

A New Sensibility towards Unfinished Ruins: Affective Knowledge Translation through Experimental Video

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journals.sagepub.com/home/sac**Pablo Arboleda**¹ 

Abstract

In the last 50 years, and due to a dilapidation of funds, hundreds of public works have remained unfinished in Italy, most especially in Sicily. In 2007, the group of artists Alterazioni Video declared these modern ruins a formal architectural style—so-called *Incompiuto Siciliano*—through which they aim to change the buildings’ negative perception, turning it into something positive. In September 2015, I carried out an urban exploration journey during which I visited a dozen *Incompiuto Siciliano* works all across Sicily in one week. Based on that journey, this paper argues that a renewed sensibility towards incompleteness necessarily requires original and creative methods to translate the affective knowledge gained in these sites. Therefore, through the use of personal narratives and the creation of three different experimental videos, the aim is to advance the way we translate embodied encounters with these spaces. This is relevant not only in the context of modern ruins but in further unruly spaces where aesthetic experiences emerge.

Keywords

sensibility, unfinished ruins, urban exploration, affective knowledge translation, embodied aesthetics, experimental video

Introduction

“Daniel! Daniel!!! Hurry, come here!!! It’s Machu Picchu, we’ve just discovered Machu Picchu!!!” Daniel clammers to the top of the soft hill where I’m standing. Both of us stand there open-mouthed while contemplating the enormous and remote concrete dam whose construction had begun 25 years ago and yet was never finished. The dam fits the surrounding landscape and the surrounding landscape fits the dam perfectly. It is a harmonious view with radiant rays bursting through the September clouds. We can hear only the rush of wind and the rustle of the bushes’ sure movement. After a long minute in silence, I put my arm around Daniel’s shoulder and tell him: “I. . . I have. . . I have no words.” (Field notes, 26 September 2015, Dam of Blufi, three kilometers away from the village of Blufi)

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Three days before this mystical experience, I had arrived in Sicily with the purpose of documenting around a dozen unfinished public works throughout island. Accompanied by two colleagues (Daniel and Chema), I was to formally capture the sites to illustrate the broader research I was doing; however, we were not unaware that we ourselves would fast become part of what we were about to see. We would do something “more” than taking pictures of unfinished ruins. This paper delves into that “more.”

In the summer of 2012, I read an article in a newspaper talking about a group of Italian artists called *Alterazioni Video*, who had declared a new architectural style: *Incompiuto Siciliano*. This style makes reference to the vast quantity of unfinished public works in Italy—around 750 erected in the past 50 years—with a third of them located in Sicily alone (*Alterazioni Video* and Fosbury Architecture, 2018). I argue elsewhere that the reasons why these constructions were never accomplished are rooted in the numerous instances of malpractice in which corruption and mafia networks went hand in hand. There, I intended to critically demonstrate that, within a context of dysfunctional modernization, unfinished public works are not an accident but an intentional, systematic white-collar crime (Arboleda, 2017a). So, at first, declaring an architectural style out of a problem that Italian society has neglected for so long struck me as funny, but after a moment of mirth, I realized that one could grasp serious implications from this case.

Indeed, *Incompiuto Siciliano* is an art project that proposes an eponymous architectural style—a successful initiative, being widely acclaimed in multiple exhibitions, workshops, academic dissertations, and social and mass media.¹ Mine is not a lonely voice within this increasing cultural appreciation—an appreciation that derives from how *Alterazioni Video* has left explicit criticism entirely aside. For the artists, it is not a matter of blaming anyone in particular, but paradoxically, their approach results in *denouncing without denouncing*—which ultimately strengthens the project’s social character whilst putting incompleteness on the public agenda (Arboleda, 2016a). *Alterazioni Video*’s intention is to dignify unfinished public works by shifting the way they are viewed, and within this revalorization process, the affect that these buildings generate when engaging with them play an essential role. Thus, apart from highlighting the sites’ peculiar meaning and materiality, which differ from other kinds of ruins (Arboleda, 2017b), the artists state that *Incompiuto Siciliano* “musters and reassembles metaphysical places of contemplation, thought and the imaginary [. . .] These are places of existential awareness, embodiments of the human soul, and they are silhouetted against the horizon, testifying to our very nature as humans” (*Alterazioni Video*, 2008, p. 193). As a researcher, that which elicits such intriguing, passionate imaginary was what I wanted to experience first-hand to then explore the ways in which this affective knowledge can be effectively translated. Hence, both the recollection of my trip and its experimental audio-visual translation, are aligned with the artists’ renewing and poetic argument. The goal is thus to contribute to emerging theories in which ruins and further readings of unruly spaces are conceived as sites of hope; as aesthetical atmospheres, provided that they engender affective knowledge gained through embodied encounters.

