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The Paradox of ‘Incompiuto Siciliano Archaeological Park’ or How to Mock Heritage to Make Heritage

(The name of the author and his/her affiliation have been deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process)¹

During the last 50 years, and due to the dilapidation of public funds, hundreds of unfinished public works have been erected Italy. In 2007, the group of artists Alterazioni Video declared these ruins a formal architectural style – ‘Incompiuto Siciliano’ – and, in doing so, their aim is to change the buildings’ dark side and turn it into something positive. One of the tangible outcomes within the artists’ proposal is the eventual creation of the ‘Incompiuto Siciliano Archaeological Park’ in Giarre, a Sicilian medium-sized village that has the highest density of unfinished public works in Italy. This article analyses 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 be the opposite of each other. This opens the possibility of putting traditional heritage assumptions in question through the production of a critical heritage whose novelty lies in the constructive use of irony, sarcasm and double meaning.

Keywords: modern ruins; temporality; memory; aesthetics; unfinished heritage; critical heritage

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

¹ Email: Information deleted

group of artists Alterazioni Video labelled this phenomenon as if it were a formal architectural style, ‘Incompiuto Siciliano’ – or ‘Sicilian Incompletion’ in English². 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 stigmatizing 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 et al. 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 Giarre³. ISAP is an on-going project: it has neither been officially recognized nor opened to the public yet; however, as one of Alterazioni Video’s members states, ‘it’s real because it’s there’ (Masu, Personal communication, 26 May 2016)⁴. 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

² Alterazioni Video have developed this idea with Enrico Sgarbi and Claudia D’Aita. Throughout this article, referring to Alterazioni Video implicitly involves the participation of these two external collaborators.

³ 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 incompletion in Italy. On the other hand, and for operative reasons, *Incompiuto Siciliano Archaeological Park* will be referred as ‘ISAP’ throughout this article.

⁴ This quote and many others that complement this article 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 paper is the first one to use Alterazioni Video’s first-hand testimony regarding the archaeological park in the realm of academia.

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

Fig. 2. Unfinished public works in Giarre. From left-right and top-down: New Theater; 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, Personal communication, 11 October 2014). Moreover, the act of formalizing 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 recognizes 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' (Personal communication, 26 May 2016)⁵. 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

⁵ 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>

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 formalization 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, Personal communication, 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 20th 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 organization (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 institutionalized 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 symbolized 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).

Fig. 3. Incompiuto Siciliano’s logo

Source: Alterazioni Video, 2008

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, Personal communication, 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 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 (Personal Communication, 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.

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. 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:

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 recognized 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' (Personal communication, 26 May 2016).

This article 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 authorized 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 article aims to contribute, with a new layer of knowledge, to the consolidation of critical heritage as 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 trivializing 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) characterizes most of the 20th century and it is increasingly obvious in the globalized 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 (Personal communication, 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 inflection between a past that was lived and a mere analysis that

develops in the present (González-Ruibal 2014b). In ISAP, this categorization 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), 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 restarted and stopped several times like frustrated attempts at resurrection (Masu, Personal communication, 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, emphasis in the original). This assertion leads the Polish researchers to remark their interest in ‘how *archaeological sites* are born’ (2015, 15, emphasis in the original) – 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 theorize the immediate association that unfinished public works evoke: failure. In its authorized 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 marginalizes 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. (Personal communication, 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 categorization 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 idealized 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 incompleteness 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, Personal communication, 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 characterizes ISAP. Pétursdóttir contends that the official institutionalization 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 sanitized 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: in ISAP, silence equals noise (deleted reference). 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 recognizable for everyone (Masu, Personal communication, 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 generalized 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 idealize 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 recognized 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 (Personal communication, 26 May 2016), he is implicitly recognizing 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 2,000 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 20th 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-industrialization, creating a generalized 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). 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, Personal communication, 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 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 contextualized as a group of nine together, placing Giarre as the most indicative paradigm of incompleteness at a national level (Masu, Personal communication, 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,

incompletion 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 scrutinized 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-contextualization 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 characterizes 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. It is true that ISAP has been presented with a series of traditional aesthetic considerations that bring unfinished public works closer to how we perceive classical ruins in a romanticized way; this is, however an obviously ironic wink to the authorized heritage aspects that particularize its monumentalizing stage (deleted reference). 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 22nd 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 5,000%; 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 article's discussion, it is interesting how Dismaland used its touristic focus as a trivializing 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 '[I]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. 4). 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. 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, prioritizing 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, Personal communication, 26 May 2016). This goes to show how seeking to be recognized as an actual heritage site by institutions before all, is a pataphysical provocation to authorized 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.

Fig. 4. Poster announcing the Incompiuto Siciliano Festival in Giarre

Source: Alterazioni Video, 2010

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 authorized 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 civilization but are simply ordinary. As Winter (2013) notes, the heritage field has grown alongside the passive assumption of technical discourses, something that is counter-productive 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 marginalized and ineffective. For ISAP, it is then a matter of building bridges between abjection and

institutionalization, 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 *public!*’ (Masu, Personal communication, 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 realization lies in finding a point of agreement with the society that it implicitly criticizes:

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, Personal communication, 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 article 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 destabilize what is assumed, ISAP is a case study that typifies this through the use of critical irony, parodying and taking advantage of (authorized) 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 discomfoting feelings. It is not after an appropriate amount of time that we seem to understand, be familiarized, 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 heritagisation 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, utilizing 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 legitimized and legalized 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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Notes on contributor

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