

Ruins: The Purgatory of Place



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Special thanks to
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Fig 2

How do we understand the complex value of post-war ruins through the unfinished public works of Sicily?



Fig 3

Author's Note

I am guilty of romanticising neglected spaces. With my first full-sized bicycle and half-size freedom, I spent the early summers of my life seeking out places where the state couldn't reach. Ironically, there were no police at the abandoned prison, down an overgrown path lined with pecan trees. Adults didn't dare follow us into the storm drains we'd charted, even when droughts stretched on for weeks. No siblings ever uncovered the historical cemetery, no teachers graced the dry dam at the end of town, and only those of us with nothing better to do knew where to find the gaps in rusted barbed wire fences or walls of invasive vines. To us, these places were sacred.

As an adult, I recognise that the increasing number of these state-neglected spaces, our precious modern ruins, were signs of the change in our town. Climate change flickered the weeks between 40 degree Celsius dry-spells, and tropical storms, hurricanes, or flooding (Li et al. 2019, p. 6). We sought the storm drains to escape the scorching sun (Schmandt, North and Clarkson 2009, p. 11). The prison was abandoned because a bigger one had to open to fit the increasing number of convicts- often people of colour discriminately incarcerated for lengthy sentences over minor offences (Martensen 2012, p. 2). Fences were rusted, overgrown, or rotting because funding went towards new motorway lanes instead of community spaces (Kirk and Mallett 2016, p. 2).

This personal experience has guided me today. I question why those spaces were so valuable to some of us, yet so neglected by the state. Now in the midst of my education in Landscape Architecture, I find myself looking less to my own perspective. Instead, I'm fascinated to find the same question in other places.

Even acknowledging the context of their neglect, many people still feel a connection to those ruins. Although these spaces of state neglect have experienced the death of their original purpose, they do not lose their value, their value changes form. Therefore, rather than see ruins as the death of a location, the following chapters investigate the rebirth of their purpose. How do we understand the complex value of post-war ruins through the unfinished public works of Sicily?



Fig 4-7

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Fig 9

Introduction

How do we understand the complex value of post-war
ruins through the unfinished public works of Sicily?



Fig 10

On the island of Sicily in southern Italy, a vast array of post-WWII ruins stretches across the region. From Palermo in the north, to the foothills of Mount Etna in the east, these abandoned works peak out from the arid landscape with their characteristic concrete forms. Will they ever be completed? Why are they still here? And what message do they send?

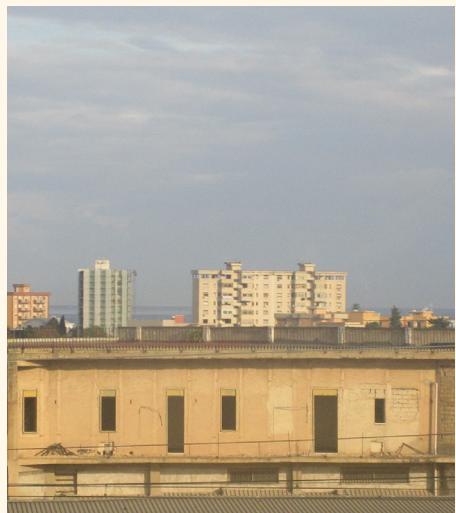


Fig 11-13

Many of these unfinished works were built during the Second World War, or directly after as a means of developing southern Italy's economy to bridge the gap between north and south (Chubb 1982, p. 28).

Malpractice, political corruption, and mafia influence kept a huge amount of those public works unfinished, while funding from taxpayer's pockets kept flowing in. The gap between the North and South- economically and culturally- is still considered prevalent in the 21st century (Martinelli 2022, p. 320).

Today there are 395 incomplete public works in Italy. At least one third of them are in Sicily. The highest concentration of these ruins is in the neighboring towns of Giarre and Riposto, often referred to as Giarre-Riposto.



Fig 14

Located in the region of Catania, between the active volcano of Mount Etna and the Mediterranean Sea, Giarre-Riposto is a town of 40,000 residents. The area receives little tourism compared to other Italian cities like Milan, Rome, Venice, and Palermo. However, it is distinguished by its title as “the Capital of Incompletion”(www.alterazionivideo.com 2009, p. 1).



Fig 15



Fig 16

Founded in 2004, the artists collective Alterazioni Video are the creators of the Incompiuto Siciliano Project (RUFA – Rome University of Fine Arts, 2024, p. 1). Known as “Incomplete Sicily” in English, the project was started in 2009 with the aim of coining a new architectural style (www.alterazionivideo.com 2009, p. 1). Incompiuto Siciliano is a project that creates a set of philosophical principles to encompass the post-war ruins across Sicily. Their goal is to reclaim these spaces not as a scar on the landscape, but a point of Italian heritage and a site for archeological tourism. This initiative chose to highlight Giarre–Riposto as its first site of intervention.

By critiquing the collective’s principles & actions, grounding the project in its historical context, filling gaps of information with field work, and investigating the emotional connection to these modern ruins, the following research aims to redefine what a ruin is.

In addition, this research aims to find the balance between the layers of ruins to answer the question:

How do we understand the complex value of post-war ruins through the unfinished public works of Sicily?

How do we understand the complex value of post-war ruins through the unfinished public works of Sicily?



Fig 17

Birth The Origin of Place

Chapter One



Fig 18

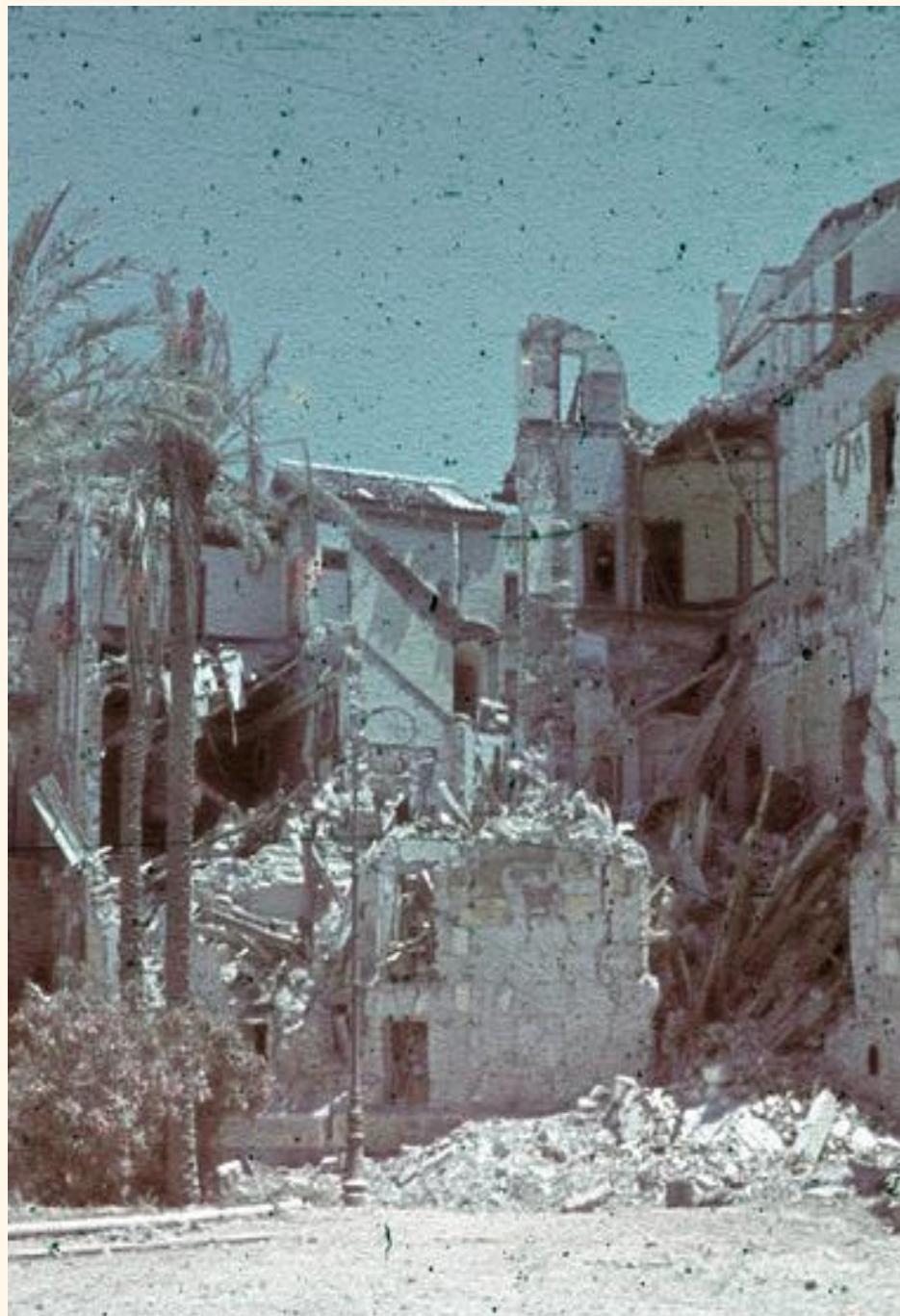


Fig 19

The infrastructure that now makes up Incompiuto Siciliano, was born from a time of immense death- World War II.



Fig 20

Like many nations during the second world war, Italy's infrastructure was heavily affected. War has long-lasting impacts. The hindering of economic activities diminishes the ability of communities to rebuild, reducing jobs, trade, and general economic opportunities (Institution of Civil Engineers 2018, p.1). Even before the war, division between northern and southern Italy was pervasive, with the south experiencing more economic disparity and hardship. WWII only served to heighten this divide, prompting the state to become involved in the development of the south (Chubb 1982, p. 28). This included a surge in the construction of public works.

