Making sense of the industrial past. Deindustrialisation and industrial heritage in Italy

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This article analyses the relationship between deindustrialisation and industrial heritage by considering recent studies on the topic. Although Deindustrialisation Studies and (Industrial) Heritage Studies focus on distinct phases of industrial change — schematically a "before" and an "after" of the history of industry — these fields increasingly converge on the role of the memory of the industrial past in the present. The essay examines these convergences in the Italian context, looking at the history of industrial archaeology and the difficulty of recognising a specifically "Italian deindustrialisation". It argues that history, especially environmental and labour history, can play an important role in this dialogue. In the last part, the article focuses on the industrial area of Porto Marghera (near Venice) and analyses the major cultural events that were organised for its centenary. It argues that this is an example both of "deindustrialisation without industrial heritage" and of "industrial heritage without the memory of deindustrialisation". This makes it difficult to develop a shared elaboration of the area's industrial past and of its future.
Key words: Deindustrialisation Studies, Heritage Studies, Industrial Heritage, Labour History, Italy, Porto Marghera (Venice)

In this article, I will examine the relationship between deindustrialisation and industrial heritage; I do so by considering the former as a historical process and the latter as a contemporary practice of, and discussion about, the industrial past. I will start from a question that may seem paradoxical at first sight: what came first, deindustrialisation or industrial heritage? The most straightforward answer is that the heritagisation of an industrial artefact can only occur after production has ceased or changed; deindustrialisation is, then, a preliminary and necessary condition for industrial heritage to be conceived.[1] Yet, if we look more closely at the connections between the two and ground them in an example, the linearity of events may not seem so clear.

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[1] Kevin Walsh, *The representation of the past. Museums and heritage in the post modern world*, London-New York, Routledge, 1992.

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Deindustrialisation is not a singular event but a prolonged process of structural change, which runs in parallel with opposed phenomena at both a global and a local level. In turn, heritage is not a product but the outcome of material and symbolical selections and negotiations between social, political and economic actors. Deindustrialisation considered in terms of the history of economic transformation and industrial heritage as the public memory of that experience are both battlefields where opposing values and interests regularly confront one another.[2] The ways in which communities have gained experience from industrial closure, the means through which they have negotiated and opposed this decline, and the outcomes of reconversion affect the strategies of the heritage industry and the accompanying heritage in a locality or region.[3]

On this basis, I view deindustrialisation and industrial heritage not in terms of a "before" and "after", as is often assumed in scholarship; Deindustrialisation Studies re-elaborate and historicise the various results of change, whereas Heritage Studies seek to make these usable and significant in the present. Rather than considering the history of the reversal of industrialisation and the memorialisation of the industrial past as distinct areas of expertise, I see them as parallel approaches. In the words of one of the founding fathers of Heritage Studies, David Lowenthal, if "showing off the past is the common result of identifying it", then my interpretation of deindustrialisation and industrial heritage raises the question of how deindustrialisation — viewed in terms of history — can be incorporated in industrial heritage practices.[4] This question takes on a particular importance if we consider the most recent wave of industrial dismantling in the Western world, beginning with the economic crisis of the 1970s, which is the *terminus a quo* of all interpretations that define contemporary societies as "postmodern", "post-Fordist" or "post-industrial".[5]

In the first part of the article, I will outline a number of important developments in international scholarship on deindustrialisation and industrial heritage. It was my longstanding interest in the former that led me to focus my attention on the latter. Next, I will consider the Italian national context, starting from the politically contentious question of whether Italy is a deindustrialised country or is in the process of becoming one. The answer to this question has consequences both for the memory of work and for the development of an industrial archaeology of the Fordist era. Finally, I will ground my analysis in

[2] Michael Frisch, *De-, re-, and post-industrialization. Industrial heritage as contested memorial terrain*, "Journal of Folklore Research", 1998, n. 3, pp. 241-249.

[3] Stefan Berger, Steven High (eds.), *(De-)Industrial Heritage*, "Labor", 2019, n. 1; see also David Nettleingham, *Heritage work. The preservations and performances of Thames sailing barges*, "Cultural Sociology", 2018, n. 3, pp. 384-399.

