

SECOND CHANCE. Architecture as an Evidential Practice

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Re Mediating Practices

Exploring Circularity's Impact on Representational Instruments and Design Processes in Architecture

The Practices in Research journal is an initiative of In Practice, an interuniversity research group of practising architects that places architectural practice at the heart of research. In Practice explores the multiple ways in which architects can engage their professional practice within academic research, and vice versa. Practices in Research (PiR) is an online journal for practice based research in architecture and related disciplines, based on a selection of contributions to a conference. PiR examines how architectural practices engage with and contribute to research.

For PiR, practice is never reduced to an illustration of theory. Conversely, research is not reduced to the observation of practice. PiR seeks contributions in which research and practice mutually enrich one another, and in which practice is essential as a subject, a modality, a perspective, or a combination thereof. While contributions are expected to

remain closely connected to practice, they are not limited to its presentation or documentation. Instead, they take a step beyond practice as such, articulating, exploring, and revealing reflections within the architectural field.

PiR also invites creative forms of communication, questioning the conventional hierarchy between text and image. Visual and written narratives are understood as operating in multiple, reciprocal ways: images are more than illustrations, and text is more than explanation.

This issue, *Re Mediating Practices*, is based on a call for contributions published in January 2025. The following paragraphs were part of the initial open call:

In the pursuit of an actual and pertinent attitude, architects are increasingly committed to working with the materials and structures that already exist. This practice—rooted in re use, reclamation, harvesting, and urban mining—challenges architects to embrace the unpredictability of what is available. Whether reimagining a structure or harvesting materials from demolition sites, they must navigate fluctuating quantities, variable qualities, and unexpected dimensions, colours, textures, and technical performance.

This unpredictability demands a mindset of resilience and adaptability from designers. Re use is not only about what remains of the material world, but also about how architects reimagine their own practices, relinquishing certainty and control in favour of experimentation and resourcefulness. To engage meaningfully with these constraints, designers must

let go of traditional aesthetic ideals as dominant drivers, instead embracing imperfection, irregularity, and serendipity.

How do architects thrive in this space of uncertainty? What instruments, methods, and processes enable them to work creatively within the flux of material availability? How do they reframe constraints—such as limited supply or inconsistent quality—not as barriers but as opportunities to uncover unexpected potential in existing resources? And what new aesthetics and spatial practices emerge when beauty is no longer defined by precision or uniformity, but by adaptability and responsiveness?

Urban mining, harvesting, and reclamation require architects to think in terms of flows: flows of materials, energy, and information. The availability of materials is contingent not only on demolition or deconstruction schedules, but also on logistical challenges, evolving regulations, and the inherent unpredictability of what is salvaged. How do architects design for this variability? How do they incorporate flexibility into their processes to align with what is available, when it is available?

Re use and reclamation are as much about unlearning as they are about learning. Architects must challenge established conventions of material perfection, the dominance of newness, and even the notion of authorial control over the design process. This work involves an ongoing negotiation between material realities and design ambitions, between available resources and project goals. How does this negotiation transform the role of the architect and the authorship of the project?

A preliminary selection of authors was invited to present at the Practices in Research conference at C.I.II.III.IV.A on 21 May 2025. Extended abstracts were made available in the conference proceedings. Following the event, a refined selection of contributors underwent a rigorous double blind peer review process for inclusion in the present issue.

All contributions in this issue were reviewed by two anonymous reviewers, in accordance with the journal's established review policy. The issue also actively supported and encouraged formats that challenge the conventional dominance of text over visual content. Several visual essays successfully underwent the same rigorous peer review process, offering complementary alternatives to more traditional articles.

Given the substantial increase in submissions, the issue is organised into thematic chapters that loosely mirror the conference structure. Across the contributions, a set of closely related concerns delineates the contours of contemporary circular and reuse driven architectural practice. Authors engage with material uncertainty, examining how variability in the quantity, quality, and performance of salvaged materials actively informs design decisions. Through processes of reclamation and contextual mining, new design methods and representational tools emerge to integrate existing materials, structures, and knowledge into architectural projects. This shift gives rise to distinct reuse aesthetics, in which established aesthetic conventions are loosened and design outcomes are shaped by availability, contingency, and material histories rather than prede-

termined ideals. Operating within such conditions requires a heightened degree of resilience and adaptability in design practice, as architects navigate open ended and unpredictable processes. At the same time, several contributions highlight a human centred shift, foregrounding collaboration with owners, users, builders, and local experts as an integral component of circular workflows. Finally, a number of projects resist predefined categories, advancing denormed and decategorized approaches that challenge conventional typologies and open space for alternative modes of practice.

