

Five Points for an Early Methodological Manifesto of Adaptive Reuse

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Introduction

In September 2025, the University of Pisa hosted a conference on adaptive reuse that attracted notable attention within the international academic debate. The discussions made clear that adaptive reuse today calls for a renewed disciplinary reconnaissance: the topic has consolidated as a professional and educational urgency, and it demands a methodological deepening capable of supporting practice with robust scientific and critical tools. The scientific direction of the conference intentionally shaped an open arena where professional experiences and theoretical research could converge, with a marked commitment to an internationally representative set of contributors. The result was a deliberately heterogeneous field of positions, allowing the debate to register how adaptive reuse is being approached across different contexts, traditions, and operative cultures. After attending the presentations and engaging closely with the papers gathered in these proceedings, I attempted to distill a set of recurring themes that repeatedly structured the conversation. Rather than proposing an exhaustive synthesis, these five points work as initial coordinates, a shared vocabulary through which the multiplicity of case studies, methods, and theoretical framings can be read in relation to one another. In this sense, the following five sections are proposed as the beginning of a wider discussion: they outline a possible methodological horizon for adaptive reuse by linking value assessment, transformation, civilizational meaning, sustainability, and the construction of dialogue between inherited fabric and contemporary intervention. These five opening points can be read as the premise for a wider, ongoing discussion on adaptive reuse conceived as a methodological culture. I hope future editions of the conference will make it possible to continue developing this research and to return to these questions collectively, with the same openness and international depth. Because adaptive reuse is, indeed, a generational task, and this conference has been an extraordinary opportunity to build an academic and professional community in which to understand, together, how to address this emerging discipline (Crudeli 2024).

Keywords: Adaptive Reuse, International Conference, Manifesto

Analysis of the Value



Fig. 1. Untitled (Carlo Morrone, 2026)

The acquisition of knowledge constitutes the first methodological step in adaptive reuse. Once an existing building enters the design process, it should be understood as a dense and stratified field of values: material, spatial, historical, social, cultural, symbolic, economic, and environmental. Each of these dimensions demands a specific interpretive approach. Conventionally, these topics can be grouped into the main issue of the identity. Architecture presents itself simultaneously as space, matter, technique, memory, and use; accordingly, its significance emerges through multiple registers that rarely converge into a stable hierarchy. (Heidegger 1971). The building to be transformed must be studied in depth so that the original unifying design idea that informed its conception can be reconstructed with the most accurate clarity, as a specific, autonomous identity. This reconstruction provides a scientific basis for the project, clarifies the formal and constructive principles that governed the work, and reveals the cultural and historical conditions that shaped its making. Throughout the design process, such knowledge remains active as a critical reference, accompanying every later decision and allowing transformation to proceed in a constructive dialogue with the building's deeper order.

From the scientific reconstruction of identity, the architect may proceed to the analysis of value. At this stage, the method shifts from a strictly scientific register toward an interpretive one, since value exceeds predefined categories, while those categories are themselves historically situated interpretive devices (Foucault 1977). In a genealogical sense, evaluative frameworks emerge through historical processes rather than from universal or self-evident foundations: values are constituted within cultures that shape what a given society is able to recognize, preserve, and privilege. Every act of evaluation is therefore conditioned by disciplinary traditions, cultural frameworks, and epistemic habits. For this reason, value analysis belongs to a field of interpretation that remains plural, and, it forever will be, debated.

Within such a condition, Multiple-Criteria Decision Analysis offers a rigorous scientific

framework for structuring the evaluative process. MCDA is useful because it makes the diverging criteria explicit, clarifies their relative weight, and exposes the grounds on which one option acquires greater legitimacy than another. Its methodological value lies in transparency, since it renders judgement discussable, revisable, and shareable among different actors involved in the process (Pintossi et al. 2023).