Encounters with Ruins and the Affect in Urban Exploration

The main form of urban exploration is to illegally trespass on abandoned sites; drawing upon the Romantic tradition of ruin gazing, explorers seek out modern ruins “as sites of aesthetic pleasure, leisure or adventure” (Mah, 2014). In recent years, the popularity of this practice has grown alongside the global fascination with decay, evidenced in numerous films, commercials, blogs, and even social media (Gibas, 2010; Klausen, 2017). Beyond its limited nature in terms of physical ability, gender, and race (Bennett, 2013; Mott & Roberts, 2014), urban exploration has also been subject to criticism due to the picturesque lens through which practitioners document their encounters with derelict buildings. Critics condemn such an aestheticization for obscuring the historical conditionings that cause ruins, and for eclipsing the harsh social reality—poverty,

marginality, and exclusion—from which they stem (Cunningham, 2011; Rosenberg, 2011; Shanks, 2014). However, without dismissing this thought, a variety of researchers agree on highlighting the affect component of urban exploration, mainly channeled through ruin imagery, as the first step to focusing attention on diverse urban problematics (Pétursdóttir & Olsen, 2014a; Pusca, 2010; Strangleman, 2013) whilst accepting and revaluing ruination through constructive fascination (Garrett, 2015). In this sense, it can be said that, moved by an “architectural enthusiasm” (Craggs et al., 2013), it is not the ruin that explorers portray in an affective way; rather, they capture the affect of their embodied encounter with that ruin.

This latter consideration makes urban exploration a critical approach from which to tackle an interesting analysis on *Incompiuto Siciliano*, because both the explorative frame of mind and Alterazioni Video’s vision require the prioritization of affective knowledge acquired through physical engagement with ruins as a means of complicating their negative origin. This means that, prior to my departure, I was indeed familiar with the political, economic, and sociological causes that produce unfinished works, and how unfavorably these buildings are generally viewed by locals and the wider public (Accattini, 2011; Faris, 2012; Innocenzi, 2013). So, while my tour could not be entirely disassociated from the resonances of corruption and organized crime, still, I was influenced by the positive reception expressed by other artists and researchers who had previously explored *Incompiuto Siciliano*’s highlights (Antolino, 2013; Dobraszcyk, 2015; Felici, 2011). Following in these footprints, I was implicitly focusing my attention on discussions that centered the visits such as monumentality, singularity, and the fascination derived from there—whilst a trip to more modest and mundane constructions would have provided a different account. Ultimately, this approach between tragedy and pleasure allows the construction of an urban explorer’s own narrative, imbuing ruination “with a new layer of history and meaning” (Armstrong, 2011, p. 277). To do such a thing requires, just as Judkins posits in relation to ruin encounters, that my story “is not so much about the things that are not there anymore, it is about what *is* still there—our connection with the place itself” (2014, p. 444, emphasis in the original).

In this way, the understanding of affect presented here is aligned with Anderson’s empirical approach reflected on his work *Encountering Affect*. For Anderson (2016), affect has three frames of meaning (as object/target, as bodily capacity from encounters, and as collective condition), which are shaped by mediating forces that usually pursue to reconcile two opposed positions—in this case, the aforementioned duality between tragedy and pleasure. Following Anderson, it is crucial to note the environment to which our affect is attached, overall, considering that affect “could attach to *anything*” (Fannin, 2018, p. 213; emphasis in the original), including those sites that society has rejected so far. Importantly, in Anderson’s reasoning, affect is ultimately guided by “the *hope* that real change is possible, which will bind people together” (Saldanha, 2018, p. 215; emphasis added), and this is not inconsequential if we conceive that the way in which we imagine ruination “impacts upon how we approach and plan for it in real life” (Dobraszcyk, 2017, p. 1). Hence, the aim of this paper is to delve into the affect encountered in unfinished ruins and translate it to those who would share said affect and those who, in principle, would not. My affect is then one among many possible reactions to incompleteness, making evident that, despite reconciling (and yet collective) aspirations, affect is not inherent to the object but projected onto it by the beholder.