To conclude this issue, the Editorial Board invited Elodie Degavre (UCLouvain), Juliane Greb (Büro Juliane Greb, UAntwerpen), Tine Segers, (UAntwerpen) and Cristian Ștefănescu (A-Works, BAS Bergen School of Architecture) to co author an overarching article reflecting on the initiative's setup and contributions. Their text offers a thoughtful synthesis of the coherence and diversity of Re Mediating Practices. They observe that circularity and practices of adaptive reuse can no longer be understood as purely technical concerns, but are instead profoundly reshaping the nature of architectural work itself. Drawing on the concluding panel discussion held at the end of the conference, they identify a set of recurring themes—uncertainty, archiving, collaboration, pedagogy, and scalability—that together outline a profession in transition, negotiating new modes of practice at the intersection of environmental responsibility and cultural imagination. While not peer reviewed, the contribution complements the intentions of the Editorial Board and the institutions represented.

Heartfelt thanks are extended to all contributors, advisors, reviewers, and members of the Editorial Board and Scientific Committee. Their collective engagement has significantly deepened and expanded the journal's reflective scope, fostering meaningful discourse on contemporary architectural practice.

Harold Fallon, Tomas Ooms
Editor in Chief and Associate Editor
PiR #06 – Re Mediating Practices

SECOND CHANCE

Architecture as an Evidential Practice

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Interpreting Clues

“If reality is opaque, there are privileged zones - spies, clues - that allow one to decipher it.”¹

Between 1874 and 1876, the Italian art critic and politician Giovanni Morelli, writing under the pseudonym Ivan Lermolieff, published articles in the German periodical *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*. Through his writing, Morelli introduced a new method for distinguishing original works of art from imitations by analysing elements considered secondary within a painting. He, in fact, identified distinctive traits of artists’ styles by carefully cataloguing details such as fingers, nails, and ears. According to the ‘Morellian method’, in those apparently marginal elements, generally rendered with less control, the artist’s individuality freely emerged, consequently enabling the art critic to unmask forgeries.² Morelli’s analytical approach introduced a way of seeing based on empirical observation, a form of knowledge grounded in the reading of traces.

The emergence of such an attitude of attention to minor detail by the end of the 19th century is the focus of the essay entitled *Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm* (1986), in which historian Carlo Ginzburg traces the birth of an epistemological model that establishes a correlation between the traces Morelli sought in paintings, the clues

that Arthur Conan Doyle’s fictional detective Sherlock Holmes discovers, and the symptoms Sigmund Freud identifies in his patients. The architect, like the art historian, the detective, and the psychoanalyst, can also draw on inductive and circumstantial intelligence to understand complex phenomena. In architectural practice, “the evidential paradigm represents a fundamental shift of the theoretical axis away from the certainties of formal knowledge, used to confirm reality, towards an open attitude of inquiry that defines its own action through the continuous discovery of new conditions and possibilities.”³ Paying attention to what fragments can reveal, and attributing value to the partial and the situated—as Ginzburg, as a historian, is accustomed to doing—transforms architectural reasoning into an interpretative act based on clues and material traces, aimed at the production of meaning and knowledge through the open-ended processes of designing and making.

In the projects below, the focus is on the exploration of design strategies developed by ErranteArchitettura when operating on existing buildings in marginal contexts. These strategies are tested in situations where projects, subjected to the influence of contingent events, confront designers with the need to deviate from automatism, building conventions, and traditional disciplinary tools. Such shifts are considered (fruitful) crises, providing unique opportunities for a deeper examination of an opaque and changing reality. Through a deliberate act of

¹ Carlo Ginzburg, “Spie. Radici di un paradigma indiziario,” in *Miti, emblemi, spie: morfologia e storia* (Torino: Einaudi, 1986), 191. Authors’ translation.