The second methodological moment is the discernment. Once values have been identified, the architect is called to establish a hierarchy among them and to determine which elements carry a higher degree of permanence, which can accommodate transformation, and which can be removed within a coherent strategy of conservation. This operation requires critical judgement, since the building constitutes a complex whole in which every local modification can affect broader spatial, symbolic, and technical relations. Discernment belongs to the core of design reasoning and turns value analysis into an explicit act of responsibility (Crudeli 2025). Methodologically, evaluation also requires an experiential process. The architectural object must be traversed physically and virtually; it must be measured, observed, and interpreted through direct perception as well as through scientific instruments. Its atmospheres, material aging, internal light, acoustic qualities, environmental behaviour, landscape relationships, and sedimented memories all enter the analysis (Stone 2020). Such an approach allows the architect to recognize the level at which identity is embodied and the degree to which that identity remains active in the present. In this sense, a constructive and architectural analysis remains indispensable. The internal logic of the work, the relationships among its parts, its distributive hierarchies, structural order, typological configuration, and spatial sequences all require clarification. Protection can therefore focus on characters of permanence: ordering principles, proportional systems, thresholds, rhythms, alignments, and spatial hierarchies through which the identity of the building is sustained over time (Carbonara 2021). Authenticity, within this perspective, resides in the continuity of relations, in the persistence of meaningful traces, and in the cultural recognition attached to them (Brandi 1963).

This approach also clarifies the legitimacy of selective demolition (Bullen 2010). Once the hierarchy of values has been defined with precision, subtraction may enter the project as an instrument of conservation. Removal can restore legibility, strengthen use, protect higher-order spatial relations, and reactivate forms of continuity that had been obscured by later accretions or by deterioration.

A values-led management perspective therefore links significance to long-term adaptability, where adaptive reuse, understood in this way, acquires the character of a continuous critical practice (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel 2019).

Transformation as Growth



Fig. 2. Untitled (Carlo Morrone, 2026)

Impermanence is an inevitable boundary condition. Buildings are exposed to continuous processes of alteration. Time acts on the architectural body through gravity, atmospheric agents, technical wear, and inhabitation (Brand 1994). Settlement, deformation, fatigue, moisture, solar radiation, thermal fluctuations, biological growth, maintenance, adaptation, and everyday use all participate in the gradual rewriting of the built artifact. Architecture therefore unfolds within an irreversible temporal condition in which permanence is always relative and material continuity always partial (Bergson 1959). In this sense, transformation is an intrinsic existential condition of the ordinary life of buildings, since every construction receives, absorbs, and registers change across its duration (DeSilvey 2017).

Within this horizon, the image of eternal architecture survives as an anthropological ambition, one that remains unreal. By logical extension of deterioration, demolition and modification also enter this sequence as moments within a broader life cycle, and are legitimized as natural acts. The concept of transformation may thus be understood as the passage from one condition of equilibrium to another, guided by time and directed through projective intelligence. The task of the architect concerns the reading and orientation of this passage, together with the recognition of the values that remain active through it. From this viewpoint, transformation acquires an explicitly value-oriented character. Any intervention may be interpreted as an upcycling practice that seeks to produce additional architectural value through a renewed relation between inherited fabric and new insertion. The new work derives its legitimacy from the conditions already present in the existing building: from its spatial order, its material logic, its damaged state, its civic role, its symbolic associations, and its future potential (Reichlin and Pedretti 2011). Value therefore emerges through a disciplined dialogue between pre-existence and project, and through the capacity of the intervention to generate a more intense, more legible, and more meaningful architectural whole. Architectural transformation develops a projective logic that can generate a new

work from the inherited one while preserving a recognizable relation to its identity-bearing structures. The existing building acts as origin, measure, and field of resistance, and the intervention proceeds by working through its constraints and latent possibilities. Transformation emerges, in this methodological sense, as an informed and situated form of growth (Hassan 2023).

The projective field of transformation includes multiple tactics for negotiating continuity, fracture, and re-signification (Ricoeur 2004). Sewing, supporting, supplementing, bracing, overlaying, and subtracting all belong to this repertoire. These actions operate at different scales and through different intensities, yet they share a common intention: they stabilize, reveal, and rearticulate the architectural body while preserving the legibility of its temporal depth. Scar, fracture, incompleteness, and material mismatch acquire a positive methodological value because they register the building's duration and allow the intervention to work with the evidence of time (Ruskin 1849). Through this approach, the project develops a more complex relation between inheritance and innovation, and the existing building becomes capable of receiving new layers of life without losing its temporal thickness (Wong 2017).

