Performing House: A Talk in Seven Fragments

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Abstract

Performing House is an ongoing practice research project exploring dwelling as a collective, evolving act rather than a fixed architectural state. Set in an olive grove in Chiliomodi, Greece, it unfolds as a slow-built experiment in co-designing a space for residencies, performance-making, and interdisciplinary exchange. The project imagines home not as an object to be completed, but as a relationship—sustained by presence, participation, and shared care.

Through performative workshops, sketches, and site gatherings, Performing House explores how architecture can perform as a verb: shaping, listening, and responding in real time. The grove, the house, and the nearby archaeological site act as living collaborators in a choreography of making and unmaking, remembering and reimagining.

This paper presents fragments of that process as a lecture-performance on the page – a document that performs its own construction. It proposes that building together is also a way of thinking together, and that design, when practiced as conversation, becomes a form of belonging.

Keywords: performance design, co-design, scenography, site-based research

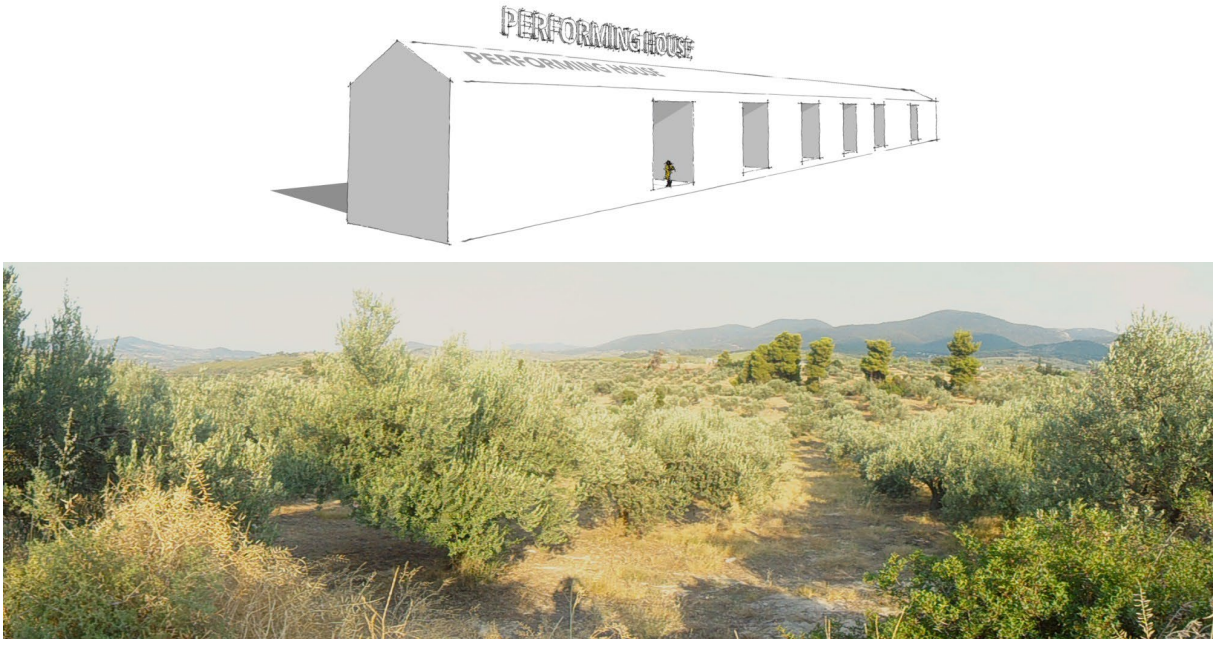
Origin Point

I am an architect. A scenographer. An educator.

My practice moves between buildings, performances, sketches, and gatherings. My studio is called Performing Architectures - because space is not a backdrop. It is an act.

Performing House grows forty minutes from here[1], in the village where I was born. In an olive grove I grew up with. In a place where the past is always present, and the future wants to be invited.