² *Ibidem*, 158-209

³ Marco Navarra, *Dell’informe. Piccola filosofia pratica per l’architettura* (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 2022), 25. Authors’ translation.

defamiliarisation, things are observed “as if they made no sense at all: as if they were a riddle”, to use Viktor Šklovskij’s words describing the artistic procedure that revives perception of the real.⁴ This act transforms observation into a critical practice, allowing extant fragments and details to operate as epistemic devices.

The necessity to reconsider architectural design in light of unexpected events encourages close attention to seemingly negligible aspects of reality. Those clues, however marginal, become resources for designing new life cycles for architecture and the people who gravitate around it. The gaze directed towards the fragment coexists with a tension toward the totality. This change of perspective transforms scarcity, ordinariness, error, and recycling into a field of experimentation and a means of creative expression.

In both experiences, *ex abrupto*, the scarcity of material resources, as well as an altered time frame, invests what is already present with a new scale of values and transforms an impasse into an opportunity for invention. In this process, observing and cataloguing what is already available in search of traces is an operation entirely analogous to that carried out by the primitive hunter. Utilising the circumstantial rationality characteristic of hunting, the architect endeavours to detect faint clues and reconstruct narratives, refining his perspective through each progression and progressively transforming the selected traces into project material. Beyond the existing

building, also waste, available materials, tools, professional knowledge, and skills emerging from the context, together with the willingness of non-specialised actors to collaborate, impact both the process and the final result. Together, these multiple resources transform the project site into an archive of knowledge and possibilities.⁵ This article explores how ErranteArchitettura, in investigating change in search of new meanings, has translated the evidential paradigm into design practice. In this framework, observation and interpretation of the traces, has proven to be an effective methodological tool to cultivate adaptability and responsiveness.

Bosco Colto



Bosco Colto pavilion, ready to host open-air lectures, presentations and concerts. Photo: Peppe Maisto

In August 2022, ErranteArchitettura took part as a tutor in Bosco Colto, a self-construction workshop aimed at building a pavilion in the Santo Pietro cork forest in central Si-

⁴ Carlo Ginzburg investigates Viktor Šklovskij’s artistic concept of *ostranenie* (defamiliarisation) in his essay *Occhiacci di legno. Dieci riflessioni sulla distanza* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2019), 16.

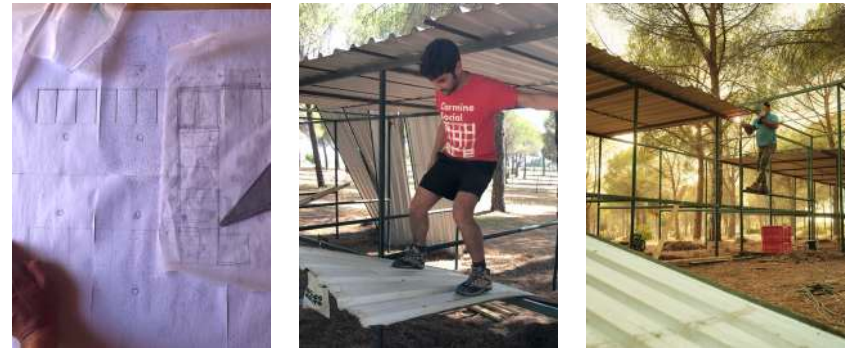
⁵ For materials on-site catalogues as a generative practice to produce situated knowledge, see Lidia Gasperoni, “On-site Catalogues: Reassembling Situated Materials,” *Candide*, no. 24/25 (2024): 1–19

cily. Before the workshop began, ErranteArchitettura and the workshop director conducted an online survey of the forest, identifying a derelict structure once used as a resting place for horses. Located near a cooperative for people experiencing mental distress, this modular construction offered potential for reuse. The designers envisioned transforming the space between the two building sleeves into an open-air didactic area, equipping the modules with wooden platforms. By mutual agreement, the architects were tasked with calculating the quantities of fir wood, lath, and boards—materials considered appropriate for self-construction—required to realise the pavilion.