[4] David Lowenthal, *The past is a foreign country*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, here p. 271.

[5] Scholarly literature on these themes is extremely vast, and I will limit myself to mentioning David Harvey's classic, *La crisi della modernità*, Milan, Il saggiatore, 1993.

a local case study that I consider to be a potential example of deindustrialisation without (for the moment) industrial heritage, but at the same time also an example of industrial heritage without placing deindustrialisation within its interpretative frame. This is the case of Porto Marghera, the vast industrial, deindustrial and post-industrial mainland area that faces the Venetian lagoon — the twentieth-century extension of the "old city" and an investment in its modernity. However, due precisely to the changes it is experiencing, nowadays Porto Marghera is caught between the stigma of the past and an uncertain future that make it extremely difficult to identify its heritage.

Studies in deindustrialisation and heritage

Deindustrialisation and Heritage Studies generally approach the theme of industrial change by focusing on two different scenarios: that in which industry fades, or collapses, and that in which it is reborn in the form of material or immaterial "heritage". These thematic areas share an inevitable and concrete rootedness in space; deindustrialisation is a selective and localised, non-global phenomenon, whereas the heritage of industrial labour — in all its tangible and intangible aspects — is inseparable from the places in which this heritage is considered such by collective actors, including when "it moves" along with migratory phenomena.

Deindustrialisation does not always produce a recognisable heritage that can be valorised: a history capable of becoming memory. The "creative destruction" of capitalism — to use Joseph Schumpeter's famous definition — that is often mentioned in Deindustrialisation Studies entails the continuous substitution of buildings and machines as a result of technological modernisation.[6] Conversely, in areas that still suffer the social consequences of dismantling, valorisation projects may encounter a double obstacle: the disapproval of local communities, especially when hit hard by unemployment or other forms of social disadvantage, or the lack of local economic resources.[7] Moreover, in many places the rise of an ecological awareness — which initially developed in close connection to the problem of "industrial risk", at least in Italy — has generated a cultural *humus* that is unfavourable to the memory of industrialisation.

However, when projects are launched for the re-use and/or valorisation of deindustrialised places, a dialogue between Deindustrialisation and Heritage Studies becomes possible, in which historians of modern times can play a

[6] See, for example, Tim Strangleman, *Portrait of a deindustrialising island*, in Graham Crow, Jaimie Ellis (eds.), *Revisiting divisions of labour. The impacts and legacies of a modern sociological classic*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2017, pp. 55-68.

[7] James Douet (ed.), *Industrial heritage re-tooled. The Ticcih guide to industrial heritage conservation*, Lancaster, Carnegie, 2013, p. 8.

significant role, especially those interested in "working-class public history".[8] Deindustrialisation Studies initially focused on the "here and now" of the crises, of their macro-economic causes and immediate effects. During a subsequent phase, they aimed at deciphering the long-term cultural and political consequences for deindustrialised communities, be they regions, urban areas, company towns or working-class districts. Many scholars of deindustrialisation have limited their perspective to a subjective theme, to the fact that people inhabit areas of decline or descend from displaced workers.[9] As the concept of deindustrialisation gradually lost its connotation of a sporadic, casual or inevitable event, instead becoming synonym with structural caesura, the role of historians — working in close connection to other social scientists — has become ever more important.

The concept of deindustrialisation entered public debate in Europe and North America in the 1980s, in the midst of a traumatic surge of renovations and closures, accompanied by harsh attacks on labour organisations. Consequently, specific attention began to be paid to the so-called Rust Belt in the United States and the coal-mining areas of Britain — torn apart by the long strike of 1984-85. Ever since the economists Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison defined deindustrialisation as a "widespread, systematic disinvestment in the nation's basic productive capacity", thus highlighting its economic and national dimension, the area of investigation has broadened considerably. The role of historians has been decisive in this development.[10]

Christopher Johnson's 1998 study of the decline of the textile industry in the Languedoc region during the Second Empire shed light on the crucial role politics played in the dislocation and articulation of industrial capital. In particular, Johnson's study was praised for having contributed to a reconsideration of the historical period in which deindustrialisation is to be located.[11] With the case of Detroit in mind, Johnson argued that the cataclysmic deindustrialisation of the 1980s in the United States was no more than an episode in the long-

[8] Michael Frisch, *Working-class public history in the context of deindustrialization. Dilemmas of authority and the possibilities of dialogue*, "Labour/Le Travail", 2003, n. 51, pp. 153-164.