Figure 1
Concept sketch and photo of the olive grove. (Skourtis, 2021).



This project is about imagining such an invitation.

It is early in its making, but its roots reach back twelve years – of sketching, performing, and returning. It balances real assets – a grove, a house, a ruin – with speculative architecture: a desire to co-create a space for residencies, performance-making, and exchange.

A space that is ours to design. To co-own. To share.

A place that performs with us – our thoughts, our bodies, our uncertainties.

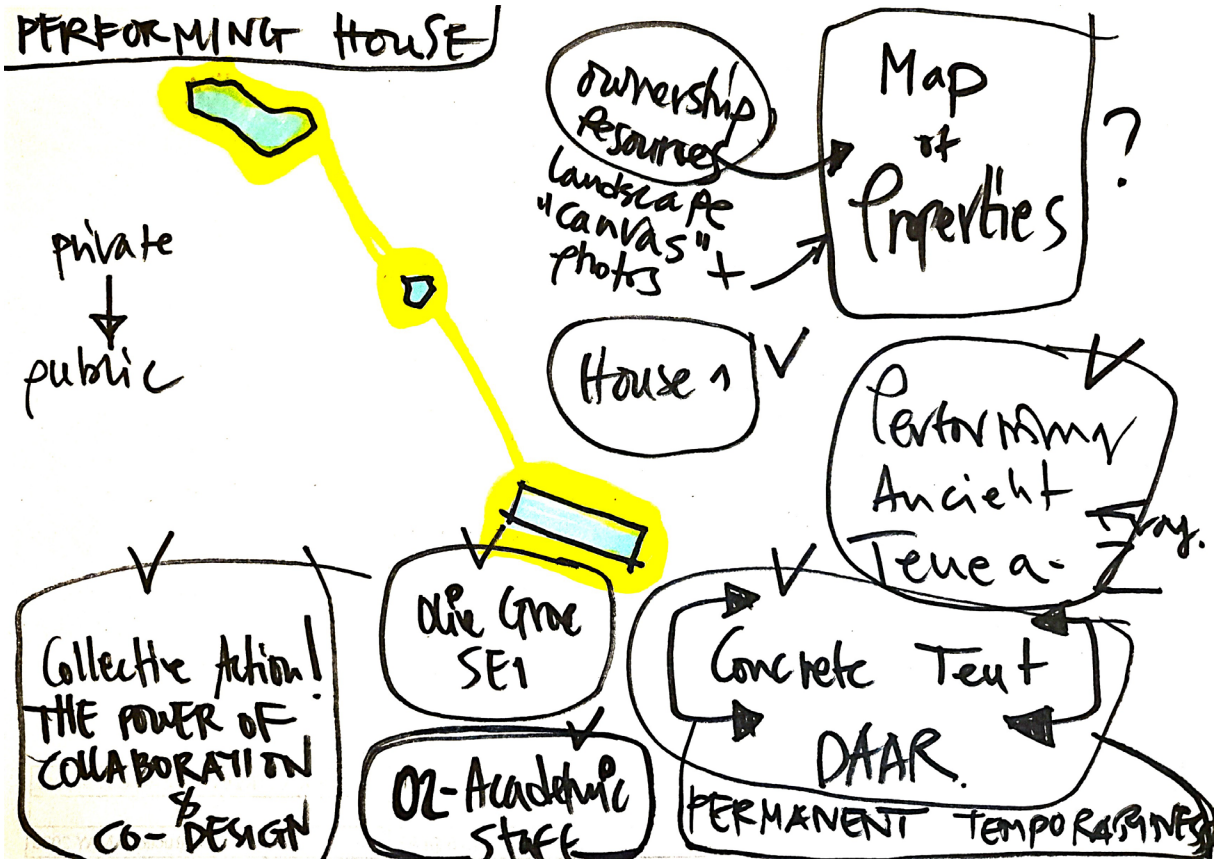
A place to feel good. Because we want to. Because we need to.