This paper begins with a methodological enquiry on the use of experimental video as a tool to translate affective knowledge. Then, given that modern ruins are said to be “only fascinating for some people, typically outsiders, passing by, snapping photos” (Mah, 2014), in the first section of this paper, I embrace my own condition as a foreigner in Sicily to advocate for the authenticity of experience that is usually attributed to modern ruins (Fraser, 2012). Moved by curiosity and the desire for reflective contemplation, my ethos may be seen as elitist and exclusive (High & Lewis, 2007; Leary, 2011). Admitting this, my positionality as a ruin-researcher from Spain (and

thus a local in a country that has also been facing incompleteness for the last decade) does not prevent me from suggesting the need to adopt a benign sensibility in order to appreciate *Incompiuto Siciliano* in the way proposed by Alterazioni Video. Second, unfinished works are labelled “unruly places” (Bonnett, 2014) when compared to the island’s commodified touristic ruins; I would argue that, as a consequence of this, the former have the potential to function as sites of adventure and play (Edensor, 2005; Moshenska, 2014). In this regard, urban exploration as a variant of psychogeography and the Situationist *dérive* (Beck & Cornford, 2012; Fassi, 2010) offers a sense of freedom that, most likely, can be found in modern ruins. In the third and last section, I counter the negative connotation of these spaces through embodied narratives and subjectivity (Garrett 2016; Pétursdóttir & Olsen, 2014b). Aesthetics are essential to this approach but, instead of glorifying *Incompiuto Siciliano* as sites for mere visual consumption, the notion of aesthetics that I discuss here is rather phenomenological—fully corporeal and closer to affection and emotion (Pétursdóttir, 2014, 2016). Aligned with Alterazioni Video’s approach, this serves to value unfinished works in their entropic condition (DeSilvey, 2014, 2017), where incompleteness is not a mere failure, but is a new typology of ruination that, on the basis of *hope*, deserves to be acknowledged for its existence.

A Creative Method for Affective Knowledge Translation

One week in Sicily, and no more than a couple of hours spent visiting each building—the brevity of this urban exploration fieldwork affords the gathering of fresh and immediate impressions, since the experience is “qualitatively different and valuable in its own right” (Dobraszczyk, 2017, p. 109). Drawing upon Romanticism and critical travel writing, the resulting rich textual descriptions and personal thoughts play an important role in solitary wandering and (auto)ethnographic writing (Wylie, 2005). The way in which the present text is written advocates for “alternative expressions and forms that *care for personal experiences* and convey moments of wonder and affect” (Pétursdóttir, 2016, p. 372, emphasis in the original), using both creative and poetic registers to communicate (Tonkin, 2010). Here, this is particularly exemplified through the regular inclusion of edited field notes that, providing an emotional, intimate, and fluid style, contribute to creating persuasive evocations (Punch, 2012).

Nevertheless, “text” is not the only relevant tool for these academic purposes (Whatmore, 2006) and, consequently, building on non-representational geography, “non-textual forms of art making naturally facilitate affective knowledge translation” (Boyd, 2017, p. 56). As in the opening field note, affect is impossible to be fully realized in language (Massumi, 2002), to the extent that we can face seemingly indescribable moments. To overcome this gap, pictures of encounters with ruins are sought since “literature focusing on contemporary ruinscapes cannot do without images” (Fraser, 2012, p. 140). However, through the use of audiovisual material, here, I attempt to present movement in collaboration with the intriguing visual and aural atmospheres of *Incompiuto Siciliano* so that wider senses are brought into play, proposing that affect in research can be adequately translated through creative ways. This is important because, as Lorimer (2010) notes in the realm of geography, there is an urgent need to engage further with new recording and editing techniques, paying greater attention to the sensorial aspect. What’s more, this vision is not trivial when considering the increasing affordability of high-quality video recording devices and the feasibility of carrying these to capture instant feelings (Vannini & Stewart, 2016). Alongside the visuals, sound is essential to this process and I have captured it directly from the environment—including the times when my colleagues and I made music with the elements found while exploring unfinished works—not inconsequential as long as music is “particularly apt for amplifying the haunted and uncanny qualities of [ruined] places” (Gallagher, 2015, p. 467; see also Fletcher, 2011).