[9] Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, Andrew Perchard (eds.), *The deindustrialized world. Confronting ruination in postindustrial places*, Vancouver-Toronto, Ubc Press, 2017, pp. 13 ff.

[10] Barry Bluestone, Bennett Harrison, *The deindustrialization of America. Plant closings, community abandonment, and the dismantling of basic industry*, New York, Basic books, 1982, here p. 6; Steven High, *"The wounds of class". A historiographical reflection on the study of deindustrialization, 1973-2013*, "History Compass", 2013, n. 11, pp. 994-1007. The international debate reached Italy through Angelo Pichierri's anthology, *Il declino industriale. Il contributo delle scienze sociali alla diagnosi e alla definizione di strategie di risposta*, Turin, Rosenberg & Sellier, 1986.

[11] Christopher H. Johnson, *The life and death of industrial Languedoc, 1700-1920. The politics of deindustrialization*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995. An anticipation of this research in Italian had appeared several years before: Id., *De-industrializzazione: il caso dell'industria laniera della Linguadoca*, "Quaderni storici", 1983, n. 52, pp. 25-56.

term transformation of capitalist economy; throughout the course of its history, the latter has constantly sought more favourable conditions for making profit through cost reduction and the disciplining of labour.

As a result, the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam suggested to expand the study of deindustrialisation to its social, cultural and political implications, and to include it in the agenda of global labour history.[12] In fact, to observe the movements of industrial capital inevitably raised the question of how "the vicissitudes of groups of workers in different parts of the world are connected in complex ways".[13] Simultaneously, some North American studies considered the resistance to dismantling an integral part of the working-class movement's political history.[14]

A growing number of oral histories, ethnographies and autobiographies have given voice to the labourers that were affected by the decline. They have done so by analysing stories of decline in terms of lost identity (i.e. class, gender, ethnic), health problems, consequences for family relations and social cohesion.[15] Often, a photographic language accompanied the ethno-historical research so as to capture faces and landscapes at the moment of transition.[16]

Industrial decline has paved the way for a reconsideration of the classical approach of labour historians; traditionally more interested in studying working-class identity formation and the unfolding of conflicts, scholars have tended to avoid analysing the longer-term implications of industrial decline. Working in close dialogue with sociology, historians have linked these reflections to situations of contemporary labour, demonstrating how the end of the Fordist paradigm has gone hand in hand with precarisation, a drop in trade union

[12] Christian De Vito (ed.), *Global labour history. La storia del lavoro al tempo della "globalizzazione"*, Verona, Ombre Corte, 2012.

[13] Bert Altena, Marcel Van Der Linden (eds.), *De-industrialization: social, cultural, and political aspects*, "International Review of Social History Supplements", 2002, n. 10, p. 2.

[14] Jefferson Cowie, *Capital moves. Rca's seventy-year quest for cheap labor*, New York, The New Press, 1999; Sherry Lee Linkon, John Russo, *Steeltown Usa. Work and memory in Youngstown*, Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2002; Steven High, *Industrial sunset. The making of North America's Rust Belt, 1969-1984*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2003.

[15] To give a few examples: Kathryn Dudley, *The end of the line. Lost jobs, new lives in postindustrial America*, Chicago-London, University of Chicago Press, 1994; Tracy E. K'Meyer, Joy L. Hart, *I saw it coming. Workers narratives of plant closings and job loss*, New York, Palgrave-MacMillan, 2009; Valerie Walkerdine, Luis Jimenez, *Gender, work and community after de-industrialisation. A psychosocial approach to affect*, Basingstoke, Palgrave-MacMillan, 2012; Christine J. Walley, *Exit zero. Family and class in postindustrial Chicago*, Chicago-London, University of Chicago Press, 2013; Tim Strangleman, James Rhodes, Sherry Lee Linkon (eds.), *Crumbling cultures. Deindustrialization, class, and memory*, "International Labor and Working-Class History", 2013, n. 1.