[1] Reference to the location of the original talk during the 2025 conference: Nafplio, Greece

As Gaston Bachelard (1994) writes, “the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer” (p. 6). Performing House begins from that shelter and steps outward - from dreaming to doing, from imagining to inviting (Figure 1).

Figure 2

Sketch, mapping the project. (Skourtis, 2024).



Three Anchors

What is Performing House, materially?

Three pieces of land: an olive grove with 130 trees; an existing house in the village; a nearby plot where the ancient city of Tenea is being unearthed. All within walking distance. All holding stories - past, present, imagined (Figure 2).

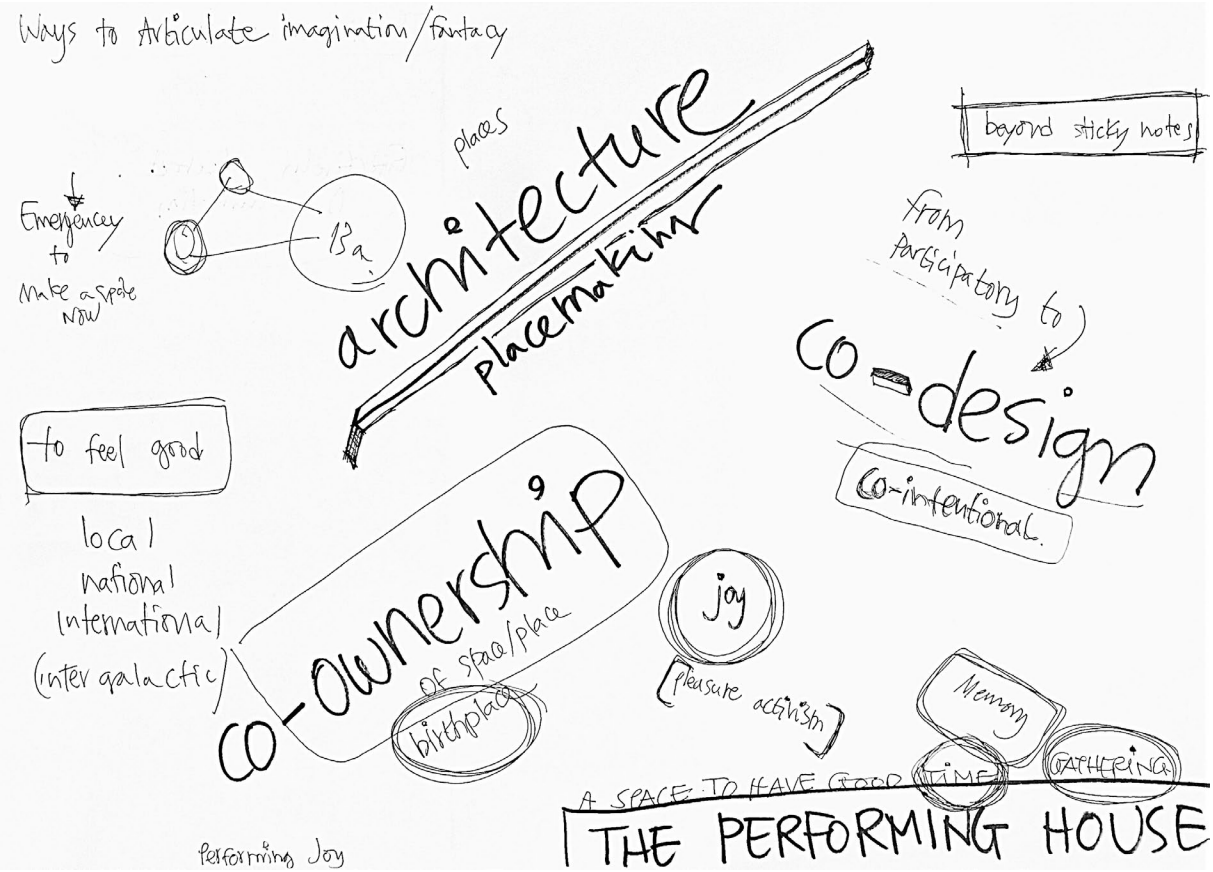
The olive grove has already performed – in Olive Grove SE1, in 02 Academic Staff - as studio, gallery, and durational act. A bridge between Athens and London, memory and invention.

