

From Prescription to Description

Using Architectural Drawing as Graphic Ethnography in Cypriot Refugee Estates

αρχιτεκτονικό σχέδιο
 γραφική εθνογραφία
 Κυπριακοί προσφυγικοί συνοικισμοί
 έρευνα σχεδιασμού
 καθημερινός χώρος
architectural drawing
graphic ethnography
Cypriot refugee estates
design-research
everyday space

Το άρθρο εξετάζει πώς το αρχιτεκτονικό σχέδιο μπορεί να λειτουργήσει ως κρίσιμο εργαλείο τεκμηρίωσης και ερμηνείας της καθημερινής ζωής στο δομημένο περιβάλλον. Στόχος του είναι να επανατοποθετήσει το σχέδιο από μια «προδιαγραφική», προβολική πρακτική σε μια «περιγραφική», εθνογραφική μεθοδολογία που αποκαλύπτει τις κοινωνικές και υλικές πραγματικότητες των κατοικημένων χώρων. Μέσω επιτόπιων σχεδιαστικών ασκήσεων στους προσφυγικούς συνοικισμούς της Λευκωσίας, η μελέτη εφαρμόζει γραφική εθνογραφία για να διερευνήσει μικροκλίμακες ιδιοποίησης και βιωμένων χωρικών πρακτικών, προτείνοντας μια μεθοδολογική και παιδαγωγική συμβολή στην αρχιτεκτονική εκπαίδευση.

This paper examines how architectural drawing can function as a critical tool for documenting and interpreting everyday life within the built environment. It aims to reposition drawing from a 'prescriptive', projective practice to a 'descriptive', ethnographic method that reveals the social and material realities of inhabited spaces. Through field-based drawing exercises conducted in the refugee estates of Nicosia, the study employs graphic ethnography to explore micro-scale appropriations and lived spatial practices, advancing a methodological and pedagogical contribution to architectural education.

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Citation: Avramidis, K. (2025). "From Prescription to Description", UOU scientific journal #10, 68-83.

ISSN: 2697-1518. <https://doi.org/10.14198/UOU.2025.10.08>
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Article Received: 26/09/2025
 Received in revised form: 27/09/2025
 Accepted: 04/12/2025



DRAWING INT[R]O

Spaces are understood here as sociocultural constructions, material archives upon which inhabitation—and, thus, memory and everyday spatial knowledge—is inscribed. As such, sites operate as repositories of traces; they hold material evidence of life.

Everyday life forms the foundation of architecture. For architecture to be meaningful, it must emerge from and engage with the quotidian; the daily experiences of those who inhabit it. Architectural drawings, then, ought to investigate and reveal people's habits, needs, practices, and patterns of use; they should serve as maps of the anthropological details of life. This paper explores a shift from prescriptive to descriptive modes of architectural drawing by offering a reflective account of this methodological approach within a design studio context.

Traditionally, architectural drawings have been employed to translate conceptual ideas into construction plans and, ultimately, built form. This mode, understood as prescriptive, privileges abstraction and asserts spatial and formal intent. In contrast, descriptive drawings—central to the present study—seek to capture how constructed environments are inhabited, transformed, and reinterpreted over time. These drawings function as tools for uncovering the lived realities within and around architecture. Here, drawing is positioned not only as an instrument of design but also as a means of investigating the experience of the built environment, what may be called a form of graphic ethnographic research. Attending to details such as informal appropriations, material adaptations, and everyday spatial practices, descriptive drawings register architecture as a living intersection of people, materials, and temporalities.

The core empirical material for this study consists of student-generated drawings. The article discusses the outcomes of the

Year 4 design studio Architectural Design VIII (ARH401),¹ taught at the Department of Architecture at the University of Cyprus. The studio engages students in field-based drawing activities, framing drawing as a method of spatial and social inquiry. Rather than a means to depict idealised futures, drawing is treated as a critical method of observing, recording, and interpreting the present, ultimately informing context-sensitive design proposals. Within this framework, drawing becomes both a research tool and a form of spatial testimony that documents appropriation, informality, and transformation in lived architectural environments.

This article is situated within the context of design ethnography, drawing on the practices of Momoyo Kaijima and Ray Lucas, among others, and theoretically informed by the work of Tim Ingold (2011a) on the phenomenology of drawing, Michel de Certeau (1984) on everyday practice, and Donna Haraway (1988) on situated knowledge. Despite their disciplinary differences, these scholars share a commitment to challenging dominant modes of knowing and representing the world, advancing instead an epistemology grounded in experience and context.

The article's contribution is primarily methodological. It proposes and tests graphic ethnography as a drawing practice, one that uses drawing not simply to visualise what might be, but to critically interrogate and learn from what already exists. Applied to the case of Cypriot refugee estates—urban environments shaped by state planning, displacement, and decades of informal transformation—the article also offers a contextual contribution to the documentation of under-represented, everyday spaces in the Eastern Mediterranean.

At the same time, it reviews the relevant literature and advances a theoretical argument for rethinking drawing as an epistemological tool, an architectural mode of research and knowledge production

aligned with material culture and ethnographic inquiry.

The following questions guide this study: How can drawing serve as a tool for documenting and interpreting everyday life in the built environment? What forms of material and social knowledge are uncovered when drawing shifts from projection to reflection? And how can such practices enrich architectural education by situating drawing as a critical and situated mode of inquiry into space as it is inhabited, altered, and lived? This article attempts to respond to this line of inquiry by following a practice of ethnographic drawing that surveys what is not normally surveyed (cf. Avramidis 2024). By treating the drawing as a material witness, the student projects seek to reveal how micro-traces—from improvised repairs to subtle spatial hacks—unsettle architectural fixity and bring lived experience back into the orthographic frame, opening the detail as a locus of possibility.

This article examines architectural drawing as a form of situated ethnographic inquiry. It first reviews key approaches linking drawing, ethnography, and material culture, before outlining the methodological framework used in the ARH401 design studio, where drawing served as a critical tool for fieldwork. This framework is tested through fieldwork conducted in Strovolos II, a refugee estate in Nicosia that has undergone decades of informal transformation, and student drawings are seen as records of these lived adaptations. The discussion turns to the pedagogical value of drawing as graphic ethnography, concluding with reflections on its capacity to document, interpret, and reimagine everyday life in the built environment.

DRAWING [ON] ETHNOGRAPHY

In architecture, drawing has long been treated as an instrument of control that fixes a single, idealised reality and projects it forward as building instruction. Drawings are

typically assumed to be stable, objective, and final: the means by which a building or a space is made manifest in the world. Yet, as Robin Evans (1997) argued, drawings are never simply neutral generators of buildings; they are 'translations' and the direction of their 'projective' force can be reversed. When we return traces of lived experience to the drawing, we reveal it as a site where people, materials, and meanings continually entangle and remake one another.

Marian Macken (2009) expands this rethinking of the architectural drawing by suggesting that drawings can operate 'post-factum,' serving as documentation that not only comes before a building or space but also remains present and continues to engage with it afterward. For Macken, post-factum drawings challenge the dominance of drawing as a purely projective act. Instead, they show that drawings can be interpretive, reflective, and generative, re-situating design not as a linear trajectory toward a final built object, but as an ongoing, recursive process. In this sense, the drawing can both record and re-make, collapsing the imagined and the actual into a continuous conversation.

This expanded understanding of drawing aligns with a material culture perspective, which recognises that the physical objects and spaces that people create define their culture, and are never passive but actively mediate the values, beliefs, habits; their ways they inhabit and/or use them. Within this frame, the drawing allows us to understand how people live, what they value, and how they evolve over time: it is not only a speculative projection but a junction that gathers the micro-histories of dwelling, improvisation, and adaptation. It is a mode of careful observation and knowledge production, an alternative tool for ethnographic research.

