



# **RECKONING WITH INCOMPIUTO SICILIANO**

**UNFINISHED PUBLIC WORKS AS MODERN RUINS  
AND ALL WHICH IT ENTAILS**

**PABLO ARBOLEDA**  
**Doctoral dissertation 2017**

**Bauhaus-  
Universität  
Weimar**







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Doctoral dissertation presented in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor philosophiae (Dr. phil.)  
at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism

Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Weimar (Germany)

Cover illustration: Incompiuto Siciliano's logo © Alterazioni Video

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## **Declaration of Honour**

I hereby declare that that the present doctoral dissertation follows academic standards and contains original academic work.

I confirm that I have independently completed this doctoral dissertation and no additional sources or aids other than those specified as such have been used.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pablo Arboleda', with a large, sweeping initial 'P'.

Pablo Arboleda  
Jaén (Spain), 27 April 2017





*Escribir es ir descubriendo lo que se quiere decir.*

Max Aub

*A mis amigos.*

*A mi familia.*

*A Cristina.*



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# CURRICULUM VITAE

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## Publications

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- Arboleda, P. 2010. (VI)VIENDO. In: *Ambientalia 2010: I Congreso Estatal de Sostenibilidad* [(VI)VIENDO. In: *Ambientalia 2010: I National Congress on Sustainability*] [conference proceedings] Creative Commons: Madrid, 142-143.

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- *GRAND TOUR: The Great Beauty of Incompiuto Siciliano*, at 'The New Urban Ruins: Vacancy and the Post-crisis City', organized by Trinity College Dublin; Dublin-Ireland, 1-3 March 2017.

- *Incompiuto Siciliano: Unfinished public works as modern ruins*, invited by the Institute of Heritage Sciences-Spanish National Research Council (Incipit-CSIC); Santiago de Compostela-Spain, 15 November 2016.

- *The paradox of Incompiuto Siciliano Archaeological Park or how to mock heritage to make heritage*, at 'On the Trace: Passing, presence and the persistence of the past', organized by University of Copenhagen; Copenhagen-Denmark, 22-23 September 2016.

- *Beyond the aestheticization of modern ruins: The case of Incompiuto Siciliano*, at 'Annual International Conference', organized by Royal Geographical Society; London-UK, 1 September 2016.

- *Incompiuto Siciliano: The critical power of a new kind of ruins*, at 'Groß Bauen. Großbaustellen von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart', organized by Brandenburg University of Technology; Cottbus-Germany, 28-30 October 2015.

- *From Berlin to Sicily: Abandonment as cultural value*, invited by the School of Architecture of Granada; Granada-Spain, 8 October 2015.

- *Sub-heritage: The heritage of subcultures. The case of urban exploration in Berlin*, at 'Innovate Heritage, Conversations between Arts and Heritage', organized by Brandenburg University of Technology; Berlin – Germany, 6–8 June 2014.

- *Students' expectations from Graduate Studies in Heritage (Tourism) Management*, at the 'International Conference: Tourism Management and Sustainability of Heritage Sites: the Role of Education and Training', organized by the Her.cul.es Programme; Assisi - Italy, 22 November 2013.

- *Incompiuto Siciliano / Sicilian Incompletion: Transforming the negative perception of the unfinished public works*, at the 'International Summer Academy Cottbus: Understanding Heritage (ISAC): The Theoretical Understanding of Sustainability in Heritage Studies and its Corresponding Disciplines', organized by the Brandenburg University of Technology; Cottbus - Germany, 8–20 July 2013.

- *(VI)VIENDO: 'Dérive' as a research tool for architectural design*, at the '7th Meeting – Spanish Schools of Architecture: Project Discussion and Seminar about Architectural Project Teaching', organized by the School of Architecture of Madrid; Madrid - Spain, 10–11 September 2010.

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# SUMMARY

Since the end of the 1950s, Italy has focused part of its modernization on the erection of public works. Due to corruption, mafia, and further malpractice, this form of development has occasionally failed, producing a high number of constructions that have remained unfinished for decades. In 2007, the group of artists Alterazioni Video constructed an informal survey in the form of an on-line tool open to public contributions, which revealed that there are 395 unfinished public works in Italy from which 156, approximately 39.5%, are located in Sicily alone. In view of such a statistic, Alterazioni Video opted to coin the term ‘Incompiuto Siciliano’ – literally ‘Sicilian Incompletion’ – to refer to unfinished public works as a formal architectural style. This re-interpretation, which aims to convey the recovered dignity of these ‘modern ruins’, considers unfinished public works a type of heritage with the potential to represent the entirety of Italian society. Furthermore, it goes as far as to say an unfinished public work is ‘Incompiuto Siciliano’ despite being located in another of the Italian regions.

This doctoral dissertation embraces the artists’ argument to develop a complete study of Incompiuto Siciliano by embedding this architectural style/artistic project within the main debates on modern ruins at present. This is important because it is expected to contribute to the revalorization and eventual recommissioning of unfinished sites by validating Incompiuto Siciliano in the realm of academia. Furthermore, this work aspires to be a worthwhile source of information for future investigations dealing with cultural interpretations of incompleteness in any other context – a not unreasonable goal considering how unfinished works are one of the key urban topics after the 2008 financial crisis. Hence, this doctoral dissertation uses Incompiuto Siciliano to discuss a different perspective in each of the five chapters and, though these can be read as independent contributions, the objective is that all chapters read together, form a clear, concise, continuous unit. And so it must be said this is not a dissertation about unfinished public works in Italy; this is a dissertation about Incompiuto Siciliano as an artistic response to unfinished public works in Italy – which clearly requires an interdisciplinary analysis involving Urban Studies, Cultural Geography, Contemporary Archaeology, Critical Heritage and Visual Arts.

Chapter 1 uses Alterazioni Video’s survey as a starting point from which to dig a little deeper into the physicality of unfinished public works (typological, urban and material qualities) to then make an analysis of their condition as spaces that have never been used nor inhabited. This body of knowledge is supplemented by three different semi-structured interviews conducted with Andrea Masu, one of Alterazioni Video’s members. These interviews, in collaboration with Alterazioni Video’s own production, show that Incompiuto Siciliano is a project that is exclusively centred in the romantic reappreciation of unfinished public works, moreover, explicit critical discourses on the negative origins of the sites are deliberately excluded from the artists’ narrative. However, according to DeSilvey and Edensor, modern ruins have the potential to empower alternative readings of modernity and notions of progress, and thus, ruins can be disruptive vehicles to new ways of looking at these. In this sense, the chapter breaks with Alterazioni Video’s romantic discourse to provide a condensed review of existing academic and journalistic works that have studied such dilapidation of

public funds, which leads one to consider that the political and economic causes that produced incompleteness in Italy are systemic and systematic. Though this interpretation mainly relies on secondary sources, it serves as an appropriate contextualization to, consequently, grasp the specificities and similarities of the Italian case when compared to more recent unfinished neoliberal topographies. The main argument being that, though belonging to different paradigms of modernization and coming from different epochs, society's behaviour in Italy, based on a broadly accepted condescension and simple indulgence, has not been that dissimilar to those countries strongly affected by the bursting of the property bubble in 2008. This contribution should be both constructive and relevant because it allows us to expand on conversations on incompleteness while building up a wider discourse on the different conditions under which ruins are produced.

Chapter 2 suggests that the power of *Incompiuto Siciliano* lies in not blaming anyone in particular for the undesirable phenomenon of unfinished public works in Italy; rather, *Incompiuto Siciliano* is a sort of 'tabula rasa' that serves as a new way of interpreting and dignifying the contemporary ruined landscape. Through the simple act of renaming them, *Incompiuto Siciliano*'s objective is to cause us to take a second look; one which does not require any modification to 'readymade' sites, ensuring that it is the way we see them which is being modified. To understand this, several theoretical reference points are reviewed, from Berger to Augé's writings. However, it is argued that *Incompiuto Siciliano*'s lack of explicit criticism paradoxically means that the project is imbued with an inherent, critical approach where aestheticization contributes to the sites being put on the agenda in a creative manner. In this sense, art demonstrates its capacity to implicitly pose questions that should be further investigated by spectators in order to determine a complete understanding of the existing context. A study of *Alterazioni Video*'s artistic inspirations and the art projects deriving from the idea of *Incompiuto Siciliano* is used to engage on-going debates about whether aestheticization is an appropriate practice that may open up possibilities for deeper investigations of modern ruins. The strongest scepticism in this debate is expressed by those who consider aestheticized imagery of ruins to be counterproductive due to the simplified view that it offers. Such critics argue that in excluding both the historic and human contexts behind ruins, aestheticization merely reinforces local stigma. Without dismissing these concerns, the chapter concludes that *Incompiuto Siciliano* is a paradigmatic example of an aestheticization of modern ruins that overcomes these inherent issues by developing new reflections. Hence, *Incompiuto Siciliano* is aligned with constructive contributions that detour the alleged shortcomings of ruin imagery, claiming aestheticization's immediacy as a valuable resource for engaging with ruins.

Chapter 3 studies *Alterazioni Video*'s proposal for eventually creating the 'Incompiuto Siciliano Archaeological Park', to be found in Giarre – which is a Sicilian town where the highest concentration of unfinished public works in Italy can be found. With this project, the artists strive to shift the negative meaning of the half-constructions by presenting them as positive heritage that could be useful to future generations. This chapter analyses such controversial monumentalization, which has been devised as an ambivalence between traditional heritage and more recent critical approaches. If heritage is usually viewed as something old, self-glorifying and beautiful, to perceive 'Incompiuto Siciliano Archaeological Park' as heritage may sound inappropriate in that, in principle, unfinished public works are not old, self-glorifying or beautiful.

Nonetheless, theorization in terms of temporality, memory and aesthetics demonstrates how the present case has the capacity to bring heritage conventionalism into question while generating a renewed sense of what it means to be classed as 'heritage'. Apart from the mentioned interviews with Andrea Masu, this is mainly done by using extensive bibliography on modern ruins dealing with difficult and industrial heritage. This is justified if we consider that *Alterazioni Video's* project aspires to create a similar paradigm to that instigated by such cases some decades ago: to reconcile people with an unpleasant site by embracing it in a way which is no longer unpleasant. Yet far from trivialising this project, its ironic content is presented in a nurturing manner, which allows us to tackle serious and complex questions in terms of how heritage is produced today. With an ironically conservative approach that hides a truly engaging heritage as its defining feature, the main argument is that the park proves an innovative example of how to invent 'unfinished heritage'; critical in its capacity to raise uncomfortable questions and in how it involves people through the creative use of sarcasm and double meaning.

Chapter 4 recounts a one-week trip I made across all of Sicily in September 2015 to visit a dozen of *Incompiuto Siciliano's* works. Such an empirical approach draws from the notion of Situationist 'dérive' and, more precisely, from urban exploration, which is the act of illegally trespassing on abandoned sites and whose ultimate objective is to re-democratise history by questioning the increasing regulation of today's urban environment. When compared to Sicily's commodified touristic ruins, *Incompiuto Siciliano* is viewed as 'unruly', and thus, following Edensor's theories, it is argued that the latter have the potential to function as sites of adventure and play. This chapter aims to contribute to the existing claim to counter modern ruins' negative understanding by exploring embodied narratives and subjectivity. Aesthetics are essential in this discussion though the definition of aesthetics used here is rather phenomenological – fully corporeal and closer to affection and emotion – where ruins are valued both for their ruined condition and for their mere existence. Ultimately, this allows me to construct my own narrative about *Incompiuto Siciliano*, which is totally detached from its actual negative origin while my presence coats unfinished ruins with a new layer of history. It is suggested that emotional depictions have the potential to play an important role in academic writing, consequently, the prose style used in this chapter is more creative while still being scientific. Moreover, beyond documenting ruins through photography, I have gone one step further and have elaborated three short-videos to illustrate the text. This audiovisual production has the potential to express not only a mute and static instant but, by presenting movement hand-in-hand with the intriguing visual and aural atmospheres of *Incompiuto Siciliano*, wider senses can be brought into play. Therefore, we can considerably advance the way we communicate and mediate physical encounters with modern ruins.

Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation by tackling a fundamental question: 'What do we do with incompleteness?' An extensive semi-structured interview with Andrea Masu is the method used to investigate his position further, in which he states that there are four different possibilities to deal with this issue: to finish the buildings; to demolish them; to leave them as they are; or to find new alternative uses while respecting their unfinished spatiality and materiality. Finishing the constructions has been excluded from a deeper analysis due to the fact that it aims to eradicate the cultural connotations of incompleteness. Thus, the eventual demolition of *Incompiuto Siciliano* is firstly studied



under Holtorf's theories on destruction and loss to argue that this can paradoxically stress the sites' nature as heritage. This is interesting because it frames us as a society driven by iconoclasm, where we are actually valuing a piece of architecture through its deliberate destruction. Further, recent approaches to DeSilvey's 'entropic heritage' may well justify the suitability of letting *Incompiuto Siciliano* rot indefinitely. In this sense, if the aesthetic appreciation of unfinished public works has been increased precisely because of the buildings' ruined condition, why should we interfere in this process? Such an approach is particularly innovative because it invites us to think that, ultimately, a 'problem' is not a problem. The last possibility deals with what I termed 'active' arrested decay – an approach largely explored by *Alterazioni Video* in several architecture workshops that are reviewed in depth. It consists of finding temporal and spontaneous uses that would only require minimal interventions to make the buildings safe. Hence, the main argument in this chapter is that there is not a single and ideal solution; rather, the issue of incompleteness will inevitably require specific measures on a case by case basis. This is relevant because it opens up a broader debate on the spectrum of possibilities to tackle incompleteness, not only in Italy but also in other contexts.

This doctoral dissertation serves as an academic validation of the first ten years in the history of *Incompiuto Siciliano*, though it certainly leaves the door open for potential further investigations. Accumulated knowledge is the basis of research and, under no circumstances, should a dissertation be an end in itself – consequently, every argument expressed in this work is prepared to be furthered. Formal quantitative research into the circumstances that caused incompleteness in Italy is urgently needed, yet the production of official data must be a priority. The worldwide aestheticization of ruins is a hot debate and, definitely, further constructive samples are necessary to consolidate ruin imagery as a first step in the renewed validation of abandoned spaces. It would also be extremely interesting to carry out a truly ethnographical understanding of *Incompiuto Siciliano*. This would require an eventual researcher to stay for a long period in the field, being in touch with people, associations and social representatives. The result of this should be a deep analysis on how citizens interact and have reacted to *Incompiuto Siciliano*: What is the tone of the press covering incompleteness? How do people respond on social media? In which ways are unfinished public works informally used? Embodied encounters with ruins and the way these are mediated is a very recent topic demanding increasing attention; responses are warmly expected from both the academic and the artistic realm. Of course, 'what do we do with incompleteness?' is going to be a crucial question in the future and, though this dissertation approaches this from a cultural perspective, it seems clear that the legal frameworks in each case will offer wider and more concrete views. Apart from these, another potential aspect to be explored is the conscious theorization of what it means to be 'unfinished' when regarding further artistic and architectural projects. This draws from the fact that there have always been unfinished works, from the Tower of Babel to LeWitt's *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes*, comprising van Eyck's portrait of Saint Barbara or *The Entombment* painted by Michelangelo. A different discussion may well be on how an architectural style comes into being: What are the conditions that allow us to formally talk about a certain style? Are these conditions applicable to *Incompiuto Siciliano*? These are only condensed ideas and, definitely, it will be enriching to witness the academic evolution of incompleteness in the next few years.



# INTRODUCTION: TIMELINE, SCOPE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

17<sup>th</sup> August 2012 was a regular summer day for me in Almería, a city located on the Spanish South-Eastern coast where, during holidays, I usually spend a couple of weeks a year. As per usual, I woke up, had my breakfast and bought the newspaper *El País* to read at the beach; but on that day, a particular article caught my attention.

At that time, I had just come back from New York City, where I did a three-month internship at a United Nations agency called UN-HABITAT. I had recently been admitted to a two-year Master's Programme in World Heritage Studies at Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg and, for this reason, I was moving to Germany by the end of the summer; World Heritage Studies would implicitly mean that I was interested in everything that had to do with 'monuments'. The title of that *El País* article was 'Monumentos a la Burbuja Inmobiliaria', which literally translated into English means 'Monuments to the Real Estate Bubble'. Such a title was as disconcerting as its content.

Lucia Magi, the author, wrote about a group of Italian artists called Alterazioni Video who, in 2008, had documented around 400 unfinished public works in Italy. In doing so, the artists had realized that this anomaly was massively present on the island of Sicily, where a third of these works were located. They had then decided to begin an artistic project based on referring to this phenomenon as 'Incompiuto Siciliano' ('Sicilian Incompletion'), considering it as having the potential to be recognized as a formal architectural style. In order to justify this daring approach, they claimed that some of these works had remained unfinished for more than 50 years and therefore, had already crossed the temporal threshold that is usually assumed for something to become heritage. Moreover, the artists explained how the decayed materiality of the works, together with the fact that they had never been used or inhabited, formed an outstanding singularity which was not comparable to any other context in the world. For all these reasons, Alterazioni Video stated that unfinished public works are the tangible representation of Italian society during the last decades, and thus, they asserted that Incompiuto Siciliano should be understood as true heritage at a national level.

Thinking about the reasons why this huge stock of public works had remained unfinished – where mafia, corruption, and a generalized incompetence in managing public resources were undoubtedly present – I could not help smiling for a few seconds. After all, in Spain we were suffering a very similar phenomenon after the bursting of the 2008 financial bubble, leaving all kinds of constructions unfinished. But considering all that ‘heritage’? I kept smiling a bit more, closed the newspaper and went to swim in the sea. I never once gave *Incompiuto Siciliano* another thought until one year later.

In October of 2012, the Master’s Programme in World Heritage Studies began as one could have expected. Analysis on the organigram of the UN system, the history of the concept of ‘World Heritage’, or the unquestionable benefits of listing properties and traditions, were the central topics shared by an interdisciplinary and international group of students whose main aspiration was to work for UNESCO in the near future. Among these dogmas, I was fortunate to attend the course ‘World Heritage and Cultural Studies’, lectured by **Manuel Peters**. I have to thank him for making us read the first chapters of a recent masterpiece on Heritage Studies, the legendary *Uses of Heritage* written by Laurajane Smith in 2006. The critical understanding of what Smith calls ‘authorized heritage discourse’ influenced me from then on, and progressively, the topics on which I worked during the programme covered controversial aspects that are purposely excluded from official narratives even if they truly represent contemporary societies.

In July of 2013, as part of a more practically oriented Study Project within the master’s curriculum, I was asked to give a 15-minute presentation about any topic of my choosing. The presentation would take place at the International Summer Academy held in our university and the event would benefit from the presence of international Ph.D. students. After thinking about it for a while, I decided that talking about *Incompiuto Siciliano* would be a great option. At this point, I also owe a debt to **Dr. Iryna Shalaginova**, who was my lecturer at that time and expressed huge enthusiasm about the topic and helped me to build the first steps of an appropriate scientific discourse. I still use her wise recommendations on academic writing and catchy presentation performance today. I called my presentation *Incompiuto Siciliano: Transforming the negative perspective of unfinished public works in Sicily*, a contribution that was half descriptive and half interpretative where, after a deeper study of Alterazioni Video’s approach, I managed to highlight the potential re-appropriation of unfinished public works after being labelled as heritage. This way, heritage could be a tool for reconciliation with a negative past and yet the beginning of a more inclusive future that might allow Italian society to recognize itself in these unfinished public works. The presentation was a great success and I received lots of kind words from the audience, who seemed to have perfectly understood that, behind the irony that *Incompiuto Siciliano* suggests, there is a serious space for reflection. I thought that my humble contribution to the topic was over but little did I know that *Incompiuto Siciliano* would come back into my life a few months later.

In December of 2013, more than one year after the M.A. programme had begun, I was focused on writing both my master’s thesis and a Ph.D. proposal. On the one

hand, I was working with an abundance of literature concerning modern ruins as my master's thesis was centred on abandoned buildings in Berlin. On the other, I was writing a somewhat abstract Ph.D. proposal, charged with good intentions and theory but slightly weak in objectives and practice. There was an invitation for applications to the University of Amsterdam and I submitted my proposal though it was later rejected. Then there was a second round of applications to the same university but, interestingly, they assigned me a tutor to polish my proposal. **Dr. Chiara de Cesari** suggested I choose a case study in order to materialize all the theoretical aspects I was proposing and I thought of *Incompiuto Siciliano* once more. She made a concerted effort to read and review my proposal, and I express my deep gratitude to her because this considerably improved my application though, in the end, it was rejected again.

In March of 2014, at the university where I was studying by that time (i.e. Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg) ten Ph.D. positions were offered; I applied and my proposal was once more rejected, however, an external evaluator of the selecting committee found that my work had a lot of potential. This is the appearance of a crucial figure in my career, **Prof. Max Welch**, who encouraged me to apply to the International Doctorate Programme on European Urban Studies at Bauhaus University Weimar with the same proposal that I had presented in Cottbus. He was extremely convincing and motivating, so I applied to Weimar and was finally accepted. Prof. Max Welch would be my main supervisor for the next three years and, from the day I had my first coffee with him, he has demonstrated a tremendous confidence in my research capacities – I am pleased to have encountered him along my way. And so, my personal story with this Ph.D. and the topic that I study share a major feature: both of them are the beautiful consequence of failure.

As I soon discovered, being admitted to a Ph.D. programme and receiving a scholarship to fund your research is not the same thing. From September 2014 to March 2015, my first few months in Weimar were a bit chaotic as I had to attend several mandatory courses, my proposals to collaborate on some Chairs were rejected and I spent most of my time applying for scholarships. All this made it impossible to truly focus on my research and, as a consequence, I was not moving forward in the way I had expected. I remain eternally grateful to my room-mates **Max Keitel** and **Josefine Schlät** for being a huge support during those months; they were really like a brother and a sister to me and I will never forget how they made me smile even in the worst moments. By March 2015, I had already taken an important decision: whether I got a scholarship or not, I would no longer live in Weimar but simply return to Spain. And a few weeks after deciding this, I actually got the Thüringer Graduiertenförderung scholarship from my university, which would afford me enough financial security to continue my research for the next two years. I really appreciate the consideration of the selecting committee and I can only say that, had it not been for their trust, I am not sure whether I would have ever written this doctoral dissertation.

In the summer of 2015, once again in Spain, I was still reading many related texts in order to clarify all the assorted ideas that I had in mind regarding *Incompiuto Siciliano*. One day, I thankfully stumbled upon the wonderful essay *Reckoning with Ruins*, written in 2012 by Caitlin DeSilvey and Tim Edensor. Suddenly, everything took form; *Reckoning*

*with Ruins* is a perfect review of the topics, disciplines, angles and practices through which modern ruins can be studied. All the confusing thoughts that I had by then were instantly tidied and I decided to structure my research, more or less, in accordance with the structure of that essay. It is not difficult to see now that the main title of this dissertation – *Reckoning with Incompiuto Siciliano* – is a tribute to DeSilvey and Endensor's work for indirectly providing me with the clues to organize myself and start writing.

In October 2015, and for the next six months, I was a visiting researcher in the **Cultural Landscape Research Group (GIPC)** at the Polytechnic University of Madrid. I am grateful to this group for having offered me a space in which to work, surrounded by a very enriching atmosphere. My colleagues from the **Bioclimatic Architecture Group (ABIO)** sitting next to me made my stay there wonderful, and with them, I spent most of my time talking, having lunch and of course laughing. It was during this research stay that I wrote the first two chapters of this thesis. Chapter 1 uses *Incompiuto Siciliano* as a point of departure to theorize on unfinished public works within interdisciplinary literatures on modern ruins. On the other hand, since modern ruins hold a negatively charged meaning by definition – which *Alterazioni Video* have deliberately excluded from their narrative – this chapter also accounts for the obscure political and economic aspects that caused this phenomenon. After remarking upon its specificities and, overall, its similarities with unfinished neoliberal topographies caused by the 2008 financial crisis, it is concluded that unfinished public works in Italy are an interesting case which serves to enrich debates on incompleteness. The draft of this chapter was presented, in October 2015, at two different conferences. I was first invited by **Dr. Rafael de Lacour**, an essential person in my further education, to give a talk at the School of Architecture of Granada and I also was invited to the conference 'Groß Bauen. Großbaustellen von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart', organized by my former university in Cottbus. The final article-form of this chapter is currently being reviewed by the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*.

Once I finished Chapter 1, I thought it was the perfect moment to search for a second supervisor. I decided to contact a person that I had never met before, **Dr. Alfredo González-Ruibal**, a Spanish researcher who is well-known for his studies on modern ruins. Very politely, I sent him an email asking for his supervision and, as I did not want him to be able to turn me down without knowing too much about my project, I sent him Chapter 1 so he could have a more concrete idea of the case study's potential. A few weeks later, he calmly accepted my request for him to be my second supervisor, and since then, Dr. Alfredo González-Ruibal has been another crucial figure in this work to whom I must wholeheartedly communicate my appreciation for his support and critical reviews of my writings.

Between January and March 2016, I wrote the second chapter of this dissertation. There, I focus on the meaning of *Incompiuto Siciliano* within the domain of visual arts. This is significant because visual arts, and especially photography, have in recent years been accused of pursuing a merely romanticized objective that ignores the political, economic and social contexts in which modern ruins crop up. Embedding Chapter 2 within this discussion makes it possible to align *Incompiuto Siciliano* with literatures on contemporary archaeology that regard the aestheticization of ruins as a

first step towards a critical comprehension of the reasons behind their origins – which ultimately leads to their reappreciation and eventual recommissioning. This chapter was later published in the *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* and then, in September 2016, presented at the Annual International Conference organized by the Royal Geographical Society in London.

As expected, before the summer of 2016, I had already finished writing Chapter 3. The chapter explores one of the main tangible outcomes from Alterazioni Video's approach to Incompiuto Siciliano: the eventual creation of the 'Incompiuto Siciliano Archaeological Park' in Giarre, a medium-sized Sicilian town that has the highest density of unfinished public works in Italy. I analyse how such a provocative project contains serious implications in terms of heritage. It is stated that, in order to forge a positivized 'unfinished heritage', Incompiuto Siciliano Archaeological Park builds bridges between aspects that, in principle, seem to oppose each other. This opens up the possibility of putting traditional heritage assumptions into question through the production of a critical heritage whose novelty lies in the constructive use of irony, sarcasm and double meaning. A draft of this text was presented in September 2016 at the conference 'On the Trace: Passing, Presence and the Persistence of the Past', held at the University of Copenhagen and, re-shaped into the form of an article, it has recently been published by the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*.

In October 2016, I started another research period, this time at the **Centre of Humanities and Social Sciences (CCHS)** of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) in Madrid. Again, I only have words of gratitude to this institution, and the people with whom I spent my time for hosting me in such an academic environment; and special thanks go to **Dr. Alberto Corsín** for being my mentor for three months. Here I wrote Chapter 4, in which I recount a journey where, during one week in September 2015, I visited a dozen Incompiuto Siciliano works all across Sicily. On the grounds of this journey, the chapter seeks to combine my personal/touristic experience of visiting these sites with my scholarly study of the unruly potential of unfinished public works. I argue that, while some buildings may well be reactivated, in a realistic sense, many others will remain uncompleted forever. Far from perceiving this as a tragic fate, my objective is to value unfinished public works in their current ruined condition, considering them catalysts of aesthetic experiences. Additionally, through the use of my own personal narratives and the creation of videos, my aim is to advance the way we communicate and mediate embodied encounters with modern ruins. In this empirical work, I learnt so much from my colleagues **Daniel Donaire** and **Chema Aranda** – the latter edited the videos that illustrate the chapter according to my instructions and he considerably improved upon my original ideas. Both of them were great companions on this trip and will hopefully also be great companions on many future ones. My gratitude is extended to **Alberto Cruz** for our inspiring conversations while watching *The Great Beauty* – something that would later be key to the writing of the conclusion of the fourth chapter. I would also like to thank **Dr. Þóra Pétursdóttir**, who additionally reviewed the text and whose critical thinking resulted in enriching insights for which I am in her debt. A draft of the chapter was presented, in March 2017, at the conference 'The New Urban Ruins: Vacancy and the Post-crisis City', held at Trinity College Dublin. The organizers are currently preparing an edited



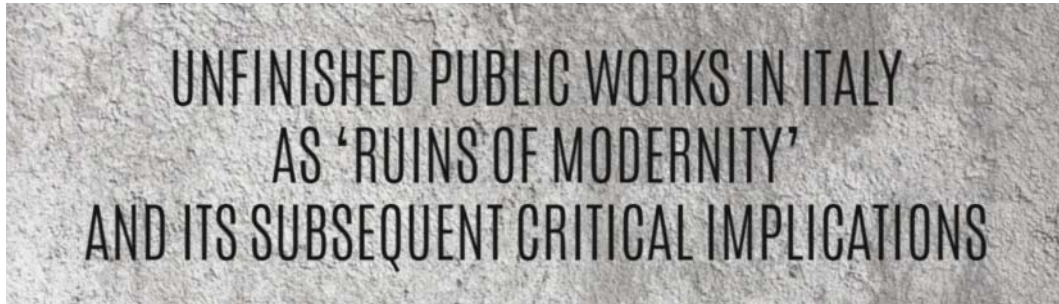
volume with the contributions of all attendants and, though my work has not yet been accepted, I do hope it will be.

To conclude, Chapter 5 was written between January and March 2017. In this chapter, I attempt to come full circle on the topics of *Incompiuto Siciliano* by reviewing the four different approaches that *Alterazioni Video* have envisaged in order to deal with unfinished public works: to finish them, to demolish them, to leave them as they are, or to opt for an ‘active’ arrested decay. The cultural implications of these strategies are analysed to, ultimately, suggest that incompleteness is such a vast and complex issue that it will surely have more than a single solution; very likely a combination of the four. This is important because it opens up a debate on the broad spectrum of possibilities to tackle incompleteness – considering this one of the key contemporary urban themes not only in Italy but also in those countries affected by unfinished geographies after the 2008 financial crisis. This chapter has neither been presented at any conference nor it has been submitted to any journal, but I have no doubt that I will have the chance to do so sooner rather than later.

This doctoral dissertation uses an artistic project to discuss five different perspectives that, though they can be read perfectly well as independent contributions, are linked together through ‘outlooks’ in between chapters in order to have a solid continuity. All these chapters have, additionally, been presented to several Ph.D. colloquiums at my university over the past three years and I sincerely thank all the attendants for their suggestions to improve my work. This is not a thesis about unfinished public works in Italy; this is a thesis on *Incompiuto Siciliano* as an artistic response to unfinished public works in Italy – which certainly requires an interdisciplinary analysis involving Urban Studies, Cultural Geography, Contemporary Archaeology, Critical Heritage and Visual Arts. As the reader will surely notice, *Incompiuto Siciliano* is a paradoxical project and I can only state that I did my best to write around 120 pages about something that is full of contrasts without falling into contradictions. They say that a joke does not need to be explained and, though I laughed on that summer day I first heard about *Incompiuto Siciliano*, dedicating so much time in trying to explain it can only mean that *Incompiuto Siciliano* is no joke.

Last, and definitely not least, this work would have never been possible without the enormous help of *Alterazioni Video* and especially one of its members, **Andrea Masu**. My deepest thanks for sharing your time with me in our fruitful interviews. I have no words to value the outstanding proofreading work that **Sisi Rabenstein** has done to provide excellence, understanding and fluidity to the whole text. **Cristina** is the person who has had to deal with me during the last seven years on a daily basis and she is the only one who truly knows how fascinated and frustrated I can be after having chosen the not-always-easy path of being a young researcher these days; for this, amongst many other things, I love you. The last of my introductory words are dedicated to my father **José María** and my mother **Paula**. Everything I am today is the result of their infinite trust, patience, comprehension and investment. And to be honest, if it was not for them, this doctoral dissertation could never have begun nor could it have finished.

## Chapter 1



### INTRODUCTION

The existence of unfinished public works in Italy is a phenomenon that, though dating back to the decades following World War II, has not been sufficiently interpreted until recent years. Today, national and international media as well as some academic texts and multidisciplinary art projects have started to address this issue, and it is not unreasonable to assert that such an increase in exposure is the consequence of the creative work done by the artist group Alterazioni Video in collaboration with their colleagues Enrico Sgarbi and Claudia d'Aita<sup>1</sup>. Alterazioni Video, originally based in Milan, first noticed the systematic presence of unfinished public works in 2006 after spending some time in Sicily. From then on, they constructed an informal survey on unfinished public works in Italy in the form of an on-line tool open to public contributions<sup>2</sup>. Alterazioni Video's preliminary results (2008) revealed that there are 395 unfinished public works in Italy from which 156, approximately 39.5%, are located in Sicily alone. This statistic demonstrated that the phenomenon of unfinished public works is most present in southern regions and proves less prominent towards the north of the country (Fig. 1). In view of such a reality, Alterazioni Video opted to

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1 See reference list for examples of media attention (Dipinto 2016; Lauria 2016; Donadio 2012; Meichtry 2012); increasing number of academic texts (Santangelo 2009; Accattini 2011; Scalia 2013; Bella 2015; Lago 2015) and artistic approaches (Felici 2011; Antolino 2013; Farmer and Cinelli 2015). On the other hand, throughout this dissertation, and for operational reasons, referring to 'Alterazioni Video' implicitly involves the participation of their two collaborators.

2 The continuously updated version of this survey is available at: <http://www.incompiutosiciliano.org/opere>





Fig. 1. National survey on unfinished public works  
Source: Alterazioni Video, 2008

coin the term ‘Incompiuto Siciliano’ to refer to unfinished public works as a formal architectural style<sup>3</sup>. This re-interpretation, which conveys the recovered dignity of these ‘ruins of modernity’, considers unfinished public works a type of heritage with the potential to represent the entirety of Italian society (2008). Yet, *an unfinished public work is ‘Incompiuto Siciliano’ despite being located in a different Italian region from Sicily*.