[16] From the classic "instant" report by Dale Maharidge and Michael Williamson, *Journey to nowhere. The saga of the new underclass*, New York, Doubleday, 1985 to Michael Frisch, Milton Rogovin, *Portaits in steel*, Ithaca-London, Cornell University Press, 1993 and Steven High, David W. Lewis, *Corporate wasteland. The landscapes and memory of deindustrialization*, Ithaca-London, Cornell University Press, 2007.

membership, a growth in inequality and the shift towards right-wing political positions.[17] A debate has unfolded about the fact that the tertiary sector, too, is increasingly affected by automisation and delocalisation processes, with similar consequences in terms of unemployment and urban voids.[18]

Next, the need to move "beyond the ruins" and the counting of lost jobs has resulted in analyses of deindustrialisation's effects also from the perspective of cultural representations.[19] Thus, the passage of time in former company towns and in the regions that are most active in the secondary sector has generated different forms of cultural engagements in literature, cinema, theatre, art and new media. Sherry Lee Linkon has introduced the concept of half-life, which in physics measures the amount of time it takes for a radioactive substance to lose half of its radioactivity within a living organism; she thus sought to analyse the culture of generations that have absorbed the legacy of blue-collar labour — although they never witnessed its decline — and are re-interpreting it with the help of new languages.[20] Finally, considerable scholarly attention is being given to the themes of the deindustrialised landscape and politics of urban regeneration, with the involvement of geographers, architects and urban planners.[21]

This synthetic overview allows me to conclude that Deindustrialisation Studies — in their most recent developments — have crossed over to a territory that had hitherto belonged to Heritage Studies. Deindustrialisation scholars are advancing an ever more critical approach to industrial heritage practices, calling for greater consideration of the social and class aspects that determine these practices. They have thus managed to draw attention to the risks of fetishising and aestheticising industrial ruins, efficiently described as "ruin porn" or "Rust Belt chic", and of urban resilience narratives that ignore the banishment of popular classes from their neighbourhoods.[22] Moreover, they

[17] Tim Strangleman, James Rhodes, *The "new" sociology of deindustrialisation? Understanding industrial change*, "Sociology Compass", 2014, n. 4, pp. 411-421; Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' alive. The 1970s and the last days of the working class*, London-New York, The New Press, 2010; Richard Sennet, *The corrosion of character. The personal consequences of work in the new capitalism*, New-York-London, Norton, 1999.

[18] Sherry Lee Linkon, John Russo, *The social costs of deindustrialization*, in Richard McCormack (ed.), *Manufacturing a better future for America*, Alliance for American Manufacturing, 2009, pp. 149-174.

[19] Jefferson Cowie, Joseph Heatcott (eds.), *Beyond the ruins. The meanings of deindustrialization*, Ithaca-London, Cornell University Press, 2003.

[20] Sherry Lee Linkon, *The half-life of deindustrialization. Working-class writing about economic restructuring*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2018.

[21] Margaret Cowell, *Dealing with deindustrialization. Adaptive resilience in American midwestern regions*, London-New York, Routledge, 2015; Ellen Braae, *Beauty redeemed. Recycling post-industrial landscape*, Risskov-Basel, Ikaros press-Birkhauser, 2015; Tim Edensor, *Industrial ruins. Spaces, aesthetics and materiality*, Oxford-New York, Berg, 2005.

[22] Tim Strangleman, *"Smokestack nostalgia", "ruin porn" or working-class obituary. The role and meaning of deindustrial representation*, "International Labor and Working Class History", 2013, n. 84, pp. 23-37; S.L. Linkon, *The half-life of deindustrialization*, pp. 131 ff.

have started to investigate how the creation of local identities can benefit from industrial heritage in different ways, depending on the extent to which processes of dismantling — and the conflicts they have provoked — have been tackled socially and politically.[23]