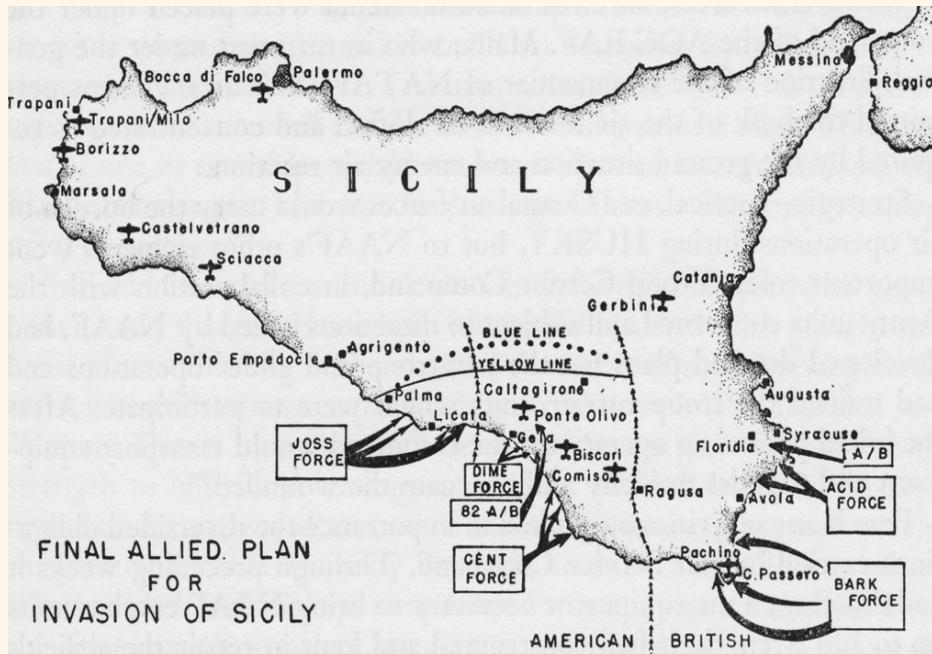


Fig 21



Fig 22

This development began positively but political corruption did not end in Sicily when the allies landed. Although fascism was very much present in the government, it failed to penetrate the south as a political movement (Chubb 1982, p. 27). After WWII, even the new Democratic Christain (DC) party had to connect with the local notables to win public interest. Furthermore, the DC also needed the support of the mafia, whose interests aligned with the party's platform, to gain voters (Chubb 1982, p. 57). The lack of a cohesive government in Sicily consistently left opportunities open for malpractice (Chubb 1982, p. 59). This vulnerability is why effective growth in the south could not be totally government-led.

The rise and fall of post-war state intervention throughout western Europe is synonymous with that of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno (Martinelli 2022, p. 319), a special entity of non-political professionals created in 1950 to intervene in industrial and economic growth in Italy (Martinelli 2022, p. 320). This separation from political corruption is what made Cassa's interventions efficient and reliable. Functioning for several decades, Cassa per il Mezzogiorno was created specifically to help grow southern Italy's infrastructure. Sometimes referred to as part of "The Extraordinary Intervention", one of the extraordinary features of the Cassa, was its speed and variety of implementation (Felice and Lepore 2016, p. 321). The Cassa could finance both state and privately-owned manufacturing firms (Martinelli 2022, p. 320), allowing it to quickly achieve progress in agriculture and public infrastructure in the first 10 years, and in the private industry sector in the 1960s (Martinelli 2022, p. 319).

However, in 1965 Italian Parliament passed law 717, revoking the political autonomy of the entity.

The Extraordinary Intervention “Cassa per il Mezzogiorno”

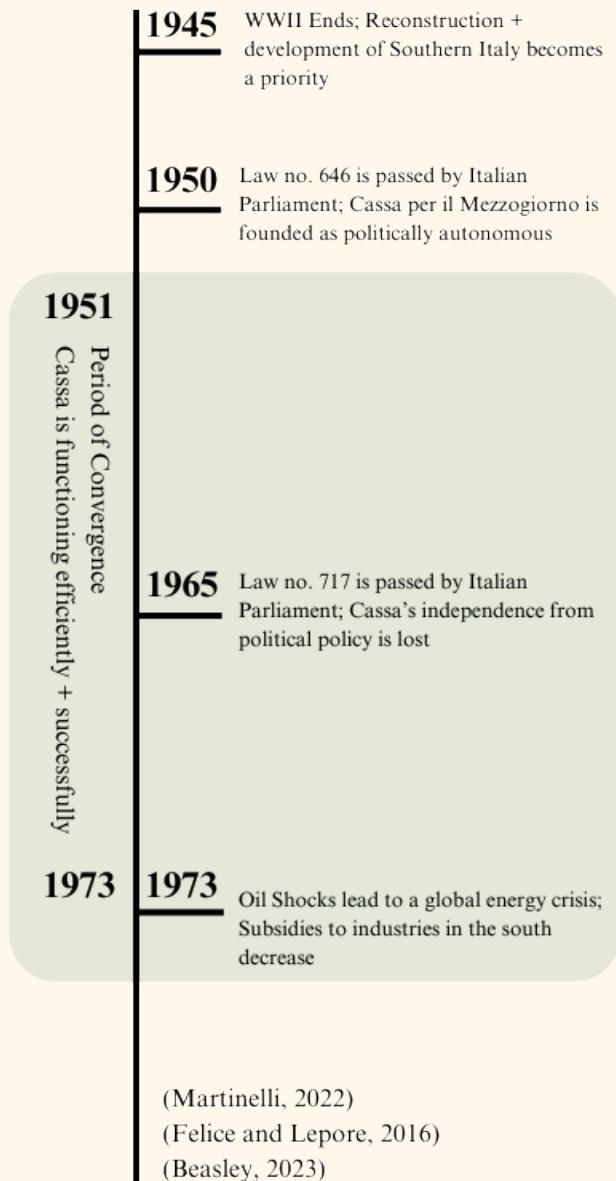


Fig 23



Fig 24

Cassa per il Mezzogiorno was still funded and operated for years but in 1973, part of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) cut oil production to boycott America funding Israel in the Yom Kippur War, sending energy prices soaring (Beasley 2023, p. 1).

The economic strain of these oil shocks worldwide led to government subsidies to industry in the south being cut.

After funding was cut and increased political corruption in the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, the south fell into a gradual, but continuous decline without recovery (Felice and Lepore 2016, p. 320). Projects were left unfinished. Whether by the genuine design error, or intentional failure motivated by mafia or political corruption, public works continued to be developed and abandoned before completion (Arboleda 2017, pp. 299–300).



Fig 25

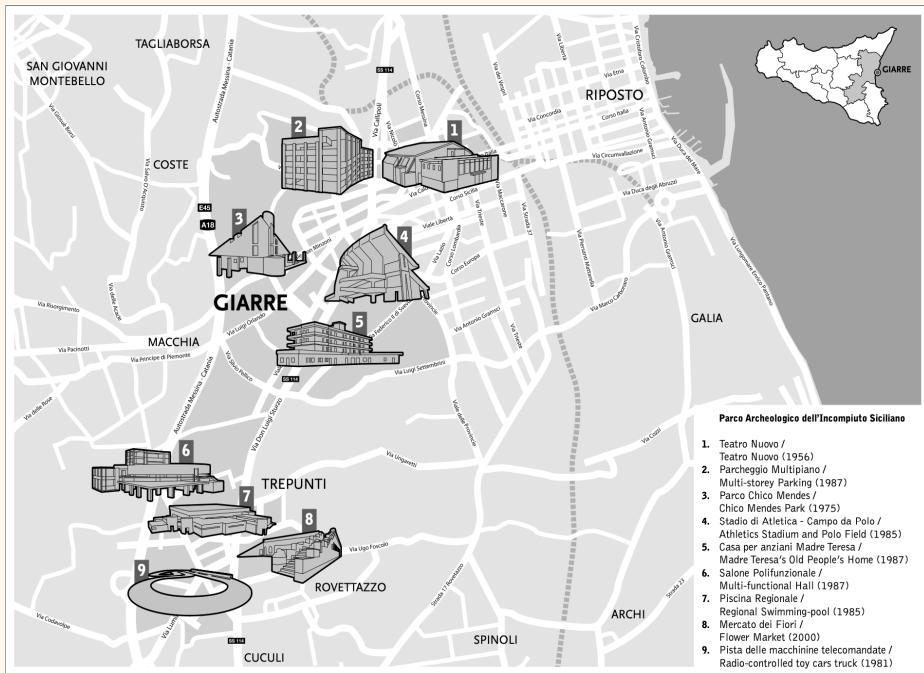


Fig 26

Decades later, due to the abandonment of so much civil infrastructure, southern Italy is once again struggling to rebuild (Khisaf 2019, p. 1). Today there are almost 400 incomplete public works in Italy, with the highest concentration of these modern ruins in the south, and Giarre-Riposto (Arboleda 2016, p. 21). The proposed archeological park of Incompiuto Siciliano today is made up of 9 unfinished works from across the post-war time period, built in Giarre-Riposto between 1956 and 1987 (Arboleda 2017, p. 3).