Traditionally understood, ethnography is a research method conducted through participant observation and interviews, i.e. approached as data gathering. In

our case, we are engaging with spaces as if conducting interviews with them (cf. Andron 2017), focusing on their material traces and experiential qualities, though this does not exclude the frequent involvement of inhabitants in the process. According to design anthropologist Sarah Pink, recent scholarship raises the need to appreciate ethnography as a methodology that creates as well as represents knowledge whilst celebrating researchers' experiences and expanding its modes (2013: 34). Anthropologist Tim Ingold—who dislikes the term 'ethnography' due to its open to misunderstanding 'ethno-' component, and its limiting literally meaning as 'a description of the people' (Ingold et al 2020)—suggests expanding visual ethnography by focusing on drawing, in order to develop a "graphic anthropology" which allows us to interpret and represent aspects of life, identity, community, and material realities (Ingold 2011b).² He urges us "consider the potential of drawing, as a method or technique much neglected in recent scholarship, to reconnect observation and description within the movements of improvisatory practice" (2011b: 2). Ingold conceptualises drawing not simply as a method of illustrating pre-formed arguments, but as an autonomous inscriptive practice, one in which the act of drawing generates and shapes the conceptual and material fabric of the research itself.

The relation between architecture and ethnography has gained attention (cf. Yaneva 2018) primarily through recent works that conduct an 'ethnography of architecture'—focusing on observing architectural practices through ethnographic methods (e.g., Yaneva 2009; Houdart & Chihiro 2009)—and 'architectural ethnography', that emphasizes representation—particularly architectural drawing—as a fundamental tool and outcome of ethnographic research for observation, analysis, and production of knowledge (e.g., Kaijima et al 2018; Briata & Postiglione 2023). Here, the focus is on the latter which resonates

with works on design ethnography that reflect on drawing (e.g., Causey 2017). In what follows in this section, key such drawing practices are traced that allow us to navigate the research and teaching position advanced here, whilst also raising questions about the role of various transcription modes in architectural ethnography.

The attention to overlooked detail finds early precedent in Kon Wajirō's *Modernologio [Modernology]* (1931), a method involving meticulous documentation of everyday objects, clothing, and interiors to analyse people's lifestyles and social identities in post-earthquake Tokyo in the 1920s. Wajirō used different drawings—sketches, floor plans, and diagrams—to study the ephemera of the modern city (e.g., makeshift furniture, handwritten signage, repaired garments, vendor layouts) and the interplay between consumption, personal habits, and social change. Kon emphasised the emotional and cultural meanings of belongings, viewing them as reflections of individual identity, memory, and social context (Kuroishi 2011, 2023). Kon's work exemplifies design analysis at its finest by uncovering the underlying structures of human practice and showing how making do and making sense are deeply interconnected in shaping the material world (Traganou & Kuroishi 2014).

This ethos carries forward into contemporary Japanese practices, like Atelier Bow-Wow (Kaijima & Tsukamoto 2001, 2007, 2014), which positions drawing not only as a representational output, but as a method of ethnographic inquiry into the social production of space (Kaijima 2018). Their work represents a move toward a more anthropological approach that prioritises understanding how spaces are lived in and used by communities before designing interventions. Their architecture and drawing practice bridges the gap between the "space of representation"—i.e., the space that is planned in advance—and the "space of occupation," that is the space emerging through use and experience; the former is defined by

building materials and construction techniques, while the latter is shaped by human behaviour, activity, and interaction (Kaijima & Tsukamoto 2017: 6, 2014: 117).

Sarah Wigglesworth and Jeremy Till (1998) also explore the relationship between architecture and the everyday. They argue that architecture often ignores the mundane realities of occupation, leading to a disconnect between design and lived experience. They suggest that embracing the everyday, can lead to more productive and relevant architectural practices, encouraging a fluid movement between engagement with daily life and periods of theoretical reflection. The famous 'Table Manners' drawings shows how everyday use disrupts and reshapes architectural order, turning a pristine design into a lived, imperfect, and memory-rich space. Wigglesworth and Till frame this not as a flaw but as a creative, productive tension between design ideals and the messy realities of human life.

Ray Lucas (2020) shows how drawing can serve as a form of 'graphic anthropology' that captures architectural arrangements in a constant state of flux. The market, he argues in his study of Namdaemun Market in Seoul, is not a fixed space but a series of daily redesigns that are improvised, ephemeral, yet socially robust. Drawing, in this case, does not stabilise form; it records negotiation. It becomes a forensic act that reveals how spatial coherence emerges not from a top-down plan, but from informal logics, collective memory, and embodied practices of trade, storage, and use. Lucas's axonometric and sequential drawings highlight how structures are built and unbuilt in rhythm with daily commerce, offering a reminder that architectural detail is often provisional rather than permanent, and that the drawing itself is an act of material observation as much as design speculation.

Whereas Momoyo Kaijima emphasizes drawings as both tools and outcomes of ethnographic

inquiry, Paola Briata and Gennaro Postiglione position ethnography as a means for architects and students to directly engage with lived space. They advocate for a designer-led ethnographic process that prioritizes immersion, affective engagement, and bodily presence in the field. Their pedagogical model foregrounds situated, sensory, and subjective knowledge. Ray Lucas sees drawing as a powerful medium through which to conduct and communicate ethnographic research. They all argue for a nuanced integration of ethnography into architectural practice and teaching.

Most of the above examples reposition ethnography not as an add-on to design, but as a way of thinking-through-making and dwelling, critical to cultivating spatial awareness and engagement with the everyday. They frame a vision of architecture that observes and responds to the real conditions and experiences of people; not through abstraction, but through engaged presence and reflective design. Together, these perspectives argue for an architectural ethnography that situates the drawing as a material junction in itself; a site where the stable promise of the plan meets the unpredictable reality of lived use. They challenge the orthodoxy of orthographic drawings to 'architecturalise' life and counter propose a drawing approach that infuses life to—or, rather, 'inhabitates'—architecture. Or, as Laurent Stalder and Andreas Kalpakci aptly put it: "the question is not how to adapt a building to fit the drawing conventions, but rather how to adapt the drawing conventions of architects to capture these environments and the life within them" (2018: 16). This means shifting the focus of drawing on different conditions of environments, such as time and inhabitation traces, among others.

This research is grounded in a pedagogically framed ethnographic methodology developed within the ARH401 design studio, where drawing is not treated as a representational end but as a situated, critical tool for fieldwork.

The methodology centres on extended engagement with the Strovolos II refugee estate, where students were encouraged to adopt a researcher's disposition: to dwell in the site, observe closely, and record iteratively. Rather than abstracting from experience, they used drawing to re-enter the space: to retrace material adaptations, spatial rhythms, and forms of inhabitation often omitted in conventional architectural representation.

DRAWING [ON] STROVOLOS II

The studio, entitled 'Caring about Refugee Estates, Refugee Estates of Care,' invites students—through an ecofeminist framing—to critically reconsider established models of spatial (re)production that typically encourage extractivism and resource exploitation. In contrast, the studio emphasises repair and reuse.³ Focusing on the refugee estates of Nicosia—urban environments shaped by tensions between formal planning and informal adaptation—the studio centres its attention on Strovolos II. This estate is one of four refugee settlements developed along Spyrou Kyprianou Avenue, running east to west through the Municipality of Strovolos, south of Nicosia's city centre. Strovolos II holds particular significance, both for its architectural design by CAEC (Pevkios Georgiades, Theocharis David, Athos Dikaios) and because its buildings are under threat of imminent demolition. The studio's objective is to propose alternative scenarios for the estate as a whole, exploring new forms of modern collective living, encompassing housing, open spaces, shared infrastructure, urban equipment, and community-based activities compatible with the neighbourhood's fabric.