Each of the three sections in this paper is complemented by a short video that has been uploaded to an online video platform, and the links are conveniently indicated as notes throughout the

following pages. These videos were edited in an intensive two-day session that took place a year and a half after the trip, and, thus, the immediacy of the collected field notes and visual data is tempered by the reflection that only the passing time affords. These videos are experimental though, in that they are assemblages, functioning as audiovisual exemplifications of psychogeographic cartographies. Relying on the use of “choppy” aesthetics, they are complex works; seemingly chaotic and disorienting, where the followed route, exact locations, and further information regarding the sites are not explicitly revealed. Rather than mini-documentaries with instructive purposes, the goal is to translate—and somehow celebrate—our physical presence and the affect prompted by it, in the “attempt” of causing reactions (Garrett, 2010a; Garrett & Hawkins, 2014).

It is worth noting that, as creative pieces, these videos need an audience to be communicated; yet, they are intrinsically partial—something that should not be viewed as a limitation but as an added value. Or, more explicitly:

[A]udiences *receive* affective knowledge in ways that cannot be predicted or ensured. From the artist’s point of view, it is an attempt to convey a conceptual feeling, but it cannot be anything other than an attempt. It might succeed or it might fail, and the experience of it will be different for each person who witness it. Moreover, it is only ever experienced as an encounter with the potential to be re-experienced in a multitude of ways. What this means is that affective knowledge gains must be tentative—framed as propositions rather than conclusions. In so doing, they remain open. However, this is not “weak knowledge”. The power of affective knowledge gains, and perhaps their greater contribution to the academy, is that they *participate* in knowledge production in ways that resists foreclosure. (Boyd, 2017, p. 96; emphasis in the original)

Hence, the mere viewing of these videos pursues to provoke empathy and tease curiosity, expecting to engage with a broader public even far beyond the academia. Therefore, the ultimate intention is to potentially go beyond ruin readers, inviting us to reflect on the way unruly spaces are affectively and effectively translated by exposing an amalgamation of situations by which you, the reader/viewer, “participate” and become part of this trip.

Matters of Sensibility

Booking budget flights for a one-week stay in Sicily; compiling my own travel guide; renting hire car and driving hundreds of kilometers to my desired destination—technically, I was not so different from any tourist, but somehow, my explorative approach towards unfinished works as non-conventional destinations changed everything. As expressed in the following conversation, even if visiting modern ruins is becoming increasingly normalized, not everybody shares such a vision:

Daniel: Dude, my family thinks I’m crazy. . . [he laughs].

Me: Why that?

Daniel: Well, they don’t understand the reason why I took my holidays just to come here and see these weird buildings.

Me: OK. . . I get it. And what do you think?

Daniel: I think I like them; I mean, I know I like them—he laughs again.

We are sitting on a restaurant terrace. In that precise moment, the waiter brings us our dinner.

Waiter: So guys, what are you doing here? Are you travelling around the island?

Me: You’re right! We’re doing a whole tour around Sicily to visit some unfinished works.

Waiter: My God. . . those buildings. . . [he says with a shocked face]. Why don’t you visit some of the actual beautiful spots we have here? (Field notes, September 24, 2015, Bar Portorico, Riposto)

Not that the waiter was embarrassed by our awareness of incompleteness—in fact, when I later explained to him that I was actually researching the buildings, he seemed happy that someone was finally paying this “problem” any attention. It is rather that, at first, the waiter could not comprehend the motivation behind visiting an unfinished work, there being plenty of conventional “touristic” pursuits on offer in Sicily. Both his reaction and that of my colleague’s relatives clearly show that modern ruins require a change of public perception, “an affective progression from disdain to acceptance” (Orange, 2008, p. 83). Moreover, simply by use of the term “ruin” to refer to unfinished works, I am providing an elitist lens through which to view that which locals see as a familiar, critical imprint (Gordillo, 2014). I do not deny the interesting scope of studying incompleteness from a formal ethnographic stance; however, since what I truly intended was to document my encounters with these deserted locations, never formally in use and certainly unoccupied during our visits (though traces of informal occupation were common), the only available subject of study was, in fact, me:

