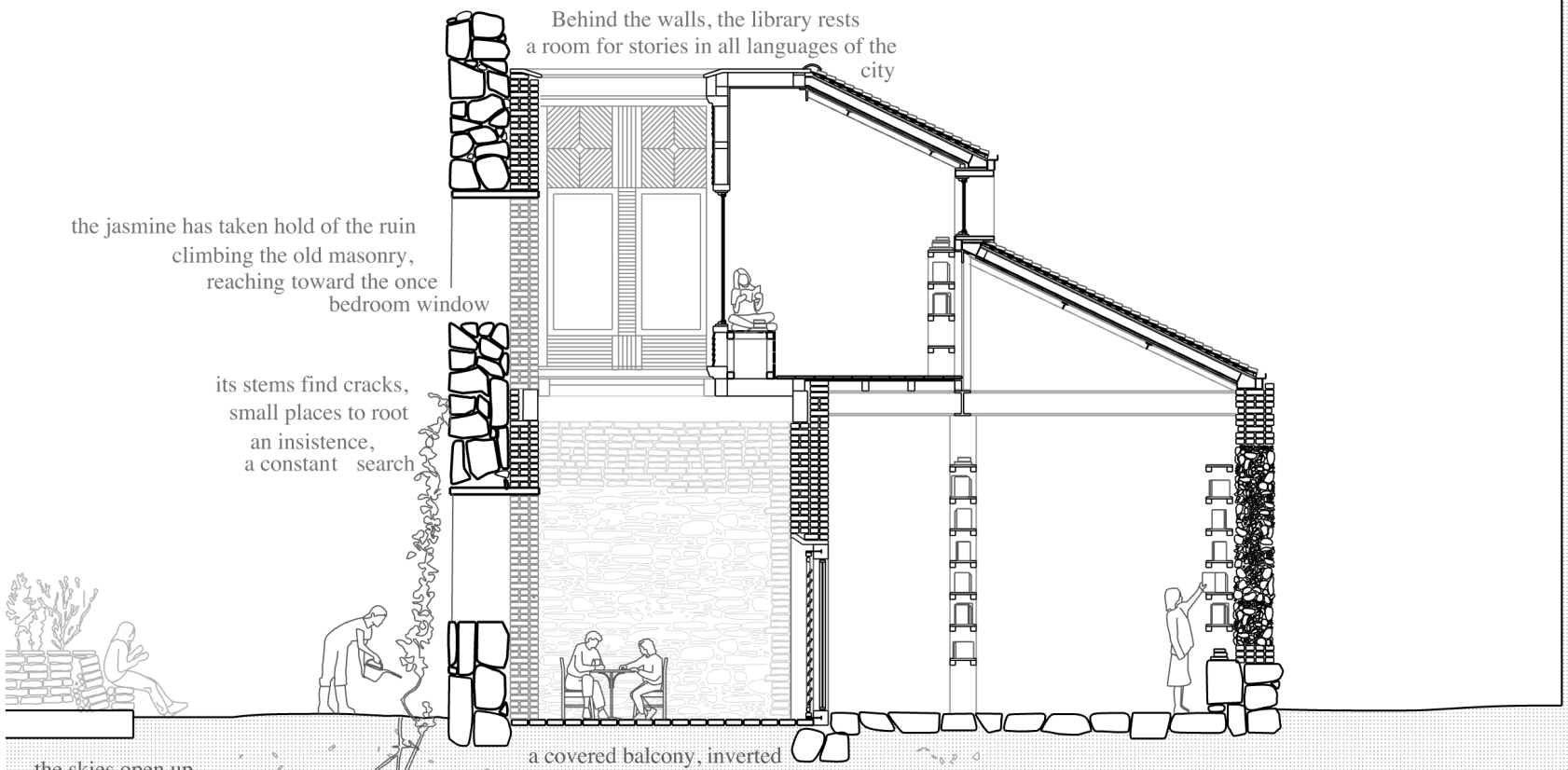
private,
but not closed, held in time
people gather
shade gathers too

and for a moment,

a narrow walkway
connects

the newer walls with the ruins
a passage between times

as you walk through
a small courtyard



Behind the walls, the library rests
a room for stories in all languages of the city

the jasmine has taken hold of the ruin
climbing the old masonry,
reaching toward the once
bedroom window

its stems find cracks,
small places to root
an insistence,
a constant search

the skies open up
just for you

light falls through the opening
washing the stones
feeding the jasmine
that climbs
patiently

a covered balcony, inverted
mirrors the windows it faces

A wooden façade, turned inward
gazing into the past
amid chipped stone and scattered tile