Subtraction occupies a particularly significant place within this framework. Selective removal can restore spatial legibility, re-establish lost hierarchies, intensify environmental performance, and open new relations. This operation acquires legitimacy when it is grounded in a hierarchy of values and when it serves the coherence of the whole. Transformation therefore includes constructive addition and calibrated removal within the same field of architectural reasoning (Wong 2023).

From this perspective, adaptive reuse appears as a disciplined form of architectural growth. The architect reads the existing building as a living system exposed to time, understands damage and obsolescence as conditions of interpretation, and develops additions or removals generated from the actual logic of the pre-existing fabric. The project thus advances through care, discernment, and value-based transformation, with the aim of producing an enriched whole whose coherence includes the past, the present, and the possibility of future change.

Manifesting Civilization



Fig. 3. Untitled (Carlo Morrone, 2026)

The third open question concerns the content of architectural production, understood as a contextualized act capable of expressing the presence of its own society (Tafuri 1972).

To conceive an architectural intervention as the manifestation of a civilization is to displace the discussion from the narrow domain of style toward the broader question of how a society relates to what it inherits (Geertz 1973). In adaptive reuse, this question acquires particular intensity, because every intervention on the existing built environment exposes a collective position on language, resources, and technology. The project becomes legible as a cultural declaration: it reveals how a given epoch understands its debts to the past, its responsibilities in the present, and the forms of transformation it considers legitimate. In this sense, reuse concerns not only the material fate of buildings, but also the ethical and cultural profile of the society that intervenes in them (Yourcenar 1951).

Within this perspective, architectural intervention takes the form of a critical and knowledge-based act. Historical inquiry, technical analysis, and design intelligence converge in a process that reworks available evidence into a projective hypothesis (Moneo 2004). The resulting solution derives from a conscious interpretive choice, one capable of holding together inherited structures and present needs within a coherent architectural language. The new layer acquires value when it enters the existing building through intelligible sedimentation, allowing time to remain readable in the work. Through this process, the project becomes a site where successive temporalities are composed into a shared order, and civilization appears in the precision with which this composition is achieved.

The cultural significance of such an operation depends mainly on the relation established between old and new. A civilization becomes visible in the way it adds to inherited matter, in the discipline with which it interprets pre-existing conditions, and in the degree of responsibility with which it transforms the historical narrative into a living and operative framework. The question concerns a hierarchy of syntax, since the success of

the intervention depends on the quality of the relation among parts, layers, systems, and meanings. Design therefore acts within continuity and through transformation, constructing a new unity out of differentiated times and heterogeneous materials. The intervention carries civilizational meaning when the added layer sustains the intelligibility of the whole and renews its capacity to address contemporary life.

Technology occupies a central place in this discussion. Every civilization is identifiable through the technical systems it develops, through the infrastructures it normalizes, and through the cultural meanings it attaches to them. In adaptive reuse, technology participates in the architectural argument and enters the project as part of its symbolic and civic content. The relation between craft and machine, vernacular knowledge and industrial procedure, local continuity and technical innovation, demands a process of mediation in which heterogeneous languages are composed within a coherent whole. Architecture thereby manifests civilization through the reorganization of technical means, through the revaluation of local intelligence, and through the capacity to connect territorial culture with contemporary performance.

From this perspective, an intervention manifests civilization when it is able to hold together at least three demands. The first concerns cultural continuity, expressed through the intelligibility of layers, the active transmission of meaning, and the capacity of the project to keep the historical narrative operative. The second concerns technological responsibility, expressed through the integration of systems within a coherent architectural language and through the careful mediation between innovation and inheritance. The third concerns ecological sobriety, expressed through the treatment of buildings and materials as long-duration resources rather than expendable commodities. When these three demands converge, the project becomes a public statement about values, innovation, and the future. It shows how a society imagines progress through building with the past, through the reinterpretation of inherited matter, and through a disciplined understanding of architecture as a cultural form of continuity in time.