Sitting atop the barren bleachers of this unfinished stadium, I cannot help thinking that there must be personal memories attached to this place. I expect former construction workers may be frustrated, as well as near neighbours, seeing this building on a daily basis for decades. But is my own fascination not as valuable as these perceptions? My experience here is surely different from theirs, and that is the take away—where I see a peaceful atmosphere to sit and contemplate the horizon, others may see a place they would never venture. This is an interesting reciprocity because, the very fact that some people would never come here is precisely what allows me dawdle, contemplating the horizon. (Field notes, September 24, 2015, Athletics Stadium and Polo Field, Giarre)

Video 1 encapsulates these thoughts,² My colleagues and I perform the music in this piece, which was recorded onsite. While trespassing in an unfinished theatre, we found discarded parts of wooden pallets and small pieces of corrugated iron, and we spontaneously began to play a sort of marimba rhythm. This action may as well serve as an introduction to the notion of experimental behavior in ruins, but my interest here is to focus on how concepts and views of *Incompiuto Siciliano* are captured, marking these sites as places for rumination. The video mostly shows wide perspectives, with massive concrete structures dominating the scene, and we humble spectators, just tiny figures, relishing the surreal chance to be the only ones in such an impressive set of enclaves. Also, clips of the buildings are interspersed with scenes of everyday Sicilian life. Seeing that which is regularly omitted from ruin imagery ultimately shows this vibrant society as the counterpoint to the deserted moments experienced in unfinished works.

When one thinks of urban exploration, the first images that come to mind are those of abandoned spaces in big cities like Berlin, London, New York, or Detroit, where consistent and constant alternative communities of practitioners coexist (Garrett, 2014). The sites of interest are normally sealed and guarded, which adds an adrenaline rush by confirming the practice as illegal (Arboleda, 2016b). However, the Sicilian context in which my own experience unfolded was different as most unfinished public works there are located in small and medium-sized villages such as Giarre, Paternò, Randazzo, Blufi, or Nuova Gibellina. Thus, the environment in which my explorations took place differs greatly from the urban conditions of big cities:

These places are located on the outskirts of towns, and it is quite easy to get in because there are no formal barriers or warning posters stopping you from doing so. The buildings are worthless in the material sense; here there is nothing to take or break! What’s more, their public status (yet they somehow belong to everyone and no one at the same time) may well explain why they do not rely on any surveillance at all. Even so, I assume that when sneaking onto one of these sites, I am doing something illegal but I am not afraid of being caught since the relaxed atmosphere of these villages contributes to erasing such a sense of risk. One can enter and remain in an unfinished work with the same level of ease and tranquillity as if one were visiting any commonplace location. Perhaps even more. (Field notes, September 25, 2015, Multi-functional Hall, Giarre)

This field note was written after, having spent several minutes searching for a particular unfinished building, I opted to ask a local for the directions—an enquiry that he did not hesitate in kindly answering. Far from rejecting the limitations of my condition as an urban explorer, I embrace the immediacy of being an outsider in Sicily to add my own perception to the history of unfinished works. In this sense, and since exploration is commonly related to discovery, Garrett remarks that explorers “are not looking to learn anything new but to learn it in new ways—through experience rather than representation. We go into a place, we dig around, we interpret it ourselves” (2015, p. 87). But how does one welcome the required sensibility to do that? It may be argued that today, in an era where we are bombarded by images of our destinations, it is impossible to discover anything. That said, though I knew I was not the first person to explore unfinished works in Sicily, this did not prevent me from discovering something relevant; sensibility towards modern ruins can be cultivated through contemplative, intimate moments that allow a grasp of both a site and oneself. Even if I had preconceived ideas of what I was supposed to find, I managed to achieve this by partially breaking away from common negative assumptions while letting myself be surprised. I lowered my expectations, and yet these thoughts came to mind strictly because *I was there*.

On Being Unruly

In a world that is increasingly scrutinized, regulated, and known, unfinished public works in Sicily can be fascinating. Bonnett catalogues them as “unruly places” because they “have the power to disrupt our expectations [challenging] us to see ourselves for what we are, a place-making and place-loving species” (2014, pp. 297–300). To “explore” means to design your own path and Incompiuto Siciliano—much like any other kind of modern ruin—provided me an opportunity for liberation from usual social constrain (Edensor, 2005). Of course, every space has its own constraints, but here my presence and behavior are mostly inoffensive, which allows me a greater degree of freedom when compared to older ruins that are correctly preserved and where a narrative is already fixed. Would it not be exciting to freely wander Pompeii, without other visitors, without rules? This may well be the dream of many, but we simply cannot do so as classical ruins are highly controlled. Consequently, regardless of the nature of the ruins I visit, the aspect I value most is the sense of freedom and, in Sicily, that could only be experienced while exploring unfinished works. Regulation affects the way we have to behave; if one does not want to behave in the accepted way, one must avoid regulation:

After having explored several unfinished buildings in the morning, my colleagues and I thought about taking a break from our journey and we came to Taormina this evening. Here, we wanted to visit the outstanding Greek theatre; however, we have arrived 15 minutes before the closing time and we agreed that it would not be worth it to pay for a ticket for such a short visit. Somehow we had forgotten that tourist sites have restricted visiting hours—a basic principle of regulation that is inconceivable for the unfinished sites that we are documenting! Our clothes are still dirty after our day of exploration and we have decided to sit in a café to rest for some time. We only see groups of tourists and elegant couples strolling along the main street of beautiful Taormina and, as soon as we drink our coffees, we will leave the city with the feeling that we do not belong here—at least in this precise moment. (Field notes, September 24, 2015, Licchio’s Bar, Taormina)

Just a few days later, a similar situation occurred to us in Agrigento:

This afternoon, we went to the magnificent Valley of the Temples and stood for some minutes in the queue of tourists waiting to buy ticket at the entrance. There was a souvenir shop, several turnstiles and even one of those machines that makes a commemorative coin out of a five cent coin. I stared at my colleagues, my colleagues stared back, and we all suddenly noticed how absurd our situation was after having spent the whole day sneaking onto unfinished works. We left before even entering. At

that very moment I understood how, just like shopping centres, these touristic sites have become mass consumption spots. And beyond the relevance of this not-so-original reflection, it is funny to note that the biggest shopping centre in Agrigento is a recent, corporate building whose façade resembles a Greek construction made of glass and steel that is called “Città dei Templi” (“City of Temples”)—we have not deigned to enter. (September 28, 2015, Entrance of “Città dei Templi” shopping center, Agrigento)

It is not a matter of downplaying traditional archaeological sites to emphasize my affect for the unruly ruins I have explored; indeed, without a shadow of doubt, there can also be a deep, reflective motivation behind visiting these normative spots (Tilley, 1997). However, when we were inside an unfinished work, the experience was not limited by norms of consumption. One is able to explore every corner, walk up and down the stairs one wants or access tight corridors. And though there were three of us, upon entering, we used to unconsciously separate and would not converge until some time later. This clearly shows the subjective potential and emancipatory power that one can feel inside a ruin. Movement is not at all constrained; it is purely fluid and improvised (Edensor, 2007, 2008); this reinforced by the fact that unfinished public works occasionally do not even have walls or doors. Hence, I could not tell how long we were in this or that building because the infinite spatial possibilities contribute to the loss of any notion of time.

This freedom provided by modern ruins makes it possible to read urban exploration as a variant of psychogeography and the Situationist *dérive* (Beck & Cornford, 2012; Fassi, 2010). I can certainly say that, though we had the clear purpose of visiting unfinished works, once inside, we created our own micro-world in which the act of wandering became random and destinationless. Moreover, Situationism is labelled this way because it encourages “the making of ‘situations’, playful creations of an active life prefigurative of a utopian remarking of social relations” (Smith, 2010, p. 104). Yet even if Situationists originally aimed to involve and provoke the rest of society through their interventions (Careri, 2002), my colleagues and I caused our own “situations” without being seen by anyone, making playgrounds of unfinished public works.

Video 2 demonstrates the playful atmosphere we created in unfinished public works.³ It starts at a children’s park, a place currently in use though it contains a building that was supposed to host a library and a game room but was left half-constructed more than 40 years ago. The lively music is directly recorded from a coin-operated ride on-site, providing a fun soundscape to the video, which perfectly suits the enjoyable scenes recorded at several Incompiuto Siciliano’s locations. Silent contemplation is certainly not the only option in these sites and, occasionally, we felt the need to interact with the environment—sometimes, only moments separated one approach from the other even in the same spot. Thus, the images in this video are no longer magnificent, glossy shots illustrating the architectural richness of incompleteness; rather, they are POVs (points of view), in an attempt to provide a subjective perspective and human scale, where the camera was an extension of our own bodies and movements.