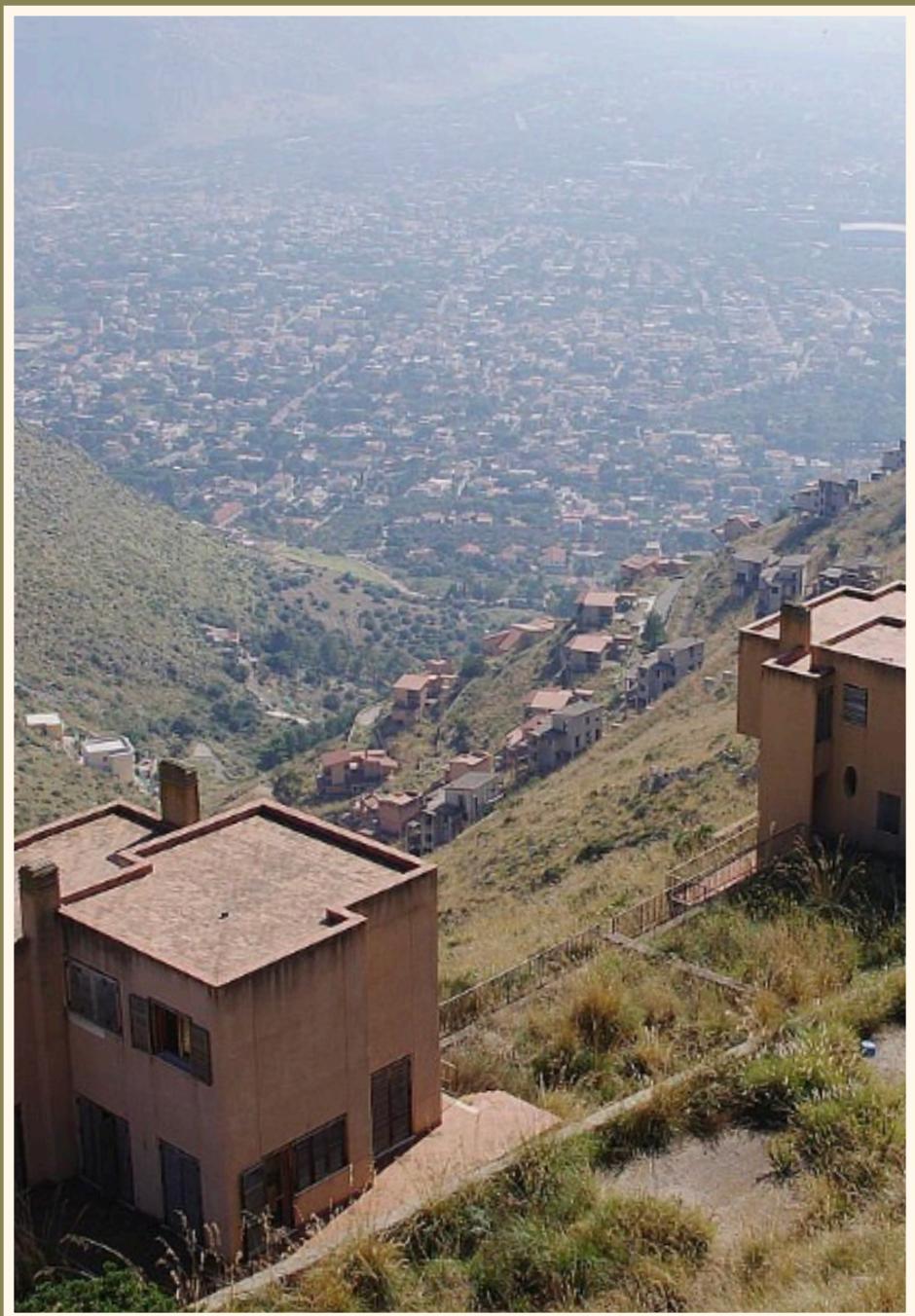


Fig 27

Death The End of Purpose

Chapter Two

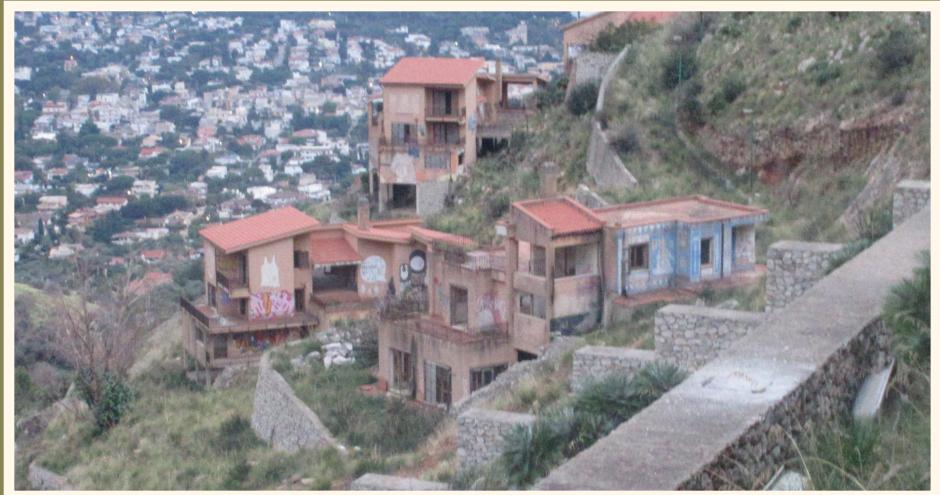


Fig 28

How do we define a ‘ruin’? The word may conjure up images of dilapidated houses, grandiose monuments, or greying remnants of ancient times. Without a clear definition of these places, how do we know what we’re valuing when we look at places like Incompiuto Siciliano?

The perception of ruins is on such a broad and often subjective spectrum that it’s important to be critical of simple definitions. Oxford Dictionary has nine definitions of ruins. Five of them include the word ‘disintegration’, and the rest feature terms like ‘loss’, ‘damage’, and ‘poverty’.

1. the physical destruction or disintegration of something or the state of disintegrating or being destroyed
2. the remains of a building, typically an old one that has suffered much damage or disintegration
3. the disastrous disintegration of someone’s life
4. the complete loss of one’s money and other assets
5. something that causes the disintegration of a person’s life or the complete loss of their assets
6. reduce (a building or place) to a state of decay, collapse, or disintegration
7. cause great and usually irreparable damage or harm to; have a disastrous effect on
8. reduce to a state of poverty
9. fall headlong or with a crash

(Oxford English Dictionary 2024, p. 1).

Despite the number of definitions and their length, their consistently negative connotations limit the existence of ruins to a blemish on landscapes. Dialect like this contributes to a narrative that ruins are dead spaces, inherently negative. These phrases paint ruins as unwanted- void of purpose.

Other definitions imply a purpose, a criteria to evaluate these spaces. UNESCO is generally less negative when defining ruins. The world heritage organisation defines ruins less so by value, but by potential for reconstruction.

1. National Symbolic Value
2. Continuing function or reuse
3. Education and Research
4. Tourism promotion
5. Site preservation

(Stanley-Price 2009, pp. 35–37).

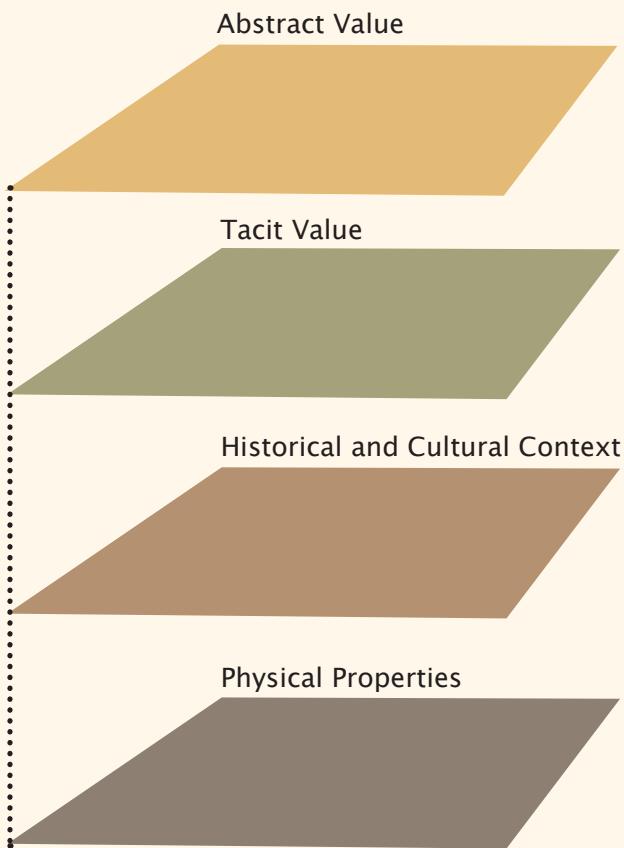
These points are practical for UNESCO's purpose in deciding if a site is worth the time and cost of reconstruction. Such criteria indicate what a ruin could become by acknowledging their potential. However, they exclude the more complex, intangible value in ruins. Many people experience an emotional or cultural connection to neglected space, adding value to them that cannot be quantified. This abstract meaning does not alone give ruins their value, but rather adds another layer.

The issue with trying to simplify a complex concept is that there will always be nuance missing. Oxford Dictionary has its perceptions, UNESCO has its reasons, Incompiuto Siciliano has its theories, and people have their feelings and fallacies. Eventually all buildings die, diverting from their original purpose (Cairns 2017, p. 5).

This death is not a glaring blemish (www.alterazionivideo.com 2009, p. 194), but an opportunity for rebirth. When the state bows out, there is a vacancy not just of physical space, but of purpose. When UNESCO qualifies the potential of this void, they're making the effort to fill that absence and change the original value through reconstruction and cultural appreciation.

The community, surrounding ecology, exploitative forces, poets, and explorers, influence how a ruin is reborn. To prevent limiting the scope of their value, let's define ruins by their point of origin and potential- at the intersection between life and death.

Ruin:
the death of the original purpose for a
space; a point of opportunity



The Complex Value of Ruins

Fig 29



Fig 30

Purgatory Waiting to Change

Chapter Three



Fig 31

The following section details the research trip taken by myself and two colleagues throughout Sicily, while staying in Catania, just a 25-minute train south of Giarre-Riposto. Our goal is to fill in gaps in information surrounding Incompiuto Siciliano- ecological resurgence, community behaviors/ engagement with the ruins, and spatial context. We expect wholeheartedly to return with more questions than answers.