Below it, a narrow space
just wide enough for a few people to sit
to read, to speak , to share

and inside
shelves lean close,
their books marked by many hands

Over time, the courtyards learn each other's rhythms

The water still runs through the first pump
slow and clear
the carob holds its shade
the lemon leans into the chapel wall
the fig stretches its roots beneath the workshops
the old tree keeps watch
the jasmine climbs, persistent

And you move between them all
the city's fragments continue to arrive
stone, tile, memory
handled, reworked, placed again
nothing ends; it only changes

The ruins hold their jasmine,

What began as a shed, a sapling
has become a way of caring
to soil, to time, to one another

And in that caring
the city lives on, unfolds
softly, patiently
rooted in the hands that keep it

conclusion

In the end, after collecting stories, reimagining streets and rebuilding gardens from fragments, one thought remained: the most significant space architecture makes is the space to imagine. Not to prescribe exactly how people must live, but to create allowances, gaps, thresholds, surfaces and moments that invite use, reinterpretation and return. These allowances have been framed as gestures of care here, gestures that preserve traces of what was, hold out potential for what might be, and leave openings for people to take possession again in ways one should not fully foresee.

Storytelling proved a practical method for articulating those allowances. When residents described rooms by scent, floors by touch, or gardens by labor, they revealed not fixed functions but gestures, ideas of a place, impressions. In attempting to materialise these ideas, in the Stories of Coexistence section, I inevitably carried my own impressions of the stories I was told.

In the courtyards of Arab Ahmed, I tried to narrate the speculative gardens through precision, selecting stones, patterns, and placements to form a cohesive tale. Not to propose a space fixed in such exactness, but to reveal the significance of every stone, to understand the weight of scale, and the care embedded in every choice. To see the pavement not as surface, but as a field of storytelling.

I carried this sensibility into the design of the building itself. The unfolding sections became studies of time, how the past converses with the future through the slow lens of nature. Trees, growth, and decay offered a measure of time that drawings alone could not. They made life's unfolding visible, reminding me that gestures of care are always gestures across time. Designing with this in mind meant shaping spaces that could hold change and make memory legible through their use.

If architecture's aim here is to encourage coexistence, its measure would not be immediate reconciliation but the slow accumulation of care that ir provides. Surfaces re-worn, plants tended, stories retold. Whether such spaces can catalyse social healing is uncertain. What is certain is this: by designing for imagination and care, by leaving room for interpretation and return, architecture could make a plausible place for a shared future to unfold.

bibliography

A.G. Leventis Foundation, and Panepistēmio Kyprou. Ereunētikē Monada Archaiologias. Four Thousand Years of Images on Cypriote Pottery. A.G. Leventis Foundation, 1997.

Pulhan, Hifsiye & Numan, Ibrahim "The transitional space in the traditional urban settlement of Cyprus" The Journal of Architectural and Planning Research, 22:2 (June, 2005): 160-177.

Αγνή Μ, Μιχαηλίδη. Χώρα, η Παλιά Λευκωσία, 1977.

Alves, Susana. “Affordances of Historic Urban Landscapes: An Ecological Understanding of Human Interaction with the Past.” European Spatial Research and Policy 21, no. 2 (December 1, 2014): 13–31. https://doi.org/10.1515/esrp-2015-0002.

Bakshi, Anita. “Chapter 4. Trade and Exchange in Nicosia’s Shared Realm: Ermou Street in the 1940s and 1950s.” Post-Ottoman Coexistence, December 31, 2016, 107–26. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781785333750-007.

Bryant, Rebecca. “Introduction Everyday Coexistence in the Post-Ottoman Space.” Berghahn Books, December 31, 2016, 1–38. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781785333750-003.

Charalambous, Nadia. “Spatial Forms of Ethnic Coexistence in Ottoman Cyprus: The Role of Urban Form in Patterns of Everyday Life.” Journal of Urban History 46, no. 3 (December 25, 2018): 579–602. https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144218816652.

Χαραλαμπίδης, Κυριάκος. Λευκωσία- Μια πόλη στη λογοτεχνία. Αθήνα: Μεταίχμιο, 2010.

Dēmētrēs Michaēlidēs. Historic Nicosia, 2012.