Though age is socially constructed, the viewer may be surprised to see in the video a group of adults behaving as if they were children. In principle, this behavior does not correspond to our age; however, this is not out of context dealing with modern ruins as

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

Indeed, it can be argued that unfinished works, in their ruined form, function as playful sites for adventure that is seldom found elsewhere (Edensor, 2008), and ultimately, in their being alternative spaces they provide the opportunity to behave in an alternative way. This contrasts with how our behavior is prescribed in regulated spaces, and it poses the question of whether *unruly places* unmask

our imposed identities and allow us to unveil how we are. And though this is enriching for both the buildings and us, it is just one of the multiple thoughts that come to mind in these locations.

Aesthetics as Embodied Experience

In the Romantic tradition, aesthetic appreciation is expressed as long as classical ruins are “well enough preserved (while retaining the proper amounts of picturesque irregularity) to produce the desired mix of emotions in the beholder” (Roth, 1997, p. 5). Considering this, is Incompiuto Siciliano not sufficiently picturesque? Despite knowing they are only a few decades old, it could be said that their unfinished materiality, with skeletal shapes of concrete, makes them look as though they had been erected some several millennia past. In the developed world, it is paradoxical that architecture, considered the study of spaces that are lived in, experienced, and sensed, has now become something to be exclusively consumed and appreciated visually, with buildings that are designed more like a powerful image rather than spaces in which to move (Robinson, 2012). Pallasmaa notes this dominance of “ocularcentrism,” in which architecture is merely constituted by a series of “retinal images” and a certain building is “an end in itself” (2005, p. 63). However, this author argues, it should not be that way, and calls for a wider sensorial understanding of the space. This way, full knowledge and authenticity can only be sought through a whole body experience, and memory and imagination can only be experienced by equalizing the importance we place on a building and on ourselves:

It was only yesterday when we started our trip and I do not even remember the precise shape of the first building we explored, but I do recall that it was a warm afternoon and when I touched the corrugated iron of its pillars, it was hot. Similarly, I cannot tell how many floors the stands of the unfinished stadium we trespassed upon has, but I remember hearing the sound of my steps and the echoes they caused. This evening, we are in this tiny village to visit a half-built bridge, and I would have to look at it once more to say the exact number of arches that the construction has; but for sure, what I will never forget is how the sky quickly gets dark and how the smell of the fireplaces coming from the houses nearby fills my nose. (Field notes, September 25, 2015, Unfinished bridge, Randazzo).

Touch, hearing, smell: all these contribute to the forging of a sensorial map of the sites I visited and, ultimately, they bring to mind moments of joy but also discomfort and vulnerability. And even if these feelings are not directly related to visual contemplation, they are essential to a complete aesthetic experience. Indeed, the term “aesthetics” has only now come to denote the physical attributes of a site, issuing a value judgement on whether the site is beautiful or not—despite the fact that, in its original concept, aesthetics referred to what can be felt and sensed through experience and perception (Pétursdóttir & Olsen, 2014b). It is not a matter of rating the scale, shapes, and textures of unfinished works to come up with a universal truth regarding their physical beauty; it is a question of stating that incompleteness responds to certain aesthetics as long as it is able to generate affective knowledge, shaped by reconciled duality because

[B]eing delighted in the unfinished velodrome we visited some days ago is only a part of my affect but the fear of being chased by a stray dog in the same location is part of my affect too, and consequently, the velodrome is aesthetical. The enormity of Mount Etna viewed from the unfinished structure whose roof was never built was quite wonderful the other day, but the claustrophobia felt in the building’s inner and obscure corridors is also part of my wonder, and once again, the place is aesthetical. One could legitimately argue that unfinished works are ugly and so, since I do not think the same after this week of exploration, it is clear that, on this occasion, beauty is not collectively forged. Yet, my last thought here in Sicily is that, beyond value judgments, anyone exploring these places would surely gain affective knowledge, certainly different from my own. (September 30, 2015, Catania Airport—minutes before heading back, Catania)

Video 3 translates the statements made in this section.⁴ We managed to get entry to an 800-metre tunnel designed to transport water to the unfinished dam of Blufi. The entrance resembles a concrete brutalist construction and, once inside, the atmosphere grows darker with every step while an overwhelming feeling of lacking oxygen is ever-present. The echo in the chamber is immense, and I began to intone an impromptu Gregorian style chant, which repeated “Incompiuto Siciliano” as the only lyrics. This plays through the entire video like a moaning melody, a dreadful dirge, a desperate cry for help. The chosen images for this video are close-up views, textures; frames that are half-way between mysterious and artistic; and experimental clips not only in their assembly in the editing process but in the way they were shot. Trash as mundane archaeological remains, material elements that acquire sculptural forms, and the additional sounds produced by our interactions with them. Only body parts are displayed, only our hands and feet. Mysticism and claustrophobia; heartbeats and sweat. Breath. Has anyone else stepped foot in these places since we left?