The first section of this chapter uses Alterazioni Video’s work as a starting point from which to dig a little deeper into the physicality of unfinished public works (typological, urban and material qualities) to then, in the second section, make a theoretical analysis of their condition as spaces that have never been used nor inhabited. All this is done by contextualizing the case with interdisciplinary literature on ‘modern ruins’, which ultimately demonstrates the suitability of referring to unfinished public works as such – not only in the artistic realm but also at an academic level. This body of knowledge is supplemented by three different semi-structured interviews conducted with one of Alterazioni Video members – Andrea Masu – between October 2014 and May 2016. These interviews, together with Alterazioni Video’s own production, show that ‘Incompiuto Siciliano’ is a project that is exclusively centred in the romantic revalorization of unfinished public works, and yet, explicit critical discourses on the negative origins of the sites are deliberately excluded from the artists’ narrative. In Chapter 2, I will argue that such a radical positivism, far from resulting in a naïve sanitization of dysfunctional management, corrupt politics or mafia networks, is rather an ironic and effective strategy of putting Italian incompleteness on the agenda, which

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3 ‘Incompiuto Siciliano’ has occasionally been translated into English as ‘Sicilian Incompletion’ though the artists prefer to maintain its original Italian name in every publication.

ultimately allows other people to explore the evident critical connotations within the phenomenon's origins. This latter thought should not be surprising because, as noted by DeSilvey and Edensor (2012), modern ruins have a 'critical power' with the potential to open up access to alternative readings of modernity and notions of progress, and thus, ruins can be disruptive vehicles that offer new ways of looking at these. In this sense, the third section of the chapter breaks with Alterazioni Video's romantic argument to provide a condensed review of existing academic and journalistic works that have studied such a dilapidation of public funds, which leads one to consider that the political and economic causes that produced incompleteness in Italy are systematic. Though this interpretation mainly relies on secondary sources, it serves as an appropriate contextualization to consequently, in the fourth section, grasp the specificities and, more importantly, the similarities of the Italian case when compared to the more recent and widely documented unfinished neoliberal topographies. The main argument is that, though belonging to different paradigms of modernization and coming from different epochs, society's behaviour in Italy, based on a broadly accepted condescension and simple indulgence, has not been that dissimilar from those countries strongly affected by the bursting of the property bubble in 2008.

This contribution is both constructive and relevant because it allows us to expand discourses on incompleteness – an increasingly important topic in urban studies – through the addition of an original case study. Said case is slightly different from the already existing ones in terms of *when and under what* political and economic circumstances it emerged, allowing us to build a wider argument about the different conditions under which ruins are produced. At this point, it is worth mentioning that the term 'ruin' has already been applied to describe the unfinished neoliberal topographies caused by the last global financial crisis. Kitchin et al. (2014) label unfinished estates in Ireland as 'new ruins' representing the property crash; Hernández (2012) calls those private unfinished constructions in Spain that reflect a 'ruined' development model and a 'ruined' way of living 'neo-ruins'; and Pálsson claims that 'these are not old ruins' (2012, 559) when referring to the half-finished and empty structures left by the collapse of the economic boom in Iceland. Hence, acknowledging that the term 'unfinished' is usually associated with the 2008 crisis, and taking into account that there is an increasing number of critical contributions voiced towards neoliberal incompleteness, this literature has been extrapolated and adjusted in order to detail a critical interpretation of the Italian case.

## PHYSICALITY

It is important to note that Alterazioni Video's exclusive focus on unfinished 'public' works responds to the necessity for creating an artistic discourse where 'public' entails a cultural attitude, a common aspiration where everyone is reflected (Masu, Interview, 13 November 2015) – as opposed to private initiatives such as the phenomena of 'abusivism' (Zanfi 2014) and 'eco-monsters' (Romita 2007; Guido et al. 2009) that have also been largely associated with incompleteness. Although the tangible repercussions of unfinished works are similar, be they privately or publicly developed, Masu (Interview,

13 November 2015) clearly distinguishes between both spheres in an attempt to classify unfinished public works as a representative factor of the Italian society as a whole.

When defining ‘unfinished public works’, Alterazioni Video (2008) refers to those public development projects whose construction process was interrupted for some reason, leaving them unfinished and their structures visible. This occurred in most of their documented cases, however, Masu (Interview, 11 October 2014) considers that ‘unfinished public works’ also involve those public constructions that were fully realized though never used due to whichever kind of bureaucratic complexity that tended to arise. In this case, an unfinished public work initially looks like a finished product but, as time passes, it suffers a progressive ruination owing to a lack of use and maintenance. An example of this sort of unfinished public work is the ‘lift to nowhere’ in Sutera. Squires (2015) explains how, in order to attract tourism, a lift was proposed to link Sutera, a village of 1,400 inhabitants in central Sicily, to the monastery on the top of its neighbouring hill. Funded by the European Union with a budget of €2million, it was finished in 2012 and, since then, has remained unused ‘because the local council cannot afford the 100,000 euro annual operating, maintenance and insurance costs’ (Squires 2015).

Regarding the typological classification of unfinished public works, and in view of Alterazioni Video’s database, it can be summarized that two major divisions exist: infrastructure and social buildings. That is to say infrastructure would include facilities such as roads, railways, airports, harbours, tramways, bridges, tunnels or dams; furthermore, social buildings would involve every construction that was intended to serve a direct public service such as sport centres, hospitals, schools, theatres, etc. This latter typology constitutes the highest proportion of unfinished public works in Alterazioni Video’s national survey, with such flagrant examples as the Athletics Stadium and Polo Field, or the Olympic Swimming-pool in the Sicilian town of Giarre amongst their number (Fig. 2 and 3), which have both remained unfinished since 1985.

Additionally, narrowing our discussion of unfinished public works’ existence to the most populated cities in Italy would provide, in territorial terms, only a very limited and erroneous perspective of the phenomenon. Without a doubt, unfinished public works exist in major urban contexts, however, the proportion in these cities is anecdotal when compared to the evident spread across the country. Small and medium-sized villages represent the characteristic and omnipresent ‘acupuncture’ where projects did not crystallize. More importantly, whether they be located in big cities, or medium or small villages, unfinished public works are rarely present in city or town centres; on the contrary, they are mostly part of the peripheral and even remote areas with respect to any settlement. This is certainly relevant when interpreting these sites as modern ruins because discourses on contemporary ruination have largely put the focus on the relation between abandonment and the suburban contexts where they are located.

In their review of the typologies considered modern ruins, DeSilvey and Edensor include ‘factories, foundries, mills; military installations and Cold War remnants; post-Socialist state-built architecture; abandoned rural settlements; urban wastelands and *edgelands*; derelict rail and transportation networks [or] maritime relics’ (2012, 466, own



Fig. 2. Athletics Stadium and Polo Field, Giarre  
Source: Pablo Arboleda, 2015



Fig. 3. Olympic Swimming-pool, Giarre  
Source: Pablo Arboleda, 2015



emphasis). As mentioned, unfinished public works in Italy are either infrastructure or social buildings. However, the remarkable aspect here is that, when mentioning ‘edgelands’, DeSilvey and Edensor open the possibility up to not only specific sites but to any site, regarding their specific urban consideration. Defined by British environmentalist Marion Shoard as the transient space between the rural and the urban, whose dynamics are ‘unplanned, certainly uncelebrated and largely incomprehensible’ (2002, 118), ‘edgelands’ is a term that has recently been brought to the study of modern ruins, together with similar concepts referring to derelict sites’ placement. For Martin, edgelands host ‘architecturally anonymous sites that are neglected in cultural and political understandings of everyday urbanism’ (2014, 1109); Light and Young (2010) opt for the term ‘liminal space’ to describe the context of ambiguous spaces which are not relevant to the elites and yet they are ignored in the representation of a dominant order – a notion of neglect shared by Sheridan (2007) in his ‘indeterminate territories’. In this sense, unfinished public works in Italy also come to reach this placeness in which modern ruins are embedded because their characteristic state of incompleteness responds to the incapacity to generate a coherent and continuous urban fabric. The fragility of the neglect context in which unfinished public works take place responds to the failure to create public activity, resulting in recognizable structures that are filled with emptiness. Additionally, the act of playing them down for so long can only be understood as a consequence of both their marginal location and their generalized mundane form and materiality, matching further discourses on modern ruins.

Occasionally, unfinished public works in Italy were envisaged as sophisticated buildings made to impress, exemplified by sports complex designed by star-architect Santiago Calatrava in Rome (Berg 2016) or the theatre conceived by eminent artist Pietro Consagra in Nuova Gibellina (Fig. 4). However, by studying Alterazioni Video’s database, it is evident that functional-oriented constructions – that paradoxically never functioned – are much more common. The aesthetic indifference relates to the fact that these spaces were expected to provide a practical service. Unfinished roads, unfinished multi-storey parking buildings, unfinished dams, unfinished hospitals or unfinished schools express an anonymous ‘broken’ functionality, without pretension or artifice – as if they were ‘non-places of inexperience’ (Wu Ming 2008). In any case, Alterazioni Video does not make hierarchical distinctions between originally ambitious works and those less refined (Masu, Interview, 26 May 2016). It could well be said that, in accordance with this view, incompleteness balances the status of every work, producing equalized spaces, as they all failed in the common objective of being used.

Within this democratization of incompleteness, a similar and gradual process of decay begins after the construction of every public work is interrupted. In Lucas’ terms (2013), this means that the Italian case is a sort of ‘slow’ ruination – opposed to ‘fast’ ruins where natural disasters, war destruction or premeditated demolition accelerate the process. In Italy, ruination occurs progressively over decades and, apart from passing time, no external agents increase degradation. Consequently, unfinished public works exist in a softened state of permanent transition, where the mutable qualities of decay applied to modern ruins are part of their characteristic materiality (De Silvey 2006). Alterazioni Video has considered this aspect when publishing a 10-bullet-point manifesto that describes the main features of the works. Number 5 and number 6



Fig. 4. Theatre, Nuova Gibellina  
Source: Pablo Arboleda, 2015

specifically address unfinished public works' materiality, where the notion of change is unequivocally present:

5. Natural vegetation interacts synaesthetically with incompleteness, re-appropriating sites and redefining the landscape. An exuberant community overrun by equally exuberant natural forces; these were the preconditions for the powerful bond between Incomplete public works and the countryside around them. Figs, meadow grass, cacti, concrete, and iron: seemingly unrelated elements became the ingredients of a recognisable style and characterised its precise geographical and historical positioning.

6. Reinforced concrete is incompleteness' constituent material. Its colours and textures are determined by the ageing and weathering of materials. Concrete was pure matter, the bone structure of modernity, a symbol of work and productivity. It could assimilate the scars of time; take on new colours and shades. Using concrete was a powerful, meaningful step that made these places unique of their type (Alterazioni Video 2008, 193).

Two different topics arise from Alterazioni Video's quote. On the one hand, they consider vegetation, for its capacity to shape the static image of unfinished public works, an integral part of the sites. Alterazioni Video specifically refers to 'natural vegetation', a tautology that must be understood as 'uncontrolled' or 'wild', which sprouts up due to a lack of maintenance. Jorgensen and Tylecote have discussed the importance of wild vegetation in urban interstices, to which they allocate derelict sites. For these authors, the complex and evolving character of vegetation allows us to 're-connect our natural-cultural selves in the context of our urban existence [while presenting] a rich contrast to the bland, sanitized landscapes that are now the mainstay of so much urban development' (2007, 458). Therefore, unfinished public works find

in wilderness an additional value that highlights their transitional state, bringing it closer to formal discourses on modern ruins and their physical attributes.

The second topic that Alterazioni Video mentions in their manifesto is the remarkable presence of concrete as the main construction material. Initially intended to last for eternity, concrete as ‘pure matter’ is no longer so ‘pure’. Concrete is not static; concrete in unfinished public works is as dynamic as a living entity. It is precisely this degradation affecting colours and textures produced by natural aging which Pétursdóttir (2012a) claims is an intrinsic value in Icelandic modern ruins made of concrete. For this author, similar to Alterazioni Video’s statement, ‘ruination, decay and the material being of [concrete] are not always regarded as negative but may be thought of as a generative process of becoming’ (2012a, 49).

## ‘...LIKE HOTELS THAT HAVE BEEN PREPARED FOR ALIENS’

Discourses on modern ruins usually begin by contextualizing the changeable meaning of the term ‘ruin’ throughout history. Fein (2011) places its first usage in the late 1300s and he asserts that most of the initial uses referred to total destruction, establishing a biblical parallel between ruin and the apocalypse. For the following centuries, this negative meaning remained fixed but variable – depending on the historical period – until Romanticism reimagined the ‘ruin’ under artistic and aesthetic notions (DeSilvey and Edensor 2012). Nowadays, ‘ruin’ still retains this idealized value inherited from Romanticism when the term is applied to ancient works (Edensor 2005), however, a different standard is in place for ruins that have been produced in the modern era.

Modern ruins are the remnants of several characteristic changing processes of the twentieth century, which have persisted and increased to current day. These processes are ‘industrialization and abandonment, development and depopulation [or] conflict and reconciliation’ (DeSilvey and Edensor 2012, 465), and they have the distinction of having been rapidly caused in a time of accelerated transformations (González-Ruibal 2008). Yet, while classical ruins transmit a sense of the glorious past as well as the idea of man-made monumentality lasting over time, modern ruins are the left-overs of current societies’ perpetual motion and indifference. This means that, though there is an increasing number of academic contributions fighting for a renewed appreciation of ruins (e.g. Pusca 2010; Strangleman 2013; Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014), authors concur that, in people’s eyes, modern dereliction mainly represents the futility of the present, and thus, are uncomfortable entities with which to deal. Moreover, due to the fact that their materiality – broken windows, cracking paint, debris or crumbling structures – does not subscribe to traditional aesthetic standards, they are not objects of desire for the greater public but controversial and displeasing sights. Therefore, in both the intangible and tangible sense, modern ruins generally echo back to the negative and threatening meaning that the term ‘ruin’ used to denote before Romanticism.

Unfinished public works in Italy are likely to be considered modern ruins since they contain certain specificities that can be attributed to the main themes in contemporary



ruinology. It seems self-evident that a process of ruination is ‘what happens to a building once standard maintenance stops taking place’ (Fein 2011, 13), and thus, ruins are places where there was once some activity. However, regarding unfinished public works in Italy, French anthropologist March Augé, who collaborated with Alterazioni Video in the footage of a short-film on *Incompiuto Siciliano*<sup>4</sup>, has satirically described the atmosphere in these spaces by positing a break from the usual notion of ruins:

[Unfinished public works in Italy] refer to a kind of monument completely different from Roman ruins: in Rome or in Pompeii one can feel the human presence, one can feel that there was a time where women and children actually used the space. [These sites] look like hotels that have been prepared for aliens. They seem to have been brought from a distant planet, from an unknown future (as quoted in Magi 2012, own translation).

Aligned with the ‘ubiquity of death’ that modern ruins usually inspire (Schönle 2006), public works were never born; these architectural interruptions – most certainly dead – generated ruins before ever having been something else. In his most popular work, entitled *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey* ([1967] 1996), American artist Robert Smithson refers to the elements he finds in the suburban landscape of his hometown as ‘monuments’: a bridge, a pumping derrick, an artificial crater where pipes gush water, a parking lot, and a sandbox. These elements serve their functions, they are finished and usable; they are monuments but they are not ruins. However, the artist also labels as ‘monuments’ a set of concrete abutments supporting the structure of a highway which was being built, which most certainly were in the condition of being, temporarily, unfinished. So although in Italy incompleteness became the public works’ final state, in Smithson’s terms they can be considered thusly;

*ruins in reverse*, that is all the new construction that would eventually be built. This is the opposite of the ‘romantic ruin’ because the buildings don’t *fall* into ruin *after* they are built but rather *rise* into ruin before they are built, [defining,] without trying, the memory traces of an abandoned set of futures (Smithson [1967] 1996, 72).

The essential point to note at this stage is that emptiness in unfinished public works does not correspond to the disappearance of life but with the fact that these ruins were never lived in. This is certainly the most defining attribute of incompleteness and it is characterized, opposed to archaeological approaches to modern ruins (e.g. Olsen 2010; Pétursdóttir 2012b; González-Ruibal 2014), by the generalized absence of artifacts that may indicate any sign of previous formal habitation. Unfinished public works in Italy are mostly ‘conserved’ in their interrupted form due to the fact that, as Masu accounts, ‘they have been surrounded by fences for decades and yet they are completely disconnected from any social or urban exchange. Nobody has a reason to go there!’ (Interview, 26 May 2016). Masu’s assertion is confirmed when looking at the presence of piles of bricks at Giarre’s Multi-functional Hall, which is a building that has never been utilized in the last 30 years (Fig. 5). Also in Giarre, Chico Mendes Children’s Park has remained unfinished since 1975, however here, glass bottles, the left-overs of a bonfire or graffiti and inscriptions on the walls can be found (Fig. 6).

4 The trailer of the short-film is available at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyxpoQGFYg4>



Fig. 5. Multi-functional Hall, Giarre  
Source: Pablo Arboleda, 2015



Fig. 6. Chico Mendes Children's Park, Giarre  
Source: Pablo Arboleda, 2015

This latter degradation can be read as the result of informal and temporary uses of the space after it is abandoned (Edensor 2005), opening up an interesting new layer of discussion that would deserve a paper all of its own.

Until now, the study of Alterazioni Video's database and their decision to refer to unfinished public works as 'ruins of modernity' have allowed us to provide a deeper theorization of the phenomenon. From now on, the chapter will focus on what the artists' narrative is omitting: a critical interpretation that is latent considering how negatively incompleteness is viewed by both locals and the public culture (e.g. Marimpietri 2011; Innocenzi 2013; Siamo Noi 2013). Hence, as fascinating as the artists' work can be, in the context of Italy, it is interesting and important to open up a different paradigm of interpretation from that of Alterazioni Video. To start, this requires an account of the obscure origin of the problem because, paraphrasing Augé, unfinished public works are neither hotels that have been prepared for aliens nor have they been brought from a distant planet.

## GENESIS

Though incompleteness in Italy is a national reality, it cannot be denied that, as expressed in the introduction, the country's southern regions present a higher proportion of unfinished public works than those regions in the north. This is the quantitative fact from which most studies draw – including this one – to illustrate the phenomenon. However, in view of Lago's analysis (2013) of the northern region of Veneto, it seems evident that the density of incompleteness found in the south is *just* a quantitative fact, which does not imply that the circumstances that caused it are different from the circumstances in the north. This is important to note because, acknowledging developmental differences between both parts of the country (e.g. Gramsci 2005; Mayo 2007; Sasson 2013), alternative readings suggest that the south neither embodies a homogenous entity nor is it that dissimilar from the north (Franzini 2008).

In any case, studies reveal that incompleteness is a phenomenon taking place in areas where, during the years that followed World War II, there were aspirations of economic modernization. Authorities envisioned construction activities as a core strategy within the economic sector, under the premise that public works would generate automatic prosperity due to the subsequent services that they would provide (Santangelo 2009). However, the excessive bureaucratization involving several administrative stages such as the national, regional, provincial and municipal, led to a lack of communication and coordinated actions, where projects prioritized localized interests over general welfare (Scalia 2013). Magi (2012) goes further in describing how authorities were guilty of competing amongst themselves in order to fund non-connected public investments and provide a framework where every city looked out exclusively for itself. According to her, this created a development model based on local pride and comparison against the neighbouring rival towns, where even small villages applied for major investments – which in many cases, turned out to be completely disproportionate and unnecessary. The fragmentation of the Italian institutional system did not only contribute to this

model through its direct implication, but it served to consolidate the generalized illusion that money was for free (Faris 2012).

Moreover, even though the decision to implement public works was taken by local councils that were granted funding by higher administrative spheres, construction concessions were given to private companies – a fact that, ultimately, was what caused a variety of complications towards accomplishing the works. Accattini (2011) primarily blames the lack of rigorous planning which, in certain cases, made it difficult to begin the building processes and consequently, extended their duration. The result of this inconsistent planning is the re-formulation of the projects, which led to the increasing cost of the constructions and ultimately, to the lack of available funding (Scalia 2013). Though institutional inefficiency is evident, the clearly documented presence of political corruption (Cappelletti 2012; De Leo 2013; Chiodelli and Moroni 2015) and mafia networks (Schneider and Schneider 2003; Giglioli and Swyngedouw 2008; Savona 2012) affecting urban-planning and construction industries in Italy, prompt us to consider that such incompetence is the result of private benefit schemes acquiring the funds put aside for public works through systemic backstairs dealing.

Accattini labels concrete ‘grey gold’ to create a buzzword explaining the illegal actions revealed by judicial investigations as ‘the use of non-adequate construction materials – mostly low-quality concrete – as well as bribery and extortion of the involved actors within the contract approvals’ (2011, 31, own translation). While authorities claimed that starting large-scale public works may counteract the recruiting power of the mafia and its illegal and lucrative activities (Bonnett 2014), the construction sector indeed provided a legal framework in which organized crime could spread its influence and business investments (Saviano 2008). In this sense, inaccurate cost estimates, disregard for building regulations or design errors, causing the bankruptcy of companies and the prosecution of both constructors and politicians, led public works to remain in a limbo due to their temporary cancellation and eventual recommencement. This collection of premeditated management failures guaranteed construction sites remaining for long periods which, rather than plunging the population into a collective frustration, contributed to raising citizens’ working expectations for the imminent jobs that the construction sector is able to generate within a short period of time (Magi 2012). In the meantime, the political outcome was evident since politicians *also* expected something back: to be elected in the following elections due to workers’ vote so this sort of ‘vicious circle’ could keep running. Creating jobs in construction was then a vote-winning strategy (Bonnett 2014) and as result, ‘politicians became dispensers of benevolence, handing out jobs and favors, with little incentive to worry about waste’ (Faris 2012).

Hence, the paradox relies on how, according to macroeconomic data, this peculiar political and economic system proves a temporary success since the involved regions’ GDP actually increases (Accattini 2011). Though such a patron-clientism model is not intrinsically negative when it is well conducted (Piattoni 1998), incompleteness demonstrates that certain growth is not aligned with a true improvement of social welfare as long as immediate revenues loom over the idea of public works as the long-term common benefit. Accattini (2011) finally indicates that there is not a coordinated



strategy to revert this order, and moreover, there is a lack of institutional initiatives to re-activate unfinished public works. According to her, the complexity that originated this situation, where every unfinished public work was produced by a set of specific causes, is the same complexity that leads us to assume that eventual solutions would involve a set of specific measures for each case.

Thus, over the decades, political authorities have been responsible for directly investing in a model that basically secures funding and creates jobs without taking into account its eventual negative consequences. In this regard, it can be said that the building process of a particular infrastructure was – *in itself* – the main economic benefit of it. All that time, there was no long-term foresight and the use and management of public works was simply not contemplated further than the construction phase. Modernization meant construction but not necessarily the future usage as a public work was already able to generate wealth so long as it was being constructed – and that seemed more than enough. This is a model that, when profitable, it is profitable for some time and for many people; however, perhaps surprisingly, when it fails this is not life or death since it has already served its purpose. Yet not finishing the buildings means that a large amount of public funds is in the pockets of a privileged minority. It is a system that paradoxically works for some *only* when it fails for the rest, demonstrating that unfinished public works are not an accident but a successful white-collar crime.

## DIFFERENT BUT THE SAME: AN INTERPRETATIVE COMPARISON WITH UNFINISHED NEOLIBERAL TOPOGRAPHIES

In terms of unfinished works, DeSilvey and Edensor (2012) assign capitalism and communism the same level of responsibility, though they establish a distinction between the failed ‘abundance’ promised by the former and the ‘banal mismanagement’ of collective aspiration found in the latter. The particularity of the Italian case is that it is neither a pure capitalist sample nor a communist one. It is rather a combination of these two orders’ features, in line with the ‘reformist-progressive’ paradigm that was dominant in Italy between the end of World War II and the beginning of liberal orthodoxy in the late twentieth century (Cassano 2009). On one hand, the excessive construction of unfinished public works aimed to energize the private sector in a context of Western consolidating democracy while, on the other, their subsidized condition provides an image in which the state, legitimately representing people, remains at the core of such failed development. In any case, the perception towards incompleteness which is mainly studied nowadays focuses on the failure of capitalist or neoliberal topographies right after the bursting of the property bubble in 2008. Kitchin et al. (2012) define ‘neoliberal topography’ as the landscape which resulted from prioritizing private economic revenues over the actual necessities of a society. The globalized aspect of neoliberal failure is demonstrated through uncompleted and empty housing and, though countries such as Ireland (Conefrey and Gerald 2010; Kelly 2012; Donovan and Murphy 2013) or Spain (García 2010; Concheiro 2012; Puntí 2012) are the major victims, neoliberal ‘wasted property’ is encountered in every corner of

the world (Moreno and Blanco 2014). As a result of this, the increasing bibliography on incompleteness is clearly addressed to critically review neoliberal manifestations and, consequently, these sources are a solid background from which the particularities and similarities of the Italian case can be interpreted.

Ruins testify to the frustration of utopian capitalist aspirations (Matos 2012), becoming 'the site of a critique of the ideology of progress' (Schönle 2006, 653). Moreover, considering ruins as part of the built environment, they represent the suspended ambitions of those empowered actors within any society because space is 'expressive of the ideals of a dominant political regime' (Light and Young 2010, 6). Within the myth of unstoppable growth (Salas 2012), where construction activity is 'the major metaphor of capitalism [and] growing means destroying' (Beltrán 2014, 3, own translation), both the Italian case and pure neoliberal incompleteness reveal the failure of starting unlimited constructions funded by limited resources. They are all the ruins of a society which permitted and financed their appearing, naively expecting that everyone would benefit from their use. But nothing could be further from the truth and, in the end, the real goal is brought to light. While in neoliberal assumptions the role of the state is ignored as long as it does not interfere in the interdependency between developers and clients (Kitchin et al. 2014), modernization in Italy has been actively subsidized by the state so industries and workers within the construction sector were assured activity. Here, the alliances between the public and the private were forged through a deliberate dysfunctionality, establishing corruption and bribery among the unfortunate realities that deepen the country's stigma. Thus, unfinished public works are neither an accident nor an anecdote but the result of a corrupt system – just like corruption is considered to be an inherent aspect also in unfinished neoliberal topographies (Jiménez 2009; Burriel 2011). Aligned with this, and according to Accattini (2011), the annual amount of concrete utilized in Italy has increased from 50 kilograms per capita in 1950 to 400 kilograms per capita in 2007. The comparison between neoliberalism and a concrete-producing machine (Hernández 2012) comes play in this when we consider that those corrupt few who are in power are the same corrupt few who manage 'grey gold', and vice versa:

...Concrete. Water, gravel and cement: the ingredients to produce it though, sadly, they are not alone. A simple mix where mafia spreads its territorial control and its capacity of intimidation while indulged administrators mediate in rigged contracts. [Then,] concrete is not only water, gravel and cement. It is the ink with which politicians and mafia have written their own history of blood and power. An infinite history (Accattini 2011, 33–34, own translation).

Thus the construction sector manifests its dominant condition by consuming land and cement, and these practices are only abruptly interrupted when authorities run out of funds – nonetheless, they are given grants by public investment in the Italian context or by private loans in the neoliberal era (Brawn 2009). Both cases lack any method of self-critique. Works, public or private, are uncompleted not because societies suddenly experienced a moment of critical thought on how they were behaving; works are uncompleted simply because there is no more money to do so – a limitation which does not quench the thirst for construction. In this sense, Manchón (2010) considers that neoliberalism can exclusively be defined with a single word, 'excess', which can

be extrapolated to the Italian case due to its failed overabundance of development. And so one can conclude that an *excessive* trust in *excessive* construction is what proves inappropriate, and ultimately, makes clear that ‘excess’ is unsustainable by definition. The Italian reformist-progressive paradigm has largely considered that ‘too much’ is always better than ‘enough’, or in other words, that enough is never enough. Similarly, in the neoliberal sphere, the fact of ignoring the notion of ‘necessity’ results in the transfiguration of what should be obvious:

In Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Modern, the first function of architecture was to provide the needs of a world of life, to produce a framework for inhabiting both in a town and countryside, built for the needs of industrial and socio-cultural development. But now in full globalized postmodernity, the primary function of architecture seems to crumble (Matos 2012, 25).

Regarding power, as well as the localized character of the unfinished public works phenomenon, Faris (2012) expresses how ‘[i]n most cases elsewhere, self-determination encourages responsibility’ while in Italy it seems to be just the opposite. Once more, establishing a relation with unfinished neoliberal topographies is inevitable. If Kitchin et al. present the Irish reality as a demonstration of the country’s incapacity ‘to manage capitalism properly’ (2014, 1078), it can be said that unfinished public works represent Italian incapacity to distribute sudden abundances of capital in an adequate and appropriate manner. And though blaming politicians, constructors, the mafia or even workers/voters certainly provides a broad spectrum of the implicated actors, it is important to note the complicity of the rest of society in not reacting to a problem that, otherwise, could not have persisted for so many decades. By silently witnessing the phenomenon, society becomes an additional passive actor whose sense of alienated local pride and megalomania is the only way to understand how unfinished public works continued to appear, year after year, in view of everyone. In a critical essay, Spanish scholar Rafael Argullol directly points to the entire Spanish society for having allowed the property bubble to happen. His criticism is perfectly applicable to the Italian case for the decades of blind and mute acceptance:

The rest of the society did not offer any resistance either. Mass media reacted late and citizens were, in the end, horrified as consumers rather than as citizens [...] The great material looting of these years, generator of both enormous wealth and irreparable damage, would not have been possible without incurring in the great looting of our consciousness – something that we now call ‘lack of values’ (2009, own translation).

Lack of responsibility, lack of capacity and lack of values. Unfinished public works in Italy, though emerging from *a different modernization paradigm that was dominant several decades ago*, are – just like unfinished neoliberal topographies – the generalized expression of ‘lack’, consequently contested with ‘excess’ in a failed attempt to create a parallel universe in which the country is fully modernized. However, this failed attempt shows the raw reality in Italian power manifestations. If the illusion of being rich societies has been the driving factor of neoliberal development in Spain or in Ireland (Azara 2012, Schultz-Dornburg 2012; Linehan and Crowley 2013; Kitchin et al. 2014), incompleteness reaches now the status of authenticity. In this sense, while the erection of public works aimed to provide the image of a modern country, by remaining unfinished, they come to truly represent ‘Italy and the age in which they were produced’ (Alterazioni Video 2008, 205).



## CONCLUSION

In the words of Alice Mah, ‘to view something as a ruin is already to have a perspective’ (2012, 8). What I propose is to go further by asserting that to view something as a ruin involves, at least, the two perspectives expressed in this chapter. One is closer to cultural assumptions, placing the term ‘ruin’ on a higher level when compared to mere ‘waste’; and the other is mainly critical, stripped of any romanticism. Alterazioni Video, as an artistic group, has creatively played with this ambivalence in order to put the phenomenon of unfinished public works in Italy on the map. They have invented a positivist architectural style formed by ‘ruins of modernity’ through the deliberate omission of the works’ critical narrative, however, such narrative remains obviously lurking. This chapter has firstly embraced the artists’ argument to embed unfinished public works’ physicality and unused condition within literatures on modern ruins, and second, it has moved further to interpret the negative origin of incompleteness in comparison to more recent unfinished neoliberal topographies.

Alterazioni Video’s database has served me well when tracing a typological, urban and material analysis of unfinished public works in Italy. In doing so, it can be stated that there are enough reasons to consider these sites as ‘ruins of modernity’ as long as their physicality fits with broader discourses on contemporary ruinology. The fact that public works have never been finished – and consequently they have never been formally used – adds a certain peculiarity to this case. Providing an academic voice to Alterazioni Video’s thesis means to go beyond the artistic realm, and thus, my contribution was born from the willingness to theorize and validate the cultural connotations of *Incompiuto Siciliano*. After all, to see something as a ruin is never trivial. And though incompleteness is not an entirely new topic within modern ruins, it would need to be explored more in depth in order to reach the similar body of knowledge that we find, for example, in industrial or war ruins. Yet considering the increasing interest in incompleteness, it would not be unreasonable to perceive it as a new branch in the study of modern ruins – to which this chapter aims to contribute.

It is true that there are already a number of contributions – though not many – from both academia and journalistic sources that have glimpsed the causes that provoked Italian incompleteness. My intention has not been to recount new stories but rather to make an interpretation of the existing ones. For this, I have condensed the political and economic reasons behind incompleteness in order to provide a comprehensible explanation of a phenomenon that, since it is repeated again and again regardless of time and location, leads to it being perceived as a solid system: a system that somehow works for some by virtue of its failing the rest. On the other hand, in countries that have been strongly affected by the 2008 housing market crash, we have witnessed hundreds of demonstrations in which those who protest held banners saying ‘It’s not a crisis, it’s a scam’. Considering that the most tangible outcome of this crisis/scam has been the erection of unfinished neoliberal topographies – this time, largely documented and interpreted – it is only a matter of comparing this with the Italian case in order to note that unfinished public works are the product of another scam, which is different but ultimately equivalent.

Italy did not have to experience the property bubble conditions in order to have its own collection of unfinished works. It has been, and still is, systematic abuses of public funds and concurrent financial decline, taking place over decades, that resulted in sites that have remained uncompleted for so long. The temporal and economic circumstances may vary from those in neoliberalism, however, the society's generalized mentality underpinning it is not that distinct. When it comes to incompleteness, we all behave the same; or rather, since we all behaved the same, we are all facing incompleteness. Therefore, this chapter should not be understood as a stigmatization of Italian policies regarding public development and expenditure. Indeed, the 'reformist-progressive' approach is definitely able to generate growth when it is well conducted, and though I would not like to initiate a debate on whether this is better or worse than neoliberalism, it seems clear that both schools of thought produce ruins as a result of confusing economic benefit with social welfare.