The studio unfolds in two stages. The first introduces students to key concepts—centred on reuse and collective living—and design precedents, focusing on housing typologies found in Cypriot refugee estates and relevant



Fig.1 - Strovolos II estate isometric; collective drawing.

examples of collective housing from international contexts. It also involves situated field studies in the neighbourhood. The second stage involves the development of design, programmatic, and management proposals informed by both precedent studies and fieldwork. The focus here is on the first stage, which progresses from macro to micro scales.

The first exercise tasked students with reconstructing the entirety of Strovolos II in isometric view (cf. Avramidis & Issaias, forthcoming). The representation (Fig.1) deliberately extended beyond the estate's boundaries, seamlessly integrating the surrounding urban fabric to prevent it from being read as an isolated parcel. This collective drawing—approximately body-sized when printed and pinned up in the studio—served not only as a shared reference and representational tool but also as a vital methodological and pedagogical device. Created through collective effort and collaboration, the drawing challenged notions of individual authorship, foregrounding interdependence. It depicted the estate in its original form, as conceived by the architects, highlighting its formal

typological purity. In the subsequent exercise, the isometric became a large-scale map, repurposed as a tool for ethnographic reporting. Onto this surface, students layered annotations—identifying spatial thresholds, embedding interview fragments, and marking observational notes—tied to specific locations. This process helped illustrate how various practices unfolded in context and the ways in which people activate the space. The drawing also provided the foundation for more focused observation-based drawings.

The second exercise sought to bring together the type (*τύπος*) with the type-less (*ἀτύπος*), creating an inventory of residents' spatial routines and practices (cf. Kenniff & Lévesque, 2021).⁴ This marked a deliberate shift away from top-down, formal, and objective design logics toward informal, bottom-up, subjective practices of adaptive inhabitation. This repositioning also reoriented drawing and recording practices: from a distant or aerial perspective to one grounded within space and experience.

Students were asked to observe and document architectural details, materials, and activities inscribed

within them, combining precise and imprecise observations with attentiveness to architectural settings and the agency of both human and nonhuman actors. This approach aimed to challenge what I have elsewhere described as the "tyranny of architectural precision" (Avramidis, 2023). Students were explicitly instructed to avoid presuming that observed spaces needed improvement through redesign (cf. Bratia & Postiglione, 2023: 35). It's an exercise in restraint: setting aside the designer's impulse to intervene in order to more deeply attune to the lived reality of the place.

Fieldwork formed the backbone of this exercise, with considerable time dedicated to detailed emplaced observation. Students were encouraged to connect with residents and engage with the everyday realities of the estate through an ethnographic lens. While specific observation and annotation tools were suggested, students selected their own sites and content. Fieldwork combined photography, drawing, and direct observation to uncover micro-scale negotiations and material traces that conventional ethnographic methods might overlook or

struggle to convey. As Suzanne Ewing argues in her volume on architectural fieldwork, "[the] recurring engagement with non-textual output, although familiar in architecture, agitates conventional anthropological paradigms, and within an 'ethnographic turn', encourages review of relationships between visual, aesthetic fieldwork output and design" (2011: 2).

As a pedagogical model, this approach invites students to engage drawing not as an act of projection but as a situated and iterative mode of research. Students were encouraged to cultivate observational patience and to recognise drawing as a practice of relational learning that involves attunement to material and social environments. This not only reframed their understanding of architectural tools but also repositioned them as embedded observers rather than distant designers. The process of drawing became a critical space for asking questions, slowing down, and rethinking the assumed fixity of built form. In doing so, the studio promoted a mode of architectural education rooted in care, attentiveness, and context, positioning students to develop design propositions that are informed not by abstraction but by the textures and practices of everyday life.

Students were encouraged to reflect on how spatial arrangements shape or challenge social interaction, and how everyday (personal) objects—often modest or improvised (e.g., a plastic chair)—undermine or exceed normative expectations of space. A core element of the work involved documenting not only architectural environments but also everyday (improvised) furnishings and objects that revealed how spaces are inhabited and made meaningful. Through drawings, photographs, and written notes, students captured habits, spatial practices, and local social dynamics (Fig.2).

Common themes that emerged included residents' affinity for gardening as a means of fostering



Fig.2 - Adaptation moments in Strovolos II. Photographs by: Victor Pilavas (left column); Andreas Nicolaou & Stavros Theophanous (right column); Stavros Theophanous & George Vessiariis (drone).

community, the revitalisation of underutilized open spaces, resident-led architectural adaptations, the reconfiguration of interiors, makeshift improvements to pedestrian and transport infrastructure, the informal repurposing of recreational facilities, and the provision of essential services and markets. Categories explored included space—both interior and exterior—and time, in terms of changing routines and rituals. Drawing techniques ranged from tracing to axonometric and orthographic representations.

From makeshift open bars and private chapels to scattered ovens and communal gardens, paradoxical elements are evident from the very first visit, highlighting the intricate nature of life in Strovolos II. Upon closer observation, care emerged as a unifying theme: a reciprocal condition wherein caring for spaces or people elicited care in return. For example, students Aikaterini Lada, Dimitrios Papanikolaou and Eleni Vassila, identified six locations that exemplified residents' spatial negotiations (Fig.3). These revealed blurred boundaries between public and private, formal and informal,



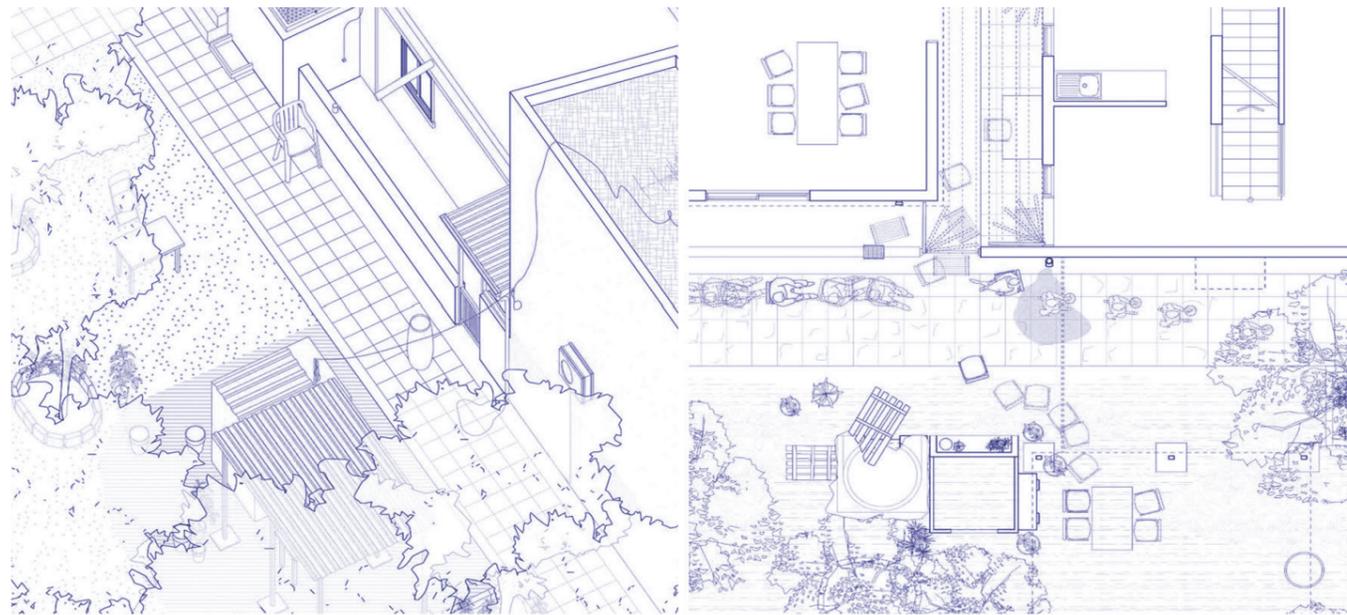
Fig.3 - Blurring the boundaries between public and private; drawings by Aikaterini Lada, Dimitrios Papanikolaou and Eleni Vassila.