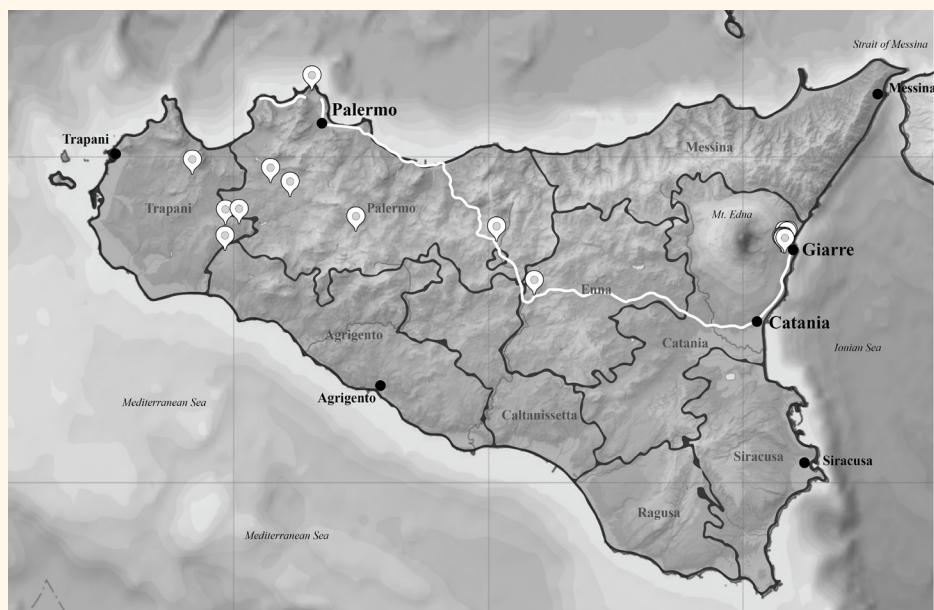


Fig 32



Fig 33-36



Gear:

- Canon PowerShot ELPH360HS
- Pocket notebook
- Pencil set
- Sketchbook
- Voice memos
- Dialogue enscriber: Otter A1, QR Code
- Komoot; hiking map application
- Personal Map (desktop research)
- Hiking boots

Notes on current gaps of information:

- Desktop research allows us to identify gaps in information on ruin locations and map our general travel route because Alterazioni Video does not share exact locations
- We've chosen a bus route from Palermo to Catania that should pass by some of the more central ruins, shown in the map above
- Most of the ruins are not on maps at all or written about, so it will be up to us to document what we find



Day 1: Arrival in Palermo

Date: Saturday, 9/11/24

Weather: Sunny, partly cloudy

“Encountering ruins is also a personal emotive experience through which they become ‘spaces in which alternative emotions, senses, socialities, desires and forms of expressiveness and speculation are provoked by their disorder and affordances’ (Edensor 2005, 171)”

(López Galviz 2017, p. 532).

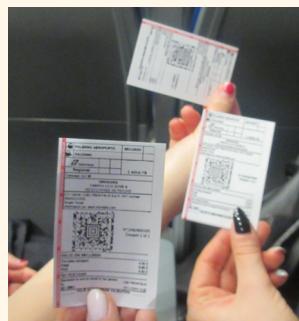


Fig 37-42

Field Notes

Reading about a place and being there are two completely different experiences. Art Village at the tip of Palermo was our first stop. These state-abandoned apartments have been reclaimed by locals as a hiking spot, and artistic community. Unlike the ruins of Giarre-Riposto, Art Village was on maps, and even a few social media sites. Towards the end of the afternoon siesta, we reached the base of the valley. We counted seeing eight hikers in pairs or alone, and one teenager on a motor bike on our way up the trail, all speaking Italian.

There was a shift in atmosphere towards nightfall. By the time the sun was setting we were past the first band of buildings, which were the most colourful, and scaling our way upwards when a group of about six teenagers stopped us. Halfway between Italian and English they warned us to be careful going up farther because people were camping past the gate into the top apartments. In the dark, as three female travelers we took their advice and headed down to catch our three hour bus to Catania. Still, in the hazy light, with the dogs' barks echoing up the valley, their warning almost felt like being told a ghost story. Despite the temptation into folklore, we discussed on our way down whether camping meant unhoused persons taking advantage of the shelter, or rowdy partygoers. Based on the desktop research about poverty in the south one might assume the former, but there was no way of knowing for certain in this case.

When the streetlamps came on we were at the bottom, but looking back we saw that even the highest point of the ruins had a streetlight shining.

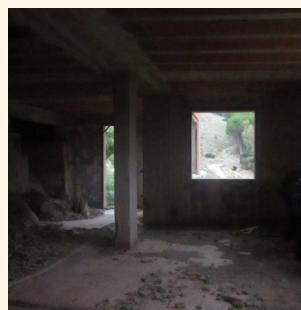


Fig 43-46; Fig 47-49

Day 2: The Capital of Incompletion

Date: Sunday, 9/12/24

Weather: Cloudy with rain and ash

“In the past, it was possible to program silent periods on jukeboxes. Shared times of silence, collective blanks. We still find blank spaces like this on the margins of the city, at its intersects, outside the metropolitan narrative. But they tend to disappear”

(Ait-Touati 2022, p. 125)



Fig 50-55

Field Notes

Though we were out of place, we felt the least like tourists in Giarre-Riposto. It was only noon, but the town was quiet. Besides the occasional pedestrian who glanced our way and some stray cats, there wasn't much activity.

Giarre-Riposto is comprised of two regions of Catania, Sicily at the base of the active volcano Mt. Etna. Combined they cover 40.56km² and have a combined population of 40,615 people, with about half being families (Urbistat.com 2022, p. 1). Only about 10 minutes after leaving the Giarre-Riposto train station, we found what looked to be an abandoned factory and kept finding more from there. In the town centre most of these ruins were fenced off or watched by CCTV. From the locked doorway, we realised that what we were feeling on our skin wasn't crumbling plaster from the building above us, but volcanic ash. It piled up under rain gutters, on cars, and in trash piles, and although interesting, it added to our discomfort.

The farther out we moved, the less surveilled and barricaded the ruins were, but the more overgrown. Brambles, drops, dense thorns and slippery boulders were a physical challenge but doing this allowed us to see traces of people before us who had set up foot ramps or left a beer bottle on the grass. Giarre is not a major city like Palermo, filled with tourists and nightlife. Therefore, these traces indicated that the people here were still finding ways to use the ruins. Perhaps like us, they were less afraid of the surrounding landscape than the cameras.

The overgrowth adds a new character to the Incompiuto Siciliano style.

In our soaked-through clothes, we ordered our coffee and talked for an hour as we waited for the rain to stop. My colleagues tell me about the ruins in their hometowns- in the mountains Bulgaria and Los Angeles California USA. Though we're all from vastly different places, we could all conjure up memories of ruins- A divorced couple refusing to let either have the mansion, so it sits empty for decades. A rich man who passes away and his property is left to no one. Is it spite? Bureaucracy red tape? We find no answer, but we do find comradery- we have each been attached to a place that didn't belong to us, or a ruin that belonged to no one.

In the evening- 20,000 steps later- we get back to our room in Catania.

We shake out the black ash from our hair.



Fig 56



Fig 57-60; Fig 61-63



Fig 64

Redacted:

During desktop research, we felt frustrated that the project only provided general information about the ruin locations (www.alterazionivideo.com 2009, p. 194). We were only able to guess coordinates using that information and google earth and hoped to confirm or correct exact locations once in Giarre-Riposto. The first thing we saw getting off the bus in Catania was graffiti in English that said “go home tourists” and two police cars. After seeing the local disdain for tourism first-hand, and how high amounts of visitors could damage a space, we understood that not including locations was protective. Whether this was the designers’ intention or not, by avoiding revealing the exact locations we avoid tampering with the rebirth of the ruins. With this in mind, exact coordinates of ruins were found, but have been redacted.

Day 3: Across Sicily

Date: Monday, 9/13/24

Weather: Early morning rain and fog, sunny

“Ruins, we argue, are relational, in time and space; they speak to what (and who) is not there—or remains either actively hidden or merely unseen—as well as what is”

(López Galviz 2022, p. 532)

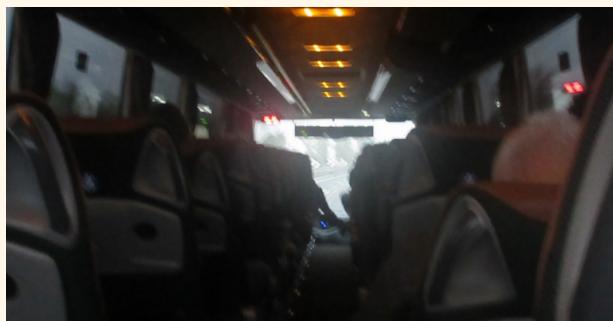
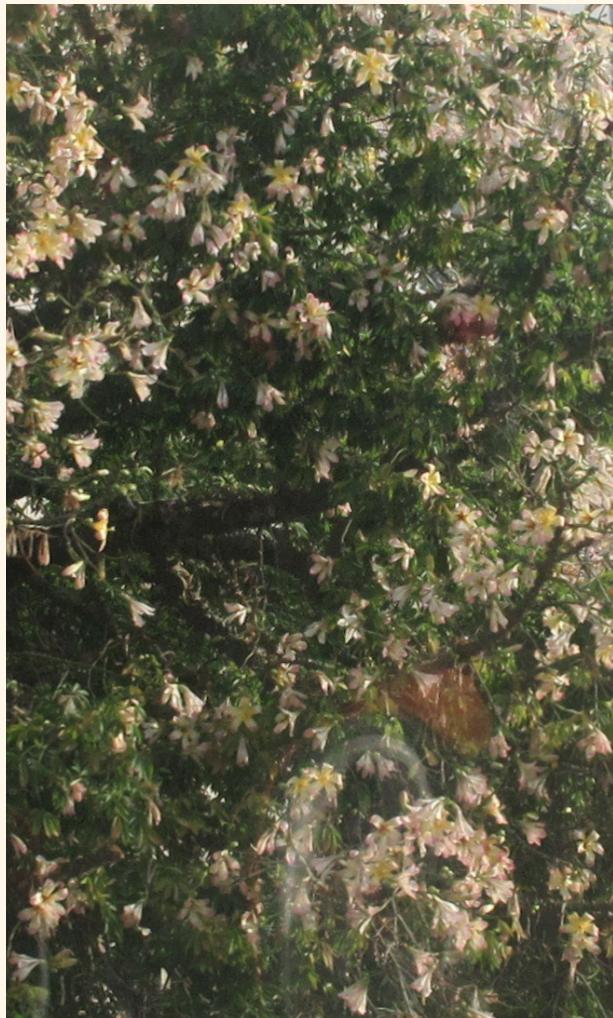


Fig 65-70

Field Notes

Somehow, we've managed not to miss a train. We boarded our 6am bus from Catania to Palermo and headed back on the route we came. In the early morning haze, the mountainous landscape looks grand and mysterious. Our backpacks spread on the floor; we discuss that this is the terrain that so much mythology was inspired by. Even as empty farmhouses and motorways that just break off speed by, the beauty of Italy is inevitably romantic. One can see how Incompiuto Siciliano holds tight to the ethos of style- there has to be an element of imagination to understand the value of this landscape.