To conclude, unfinished public works in Italy and unfinished neoliberal topographies are, in fact, symbiotic cases. The latter helps to interpret the former and the former anticipates the future of the latter. Kitchin et al. notes how, until now, we have waited to tackle the problem of unfinished neoliberal topographies by putting them on the back-burner, to be corrected at a later date. What's more, the authors claim that after the housing crisis, they no longer recognize the damaged Irish landscape: 'The past, it seems, is literally another country' (2014, 1078). Contradictorily, while simultaneously ignoring incongruous problems, we often like to imagine how the future could be, but unfinished public works in Italy are a warning of how inaction and the passing of time only produce older ruins. And so perhaps, some decades from now, we will most probably end up witnessing neoliberal topographies where the future is *literally* another country: Italy.

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## OUTLOOK

Chapter 1 is a call for appropriate and adequate modernization resulting from combining a positive approach with its negative origin. I reiterate that this dissertation is not about ‘unfinished public works in Italy’ but about ‘Incompiuto Siciliano’, and thus, Alterazioni Video’s work is what is worth continuing to explore. Following DeSilvey and Edensor’s *Reckoning with Ruins*, the ‘critical power’ of ruins is what makes them ‘counter-sites’, shouting back to at forces that created them – and consequently they become places of ‘resistance and regression’. In this sense, the authors suggest that artistic practices often provide an aestheticized version of modern ruins that may not always contribute to ruins’ inherent criticism. The question remains, however, when does the aestheticization of ruins become critical and constructive? It is precisely from this context where Incompiuto Siciliano emerges. In the next chapter, the consideration of unfinished public works as an architectural style is studied as artistic creation in itself. The objective is to posit that such a shift of perception is not at odds with a critical understanding; rather it is the first step towards comprehension of the phenomenon, ultimately leading us to the sites’ revalidation.





## Chapter 2



### INTRODUCTION

Highways and railways that lead to nowhere; enormous dams that have never held back water; schools, hospitals or theatres without students, patients or spectators. All unused or uninhabited due to incompleteness. Over the last 50 years, a disastrous development model in Italy – particularly evident in the southern regions of the country – has resulted in unfinished examples of every imaginable kind of public infrastructure and social building. The Milanese group of artists Alterazioni Video (2008) has documented a total of 395 unfinished public works in Italy, of which around a third are located on the island of Sicily. This geographical distribution has prompted the artists to coin the expression ‘Incompiuto Siciliano’ as a new architectural style with the potential to represent Italian society of the last half century. Through radical aestheticization, their intention is to ‘change the dark side of these structures into something positive, something that could be useful for future generations’ (Alterazioni Video 2012). Based on several academic and journalistic contributions that build on this idea of Incompiuto Siciliano (Santangelo 2009; Accattini 2011; Faris 2012; Magi 2012; Scalia 2013; Bonnett 2014; Bella 2015; Lago 2015), Chapter 1 concluded that it is a product of the systematic waste of public resources resulting from political corruption, mafia networks and society’s indulgence of these anti-social elements. However, the present chapter argues that the power of Incompiuto Siciliano as the term is used by Alterazioni Video lies in not blaming anyone in particular for this undesirable situation; rather, Incompiuto Siciliano is a sort of ‘tabula rasa’ that serves as a new way of interpreting and dignifying the contemporary ruined landscape, where the use of a deliberate aestheticization conveys an implicit critical and informative purpose.

Through a simple act of renaming, *Incompiuto Siciliano*'s objective is to cause a gaze turn that does not require any modification at the 'readymade' sites; it is the way we look at them that is being modified. Suddenly, we are not facing the wasteful traces of management malpractice; rather, we are seeing 'beautiful' works of art. There are several theoretical reference points for understanding *Alterazioni Video* and *Incompiuto Siciliano*. The group highlights Berger's work (1972) on how our perspective changes as soon as we consider ourselves as being in front of a work of art; by extension, this can also be applied to being in front of something conceived of as a 'ruin' (Augé 2003). Also relevant here is Stead's (2003) remarkable comparison of how ruins were perceived by Albert Speer – who was Hitler's chief architect and Minister of Armaments and War Production for the Nazi regime – and how they are understood in the allegoric criticism expressed in Walter Benjamin's writings. Following Speer's view, unfinished public works can be seen as pleasing and monumental constructions, whose decayed state – just like classical ruins – is the product of organic transformations in time that point to eternity. However, following Benjamin's perspective, it is impossible to read *Incompiuto Siciliano* without a critical sense that it brings us closer to the negative 'historical truth' that explains its existence (Stead's study is discussed in further detail below). As noted above, however, *Alterazioni Video* deliberately avoids engaging with this latter perspective – and this lack of criticism paradoxically means that the project is imbued with a critical approach. This is the reason why the artists consider their work as an example of Cramerotti's 'aesthetic journalism' (2009). The aestheticized approach towards unfinished public works contributes to putting the sites on the agenda in a creative manner: 'informing without informing', or even 'denouncing without denouncing'. In this sense, art demonstrates its capacity to implicitly pose questions that should be further investigated by spectators in order to determine a complete understanding of the existing context.

The study and analysis of *Alterazioni Video*'s artistic inspirations and the art projects deriving from the idea of *Incompiuto Siciliano* can be used to engage on-going debates about whether aestheticization is an appropriate practice that may open possibilities for deeper investigations of modern ruins. The strongest scepticism in this debate – which is for the most part conducted within contemporary archaeology – is expressed by those who indiscriminately label ruin photography 'ruin porn'. From this perspective, aestheticized imagery is not only unable to engage with further topics but is even counterproductive, due to the simplified view that it offers. Such critics argue that in excluding both the historic and human contexts behind ruins, aestheticization merely reinforces local stigma (e.g. Cunningham 2011; Leary 2011; Rosenberg 2011; Remenapp 2015). Without dismissing these concerns, the present chapter suggests that *Incompiuto Siciliano* is a paradigmatic example of an aestheticization of modern ruins that overcomes these problematics by developing constructive reflections. Hence, *Incompiuto Siciliano* is aligned with constructive contributions that detour the alleged shortcomings of ruin imagery, claiming aestheticization's immediacy as a valuable resource for engaging with ruins (e.g. Pusca 2010; Strangleman 2013; Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014).

## INCOMPIUTO SICILIANO AS A SHIFT OF AESTHETIC PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE CONTEMPORARY RUINED LANDSCAPE

The group of artists known as Alterazioni Video – consisting of Paololuca Barbieri Marchi, Alberto Caffarelli, Matteo Erenbourg, Andrea Masu and Giacomo Porfiri – was founded in Milan in 2004, although today its members mostly operate from New York and Berlin. Throughout their ongoing career, their distinguishing mark has been a disconcerting irreverence that envelops artistic and heritage conventions within popular culture. Video works are at the core of Alterazioni Video's practices, although Bargna suggests that the group regards video art as simply a medium through which the artists funnel 'their poetics, which looks at artistic action immersed in daily life, as the way to bring out the underlying political logic of the situations being considered [...] and turning them against themselves' (Bargna 2012, 104). This is the key to understanding *Incompiuto Siciliano*, the most important and extensively documented project ever created by Alterazioni Video.

Regarding the architectural paradigm where *form follows function*, what *are* those unfinished public works scattering the Italian landscape, if they never had any function? What is a construction with the form of a stadium if it has never been used as such? These were some of the questions that the members of Alterazioni Video posed to themselves in 2007 after surveying hundreds of uncompleted projects (Masu, Interview, 11 October 2014). Considering the complexity of architecturally signifying sites that have never served the function for which they were conceived (Matos 2012), Alterazioni Video's response is both original and intricate: unfinished public works are artworks that can be considered as a formal architectural style, *Incompiuto Siciliano*, in which 'the conflict between form and function is resolved. Lack of function becomes a form of art' (Alterazioni Video 2008, 193). Or in other words, if a construction with the form of a stadium was never used as a stadium, it can only be a piece of art – that, interestingly, has the form of a stadium.

Through this renaming, the perspective proposed by Alterazioni Video lies in Duchamp's readymade tradition, where everything can become art, where a simple urinal is a work of art simply because it has been turned around, labelled 'Fountain' and displayed in a museum. Certainly, Alterazioni Video's approach is contemplative, and ultimately rhetorical; however, unlike Duchamp's art, unfinished public works are not modified and they remain *in situ*. In *Incompiuto Siciliano*, modification is exclusively addressed to our perception, and it does not involve a physical transformation or transportation. This is something that Bargna (2009) takes further in coining the idea of an 'ethnographic turn' in contemporary art. According to this perspective, artists, rather than producing objects to be exhibited in museums and galleries, relate their conceptual process to specific social contexts to finally focus on a work 'whose objective is to comprehend and modify reality' (Bargna 2009, 22, own translation). Following this, and similar to how Duchamp's urinal is no longer an eschatological object but a re-conceptualization of the Renaissance obsession for fountains, unfinished public works no longer exemplify the harsh corrupted reality to which they belong; instead, when interpreted through *Incompiuto Siciliano*'s filter, they are born from the creativity that

‘only a passionate and deep relationship with one’s own land can generate’ (Alterazioni Video 2008, 193). Just as French Gothic mentally suggests ‘cathedrals’, Incompiuto Siciliano is a metonym that designates ‘unfinished public works’. Incompiuto Siciliano is then an artistic project that proposes an architectural style which conveys a shift of aesthetic perception. Therefore, its artistic component is in our gaze.

Thus it is not surprising that Alterazioni Video takes John Berger’s popular book *Ways of Seeing* (1972) and Marc Augé’s *Le Temps en Ruines* (2003)<sup>1</sup> as the perceptual roots of Incompiuto Siciliano (Masu, Interview, 13 November 2015). According to Berger, ‘we never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves’ (Berger 1972, 9); further, and building his discourse on the power of images, ‘when an image is presented as a work of art, the way people look at it is affected by a whole series of learnt assumptions about art’ (Berger 1972, 11). Yet, when Alterazioni Video worked with the well-known Italian photographer Gabriele Basilico to document Giarre – a medium-sized Sicilian village declared to be the ‘capital’ of Incompiuto Siciliano for having the highest density of unfinished public works in Italy (Fig. 1, 2, 3 and 4) – they intentionally opted for an aestheticized version of the sites in order to question assumptions that, according to Berger, ‘mystify rather than clarify’ (Berger 1972, 11). Berger’s list here consists of beauty, truth, genius, civilization, form, status and taste, followed by ‘etc.’ Certainly, Basilico’s pictures can be considered as ‘nice pictures’, since his artistic gaze implies a sort of selection in terms of chosen angle, proportion, texture or technique. Here, unfinished public works are presented as beautiful ancient sites in order to reinforce their credible status as architectural style. Monumentality, nostalgia or the passing of time are inherent romanticizing affections that are aroused when these pictures are viewed.

Hence, aesthetic assumptions were simply absent before Alterazioni Video rendered them visible, strengthening Augé’s perspective that ruins ‘exist by the gaze’s effect through which we look at them’ (Augé 2003, 50, own translation). This is particularly relevant because, according to interviews conducted with locals, and further data collected by Alterazioni Video, people tend to erase unfinished public works from their social imaginary. As long as uncompleted structures are conceived as wasted properties that then become familiar, it seems that they do not deserve to be looked at:

It’s like when you go to work every morning. Day after day you take the same route, you pass through the same places; and after some time there’s nothing special in what you see. You simply got used to it. We come from Milan and for us, all those unfinished buildings are outstanding, a fascinating view for outsiders! But locals don’t even turn their heads to stare. It’s an internalized lack of perception that leads to a sort of collective amnesia. We just want to recover those places by proposing a new way of seeing them (Masu, Interview, 11 October 2014).

The artists of Alterazioni Video draw their theoretical reference from Augé due to the way the author connects construction works – virtually unfinished – with ruins. For him, construction works ‘reopen the temptation of past and future. They act just like

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1 This book was published in French in 2003 and no English edition has yet appeared. Quotes from this work given here are my own translations from the Spanish edition (also 2003).





Fig. 1. Gabriele Basilico's picture from Athletics Stadium and Polo Field in Giarre, unfinished since 1985  
Source: Alterazioni Video, 2008



Fig. 2. Gabriele Basilico's picture from Multi-functional Hall in Giarre, unfinished since 1987  
Source: Alterazioni Video, 2008



Fig. 3. Gabriele Basilico's picture from Chico Mendes Park in Giarre, unfinished since 1975  
Source: Alterazioni Video, 2008



Fig. 4. Gabriele Basilico's picture from Multi-storey Car Park in Giarre, unfinished since 1987  
Source: Alterazioni Video, 2008



ruins' (Augé 2003, 108, own translation). But, what perspective towards the ruined landscape should *Incompiuto Siciliano* transmit?

First, it is necessary to contextualize the notion of landscape in terms of perception because, just like ruins, 'every landscape exists only through the gaze that discovers it. This entails, at least, the presence of a witness [...] There is no landscape without a gaze, without the consciousness of landscape' (Augé, 2003, 46, 85, own translation). Landscape, then, is a visual construction – and, consequently, a mental construction (Schama 1995) – from which the observer is detached. This recalls Cresswell's distinction between landscape and place: while we imagine ourselves inside a place, '[w]e do not live in landscapes – we look at them' (Cresswell 2004, 11). This is aligned with the traditional idea of untouched landscape, the contemplation of which forms a certain peace of mind that is perfectly applicable to Romantic paintings where classical ruins coexist aesthetically with nature. However, as Picon (2000) suggests, the irruption of contemporary ruins leads to new 'anxious landscapes', those in which anguish, rage or indignation emerge by revealing the 'question of death'. With this in view, it is interesting how, in *Incompiuto Siciliano*'s perception of landscape, the spectrum between tradition and modernity emerges as a space for reflection.

In Basilico's pictures, decaying concrete stands in front of a contrasting flat background that forms the sky. Defined lines, balanced textures and darker shadows bring unfinished public works into a foreground that interacts with the wild vegetation that has already started to take sites back. *Incompiuto Siciliano* is displayed, as in traditional landscape, as if the ruins were melting into vegetation. However, this organic manner of presenting *Incompiuto Siciliano* contrasts with the incisive and irrational way in which it developed, showing 'contemporary man's conquest of the landscape' (Alterazioni Video 2008, 193). Indeed, the viewer cannot help asking, 'How and why did this happen? Who did this?' Once more, anguish, rage and indignation; but the power of *Incompiuto Siciliano* is that it does not answer those questions directly. Its great value is that it is merely a radical aestheticization of a disturbing, decayed and anxious landscape. *Incompiuto Siciliano*'s affection comes to tease our curiosity.

This is particularly important, because a landscape is the space that one describes so others can push their imagination to create their own landscape (Augé 2003). Landscapes are then defined as 'culturally produced artifacts' (Barndt 2009, 273), where culture is a synonym of communication (Harrison 2004), rendering visible what others have not yet seen. *Incompiuto Siciliano*'s framing as a landscape between tradition and modernity is a mirror which reflects both conservative and critical approaches to ruins. To return to Stead's discussion of Speer and Benjamin, Stead explains that Speer diminished the relevance of modern ruins, in contrast to the monuments of the ancient past, due to their inability to inspire heroic messages for future generations. Moreover, modern ruins do not even fit Speer's aesthetic criteria, because they have not passed through any time filter. The German architect preferred the beautiful effect that nature and weather produce in his idea of 'natural' ruins – which thus are placed 'on the scale of geological time' (Stead 2003, 54). In this sense, Speer is already envisaging a ruined state at the time of planning, hoping that in a distant future, his constructions could resemble – and be admired just like – Roman constructions. Or in other words, Speer's



approach to ruins is so static that for him, even if a society fades away, its power is transmitted through eternal ruins.

In contrast to this conservative view, in ‘Benjamin’s philosophy the ruin provides an emblem of allegory as a critical tool for historical materialism’ (Stead 2003, 51). Stead explains that Benjamin’s perspective allows us to progress from ruin as a mere ‘object’ to ruin as an actual ‘process’. In this way, ruins no longer use their beauty to hide their ‘historical truth’; rather, the allegory makes ruins go *beyond* aesthetics, to a place where, once they are detached from romantic and mythologizing assumptions, their critical existence is revealed: ‘Where Benjamin sees transience and decay, Speer sees permanence and continuation’ (Stead 2003, 59).

Incompiuto Siciliano is particularly interesting for representing a combination of both views, and for using the resources of a conservative perspective to silently induce critical thinking. Alterazioni Video presents Incompiuto Siciliano as splendid decaying monuments, as the remnants of a great empire of antiquity. The artistic basis for this lies in picturing Incompiuto Siciliano as spaces filled with Speer’s classical aesthetics, though, in its application to modern ruins, the ‘classical’ turns into ‘critical’. It is certainly true that the focus is not on political corruption or wasted funds; however, for a not-too-naïve viewer, there is no doubt that, *beyond* this aestheticization, there is a strong denunciation. Such is the implicit criticism in Incompiuto Siciliano: it is a powerful art project because it deliberately blurs the line between what is right and what is wrong by not blaming anyone in particular. It ironically adopts a romanticizing positivistic gaze towards a situation that is undoubtedly negative. Yet, Incompiuto Siciliano is ultimately an example of Benjamin’s allegory, where a critical reading of ruins inevitably arises in the viewer’s mind. It cannot be denied that the radical depolitization of Incompiuto Siciliano requires a process of repolitization to be fully understood, which is why, as suggested above, the project, while not engaging in criticism, is paradoxically imbued with criticism.

This is why it is reasonable for Bargna (2011) to present Alterazioni Video as art activists or political artists, using conscious provocation to get a critical reaction from spectators. The artists act as mediators, asking for an active reception of their work that entails a higher degree of complexity than the passive sacralization of traditional art. Incompiuto Siciliano thus becomes an act of engagement with society, a democratic inclusion in which creative irreverence is a strategy to shed light on oblivion:

Creativity and information are no longer distinct [...] therefore we must think of how to inform with a light touch, how to yield pleasure while maintaining a political grasp, how to know and to dream at one and the same time (O’Reilly 2009, 9).

This statement is from O’Reilly’s foreword for Alfredo Cramerotti’s *Aesthetic Journalism: How to Inform without Informing* (2009), the last theoretical reference point by which Alterazioni Videos frames its artistic approach (Masu, Interview, 13 November 2015). Cramerotti gives as one example of ‘aesthetic journalism’ an art film about Uganda under Idi Amin that ‘tells the viewer the harsh reality without actually informing about what went on there’ (Cramerotti 2009, 30–31). Aesthetic journalism involves the investigation of particular circumstances taking place in particular contexts, but

its modes of representation belong to art media and not to channels of journalistic presentation. For the author, aesthetic journalism contributes to building '(critical) knowledge with the mere use of a new aesthetic "regime"' (Cramerotti 2009, 22). This is because 'knowledge and aesthetics are not necessarily opposite' (Cramerotti 2009, 28) and he finally applies Umberto Eco's notion of 'open work' to note the essential role of the spectator in the completion of art.

It is not hard then to perceive the similarities between aesthetic journalism and *Incompiuto Siciliano* as art project as being due to the common interest in creating new aesthetic perceptions to spread a critical message in an indirect way. Indeed, though *Alterazioni Video*'s contribution is as intangible as a shift of perception can be, the group has attempted to communicate this through the elaboration of short films, posters, sculptures and performances. However, before going deeper into an interpretative analysis of these, let us take some time to explain three artistic projects in the history of contemporary art that inspired *Incompiuto Siciliano*.

## ARTISTIC INSPIRATIONS FOR INCOMPIUTO SICILIANO

*Alterazioni Video* has stated that the concept of *Incompiuto Siciliano* was developed from three artistic projects (Masu, Interview, 13 November 2015). The projects date from the 1970s to the 1990s, and this timeframe, together with the fact that they focus on a re-interpretative relation with existing modern ruins rather than the skilful production of new art pieces, allows them to be categorized into the conceptual art tradition. An objective description of each of these in the first place will subsequently lead – due to their notorious resemblances – to an appropriate contextualization of *Incompiuto Siciliano*.

### **Robert Smithson – Hotel Palenque, 1969–72**

In 1969, the American artist Robert Smithson left New York for a remote half-finished hotel not far from the archaeological Mayan site of Palenque, located in the midst of the jungle of southern Mexico (Wakefield 1995). Three years later, in 1972, he gave an account of this trip in a lecture for architecture students at the University of Utah that placed his pictures and oral communications as being a form of art<sup>2</sup>. His exploration of the unfinished spatiality of the hotel, with 'floors that really go to nowhere and stairways that just disappear into clouds' (Smithson 1995, 120), suggests to him the prison series of Giovanni Piranesi (Fig. 5). However, the most effective stylistic device that Smithson used is that of continuously comparing the hotel with Mayan temples. For him, both hotel and temples are ruins conceived with the same 'spirit', making it possible to frame the hotel in the rhetoric of archaeological time and describing it as a 'man-made wonder'.

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2 Along with the transcript published as (Smithson 1995), a recording of the 1972 lecture is available at: [http://ubu.com/film/smithson\\_hotel.html](http://ubu.com/film/smithson_hotel.html)

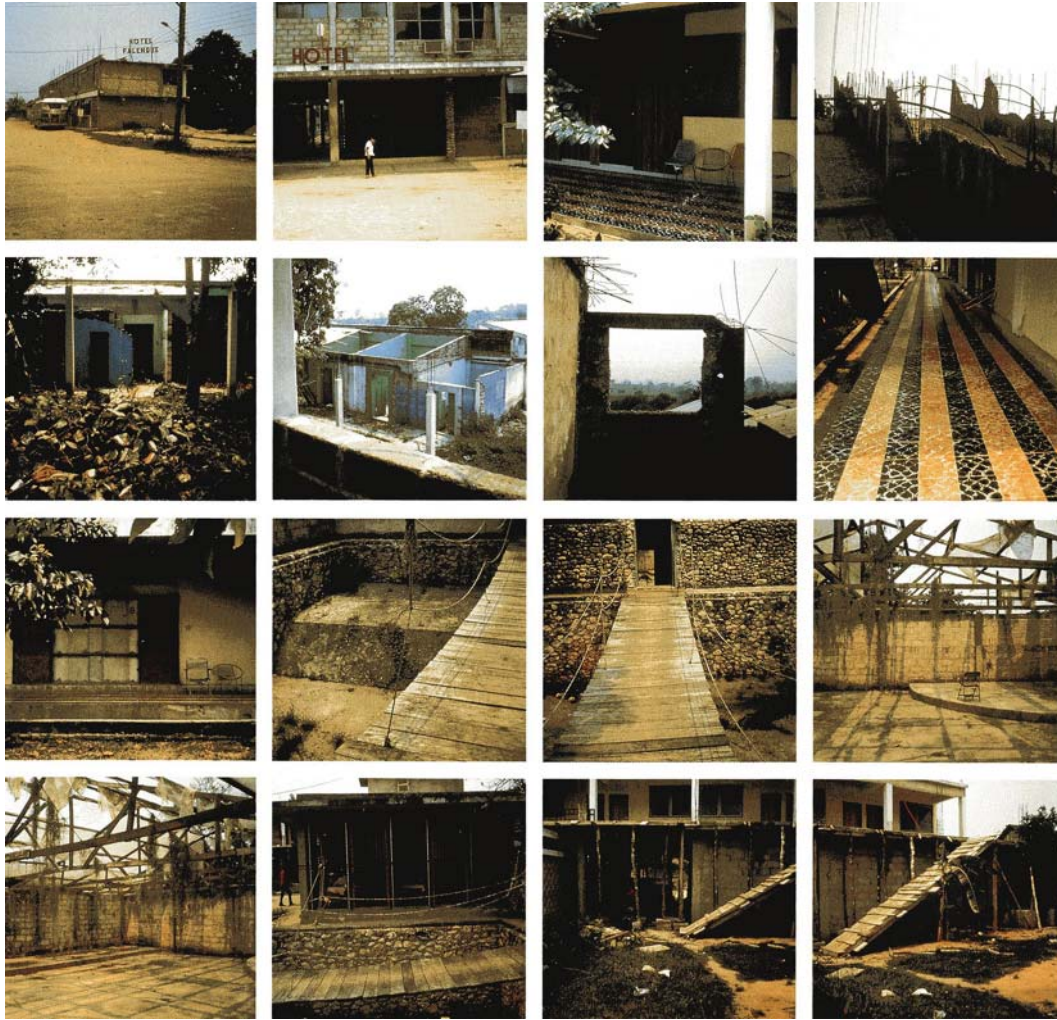


Fig. 5. Robert Smithson's pictures from *Hotel Palenque*  
Source: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

Smithson thus used the archaeological environment in which the hotel is located to perceive it as a Mayan ruin – in the same way *Incompiuto Siciliano* inaugurates an architectural style in a country where the weight of architectural tradition is well known. In both cases, the existence of a solid heritage background justifies and strengthens the artists' approach as a radical contrast and provocation. Yet, it is not difficult for us to see that *Hotel Palenque* and *Incompiuto Siciliano* also share the use of irony to cause a gaze turn. Acting as a tourist who has just come back from his holidays, Smithson shows his slides through a beamer and invites the audience to repeat his experience. This normalized transfiguration of reality is the reason why Jaua relates Smithson's project to 'the entropic power of laughter' (Jaua 2008, own translation), where humour becomes a useful tool to build an efficient discourse<sup>3</sup>. Hence, to propose that a half-finished hotel in Mexico induces the same aesthetic reactions as a Mayan ruin, or that a set of unfinished public works in Italy constitutes a new architectural style, can both be interpreted as a satirical deployment of familiar references.

3 Indeed, audience laughter can be heard in parts of the recording of Smithson's lecture.

### Gordon Matta-Clark – Day’s End

Nothing is left from *Day’s End* after police closed it down in 1972 – on the day of its inauguration – and the New York City’s jurisdiction demolished it two years later (Hinojosa 2007). Artist Gordon Matta-Clark had chosen an abandoned industrial building in Pier 52 to develop one of his famous interventions based on material subtractions. The building, though charged with the memories of an important industrial past, was located in a declining and neglected area, and its only use at that time was by men seeking random gay sexual encounters (Lee 1999). Over two months, Matta-Clark extracted parts of both the roof and the walls, creating a series of elliptical holes that generated a dynamic game of lights reflected on the Hudson River<sup>4</sup> (Fig. 6). The artist’s intention was to propose a controversial dialectic between the usual grandiose assumptions applied to traditional monuments and the new alternative and individualized readings of the past contextualized in the present (Zalman 2005).

The physical intervention involved in creating *Day’s End* distinguishes the project from the approach of *Incompiuto Siciliano*. The former modified a ruin to provoke a shift in perspective, while *Alterazioni Video* suggests that a shift can be achieved without touching the structure being viewed. However, the elements that connect the two projects are far more numerous than those that distinguish them. In both instances, a revision of the aesthetic paradigm makes it possible to see ruination with new eyes, and neglected spaces are put on display so that society can ask uncomfortable questions about the origin and present state of the situation: ‘Who owned the building? What was it being used for? Was it really abandoned?’ (Lee 1999, 130). On the other hand, the notion of an appropriate heritage context is also present. Zalman (2005) notes that not far from Matta-Clark’s project one can find the Statue of Liberty, representing a self-glorifying American identity; *Incompiuto Siciliano* similarly builds bridges with a territory that is famous – for instance, with the outstanding Greek ruins in Agrigento’s Valley of the Temples. In both cases, by establishing a parallelism between monuments of the heritage establishment and the potential counter-meanings modern ruins evoke, Matta-Clark and *Alterazioni Video* bring attention back to places that, until then, had remained ignored.

### Martin Kippenberger – MoMAS

There is little documentation on *MoMAS*, the conceptual artwork ‘created’ by the German artist Martin Kippenberger (Fig. 7). One of the few existing writings is Krieger’s review, which introduces the project as follows:

The founding story of the Museum of Modern Art Syros (MoMAS) – Kippenberger’s ‘museum’ project from 1993 until 1996 – reads somewhat like a creation myth. In 1993, Kippenberger came upon an abandoned, incomplete slaughterhouse while strolling on the Greek island of Syros [...] It had no walls and consisted of little more than a floor and a roof with a few pillars to support it. Yet, standing atop a hill, the skeletal construction somehow held a stately profile. Despite its humble intended function, its

4 A 23-minute film on the work’s elaboration process and final result is available at: [http://www.ubu.com/film/gmc\\_daysend.html](http://www.ubu.com/film/gmc_daysend.html)



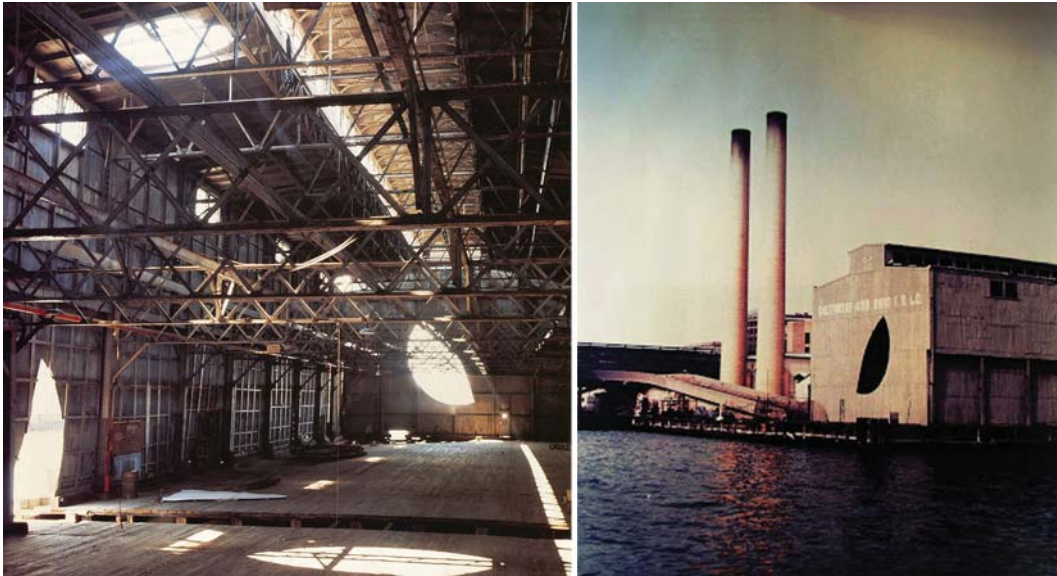


Fig. 6. Inside and outside views of Gordon Matta-Clark's *Day's End*  
Source: Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark

triangular roof and white pillars, standing like columns, reminded Kippenberger of some 20<sup>th</sup> century Acropolis. And with its view of the Mediterranean, the site was perfect. Kippenberger thus declared the structure to be his own museum. Through a simple, *deictic act*, Kippenberger had transformed the frame of the slaughterhouse into an institutional 'frame'. No alterations were made to it. *MoMAS* was an architectural readymade (Krieger 2011, 65, own emphasis).



Fig. 7. Martin Kippenberger's *MoMAS*  
Source: Riiko Sakkinen, Estate of Martin Kippenberger and Maria Papadimitriou



Krieger goes on to recount how the museum held one exhibition per year until 1996, hosting ‘possibly the smallest audience in the world’ (Krieger 2011, 65). After Kippenberger’s death in 1997, *MoMAS* ceased activity and today, the structure has been completed and converted into a municipal government sewage plant (De la Barra 2006).

The parallels between Kippenberger’s project and *Incompiuto Siciliano* are not difficult to see. First, the assimilation of *MoMAS* as a sort of Acropolis comes to fit – once more – the monumental and classical attributes applied in the Italian case. But more important is what Krieger, using critical theory, calls ‘deictic act’. *Deictic* here is a ‘class of word whose meaning can only be fully determined by context’ (Buchanan 2010, 115). Hence, to label an uncompleted slaughterhouse a ‘museum’ or to declare an unfinished public work as part of an ‘architectural style’ automatically becomes an implicit critical gesture that is comprehensible only if we know the context in which it is pronounced. Kippenberger’s aim was to address ‘the question of how the institutional frame supports and influences the value assigned to works’ (Krieger 2011, 9); *Alterazioni Video* reveals the disastrous Italian public management of the last decades, but the group does it by pushing the boundaries of what deserves to be seen as beautiful and what does not. In any case, it seems clear that after the extrapolation of *MoMAS* into the rhetoric of *Incompiuto Siciliano*, it is possible to read a coherent aesthetic transfiguration in the artistic perception of modern ruins.

### Other examples

Finally, before going deeper into *Alterazioni Video*’s practice, it is worth surveying how some other contemporary artists have also disrupted the way in which modern ruins are usually discussed. Camilo José Vergara’s photographic work (1999) on abandoned automobile factories in Detroit leads him to suggest that such an ‘American Acropolis’ should be maintained as a museum of the tragic fate of capitalism; in Egypt, a pair of German artists, Sabine Haubitz and Stefanie Zoche, have documented a considerable variety of unfinished five-star hotel complexes as ‘monuments to failed investment’ (Gill 2008); while Hernández and Zammit (2012) have presented a collection of unfinished houses in Spain as if they were on sale in a real estate catalogue. It is certainly impossible not to see the implicit – though strong – criticism behind this creative consideration of modern ruins.

## ART PROJECTS DERIVING FROM INCOMPIUTO SICILIANO

*Incompiuto Siciliano* focuses on shifting the perspective through which we stare at unfinished public works. As such, its final objective is not the production of objects, but the mentioned gaze turn in itself. However, in order to generate this new aesthetic paradigm, *Alterazioni Video* has opted for carrying out several artistic projects that, rather than being ends in themselves, should be seen as a medium to originate a new *way of seeing*.