Similarly to the extension of Deindustrialisation Studies beyond the socio-economic sphere, considerations of industrial heritage are no longer limited to archaeological or museum-related issues. As I already mentioned, by now industrial heritage scholars have increasingly acknowledged the fact that late twentieth-century deindustrialisation processes introduced new challenges for their field, leading them to examine an impressive amount of sites, buildings and relics that have lost their productive functions over the past 30 to 40 years.[24]

The retrieval of a former industrial artefact in terms of a monument, landmark, *lieu de mémoire* or container of completely different functions from those it was built for in the first place, is no longer seen as a purely aesthetical operation, as a form of urban requalification or as a valorisation of heritage. The experts employed in valorisation projects are increasingly encouraged to reflect on the industrial memories associated with these sites, on the effects such projects could have on local communities in terms of strengthening social ties and public participation. The acceleration of the technological change in "late modernity", which also renders the immediate past prematurely obsolete, opens up space for an "archaeology of the recent and contemporary past".[25] The selection of heritage can thus be directed at moments and subjects that have thus far been excluded, for example the case of closed factories that had seemed ahead of their times just a few years before being declared out-of-date.

The heritage idea is nowadays very distant from its original focus on the birthplace of industry narratives that were an integral part of industrial modernity and nationalism.[26] It is equally distant from industrial archaeology, which originated in the 1950s in Britain; this was more a cultural movement than a discipline, aimed at valorising and conserving the "ruins" of the Industrial Revolution and of the Victorian era. During the years that Margaret Thatcher ruled during the 1980s — the age of British deindustrialisation and delabourisation — the taste for industrial heritage was often accompanied by a conservative political nostalgia for the age of national greatness and empire. In

[23] Stefan Berger, Jana Golombek, Christian Wicke (eds.), *Deindustrialization, heritage, and representations of identity*, "The Public Historian", 2017, n. 4; Idd., *Industrial heritage and regional identities*, London-New York, Routledge, 2018.

[24] Rodney Harrison, *Heritage. Critical approaches*, London-New York, Routledge, 2013, in particular pp. 79-85.

[25] Rodney Harrison, John Schofield, *After modernity. Archaeological approaches to the contemporary past*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010.

[26] Laurajane Smith, *Uses of heritage*, London-New York, Routledge, 2006, pp. 20 ff.

the meantime, cultural, natural and industrial heritage had become the stage of interventions by transnational organisations such as UNESCO, with its World Heritage Convention, and the International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (hereafter TICCIH).[27]

The increasingly evident political dimension of the debate around industrial heritage, as well as the presence of institutions that took charge of an "authorized heritage discourse", are at the basis of a critical reconsideration of heritage studies.[28] In the 1980s, Robert Hewison — a British scholar of John Ruskin — coined the term "heritage industry" to describe the proliferation of museums and heritage sites in the Anglo-American world; this industry was slowly but steadily becoming a real economic activity.[29] Hewison interpreted this obsession with the past as the unhealthy expression of a society incapable of imagining a future for itself because suffering from too rapid changes, primarily that of industrial decline: "while the real world of industrial manufacturing decays, redundant and obsolete machinery flourishes — in museums".[30] The main limit of museums such as the Ironbridge Gorge Museum in Shropshire or the Beamish in Durham — which often employed former labourers so as to promote the creation of alternatives to job loss — was the narration of a sweetened past, freed from trauma and conflicts, not in the least those caused by the post-industrial transition.

In the 1990s, the French historians Louis Bergeron and Gracia Dorel-Ferré suggested that we abandon the concept of industrial archaeology in favour of the broader idea of "histoire du patrimoine industriel", that is, of a stronger link between labour and entrepreneurial history and practices of safeguarding material artefacts. Contemporary deindustrialisation processes — "les temps des grandes friches industrielles" — gave priority to this "new territory" of research.[31] They also opened up the possibility of widening public awareness of their relevance by involving the affective memory of the protagonists: "il n'est que de visiter la mine d'Alès et d'écouter d'anciens mineurs, qui n'hésitent pas à commenter avec amertume les circonstances dans lesquelles furent décidées les fermetures, prématurées, selon eux, des puits de mine".[32] If

[27] The *Convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage* was ratified in 1972; the TICCIH was founded the following year.