Once on site, new findings reshaped the process. The structure, thought to consist of prefabricated modules, revealed geometric irregularities. These anomalies became a focus of investigation, recorded by tutors and students using labels and on-site drawings complete with descriptions and measurements. During this initial observation phase, a detailed collective drawing was produced, representing the “as found” structure and its relationship to the surroundings. Both natural and artificial materials, signs of human



Bosco Colto pavilion, catalogue of clues during the investigation phase. Photo: ErranteArchitettura



Bosco Colto pavilion, collective drawing produced by tutors and students, followed by collective actions of deconstruction, cutting, rotation, tilting and welding of the existing structure. Photo: ErranteArchitettura / Piermanuele Sberni

activity, and traces of past incidents were catalogued: the seriality of planted trees, felled and fallen trunks, subsidence, misalignments, and spontaneously grown prickly pears. These observations, attentive to minor details, provided clues that suggested new design narratives based on situated instances.

The last-minute unavailability of the planned wood supply prompted a reconsideration of the design approach: subtraction, reduction, and harvesting, rather than the addition of external materials. On-site materials, despite their scarcity and neglect, were re-evaluated, acquiring new value through their combinatorial potential. The resulting catalogue, initially limited to the structure and its immediate surroundings, expanded to include the know-how, time, and commitment of local artisans and volunteers, including psychiatric patients. Clues oriented the project: the existing structure was collectively deconstructed, cut, rotated, and welded, giving rise to a new organism. Corrugated roof sheets were partially dismantled and reused to create platforms. A new entrance, formed by rotating part of one of the existing sleeves, was covered with folded

roofing slabs to serve as an elongated planter for recovered prickly pears. Logs and other found elements contributed to the pavilion's interior design. A light green agricultural fabric—one of the few new materials—wrapped the structure, distinguishing the interior from the exterior.

The project demonstrates that within the process itself lies the potential to transform scarcity, contingency, and error into generative conditions for rethinking how architecture is conceived and made.

Casa BM

The second project, Casa BM, similarly explores a situation in which material resources are scaled down and redefined during the construction process. In this case, the principles developed for the Sicilian pavilion are transposed into the more complex context of building a house.

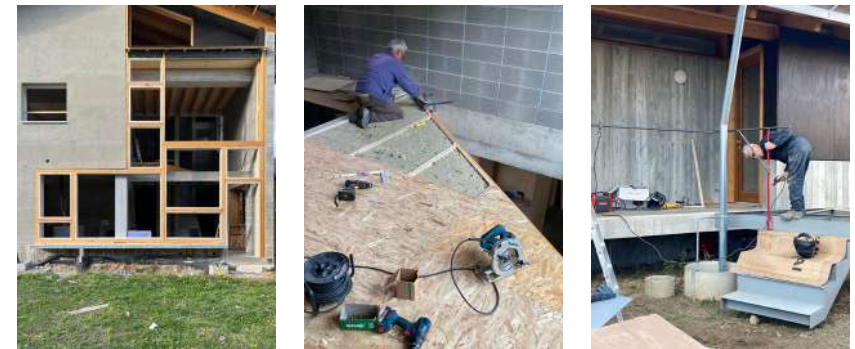
Casa BM is located in a village in the Valle Po, a valley in the Cottian Alps, southwest of Piedmont. The project in-



Casa BM, the new composite façade on the south front of the existing building, realised in collaboration with a local joinery company. Photo: Luca Bosco

volves refurbishing and expanding an abandoned 1970s house, a five-year process marked by fluctuations in the clients' finances, the contractors' expertise, and material costs.