After a small exhibition in Rome, Incompiuto Siciliano's debut within the art world was the European Biennial of Contemporary Art *Manifesta 7*, held in 2008. *Alterazioni Video* exhibited, among other pieces, a sculpture and a series of collages. The sculpture, which remained untitled, was formed of a concrete table out of which a real cactus emerges (Fig. 8). This can be interpreted as a beautiful abstraction of Incompiuto Siciliano's materiality: straight lines of cement combined with the organic shapes expressed by a colonizing living plant. The collages were printed as 150 x 100-cm posters and their background shows data about and layouts of unfinished buildings in Giarre (Fig. 9). They focus on specific sites through the introduction of pop elements in the foreground: vintage cars refer to Giarre's unfinished car-park; a swimmer is surrounded by pictures of the half-finished Olympic swimming-pool, a project interrupted in 1985; once more a cactus appears, this time bringing us to a multi-function hall; and a human skeleton in a position of prayer personifies the death of an old people's home, uncompleted since 1987.



Fig. 8. Untitled sculpture  
Source: *Alterazioni Video*, 2008

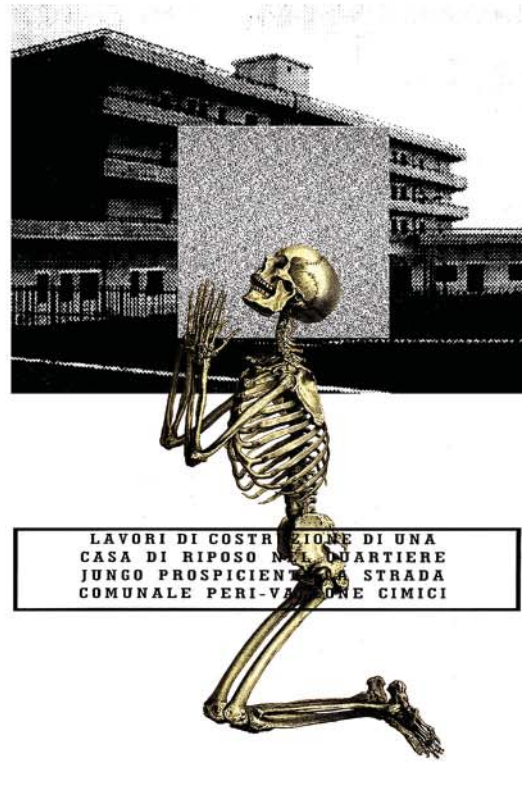
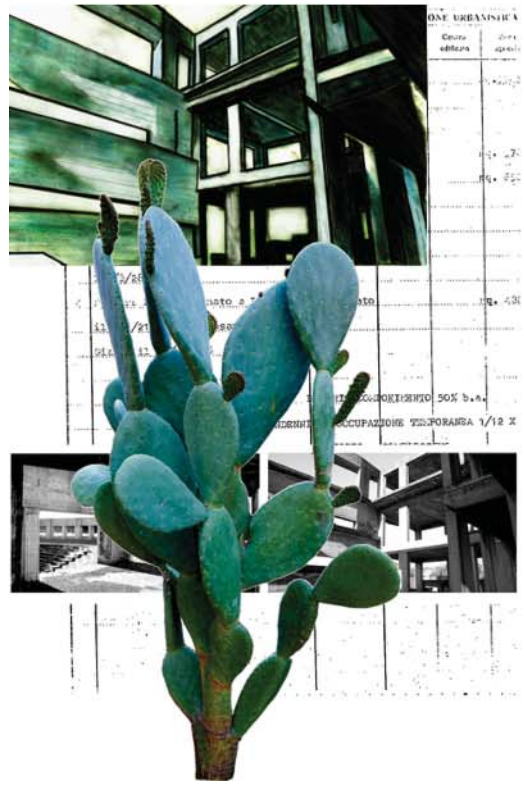
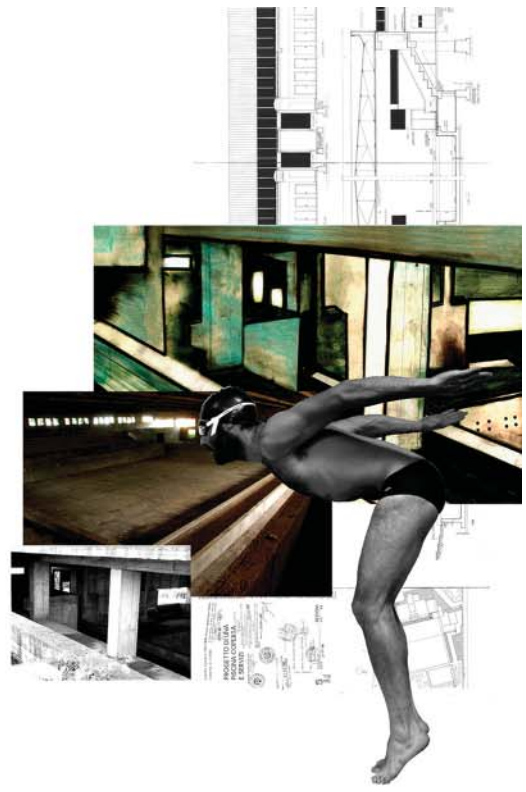


Fig. 9. Series of collages  
Source: Alterazioni Video, 2008



Bargna (2011) suggests that Alterazioni Video's art expressions might be related to how political power uses media to spread a certain message, yet the use of political tools conveys an artistic experience whose purpose is both critical and aestheticizing. The way that art performances are able to congregate people has a parallelism with public demonstrations, and this fits the political dimension expressed here. This was the case with the first 'polo match' played in Giarre's Athletic Stadium and Polo Field. Organized by Alterazioni Video, together with the association Effetto Domino, this form of art happening took place on 11 December, 2011, resulting in a festive event that was filmed and edited as a 3-minute video by the Sicilian online newspaper *CTzen*<sup>5</sup>.

The video begins by showing the organizers characterized as polo players but, instead of riding real horses, they ride wooden hobby horses. Before starting the game, the players, organized into two teams, listen to the Italian national anthem with their hands on their hearts. The atmosphere is charged with a ridiculous solemnity. After this, they play, they enjoy themselves, and above all, they laugh. The result of the match is not relevant at all; the important point is how dozens of locals have come to watch this surreal performance from the stadium's seating area. Interviews are conducted with the organizers, and they explain that their intention is to raise awareness about the uncompleted location, re-marking it as a potential site not only for sport facilities but for potential cultural or commercial uses. Despite the evident provocation, the locals respond in a very positive way, which is ultimately summarized in a middle-aged man's statement: 'I totally agree with this irony, whose meaning is clearly addressed to claims for hopeful expectations' (CTzen 2011, own translation).

The performance stresses the engaging and experimental aspects of the practice; the video footage merely registers what actually happened. In contrast to this documentary approach, in the last nine years Alterazioni Video has completed around a dozen fiction films. Of these, the one dedicated to *Incompiuto Siciliano* is *Per Troppo Amore*, shot between 2010 and 2012, which was first exhibited in November 2012 at the Film Festival *Lo Schemo dell'arte*. This 22-minute piece, with which Marc Augé actively collaborated, is a low-budget collage of clips that explores the aesthetic possibilities of sobriety and irony, with locals as amateur actors<sup>6</sup>. Its psychedelic argument has been summarized:

[Augé gives voice to an] alien with the form of a dog that arrives to Giarre and gets into some of the unfinished buildings. And even if he comes from a planet that is way more developed and intelligent than ours, he is not able to comprehend anything (Magi 2012, own translation).

Before this happens, the film introduces the Sicilian landscape (Fig. 10) by showing an aestheticized version of the dam in the town of Blufi, unfinished since 1990, and then moving on to Giarre's uncompleted Chico Mendes park, where a teenage girl describes to a friend how such a location is 'very beautiful'. After the trinity formed by dog/alien/Augé visits several unfinished public works in Giarre, we hear his voiced-over thoughts calling for profound rethinking:

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5 The video is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYrsJ7nJE9Y>

6 The trailer of *Per Troppo Amore* is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyxpoQGFYg4>

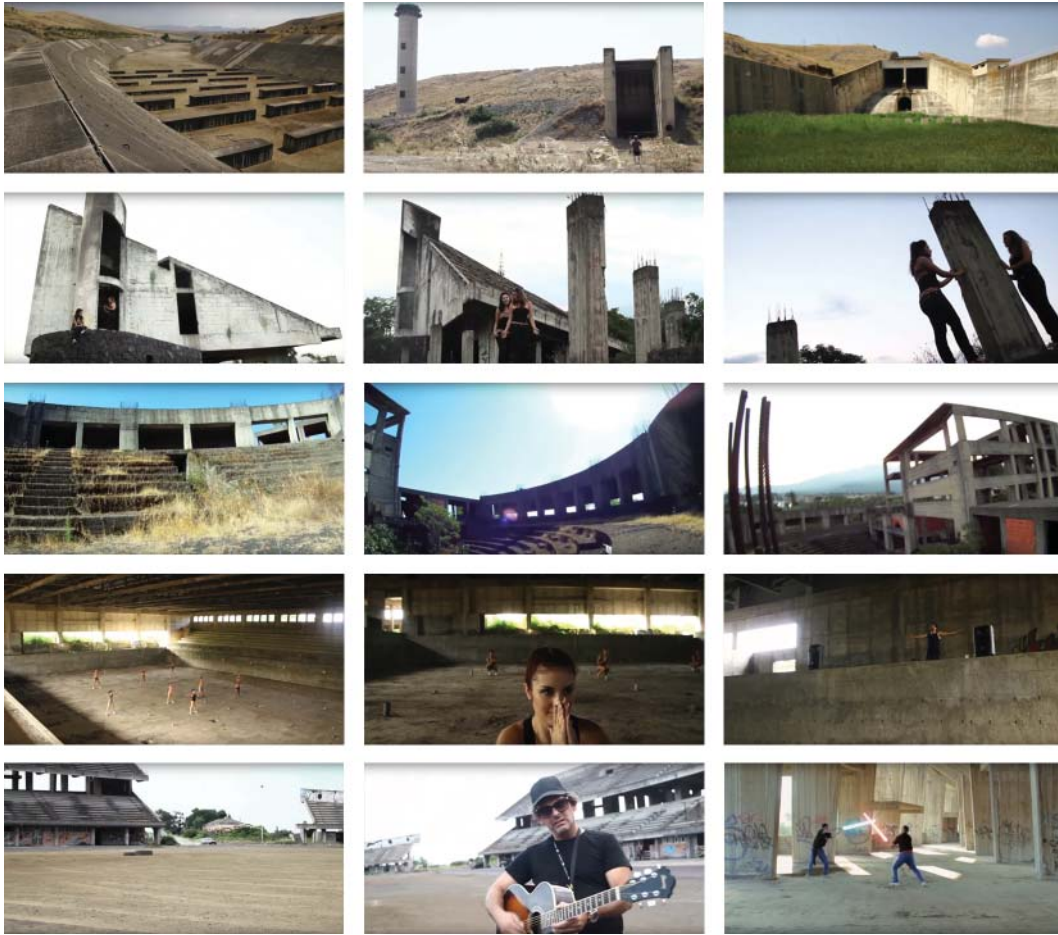


Fig. 10. Captions from *Per Troppo Amore*  
Source: Alterazioni Video, 2012

For years men have persevered in resuscitating ruins of the past. Tourists still come from all over the world to admire them. They travel through space to admire the work of time like in Greece, Guatemala or Cambodia; all countries where the traces of the past need to be resuscitated to believe in the future. The beauty of what should have been, the beauty of that moment in which anything could have happened. The beauty of the original gesture, of the interrupted momentum. They also describe the beauty of the landscape in which they are set. The beauty of nature and of the vegetation that almost completely covers them in some areas (Alterazioni Video 2012, transcribed subtitles).

*Per Troppo Amore* is punctuated by more extravagant scenarios and situations, bringing life to places that never before featured any life. However, it is remarkable how, despite being a film 'without an end' (Alterazioni Video n.d. 1), its final credits are accompanied by real press cuttings that deal with unfinished public works and *Incompiuto Siciliano* – demonstrating the public and political repercussion of Alterazioni Video's project in local and national media. Yet, it is not unreasonable to perceive that there is space for serious criticism *beyond* *Incompiuto Siciliano*'s particular aestheticization. In addition to this, such an original way of revealing by not revealing has attracted the attention of further art practitioners who, along the same lines as Alterazioni Video's proposal, have also treated unfinished public works from an aestheticizing point of view.



Perhaps the most notable example is Benoit Felici's 32-minute documentary film *Unfinished Italy*<sup>7</sup>. Felici travels around Sicily in order to capture the beauty of unfinished public works, the beauty 'of this which could have been. Of this which is not yet there. Of this might be one day' (Felici 2011). Undoubtedly, his film is an aestheticizing exercise that includes pleasant portraits of the buildings, showing their detail and monumentality. The use of traditional Sicilian music to accompany this imagery of decay gives a feeling of melancholic solitude. However, for Felici, the beauty of ruins is only an excuse to dig deeper. Through the inclusion of interviews conducted with locals, it is clear that the director's intention is *also* to provide a critical explanation of the political reasons for the phenomenon. The film finally takes a positive turn, displaying how people interact with unfinished public works on a daily basis. All of a sudden, the melancholic solitude is replaced by a human portrayal of ruins.

In a similar critical approach to the beauty of unfinished public works, in 2013 the Italian photographer Angelo Antolino portrayed dozens of these ruins during a trip that took him to different locations around Italy. Though his images are romanticized by the fact of having mostly been taken in twilight hours, they come to express 'billions of euros and thousands of acres unnecessarily cementified' (Antolino 2013). Antolino's aesthetic criticism has been even covered by the Italian edition of *National Geographic*, which published his pictures together with brief summaries of the stories of specific failed buildings (Gravino 2013).

In summary, works deriving from *Incompiuto Siciliano* are a demonstration of how art uses the aestheticizing aspect of ruins to build a critical discourse which, ultimately, may contain the expectation of engagement. This is particularly relevant because, in the last few years, ruin imagery has been largely accused of pursuing a merely romanticizing purpose that trivializes the harsh reality behind ruins' existence. Embedding *Incompiuto Siciliano* within this discussion serves to align Alterazioni Video's approach with literatures that claim the aestheticization of ruins is a first step towards subsequent comprehension.

## BEYOND THE CONTROVERSY IN THE AESTHETICIZATION OF MODERN RUINS

It is no secret that, throughout modern history, artists have been largely fascinated with ruins. Since the age of Romantic paintings, classical ruins have been portrayed in a picturesque manner, evoking sublime aesthetic values such as 'finality, beauty, majesty, glorious memory, tragedy, loss, and historical import' (Mah 2012, 7). In the early depiction of modern decay, twentieth avant-gardes also persisted in these melancholic and nostalgic feelings (Kemp 1990). Back then, the focus on representing ruins was made possible by the new popularization of photography – an evolving relation that has considerably intensified in the last decade (Pálsson 2012). Today, 'the taste for

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7 The trailer of *Unfinished Italy* is available at: <https://vimeo.com/17796072>

urban decay seems to be global' (Gibas 2010, 156), and as a matter of fact, visual representations of modern ruins are as global as the era in which we live: photographs contain similar architectural elements and stylistic conditions regardless of the exact location where they were taken (Fein 2011). Ruins are also exhibited in countless media such as books, films or advertisements (Garrett 2013); it is not unreasonable to say that we are in the midst of 'an unexpected golden age for dereliction' (Manaugh 2008, 7). Moreover, due to the current easy accessibility of recording devices and the sharing of pictures through social media, the line between professionals and amateurs has been blurred, posing ruin representation as a democratized practice (Herstad 2014). Or, in Mullins's words, '[t]oday's ruin photography is perhaps an art of the people' (2014, 28).

In this context, it is important to note that 'ruins themselves carry a meaning that is impossible to detach from their image' (Remenapp 2015, 12), and, consequently, they are still perceived as threatening spaces usually associated with destruction, uncertainty and crime (Harvey 2000; Cowie and Heathcott 2003). However, the way ruins are portrayed retains their picturesque attributes, and such an affective gaze may well eclipse a harsh reality that lies behind them (Cunningham 2011). From this last thought, a series of undeniably negative assumptions arise, and *Incompiuto Siciliano* represents the perfect case study for seeing how it is possible to go *beyond* these. They place the aestheticization of unfinished public works as a justified activity that – in a compatible manner – opens the possibility for deeper critical analyses.

As noted above, the most recurrent way of dismissing ruin imagery is to label it as 'ruin porn'. Here, the term 'porn' does not have sexual connotations, but is used to emphasize the both passionate and guilty desire for ruins as disposable consumption spaces (Vultee 2013; Piccini 2014), and to indicate a 'one-eyed portrayal of urban decay that turns social and material misery into something seductive and aesthetically pleasing' (Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014, 7). In this context, privileged 'outsiders' are blamed for simplifying, trivializing or even obscuring the historical conditionings that have caused a ruin, through a merely sensual representation (High and Lewis 2007; Leary 2011). This criticism may be applied to *Alterazioni Video* because, after all, they are a group of artists who come from one of the richest parts of Italy (the north), and who deliberately reject focusing on the political origins of unfinished public works. However, as mentioned before, their 'outsider' status does bring added value, since they are able to see things that locals had long normalized and do not see anymore.

'Ruin porn' has also been accused over its actual form of representation, which usually excludes people and demonstrates a lack of engagement (Leary 2011; Shanks 2014). The majority of abandoned sites photographed today correspond to places where people used to live and work, such as former industrial plants or derelict residential areas (Mah 2012; Strangleman 2013). In these cases, buildings are detached from memories and 'any human presence is exhibited by the trace of their past presence' (Cunningham 2011). The question whether this critique is appropriate in the case of *Incompiuto Siciliano* is an interesting one, because we are now dealing with spaces that were never used or inhabited. Basilico's or Antolino's pictures are then not unfair to anyone; they simply express the authenticity of unfinished public works. These spaces have always been empty, and therefore they are portrayed as such. And even if we choose to validate the

controversy around human presence, it is worth recalling how Alterazioni Video has suggested the aestheticization of *Incompiuto Siciliano* without leaving people entirely aside. The artists' commitment here is reflected in the performance at the Polo Field, and in their film: both included the participation of locals who – as also in Felici's documentary film – normalize the eventual re-use of the sites in a productive way.

'Ruin porn' is also criticized for simply reinforcing problems, contributing to public indignation. Blackmar (2001) notes how pictures of dereliction imply 'sadness'; Rosenberg (2011) directly accuses ruin depiction of being 'counter-productive' for representing communities as if they are beyond help; and Ryzewsky (2014) documents the potential 'damage' that images do to resentful people. Remenapp goes further, warning that artists 'can create an image that is aesthetically pleasing in way that may or may not correspond to reality' (2015, 15). These accusations may contain truth, but no-one who has understood *Incompiuto Siciliano*'s critical aestheticization could take such a view of Alterazioni Video's work. Disassociated from the positivistic filter that Alterazioni Video proposes, imagery of unfinished public works is nothing more than the representation of political corruption and the Italian stigma of the mafia; is this not the reality that *Incompiuto Siciliano* aims to change? Are not rage and disillusionment what Alterazioni Video faces?

These meaningful questions lead us to understand Alterazioni Video as art – or even archaeological – activists, because *Incompiuto Siciliano* is, ultimately, a socially committed project. Such assimilation is not new in the aestheticization of modern ruins. In his study of artistic representations of contemporary abandonment in China, Chu (2012) highlights the 'ecological consciousness' embedded in several projects, to the extent of labelling them 'eco-art'. For him, the value of art lies in showing a landscape that is no longer associated with negative ruins but with an awareness of 'unity and harmony'. Moreover, in the analysis of the imaginary addressed to abandoned old ships in Bangladeshi wastelands, Crang (2010) documents how artworks have contributed to making visible the leftovers of global consumerism. Though acknowledging that they can only be fully interpreted after studying the economic conditions that caused this situation, the beauty of such portrayals is that they have the potential to be used in media campaigns, making it possible to 'speak to the wider agenda of the environment, global responsibility, and inequality' (Crang 2010, 1089). In the view of these examples, it is not unreasonable to consider *Incompiuto Siciliano* as a subtle paradigm of political art, whose interest, just like Pusca notes in ruin photographs, 'is not so much the "things" they depict, as the "politics" behind them' (Pusca 2014, 35). And, since '[n]ew forms of seeing create new possibilities for action' (Pusca 2010, 244), the aestheticized transfiguration of the ruined landscape in *Incompiuto Siciliano* comes to fit Martin's vision (2014), in which ruin imagery serves as a critique of the existing contexts without rejecting the possibility of improving them.

This notion of 'improvement', which is undoubtedly present in the shift of perception that Alterazioni Video suggests, is better understood through the 'anesthetization' effect that Pusca (2010) notes in her contribution on industrial abandonment of Postcommunist European countries. In this sense, aestheticization moves into anesthetization as long as images of ruins are

opening up new ways of engaging with these spaces by tapping into their emotional and redemptive potential: their ability to provide both hope and a new sense of purpose to the communities that surround them. Decay need thus not always symbolize the death of a particular utopia but also the breeding ground of new hopes and utopias (Pusca 2010, 240).

Incompiuto Siciliano's visual impact enlarges productive debates, and it has succeeded in compelling further questions. As noted in Chapter 1, its approach of aestheticized exposure has resulted in a series of academic and journalistic contributions that have investigated the phenomenon more deeply; it has also prompted architecture workshops seeking strategies of re-valorization and eventual re-activation (Alterazioni Video n.d. 2). Incompiuto Siciliano is an extraordinary example of how the aestheticization of modern ruins, as noted by Mullins (2012), awakens our curiosity. Therefore, far from condemning Alterazioni Video for its ironic and occasionally reductive manner of presenting Incompiuto Siciliano as something 'beautiful', we should rather be thankful because such a project uses the shortcomings of aesthetics to place arts as a valid method for engaging with ruins – just like Pétursdóttir and Olsen (2014) in particular have addressed the subject in the context of photography. With Incompiuto Siciliano, Alterazioni Video has created an architectural style as their preferred way to reflect on unfinished public works. However, further involvement remains our own responsibility:

Just because [artists] are not critical in the ways some of us might want them to be (although often times they are), it does not mean that their idea cannot be adopted for critical purposes [...] The point I want to make then, is that each subsequent generation makes its own art, or does its own critique in different ways. But that is not to say that these interventions cannot, in turn, be used in different ways later (Strangleman 2013, 34-35).

## CONCLUSION

This chapter poses Incompiuto Siciliano as a paradigmatic case in which the aestheticization of modern ruins, far from being simplistic, conveys a complex irony that ends up being a creative strategy to recover unfinished sites from oblivion – an ongoing debate within the literature of contemporary archaeology. Incompiuto Siciliano is an artistic project that, by labelling unfinished public works as a beautiful architectural style, aims to shift our perception towards the contemporary ruined landscape. In this sense, Alterazioni Video draws on the fact that both 'ruin' and 'landscape' are mental constructions susceptible to modification through the way we look at them, and even the way we refer to them (Berger 1972; Augé 2003; Schama 1995).

Alterazioni Video's points of reference – Smithson, Matta-Clark and Kippenberger – help to locate Incompiuto Siciliano within an artistic tradition where applying the aestheticizing attributes of classical ruination to modern dereliction turns out to be an ironic strategy to establish a dialogue between the conservative and critical approaches to ruins outlined by Stead (2003). It seems that there is nothing funnier than granting the pompous qualities of old ruins to modern waste. Ultimately, this is an effective

way of explaining complex places and situations that otherwise would be difficult to understand. Similarly, in Alterazioni Video's graphic art, sculpture, performance and film, the aestheticizing attributes encountered in unfinished public works are the breeding ground for subsequent critical and engaged implications which have also made visible the phenomenon of unfinished public works. Aestheticization has become a means to a very particular end: to implicitly recount how the Italian landscape, especially in Sicily, has been dramatically shaped in the last 50 years. By rejecting a truly realistic depiction of the phenomenon, and not seeking to provide information as such, *Incompiuto Siciliano* succeeds in prompting spectator responses, as with Cramerotti's 'aesthetic journalism' (2009). *Incompiuto Siciliano* then expresses that beauty and criticism are not incompatible; or, what is more, that a subtle critique is stronger than factual information.

Regarding the usual criticisms of the aestheticization of modern ruins (Cunningham 2011; Leary 2011; Rosenberg 2011; Remenapp 2015), we can certainly recognize that one of the first emotions when viewing an unfinished public work is indignation. In Italy, these half-constructions are undoubtedly associated with wasted funds, the financial interests of a corrupt minority, Italian criminality, the systematic violation of territory and, ultimately, an inability to solve these problems over the last decades. It may well be argued that *Incompiuto Siciliano* essentially shows an aesthetic reality while deliberately ignoring the political context; however, its original position is what makes it productive – promoting constructive fascination and aligned with positive approaches found in contemporary archaeology (Mullins 2012, 2014; Strangleman 2013; Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014; Piccini 2014; Pusca 2010, 2014).

It cannot be said that Alterazioni Video has not investigated unfinished public works in depth; the group has simply done it in a different way, its own way. Using the tools with which they are familiar, they demonstrate that ruins' aestheticization is a first step towards re-valorization and eventual re-activation. *Incompiuto Siciliano* shows that there is space for reflection *beyond* aestheticization. It also makes evident that, when arts focus attention on 'something', this 'something' is potentially important for the rest of the society – although the way that it is tackled will depend on the actor. Artistic approaches to ruins are not new and they will not cease in the future; therefore, we would do well to regard them as fruitful contributions.

Perhaps this debate could be summarized by coming back once more to one of Alterazioni Video's bedside books, the legendary *Ways of Seeing* written by John Berger. The very first sentence says: 'Seeing comes before words' (Berger 1972, 7). Similarly, *Incompiuto Siciliano* has taught us to see; words should come after.



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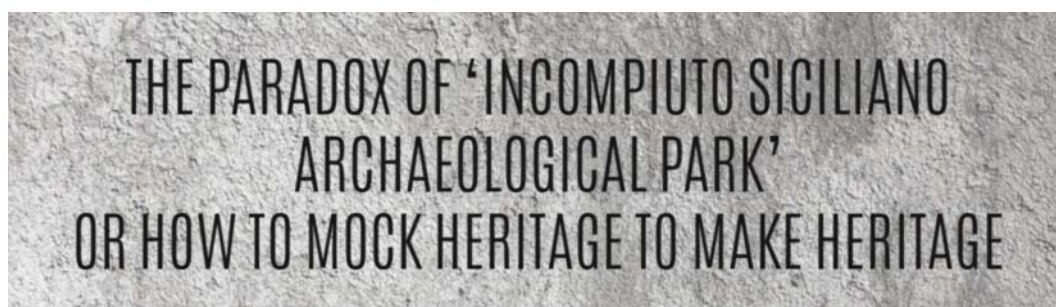
## OUTLOOK

Chapter 2 has definitely moved on from any negative assumption associated with incompleteness to the fully positive view that Incompiuto Siciliano conveys. In order to do so, this chapter has reviewed most of the artistic operations carried out by Alterazioni Video but deliberately omitting the most important one: the eventual creation of the so-called 'Incompiuto Siciliano Archaeological Park'. In *Reckoning with Ruins*, DeSilvey and Edensor note how ruins serve to 'recast our relationship with the past' and yet, it seems appropriate to frame 'Incompiuto Siciliano Archaeological Park' in a heritage discourse that not only contemplates temporality but also memory and aesthetics. Therefore, 'unfinished heritage' emerges from the paradoxical qualities that are found: Is Incompiuto Siciliano new or old? Is it beautiful or ugly? Where is the line between mourning and celebration? In the following chapter, I state that there is no easy answer to these questions but rather an ambivalent condition that allows us to talk about a critical heritage whose novelty lies in the constructive use of irony, sarcasm and double meaning.





## Chapter 3



### INTRODUCTION

For the past 50 years Italy has focused part of its modernization on the erection of public works. However, due to malpractice which involved inaccurate cost estimates, a disregard for building regulations or design errors driven by political corruption and mafia networks (Santangelo 2009; Accattini 2011), around 400 public works have remained unfinished. Approximately a third of these ruins are located in Sicily alone, and thus, in 2007, the group of artists Alterazioni Video labelled this phenomenon as if it were a formal architectural style: 'Incompiuto Siciliano'. The artists trace back to film director Pietro Germi's words to justify the term 'Siciliano' as a representative factor of the whole of Italian society: 'I believe in Sicily the general Italian characters are slightly exaggerated, I would say that Sicily is Italy twice, that all Italians are Sicilians, but Sicilians are just more' (1964). Yet far from stigmatising a single Italian region, Incompiuto Siciliano refers to a systematic national problem (Alterazioni Video 2008), in which an unfinished public work is Incompiuto Siciliano regardless of its location in the country. Moreover, something becomes a 'style' when it is replicated, and the unfinished works caused by the 2008 speculative crisis in Spain (Concheiro 2012), Ireland (Kitchin, O'Callaghan, and Gleeson 2014), Iceland (Pálsson 2012) or any other country in the world (Moreno and Blanco 2014) lead us to think that Italian problematics are just preventient, not unique.

Be that as it may, every architectural style needs a site of reference and for Alterazioni Video and its Incompiuto Siciliano that site is what the artists themselves have called

'Incompiuto Siciliano Archaeological Park', to be found in Giarre<sup>1</sup>. ISAP is an on-going project: it has neither been officially recognised nor opened to the public yet; however, as one of Alterazioni Video's members states, 'it's real because it's there' (Masu, Interview, 26 May 2016)<sup>2</sup>. Hence, in the view of its proposed touristic plan (Fig. 1), ISAP would include nine unfinished public works erected between 1956 and 1987, whose original objective was to host social facilities (see Fig. 2 for a description of each). Through this project, the artists pursue to shift the negative meaning of the half-constructions by presenting them as a positive heritage that could be useful for future generations, reaching a horizon in which they could be transformed into 'a tourist destination, giving new value and meaning to the monuments of a perpetual present' (Alterazioni Video 2008, 194).

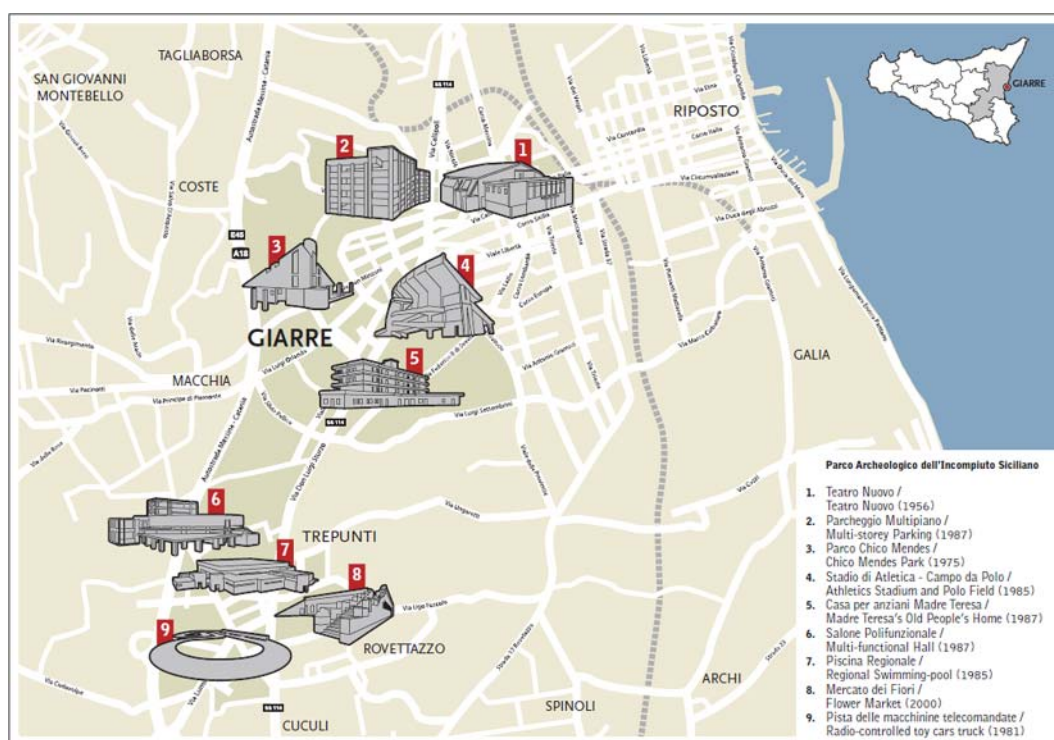


Fig. 1. Tourist map of the Incompiuto Siciliano Archaeological Park in Giarre  
Source: Alterazioni Video, 2008

1 Giarre is a Sicilian town with a population of 28,000 people and nine unfinished public works, a proportion that makes it the settlement with the highest density of incompleteness in Italy. On the other hand, and for operative reasons, Incompiuto Siciliano Archaeological Park will be referred to as 'ISAP' throughout this chapter.

2 This quote and many others that complement this chapter are the product of three different semi-structured interviews that I conducted with Andrea Masu between October 2014 and May 2016. These interviews are a particularly useful empirical method because, until now, there has not been a thoroughly written theorization on the artists' practices. Yet though national and international media have already covered the topic of Incompiuto Siciliano, this chapter is the first one to use Alterazioni Video's first-hand testimony regarding the archaeological park in the realm of academia.