So much of this research trip has been about grounding the principles of Incompiuto Siciliano in physical properties, to highlight the depth of its abstract meaning. The project is based on the work of Alterazioni Video, including arial footage of the incomplete works of Sicily and Giarre (alterazionivideo.com 2009, p. 1). While this footage is artistic, this type of media creates a sense of detachment from the unfinished works and the struggles of the people of Sicily who live around them. Even for a short time, being on the ground gives one a sense of how looming these spaces can be. The fences, cameras, and even ecology around them scream that ruins do not belong to the community- yet community finds a way.



Fig 71

Incompiuto Siciliano is more than the abstract feelings of those who experience the place, but still, those emotional connections are a crucial part of the character of the site. “There is no landscape without a gaze, without the consciousness of landscape” (Arboleda 2016, p. 25). How does one find the balance between romantic notions of ruins, and their actual existence? (Dobraszczyk 2017, p. 4). Ruins are not static and are certainly not just what was once a building, they are dynamic landscapes. Like the cycles in nature, ruins would continue to change without human intervention. Like the unfinished works in Giarre behind fences, even if they aren’t directly touched by people, ruins can host habitats, provide structure for climbing plants, and divert the flow of water. Still, we will continue to shape ruins as they shape us, because we are vagabonds (Gilles Clément, 2011 p. 275).

Incompiuto Siciliano proposes an interesting framework of thought and has provoked a much-needed discussion around ruins but forgets to disclose the stories of the people who live in Giarre–Riposto. How are their lives impacted by this architectural style? What experiences have they had at the ruins? Do they feel an emotional connection to these spaces? Regardless of the impulse to freeze time or to freeze human interference, ruins and humanity– our culture, feelings, and history– are intertwined. The post-war ruins of Sicily exist because of humanity in all its flaws. With Incompiuto Siciliano, not as a philosophical project, but a collection of places in purgatory, we have the incredible opportunity to witness the rebirth of space on an expansive scale.

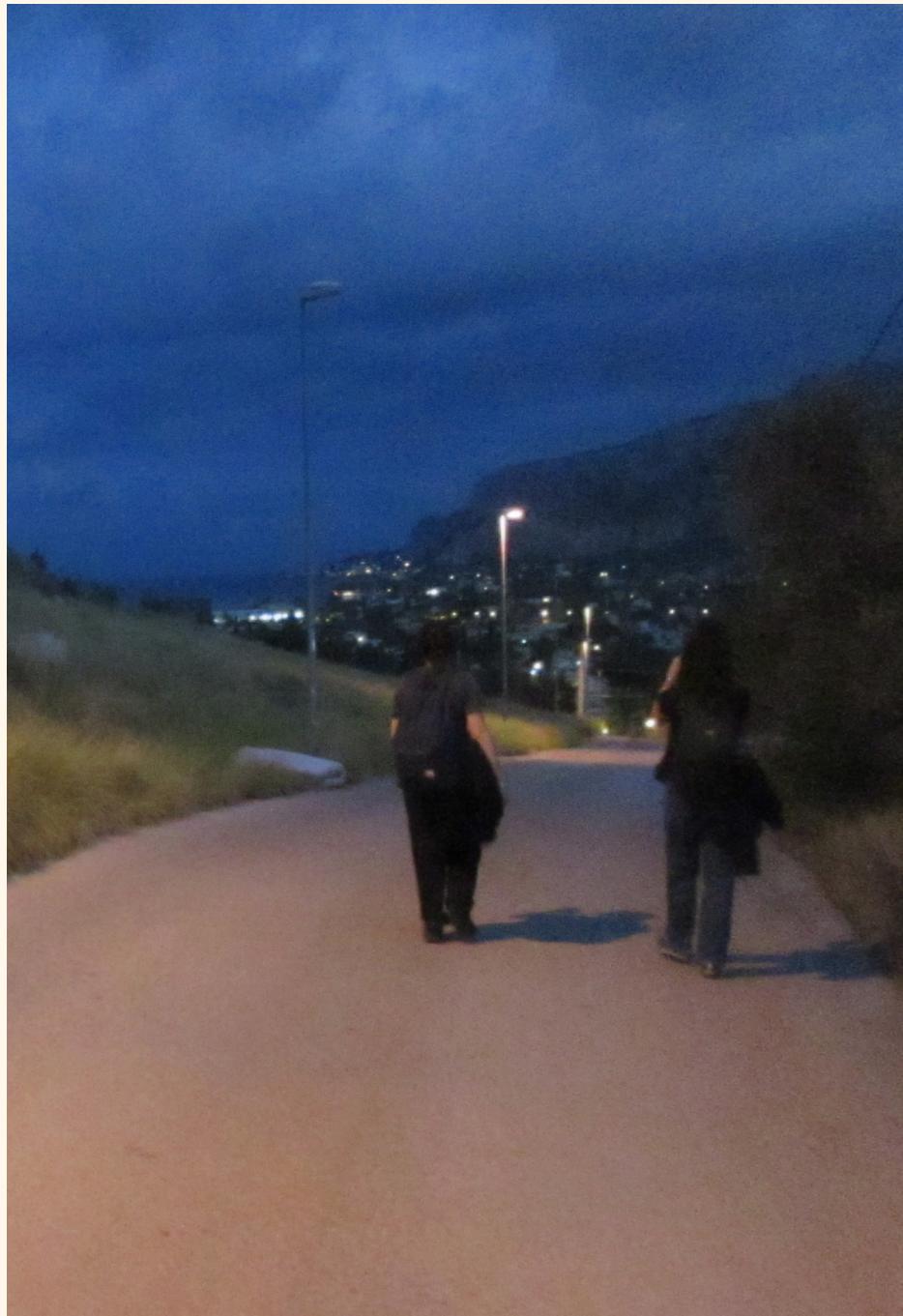


Fig 72



Fig 73

Incompiuto Siciliano the Intersection of Spectrums

Chapter Four



Fig 74

Oftentimes ruins and their communities are discussed in terms that vary between romantic and rational, physical and non-physical, and intentions that range between exploitative and empowering. In this section we will analyse where Alterazioni Video sits along these spectrums and how that stance will impact the success of the project.

The following diagram is an intersection of spectrums; a method I've developed of understanding the abstract space a landscape inhabits.

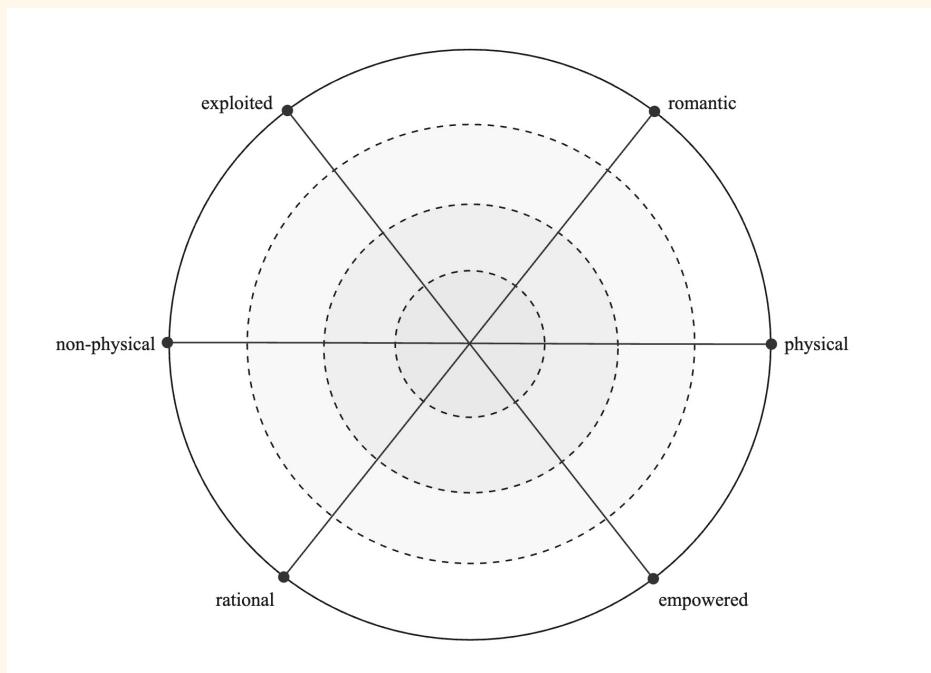


Fig 75

The accumulation of perspectives is more powerful than one in isolation. By identifying one point along each spectrum and connecting the space between those assumptions, one can map a general picture of how ruins are perceived. The closer this shape is to the centre circle, generally the more balanced the perspective.

These are the principles of Incompiuto Siciliano as defined by the Alterazioni Video collective and what they imply (Divisare 2017, p. 1):

1- Incompiuto Siciliano is an interpretative philosophy.

“The Incompiuto is the interpretive paradigm of public architecture in Italy from the postwar period until today”

2- Incompiuto is ethically independent.

“The Incompiuto is based on an ethics and an aesthetics of its own”

3- Incompiuto considers unfinished works as modern ruins.

“Unfinished works are contemporary ruins. Born as such, monuments generated by the creative enthusiasm of liberalism”

4- Incompiuto is a decisive celebration of human conquest.

“The Incompiuto redefines the landscape in an incisive and radical way. The process of creating unfinished public works celebrates the conquest of the territory on the part of modern man”

5- Incompiuto is about unfinished projects.

“The Incompiuto has as its postulate the partial execution of the project”

6- Incompiuto is often characterised by degraded concrete.

“The Incompiuto has concrete as its constituent material.

“The colors and surfaces are determined by the degradation of the materials due to the effects of time and forces of nature”

7- Incompiuto views regenerative nature as part of ruins.

“Nature, by means of the spontaneous vegetation, synaesthetically dialogues with unfinished works, reappropriating the sites”

8- Incompiuto believes that function follows form/ flaws are art.

“In the Incompiuto, the tension between function and form is resolved. Here, the defect becomes a work of art”

9- Incompiuto is an abstract collection.

“The Incompiuto reassembles and collects sites of contemplation, of thought, and of imagination”

10- Incompiuto is political and artistic/ part of a social organism.