If the house's partial demolition, consolidation, and structural extension were completed in the first construction phase, following a linear process, the post-pandemic period represented a second phase of the construction site. Here, the project had to be re-envisioned to address unpredictable external factors. New strategies were introduced, involving reduction, adjustment, and approximation—transforming a contingent horizon into an opportunity to explore alternative approaches. The construction of the building's envelopes, interiors, and accessory structures falls within this phase. The project in fieri thus became the subject of an act of overwriting, turning construction into a search for possibilities. This process involved investigating artefacts, waste, available stock, and ordinary building materials, as well as simplified construction techniques,



Casa BM, the adoption of a do-it-yourself approach and the inclusion of non-specialist knowledge guided the design of easily realisable architectural solutions. The glazed façade was assembled from standard windows set within a bespoke timber structure built on site. The timber floor, parapets—conceived as assemblages of semi-finished elements—and downpipes—fixed with bent metal supports attached to prefabricated concrete pipes—all employ simplified building methods that enable self-construction. Photo: ErranteArchitettura



Casa BM, the investigation of semi-finished product stocks and economical building materials oriented the project. Wood panelling, shelving and fixed furnishings were all produced on site with limited tools and visible fixings.
Photo: ErranteArchitettura / Luca Bosco

local expertise, and the contribution of non-specialised participants. A multiplicity of clues guided this process, gradually transforming the project itself. Though this approach inevitably introduced inaccuracies and construction errors, ErranteArchitettura's direct engagement on site, alongside traditional studio practice, turned the work into a fertile ground for experimentation, continuously adapting to on-site conditions.

This phase required assessing the availability and skills of potential collaborators—both individuals and local contractors—with the aim of identifying and tailoring the most viable solutions. The construction systems of key nodes emerged from negotiations with local firms, producing hybrid solutions that combined traditional craftsmanship with project-specific needs. The large south-facing façade exemplifies this collaboration. Moreover, the adoption of a do-it-yourself approach, and the inclusion of non-specialist knowledge and tools—from architects, owners, and friends—encouraged the design of architectural solutions that were simple and easily realisable. Chilean pine ply-

wood panels, standard battens, and varied wooden flooring stocks are economical, semi-finished products whose recognisability and compositional clarity are retained. Their use, governed by a limited set of shared rules between architects and builders, reflects a strategy aimed at eliminating the superfluous and accepting imperfection, privileging spatial quality instead. Approximation and simplification emerge, for instance, in the transversal use of semi-finished elements: concrete blocks serve as cladding, interior partitions, garden borders, and paving for surface-water regulation.

Simple self-construction assemblies reduced the distance between owner, user, and builder: “Material objects, created through human labour, are imbued with symbolic meaning—personal, familial, and social—that is perpetuated and reinterpreted across generations”.⁶ This direct involvement is inseparably linked to affective aspects projected onto things. The strengthening of bonds between in-



Casa BM, The ductility of the concrete blocks. Cladding the living area. Dividing walls across both floors. Garden borders. Paving to manage surface water on the slope down to the basement. Leftover blocks of different thicknesses, which would otherwise have been discarded due to the small quantity of remaining material, were reused to build the kitchen walls, whose design is defined by the sequence of partitions with varying thicknesses. Photo: ErranteArchitettura

⁶ Remo Bodei, *Generazioni. Età della vita, età delle cose* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2015), 85. Authors' translation

habitant and space transforms the house into a home rich with stories and memories—a familiar artefact to be cared for through repair and open to exploration through future modifications.

Among the strategies adopted, the on-site cataloguing and reuse of materials and components from demolition ensured the preservation of unique and valuable elements otherwise destined for discard. According to this, the external paving, was made from reused roof beams transformed into steps connecting the southern terraces; stone slabs from a nearby ruined building define the entrance area, and granite steps from the original staircase were reused to form garden paths. The garden itself became a patchwork of cultivated and native plants—formal shrubs preserved from the pre-existing garden alternating with spontaneous vegetation, as well as plants recovered from nearby landslides or collected along roadsides.

In general, resources are not employed to conceal ordinary elements but to reveal their latent potential. This approach