Architecture, in this frame, is not construction but relation. It is the choreography of gathering. The feeling of being well together.

The tent is concrete. The future is soft. We design by asking questions (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Sketch, mapping the project. (Skourtis, 2024).



Situating the Practice

The grove is not remote. Ninety minutes from the Athens airport. Forty minutes from here[2]. Twelve minutes between each anchor point. Close enough to be reachable, far enough to feel apart.

In 2013, I performed here to introduce myself to new colleagues - bringing the grove with me to London (Figure 4). During lockdown, a tree became my collaborator, my studio, my stage (Figure 5).

Now the question is: how do we co-design a future?

[2] Reference to the location of the original talk during the 2025 conference: Nafplio, Greece

Architectural collectives such as Archio remind us to ask open questions, design for shared ambition, bring value as you go. Performing House borrows that ethos, testing it through scenographic play.

Can a grove become a performance space? Can a ruin host reassemblies of the future? Can we draw on post-it notes and build from trust?

Here, performance design becomes a research method: mapping spatial relations through encounter and dialogue. As Rendell (2010) proposes, site-writing turns reflection into a spatial act - writing as building, documentation as event.

Figure 4

Invitation, 02-Academic Staff performance and installation in the olive grove and RCSSD. (Skourtis, 2013).



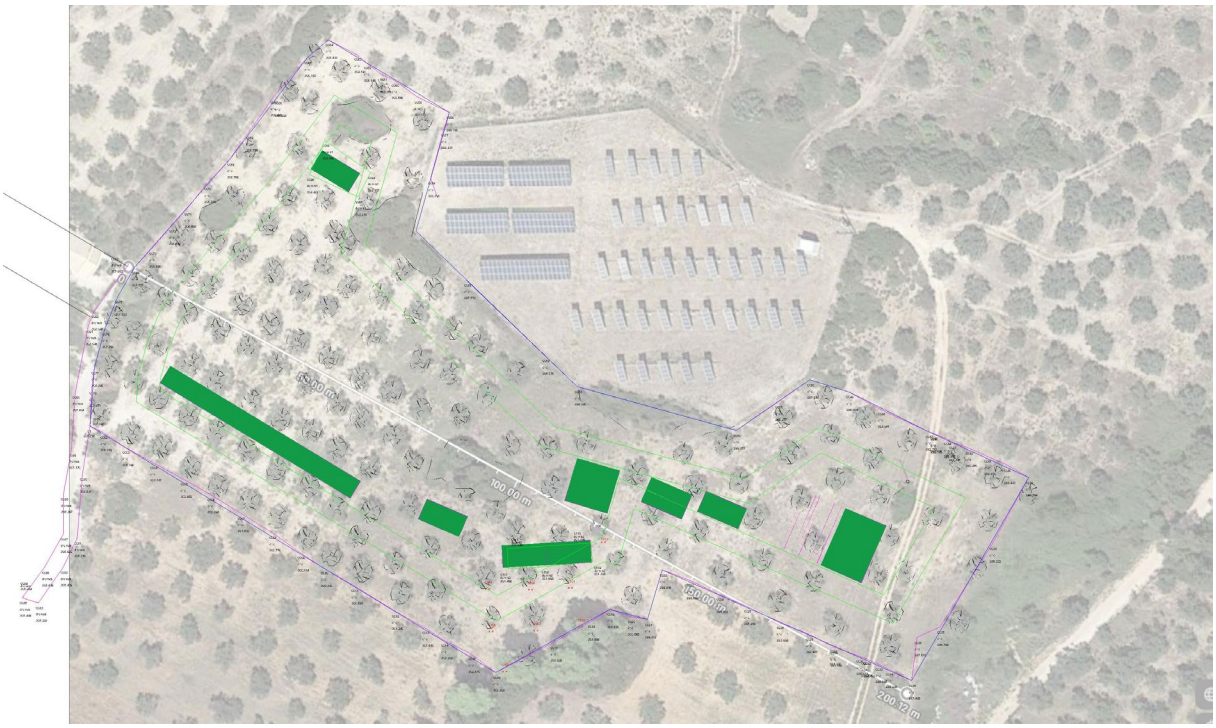
Figure 5

Photos from an installation in the olive grove during the 2021 lockdown. (Skourtis, 2021).



Figure 6

Concept architectural sketch, plan. (Skourtis, 2022).



Master Planning as Play

Aerial views become playgrounds. Buildings dissolve into lines. Plans turn into choreography. Sections into speculation (Figures 6, 7).

From afar, the site looks simple, but we draw over it repeatedly – each line an invitation.

Figure 7

Concept architectural sketch, plan. (Skourtis, 2022).

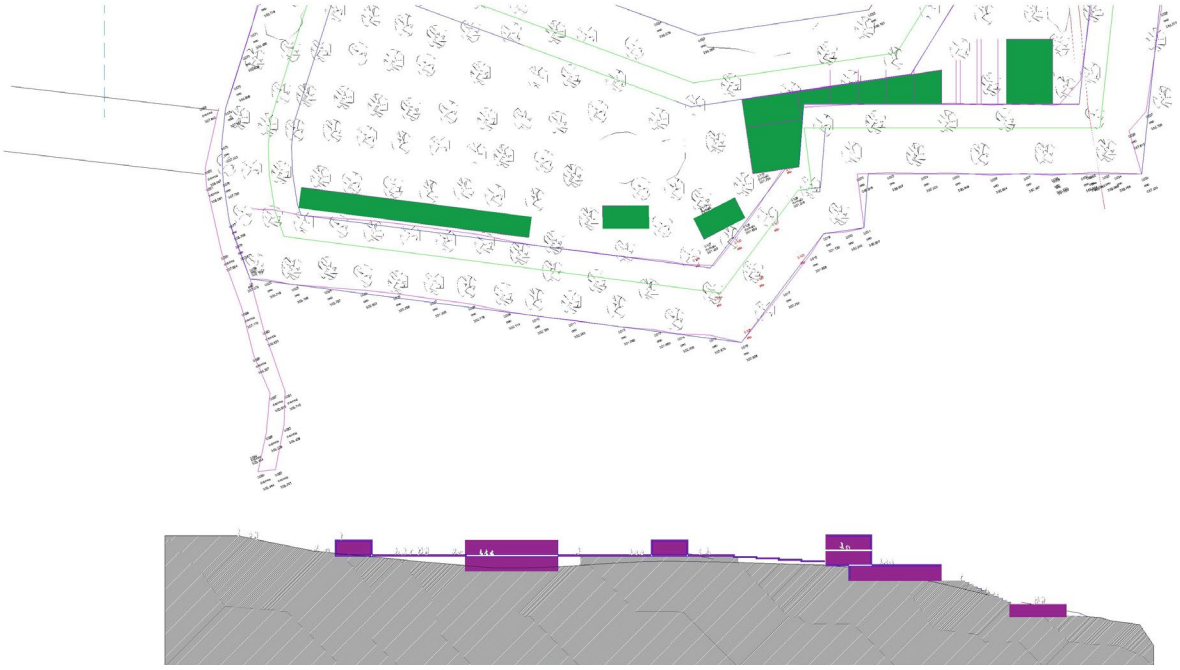
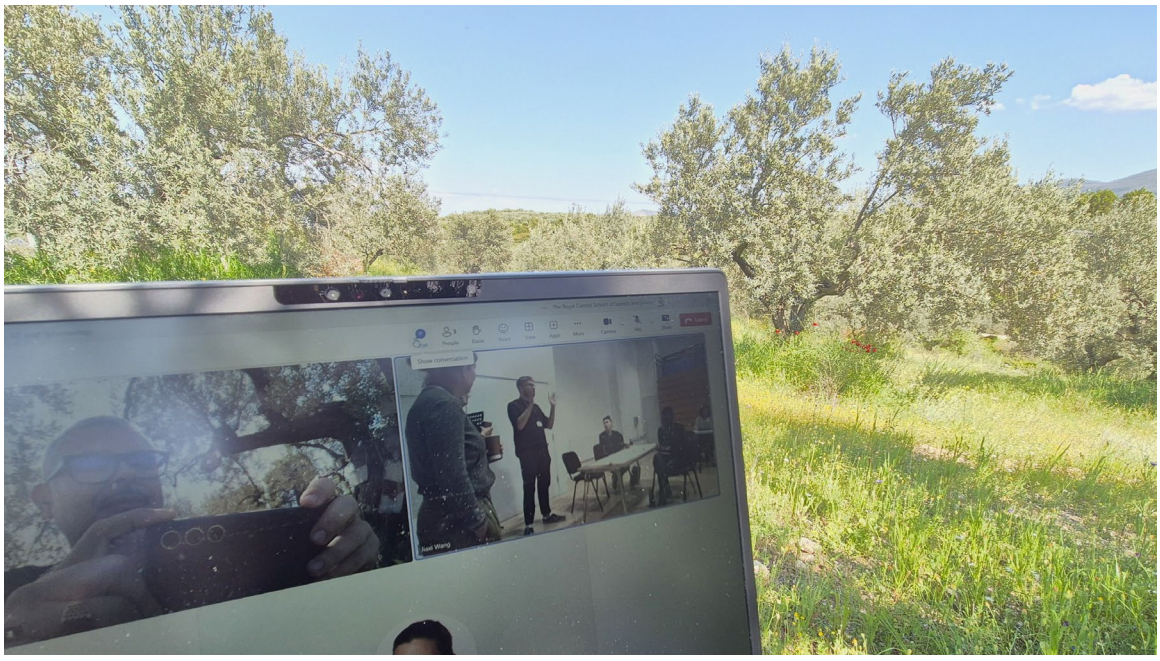