Dietzel, Irene. “Sharing Traditions of Land Use and Ownership: Considering the ‘Ground’ for Coexistence and Conflict in Pre-Modern Cyprus.” Berghahn Books, December 31, 2016, 39–58. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781785333750-004.

Dillon, Patrick, and Sirpa Kokko. “Craft as Cultural Ecologically Located Practice. Comparative Case Studies of Textile Crafts in Cyprus, Estonia and Peru.” Studia Vernacula 11 (November 5, 2019): 8–33. https://doi.org/10.12697/sv.2019.11.8-33.

Dincyurek, Ozgur, and Ozlem Olgac Turker. “Learning from Traditional Built Environment of Cyprus: Re-Interpretation of the Contextual Values.” Building and Environment 42, no. 9 (September 2007): 3384–92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.buildenv.2006.08.007.

Durrell, Lawrence. Bitter Lemons of Cyprus. Open Road Media, 2012.

Fletcher, Angus, and Harold Bloom. Allegory : The Theory of a Symbolic Mode. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021.

Hadjittofi, Petroula. “Continuity and Change in Craft Labour.” Moving the Social 71 (August 2024): 75–110. https://doi.org/10.7788/mots.2024.71.75.

Hanauer, David. “Poetic Writing Research: The History, Methods, and Outcomes of Poetic (Auto) Ethnography.” De Gruyter EBooks, September 20, 2021, 421–48. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110645958-017.

Handel, Ariel. “What’s in a Home? Toward a Critical Theory of Housing/Dwelling.” Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space 37, no. 6 (January 8, 2019): 1045–62. https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654418819104.

Hatay, Mete, and Rebecca Bryant. “The Jasmine Scent of Nicosia: Of Returns, Revolutions, and the Longing for Forbidden Pasts.” Journal of Modern Greek Studies 26, no. 2 (2008): 423–49. https://doi.org/10.1353/mgs.0.0032.

Illich, Ivan. “Dwelling.” In In the Mirror of the Past. Marion Boyars Publishers, 2021.

Ιωνα, Ιωάννης. Παραδοσιακα Επαγγελματα της Κυπρου. Λευκωσία, 2001.

Κάραγιαν, Ανδρέας . Αληθής Ιστορία. Εκδόσεις Καστανιώτη, 2008.

Keller, Eva. “Looking at the House from Inside: The Processes of Constructing Group Identity amongst Greek-Cypriots.” The Cyprus Review 9, no. 2 (January 1, 1997): 41–56.

Koch, Regan, and Alan Latham. “Inhabiting Cities, Domesticating Public Space: Observing Change in the Public Life of Contemporary London.” Routledge EBooks, March 3, 2021, 374–83. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351202558-56.

Kokko, Sirpa, and Minna Kaipainen. “The Changing Role of Cultural Heritage in Traditional Textile Crafts from Cyprus.” Craft Research 6, no. 1 (March 1, 2015): 9–30. https://doi.org/10.1386/crre.6.1.9, 1.

Κυθραιώτης, Γιώργος Χρ. Περίπατος στα Τείχη. Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Άρμος, 2005.

Lefebvre, Henri. Rhythmanalysis. A&C Black, 2004.

Lytton John Musselman. Figs, Dates, Laurel, and Myrrh. Timber Press, 2007.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. Phenomenology of Perception. London: Forgotten Books, 1945.

Papastergiou, Christos. “Garden Travelogues.” FOOTPRINT 18, no. 1 (September 30, 2024). https://doi.org/10.59490/footprint.18.1.6943.
Peregrine Horden, and Sharon Kinoshita. A Companion to Mediterranean History. Chichester, West Sussex, Uk: Wiley Blackwell, 2014.
Pimlott, Marc. The Public Interior as Idea and Project. Heijningen: Jap Sam Books, 2016.
Pulhan, Hifsiye. “The Traditional Urban House in Cyprus as Material Expression of Cultural Transformation.” Journal of Design History 19, no. 2 (January 1, 2006): 105–19. https://doi.org/10.1093/jdh/epi050.
Sutton, David C. Figs. Reaktion Books, 2014.
Young, Fiona, and Benjamin Cleveland. “Affordances, Architecture and the Action Possibilities of Learning Environments: A Critical Review of the Literature and Future Directions.” Buildings 12, no. 1 (January 13, 2022): 76. https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings12010076.