Fig. 2. Unfinished public works in Giarre. From left-right and top-down: New Theatre; Multi-storey Car Park; Children's Park; Athletics Stadium and Polo Field; Care Home; Multi-functional Hall; Olympic Swimming-pool; Flower Market; Radio-controlled toy-car track.  
Source: Alterazioni Video, 2008

Of course, Alterazioni Video have had to deal with incomprehension due to the strange nature of their proposal. At the beginning, their intention to declare a new architectural style was viewed with suspicion by certain architects, who considered *Incompiuto Siciliano* as a provocation in an era where architectural styles no longer exist (Masu, Interview, 11 October 2014). Moreover, the act of formalising a style in a country like Italy, with a long architectural tradition and 51 sites inscribed on the World Heritage Site List, can only reinforce this provocation. Indeed, the artists had several meetings with Giarre's Mayor and his board of assessors in order to implement ISAP, and Masu recognises that it was difficult to convince politicians and the general public, who were initially completely against the project, 'turning them mad because they thought we wanted to revel on Giarre's embarrassment' (Interview, 26 May 2016)<sup>3</sup>. Other people simply wanted to take advantage of Alterazioni Video's initiative in order to take it in different directions. However, in 2010, Alterazioni Video was able to present the ISAP project to the political representatives in Giarre, and the council unanimously voted to task the Mayor with overcoming the institutional and legal hurdles towards the

3 The basic principles of *Incompiuto Siciliano* Archaeological Park and its primary negative reception somehow resemble the intention of artist Camilo José Vergara for creating an 'American Acropolis' out of Detroit's ruins. In the mid-1990s, controversial debates aroused regarding this issue. For more information, see:

<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/12/10/us/a-tribute-to-ruin-irks-detroit.html>

formalisation of the park. The harsh reality is that, six years after this mandate, nothing has really changed. The nine buildings of the park remain inoperative and, as time passes, it becomes ever more likely that the project will stagnate in the sea of red tape.

Despite this, ISAP is both an exceptional and provocative case study in that it deals with buildings that have yet to have had a first life to a straight recognition as heritage, and thus, it is not surprising that Alterazioni Video label it as a ‘pataphysical’ project (Masu, Interview, 13 November 2015). Pataphysics is a French pseudo-scientific cultural movement that, based on earlier writings by novelist Alfred Jarry, developed throughout the second half of the twentieth century. The members of this movement established The College of Pataphysics, founded in 1948 in Paris, whose objective was to mock professional associations and art academies by parodying their structures of organisation (Hugill 2012). Pataphysics so proposes the acceptance of grotesque aspects within a society, using humour as a way to contradict power, authoritarianism, and the academic and institutionalised thought (Bök 2002). Hence, ISAP draws from Pataphysics in how it exposes a society to their ghosts: unfinished public works caused by corruption or mafia practices that, with a simple gesture, become places to be visited. Or in Bargna’s words, a reality that ‘was considered outrageous until now, suddenly takes the form of something to be exhibited, a valuable resource, the ambiguity of the double sense’ (2009, 25). Moreover, ISAP’s pataphysical spirit is manifested in the fact that it is the designated site to represent an invented architectural style which not only has its own pompous manifesto (Alterazioni Video 2008), but is also symbolised by a logo that is reminiscent of UNESCO and further heritage institutions (Fig. 3). By taking to the extreme a formal architectural style or the official designation of a site, the importance of ISAP lies in satirically employing the traditionally hegemonic mechanisms of heritage, turned on their head: ISAP is presented in such a *conservative* way that, paradoxically, it ends up being a *subversive* proposal (Bonnett 2014).

The truth is that ISAP is not as conservative as it may appear at first sight: ‘We don’t want to freeze the buildings’ state in time. We’re in the process of monumentalizing them and, once this is done, it will be necessary to de-monumentalize them in order to move forward’ (Masu, Interview, 26 May 2016). Similar to Olivier’s postulation (2001) of static ruins and ruins as a process, the notion of ‘monumentalizing’ to then ‘de-monumentalizing’ is particularly relevant, because it puts the two different stages or approaches in which ISAP unfolds on the table. On one hand, and as above



Fig. 3. Incompiuto Siciliano’s logo  
Source: Alterazioni Video, 2008



mentioned, ISAP's monumentalizing aspects refer to the way *Incompiuto Siciliano* has been presented as a formal architectural style in need of imminent official recognition. On the other, it is envisaged that its subsequent de-monumentalizing process could simply make the buildings safe, placing them back in the urban dynamics of Giarre. According to Masu (Interview, 13 November 2015), this should be done by respecting the unfinished materiality of the sites, a gesture of 'active' arrested decay where, finally, activities could be held. In sum, ISAP is presented as a sort of 'living' archaeological park in which unfinished public works are re-adapted and finally inhabited without losing their particular ruined traces. In so doing, they could become a mended version of their intrinsic dark past<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore, the ultimate objective of this project resembles that of the work done, for example, in Germany's postindustrial landscapes. Barndt (2009) indicates how, during decades, art photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher contributed to the aestheticization of abandoned factories, progressively replacing 'coal and smog' with a new degree of appreciation (Fig. 4). Noted by the researcher, without this very first step, it would have been impossible to accomplish the set of recreational industrial parks that today litter the Rhur valley (Fig. 5):

The landscape becomes a resource for local citizens, redirecting their former workplace-based class identification to an affective relationship with the region's location and history. Moreover, the new landscape attract tourists, which might eventually lead to new economic uses and profits (Barndt 2009, 277).

As a matter of fact, *Alterazioni Video*'s website notes how there has been a growing academic interest in Italian unfinished public works, with several architecture workshops carried out by different universities to contemplate the re-activation of the buildings. Whether ISAP is recognised or not, the project is currently more alive than ever. In May 2016, *Alterazioni Video* initiated a series of interdisciplinary meetings across the main Italian cities with the objective of discussing the possibility for *Incompiuto Siciliano* becoming an accepted paradigm to look at unfinished public works. After this process of debate, open to locals, architects, urbanists, philosophers and artists alike, Masu indicates that *Alterazioni Video*'s intention is to go back to Giarre 'in five years or so, for a new round of meetings so that ISAP can finally be implemented' (Interview, 26 May 2016).

This chapter digs a little deeper into that grey area between ISAP's monumentalization and de-monumentalization, which I devised as a parallel dichotomy between traditional or authorised heritage as 'common sense' (Smith 2006) and more recent critical approaches. If traditional heritage is viewed as something old, self-glorifying and beautiful, to perceive ISAP as heritage may sound inappropriate in that, in principle, unfinished public works are not old, self-glorifying or beautiful. I argue however that this apparent contradiction functions as a paradox and, considering the importance of paradoxes in the formation of critical thinking (Eliason 1996), the chapter aims to contribute, with a new layer of knowledge, to the consolidation of critical heritage as

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<sup>4</sup> 'Active' arrested decay, together with further strategies to tackle incompleteness, is studied in depth in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.



Fig. 4. Bernd and Hilla Becher's picture from Wessling Chemical Factory, near Cologne in 1998  
Source: Lempertz Auction House

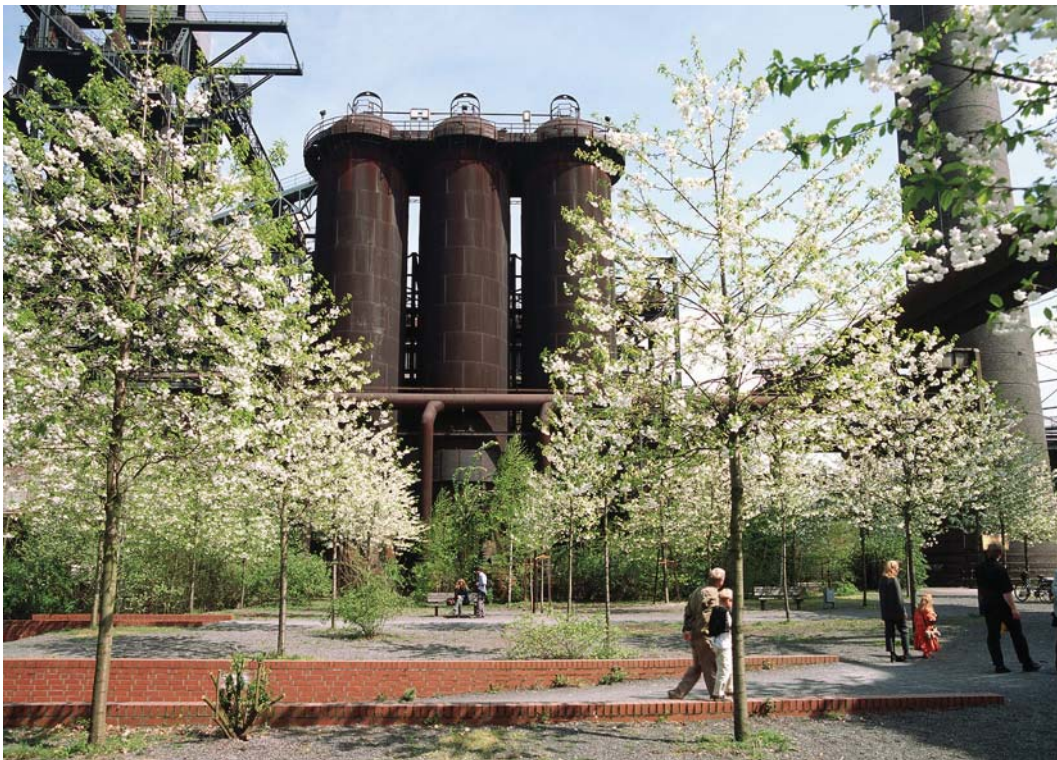


Fig. 5. Duisburg North Landscape Park  
Source: Latz+Partner Architects

an increasingly important discipline. Therefore, the following theorization in terms of [1] temporality, [2] memory and [3] aesthetics demonstrates how the present case has the capacity to put heritage conventionalism into question while generating a renewed sense of what it means to be classed ‘heritage’.

Due to ISAP’s being labelled as an ‘archaeological park’, this study is mainly done by using extensive literature on modern ruins, particularly taking into account those contributions dealing with difficult and industrial heritage. This is justified if we consider that ISAP aspires to create a similar paradigm to that instigated by such cases some decades ago, one which is well established today: to reconcile people with an unpleasant site by embracing it in a way which is no longer unpleasant. To that end, though provocation is usually understood as a way of inciting strong reactions, ISAP’s provocative spirit is presented here as a generative factor with the potential to trigger positive responses. Yet far from trivialising this case, its ironic content is presented in a nurturing manner, which allows us to tackle serious and complex questions in terms of how heritage is produced today. With an ironic conservative approach that hides a truly engaging heritage as its defining feature, ISAP proves an innovative example of how to produce a new type of heritage (Holtorf and Högberg 2013), an *unfinished heritage*; critical in its capacity to raise uncomfortable questions and in how it involves people through the creative use of irony, sarcasm or double meaning.

## TEMPORALITY

The idea that something has to be old to be heritage is as old as the idea of heritage itself. Today, almost 40 years since the first inscriptions, the World Heritage List includes only a few cultural sites which are indeed younger than UNESCO’s 1972 Convention (Díaz 2016) – demonstrating the persistence of this idea. However, in relation to Riegl’s ‘age-value’ (1982), it seems clear that heritage manifests in the passage of time, regardless of whether more or less time is needed. And interestingly, today, time seems to pass faster than ever.

Augé’s notion of ‘supermodernity’ (1995) characterises most of the twentieth century and it is increasingly obvious in the globalised present. It refers to the exponential acceleration of history and its spatial implications, yet it is a temporal dimension that has been the recent target of scholars studying modern ruins. For González-Ruibal (2008), an archaeology of supermodernity explores the material excesses committed in the name of progress, and those excesses are part of an era where ‘there is no past or future: only the instant’ (González-Ruibal 2014a, 7130). Aligned with this, Pálsson (2012) refers to current societies as communities where events are immediately historicized, which ultimately explains why, for both archaeology and heritage, age is no longer an essential variable since there are no significant thresholds being crossed. Knowing this, and considering that unfinished public works in Giarre were erected in a context of excessive modernization not so long ago, the question is simple: Have the buildings in ISAP already crossed one such threshold to be perceived as heritage? The answer depends on the temporal frame that we use.



From a traditional point of view in which history is a straight line, ISAP dates back to thirty, forty or fifty years ago, and therefore, its buildings are not comparable with older temples or palaces. Common sense dictates that unfinished public works only represent a tiny portion of Italian history as a whole. Placed on the same timeline, they are not as old as Roman or Baroque constructions and so, to label unfinished public works as heritage is halfway between weird and absurd. However, when embedded in our context of supermodernity, ISAP is actually very old, and that is the duality in Alterazioni Video's message. If the construction of a building is interrupted for a couple of years, it does not seem to be a big issue because there might still be chances to re-start the construction – there is a sort of blind faith in progress that makes us consider that such a situation is simply transitory. But buildings whose construction has been interrupted for about half a century are old enough to be *just* unfinished works. In fact, incompleteness is already their final state and, following Virilio's thought (2006), it can be said that while five decades in the history of time may not be too much, five decades of supermodernity is a lot. Such is ISAP's temporal dichotomy: unfinished public works in Giarre are not old enough by traditional heritage standards but, at the same time, they are deemed too old to be products erected by our own generation.

Hence one of the reasons that makes ISAP sound disconcerting; we are unconsciously asked to apply the chronological characteristics of traditional heritage to a site that belongs to our present. 'Some unfinished public works are taking longer to construct than some parts of the Chinese Wall' – says Masu (Interview, 11 October 2014) in a statement which is witty for drolly noting that things in supermodernity can also be slow. Furthermore, the joke works because it assigns the notion of time distance to a site like ISAP, which is not so. While the Chinese Wall may evoke an era of wars, invasions, violence or authoritarian dynasties that are too remote to affect us, the 'historical proximity' (González-Ruibal 2008) of unfinished public works makes Italian dysfunctionality and its monumentalization problematic – especially considering incompleteness is still a phenomenon which is far from being over (Accattini 2011). ISAP is presented with a temporal patina that should inspire affection, however, it is impossible to deny that '[a]s the time of a ruin approaches our own, the sense of enormity of temporal scale will fade as familiarity displaces sublimity' (Korsmeyer 2014, 433). Therefore, the ironic tone of ISAP is clear in that it is an attempt to charge a site with the symbolism of pastness even if there is no distance between said ruins and ourselves.

A feeling of incomprehension, therefore, is perfectly understandable if we consider the daring choice to use the word 'archaeological' to describe the project. In conventional terms, archaeology refers to sites that were once used and inhabited, allowing us to trace their precise lifetime. The moment in which something is labelled as 'archaeological' represents a point of inflexion between a past that was lived and a mere analysis that develops in the present (González-Ruibal 2014b). In ISAP, this categorisation is problematic because it automatically suggests *claudication*: the assumption that unfinished public works cannot be anything else but dead sites, no longer capable of hosting the activities for which they were initially designed since what was perceived as a necessity some decades ago may not be needed today. Accepting then that unfinished works are archaeological remnants means that they are terminally-ill patients beyond

help – the acceptance that Giarre’s people were not able to give more than opting for a forensics approach. In this way archaeology, or heritage, only contribute to the cold mummification of places – monumentalization as it is commonly understood. Quite the opposite, however, is seen in the ultimate de-monumentalizing phase contemplated in ISAP, which demonstrates how labels that may sound out of context at first, not nearly inappropriate, can transform our relation with an inherited present:

[An] archaeology in and of the present must be viewed first as a critical engagement with the present and only subsequently as a consideration of the spaces in which the past intervenes within it. [It is] a discipline which is concerned explicitly with the present itself. This present is not fixed or inevitable, but is still in the process of becoming; it is active and ripe with potential. [It requires] to shift archaeology away from the study of the ruin, the derelict and the abandoned to become a discipline which is concerned with both the ‘living’ and the ‘dead’ (Harrison 2011, 153, 157, 160).

The metaphor of temporality regarding life and death is quite pertinent here because it has been a recurring one applied to ruins. If buildings under construction are always a ‘promise for the future’ (Puntí 2012, 117, own translation), unfinished public works in Giarre can be seen as just the reverse: for them, time has come to an end. This thought is actually accentuated if we consider that incompleteness never hosted any life at all. It is a case of architectural miscarriage in which death was present before the buildings were actually born. However, there is no death as we usually know it. Most unfinished public works do not have a specific date etched on their epitaphs but rather their construction has been eventually re-started and stopped several times like frustrated attempts at resurrection (Masu, Interview, 11 October 2014). The result is that, just like other ruins which are not victims of sudden destruction, the buildings in Giarre slip towards a gradual death. Far from perceiving this as an inevitable tragedy, González-Ruibal points out that a modern ruin ‘lies somewhere in-between death and life [while the] time of agony is often a reversible time’ (2014b, 372), and for Pétursdóttir (2012a), ruination has the potential to be a ‘generative process’. It is precisely this ‘afterlife’ condition (Dawdy 2010) in which the nine unfinished public works, re-born and re-baptised as ISAP, find themselves. The statement made by Kobińska et al. in relation to Soviet remains in Poland is also applicable to ISAP: ‘It can be said that *by dying they actually were born for the present*’ (2015, 15). This assertion leads the Polish researchers to remark their interest in ‘how *archaeological sites* are born’ (2015, 15) – an idea that, when extrapolated to Alterazioni Video’s project, is extendable to how *heritage* is born.

Indeed, nobody doubts that the creation of heritage or ‘heritageisation’ (Harvey 2001) is an organic process acquired over time, and it is precisely this certainty which, a project like ISAP ultimately puts into question with its particular ironic touch. Here, heritageisation is as accelerated as the supermodernity to which it belongs. What once were unproductive relics of the past, Alterazioni Video transform into a fruitful site with the potential to function in the present. And paradoxically, even if it subverts our common concept of heritage, ISAP aspires to be a legitimate gesture to take back from oblivion what, otherwise, would be easy to forget.



## MEMORY

In order to better understand, and before going deeper into specific issues regarding memory in ISAP, it is important to theorise the immediate association that unfinished public works evoke: failure. In its authorised version, heritage refers to self-glorifying times where retrospection becomes society's vehicle to remember itself in the most favourable manner and expose this to others. Dominated by pride, it is not surprising that this discourse marginalises sites that make people feel embarrassed. Incompletion is commonly overlooked in the logics of a less harmful approach in which forgetting – or simply not wanting to know – is the way that a society has to move on. Deprived any meaning, just like Bauman's 'empty spaces' (2012), Masu expresses how Alterazioni Video encountered this situation during the early steps of the project:

When searching for the unfinished works we talked to locals, but most of them were not able to say anything. It is not a deliberate silence, it is not that they fear the consequences of whistle-blowing; it is that they really know nothing. The sites have been surrounded by fences for decades so they are completely disconnected from any social or urban exchange. Nobody has a reason to go there, they are black holes with a tendency to disappear. Imagine you are a kid growing in Giarre, what kind of future do you expect for yourself when you look at those buildings everywhere? Well, we observed how people create a sort of parallel reality by excluding what they don't need from their attention, but in the end, this affects the perception of their environment in a negative way. With ISAP, we want to change that (Interview, 26 May 2016).

As a matter of fact, Masu's statement suggests what is not nearly a secret: memory can be traumatic. Unfinished public works undoubtedly elicit a feeling of sadness due to the unfulfilled aspirations of a society. They are in no way epic, and that is an additional problem regarding their monumentalization. Le Feuvre (2008, 2010a) identifies failure as 'a symptom of our times' that contradicts the certainty of progress by exposing us to the 'unexpected', and considering that ISAP is formed by 'unexpected' buildings, their primary categorisation is aligned with Light's 'unwanted' heritage to subsequently unfold as Riegl's 'unintentional' monuments. As this relates to Bucharest communist legacy, Light (2000) argues that its value has been constructed outside Romania, clashing with locals' interest in leaving their past behind while hoping for a more progress-oriented narrative. Yet, what Light calls 'unwanted past' fits the mentioned rhetoric that Alterazioni Video struggle to revert. On the other hand, for Riegl (1982), unintentional monuments are not initially constructed to commemorate anything or anyone, and yet, the mere passage of time makes them function as idealised sites for present generations. It is obvious that Giarre never expected to erect any monument – people only anticipated a new theatre or a new children's park. Nevertheless, ISAP frames decades of incompletion as a reality that has produced an 'unintentional' cultural value.

By treating unfinished public works as monuments, one might think that Alterazioni Video's intention is to exalt the past – just like intentional monuments do (Scarborough 2014) – but this is only another provocative factor in their objective for bringing attention to what has been neglected. Far from glorifying the management errors that caused the unfinished phenomenon, ISAP is stripped of any negative connotation

in order to value the sites for their mere existence. Thus, mocking the traditional monuments' sacralisation is a strategy which can create positive social imagery, where the dilapidation of public funds is ironically redefined as architectural exuberance: 'Incomplete projects are the ruins of modernity, monuments born of laissez-faire creative enthusiasm' (Alterazioni Video 2008, 193). Here, an unfinished public work is not a failure because the negative circumstances that may lead us to think so are consciously ignored. In obviating the obvious, Alterazioni Video creates a satirical disconnect between cause and effect, between production and product. Exposing reality in these terms is not easy since it requires us to step away from basic assumptions, inviting us to perceive failure in Le Feuvre's positivistic thought (2010b), where the gap between intention and realisation is a celebratory and spontaneous opportunity that originates new meanings.

All this is translated into how ISAP induces to *forgetting while remembering*. In a deliberate manner, Alterazioni Videos's narrative does not include the dark side of unfinished public works which, on the other hand, remains silently and critically evident. It is not a question of directly denouncing 'who did this or who did that' (Masu, Interview, 26 May 2016). For the artists, the best way to form a positive connotation that is memorable in the future requires the selection of a negative counter-part to be forgotten. In principle, this may sound like an authoritarian white-washing approach, but it is rather a demonstration of Harrison's critical position in which 'the process of forgetting is in fact integral to remembering' (2013, 579). And once more, this is the contradictory gesture that characterises ISAP. Pétursdóttir contends that the official institutionalisation of ruins can negatively result 'in the active forgetting of things' (2012b, 578) and Harrison (2013) acknowledges this as an eventual complication in the creation of heritage because, ultimately, elites select what is worthy of preservation. However, if someone were to accuse a simple group of artists of such a domineering aim, it would only mean that the sarcastic monumentalization that they were proposing was not being understood. Certainly, ISAP emerges as a project that pursues recognition by disowning an uncomfortable past while showing its sanitised version in the present. But rather than being just like any other kind of traditional heritage, in absurdly trying to hide what is impossible to dismiss, it works as a radical gesture due to its implicit critical charge. As noted in Chapter 2, in ISAP, silence equals noise. Therefore, using González-Ruibal's terms, Alterazioni Video takes advantage of how memory is 'tricky' since 'we remember what we want to remember [while concealing] what does not fit the image of ourselves' (forthcoming). In this sense, Huyssen (2003) asserts that our present era is already 'saturated' with memory, and it is precisely on this basis, together with Augé's work (2004), that Harrison talks about a 'crisis of accumulation of the past' that threatens to devalue heritage as something worthless:

If we, as individuals, were able to remember everything, we would not be able to make sense of the information we could recall. Our memories would be saturated with information, and it would be impossible for us to adequately sort through the piles of memories to find the ones that were important to us (2013, 588).

Even supposing someone could legitimately declare that the particular causes that interrupted the construction of each building might be of interest, without these, ISAP already exhibits a phenomenon that is globally significant and clearly recognisable

for everyone (Masu, Interview, 13 November 2015). Surely, as Harrison's scepticism suggests, ISAP does not need to be overwhelmed by chronicled details to function as heritage because it pursues an effective equilibrium between forgetfulness and remembrance. Hence, in terms of memory, what kind of site is ISAP in the way *Alterazioni Video* presents it? The answer lies in-between what unfinished works are now due to their current generalised dismissal, and what they might prove to be due to an unproductive overabundance of recollections.

González-Ruibal coins the expression 'places of abjection' to describe negative or hurtful sites that have not yet been interpreted because their 'existence has been erased from collective memory, about which nobody is allowed or wants to speak or whose existence is denied' (2008, 256). Looking back to Masu's statement in regard to how Giarre's people do not know anything about unfinished public works, we can certainly assume that these sites are, currently, places of abjection. For González-Ruibal (2008), the opposite of places of abjection is what Nora (1984) calls 'lieux dominants', where an excess of memory is used to idealise sites that are, ultimately, engulfed by the heritage apparatus in its interest to establish a homogenous discourse. It could be interpreted that ISAP, in aiming for official designation and sustaining something anachronistic such as the creation of an architectural style that relies on a rigid manifesto, aspires to be recognised as a 'lieux dominant'. But again, interpreting ISAP in this way means that the provocative component of its monumentalizing stage is being misunderstood.

A paradox is precisely a paradox because it implies a contradictory double meaning, and ISAP's ultimate objective is, paradoxically, to de-monumentalize unfinished public works, creating sites that preserve their unfinished aura while rejecting their being *only* that. To this end, incompleteness should not only refer to incompleteness in the same way that heritage should not only refer to memories of the past. ISAP is not a site to directly exemplify mafia or corruption – that would be too obvious and not that constructive. Consequently, when Masu asserts that it would be ideal to have an unfinished building functioning as a library or anything else that may be needed in Giarre while still featuring its uncompleted materiality (Interview, 26 May 2016), he is implicitly recognising the importance of keeping memory in place, while at the same time, finding an opportunity to make it practical and valuable for today's people. And yet, if we accept that, when looking at an unfinished public work, incompleteness speaks for itself without the need for said chronicled details, this inevitably leads us to discuss ISAP in terms of aesthetics.

## AESTHETICS

Since Vitruvius wrote his *Ten Books on Architecture* more than 2000 years ago, it has been assumed that architecture must be beautiful; what is not so clear today, and especially in the context of modern ruins, is what it means exactly to be beautiful. Nobody can doubt that behind many heritage designations lies a homogenous discourse regarding aesthetics, where words such as 'unique' or 'outstanding' are highlighted; applying

these terms to ancient ruins is not difficult since it falls into the realm of heritage common sense. For example, Roman temples were originally designed to be beautiful, and indeed, they are still beautiful in our eyes because their universal canon transcends time. Moreover, though temples were conceived to praise Gods, it is evident that they lost that function a long time ago. Yet, for us there is no changing aesthetic taste due to the fact that we have always known Roman temples in their ruined form. However, the same cannot be said for modern ruins.

People do not generally love modern ruins because they are a displeasing tangible imprint which is incompatible with the ideology of progress (Pusca 2010). Quite often, buildings that are modern ruins today were not initially conceived to be beautiful but to simply serve their function – such is the case of most of the twentieth century industrial remnants. Once a factory ceases its activity, it loses its *raison d'être*; it is neither productive nor beautiful. In point of fact, one could say that its visible traces of decay are intermingled with the frustration of a recent de-industrialisation, creating a generalised abjection towards a site in which (negative) tangible and (negative) intangible aspects are strongly connected. Our generation knew this factory or that office block in its former days of activity and we are not used to seeing this kind of building as a ruin. However, in the last few decades, it has become increasingly evident that an industrial site is also susceptible to being described as ‘unique’ or ‘outstanding’, demonstrating how – unlike ancient ruins – this sort of ‘archaeology’ has experienced a changing aesthetic taste with many sites listed and protected as heritage (Orange 2008). This shows how our perception can shift as time passes, and ultimately, it indicates that there is no such thing as aesthetic uniformity in heritage but rather a set of *different ways of being beautiful* that can peacefully coexist as long as the space is able to trigger emotions (Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014)<sup>5</sup>. It is in the middle of this intricate debate where the paradoxical qualities of ISAP emerge once more: Are unfinished public works in Giarre ‘unique’ and ‘outstanding’?

Concerning the huge stock of abandoned communist bunkers in Albania – approximately 700,000 units – Díaz (2016) notes the precariousness of perceiving them as heritage because they contradict the traditional idea of something being unique. If a structure is seen on a regular basis, it tends to be too familiar and overlooked, however, the author points out how all bunkers together have the ‘quality of repetition’ that makes the case of Albania unique. The same characteristic can be applied to unfinished public works. They are not anecdotal; they have been systematically produced over decades and that is precisely what makes this a phenomenon. Furthermore, the intention to recognise ISAP in Giarre, which covers nine specific buildings, does not follow any aesthetic reason but rather responds to a question of high density (Masu, Interview, 26 May 2016). Even the smallest town in Italy has its own heritage, consisting of at least a tiny church or a hermitage, and consequently, the presence of a church or a hermitage does not make an Italian town unique. But Giarre is genuinely unparalleled for having such a concentration of unfinished public works; it is what differentiates this town from any other. Yet, the ‘quality of repetition’ is Alterazioni Video’s understanding of

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5        Such a phenomenological depiction of aesthetics is the main question studied in the next chapter of this dissertation.

uniqueness – no longer associated with scarcity – whose strength, instead of residing in a single unfinished work that may well be encountered at any other Italian location, is contextualised as a group of nine together, placing Giarre as the most indicative paradigm of incompleteness at a national level (Masu, Interview, 26 May 2016).

Despite this, it is still possible to understand Professor Alastair Bonnett, who after visiting Giarre's unfinished works later reflected that, even if pictures he had seen prior to his visit contained a 'beguiling' aesthetic, 'on the ground it soon gets wearisome' (2014, 152). Every building looks the same for Bonnett, and though this is expressed in a clearly belittling way, it could also be read as the confirmation that *Incompiuto Siciliano* responds to an actual aesthetic pattern. Much like any other architectural style, *Incompiuto Siciliano*'s material traces are a constant that, in this case, are evidenced in ISAP's decaying concrete, rusted iron or wild vegetation (Alterazioni Video 2008). And though this materiality does not fit into the notion of traditional heritage either, incompleteness ends up being a contemporary aesthetic value that makes buildings special. Certainly, if they had been finished and used, they would simply be part of Giarre's everyday life and consequently Alterazioni Video would have never scrutinised them since, structurally speaking, they are just ordinary. But the fact that they are uncompleted makes them outstanding because the norm for a public work is that it be in use. Scarborough states, in relation to modern dereliction, that '[s]ome ruins appear more beautiful in their ruined form than they did at the height of their architectural form' (2014, 446). Here is then another of ISAP's paradoxes in terms of aesthetics: the buildings in Giarre never reached the *height* of their architectural form. They have always been unfinished and therefore they share with ancient ruins the fact that we have always known them in their ruined form. But still, unlike ancient ruins, unfinished public works do require us to alter our aesthetic taste in order to appreciate them.

The 'sublime', due to its Romanticist charge, has been widely adopted as one of the most important aesthetic principles in the renewed appreciation of modern ruins, and thus it is possible to encounter it at ISAP. It was originally defined by Burke as:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror [...] When danger or pain press to nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful (1834, 32, 33).

In addition to this, and following Crang's use (2010) of sublimity to frame industrial ruination, Giarre's unfinished buildings – with piles of trash and endless remains of construction materials – show that once a society loses the control of progress, the outcome is inevitably a terrible undoing. Nevertheless, in the de-contextualisation from the past that ISAP proposes, where a distance from a harsh reality is deliberately marked, it is possible to perceive incompleteness as uncannily pleasing. Sublimity is then the connection between what, at first sight, are antonyms – such as 'pain' and 'delight' – highlighting the contradictory duality that characterises ISAP. Hence, similar to the way in which something can be at the same time old and new, death generates life, failures are wont to be celebrated and forgetting is integral to remembering, ISAP's aesthetics tell us that what in principle may be seen as ugly, is not at odds with beauty.



In the context of contemporary decay in China, Chu has indeed pointed out that ‘boundaries between beauty and ugliness can often be blurred’ (2012, 195), and additionally, Bicknell (2014) notes how this differentiation can change over time. As argued in the previous chapter, it is true that Incompiuto Siciliano has been presented with a series of traditional aesthetic considerations that bring unfinished public works closer to how we perceive classical ruins in a romanticised way; this is, however an obviously ironic wink to the authorised heritage aspects that particularise ISAP’s monumentalizing stage. According to common sense, aesthetics basically refer to the visual or tangible features of a site, but certainly, aesthetics can be more than that:

The important thing to consider here is that discussions and debates are necessary, and by presenting a wider palette of reasons as to why something is pleasing, aesthetically and even historically acceptable, the goal is that it will evolve towards a reflection on the community’s heritage values, seeking the relevance of their past by its innate importance, unhindered by traditional aesthetic conventions (Díaz 2016, 26).

Still, unfinished public works teach us that beauty is not only the lack of ugliness. Detached from their negative connotations, buildings in Giarre could inspire ‘spiritual habitation and contemplation. These are places of existential awareness, embodiments of the human soul’ (Alterazioni Video 2008, 193). These considerations though not strictly visual, directly affect our perception. ISAP proposes to strip beauty in search of deeper intangible aesthetics because, otherwise, our focus would be superficial – equivalent to our only judging a person by their physical appearance. ISAP is then a matter of inner beauty, of finding the intrinsic aspects of a site that can progressively make us see it as beautiful, as a whole. Along these lines, through the use of Cousins’ theories (1994), it can be said that ISAP’s first impression as an ugly site is, in fact, an integral part of its eventual beauty.

## INCOMPIUTO SICILIANO ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK AS CRITICAL HERITAGE

On 22 August 2015, the well-known British street artist and political activist Banksy inaugurated a grim ‘bemusement’ park in the town of Weston-super-Mare, in England’s West Country. Banksy named it ‘Dismaland’, a play on Disneyland from which he even refashioned the famed Cinderella-castle logo (Banksy 2015). In Dismaland, pieces created by Banksy and fifty-eight other guest artists served as the counter-point of what one could expect from the typical ‘amusement’ park: the entrance resembled an airport security zone; a shop offered money to children at an interest rate of 5000%; and workers sold balloons on which ‘I am an imbecile’ was written (Brown 2015; Jones 2015). Dismaland was a critique of how our society behaves today, most notably expressed as an enjoyable spectacle. One month later, the park shut and its remnants were used as construction materials to ameliorate the worsening conditions of refugees in the now dismantled Calais jungle (Ellis-Petersen 2015).