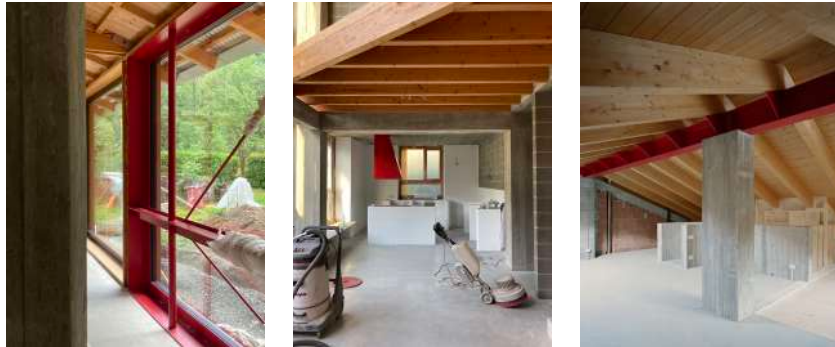
Casa BM, the cataloguing and reuse of materials from the site and its immediate surroundings. Steps from the demolished staircase of the original building define the paths around the house, while stone slabs from a nearby ruin mark the entrance area. The garden forms a patchwork of 'domestic' and 'wild' plants—some purchased, some preserved, others arrived by chance or found along the roadside. Photo: ErranteArchitettura



Carpenter Sofa and Carpenter Chair, furniture exploring the aesthetic potential of semi-finished materials. Photo: ErranteArchitettura

transforms the dynamics of construction into a field of discovery, where Ginzburg's evidential paradigm, Ingold's anthropology of making, and Bodei's philosophy of everyday objects converge in a poetics of the ordinary, grounded in attentive observation.

This pursuit of revelatory traces found a clear expression in the Carpenter Sofa and Chair projects, realised during the construction of Casa BM. The spontaneous gesture of a worker, who almost instinctively assembled a seat from found fragments of metal gabion on site, became the spark for a series of design explorations. Both Carpenter, reflecting on the reuse of waste, the aesthetic potential of overlooked elements, and semi-finished materials, exemplifies the use of montage as a critical practice. Likewise, in the Casa BM, construction errors and process accidents—data as marginal as they are revealing—are transformed into design potential. In this regard, the new ridge beam of the existing building, whose geometry resolves its non-barycentric position relative to the median axis, and the metal bracing on the ground floor, both transform structural needs into didactic as well as aesthetic experiences.



Casa BM, the design potential of technical requirements and construction errors. The metal bracing on the ground floor, the kitchen hood—designed to address a spatial misalignment—, and the new ridge beam—whose geometry resolves its non-barycentric position in relation to the existing building’s median axis—turn necessities into vivid, didactic and even aesthetic experiences. Photo: ErranteArchitettura / Luca Bosco

The legibility of these additions is, here and there, signalled by red paint.

From Clues to Constellations

When the project is challenged by a changing framework, the epistemological model proposed by Ginzburg promotes the acquisition of situated knowledge that extends beyond the confines of the architectural site⁷, incorporating both human and non-human actors. With the attitude of the *bricoleur*⁸—observing, weighing, manipulating materials, and rethinking tools—architects avoid the stance of external observers and instead establish relationships of “correspondence” with the world.⁹

7 On the agency of architectural sites as a design resource, see Albena Yaneva and Brett Mommersteeg, “How Does an ANT Approach Help Us Rethink the Notion of Site?,” in *The Routledge Companion to Actor-Network Theory* (London: Routledge, 2019), 306–317

8 According to Claude Lévi-Strauss’s definition in *Il pensiero selvaggio* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1964)

The two projects presented illuminate a perspective from which to face contingency, to learn from it through that practical and observational engagement that Ingold calls the “art of inquiry”. Drawing attention to apparently secondary aspects and anomalies is, for ErranteArchitettura, an exploratory practice instrumental in shifting attention towards the processes that shape reality. The material traces of time, adaptation of use, and unforeseen events are fragments that, recomposed, shape a new whole open to interpretation. ErranteArchitettura’s practice recognises in overlooked details—traces of real or presumed processes—those spaces of ambiguity and incompleteness capable of activating a profound involvement and a deeper knowledge. Through the mapping and imaginative recomposition of fragments, the project constructs meanings. Within this Benjaminian “constellation of fragments”¹⁰, everything is included: “even the ‘keepsakes’, more or less useless, more or less affectionately preserved [...] become valuable assets for the project,”¹¹ helping to face today’s and future crises.

9 Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013).

10 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999)

11 Renato Bocchi, “Recycle,” in *Recycled Theory: Dizionario illustrato / Illustrated Dictionary* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2016), 482.



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