Figure 8

Photo, attending a RCSSD departmental meeting from the olive grove. (Skourtis, 2025).



Remote attendance becomes site-specific; a departmental meeting takes place beneath a tree. The institution follows us into the field (Figure 8).

Performing House is not one building. Not one style. Not one outcome. It is a rhythm. An atmosphere. A willingness to try.

Performing Ancient Tenea, and My House

The ancient city of Tenea lies beneath the soil of my third anchor. Partially excavated, still whispering.

In October 2024, it hosted the first Performing Ancient Tenea gathering (Figure 9). The artists arrived without scripts or sets - only gestures, fragments, footsteps, offerings. The archaeologists were the audience; the excavation was performed to them.

In that exchange, site became dramaturg, history became improvisation.

The existing house became a site of editing - its yard a frame for firelight, its walls a palimpsest of drawings, maps, and late-night notes.

Figure 9

Invitation visual, from Performing Ancient Tenea: Fragments 1. (Skourtis, 2024).



Figure 10

Photo, during editing footage from Performing Ancient Tenea, in the house. (Skourtis, 2024).

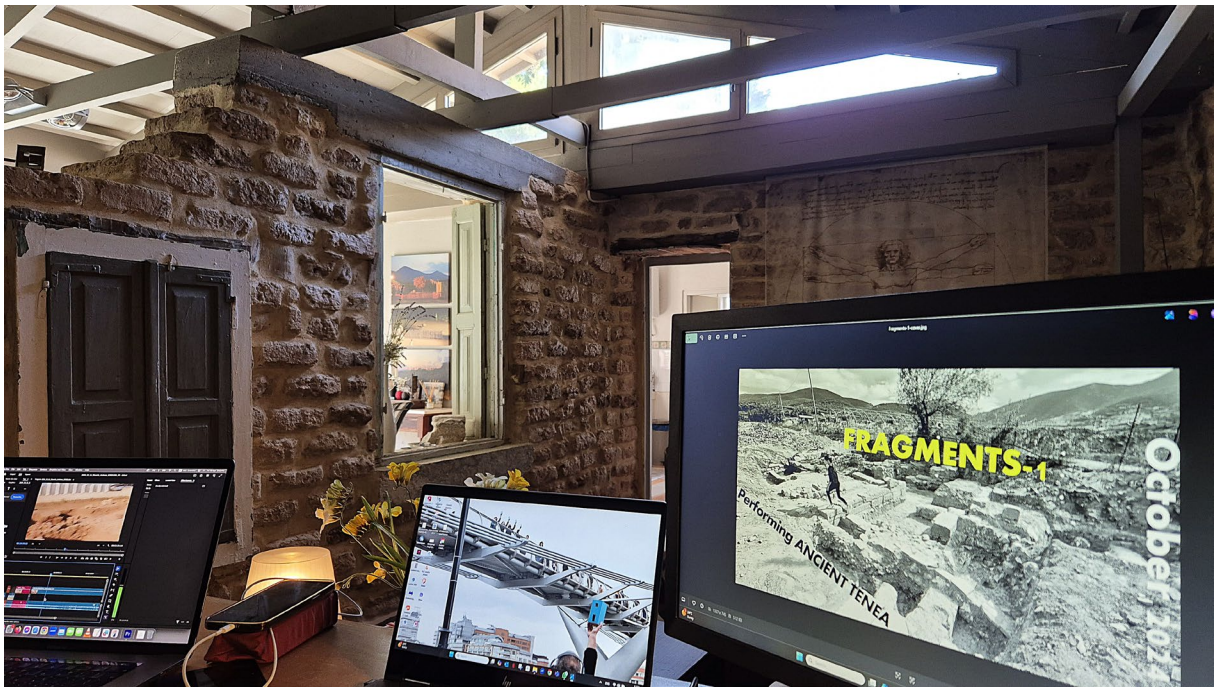


Figure 11

Photo, from a reflective night gathering in the house. (Skourtis, 2024).



An Open Ending

The house is already standing. The kitchen might already exist – in someone else's dream, in someone else's photo. The concrete tent reminds us: permanence can be portable (Figure 12).

Performing House is not proposing a building. Not yet. It proposes a way of being with place, with each other, with uncertainty.

What might we build if we begin by asking questions?

How do we gather to feel good, not just to be productive?

Can we perform care in the act of co-making?

Can a house hold performance, learning, and the pleasure of shade?

Figure 12

Photo, The Concrete Tent, from a keynote by DAAR Architects at RIBA, London. (Skourtis, 2024).



So, What Is This Project Trying to Do?

It's trying to make a space that performs with us, that gathers us, that feels like a pause and a beginning.

It's trying to use what we have – trees, ruins, drawings, attention – and grow what we need.

It's trying to imagine how we might learn differently, live differently, build together.

It's not trying to prove. It's trying to ask. And to invite you in.

Conclusion

Performing House is both proposal and process, both question and dwelling. It tests how architecture might act as an event and how performance might dwell. In a time when creative practice often accelerates towards outcomes, this work chooses slowness, iteration, and shared authorship. The olive grove becomes a classroom without walls, the ruin an archive in flux, the house a rehearsal for co-habitation. Each gesture – sketch, conversation, or walk – becomes part of a collective scenography of care. This paper, like the project, remains unfinished: an open plan drawn in soft pencil.

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