Fig.4 - The 'open bar' and its components, by A. Lada, D. Papanikolaou and E. Vassila.

producing what one might call urban domesticities. A covered communal area in front of private courtyards functions as a flexible social hub in the absence of designed shared spaces. Nearby, outdoor ovens and a makeshift storage unit activate a green space as a site for gathering. An improvised chapel extends private use into public space, reshaping its collective meaning. A semi-public urban farm accommodates both enclosed and open cultivation, balancing privacy and interaction. A shared cul-de-sac functions dually as a space for car repair and spiritual practice, embodying the paradoxes of everyday life. Lastly, a privately hosted open bar informally occupies the sidewalk, fostering neighbourhood connections. The exploded axonometric of this ad-hoc structure captures its material and spatial sophistication (Fig.4). Together, these interventions reflect adaptive, community-driven uses of space that drawings can document to reveal the dynamics of daily life in the refugee estate.

Andreas Nicolaou and Stavros Theophanous focused on a passageway informally appropriated by Mrs. Sofia and her husband over five decades. Intended as a communal green space, it had been transformed into a richly personalised environment, complete with concrete kitchen, roofing, basins, and planted trees. The ground floor emerges as a privileged spatial condition, enabling everyday rituals such as watering plants or drinking coffee. Their drawings—evoking the spirit of Wigglesworth and Till—captured the residents' rituals by animated objects—the chair, the bucket, the water tank—each contributing to a choreography of daily life (Fig.5). In a second case, Andreas and Stavros studied a notably overcrowded 90m² apartment housing nine individuals, including three generations of family. The overcrowding severely impacted quality of life, prompting the appropriation of communal areas—such as the staircase, rooftop, and a long-vacant adjacent apartment—as extensions of the domestic space. Through participant observation



and hand-drawn mapping, the transformed interior revealed how furniture began to act as spatial dividers, compensating for the removal of partition walls. The balcony became a bedroom, the sofa a bed, and the arrangement of objects sustained a sense of spatial order. Drawing was essential in capturing this improvised choreography of domestic life under constraint.

Eleni Gabriel and Maria Orfanou, through careful ethnographic observation, revealed a hidden network of gardens whilst exposing that the planting—especially of productive trees—is a way of connecting with homelands before being uprooted. To explore this situated human geography, on top of the photographs, Eleni and Maria produced a series of plans to study the organisation of the gardens but also linear perspective tracings (Fig.6). As Ray Lucas argues, in his study of the discipline of tracing in architectural drawing (2018), the traced drawings are not mere replicates but re-performances of an original, opening up opportunities for knowledge production. The human presence is implied rather than depicted, with objects and spatial arrangements serving as traces of occupation. The protagonists, in this case, are the plants. These absences encourage the viewer to infer meaning, prompting reflection on what each garden reveals about its inhabitants (cf. Rice 2024). The drawings become a space for interpretation, where the significance of plants and their placement suggests the rhythms, habits, and values embedded in each case.

Eleni Sergiou and Antigoni Karekla studied the front and backyards of single-row family houses, producing elevations that captured a range of personalisations diverging from the estate's original uniformity: decorative tiles, pergolas, storage additions, water tanks, laundry spaces, air conditioning units, and more (Fig.7). The need for shade has prompted the installation of improvised canopies in outdoor seating areas, while the rear façades often feature added storage,

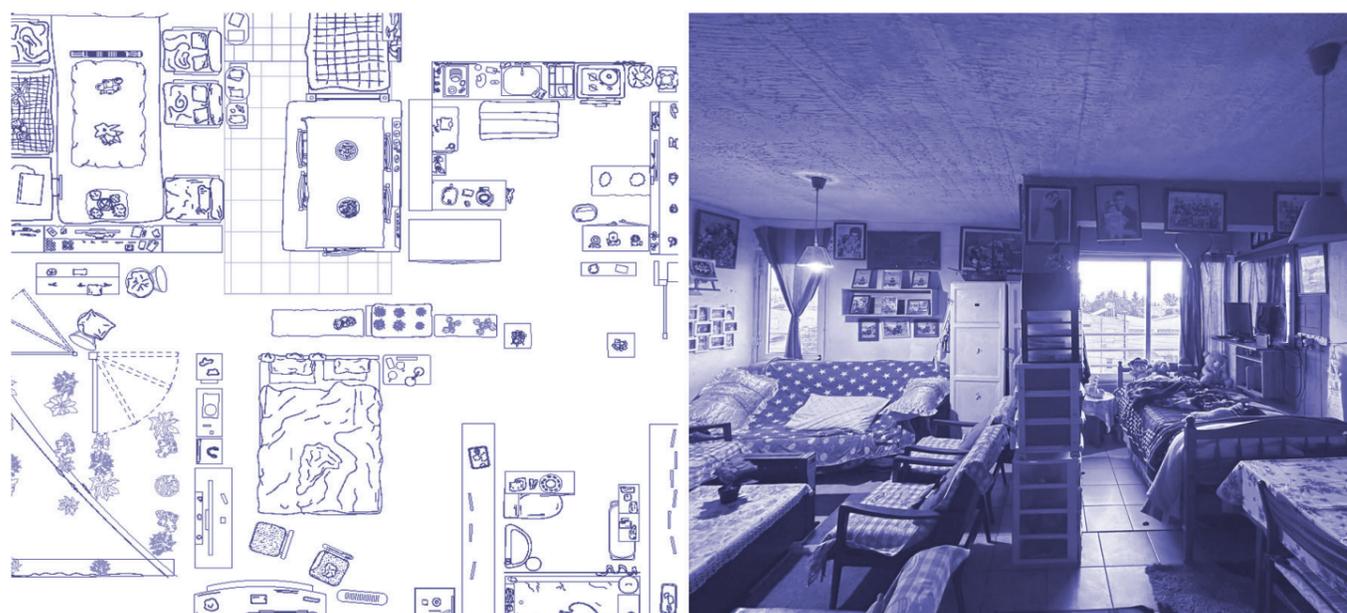
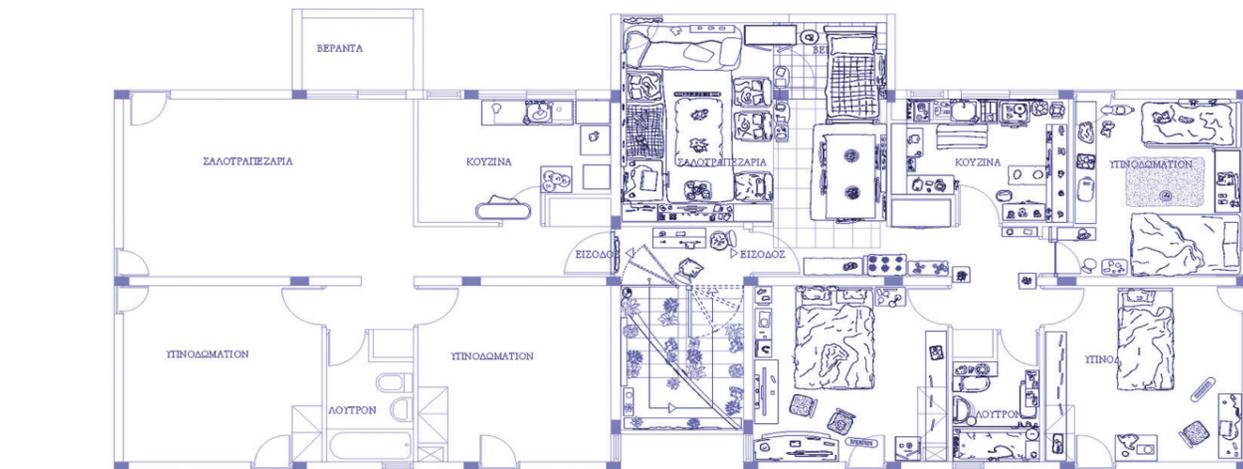
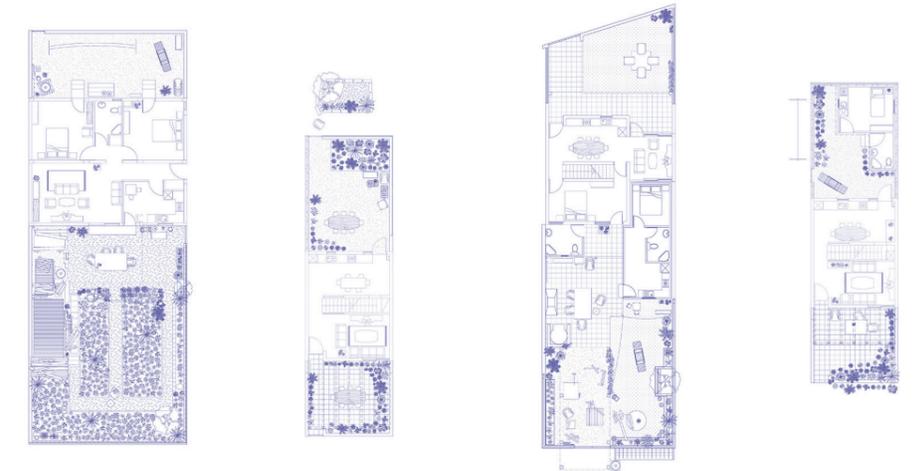