“The Incompiuto is a symbol of political power and artistic sensibility. Not only works of architectural genius but nerve endings of a complex and articulated social organism”

Physical to Non-physical

We've established that it's important to examine ruins in abstract space and explore those emotional connections first-hand, but how does the project Incompiuto Siciliano address this abstract layer? Incompiuto Siciliano is more about identifying a new architectural style than proposing physical interventions (www.alterazionivideo.com 2009, p. 1). Because of this goal, how Alterazioni Video discusses the ruins of Sicily is key to understanding the impact the project has on the abstract space ruins inhabit.

There is value in abstract knowledge. However, it is important to distinguish between abstract thought and tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is informed by on-the-ground experience, often found within the local community. Abstract thought, like that in the Phenomenology of style, a key text used in the Incompiuto official project, exists in conceptual space as an artistic text.

Alterazioni includes aerial footage of Giarre-Riposto on the project's website (alterazionivideo.com 2009, p. 1) providing a helpful overview of the ruins but is not accompanied by historical or social context. Through such information, the Alterazioni collective is successful at providing abstract knowledge, but not tacit knowledge. It is disclosing the community around Incompiuto Siciliano where Alterazioni falters.

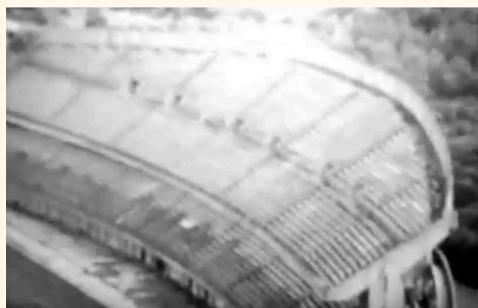


Fig 76-79

The collective argues in their 8th principle that, “In the Incompiuto, the tension between function and form is resolved. Here, the defect becomes a work of art”, claiming that function follows form, that flaws are art (Divisare 2017 p. 1). Contrary to this assumption, in one of the few articles available that included interviews of locals from Giarre–Riposto, many people in the community referenced the feeling that these unfinished works were exploited by those in power to make money (Popham 2010, p. 1). It is possible to change this perception.

The Pizzo Stella Art Village in Palermo is a successful example of abandoned developments evolving into a place of empowerment and artistic expression as its new purpose. A project, started in 2013 by the Italian Fare Ala collective, is made up of about 170 villas that received building permits in 1978 and were eventually abandoned or left incomplete. Only 50 of these villas spanning across an entire mountain are inhabited today (Fareala.com 2016, p. 1). Over the past few years, Art Village has even received praise in travel blogs (Guilia 2021, p. 1). The difference between Art Village and Incompiuto Siciliano, is that Fare Ala actively promotes the work of the street artists intervening on site on social media, while referring to the artists on their official project site as partners (Fareala.com 2016, p. 1). While both collectives consider themselves abstract projects, Incompiuto Siciliano lacks the transparent tacit knowledge that comes with uplifting the community that truly changes the purpose of ruins.



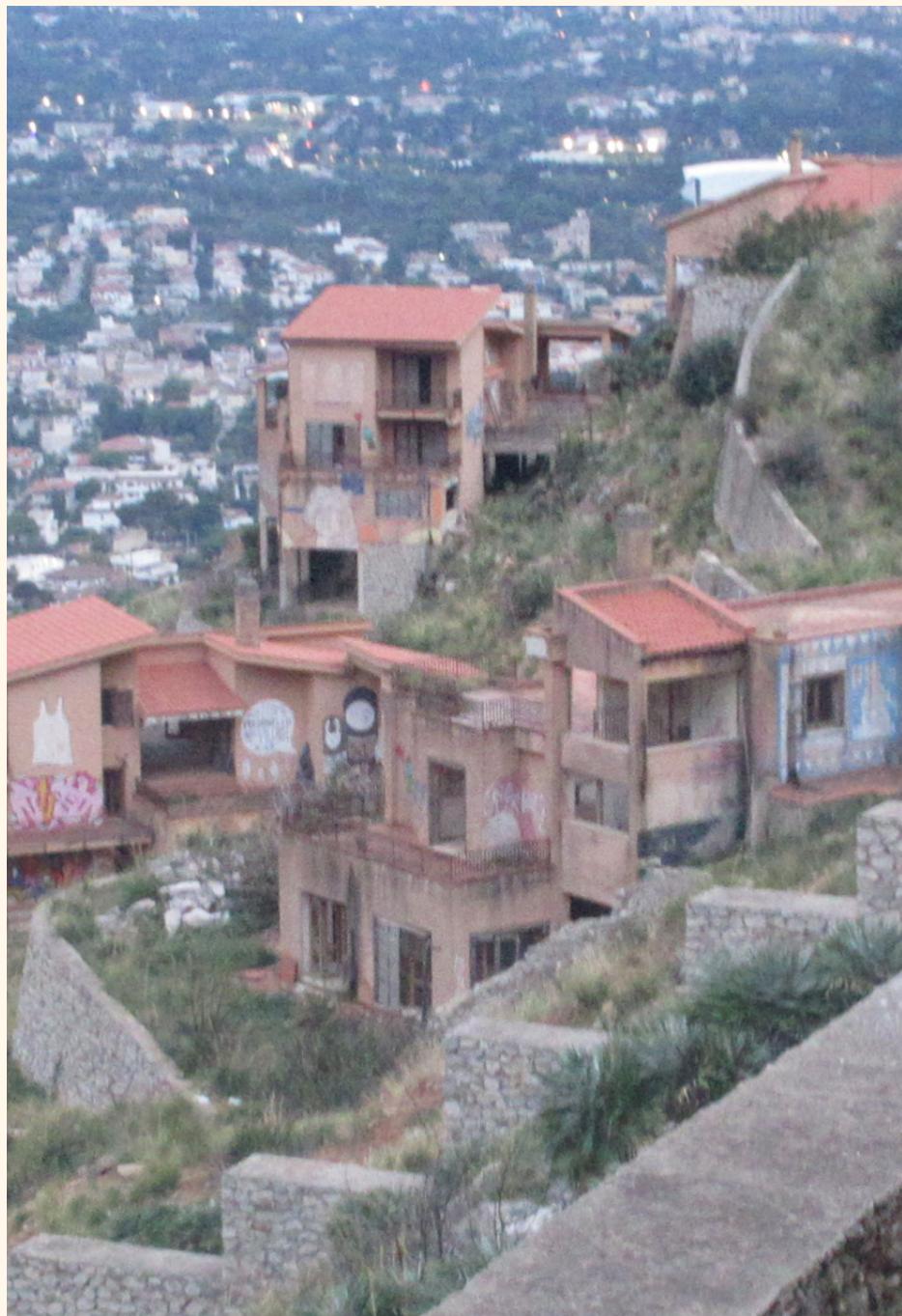


Fig 80

Exploited to Empowered

Those of us who have an influence over the rebirth of a place have a responsibility to uplift the communities we work with, because the intentions behind a landscape matter. Although the original state- corrupt political officials, notable public figures, and misinformed architects- and their intentions are no longer directly present in the unfinished works of Sicily, this void of explicit purpose creates a power vacuum. In the case of Giarre-Riposto, it is designers that have stepped in.

Founded in 2004 in Milan, Alterazioni Video now operates outside of Italy in New York and Berlin (Alterazionivideo.com 2016, p. 1), giving them a voice in major cities abroad that most citizens of Giarre- Riposto don't have, so the terminology they use to talk about the small town in Sicily is crucial. Much like the terms "disintegration" and "damage" that Oxford dictionary uses to describe ruins (Oxford English Dictionary 2024, p. 1), the terms "conquest" and "unapologetic" disregard the exploitation behind modern ruins. Look back to the state that brought Sicily to their difficulties today. It was strong interference from a powerful body, in this case politicians from Italian Parliament, that hindered and halted the work of Cassa per il Mezzogiorno that was so economically comforting to the south directly after WWII (Felice and Lepore 322). Power can be detrimental if not considerate and balanced.



Alterazioni Video has the opportunity to influence the nonphysical space that modern ruins inhabit people's minds. The collective expands on their 4th principle by characterising the intellectual conquest over Sicily's abandoned works as "determined, vital and unapologetic" one that, "celebrates the conquest of the territory on the part of modern man" (Divisare 193). One has to ask, whose conquest are we celebrating? The official Incompiuto project does suggest transforming these "glaring blemishes on the civic horizon" into a valued locations for tourism (Alterazionivideo.com 194). However, there is a lack of information on how, if at all, the collective includes the local community in the discussions around this goal. Would this benefit the local economy or would funds go directly to the government or the Alterazioni Video collective itself?

According to a 2010 news article, there was a "festival of the incomplete" led by Alterazioni Video in Giarre–Riposto, including tours, performances, and chariot races celebrating the unfinished works and educating tourists and locals (Popham, 2010). Claudia D'Aita, local councilor and lawyer is cited as one of the key residents working with Incompiuto Siciliano (Popham, 2010). Although the author states that the festival was hard to find as an outsider, his descriptions paint a picture of an empowering event. Overall, the real shame is that there is so little about these positive interventions and community connection available, even on Alterazioni's own website, so the line between exploited and empowered for Incompiuto Siciliano is blurred.

Romantic to Rational

In his work, *Beyond Ruinlust*, López Galviz argues that in order to move past ruinlust– the extreme romanticism of ruins– we must be multi-disciplinary, showcase the social conditions that ruins exist within, and discuss the ever-changing meaning of ruins and their connections (López Galviz 2017, p. 533).

Some even argue that the critical existence of ruins is only revealed after becoming detached from their romance (Arboleda 2016, p. 6). It's key to make the distinction between perceived romantic value and emotional value. Romanticism is more about pursuing an aesthetic nirvana, while emotional value is based on the tacit knowledge and emotional connection of residents to the site. Emotional value isn't always romantic– communities have problems and people have grievances, but these are feelings that directly connect to the context of a site.



Fig 81

The Phenomenology of Style by the Wu Ming Collective is used as a key text in the Incompiuto Siciliano official project report. The Wu Ming Collective's work in all its poetics characterises ruins as powerful lures that lead their surrounding community, with lines like "a style...creates tracks running across social groups and realms, it informs their behaviour, marks out representations and shapes the outlook of entire communities" (www.alterazionivideo.com, 2009, p. 203).

This notion is romantic and intoxicatingly beautiful in its description, but it may be irresponsible to make such bold claims about communities without supporting evidence from the rest of the project. When we write about ruins, we must keep in mind that the non-physical space they take up in our minds is important. The abstract impression of a space matters because one the physical and non-physical play off each other.