Undesirable and overlooked, unfinished public works can certainly be considered so but *attempting* to change their fate is totally legitimate. They are mostly located in rural contexts, in towns where changes occur later and more slowly; all the while, the structures simply stand there because there is no financial resource to either demolish or finish them (Arboleda, 2019). It would be reasonable to condemn this status quo, which causes these constructions to linger, seemingly inactive while, at the same time, calling out for eventual investments that could revert this situation. However, noting the monumentality and the vast quantity of these sites, it would not be unreasonable to think that, being realistic, many of them will simply remain unfinished forever. This inevitability is fascinating, and it is an interesting paradox that while being completely neglected, the works are indirectly well-preserved as what they have always been: ruins. Such a chaotic, entropic nature in which decay is assumed, respected, and celebrated (DeSilvey, 2014, 2017) is precisely what makes incompleteness different, valuable, and appealing. I am aware of the controversy that this reflection could cause as it defies common sense and, academically speaking, contradicts the notion of progress (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2012). Though as suggested by *Alterazioni Video*, far from considering ruination a tragic fate, the translation of my affect may well contribute to the beginning of an afterlife for these buildings; those that are now open to further affect knowledges and perceptions; those that are now open to exploration.

Proposition

Alterazioni Video offers a vision towards unfinished buildings that is extremely original since it defies reasonable pejorative assumptions by inviting society to interpret these sites as romantic cultural productions. This paradigm shift implies the formation and cultivation of a new sensibility that does not only apply to concepts like “beauty” or “taste” but that requires a full phenomenological analysis to gain affective knowledge. Drawing on research methods that are suitable in terms of creativity and artistic dimension to *Alterazioni Video*’s project, this paper has attempted to contribute to the existing challenge of how to translate such a knowledge in the context of academia. Furthermore, while this work surely has the potential to engage further scholars studying other spaces beyond ruins, it remains accessible to a broader public in the hopes of sparking an interest, challenging people to ponder upon incompleteness from their own perspectives.

Sensory and performative methods are not meant to be applied exclusively to ruins, though it is also true that, due to their uncanny attributes, ruins have traditionally been subject to these alternative modes of investigation. In this sense, and despite its limitations, urban exploration’s validity as qualitative fieldwork relies on a curiosity about visiting non-conventional spaces and the inherent human desire to provide accounts of lived experiences. In an era dominated by quick information consumption through visual culture, experimental video enables us to tell something “more” than what one

can see. As such, experimental video is presented as an accessible tool to potentially translate affective knowledge—knowledge that remains open (as incomplete as the spaces from which it was gained) and whose ultimate validity depends on audiences' reception and interpretation.

Seemingly worthless, neglected and forgotten, incompleteness in Sicily has the paradoxical quality of being omnipresent whilst remaining invisible. It is unseen because it is seen everywhere. Embarrassment, frustration, and helplessness combine to transform a massive architectural phenomenon into something easily ignored by looking the other way. As such, a logical reading would be tempted to disregard incompleteness, inviting society to move on; after all, if unfinished buildings have been overlooked, it must be because they are unimportant. However, I cannot help thinking about the increasing number of people—myself included—who have indeed directed our attention to the matter, providing a new meaning to a reality that, thus far, had been meaningless. Inspired by an artistic rationale, my work humbly aspires to testify affect and project significance onto incompleteness, and perhaps in doing so, hopefully find the sole path towards reconciliation, towards healing, and towards completion.

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Notes

1. A quick search for 'Incompiuto Siciliano' on Google produces approximately 79,500 results while its page on Facebook is followed by more than 20,000 people. A broader list of such a public impact is available at https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_4tPt3jJkYWbVdFaFMtTjMwNHc/view

2. Video 1 is available at: <https://vimeo.com/519093242>.
3. Video 2 is available at: <https://vimeo.com/519093323>.
4. Video 3 is available at: <https://vimeo.com/519093414>.

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