Concerning the present chapter's discussion, it is interesting how Dismaland used its touristic focus as a trivialising element when exhibiting present-day realities that are undoubtedly uncomfortable. ISAP can be considered in similar terms due to its aim of commodifying something that, at first sight, is repulsive. It is then an eminent political project whose strength paradoxically lies in its not presenting itself as explicitly political – just as Dismaland used the bombastic figure of an amusement park. If it can be said that a '[l]ack of politics is always conservative politics' (González-Ruibal 2008, 261), ISAP ironically contradicts this, because here the lack of politics proves an indicative factor of subversive politics, where criticism silently emerges from the consideration of heritage as a 'political act' (Smith 2012). And although ISAP takes this indirect path, it cannot escape the thought that 'ruins serve as sites at which abject and awkward presence might be conjured up to shout back at power' (Edensor 2008, 263) – making modern dereliction ideally placed as a field from which to study the production of critical heritage.

At this point it is important to focus on the de-monumentalizing spirit that ISAP truly pursues, which has relied on a strong participative base. The most obvious example of such engagement was the celebration of the *Incompiuto Siciliano Festival*, which took place in Giarre with the intention of promoting the prospective park (Fig. 6). In July 2010, for three days, several unfinished buildings were re-appropriated in order to host performances, guided tours, workshops, concerts and even a citizens' assembly (Fig. 7). These activities were not only carried out by Alterazioni Video, but they also had the collaboration of local partnerships and support from public entities at different institutional tiers such as 'Regione Sicilia', 'Provincia Regionale di Catania' and 'Comune di Giarre' (Alterazioni Video 2010). This allowed them the opportunity to shine a light on the issues of incompleteness in a constructive way, prioritising the engaging possibilities of unfinished public works and demonstrating the importance of raising locals' awareness of incompleteness as a cultural asset that, until now, had been neglected (Masu, Interview, 26 May 2016). This goes to show how seeking to be recognised as an actual heritage site by institutions before all, is a pataphysical provocation to authorised designations that have traditionally been disconnected from people's interests. ISAP's true meaning behind this sarcasm acknowledges that such recognition could only be possible if it is primarily accepted by the general public.

Moreover, Alterazioni Video is not a group of technical experts appointed by some elite; they are just a group of artists constructing heritage *for* the people and in collaboration *with* people. ISAP is then a clear paradigm of amateur production of heritage 'from below' (Robertson 2012), which contradicts the sacred and indisputable origin that is commonly attributed to authorised heritage. Additionally, as noted by Smith (2012), a mere technical analysis as the only way to judge what is heritage or not, ultimately ensures that the politics behind a certain site remain ignored. Along these lines, ISAP is a project which is closer to critical heritage since it is a case where attempting to grasp technical details does not overtly make sense: foundations, materials, structure or design do not require any scientific study to highlight the buildings' importance since these aspects, which are usually taken into account in traditional heritage, are no longer the production of some genius civilisation but are simply ordinary. As Winter (2013) notes, the heritage field has grown alongside the passive assumption of technical

# FESTIVAL INCOMPIUTO SICILIANO

**GIARRE (CT) 2 - 3 - 4 LUGLIO 2010**

**VENERDÌ 2 LUGLIO**  
**luogo: Palazzo Comunale**  
**ore: 11:00**  
 Dono dell'opera  
 "Untitled" di Alterazioni Video  
**luogo: Sala Messina "ex Pescheria"**  
**ore: 17:00**  
 Inaugurazione del festival e  
 mostra "Parco dell'Incompiuto  
 Siciliano di Giarre" con il workshop  
 di Marco Navarra  
**luogo: Centro Polifunzionale**  
**ore: 20:30**  
 "L'origine del mondo -  
 la vita nasce dalla pietra"  
 performance del gruppo Coloco

**SABATO 3 LUGLIO**  
**luogo: Parco Archeologico  
 dell' Incompiuto Siciliano**  
**ore: 11:00 / 18:00**  
 Alla scoperta delle bellezze  
 dell' Incompiuto Siciliano.  
 Tour d'autore per le opere incompiute  
 guidati da scrittori e artisti siciliani.  
**luogo: Sala Messina "ex Pescheria"**  
**ore: 21:00**  
 Presentazione del workshop e  
 del lavoro dello studio di  
 architetti/paesaggisti Coloco

**DOMENICA 4 LUGLIO**  
**luogo: Parco Chico Mendes**  
**ore 16:00**  
 Assemblea cittadina:  
 "Da sconfitta a risorsa:  
 un nuovo parco per la città"  
**ore: 19:00**  
 "Da Giarre, con amore",  
 cerimonia del taglio di  
 una colonna incompiuta  
**ore:20:30**  
 "In principio era il fuoco"  
 concerto/spettacolo del gruppo  
 Alterazioni Video

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Fig. 6. Poster announcing the *Incompiuto Siciliano Festival* in Giarre  
 Source: Alterazioni Video 2010





Fig. 7. Several activities carried out at the Incompiuto Siciliano Festival in Giarre  
Source: Mattia Pacorizzi, Piero di Domenico and Francesca Pini, 2010

discourses, something that is counterproductive because it obscures the social and political realm of sites. Yet, in order to be more accessible and democratic, ISAP stands out as ‘new heritage’ in which conservative protection is shifted to creation (Holtorf and Fairclough 2013).

And although presenting an ISAP aligned with theories on critical heritage studies may sound like a breakthrough for the heritage establishment, it is important to stress the point that Alterazioni Video’s initiative is not originally conceived as ‘underground’, but rather as a project to be embedded with institutional support. This, as expressed by Winter (2013), is not a contradiction but a necessary step to complement the general meaning of heritage, whose critical aspects would otherwise run the risk of being marginalised and ineffective. For ISAP, it is then a matter of building bridges between abjection and institutionalisation, placing people at the core of the debate without the fear of being swallowed by the system. This makes sense if we consider that, after all, ‘unfinished public works are already part of the system; they are *publiid*!’ (Masu, Interview, 26 May 2016).

In accordance with this, we can certainly claim that ISAP also fits Witcomb and Buckley’s arguments (2013) for a more productive critical heritage. On one hand, critical heritage and Incompiuto Siciliano share an important foundation trace: they are both born from manifestos, which in principle, are a ‘form of provocation [marking] something entirely different from whatever preceded it’ (2013, 562). On the other, said provocation which these researchers advocate aspires to be more than merely a nuisance. ISAP exemplifies this position in that it is a constructive provocation that seeks a solution to the continued existence of unfinished public works by framing something that is not heritage in a heritage debate. This is done by lingering between contradictory stances – repudiation and recognition – whose only credible shot at realisation lies in finding a point of agreement with the society that it implicitly criticises:

It should be possible to engage with the heritage industry while also retaining critical distance [... We] do want to suggest that it might be worth thinking about the production of knowledge along a continuum between these two end points and that a critical heritage studies could be somewhere in the middle [... It] is clear that the future development of heritage studies will require both provocation and engagement with professional practice (Witcomb and Buckley 2013, 563, 564, 574).

ISAP represents a strong provocation because its acceptance requires a high degree of self-criticism. If heritage is usually presented as something fixed, regimented and publicly established in positive interpretations, in stark contrast, ISAP may well prompt shame and the ridiculing of its society as a whole. Shaking the foundations of such identification means the creation of a heritage that is not so settled; in sum, an unsettled heritage that is able to originate more enriching debates (MacDonald 2008). The time needed for the ISAP to be implemented will be the time that unfinished public works will require to change their meaning. Meanwhile, incompleteness remains in a sort of limbo, ‘awaiting translation to the PARADISE of “architectural merit”’ (Virilio 2008, 207) – just as occurred with difficult or industrial heritage some decades ago. Yet, we may be witnessing the birth of a new kind of heritage, an *unfinished heritage*, a recognition that does not spawn from common sense but rather for which it is necessary to struggle. It is a matter of acceptance, of adopting what until now has been rejected, to then include it in a positive narrative in which society eventually becomes proud of its own resilience (Orange 2008), of its capacity to not only accept the past, but to provide it with new meaning in order to ‘pacify history’ (Barndt 2009).

ISAP is in the process of achieving this goal: some years ago, national and local media started to cover ISAP with a certain degree of mockery and scepticism, however, more recently, the same media have progressively changed their language to highlight the heritage potential of unfinished public works (Masu, Interview, 26 May 2016). Van der Hoorn asks herself: ‘How can a long undesired piece of architecture all of a sudden become an attractive souvenir for tourists, a talisman, a valuable object?’ (2003, 189). In the case of ISAP the answer is through the invention of an architectural style framed as an archaeological park that can be positively adopted and adapted by people, shifting its primary negative meaning towards a more constructive reading.

## CONCLUSION

By confronting the idea of traditional heritage as something static and beyond rebuke, this chapter shows how tackling assumptions with their antithesis can result in a paradoxical approach which, ultimately, foments an improved take on critical heritage. This requires us to redefine both certainties and their extremes, finding original and constructive meanings. If provocation has the potential to destabilise what is assumed, ISAP is a case study that typifies this through the use of critical irony, parodying and taking advantage of (authorised) heritage to subsequently produce (critical) heritage; it mocks heritage to make heritage.



By aiming to shift reality towards a new reality, ISAP is a pragmatic artistic project whose creativity lies in satirically putting the cart before the horse. Alterazioni Video subverts the authorship of heritage designation by abruptly declaring a new architectural style – which is no mean feat – and proposing an ‘archaeological’ park – which is no less. In the heritage world, these decisions are usually reserved for experts and political elites who, based on the importance of a cultural value acquired over time, dictate what deserves to be labelled heritage. But now, a simple group of artists have implausibly taken such a dominant position: ISAP is an ‘invented’ site that transforms mere unfinished works into heritage. It is disconcerting because it is not expected; and it is proposed in such an artificial manner that it shocks.

ISAP is conservative and subversive; monumentalization and de-monumentalization; old and new; dead and alive; failure and celebration; oblivion and remembering and last but not least, ugly and beautiful. As a site that comes to represent a new architectural style, it is not surprising that contradictory and disconcerting affections arise, something that actually fits the usual incomprehension towards new architectural elements:

It only takes a quick review of architectural and artistic movements throughout history to come to notice a pattern: during or immediately after a style comes to be, criticism arises, mostly due to misunderstanding, shock, and discomforting feelings. It is not after an appropriate amount of time that we seem to understand, be familiarised, and even accept – or at least coexist with – the new paradigms of perceptions (Díaz 2016, 125).

To rename a set of unfinished public works as ‘archaeology’ may sound totally inappropriate. Even ridiculous. But after a moment of mirth, we can certainly gather serious heritage implications from it. If unfinished public works are problematic, their heritageisation could be seen as a pure provocation. However, this provocation, far from deepening the stigma, is part of an eventual solution. To achieve this, ISAP plays with double meaning in applying certain characteristics that have usually been applied to traditional heritage. It is heritage turned against heritage, an aspect that finds a precedent in difficult or industrial heritage. These types of heritage have been progressively included in heritage debates; this surprising development has succeeded in calming tensions. And so, if we opt for including the present case study within those categories that Holtorf and Högberg (2013) label as future trends in heritage, it is not unreasonable to state that the time has come for a so-called *unfinished heritage* – especially, if we examine how incompleteness is increasingly considered a cultural value after the 2008 financial crisis and the unfinished spaces that it generated (Pálsson 2012).

Also, though there is an international awareness claiming that things to be labelled heritage sites do not need the official valuation of experts (Pétursdóttir 2012a), ISAP ironically opts for the authoritarian approach in which heritage is heritage because it is subjected to management and the preservation processes (Smith 2006). However, its de-monumentalizing phase offers more than that. ISAP as critical heritage strives to serve the actual needs of Giarre’s people, by not just being a tourist destination but a source of potential utility. Alterazioni Video’s proposal is clear: on the basis that heritage is for good, the eventual changes to the buildings should respect a history of incompleteness, something which is compatible with new forms of interpreting and transforming heritage:

Something new always emerges out of the transformation of the old [...] To restrict the term 'heritage' to commoditized and merchandised special and isolated places is to miss the centrality of heritage to the much more important daily experience of life (Holtorf and Fairclough 2013).

Therefore, if it is all a matter of generating a more positive Italian identity, society will have to learn to appreciate unfinished public works, utilising self-criticism and humour as innovative tools to achieve this. ISAP shows that a sense of humour is effective in establishing a first impression with people, but that is not enough. The sarcasm in Alterazioni Video's approach causes questions to be posed of heritage's established dogma, particularly if we consider that the use of irony is undoubtedly a critical tool. Should ISAP finally be legitimised and legalised in the way that the artists are proposing, it will not serve as a memento of corruption and the mafia, at least not in the explicit sense, but rather as a demonstration of how Italian people overcame these stigmas. On the other hand, if ISAP never receives official recognition, at least it will have contributed to an interesting debate in heritage studies. And since it may never be implemented, it could result in an archaeological park made up of unfinished works which, in and of itself, is unfinished. Now, wouldn't that be a perfect metaphor?

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## OUTLOOK

Chapter 3 showed the paradoxical ‘heritageisation’ of Incompiuto Siciliano, and though the intrinsic critical meaning of this is undoubtedly present, it would not be unreasonable to confuse it with traditional sites of tourism with which heritage is usually associated. DeSilvey and Edensor highlight that ‘sensual and imaginative engagements’ with ruins contribute to the detachment of abandoned spaces from the usual idea of heritage, and as noted in the authors’ essay, exploration and subjectivity are at the core of this debate. Therefore, in the last few years, and due to the playful component of modern ruins, it has been increasingly evident that the practice of visiting these locations in-person has contributed to the forging of alternative and personal experiences while, at the same time, countering given narratives. Chapter 4 is a study of Incompiuto Siciliano from one such embodied approach, where I recount a weird ‘touristic’ journey on which I visited a dozen unfinished public works all across Sicily. I argue that, while some buildings may well be recommissioned, many others will remain unfinished forever. The way I see it, this is not a tragedy and thus, my aim is to consider Incompiuto Siciliano as a positive paradigm of spaces for contemplation and individual reflection.



## Chapter 4



### INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

‘Daniel! Daniel!!! Hurry, come here!!! It’s Machu Picchu, we’ve just discovered Machu Picchu!!!’ Daniel ran and climbed to the top of the soft hill where I was standing. Both of us were open-mouthed while contemplating an enormous and remote concrete dam whose construction had begun 25 years ago and was never finished. The dam fits the surrounding landscape perfectly and the landscape fits the dam perfectly. It was quite a harmonious view with the radiant rays of sunset bursting through the September clouds. We could only hear the wind hitting our ears and the sound of the bushes’ paced movement. After a long minute in silence, I put my arm around Daniel’s shoulder and told him: ‘I... I have... I have no words...’

Three days before such a mystical experience, we had arrived in Sicily with the purpose of documenting around a dozen unfinished public works across the whole island. We were to formally portray the sites to illustrate the research I was doing; so far, so good. However, we soon realized that we ourselves were becoming part of what we were seeing. We were doing something ‘more’ than simply taking pictures of unfinished ruins. This chapter delves into this ‘more’.

In summer 2012, I read an article in a Spanish newspaper talking about a group of Italian artists called Alterazioni Video, who had declared a new architectural style: ‘Incompiuto Siciliano’<sup>1</sup>. This style makes reference to the vast quantity of unfinished public works in Italy – around 400 erected in the past 50 years – where a third of them are located in Sicily alone (Alterazioni Video 2008). As noted in previous chapters, the reasons why these constructions were never accomplished are more complex than

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1 The Spanish newspaper article that I refer in-text is available at: [http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2012/08/17/actualidad/1345232388\\_345931.html](http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2012/08/17/actualidad/1345232388_345931.html)

simply pointing to corruption or mafia, though the issue may well be summarized as *authorities just ran out of funds*. So declaring an architectural style out of this problematic reality sounded funny to me, but after a moment of mirth, I thought that one could grasp serious implications from this case. Indeed, Alterazioni Video's objective is to dignify unfinished public works by shifting the way we look at them, and thus, apart from highlighting the sites' peculiar materiality, the artists state that Incompiuto Siciliano 'musters and reassembles metaphysical places of contemplation, thought and the imaginary [...] These are places of existential awareness, embodiments of the human soul, and they are silhouetted against the horizon, testifying to our very nature as humans' (2008, 193). While at the time of organising the one-week fieldwork in Sicily I simply expected to collect photographic data on some unfinished public works, the present chapter aims to serve as a validation of the artists' poetic argument.

In order to begin with such a reasoning, I noticed that I was about to become just like those Romantic travellers that used to conduct initiation journeys by visiting masterpieces of past architecture: the so-called Grand Tour. This is an appropriate comparison because, in fact, Sicily has long attracted the attention of the likes of Goethe ([1816] 1982), Wagner (Grasa 2004) or de Maupassant ([1886] 2013), and more recently, of Borges (Luque 2007), Brandi ([1989] 2015) or Consolo (2016). The list goes on, but these eminent travellers have something in common: they all left home in search of the beauty of ancient ruins in Segesta, Agrigento, Siracusa or Taormina. Accompanied by my two colleagues Daniel Donaire and Chema Aranda – who have no relation with academia at all – I visited ruins that are not quite so distant in time though my way of *sensing* Incompiuto Siciliano ended up being quite romantic after all. It was an initiation journey of incompleteness: the Grand Tour of Incompiuto Siciliano, where the noble columns' capitals are now formed by rusted corrugated iron.

Regarding Flaubert's Romantic vision of Athens, Crang and Travlou argue how the French writer had memories 'in absentia', meaning 'the memories a person has for a place and time where he or she has never been, [which in this case, are] conditioned by an education that inculcated a thorough knowledge of the classical world' (2001, 167). Travelling is, in this sense, an affirmation of what one knew before going to a place. Once in Sicily, I somehow experienced this. I was familiar with the political, economic and sociological causes that produced incompleteness, however, it is worth mentioning that I have never been particularly interested in knowing the exact processes that interrupted the construction of each of the buildings that I would later visit. Furthermore, in order to choose a route, I prepared a brief travel guide that included the Incompiuto Siciliano's highlights that other people had visited before me (e.g. Felici 2011, Antolino 2013; Bonnett 2014; Dobraszczuk 2015). One could think of Augé's words (1998) when he states that today, in an era where we are bombarded by images of our destinations, it is impossible to discover anything. According to him, people only endeavour to follow in the footsteps of previous tourists and yet, one would be upset if, in the end, reality did not fit with what one had imagined. As I am aware of how the figure of the 'tourist' is today charged with pejorative connotations (e.g. Urry 1990; Löfgren 1999; Larsen 2006; Crang 2011; Thurlow and Jaworski 2011), my aim is not to contradict Augé. Nevertheless, in the first section of this chapter I build on Mah's notion of 'dereliction tourist', defined as the person seeking out

abandoned sites ‘as sites of aesthetic pleasure, leisure or adventure’ (2014), to pose the idea that there are still chances to discover both a site and oneself even if we have preconceived ideas of what we are supposed to find. This required me to lower my expectations and that is the reason why the travel guide I designed merely contained information on how to arrive at the sites. In point of fact arriving at the sites was not an easy task because, even if Alterazioni Video have consciously mapped them out<sup>2</sup>, when driving a rental car one cannot ask the GPS to take him to an unfinished dam.

The second section of this chapter keeps building on the figure of the ‘dereliction tourist’ and, especially, on its link to urban exploration practices. Urban exploration is the act of illegally trespassing on abandoned sites, and its ultimate objective is to re-democratise history by bringing into question the increasing regulation of today’s urban environment (Garrett 2013). Yet unfinished public works in Sicily viewed as ‘unruly places’ (Bonnett 2014) are compared to the island’s commodified touristic ruins. I argue that the former have the potential to function as sites of adventure and play (Edensor 2005; 2008a), offering me an experience ‘which is seldom found elsewhere’ (Fraser 2012, 149). The experimental component expressed here takes us to the third section, where I conclude noting the aesthetic possibilities with which unfinished public works are charged. To do such a thing requires, just as Judkins poses, that my work ‘is not so much about the things that are not there anymore, it is about what *is* still there – our connection with the place itself’ (2014, 444). Yet this chapter aims to contribute to the existing claim to counter modern ruins’ negative understanding by exploring embodied narratives and subjectivity (Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014a; Garrett 2011; 2016). Aesthetics are essential in my approach to incompleteness and, in fact, it is an interesting paradox that, due to the fact that unfinished public works are completely neglected, they are indirectly well preserved. Thus, precisely because they are ignored ruins that represent a failure, they will likely physically remain in the landscape longer than any regular building. This persistence has always fascinated me, however, it is not entirely my intention to glorify or beautify *Incompiuto Siciliano* as sites of mere visual consumption. The notion of aesthetics that I argue here is rather phenomenological – fully corporeal and closer to affection and emotion (Pétursdóttir 2014; 2016) – where I value ruins both for their ruined condition and for their mere existence. Ultimately, this allows me to construct my own narrative about *Incompiuto Siciliano*, which is totally detached from its actual negative origin while my presence imbues unfinished ruins ‘with a new layer of history and meaning’ (Armstrong 2011, 277). But the question now is, how should I express all this?

Romanticism and travel writing in general can give us some clues. These narrative forms are usually dominated by rich textual descriptions accounted in first person and, though subjectivity has traditionally been an enemy of science, I do think that emotional depictions have the potential to play an important role in academic writing. The way in which this article is written advocates for a different scientific language, ‘for alternative expressions and forms that *care for personal experiences* and convey moments of wonder and affect’ (Pétursdóttir 2016, 372). In sum, if I am dealing with feelings

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2 Alterazioni Video’s online map marking the exact location of unfinished public works in Italy is available at: <http://www.incompiutosiciliano.org/opere>



that are usually out of the scientific realm, it is not unreasonable to use a different and more creative register to communicate – while still, being scientific. However, we would be doing a disservice by considering ‘text’ the only relevant contribution to these academic purposes. The fact that, as touched on the beginning of this introduction, I had no words to describe my emotional state when visiting the unfinished dam exemplifies just how difficult communicating emotions through language can be. And even if I had tried, it would not have been enough because whichever words I would have used could only have been an approximation of the affective associations I was experiencing at that very moment.

The use of pictures could certainly help since ‘literature focusing on contemporary ruinscapes cannot do without images’ (Fraser 2012, 140) and a variety of researchers have claimed photography is a useful method in the renewed understanding of modern ruins (e.g. Edensor 2005; Pusca 2010; Strangleman 2013; Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014b, Garrett 2015). However, on this occasion, I have gone one step further as I believe that audiovisual material has the potential to express not only a mute and static instant but, by presenting movement in collaboration with intriguing visual and aural atmospheres of *Incompiuto Siciliano*, wider senses can be brought into play. Though the technique of Witmore’s ‘peripatetic videos’ (2005) considerably differs from my material, the arguments lying behind his audiovisual archaeological practice are similar to mine. Rather than simply representing, Witmore aspires to ‘mediate’ with eventual viewers, hoping to cause active reactions. He aims to transcend scholarly narratives through, once more, a phenomenological scope that ‘allows us to attain richer and fuller translations of bodily experience and materiality that are located, multi-textured, reflexive, sensory and polysemous’ (2004, 60). Yet, how can I bring the sense of enormity of being in an unfinished swimming-pool or the mysterious desolation felt in an abandoned theatre closer to a person that has never been there and probably will never be? Sound is essential in this process and I have captured it directly from the environment – including the times when my colleagues and I have played music with the elements found while exploring unfinished works. This is not inconsequential as long as music within ruins ‘plays a critical role in the temporalities of this imagination, contributing to the formation and reformation of spatial memories as it connects to and revives alternative times and places latent within a particular environment’ (Fletcher 2011). And even if one could relate this to a nostalgia which mourns the tragic fate of buildings that have never been used nor inhabited, my objective is rather to present these sites as spaces of celebration. Therefore, each of the three following sections is illustrated by one video that has been uploaded to an online video platform, inviting us to reflect on how modern ruins are documented by exposing an amalgam of situations in which you, the reader/viewer, become part of my trip.

## AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE DERELICTION (GRAND) TOURIST

Mah states that the dereliction tourist is the person ‘deliberately seeking out spaces of dereliction as sites for urban exploration, aesthetic appreciation, and discovery’ (2014). According to this definition, was I practicing dereliction tourism in Sicily? The answer

is a more complex one than a simple yes or no. If we follow a strict reading of these words, I could argue that I do, in fact, deliberately seek out unfinished public works; however, my primary objective was to formally document them for my research. And though, once there, unfinished public works became sites of exploration, appreciation and discovery for me, the truth is that I did not seek that out in advance. I had not formulated any hypothesis to prove, not in the traditional scientific sense, and yet these thoughts came to my mind strictly because I was there (Armstrong 2011).

Perhaps, the problematic term here is ‘tourist’. Etymologically speaking, it seems evident that we can trace the term’s origin back to the Romantic Grand Tour but, considering the recent democratization of tourism and its subsequent trivialization (e.g. Urry 1990; Larsen 2006; Thurlow and Jaworski 2011), who would dare label Goethe or Wagner as mere ‘tourists’? The contributions that derived from their stays in Sicily – part of the book *Italian Journey* by the former and the completion of the opera *Parsifal* by the latter – allow us to place these creators in opposition to the cultural indifference that today is usually associated with tourists. And while the relevance of my work is obviously not comparable to that of Goethe or Wagner, it is also important for defining a separation with the ‘turistas vulgaris’: the fact of deeply reflecting on a trip once the trip is over (Löfgren 1999; Crang 2011). One could legitimately argue that this is only due to my position as a scholar researching unfinished public works, but this self-questioning is precisely one of the attributes that distinguishes me from a tourist, even if I was also doing a ‘tour’.

Another differing feature is, obviously, the very nature of the sites I was visiting. Technically, I was a tourist: I had booked cheap flight tickets to stay in Sicily for only one week; I had prepared a travel guide; I had rented a car; I drove hundreds of kilometres to take some simple pictures of what I wanted to see; and in the evenings, still with my colleagues, I sat in some restaurants to eat pizza. But somehow, the non-conventional character of unfinished public works as tourism destinations changes everything. For my own family, it had not been that surprising as they were aware of my study, however, I know that for my colleagues’ relatives, our trip was really quite absurd. Even if visiting modern ruins is becoming increasingly normalised, I still remember the shocked faces of every waitress or hotel receptionist when I told them that I was travelling across the island just to visit unfinished public works. It is not that locals were embarrassed by our knowledge of such a problem – indeed, when they later knew that I was actually researching the buildings, they seemed happy that someone was finally paying incompleteness any attention. It is rather that they could not comprehend the motivation behind visiting an unfinished building when there are plenty of conventional touristic things to do in Sicily.

These reactions clearly show that modern ruins are ‘only fascinating for some people, typically outsiders, passing by, snapping photos’ (Mah 2014). Yet, simply by using the term ‘ruin’, I am fetishizing a set of spaces that locals view as a familiar sight (Gordillo 2014). I do not deny the interesting scope of studying modern ruins in a formal ethnographic manner – indeed, in the context of unfinished public works in Sicily and in the rest of Italy, this is still to be done. However, since what I truly wanted to do was document deserted places that nobody ever used and where I never found

anyone during my visits, the only available subject of study was, in fact, me. I guess there must be personal memories attached to certain unfinished public works; for instance, stories of former construction workers or the lifelong experiences of people who have homes nearby so they have been seeing an uncompleted building on a daily basis for decades. But is it my own fascination not as valuable as these perceptions? My experience of unfinished public works is surely different from that of locals, and that is the takeaway message from my experience. Where I see a peaceful atmosphere to just sit and contemplate the horizon, others may see a place they would never go. And ultimately, this is an interesting reciprocity because, the fact that some people would never go to an unfinished public building is precisely what allows me to perceive it as a peaceful site where I can dawdle while contemplating the horizon.

As explained above, far from rejecting the limitations of my condition as a dereliction tourist, I am embracing the immediacy of being an outsider (Mah 2014) to add a new layer of history to unfinished public works – just like Gordillo (2014) points towards one's own origin as a determining factor in the appreciation of ruins. This makes me think critically on whether I am truly an outsider or, on the contrary, somehow part of Sicily. I was born in Jaén, a city with a population of 120,000 people in Andalusia, yet the south of another Mediterranean country: Spain. Spain has been strongly hit by the recent recession, and thus, dozens of public works have remained similarly unfinished. From the window at my parents' house I can see the remnants of what was to be a museum. They started to build in 2009 and, eight years later, it is only a huge uncompleted mass of concrete. In May 2014, I snuck in, took some pictures, and sent them to the major Spanish newspaper – *El País* – together with an article arguing against the spending of any more money on the building's formal construction. I claimed that the museum was already beautiful in its unfinished form and that we should all find alternative ways to re-appropriate it more informally. *El País* published my pictures and parts of my text; the resulting review remained in the top-10 most-widely read articles for one week<sup>3</sup>. What I aim to illustrate with this anecdote is my acute awareness of incompleteness and the potential link between my personal background as a Spaniard and the topic of my present research; and so, am I a foreigner in Sicily?

Video 1 encapsulates these thoughts<sup>4</sup>. My colleagues and I perform the music in this piece, which was recorded on-site. During one of our intrusions on an unfinished theatre, we found discarded parts of wooden pallets and small pieces of corrugated iron, and we spontaneously began to play a sort of marimba rhythm. This action may as well serve as an introduction to the notion of experimental behaviour in ruins, but since I argue this in the following sections, my interest here is to focus on how concepts and views of *Incompiuto Siciliano* are captured, marking these sites as places for contemplation. Clips of unfinished public works are intermingled with scenes of the everyday Sicilian life. I considered this important because we are seeing what is

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3 The resulting review in *El País* is available at:  
[http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2014/05/25/andalucia/1401025549\\_659596.html](http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2014/05/25/andalucia/1401025549_659596.html).

It is worth mentioning that the construction works of the museum have recently been retaken and it seems now more likely that they could inaugurate the building in the near future.

4 Video 1 is available at: <https://vimeo.com/203863437/967ca7eabf>

regularly omitted from ruin imagery, and it ultimately shows a society that is not so distinct from my own.

When traveller Guy de Maupassant did the Romantic Grand Tour of Sicily, he compared some of the locals' sociological aspects to that of Spaniards:

Sicilians are much like Arabs [...] Their natural pride, their appreciation of noble titles, the nature of their haughtiness and even their physical appearance make them look more like Spaniards than Italians [...] It is their tone of voice, the nasal intonation of street vendors ([1886] 2013, 16, own translation).

I noted these shared traces when the same waitresses and hotel receptionists who were surprised by our trip treated us with incredible hospitality once they found out my colleagues and I were Spaniards. They talked to us of football, they remarked on our tanned skin, just like theirs, and they referred to our common cultural roots as Sicily was under Spanish dominion for centuries. 'Voi siete come i nostri fratelli'<sup>5</sup>, they used to tell us. Thus, at least in my case, the insider/outsider line is rather blurred, and still, I found in *Incompiuto Siciliano* the authenticity of experience that is usually attributed to modern ruins (Fraser 2012).

It is this latter thought which inevitably leads me to delve into one of the terms that Mah uses to define dereliction tourism, I mean that of 'urban exploration'. Now the question becomes whether we were carrying out urban exploration in Sicily. Considering the unruly nature of the sites we visited in combination with the playful sense of freedom we felt and how all this is susceptible to being treated with a Situationist approach – as I do in the following section – there is no doubt in my mind that we behaved just like urban explorers. Nevertheless, I do feel some clarification is necessary. When one thinks of urban exploration as a transgressive practice to get to know the hidden ruination of modernity (Garrett 2013), the first images that come to mind are those impressive pictures of abandoned spaces in big cities like Berlin, London, New York or Detroit, where consistent and constant alternative communities of practitioners coexist (Garrett 2010; 2014). The sites of interest are normally sealed and guarded, which ultimately adds an adrenaline rush by confirming the practice as illegal (Arboleda 2016). However, the Sicilian context in which my own experience unfolded was different. Most unfinished public works there are located in small and medium-sized villages like, for example, Giarre, Paternò, Randazzo, Blufi or Nuova Gibellina, and thus, the environment in which my explorations took place differ greatly from the urban conditions of big cities. Within these small and medium-sized villages, unfinished public works are usually located on the outskirts of towns, with almost no formal barriers or warning posters stopping you from entering. Moreover, the building's worthlessness, where there is nothing to take or break, with their public status – yet they somehow belong to everyone and no one at the same time – may well explain the fact that they do not rely on any surveillance at all. Even so, I assumed that when sneaking onto one of these sites I was doing something illegal, but the fear of being caught was definitely not present since the relaxed atmosphere of these villages

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5 'You're like our brothers'.

contributes to erasing such a sense of risk. Therefore, in my experience one can enter and remain in an unfinished public work with the same level of ease and tranquillity as if one were visiting any commonplace location. Perhaps even more.

## ON BEING UNRULY

If dereliction tourism leads to a discussion of urban exploration, then urban exploration forces me to tackle further issues. Edensor wisely notes that '[a]uthorities in cities that are able to attract inward investment are more likely to demolish derelict structure taking up space that might be used for new enterprises, whereas in cities which fail to attract new investment, there tends to be a greater prevalence of ruins' (2005, 4–5). This thought can certainly be applied to the Sicilian rural contexts I visited in search of unfinished public works. These are towns where history is not as accelerated as we would usually assume today (Virilio 2006); these are towns where changes occur later and slower. And meanwhile, unfinished public works simply stand there because there is no economic capacity to either demolish or finish them. It would be reasonable to condemn this status quo in which uncompleted buildings are seemingly inactive while, at the same time, calling out for eventual investments that could revert this situation. However, I argue that it is precisely the unfinished condition of these sites – ruined and unruly – which makes them different, valuable and appealing.