Fig.5 - The choreography of everyday life, by Andreas Nicolaou and Stavros Theophanous

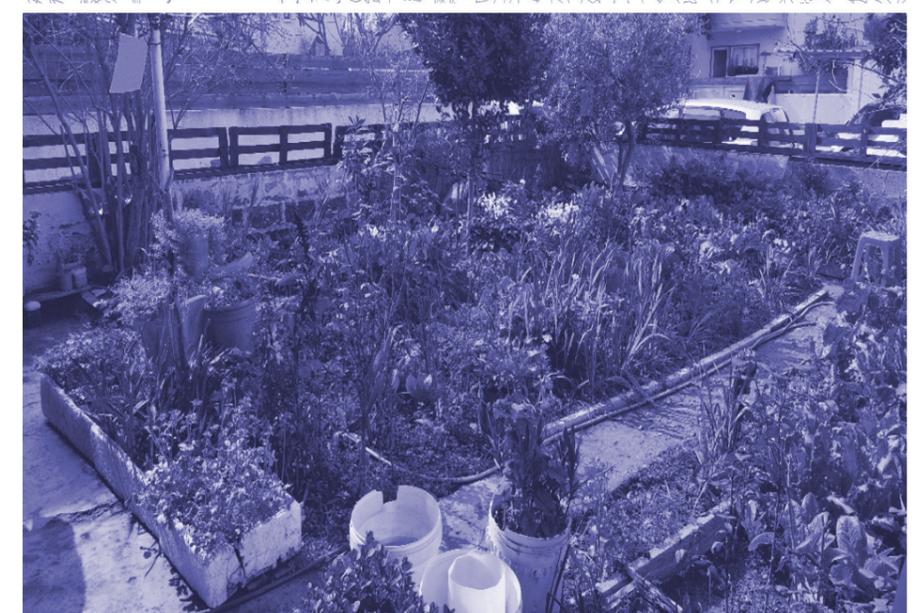


Fig.6 - The hidden gardens of Strovolos II, by Eleni Gabriel and Maria Orfanou.

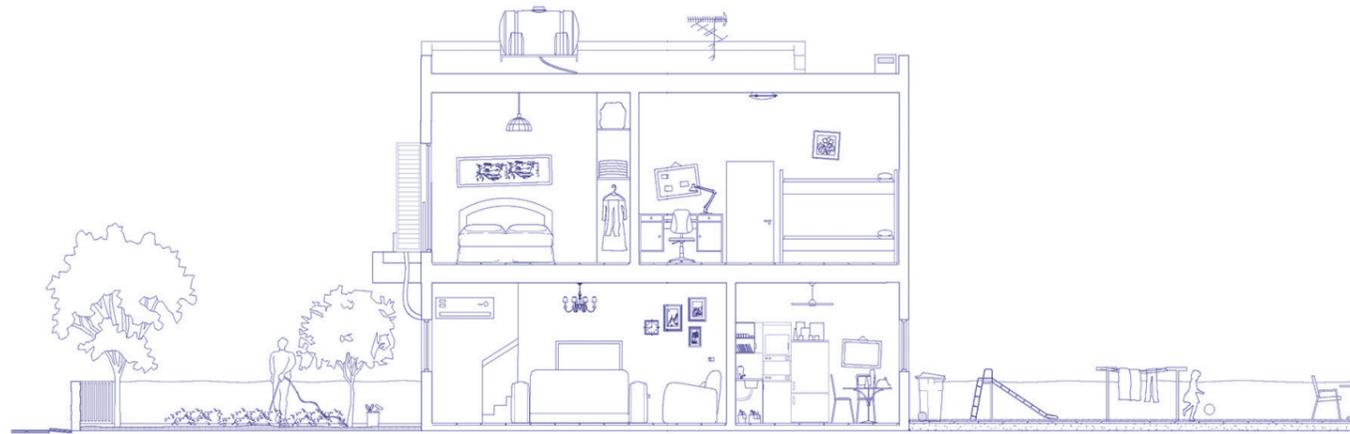


Fig.7 - Interior/exterior of the Strovolos II row houses, by Eleni Sergiou and Antigoni Karekla.

reflecting both a demand for extra space and a blurring of boundaries between interior and exterior. Additional modifications, such as altered doors and air conditioning units, further demonstrate individual interventions. The drawings also capture how planting, cultivation, children's play, and laundry extend into the outdoor areas, highlighting the continuous interplay between domestic life and outdoor spatial adaptation.

Marina Koiliari and Savvina Vorka, study physical thresholds and material boundaries between and across different properties while the accent of Eleftherios Christou and Louiza Toumpa is on the estate's modest commercial centre

(Fig.8). Their drawings capture the daily interactions of residents with shop owners, who often extend their shops informally into public space, with places like the local grocery acting as social hubs. Some residents created shortcuts through backyard walls to access these spaces, disrupting the estate's original planning logic. The shared pedestrian paths—animated by watering, conversations, laundry, and play—blurred lines between private and public, revealing a rich social ecology.

Georgios Beis and Victor Pilavas, using sectional and isometric drawings, documented the qualities of the estate's informal pedestrian alleys through a peripatetic

experience (Fig.9). These capture key moments along the path demonstrating their role as places for community gardening and gathering, as shortcuts through passages and/or as places of boundary negotiation. Nikolas Kallenos and Alexandros Skenter shift the focus on the characteristic cul-de-sacs, highlighting them as critical sites of interaction that resist the estate's formal organization. Their work revealed not neighbourhoods based on building blocks, but a mosaic of "micro-neighbourhoods" defined by proximity, ritual, and shared use (Fig.10).