The Sustainable Principle

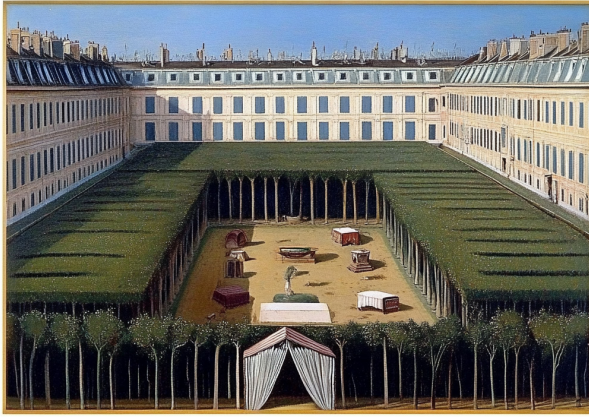


Fig. 4. Untitled (Carlo Morrone, 2026)

The fourth question concerns an urgency of our society and of our time, a question already addressed by previous generations, but one that today has acquired a primary role, given the emergencies that demand it, including the climate emergency. Within the contemporary discourse on adaptive reuse, in fact, sustainability occupies a foundational position (Wilkinson 2014). The built environment absorbs enormous quantities of energy, raw materials, and technical labor, and every act of demolition triggers a further expenditure of resources through disposal, replacement, and reconstruction (Schwartz 2018). The environmental problem therefore concerns not only operational performance, but also the embodied energy already contained within the existing building stock (Elefante 2007). Adaptive reuse acquires relevance within this condition because it prolongs the life of architectural assets, reduces the need for new extraction and production, and redirects design culture toward the responsible management of what has already been built (Power 2008).

From this perspective, sustainability begins as an ethics of resources. Existing buildings carry accumulated matter, labor, carbon, technical knowledge, and cultural meaning. Their transformation therefore concerns conservation in the historical sense and stewardship in the environmental sense. To reuse an existing structure means to treat inherited matter as an active reserve of value, capable of supporting future uses without re-entering the full cycle of extraction, manufacture, transport, and assembly (Corsini 2025). Adaptive reuse can thus be understood as a responsible response to the climate emergency, resource scarcity, and the growing recognition that the building stock of previous civilizations constitutes a long-duration resource rather than a disposable residue of past economies.

This principle also operates at the urban scale. Sustainability in adaptive reuse is tied to a broader transition in urban development in which obsolete infrastructural spaces are redirected toward new civic-centered uses (Angrisano and Bottero 2025). Through this shift, transformation contributes to environmental reduction goals while also producing

social and economic effects: the activation of abandoned areas, the strengthening of local economies, the renewal of collective meanings, and the stabilization of neighborhoods through renewed forms of use (Gissara, Percoco, and Rosmini 2018).

A second dimension concerns method. Sustainability requires operational criteria, design tools, and evaluative procedures capable of translating general principles into measurable and technically credible decisions. The proceedings repeatedly orient this discussion toward life-cycle reasoning and circular models of resource use. In this framework, architecture enters a metabolism of recycling (Fusco Girard and Gravagnuolo 2025). The inherited building can be understood as a non-renewable technical deposit whose value may be extended through successive phases of transformation. When full-building reuse proves impossible, the reuse of materials and components still preserves part of the environmental and economic value otherwise lost through demolition.

Within this circular horizon, sustainability depends on detailed technical knowledge, linking sustainable intervention to the close study of the existing building envelope, constructive stratigraphy, the life cycle of components, and the compatibility between new technologies and inherited fabric. Sustainability therefore gains architectural precision through diagnosis, evaluation, and selective technical integration. Adaptive reuse often requires additions or transformations aimed at improving energy performance, indoor comfort, water management, and operational efficiency. These interventions may involve envelope upgrading, improved thermal continuity, low-impact systems, renewable energy strategies, and more efficient management of energy flows within the building. Their architectural quality depends on the ability to integrate technical systems into a coherent transformation of the whole.

Taken together, these positions frame sustainability as a principle that joins environmental responsibility, technical intelligence, and civic stewardship. Adaptive reuse emerges as one of the clearest architectural expressions of this principle because it treats buildings as evolving reservoirs of value whose life can be extended through informed transformation. The project becomes sustainable when it preserves embodied resources, reduces emissions, guides technical integration with precision, and supports future adaptability through a circular and long-duration understanding of the built environment.