Fig 82

Phenomenology of a style

What is a style?

A trait which is both shared and a sign of distinction, which identifies and grasps the sign of its times. It has aesthetic, ethical and anthropological effects. It is repeatable practice, which lays down, stratifies and produces followers and variations on a theme. A phenomenon which creates a school of thought without the need for an academy. A style which creates tracks running across social groups and realms, it informs their behaviour, marks out representations and shapes the outlook of entire communities. It is recognizable. It is capable, by analogy, of evoking similarities and pinpointing distinctions. It is a technique which becomes a discourse, and vice versa. It is material, colour, instruments, form, and language. It leaves peculiar, indelible marks. It tells the story of a world and a period in time through marks, signs or traits, internal coherences. But, in order to be all this, does it also need to be aware?

I don't think so.

I wander, virtually, through lunar landscapes, which are all different and yet similar: there are no faces or people. Just forms and structures: simple, bare, abstract. I sense continuity and analogies. They seem to be reciprocal allusions, citations. Whale sounds resonate, despite being hundreds of miles away. There are semi-spheres, towers, cubes, asphalt, concretes. Reinforced. Glass, steel. I come across devices pointing upwards or towards the surrounding environment.

There is every imaginable shade of grey. Cream, light blue. Verging on scrublands, weeds, wild vegetation, with edges and cracks.

Hospitals, administration offices, sports facilities. Turnoffs, flyovers, motorways. Industrial complexes, power stations.

A style is a metaphor.

Constants evoking deep meanings, they encompass the truth behind a given period in history in one fell swoop. They are vectors directing mental and physical resources.

I continue my search.

Non-places of inexperience. With nothing bland or insignificant about them.

Another, perhaps decisive, step forward compared to the non-places of transition and consumption, which have dominated, and still dominate, the modern-day scene on our planet: airports, stations, motorways, shopping malls.

After first numbing and then eliminating our senses – duration,

distance, identity, tastes, smells – everything human is ultimately abolished. Neither contemplated, nor foreseen, after being removed man finds himself alone in face of his work, and then he disappears. He sets the process or execution under way. He starts the building work. He triggers off the device.

Then, finally, the work is delivered ready to serve its ideal function. Pure, abstract and, at the same time, powerful, concrete and present space. A pure economic engine, financial vector, a profit-making machine which feeds itself in perfect balance. The work embodies the dream of modern-day liberalism. It brings it about.

A factory without workers, a hospital without patients, a university without students.

A city with no inhabitants.

Nowadays, crime has a strategic kind of intelligence.

It looks ahead, plans and devises. It thinks, it is one step ahead. It reads its own age and feels in sync with it, it is its best interpreter. Nowadays, crime has style. It creates style. As well as value. All too often we look at important phenomena through the wrong lenses, which are unsuitable for understanding things. Emergency, decay, lack of care, corruption, incompetence, backwardness.

There is, unquestionably, all this, but there is more too, much more. At their opposite extremes. Strategy, decision-making. Economics, the draining of public and private resources.

Making a profit and then distributing it. Control of the land and the labour force inhabiting it. Managing financial and migratory flows. Very careful long-term analysis of the workings of power and how it is maintained. After over four decades on the scene, "Incompiuto italiano" needs to be studied in depth. It represents phenomena of such obstinacy and stubbornness that it is bound to contain signs and meaning of rare power and effectiveness.

Over 40 years these forms have left profound traces on the land and on the very flesh of the country, shaping its environment and community. They have piled up, first on the surface, and then in the memory and the collective psyche and consciousness.

"Incompiuto siciliano" has founded its own ethics and aesthetics, which we must fully come to terms with. Without trivialising them or taking the easy way out.

Ethics and aesthetics: the columns underpinning any style.

One of the most effective metaphors for describing this limb of land extending into the Mediterranean, into its present.

Giarre. Capital of Italy.



Fig 83

Our perception is an indication of experience, intentions, and an opportunity to question why we make assumptions about a place. When people in positions of power- academics, designers, government officials, we members of our own state- enter a space with our own fallacies, we risk misusing our power.

Some view ruins as an ideal, romantic landscape, while others, like Picot, suggest that modern ruins give birth to anxious landscapes because their existence is evidence of a conflict, failure, or death (Arboleda 2016, p. 25). The research on the case study of Incompiuto Siciliano, Beyond the Aestheticization of Modern Ruins is effective because it showcases dissenting opinions. Alterazioni Video leans romantic in their interpretation of Sicily's post-war ruins because of their emphasis on abstract style. Without using their platform to directly acknowledge people like the ones who live in the small town of Giarre-Riposto, the project does not fully move beyond ruinlust.



Intersection of Spectrums

Based on these investigations, this is the final diagram mapping Incompiuto Siciliano's perception of modern ruins.

No place exists in isolation from its context. There is power to simplicity, but when it comes to modern ruins like those of Sicily with such a complex background, acknowledging nuance is due diligence for designers and academics alike.

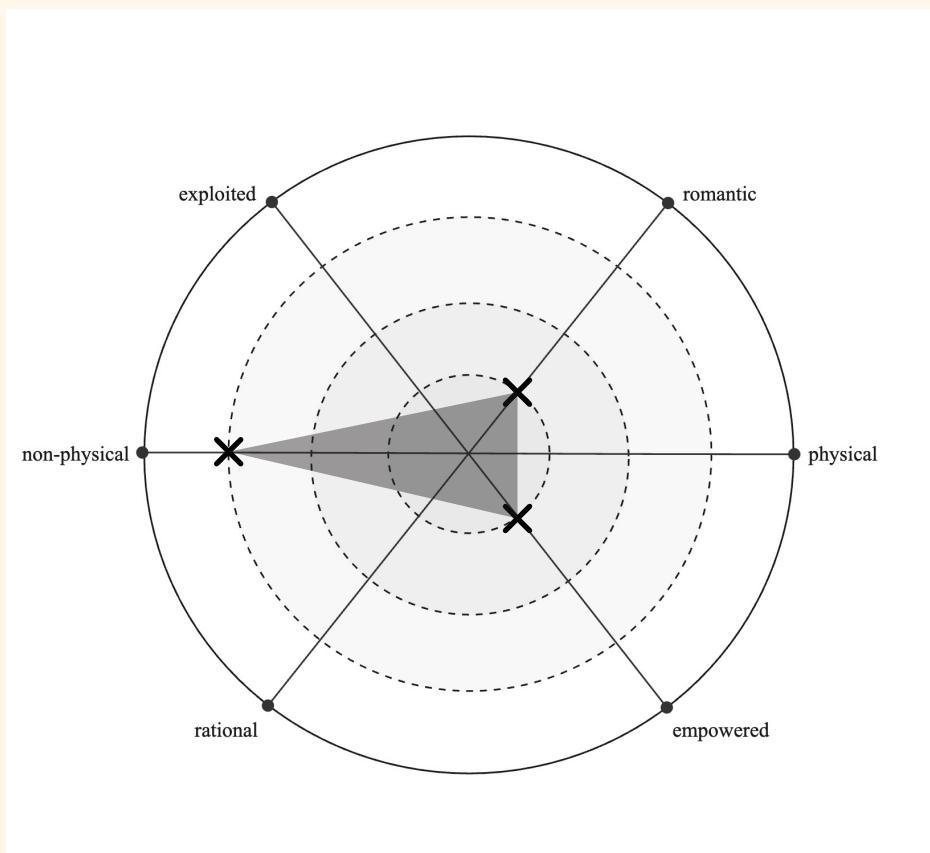




Fig 85

Rebirth A New Purpose

Chapter Five



Fig 86

The life of a space is not linear, but cyclical. The existence of a place does not end abruptly when its original purpose fails and ruin begins. Because the birth of an idea implies its eventual death (Cairns 2017, p. 6), then death becomes a crucial consideration of any space. We've established that ruins imply a death of their original purpose, but what exactly happens after death? Cairns further suggests that the death of a building is much like the death of a body, inevitable and not necessarily an end.

The Law of Conservation of Mass states that matter can be neither created nor destroyed (Encyclopedia Britannica 2025, p. 1). If all buildings must experience a death, consider ruins as an opportunity for rebirth, a redistribution of matter and energy. Wherever this rebirth leads, viewing the point of state neglect, a failing of the state, as a moment of potential can be empowering. It's crucial to acknowledge that this potential can range in outcomes, from social development for local communities, academic exploitation, ecological revival, historical significance, new folklore, and more.

Looking back on my own experience growing up in rural southern America surrounded by our own modern ruins, one can understand how western films that have become synonymous with Texas ghost towns as a major source of folklore and art, but many of those ghost towns were abandoned due to economic instability (Silverberg 2020, p. 2). Think bible belt ghost town and a tumbleweed rolls by on a barren landscape as cowboys draws their pistol.

Think post-war Italian ruins. The lack of a common perception signifies that these unfinished works are still settling into their new purpose.

- ALLE HÅRDFØRE MÆND VAR PÅ GULDJAGT-
HAN MÅTTE NØJES MED 11 DRENGE TIL DET FAREFULDE JOB!

JOHN WAYNE Cowboys

EN MARK RYDELL FILM



ROSCOE LEE BROWNE · BRUCE DERN · COLLEEN DEWHURST ·

Musik: John Williams · Drejebog: Irving Ravetch & Harriet Frank jr og William Dale Jennings ·

Produktion og iscenesættelse: MARK RYDELL

Technicolor® og Panavision® fra Warner og Constantin Distr. A/S



Fig 87

The interest of Incompiuto Siciliano is that it has not yet been reborn and is trying to shape the new purpose of the modern ruins of Sicily. Currently the space sits in purgatory, having the potential to be many things. Like many modern ruins outside of mainstream perception, this Sicilian expanse is unable to have only one kind of purpose. However, by examining its concept and context we may be able to glimpse the direction of its rebirth.