The final outputs were compiled in a uniform A3 portrait format,

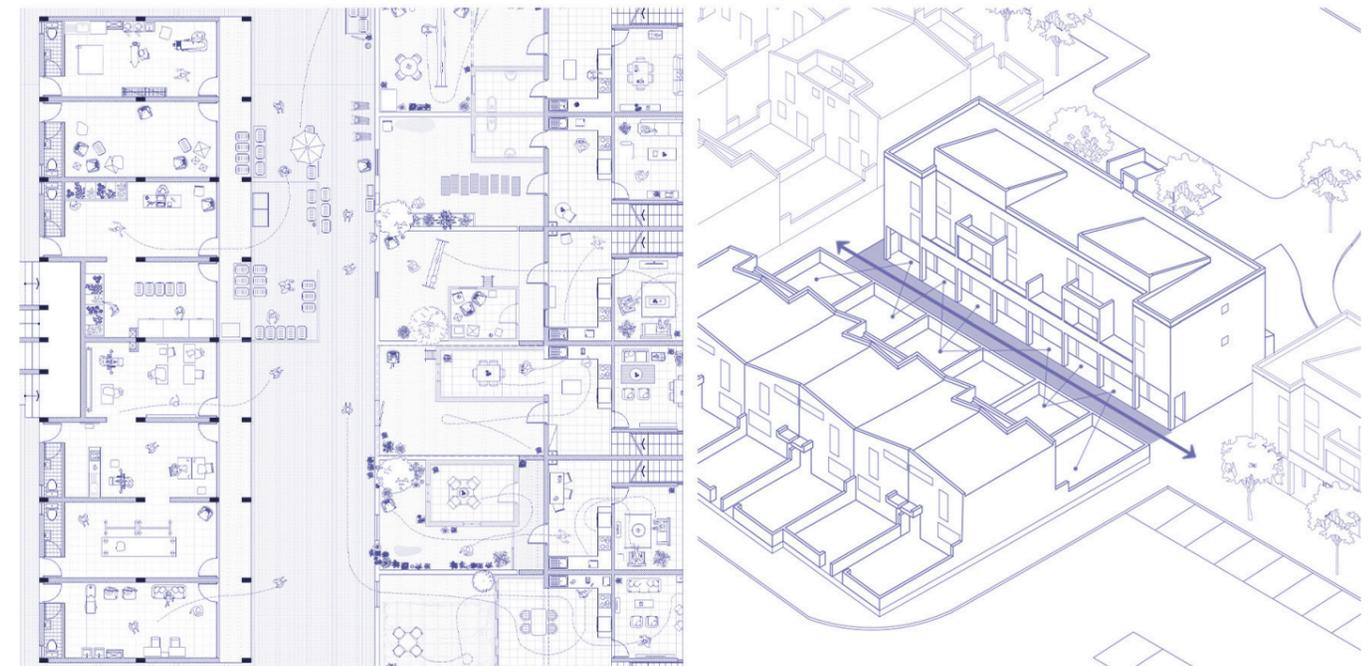
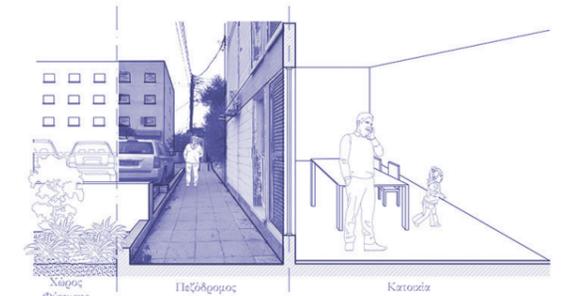
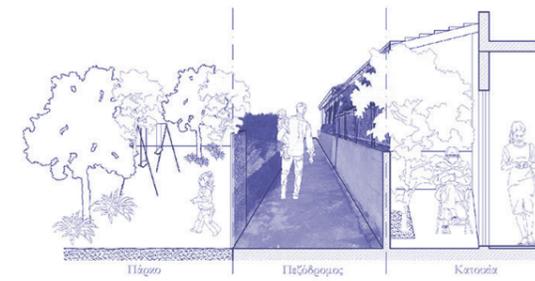


Fig.8 - Thresholds and boundaries, by Marina Koiliari and Savvina Vorka (top), Eleftherios Christou and Louiza Toumpa (bottom).

producing detailed, spatialised narratives that foregrounded the physical, material, and social dimensions of life in Strovolos II. This process underscored the value of observation not only as a subjective act but also as part of a shared method of representation and storytelling. The aim was to build a collective archive that reveals the complexity of lived space and is read for patterns: recurring informal practices, subtle appropriations, or material traces that suggest new ways of understanding the estate as a living, evolving environment. This graphic ethnographic archive demonstrates how drawing—when approached as a descriptive ethnographic tool

alongside other media—becomes a critical practice for registering the traces of inhabitation and revealing how people shape and are shaped by their architectural environs, continually negotiating the boundaries between formality and improvisation.

In doing so, the studio foregrounded drawing as slow observation practice and research method capable of capturing and interpreting the layered dynamics of lived space. The drawing becomes both testimony and interrogation, a record of what is, and a prompt for seeing differently. These drawings do not impose architectural knowledge upon the site; rather, echoing Kaijima, they become

"instances of collective learning, not a one-way knowledge transfer" (2021: 261).

Strovolos II serves as an exemplar case of the ethical and practical challenges inherent in graphic ethnography within architectural education. Cypriot refugee estates demand of students a heightened sensitivity to the histories and vulnerabilities embedded in everyday spaces. Navigating this context, students were compelled to engage with residents' lives ethically, often encountering tensions between the desire to document and the risk of intrusion into private, and sometimes contested, spatial narratives. This situated context foregrounded the