I am aware of the controversy that this reflection could cause as it defies common sense and, academically speaking, it contradicts the notion of progress (DeSilvey and Edensor 2012). But in a world that is increasingly scrutinized, regulated and known, unfinished public works can be fascinating. Bonnett catalogues them as 'unruly places' because they 'have the power to disrupt our expectations [challenging] us to see ourselves for what we are, a place-making and place-loving species' (2014, 297, 300). To 'explore' somehow means to design your own path, and unfinished public works provided me an opportunity for liberation from usual social constraints (Edensor 2005). Of course, every space has its own constraints, but here my presence and behaviour are mostly inoffensive, which allows me a higher degree of freedom when compared to sites where a formal activity is carried out. This does not only tell us a lot about the spaces I explored but it also tells us a lot about me as an individual. In this sense, and since exploration is commonly related to discovery, Garrett remarks that explorers 'are not looking to learn anything new but to learn it new ways – through experience rather than representation. We go into a place, we dig around, we interpret it ourselves' (2015, 87). Yet I knew I was not the first person to explore unfinished public works in Sicily, and consequently, I did not expect to discover anything particularly relevant. My presence inside the empty hole of what was to be a swimming-pool is, to some extent, meaningless, but still, it is only in being there that I discover how 'to grasp the banal everyday life of things' (Pétursdóttir 2012, 600). There is no a tour guide explaining why this site is important because it is not: it is just an unfinished swimming-pool. However, I value it for being just that, and this is an intriguing thought that would not have come to mind at any random touristic spot where the site is correctly preserved and which contains a narrative that is already fixed:



While walking among the well-kept ruins of, for example, Pompeii, Rome and Athens, may be an experience equally (though differently) affective to that of entering a recently abandoned building, the fact remains that the former is easily conceived of as heritage while the latter is generally not. And more important than their genuine ‘oldness’ in this relation, is the very fact that the former have been subjected to a particular curative care and a particular *aesthetics*, crucial to their current mode of being as styled, ordered and pleasant spaces where further decay is staved off through restoration and preservation (Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014a, 15).

This quote invites us to think of an interesting point: that the only fate of a regulated site – classical ruins in this case – is that of being a touristic spot. But, would it not be exciting to freely wander through Pompeii, Rome or Athens without other visitors doing the same and without following any rules? I am sure that this is the dream of many – I would also enjoy this a lot – but we simply cannot do so as classical ruins are highly controlled. Consequently, regardless of the nature of the ruins I visit, the aspect I value most is the sense of freedom and, in Sicily, I could only experience that while exploring unfinished public works. Let’s reverse the question: would it have been so exciting to visit the unfinished swimming-pool if I had had to pay an entrance fee and follow a guided tour? I would have probably seen the same things but I would have never been able to simulate a football match with my colleagues using the huge concrete hole as a field and an empty rusty can as a ball – which I did. Regulation affects the way we have to behave, and ultimately, if one does not want to behave in the accepted way, this requires an avoiding of regulation.

After having explored several unfinished public works in the morning, my colleagues and I went to Taormina one evening and another evening to Agrigento. In Taormina, our objective was to visit the outstanding Greek theatre; however, we arrived there 15 minutes before the closing time and we agreed that it would not be worth it to pay for a ticket for such a short visit. Somehow we had forgotten that tourist sites have restricted visiting hours – a basic principle of regulation that is inconceivable for an unfinished public work. Our clothes were still dirty after our day of exploration and we decided to sit in a café to rest for some time. We could see hordes of tourists and fancy couples strolling along the main street of beautiful Taormina and, after half an hour, we left the city with the feeling that we did not belong there. A similar situation occurred in Agrigento. On this occasion, we went to the magnificent Valley of the Temples and stood for some minutes in the queue of tourists waiting to buy an entry ticket at the entryway. Here was a souvenir shop, several turnstile gates and even one of those machines that makes a commemorative coin out of a five cent coin. I stared at my colleagues, my colleagues stared back, and we all suddenly noticed how absurd our situation was after having spent the whole day sneaking onto unfinished public sites. We left before even entering. At that very moment I understood how, just like shopping centres, these touristic sites have become mass consumption spots (Urry 2004). It is not a matter of down playing them to emphasize my affection for the ruins I explored, indeed, without a shadow of doubt, there can also be a critical motivation behind visiting these normative spots. Yet it is clear that the major difference here is what, regardless of the location, separates the curious individual from the lethargic mass. And beyond the relevance of this reflection, it is surprisingly funny that the biggest shopping centre in Agrigento is a postmodern building whose façade resembles

a Greek construction made of glass and steel that is called ‘Cittá dei Templi’<sup>6</sup> – which we did not enter either.

In stark contrast, when we were inside an unfinished public work, the experience had no limitations. One is able to explore every corner, walk up and down the stairs one wants or access tight corridors. And though there were three of us, at the very moment of entrance, we used to unconsciously split up and did not see each other until we gathered again some time later. This is remarkable because it clearly shows the subjective potential and emancipatory power that one can feel inside a ruin. Movement is not at all constrained, it is purely fluid and improvised (Edensor 2005; 2008b), this reinforced by the fact that unfinished public works occasionally do not even have walls or doors. I could not tell how long we were in this or that building because the infinite spatial possibilities contribute to the loss of any notion of time and, in this sense, incompleteness does not necessarily differ that much from older ruins (Tilley 1997). However, the issue is that many authors have posited that this absolute freedom provided by modern ruins is susceptible to being regarded as a variant of psychogeography and the Situationist *dérive* (e.g. Fassi 2010; Beck and Cornford 2012; Fraser 2016); I can certainly say that, though we had the clear purpose of finding unfinished public works, once inside, we created our own micro-world in which the act of wandering became random and destinationless. Moreover, Situationism is labelled this way because it encourages ‘the making of “situations”, playful creations of an active life prefigurative of a utopian remarking of social relations’ (Smith 2010, 104). And even if Situationists originally aimed to involve and provoke the rest of the society through their interventions (Careri 2002), my colleagues and I caused our own ‘situations’ without being seen by anyone, making unruly playgrounds out of unfinished public works.

Video 2 demonstrates the playful atmosphere we created in unfinished public works<sup>7</sup>. It starts at a children’s park, a place which is actually in use though it contains a building that was supposed to host a library and a game room but was left half-constructed more than 40 years ago. The childish music is directly recorded from a coin-operated caterpillar on-site, providing a fun soundscape in the video that perfectly suits the enjoyable scenes recorded at several *Incompiuto Siciliano*’s works. After watching this video, the viewer may be surprised to have seen a group of adults behaving as if they were children. It is a behavior that does not correspond with our age, however, this is not out of context when we are dealing with modern ruins:

[Abandoned sites] afford room for imagination. If you think of where kids like to play it is often not in the prescribed playgrounds but it is in the sites outside of that, where there are objects that can be transformed in the imagination into a whole variety of things (Pinder, as quoted in Garrett 2010, 1453).

Indeed, it can be argued that unfinished public works, in their ruined form, ‘function as sites for adventure and wild play that may not be available elsewhere’ (Edensor 2008a, 263; cf. Moshenska 2014), and ultimately, in their being alternative spaces they

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6 ‘City of Temples’.

7 Video 2 is available at: <https://vimeo.com/203874801/e537245f0a>

gave us the opportunity to behave in an alternative way. This makes me think of how our behavior is alienated in regulated spaces and, on the other hand, of whether unruly places unmask our imposed identities and allow us to unveil how we truly are. Suddenly, we are a group of three friends who no longer gather to just sit and recount stories of the past; we are three friends who are *producing* new stories. And though this is already an exciting feeling, it is not the only emotion that one can experience in these locations.

## AESTHETICS AS EMBODIED EXPERIENCE

In the Romantic tradition, aesthetic appreciation is expressed as long as classical ruins are ‘well enough preserved (while retaining the proper amounts of picturesque irregularity) to produce the desired mix of emotions in the beholder’ (Roth 1997, 5). Considering this, is Incompiuto Siciliano not picturesque enough? Were it not for my knowing that they are only a few decades old, I could say that their unfinished materiality of skeletal shapes of concrete makes them look as though they had been erected a couple of millennia ago. But the difference between seeing an unfinished public work from outside and getting inside it is obviously a question of physical distance. To some extent, it is paradoxical that architecture, an art that is understood to be lived in, experienced and sensed, has now become something to be exclusively consumed and appreciated visually, with buildings that are designed more like a powerful image rather than spaces in which to move (Robinson 2012). Even at closer distances and, considering the mentioned increasing regularization, the space is not conceived to be interacted with – as if everything was a museum safeguarded behind a glass case (Merriman 1991). Pallasmaa notes this dominance of ‘ocularcentrism’, in which architecture is merely constituted by a series of ‘retinal images’ and a certain building is ‘an end in itself’ (2005, 63). However, for the author, it should not be that way, and thus, he calls for a wider sensorial understanding of the space, where full knowledge and authenticity can only be encountered through the action of the whole body; where memory and imagination can only be experienced as long as we equalize the importance of a building with the importance of ourselves. To be honest, I do not remember the precise form of the first unfinished public work I visited in Sicily, however, I do recall that it was a warm afternoon and when I touched the corrugated iron of its pillars, it was hot. Similarly, I could not tell how many floors the stands of the unfinished stadium I trespassed upon had, but I remember hearing the sound of my steps and the echoes they caused. One evening, we went to a tiny village to see a half-built bridge, and I would have to look once more at the pictures I took to say the exact number of arches that the construction has; but what I could not forget is how the sky quickly got dark and how the smell of the fireplaces coming from the houses nearby penetrated my nose. All these moments contribute to the forging of an emotional map – beyond sight – of the sites I visited, and ultimately, they bring to mind feelings such as joy or delight and also discomfort and vulnerability. And even if these feelings are not directly related with visual contemplation, they are essential for a

complete aesthetic experience<sup>8</sup>.

Indeed, the term ‘aesthetics’ has only now been engulfed by common language to denote the physical attributes of a site and then to issue a value judgement on whether the site is beautiful or not – despite the fact that, in its original concept, aesthetics referred to what can be felt and sensed through experience and perception (Péttursdóttir and Olsen 2014a). Yet, it is not a matter of me rating the shapes and textures of unfinished public works to come up with a universal truth regarding their physical beauty; it is a question of stating that incompleteness responds to certain aesthetics as long as it is able to trigger emotions. Furthermore, these emotions do not have to necessarily be good. Being delighted in an unfinished velodrome is only a part of my fascination but the fear of being chased by a stray dog in the same location is part of my fascination too, and consequently, the velodrome is aesthetically-pleasing and even sublime. The enormity of Mount Etna viewed from the stage of a multi-functional hall whose roof was never built is quite wonderful, but the claustrophobia felt in the building’s inner and obscure corridors is also part of my wonder, and once again, the multi-functional hall is aesthetically-pleasing. Along these lines, one could legitimately argue that unfinished public works are ugly and so, since I do not think the same, it is clear that beauty, as it is commonly understood, is the result of personal taste. However, what I note here is that anyone visiting one of these places will surely have to say something more than simply ‘it is ugly or it is beautiful’. Beyond value judgments, further emotions, certainly different from my own emotions, will have been aroused in this or that person. Therefore, while beauty or ugliness are subjected to visual impression and opinion, the potential of unfinished public works to be aesthetically-pleasing is indisputable because these sites offer wider embodied perceptions.

Let’s think once more about when we were children and the bodily experiences that related the beginning of our comprehension of the world with the inputs that surround us. Children obviously see things, for example a toy, but children also enjoy biting toys. They feel the need to touch mostly everything and they are attracted by any kind of sound, developing their learning process through this constant interaction between things and senses. I find interesting this comparison with children particularly because their understanding unfolds in the present and it is progressively adopted to their future, however, we do not usually think about children’s past. Present and future are contemplated, but the past is basically excluded – and this is precisely what I experienced while visiting unfinished public works in Sicily. While sensing these spaces, my focus was put in the present and, at some point, maybe due to my background as an architect, I wondered how unfinished public works would look in the future. My concern comes from what the space *is* now (Judkins 2014) and what it *could be* after several years; and I assume that, for many sites, there will not be too much difference between these two stages. But my concern is not for what the space once *was*. The landscape artwork *Cretto di Burri* comes to exemplify this temporal rupture perfectly. In 1968, the Sicilian town of Gibellina was completely destroyed in an earthquake and, years later, it was

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<sup>8</sup> In the last years, the multi-sensorial experience of ruination has been taken into account even in heritage sites susceptible to being considered as ‘conventional’. Such is the case of Forte Belvedere in Northern Italy or Philadelphia’s State Penitentiary, where decay keeps running its course.

rebuilt as Nuova Gibellina twenty kilometres away. In 1985, authorities commissioned the artist Alberto Burri to build a memorial in the disaster's original location and he designed a grid of 85,000 square metres made of concrete blocks of 1.5 metres height that is supposed to be read as an abstraction of the former town. The construction was interrupted five years later and it remained unfinished until 2015, when authorities decided to invest in its completion allowing it to coincide with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of its erection (Maderna 2015). Yet *Cretto di Burri* is today a public and open space where one can freely sit, wander and jump, and its huge scale and the (un)finished materiality of the concrete – that still make it resemble a ruin – are quite overwhelming. All this highlighted the sense of solitude I felt during my visit to such a remote location so, for me, it was not a site to explicitly honour the victims of the earthquake but a place in which to be aesthetically conscious of my present existential awareness. I felt a strong temporal distance from anything that occurred here prior to my presence, and this, which may sound like a contradiction because ruins usually symbolize the weight of history, should not be that strange as alternative readings suggest that 'ruins do not merely evoke the past' (Edensor 2005, 125). I believe that my sensory and aesthetic experience in Sicily can only be understood as a present reality that serves as an invitation for future engagements, and yet, it strengthens the multiple temporalities available in unfinished public works (Armstrong 2011).

Hence, recognizing that even if one of the distinctive traces of modernity is the production of ruins, our common sense does not see it as 'normal' to go there. Ruins are part of the contemporary landscape with which we became familiar at a certain distance, but our consciousness somehow dictates that there is no need to see more than what we see from outside. I do accept the normalcy of this thought but I want to state that, once inside a ruin, and though unexpected sensations arise, after some minutes, these sensations tend to be naturalized. Similarly to the way our pupils contract or dilate depending on whether we are in an environment with more or less light, the rest of our body adapts to the unfamiliar setting of being in an unfinished public work. Suddenly, I am no longer aware of the outside and 'normal' world, instead, my senses and my mind perceive incompleteness as a normal world in itself. Unfinished public works can certainly be undesirable, neglected and overlooked, and attempting to change their fate is totally legitimate. However, noting the monumentality and the vast quantity of these sites, it would not be unreasonable to think that, in a realistic sense, many of them will simply remain unfinished forever. They were once buildings under construction but we have to accept that their unfinished condition will be dominant still in a distant future<sup>9</sup>. Far from considering this a tragic fate, I think that my aesthetic experience contributes to the beginning of the afterlife for these buildings; those which are now open to further experiences whose appeal resides in being different every time. Or, in Garrett's words:

[T]hat is part of what makes the experience what it is: being in a ruin that, despite remaining popularly perceived as 'closed and dead', quite clearly still has an architectural and memorial life to live out. Explorers enjoy being a part of that afterlife, being witness to the creeping death of a place, a rare privilege (2015, 77).

<sup>9</sup> The cultural implications of such an entropic approach are discussed in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.



Video 3 mediates the statements made in this section of the chapter<sup>10</sup>. I got inside an 800-metre tunnel designed to transport water to an unfinished dam. The entrance resembles a concrete brutalist construction and, once inside, the atmosphere turns darker at every step. The echo in the chamber is impressive and I spontaneously started to sing a sort of Gregorian chant repeating ‘Incompiuto Siciliano’ as the only lyrics. This music plays through the entire video, with closer views, textures, material elements and all the additional sounds produced by our interactions with them. Mysticism and claustrophobia; heartbeats and sweat. Breath. Has anyone else been in these places after we left?

## CONCLUSION

During the days we spent in Sicily, my colleagues and I used to exclaim ‘Wow... What a great beauty!’ every time we were contemplating unfinished public works. I have to admit that, at that time, we used that expression to denote the shape and material qualities of the buildings, and I also have to admit that such an exclamation was in direct reference to Paolo Sorrentino’s film *The Great Beauty*, which only one year before had been awarded the Oscar for best foreign language film. I have watched *The Great Beauty* a couple of times more after having been in Sicily and I consider it an ideal point from which to finish polishing the arguments expressed in this chapter.

The film is about the existential crisis of a sixty-five year-old man, Jep Gambardella, who is masterfully played by actor Toni Servillo. Gambardella lives in a lovely penthouse with stunning views of the Roman Coliseum and he works as an art critic for a prestigious magazine. His style, his culturally and economic privileged position, and his influencing circle of friends lead us to think that he has everything that a person could need to be happy. When Gambardella was young, he wrote a wonderful novel and, in the search of inspiration to keep writing, he moved from his small coastal hometown to the cradle of architectural beauty: Rome. However, four decades later, he has been unable to write another book. He is tormented by the ridiculous frivolity of the ‘highlife’ despite the fact that he was originally ‘destined for sensibility’. And somehow, I also think that, in order to fully appreciate *Incompiuto Siciliano*, one must be destined for sensibility.

*The Great Beauty* is a sequence of vignettes that can be metaphorically transferred to my own presence in Sicily. At the beginning of the film, there is a group of Japanese tourists who are paying attention to their tour guide while visiting the outstanding Fontana dell’Acqua Paola; one of the tourists leaves the group and he goes to freely take some pictures. All of a sudden, he suffers a heart attack and falls down dead on the ground. I see it as a critique of the regularisation of space and the dramatic consequences with which society can punish anyone who attempts to experience something by himself. In another scene, Gambardella is lying on the bed, enjoying the moment after he has

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10 Video 3 is available at: <https://vimeo.com/203987616/f9314cedb3>

made love with a beautiful woman at her place. She breaks such a magical instant by leaving the room to get her laptop so she can show him some pictures she took – which Gambardella is not interested in seeing. Just a moment before escaping through the window, he convincingly tells himself that the most important thing he discovered a few days after turning sixty-five is that he cannot waste any more time doing things he does not want to do. Later, Gambardella will confess: ‘At my age, a beauty isn’t enough’. This reminds me, once more, of the moment in which my colleagues and I were standing at the entrance of Agrigento’s Valley of the Temples. We did not enter because we simply did not feel like doing so; and perhaps, at our age, a beautiful site is not enough either.

In a memorable dialogue, a depressed Gambardella is trying to express his existential disenchantment to his editor, who is also his friend. In a moment of affection, the editor calls him ‘Jeppino’ (diminutive of his given name ‘Jep’), and Gambardella, considerably touched, says that nobody had called him that for centuries. The editor, in a comforting tone, replies: ‘A friend, every now and again, needs to make their friend feel like they did as a child’. This scene brings to mind how I played, jumped, ran, or in sum, sensed unfinished public works in Sicily in the presence of my colleagues. Because, after all, Daniel and Chema made me feel as if I were a child again. And talking about friends, back in the film, Gambardella visits one of his, who is increasingly frustrated as he struggles to write a theatre play. Gambardella scolds his friend for thinking that ‘certain intellectual feats’ give him dignity, and then suggests: ‘Try and write something of your own, like a feeling’. In some way, I do feel like Gambardella was talking to me.

Throughout the film, the only moment in which we see a passionate Gambardella is when he recalls his ‘first time’. With a blank look on his face and thin smile, he recounts:

On an island... one summer. I was 18, she was 20. At the lighthouse, at night. I went to kiss her, she turned away. I was disappointed. But then she turned to look at me. She brushed me with her lips... she smelled of flowers. I didn’t move, I wasn’t able to move. Then she took a step back... and said... She took a step back. And said...

Gambardella does not find the words to continue, but at the end of the film we will discover that such an instant, which is beyond description, is Gambardella’s ‘great beauty’. He moved to Rome thinking that an idyllic highlife would fulfil his expectations, however, nothing is comparable to that moment on a summer night – and ultimately, not having experienced anything nearly similar is the reason why he never wrote another book. In the last scene, Gambardella reconciles with himself by coming back to the lighthouse for the first time after all these years.

I have not gone back to Sicily anymore after the contemplation of that unfinished dam left me speechless, but this has not stopped me from understanding unfinished public works’ capacity to trigger emotions, and my own capacity to feel those emotions. I have had to remember, and since they say that there is nothing more subjective than memories, only through them have I found The Great Beauty of Incompiuto Siciliano.

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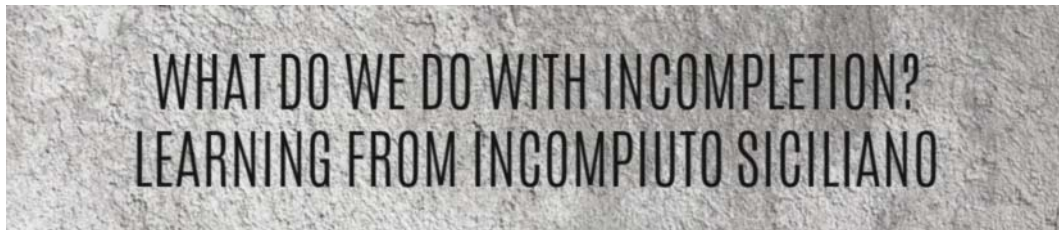


## OUTLOOK

Chapter 4 is obviously the most personal contribution to this dissertation, however, I have largely justified its suitability by connecting my own experiences with broader literatures on modern ruins. The chapter also represents a moment of reflection before tackling a final question that results from common sense: ‘What do we do with unfinished public works?’ *Reckoning with Ruins* gives some clues to the ‘productive possibilities’ of the eventual conservation of ruins and I now extend such a debate to the context of *Incompiuto Siciliano*. Once more, there is no a single answer and, clearly, finishing the works, demolishing them, not doing anything or opting for an ‘active’ arrested decay each have a set of cultural implications that must be taken into account. Regardless of the specificities of each unfinished construction, these four approaches are all likely to happen – demonstrating the richness and complexity of incompleteness. With Chapter 5, I attempt to come full circle, opening my research up to the available spectrum of options awaiting incompleteness as one of the key urban topics after the 2008 recession dotted the world’s landscape with a plethora of unfinished geographies.



## Chapter 5



### INTRODUCTION

‘It’s difficult to travel around Sicily and not stumble upon these massive concrete constructions’ – says Andrea Masu in reference to the approximately 160 unfinished public works spread across the whole island (Interview, 15 March 2017). As noted in previous chapters, Masu is a member of the group of artists Alterazioni Video who, in 2007, and after having mapped around 400 unfinished public works throughout Italy, declared such a phenomenon to be a formal architectural style: the so-called ‘Incompiuto Siciliano’<sup>1</sup>. These constructions, which include any kind of infrastructure or social building imaginable located in urban, rural and remote contexts, are the result of a systematic and deliberately dysfunctional modernization (i.e. mafia and corruption amongst further problems) taking place in Italy during the decades that followed World War II. Chapter 1 showed that, even if the period and economic situation in which they were erected are particular, the uncompleted landscape that remains is not that dissimilar from the one left by the 2008 recession in countries like Ireland or Spain. Be that as it may, with *Incompiuto Siciliano*, the artists’ objective is to generate, by completely detaching the buildings from their negative origins, a new and positive aesthetic paradigm for unfinished public works. This requires a change of mindset from which these ‘massive concrete constructions’ are now seen as a form of art full of heritage implications – deserving of a renewed valorisation (Alterazioni Video 2008).

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1 The opening quote is part of a long semi-structured interview conducted with Andrea Masu on 15 March 2017; the quotes in the rest of the chapter refer to the same interview. On the other hand, and just to reiterate, the term ‘Incompiuto Siciliano’ may be misleading since, according to the artists, this new architectural style comes to represent a *national* reality where any unfinished public work is indeed ‘Incompiuto Siciliano’ even if it is located in a different Italian region to Sicily

After having studied unfinished public works in Italy and Incompiuto Siciliano as an artistic approach for more than three years, I cannot help asking myself the same recurring questions over and over: ‘What do we do with incompleteness?’; ‘Is a structure that has been left half-finished for more than 50 years beyond help?’; ‘How can we deal with such a wide variety of cases?’ and ‘Can eventual practices be extrapolated to other countries?’ The present chapter was born out of these questions and it aims to provide some responses. In order to do so, I further investigate Masu’s position when he states that there are four different possibilities to tackle incompleteness: to finish the buildings; to demolish them; to leave them as they are; or to find new alternative uses while respecting their unfinished spatiality and materiality<sup>2</sup>. In this regard, Masu concludes by asserting that, for him, there is not a single and ideal solution; rather, the issue of incompleteness is so complex that it will inevitably require specific measures for every different case. The main argument of this chapter embraces this latter statement, claiming that, if someone were expecting a unique response to incompleteness, this would simply not be recommendable. I do admit that, in a world that is increasingly looking for quick fixes and where we have become used to global planning, my position may well sound discouraging. However, far from seeing this as a disadvantage, I state that facing a problem that admits a broad range of possibilities is precisely what makes incompleteness interesting and enriching. The objective is then to open up a debate which will undoubtedly be one of the key urban themes in the following years, not only in Italy but also in those countries affected by the unfinished geographies that resulted from the 2008 financial crisis.

## STRUCTURE

The structure of this chapter follows the above mentioned possibilities for incompleteness. The first of these (i.e. to finish the constructions, even if their completion involves a change of the originally intended use) has been excluded from an extensive analysis in this chapter due to the fact that it stands in radical opposition to the notion of ‘unfinishedness’ present in Incompiuto Siciliano’s discourse. ‘Unfinishedness’ is defined by Bille and Sørensen as the quality by which architectural works can ‘endure, transform and assume new forms and experiences through their very disintegration’ (2016, 344). It is not my intention to undermine the possibility of finishing the works – indeed, I assume that this is the option that common sense dictates – I am merely suggesting that such an approach aims to eradicate that which makes incompleteness interesting and, consequently, it is less pertinent to the present analysis. Therefore, I do consider finishing a building to be the most legitimate action to take as long as it is physically feasible, economically viable, and still meets the needs of the population. However, we should be careful not to employ the same agents and actions that once halted the works because, as Kitchin et al. (2014) demonstrate in the case of Ireland,

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2 Andrea Masu expressed this argument in a recent talk at *TEDxPotenza*, where he gave a presentation on the general concerns regarding Incompiuto Siciliano. The eventual future of unfinished public works is discussed in the following video from min. 17:30 onwards:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWmEBk\\_vwQw&t=1062s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWmEBk_vwQw&t=1062s)

this can cause the problem to persist. In sum, the finishing of the buildings should pursue a clear practical purpose and under no circumstances should this contribute to construction *per se* being the economic engine of any society – as has often been the case.

In a realistic sense – and this will be an expression widely used throughout this chapter – not every unfinished public work can be completed. Let's take, for example, the Athletics Stadium and Polo Field in Giarre (Fig. 1). This is one of the most iconic samples of *Incompiuto Siciliano* because it is a clear sample of a 'problem' driven by megalomania, floods of wasted investment, an absurd and unnecessary programme, ridiculous design errors and, surprisingly or not, a weird unfinished beauty. At a staggering cost of €9million, it was expected to host 20,000 spectators in a town of 28,000 inhabitants where there has never been a polo playing tradition. Apart from the interruption of its construction more than twenty years ago, 'the bleachers unacceptable slope and the stairways with its non-standard steps [make the polo stadium] a truly problematic building for the administration because it is impossible to be completed, or to think to a functional rehabilitation' (Bonizzoni et al. 2014, 223). So, once more, the question is: *what do we do* with buildings and structures like this one?

For the last ten years, *Incompiuto Siciliano* has been presented as a sort of cultural value largely celebrated in exhibitions, workshops, festivals, and national and international media. Moreover, a quick search for 'Incompiuto Siciliano' on Google gives approximately 16,800 hits on the internet and its fan page on Facebook is followed by more than 15,500 people. And so, though it has not been officially recognized



Fig. 1. Athletics Stadium and Polo Field, Giarre  
Source: Pablo Arboleda, 2015



as ‘heritage’ by any institution, its growing popularity and the enriching theoretical considerations in which it is framed serve as justification for, as argued in Chapter 3, treating *Incompiuto Siciliano* as an original sample of ‘unfinished heritage’. It is precisely this paradoxical condition of *being heritage without being heritage* which makes unfinished public works allow three different possibilities of intervention that would traditionally fall outside the realm of preservation.

The first section of this chapter studies a radical approach: the destruction and demolition of unfinished public works. One might think that this eventual option clashes with ‘unfinishedness’ in a similar way that finishing the buildings do; that is, by automatically correcting the problem. I do admit the logical reasoning behind this thought and I would actually recommend it in cases where the construction process of some work did not match the legal requirements from the start and, for this reason, the first stone should never have been laid<sup>3</sup>. However, regarding the cultural and heritage frameworks under which this chapter is written, I use the case of a sports hall in the Sicilian town of Comiso that has remained unfinished since the 1990s. In July 2016, *Alterazioni Video* organized a workshop with the objective of demolishing it and, though this never happened, by following Holtorf’s theories (2006; 2015) on destruction and loss I argue that demolishing unfinished public works can paradoxically stress their very nature as heritage. This is interesting because it classes us as a society driven by iconoclasm, where we are actually valuing a piece of architecture through its deliberate destruction (Harrison 2012). In other words, by attempting to exorcize the ghosts of incompleteness we may well be recognizing their importance.

The second section is no less radical since it contemplates leaving unfinished public works as they are. Anyone reading this could well consider this position to be a prototypical way of kicking the problem down the road; however, I build on recent approaches in ‘entropic heritage’ (DeSilvey 2005) to justify the suitability of letting *Incompiuto Siciliano* rot indefinitely. In this sense, if the aesthetic appreciation of unfinished public works has clearly increased due to the buildings’ ruined condition, why should we interfere in this process? This approach is particularly recommendable for remote buildings and infrastructures completely disconnected from any urban or rural dynamics. I suggest that, if there are not enough funds to finish or demolish them, and their eventual re-adaptation makes no sense as they are located in the middle of nowhere, would it not be optimal to just witness their progressive dereliction? A considerable amount of scholars (e.g. Burström 2009; DeSilvey 2006; 2014; Kobińska 2014; Pétursdóttir 2012a; 2012b) have remarked on the suitability of valuing ruins for what they are and, though it may seem that this approach does not correct the situation, it is, in a way, particularly innovative because it invites us to think that, ultimately, a problem is not a problem.

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3 In the context of Spain, a paradigmatic case in which demolition aims to revert a situation is the sadly famous ‘Algarrobico’s Hotel’. The construction of this huge building was approved even though it is located on the coastline of a Natural Park and, since it became a great scandal, it was left half-finished. After ten years of negotiations, authorities have now approved its demolition though the structure is still standing. More information is available at: <http://www.dw.com/en/belated-win-for-coastal-protection-in-spain/a-19067579>

Perhaps, the third section is the one that sounds most hopeful, though as stated, it is not my intention to prioritize one approach over another. It deals with what, in Chapter 3, I called *'active' arrested decay* – a possibility largely explored by Alterazioni Video in several architectural workshops that I will review in depth. It consists of no longer viewing unfinished public works as waste but as resources, finding new alternative uses that would only require minimal interventions, in order to make them safe, while respecting their unfinished materiality and spatiality. In principle, it seems like the ideal option in that communities could actively participate, making their own interaction as part of the heritage process (Smith 2006). Just like the previous approaches, this one is not new either, and we can find infinite examples in which similar practices have been implemented in other ruined areas (e.g. Barndt 2009; Krivý 2013; Oevermann et al. 2016; Sandler 2011; Strömberg 2013). It is definitely a positive solution based on temporary uses and spontaneity, but it requires a certain dynamism in contexts where this is not always the case. Moreover, this should emerge from a real democratisation, by which I mean that such an approach is not imposed – something which is in stark contrast to how communities have long neglected these sites. Once more, what do we do with incompleteness?

## DEMOLITION

The notion of heritage is founded on the ethical mantra that we, the generation of the present, must safe-guard the past for the future. Recognizing this universal truth, how is it that a group of artists, who invented a new architectural style to reappraise unfinished public works, leave the possibility of tearing them down open for discussion? What seems to be a contradiction in terms is a clear exemplification of the interdependence between memory and oblivion (Russell 2012; Morris 2014) – between preservation and erasure. The latter can be defined as 'the forgotten twin of modernization' (González-Ruibal, forthcoming), and indeed, it would be impossible to understand the profusion of heritage without the destructive qualities given to modernity and change. In other words, as there has been increasing material progress, our concerns in terms of conservation became more serious, and today, '[i]t is almost as if one is not allowed to be interested in the past without wanting to keep or restore' (Fairclough 2009, 158). Assuming then that heritage is endangered by modernity, the peculiar paradox of *Incompiuto Siciliano* is that it is not as clear whether a public work which has been unfinished for decades is already a cultural asset or whether it is still a wasted product of failed progress. Its eventual demolition can be viewed as a crime or, on the contrary, as a restorative action. In order to overcome this dichotomy, it is important to keep Holtorf's assertion in mind – '[d]estruction and loss are not the opposite of heritage but part of its very substance' (2006, 101) – to similarly pose that the debate is 'not so much how best to preserve, but how best to erase' (Holtorf and Kristensen 2015, 313).

I would like to begin with a minor case of *Incompiuto Siciliano*'s deliberate destruction. In July 2010, for three days, Alterazioni Video organized the *Incompiuto Siciliano Festival* in

the town of Giarre – which is known as the ‘capital’ of Incompiuto Siciliano for having the highest concentration of unfinished public works in Italy (Pini 2010). The festival aimed to raise awareness of incompleteness amongst locals and included workshops, concerts and performances in which on average around 200 people were involved. One of these performances, which took place at a children’s park whose construction was interrupted forty years before, consisted of tearing an unfinished column down and everyone was invited to take part in it. With a weight of one ton, the column was then transported to the Italian pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale that same year, where it stood there as ‘an invitation to discuss incompleteness, an issue that had been ignored for too long’ (Masu, Interview, 15 March 2017) (Fig. 2). This anecdote shows that the partial destruction of a work can breathe new life into a community and yet the column, moved around and displayed, suddenly becomes a relic – an object of admiration even if the site where it comes from had been dismembered<sup>4</sup>. The column stands as a symbol of all incompleteness in Italy just like a fragment has the potential to represent a whole (Korsmeyer 2014). The performance similarly illustrates how to exorcise architectural remains and, in spite of the obvious differences in terms of historical relevance, it can be compared to the fall of the Berlin Wall in the sense that a festive and participatory destruction is viewed as a positive action. Quoted by van der Hoorn, Ladd writes:

First Berliners, then tourists hacked away at the Wall. They contributed in a minuscule way to the removal of the concrete, but more significant was their ritual participation in the removal of the symbolic barrier. It was in this carnival atmosphere that the concrete was divested of its murderous aura and invested with magical properties (2003, 194).