Dialogue toward Unity

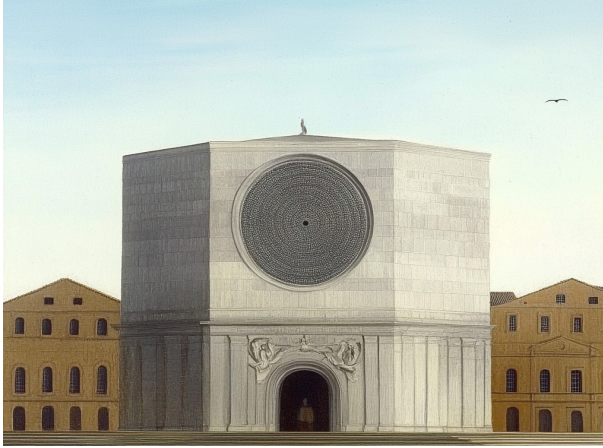


Fig. 5. Untitled (Carlo Morrone, 2026)

The last open question concerns the architectural project as a disciplinary issue, understood in terms of composition and design choices. Within the discourse on adaptive reuse, establishing a dialogue constitutes one of the central methodological principles of intervention. The project enters an existing building as a new layer within a pre-existing temporal field, and its task concerns the construction of relations among what has been inherited, what is required in the present, and what may remain open to future transformation (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel 2013). In this sense, the building cannot be approached as a neutral support for a new program, nor can the new intervention claim full autonomy from the material and cultural thickness of the site. Adaptive reuse unfolds through a design conversation across time, in which architecture works as an interpretive practice capable of making multiple temporalities legible within a single work (Franco 2024).

Dialogue therefore concerns unity, though unity here does not imply homogeneity. It concerns the integration of differences within a coherent whole. The new fragment acquires architectural legitimacy when it contributes to the intelligibility of the artifact, clarifies its transformations, and allows its temporal depth to remain perceptible. The project works through reinterpretation and additions, yet each of these actions gains meaning through the quality of the relations it establishes with the pre-existing structure (Piana 2001).

The ambition of adaptive reuse lies in the construction of a renewed whole. A genuine dialogue emerges only when the interdependencies among building, context, use, memory, governance, and community are recognized and allowed to shape the project from within. This requirement becomes especially important in regenerative reuse, where the value of the building exceeds its material envelope and extends into intangible and urban dimensions. Dialogue also has a formal and technological dimension (Guidetti and Massarente 2021). The relation between old and new is necessarily heterogeneous, and its architectural value depends on the density of the relational field produced by their encounter. Materials, construction systems, environmental devices, circulation elements, thresholds, and

structural additions must all participate in a coherent syntax. Technology enters this field as part of the language of transformation and participates in the semantic charge of the intervention. Mechanical systems, environmental controls, and technical upgrades therefore require the same interpretive discipline as spatial and formal decisions, since they contribute to the way the building speaks across time.

One should therefore privilege forms of transformation in which the new intervention sustains a productive tension with the old, allowing the reused building to appear as a field of temporal negotiation (Posocco and Raitano 2018). The most convincing projects are those in which the existing structure remains active as a bearer of memory and form, while the new work enters with sufficient clarity to reveal the specificity of the present. Architecture gains intensity through this exchange, and reuse emerges as the site where continuity and innovation become mutually articulate.

A dialogical approach also transforms the managerial and interdisciplinary structure of the project. Adaptive reuse increasingly requires mediation among values, actors, and forms of expertise. Dialogue therefore concerns the building and its historical layers, but it also concerns the collaborative framework through which the intervention is conceived, negotiated, and implemented. In this sense, the architect works as the director of a complex cultural operation, coordinating heterogeneous forms of knowledge toward a coherent result.

From this perspective, establishing a dialogue means constructing an architecture capable of listening, interpreting, and responding. It means reading the existing building as a dense field of temporal, material, and social relations; allowing the new intervention to arise from that field with clarity and critical precision; and organizing the entire process through an exchange among disciplines, institutions, and communities. Adaptive reuse becomes meaningful when the resulting work sustains this plurality without dispersing into fragmentation. The project then acts as a medium through which past, present, and future remain simultaneously active, and architecture acquires the capacity to transform inherited matter into a renewed form of collective intelligibility.

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