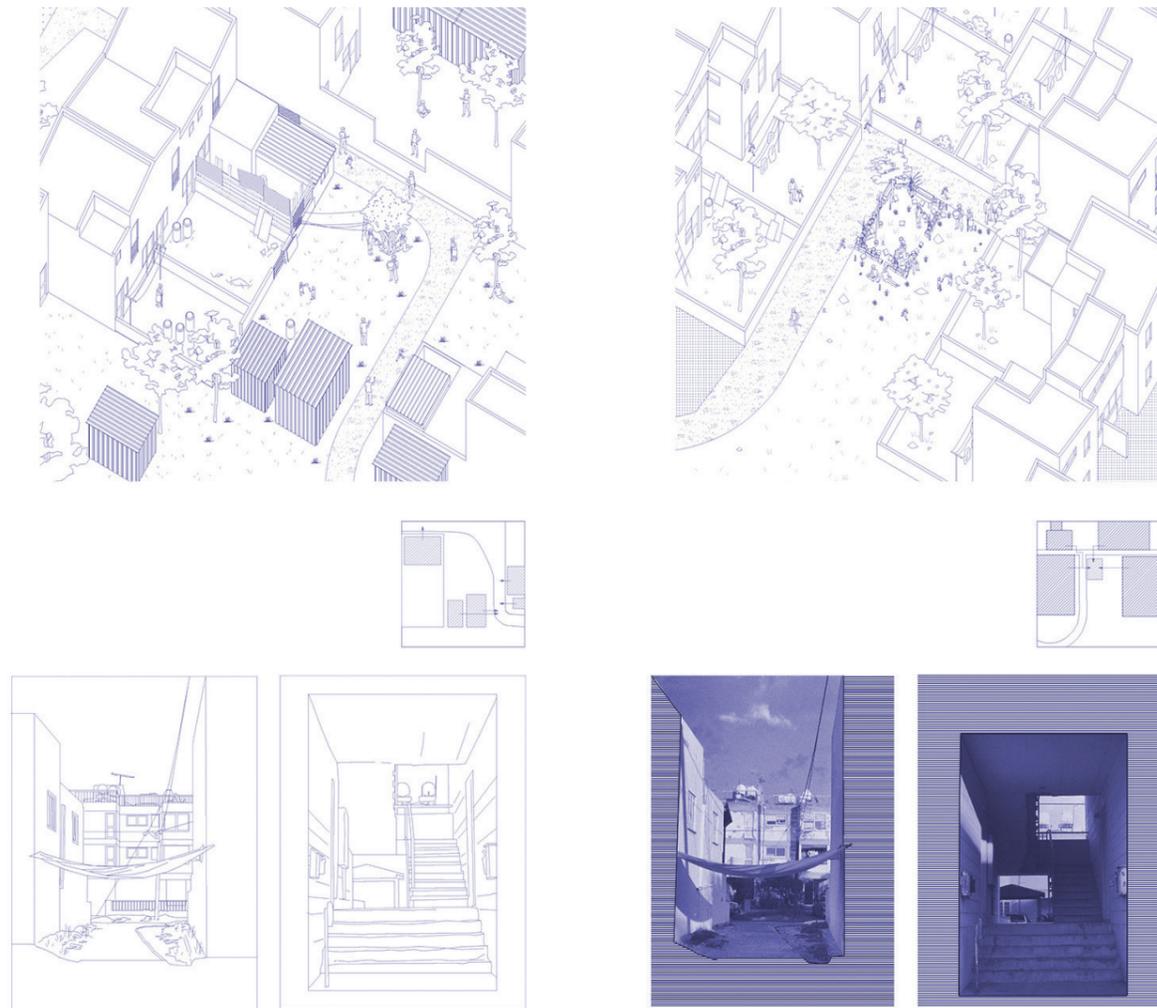


Fig.9 - Pedestrian alleys; by Georgios Beis and Victor Pilavas.

necessity of consent and ongoing dialogue, aligning with Pink's insistence on ethical attentiveness in visual ethnography (2007: 58). Ethical considerations that emerged over the semester had to do with the documentation of private spaces, difficulties in gaining full access or trust, managing biases in observation, or the inherent limitations of drawing as a medium to capture all aspects of lived experience. A student's familial ties helped access while photography and annotation supplemented the aspects that drawing sometimes could not convey.

Moreover, the collective archive of drawings from Strovolos II exemplified the challenge of integrating subjective perspectives into a shared representation of space. Students' individual interpretations were brought into conversation through studio critique and collective reflection,

fostering a pluralistic yet coherent understanding of the estate's socio-spatial dynamics. This collaborative process echoed Ingold's (2011) conception of drawing as a relational practice, where observer and observed co-constitute meaning through attentive engagement.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

"By all accounts, as a technique of observation drawing is unrivalled," Ingold argues (2011b:16), who likens drawing to walking, where the drawer—like the pedestrian carefully watching his/her steps—synchronises perception with action, becoming immersed in the world through the very act of tracing it. The drawings discussed here, though created digitally, serve a similar purpose to ethnographic field notes: they contribute to theory development, providing

contextual understanding, and guide future designs (cf. Lucas 2020: 13).

Drawing has played a crucial role not merely in documenting, but in reimagining both the past and present as foundations for the future. While inherently incomplete and shaped by personal experiences or the limitations of the outsider, the drawing remains a vital tool to grasp and preserve fragments of lived reality. As Ingold (2020) suggests, "students should cultivate more their subjective sensibilities in order to produce better observations," thereby underscoring the value of subjectivity in enriching the act of observation.

Drawing, unlike other forms of documentation, invites a more attentive and embodied mode of seeing. It focuses on subtle details that might otherwise escape notice, while allowing these to inform

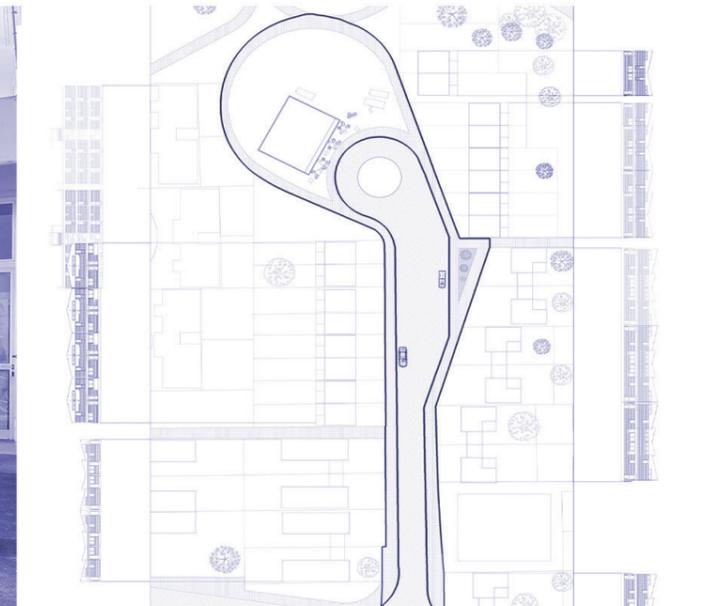
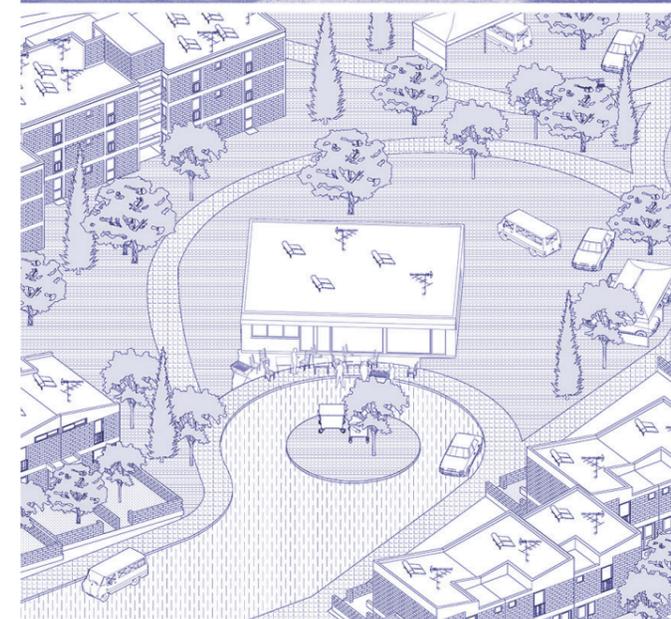
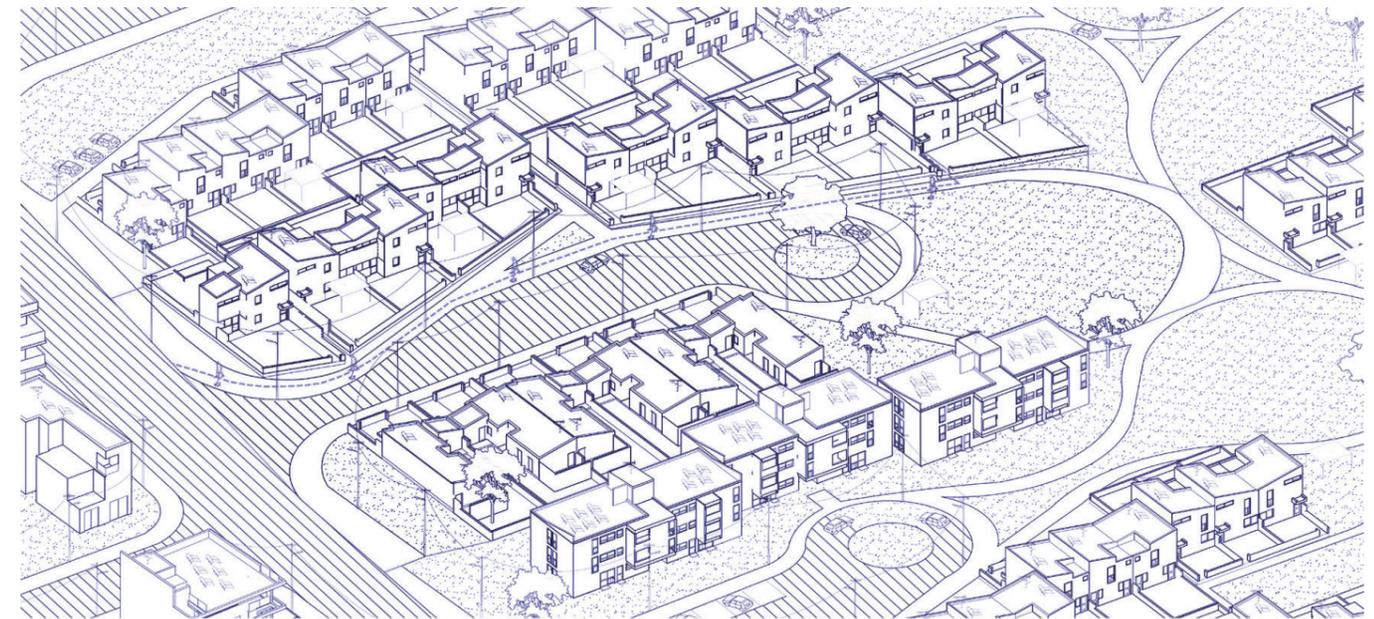