In her own words, van der Hoorn concludes that

the success of what can only be termed as an ‘exorcism’ was dependent on its public character [...] Dismemberment is often associated with forgetfulness [but after] a building has been dismantled, its pieces can continue to refer to its history – at the same time, individuals can and do transform and reinterpret them (2003, 197, 210).

I mentioned that Alterazioni Video’s performance is a ‘minor’ case of Incompiuto Siciliano’s destruction because it involved the removal of a single column, but let me delve more deeply into another recent workshop that pursued the complete demolition of a sports hall in the town of Comiso – though this has not been accomplished yet. The way in which Alterazioni Video announced the event as part of the *Ragusa Foto Festival 2016* does not leave room for doubt; the objective was clear: ‘What if we blow it up?’ (Fig. 3). Masu passionately contextualizes the reasons and motivations behind this approach:

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4 A short-video showing the removal of the column and its subsequent transportation process is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lH1pr1tPrLE>

On the other hand, the ‘relic’ metaphor is quite pertinent here because, though Alterazioni Video relied on the authorities’ permission to tear the column down and take it to Venice, a local politician expressed his disagreement for considering that a simple column was being treated ‘like a pilgrim Virgin Mary, isn’t? It travels to... to be seen, to be... to be what? Adored?’ This quote is part of the short-film *Per Troppo Amore*, directed by Alterazioni Video and whose trailer is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyxpoQGFYg4>



Fig. 2. Tearing the column down and then exhibited at the Venice Architecture Biennale  
Source: Francesca Pini and Alterazioni Video, 2010



Fig. 3. Image announcing Alterazioni Video's workshop at the *Ragusa Foto Festival 2016*  
Source: Alterazioni Video, 2016

The sports hall in Comiso was set on fire twice in the last few years and the structure is fatally damaged, it is certainly impossible to rebuild its roof. The way it is now, I see it as a beautiful open-air arena to host cultural activities. However, we suggested its demolition because it is located on top of a hill on the town's outskirts. Below its foundations, the hill is hollow, there's some sort of cave. We thought that tearing the building down and generating a vertical hole and then a horizontal tunnel could be a good option to reconnect the town with the hill. The building would then be related to Comiso through its very absence – an original way of mediating the need to put incompleteness on the table (Interview, 15 March 2017).

It is true that a mere unfinished sports hall located in a tiny Sicilian town cannot be considered an architectural landmark but, following Holtorf's thought (2006) as regards the destruction of the Twin Towers (and once more, in spite of the greater importance of this tragic event), it could be said that the eventual void in Comiso may well function as a site of cultural significance. A construction becomes relevant then only by disappearing, and perhaps, the most important day in the interrupted history of this sports hall is its actual demolition – making the concept; '[e]ven destruction implies creation' (Holtorf 2006, 108) quite evident. And what is more, Masu's words indicate that demolition can function as a wake-up call. The erasure of an *Incompiuto Siciliano's* work may well serve to give greater value to the rest of the unfinished public works that are still standing or, at least, to keep them in the public eye. In this regard, 'one heritage object gained may compensate for another one lost' (Holtorf 2014, 412). Therefore, the way in which *Alterazioni Video* view demolition is not a matter of deliberate forgetting, quite the contrary, and as long as the importance of *Incompiuto Siciliano* increases, it demonstrates an extreme care not only for remembering incompleteness but also for 'building' something new out of it. The demolition of sites becomes then a collective act in which a community reaffirms itself, just the contrary of the purpose behind the erection of sites.

Along these lines of thought, Harrison uses the notion of 'absent heritage' to denote 'the memorialisation of places and objects whose significance relates to their destruction or absence' (2012, 169) – a new trope that, as he argues, is often followed by 'an act of iconoclasm' (2012, 170). Iconoclasm involves the deliberate erasure of cultural elements of the past that are considered threatening and uncomfortable for the consolidation of a new cultural reality. It is neither right nor wrong – it truly depends on the perspective we use to judge it – but, what is indisputable is that iconoclasm implies 'a tacit knowledge of the symbolic power of the image being removed [and certainly,] if the image had no symbolic power, it wouldn't need to be erased' (2012, 170, 171). Hence, if we consider that *Alterazioni Video* are proposing an act of iconoclasm in Comiso, we are implicitly providing the sports hall with a certain importance; the importance of being a burden to the conception of a new beginning. Meanwhile, since the eventual demolition of the building will still require some time and negotiations (Masu, Interview, 15 March 2017), we can only evoke the sublime connotations of destruction. Lucas (2013) establishes a difference between 'slow' and 'fast' ruins in that the former are abandoned and deteriorate over time while the latter are the product of a concrete moment of devastation. The beauty of slow ruins has largely been debated (e.g. Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014; Strangleman 2013) but now, I would like to briefly highlight the sublimity of viewing the sudden destruction of a building.



The main outcome of Alterazioni Video's workshop in Comiso was a 6-minute video that included clips of one of the fires that, years ago, damaged the sports hall. We see how a congregation of people feel curiosity and simply stop, at a safety distance, to witness the disaster. This brings to mind the footage of endless constructions being deliberately demolished and how this can be extremely hypnotizing<sup>5</sup>.

In a realistic sense, not every unfinished public work in Italy will be demolished, after all, demolition also requires a considerable amount of funds. Moreover, it is not unreasonable to think that the same corrupt agents who lined their own pockets with the profits from the construction could well be the same ones who do so once again with their destruction. However, what I argue in this section is that, in cases where demolition is conceivable, the ghost of a demolished building will speak volumes for those still standing and those still standing will speak up for those that once stood.

## ENTROPY

We all know the following philosophical question: If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound? In light of the topic of this chapter, I will pose it differently: If an unfinished public work keeps decaying and no one is around to save it, can we refer to it as heritage? Beyond the possible (philosophical) responses, what I want to stress here is that, at an elementary level, heritage is a man-made production which is only manifested as long as it is actively managed and conserved (Smith 2006). An old castle is just an old castle if nobody keeps an eye on it but it suddenly becomes a piece of heritage when it receives care and attention. What's more, nothing is heritage in and of itself, rather, it requires someone who views it as such. An unfinished public work could just be an unfinished public work but, now being re-contextualized as in the case of *Incompiuto Siciliano*, it acquires a heritage status. This certainly involves a reinterpretation and subsequent reappreciation, however, does it also involve the inherent conservation usually associated with heritage? According to Masu (Interview, 15 March 2017), the possibility of letting *Incompiuto Siciliano* lie does exist, and it is actually quite a decent one as long as the construction silently crumbles – becoming an element of note in the landscape. In view of the dozens of unfinished buildings and infrastructures which had been erected in the middle of nowhere (Fig. 4), I would add that there is not much more to be done than opting for this seemingly poetic vision. After all, 'if a ruin decays it remains still a ruin' (Crang and Travlou 2001, 171), which leads us to Robert Smithson's 'entropy' ([1967] 1996). A paradoxical 'chaotic stability' is used by Salas to brilliantly exemplify this concept:

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5 The video that resulted from the workshop in Comiso is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oxsun7YuxOs>

Furthermore, a quick search on the internet is sufficient to find dozens of videos showing the 'best' building demolition compilations. An example of this is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VcZ2RTil2M>

Entropy is the thermodynamic tendency of all systems to reach their maximum degree of stability, which coincides with their maximum degree of disorder. This way, if we drop molecules of milk into coffee, those will mix with these quite randomly making it as unlikely that the milk will separate from the coffee as it is for a glass to land in its original form after throwing its broken pieces on the floor. According to this law, life, that fragile, exceptional and unstable thing that we generally call nature, is, therefore, the most unnatural thing in the world (2012, 29).

Following Pálsson, it can be said that entropy is the ‘disintegration of all matters’ (2013, 177); he similarly points out the Simmelian thought in of ruination as ‘the return of architecture into nature’ (2013, 174). Hence, it seems that there is nothing more authentic than a ruin in the process of becoming so; there is nothing more natural than being reclaimed by nature. This approach is essential to the comprehension of another action that also took place during the *Incompiuto Siciliano Festival*. Alterazioni Video invited the French group of landscapers Coloco, who gave a performance entitled *L’origine del mondo* (‘The origin of the world’ in English) at a multi-functional hall in



Fig. 4. Remote unfinished public works  
Source: Alterazioni Video, 2016

Giarre that has remained unfinished since 1987. *L'origine del mondo* was a ninety-minute 'sui generis' opera in which Coloco represented 'the cycle of life, [stating that] public spaces of culture, whether finished or not, are a common good in the service of society – which has paid off' (2010, own translation). One of the acts in this opera consisted of using hand-made catapults to throw hundreds of seeds all around, aiming to create a wild botanic garden that, in a distant future, could swallow the entire building (Fig. 5). It is quite paradoxical that this performance strives to reclaim a site through its very natural decomposition; which ultimately aspires to generate yet another site. The multi-functional hall may or may not be too damaged for its recuperation in a conventional sense but, applying DeSilvey's thought here, it can be suggested that 'it is possible to see the on-going intervention of the trees and the soil as productive of other resources for recalling the past in this place' (2006, 327). Nature, progressively destroying and progressively creating, is crucial in such an entropic fate, proffering plants as a cultural factor within ruination (Jorgensen and Tylecote 2007; Qviström 2012). Their mutable qualities accelerate a process through which a building is no longer the same (Edensor 2005; Prominski and Koutroufinis 2009; Garrett 2010).

But not only natural agents intervene in entropy, humans also do their part. After a space is abandoned, there is some sort of *natural* tendency to use it for informal and temporary activities – which consequently depicts humans as an inherent colonising species (Torres 2004). These activities can seem reprehensive and deviant, just like Pini tells in the case of unfinished public works where 'teenagers gather to secretly smoke, get stoned or make love' (2010, own translation). Aligned with this, I have myself witnessed many examples of graffiti branding the walls (basically, simple inscriptions)

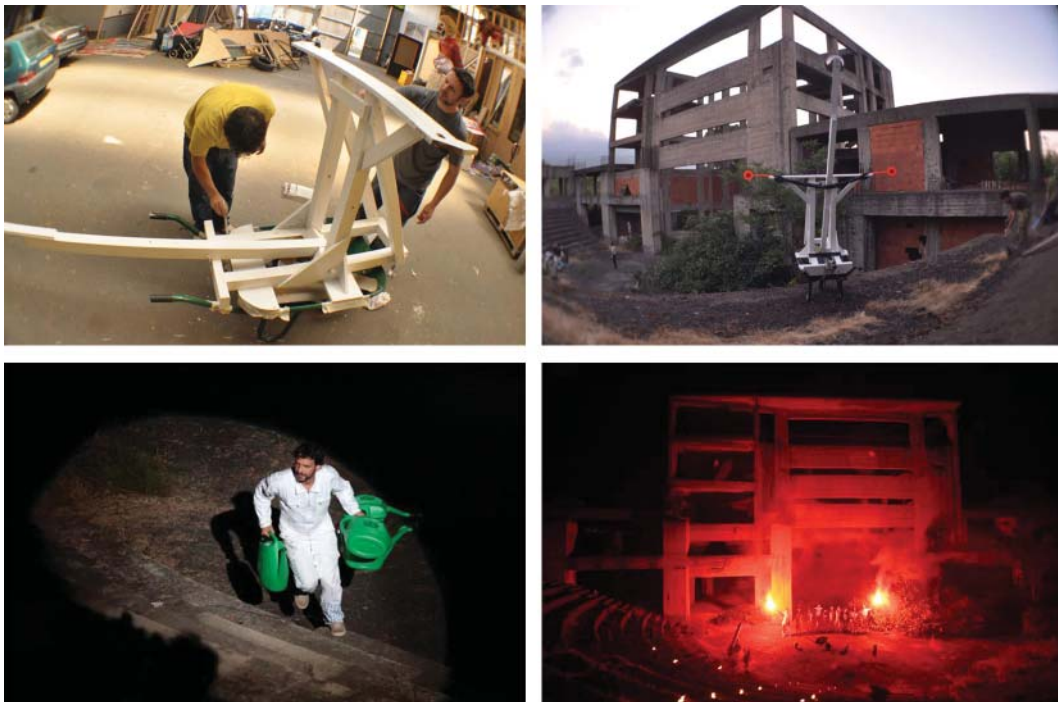


Fig. 5. *L'origine del mondo*. Hand-made catapults and performance  
Source: Coloco, 2010

and, not that surprisingly, the constructions located in remote areas tend to be more pristine than those in urban and rural contexts. Any material remaining that may have certain value has been taken long ago. Kobialka et al., in their study of abandoned Soviet sites in Poland asserted that they ‘have become landscapes of a creative street art [and since] bricks from the Soviet buildings were often used for constructing new facilities by Poles [... the] death of some heritage means here quite literally the birth of another heritage’ (2015, 16). It is not difficult to glimpse the extraordinary positivism within this narrative which, on the other hand, is subjected to heavy criticism (González-Ruibal, forthcoming). However, it is not my intention to provide a value judgement but rather to demonstrate that, regardless of the way we view it, people slowly and *entropically* contribute to the crumbling of incompleteness to dust.

The question of whether considering entropy, in and of itself, an ideal option for ruins is not new. Burström (2009) supports this approach for an old junkyard with vintage cars in Sweden and Kobialka (2014) draws from such a case and such an argument to build a similar discourse for a tram depot in Wrocław. In both scenarios it is asserted that the permanent ruination detached from any preservation practice is precisely what fascinates eventual visitors – and the same can be applied to *Incompiuto Siciliano* as evidenced in several reviews written by people after visiting unfinished sites on their own (e.g. Bonnett 2014; Dobraszczuk 2015). In this sense, any attempt to stop or revert the ruined condition of incompleteness stands in clear contradiction of the authenticity of *Incompiuto Siciliano* or, in other words, the best way to preserve it is not try to preserve it. These buildings have been decaying from the very moment that construction sites were left abandoned and their peculiarity comes from that. The actual ‘threat’ of letting them go can actually be viewed as ‘hope’ that makes them gain a higher degree of attention. Today, with thousands of people now aware of *Incompiuto Siciliano*, it would not be unreasonable to imagine that controversy may be courted should the sites’ entropic ‘unfinishedness’ be put into question.

Authorities’ inaction over the last few decades has contributed – certainly without their wanting to – to the creation of a whole set of unfinished public works that, even if in their eyes mean nothing, have been creatively renamed an architectural style. This attests to the thin line between neglect and affection which is worth exploring. Pétursdóttir, in her study of abandoned herring factories in Iceland, uses Heidegger’s concept of ‘Gelassenheit’ – or ‘releasement’ as she translates it – to depict the buildings’ ruination as ‘a process, an experience or a movement towards the unexpected, the thing itself in its native “mysterious” being’ (2012a, 43). Important to our discussion, this does not mean turning your head away from ruins but, quite the contrary, learning to appreciate them the way they are and the way they will be after increasing degradation. For Pétursdóttir, Gelassenheit

is not a suggestion of a passive or indifferent attitude but rather an active but non-intrusive acceptance of things in their remote otherness. It is a different way of valuing the world, thus, that does not precondition its management or domestication (2012a, 43).

Aligned with this, DeSilvey (2014) coined the term ‘palliative curation’ in her reflection on the ruins of the well-known atomic test facility at Orford Ness, located on England’s



Eastern coast. She recounts how the managers of this site have advocated for a do-not-touch strategy in which ‘continued ruination’ runs its course. Past, present and future are strongly connected here, assuming progressive loss as a component of heritage:

Palliative care of a terminally ill patient involves minimal clinical intervention, only that necessary to ensure comfort and dignity. Applied to the care of buildings, a palliative approach would accept that structures and artefacts have a finite lifespan, just as people do (2014, 88).

Though unfinished public works in Italy have been subjected to an involuntary entropy for decades, in a realistic sense this will not be the case forever. I am thinking of those works that still have some potential to be reintegrated within certain urban dynamics. For the rest, entropy has been and will necessarily be the only option. On the positive side, this is surely the least costly approach as it only requires a shift of perception – perhaps a signpost? But if it is all a matter of finding ‘a way between care and carelessness’ (Pétursdóttir 2012b, 599), probably referring to an unfinished public work as ‘Incompiuto Siciliano’ is just the ticket.

## ‘ACTIVE’ ARRESTED DECAY

Arrested decay is a conservation strategy in which, following the premise of *conserve as found* with minimum intervention, a ruined site is frozen in time, rejecting both integral rehabilitations and an entropic future. If we think about classical ruins, this is certainly the main maintenance policy that is applied and, in curatorial terms, it conveys the material sacralisation of a structure. In this sense, and once again returning to the idea of classical ruins, we can recognize that arrested decay restricts the role of a ruin, limiting it to a museum where one is not allowed to touch anything. Whereas a new use is given to these ruins – now they are attractions for tourists – the possibility of being something else is not contemplated. On the other hand, when Masu asserts that Incompiuto Siciliano may well be re-used as long as its unfinished shape and materiality are respected, he is implicitly advocating for a truly ‘active’ arrested decay in which an unfinished public work can be something more than just a monument or a museum. In this approach, minimal interventions should guarantee safety and, at the same time, the eventual alternative uses should serve to reconnect and reconcile society with incompleteness because ‘life must go on’ (Masu, Interview, 15 March 2017). Hence, the question here is how to fill these spaces with activity when, in fact, they have always been ruins with no period of use at all – but still be able to sense this fact. Considering that finally having a use is what usually completes architecture, the challenge then is to respect Incompiuto Siciliano’s unfinishedness while using it.

The fact that modern ruins afford room for imagination is quite an international tendency in the most positive discourses nowadays, and incompleteness does not escape this. For example, in Spain, the main disadvantage of unfinished developments can be seen as an actual advantage because ‘incompleteness admits the option of being completed, transformed or changed, and precisely, contemplating such a range of



options is the main condition to imagine and dream' (Schultz-Dornburg 2012, 15, own translation). Or regarding the Chinese ghost towns built in the last decade, it is enriching to see how their undoubtedly negative origin can be viewed as a 'potential for adaptation' (Ulfstjerne 2016, 403). With this philosophy in mind, it is possible to better understand the motivations behind a series of workshops that Alterazioni Video have been conducting since 2009 with several architecture schools from all over Italy. The elementary thought is working on the notion of 'unfinished' as something positive that ultimately becomes representative of incompleteness in this country and, to achieve this, the students' proposals usually embrace an eclectic programme that is not fixed in time. Ephemeral additions are projected in order to be as unintrusive as possible while stressing the evolving character of *Incompiuto Siciliano*. The different dimensions of each building being studied and the concern for their existing materiality are not a burden to alternative uses but rather main lines from which architecture can grow. In his own words, Masu explains the results of these workshops:

Our discourse is pretty clear! We tried to open unfinished buildings and work on the potential that we think they have. It is not always easy to communicate this message to architecture students, indeed, at the beginning I found that they felt the need to come up with formal designs immediately, I mean, they see a problem and they offer you a solution. But we wanted to go beyond by stressing the imaginative level in all this and, in the end, every workshop was quite successful. If I had to summarize the results, and just to put it simply, I think that the famous 'unfinished' social houses built by Pritzker-award winning architect Alejandro Aravena in Chile are the perfect comparison. You know, these houses were given to their owners in a very basic estate, made from concrete and so on. But far from restricting eventual interventions, the owners were free to transform and complete their houses with their own resources. It's an architecture that acquires its form over time! Years later, the houses have definitely changed but there's a level of 'completed incompleteness' that fascinates me. I like to see the designs made by our students as a variant of this. Not as projects, but as evolutions (Interview, 15 March 2017).

Taking a closer look at these 'evolutions', one can have a clearer idea of what Masu suggests. For three days in February 2009, the University of Suor Orsola Benincasa and other partners organized a workshop in Naples that focused on the reuse of five constructions in the city. These were a social housing complex, a sports centre and three different overpasses that have sat unfinished for at least thirty years. For one of these overpasses – the so-called 'Ponte dei Capri' – students imagined playgrounds, an open-air cinema, a shelter for street vendors or a belvedere within a park (Fig. 6). Importantly, none of these eventual uses is exclusionary and they all contribute towards leaving the original structure pretty much as it is (i.e. working on its 'potential'). In his analysis of the reuse of military bunkers in Scandinavia, Strömberg notes how any intervention 'must be completely reversible' (2012, 69). He recognizes that '[t]he point of departure of this whole venture is an aesthetically-grounded postmodern neo-romanticism which turns rust and concrete into appealing gestures of victory' (2012, 70), finding in Duchamp's 'ready-made' a source of inspiration. A similar line of thought is shared by Sandler (2011) in what she calls the 'counterpreservation' of the iconic Haus Schwarzenberg in the city centre of Berlin. She convincingly argues that accepting ruination with minimal interventions 'retains a sense of contrivance and intentionality that distinguishes it from neglect' (2011, 691), allowing a building to speak to its own history while generating an alternative culture that makes it different



Fig. 6. Original Ponte dei Capri on the top-left and its imagined proposals  
Source: Alterazioni Video, 2009

from the rest. Undoubtedly, the proposals imagined for *Incompiuto Siciliano* go in this direction, with the sole exception that, in Italy, these ruins have never been used before.

Another example is the workshop entitled *Incompiuto Siciliano – The Florence Step*. Organized by the University of Florence in the very same city, it took place over some weeks between February and April 2009 with the objective of devising a series of interventions for unfinished public works in Giarre. An unfinished children’s park is transformed into a site for displaying projections; a swimming-pool finally has water but now to host a botanic garden and the multi-functional hall mentioned in the previous section is a sort of open-air theatre in which to perform (Fig. 7). These fresh ideas are a direct result of the student’s freedom and the flexibility found in incompleteness, and ultimately, this vision contemplates how low-profile interventions may well acquire a significant value. Krivý (2013), in his research into the transformation of an obsolete industry in Helsinki, claims that this is being done under a regime of ‘cultural governmentality’ where the plan is paradoxically not to plan. According to him, ‘planning is being carried out with a deliberate minimization of planning interventions and the promotion of the spontaneous, non-planned practices of cultural producers’ (2013, 1724). Fernández (2012) similarly supports a bottom-up decision making and even a ‘DIY’ approach in his theoretical essay on the global activation of spaces interrupted by the 2008 crisis. He criticizes how, from a traditional planning perspective, hopes are pinned on buildings, on objects – what he refers as ‘hardware’. However, he advocates for a turn to ‘software’ in a duality that comes to express that, considering that these sites are already built, there should be nothing wrong in simply using them as assets in a non-expansive manner. Yet for *Incompiuto Siciliano*, it is not unreasonable to state that, since there has been a lack of coordinated actions by authorities to tackle the phenomenon of incompleteness, these workshops function as interesting plans born out of not planning in an official way.



Fig. 7. Before and after of unfinished public works in Giarre at the workshop  
*Incompiuto Siciliano – The Florence Step*  
Source: Alterazioni Video, 2009

I find it particularly enriching to conclude this review of *Incompiuto Siciliano*'s workshops by briefly mentioning one of them that has the unique distinction of having gone beyond imagination<sup>6</sup>. Curated by Prof. Marco Navarra from the University of Catania, there was an open call for students of different universities to participate. The workshop took place in Giarre between 5<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> December 2011 and, after having held meetings with people and associations that informally use the Athletics Stadium and Polo Field, the objective was to provide them with 'furniture for their activities, meaningful multi-use elements capable of being re-arranged according to their needs – from a bar to locker rooms' (Masu, Interview, 15 March 2017). None of these structures built with plastic fruit crates remain today (Fig. 8), but as Petrescu wisely notes, 'in participative projects, the process is somehow more important than the result' (2005, 45). 'Process' is indeed a keyword in the community reactivation of ruins, where a certain sense of belonging emerges to consolidate the heritage status of a site (Oevermann et al. 2016).

Considering there are hundreds of unfinished public works in Italy, it is certainly unlikely that, in all of them, their decay could be arrested while finding new alternative uses. In a realistic sense, if this were to happen, it would have started long ago. But it is never too late for those buildings that may have a chance; it is never too late for imagining – most of all, because the proposals studied in this section have the shared

6 Due to a lack of space, it is impossible to go through every *Incompiuto Siciliano*'s workshop in this chapter. Apart from those mentioned in-text, the completed list of workshops stands as follows: 2007 – *Incompiuto Siciliano*, The Italian Academy Columbia University, NYC; 2008 – *Incompiuto Siciliano*, Hangar, Barcelona; 2009 – *Pic-Nic al Tempio*, curated by NOWA, San Michele di Ganzaria; 2009 – *Le Forme dell'Incompiuto*, DOCVA, Milano; 2009 – *Il Mai Finito*, curated by Alessandro Rocca, Milano; 2010 – *Stadio del Polo with Studio Nova*, Festival of *Incompiuto Siciliano*, Giarre; 2012 – *Milano e Oltre: Creatività Giovanile verso Nuove Ecologie Urbane*, Connecting Cultures, Milano. Moreover, an increasing number of master thesis have focused on the reuse of *Incompiuto Siciliano*, see reference list: Lambiasi and Zambú (2010); Scalia (2013); Bonizzoni et al. (2014); Bella (2015); Grasso (2015); Lago (2015); Tomasino (2016).





Fig. 8. Beyond imagination  
Source: Marco Navarra, 2011

characteristic that they would not require a huge investment. Therefore, completing something by leaving it uncompleted is a paradox that is worth exploring.

## CONCLUSION

Incompiuto Siciliano is probably the most solid response to the phenomenon of incompleteness at an international level and it emerged from a context where public works have been left unfinished for many decades. Its conception dates back to 2007 – a mere one year before the crisis that hit the entire world started to put incompleteness on the global agenda – and since then, Alterazioni Video have been working on overcoming this issue in a way from which we can certainly extract fundamental approaches. It is both surprising and inspiring that these methods come from the artistic realm, and using culture and heritage as non-conventional frameworks to deal with such a harsh reality, the institutional paralysis that have identified these past few years is bridged. It may be possible to ignore an individual unfinished building, but it seems very difficult to ignore them as an ensemble, as a true phenomenon. And so all the possibilities expressed in this article urge us *to do something*.

The notion of ‘unfinishedness’ applied to incompleteness is essential to the understanding of the constructive connotations of Incompiuto Siciliano. Finishing

and formally using uncompleted works is definitely good news as long as this is truly practical and benefits the whole society. In these cases, incompleteness would have been a transitory state with an undoubtedly happy ending. But the increasing relevance and popularity of *Incompiuto Siciliano* is precisely based on assuming that not every construction can or should be completed – not nearly most of them. It may sound pretty uncomfortable to admit that incompleteness is actually a fixed state, but only in doing so it is possible to move forward and find multiple happy endings.

First, demolition is not the opposite of construction – at least, this chapter has attempted to justify this to those thinking about instant solutions. Indeed, demolishing and constructing can rather be synonymous when considering intangible implications. I can see the great love that *Alterazioni Video* feel for *Incompiuto Siciliano*, however, they would not hesitate in materially destroying an unfinished public work if its absence were to be more significant than its presence. That is love also. This can have a series of advantages at a local level while eradication also contributes to the reappraisal of the buildings that will remain standing – call it a benevolent sacrifice. Second, leaving the constructions as they are should not be mistaken for not caring at all, and once more, I reiterate that every approach here involves doing something. Hence, the eventual entropic future of many unfinished public works in Italy requires a change of mentality that only *Incompiuto Siciliano* can offer. Nothing that lasts for that long avoids having any meaning. In this sense, incompleteness is the superlative definition of ruins because an unfinished building has always been a ruin. This is the condition in which *Alterazioni Video* found them and the condition in which we all got to know them. Thus, it should not be unreasonable to deem their increasing ruination to be the process that identifies them – ‘for dust though art and unto dust shalt thou return’. Third, from waste to resource is the philosophy behind ‘active’ arrested decay. *Incompiuto Siciliano* is not a group of traditional heritage sites to be conserved in a pristine way; it is rather ‘unfinished heritage’ that can be used and uncompleted at the same time. Any activity or intervention is welcome as long as the traces of incompleteness can still be sensed, and though coexisting with ruination is not entirely new in the broad field of modern ruins, the proposals imagined for *Incompiuto Siciliano* may well advance a participatory approach with which the regeneration of unfinished spaces can be addressed.

As seen, none of these strategies is a final and global solution on their own, because, realistically, each of these will occur in one way or another. So it is probably more enriching to interpret them as complementary – ideal when they all take place simultaneously. Whatever happens to these places it will have been somehow depicted in this chapter: it is like playing an infinite lottery in which, sooner or later, every number will appear. Then, ‘what do we do with incompleteness?’ – I ask myself again. It is not that I am ignoring the question, on the contrary, I narrow the answer down by stating that it is far more complex than coming up with a single response. This chapter is an anticipation of all the possible futures of incompleteness where a certain degree of speculation is undoubtedly present. But there’s no doubt, even if *Incompiuto Siciliano* is presented as a homogenous architectural style, the ways of interacting with it cannot be judged as ‘better or worse’. Beyond this ambiguity,



maybe the best is to opt for perceiving unfinished public works in Italy as a laboratory in which to experiment and learn. Trial-and-error without fearing failure; there is no need to rush. After all, they have been standing there for quite some time.

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## EPILOGUE

In our last interview, Andrea Masu made a reference to the book *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* – written by Italo Calvino in 1988 – to define *Incompiuto Siciliano* in very poetic terms which I consider ideal to conclude this dissertation. According to Masu, *Incompiuto Siciliano* can be summarized through a parallel drawn to the Greek myth of Medusa. Medusa was a monster generally represented as a charming female figure with living snakes in place of hair. Anyone who dared to gaze into her eyes would automatically be turned to stone. The only way that hero Perseus found to kill Medusa was to approach her but, far from looking at her directly, he avoided being petrified by observing the monster's reflection in his own mirrored-shield. Once closer, Perseus beheaded Medusa with a sword. In this comparison, the obscure causes of unfinished public works in Italy are the monster, which instead of turning everything to stone, turns everything to concrete. *Incompiuto Siciliano* is that reflection in the shield, something that allows us to approach incompleteness without succumbing to it: the only way to kill the monster. Throughout this dissertation, I have provided many different explanations of *Incompiuto Siciliano*, but perhaps, none of these was as concise, adequate and beautiful as the story from ancient times.

This doctoral dissertation serves as an academic validation of the first ten years in the history of *Incompiuto Siciliano*, though it certainly leaves the door open for potential further investigations. Accumulated knowledge is the basis of research and, under no circumstances, should a dissertation be an end in itself – consequently, every argument expressed in this work is prepared to be furthered. Formal quantitative research into the circumstances that caused incompleteness in Italy is urgently needed, yet the production of official data must be a priority. The worldwide aestheticization of ruins is a hot debate and, definitely, further constructive samples are necessary to consolidate ruin imagery as a first step in the renewed validation of abandoned spaces. It would also be extremely interesting to carry out a truly ethnographical understanding of *Incompiuto Siciliano*. This would require an eventual researcher to stay for a long period in the field, being in touch with people, associations and social representatives. The result of this should be a deep analysis on how citizens interact and have reacted to *Incompiuto Siciliano*: What is the tone of the press covering incompleteness? How do people respond on social media? In which ways are unfinished public works informally used? Embodied encounters with ruins and the way these are mediated is a very recent topic demanding increasing attention; responses are warmly expected from both the



academic and the artistic realm. Of course, ‘what do we do with incompleteness?’ is going to be a crucial question in the future and, though this dissertation approaches this from a cultural perspective, it seems clear that the legal frameworks in each case will offer wider and more concrete views. Apart from these, another potential aspect to be explored is the conscious theorization of what it means to be ‘unfinished’ when regarding further artistic and architectural projects. This draws from the fact that there have always been unfinished works, from the Tower of Babel to LeWitt’s *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes*, comprising van Eyck’s portrait of Saint Barbara or *The Entombment* painted by Michelangelo. A different discussion may well be on how an architectural style comes into being: What are the conditions that allow us to formally talk about a certain style? Are these conditions applicable to *Incompiuto Siciliano*? These are only condensed ideas and, definitely, it will be enriching to witness the academic evolution of incompleteness in the next few years.

To be honest, I do not really know what the English expression ‘Reckoning with...’ means in Spanish. I once asked a friend of mine, who is a native English who also speaks Spanish, to provide me a translation of this in my own language. He said it was pretty difficult because, as far as he knew, there was not a literal expression in Spanish that may mean exactly the same. He told me that ‘Reckoning with...’ can be understood as when you are talking about a topic with which you are clearly familiar but, at the same time, are aware that you do not know everything about. Whether such a definition is fully correct or not, I consider it very appropriate to depict the work I have done regarding *Incompiuto Siciliano*. Obviously, to come up with a subtitle for this dissertation such as ‘Unfinished Public Works as Modern Ruins and All which it Entails’ is too ambitious, and a more appropriate one would have been something like ‘...and *Not* All which it Entails’.

What seems clear is that *Incompiuto Siciliano*, *Alterazioni Video*, and hopefully this dissertation too, became an integral part of the history of unfinished public works in Italy and any attempt to recount new stories about these sites will necessarily require us to dwell on the work that others have previously done. An even then, these new stories will still remain uncomplete because, after all, every story is always unfinished.