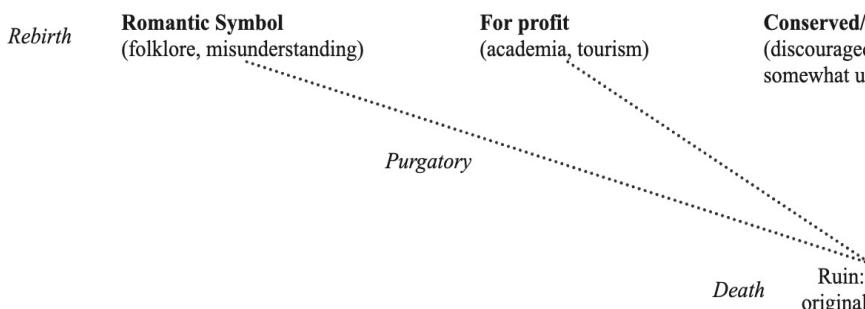


Fig 88

I have created the diagram below to illustrate the potential directions of rebirth a landscape can experience. Furthermore, this visual places that rebirth in the context of the purpose a place had before the point of ruin.

Birth- Death- Purgatory- Rebirth

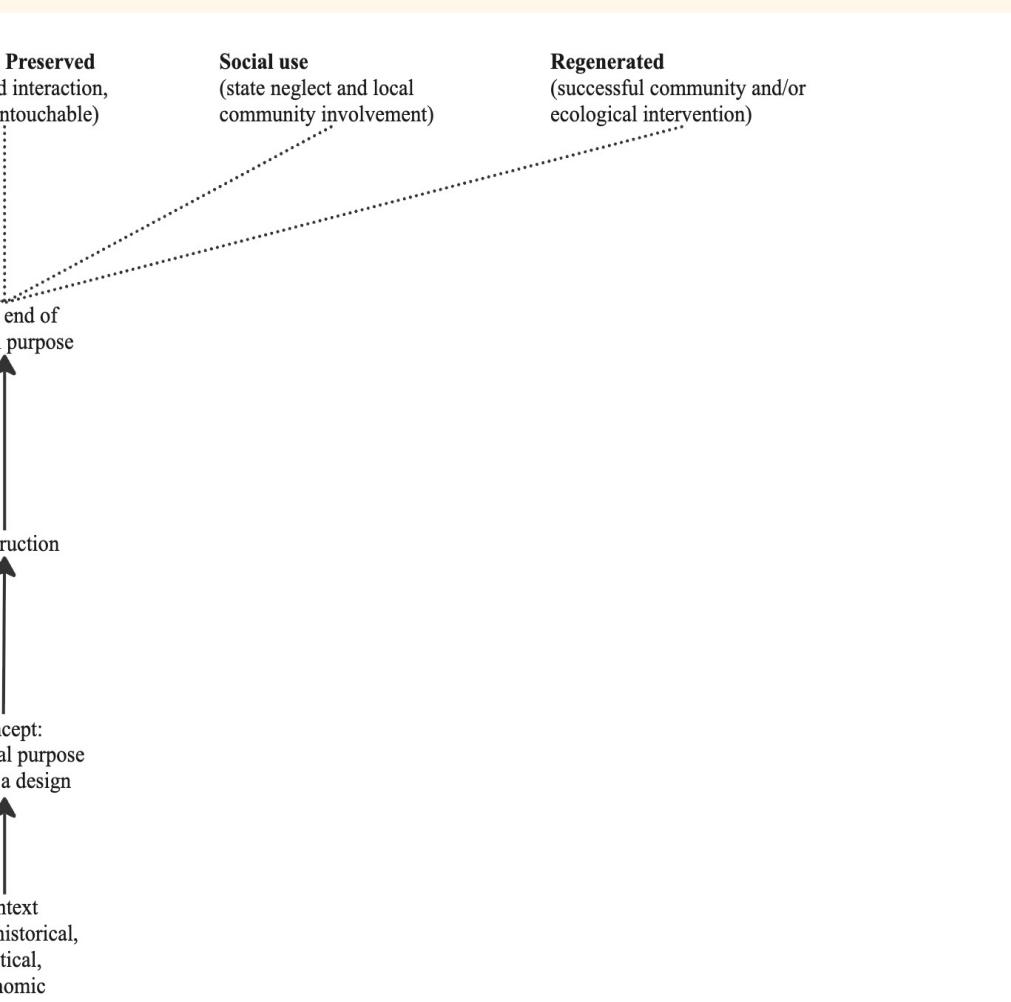




Fig 89

Cycles

Chapter Six



Fig 90



Fig 91

Ruins, like the communities and natural elements they exist among, experience cycles. This is something those working on the Incompiuto Siciliano project succeed at conveying, describing the Incompiuto in their 7th and 10th principles as a complex social organism, enriched by the natural cycles that regenerate the surrounding ecology (Divisare 2017, p. 1).

Ruination is an organic, temporal process (Stanford 2000, p. 40), and as somewhat shared spaces, ruins are constantly redefined (Ait- Touati 2022, p. 129). With changes in environment the experience around unfinished works changes. Ash raining down on Giarre is significant enough to cause one to seek out low drainage points to find heaps of it, or look up to see what's falling and notice the particularly fine craftsmanship of a roof no longer appreciated. Change creates opportunity to alter one's perspective, keeping your view as dynamic as the spaces you experience.

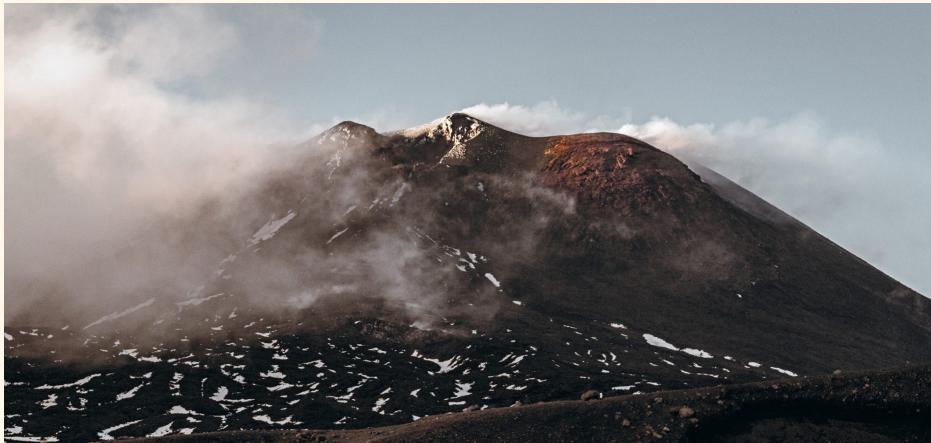


Fig 92

Ruins inhabit a unique space and time. Rather than be overwhelmed by their complexity, use them an opportunity to understand places at a deeper level. As humans and even as designers, conservationists, artists, we have an almost impulsive need to stop a place in time, before it can change (Stanford 2000, p. 35). There is absolutely value in historical conservation, but man's fear of loss is a different matter.

Cycles include death as much as they include life, and that constant change is uncomfortable. Human lives are relatively short compared to that of a brick, stone, or even a building, so there is an instinctive need to either stop the space around us from changing, hate ruins, or impose man's conquest on the landscape. Incompiuto Siciliano has sparked a meaningful dialogue, but their principles view the ruins of Sicily as already "genius" (www.alterazionivideo.com 2009, p. 194)

To go beyond ruinlust, beyond our fear of change, projects like Alterazioni Video's should encourage acceptance of ruins' changing state, rather than preserve them as perfect incomplete works.

The final diagram developed below, simplifies the cyclical lifespan of ruins

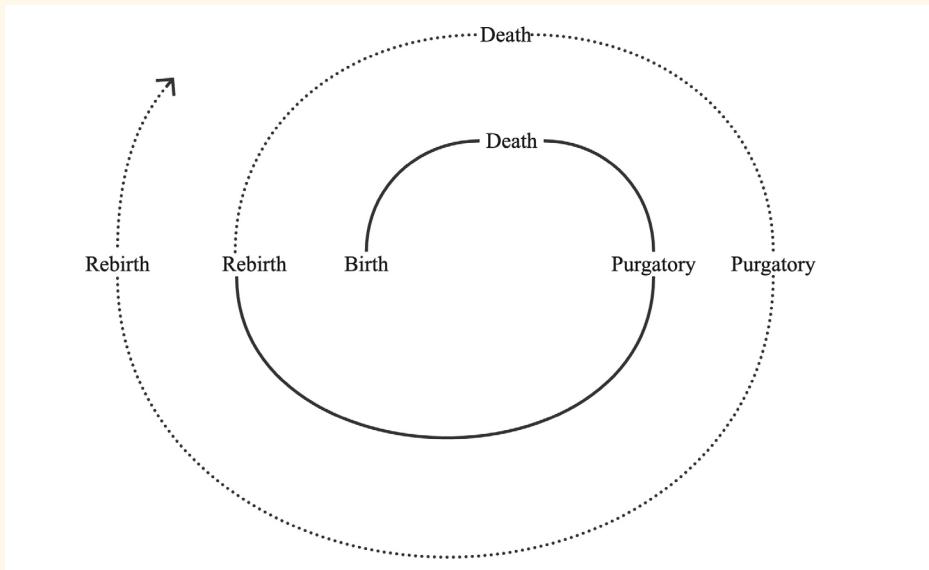


Fig 93

In summation, ruins encompass the death of the original purpose of a space. Even though this death is inevitable, it's not necessarily negative. The lifespan of a place is not finite or linear. Death implies a rebirth which means that the purpose of ruins is cyclical and ever-adapting with the communities they exist with, like in the quiet town of Giarre-Riposto. Balance between views and a wide range of views enable us to be responsible when talking about ruins. This is what makes ruins the state-abandoned infrastructure of Italy so fascinating; they provide an opportunity to redefine ruins on a grand scale while restoring pride to once exploited areas. These spaces are not dead but teeming with life just below the surface- it's in the traces people leave behind, the art on the walls, and even the stories that they tell. Ruins are layered in value, but it is those layers that enable works like those of Incompiuto Siciliano with the potential to be reborn.



Fig 94

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Fig 1	Sydney Olszewski
Fig 2	Sydney Olszewski
Fig 3	Alterazioni Video
Fig 4	Google Earth
Fig 5	Google Earth
Fig 6	Google Earth
Fig 7	Google Earth
Fig 8	Sydney Olszewski
Fig 9	Divisare
Fig 10	Divisare
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