Fig.10 - Cul-de-sacs as micro-neighbourhoods, by Nikolas Kallenos and Alexandros Skenter.

future design possibilities. Rather than offering a final representation, ethnographic drawing opens up space for interpretation, reflection, and transformation.

Although architectural design has traditionally been oriented toward speculation and future projection, as Ingold (2020) reminds us, "you cannot speculate or propose without a deep understanding of the lived world, and deeply understanding the lived world would be completely pointless if it wasn't linked to some sort of proposition or speculation about how life might be." In this way, drawing becomes not just a representational practice but a critical method for engaging with the present and imagining the future.

Here, drawing functions as a bridge between observation and understanding, cultivating a more active and responsive form of attention. Through acts of showing, narrating, and tracing, it sharpens sensitivity to nuance and enhances awareness of the evolving nature of place. Drawing is not merely a tool of final representation or a means of depicting reality; it is a fundamental method of knowledge production that links observation with expressive transcription. The aim of ethnographic knowledge—produced through the tools of the architect—is not to be directly translated into specific design solutions based on user demands. Rather, in line with our experience and echoing Bratia and Postiglione (2023: 41), ethnographic insights function as a way to understand the dynamics of a place, offering deeper knowledge that can inform and support reflective design choices. Ethnographic drawing enables the surveying of what is typically overlooked. It attends to the informal appropriations, material adaptations, and social improvisations that conventional orthographic drawings tend to omit. In this shift from prescription to description, drawing becomes not merely a tool for envisioning future architecture, but a means of uncovering the everyday spatial practices that shape it

after construction: what remains, transforms, and is quietly reinvented in use. By focusing on these small, often unnoticed details—leftover objects, spatial arrangements, or fleeting moments—drawing captures the anthropological richness embedded in ordinary settings. These seemingly minor elements can speak to larger narratives, offering spatial evidence of lived experience.

The practice of ethnographic drawing, as explored here, repositions architectural representation as a process of inquiry rather than resolution. By tracing the informal, the improvised, and the residual, drawing becomes a critical lens through which lived experience can be surfaced and made legible. This challenges disciplinary conventions that equate drawing with control, precision, and foresight, offering instead an approach that values partiality, subjectivity, and embeddedness. In this context, drawing is not only a method of seeing but also a way of knowing, one that acknowledges the agency of everyday actors, materials, and temporalities in shaping architectural space. Such a shift has implications for both practice and education, encouraging architects to approach the built environment not as a fixed outcome but as a dynamic field of encounter and transformation.

Reflecting on the outcomes of the study, it becomes clear that the studio's pedagogical framework—grounded in careful observation, ethical attentiveness, and situated engagement—allowed students to reveal the lived realities of Strovolos II through drawing. In many ways, their work embodies Ingold's (2011b) idea of drawing as a continuous "movement of observation and description," while echoing Kaijima's (2018, 2021) understanding of drawing as a collective process of learning and exchange. The students' drawings translated everyday gestures and material improvisations into spatial knowledge, capturing what de Certeau (1984) would call the "tactics" of inhabitation that transform planned architectures

into lived spaces. At the same time, they align with Haraway's (1988) notion of "situated knowledges," recognising that every act of observation is partial, embodied and situated. Taken together, these works show how an ethnographic approach to drawing can move beyond representation, bridging theory and experience, and confirming, as Lucas (2020) argues, that drawing is itself a way of thinking and knowing.

The approach advanced here challenges the supposed neutrality and objectivity of conventional orthographic drawings, positioning drawing instead as both inquiry and a generator of knowledge: an act that recognises buildings as dynamic junctions between design and improvisation, matter and meaning. In this context, drawing is less about prescribing a finished space than about describing the iterative acts of small-scale reconfiguration that make architecture a living, open-ended process. In embracing observation, subjectivity, and the everyday, ethnographic drawing affirms that architecture is not a static object to be completed, but a dynamic field of experience to be continuously lived, traced, and reimagined. In the Strovolos II studio, this continuity between observation and design was made tangible. Students' careful attention to marginal details, informal appropriations, and lived adaptations in their ethnographic drawings did more than produce site knowledge: it cultivated the sensibilities and attentiveness that directly informed reflective, context-sensitive design proposals. In this way, drawing functioned as both a method of inquiry and a bridge to speculative practice, demonstrating how the act of observing and tracing the everyday can shape the imagination of future architectural possibilities. By animating drawings through the lived, the improvised, and the mundane, students introduced the vitality of life into architectural representation. In the end, to draw ethnographically is to draw life itself, and to recognise that architecture, at its most vital, is nothing less.

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NOTES

1. I have been running the ARH401 module since 2021 and had the privilege to teach together with a number of great colleagues who contributed to its development: Platon Issaias, Konstantinos Marcou, Olga Balaoura, Charis Nika, and Ersia Stylianou. As of 2024, the studio focuses on refugee estates in Cyprus and introduced the drawing exercises that are of interest here. The article presents projects from the spring semester of 2025 during which Frixos Petrou acted as teaching assistant and I'm indebted to his input.

2. Ray Lucas identifies a tension between what might be called an ethnographic mode and its anthropological interpretation. Echoing Ingold, his dissertation supervisor, he highlights a broader concern: that ethnography is increasingly treated as mere reportage, lacking the reflective depth that characterizes anthropology (Lucas 2020:16).

3. For a detailed discussion on the studio's theoretical and conceptual framework as well as key student design outputs see Avramidis (forthcoming).

4. Here, I am not arguing against typological thinking or the generative and creative capacities of type. On the contrary, I acknowledge that types carry disciplinary memory and can be framed culturally (cf. Lechner 2021; Lechner & Postiglione 2025). I argue that both type and type less improvisations are key to appreciating adaptive capacities in architecture.