[28] On the concept of "authorized heritage discourse", see L. Smith, *Uses of heritage*, in particular pp. 29-34.

[29] Cfr. Robert Hewison, *The heritage industry. Britain in a climate of decline*, London, Methuen, 1987, pp. 88 ff.

[30] R. Hewison, *The heritage industry*, here p. 91.

[31] Louis Bergeron, Gracia Dorel-Ferré, *Le patrimoine industriel, un nouveau territoire*, Paris, Liris, 1996, here p. 1. The text can be consulted online, on the website of the Association pour le Patrimoine Industriel de Champagne-Ardenne, www.patrimoineindustriel-apic.com (last accessed 5 August 2019).

[32] L. Bergeron, G. Dorel-Ferré, *Le patrimoine industriel, un nouveau territoire*, here p. 41.

in the midst of conflicts triggered by deindustrialisation — as in 1980s Britain — the heritage boom had seemed a pathological phenomenon, as time passed it revealed itself to be a favourable context for alternative and experimental developments.

It is precisely in those areas where deindustrialisation has been most intense that politics and debates about regeneration have allowed for stimulating forms of remembrance. Laurajane Smith, for example, has studied the case of Castelford, a coal-mining city in Yorkshire where closures have been so rapid and radical that no relic around which to construct an industrial memory remains. Nonetheless, the local community has developed — from below and independently from any kind of institutional politics — shared feelings about its working-class identity, promoting cultural events capable of socialising and transmitting this identity, with a positive effect on the citizens' self-perception.[33] Placing emphasis on the immaterial dimension of heritage, which has probably been the most relevant development of the past years, means taking another step towards the social history of deindustrialisation, and towards public history.

The Italian path towards a memory of industry

The times and modes of industrial modernisation affect the times and modes in which industrial heritage practices and narratives are developed in a specific national or local context. If the purpose of the latter is to give value (including in economic terms) and meaning to the history of industrial heritage in the present, then the historical interpretation of that past overwhelmingly comes into play. As I have tried to explain, I believe that to also include the history of deindustrialisation in this sense-making process might enhance not only the interdisciplinary dialogue between specialists, but also the public engagement of the involved actors.

The more industrial decline is perceived, studied and discussed, the more the memory of industry is able to move beyond politics of requalification (which often coincide with gentrification processes), beyond the linear history of scientific progress, and beyond a sweetened or nostalgic narrative. As the aforementioned studies suggest, the history of deindustrialisation can renovate that of industrialisation, preventing it from becoming an absolute entity — extracted from the flow of capitalism's continuous transformations. By introducing elements of discontinuity and transition, industrial heritage is brought closer to the present and connected to living memories, while the disorienting effects of change become more comprehensive and reflection on the current

[33] L. Smith, *Uses of heritage*, pp. 237 ff.

"society of labour" is encouraged (even only by way of creating a contrast). The dismantling experience is that *tranche* that enables industrial heritage projects to involve local communities, to acknowledge the existence of both dividing and cohesive elements of industrial memory, and to interpret seemingly unconnected cultural phenomena.

In Italy, public interest in industrial heritage developed later than elsewhere. It wasn't until halfway through the 1970s that discussions about industrial archaeology emerged, and the first plans for the safeguarding of industrial sites were undertaken. In 1975, experts began studying the retrieval of the historic working-class town of Crespi d'Adda (Lombardy), destined to become the first Italian industrial site to be included in the UNESCO's World Heritage List. If compared to the British tradition, Italian industrial archaeology has distinguished itself by a lesser involvement of local enthusiasts and a stronger embeddedness in universities, resulting in a strong focus on methodological aspects. With regard to the French tradition, Italian institutions are far less inclined to consider industrial archaeology an important field of cultural politics.[34]

The first local industrial archaeology associations were formed in the 1980s. They started an innovative activity, but were soon faced with a context of fragmentation and isolation, which was marked by a more general climate of reduced interest — on behalf of intellectuals — in the world of industry and blue-collar labour.[35] Thus, it was the politician and trade unionist Bruno Corti who directed the Roman Institute for Material Culture and Industrial Archaeology (Istituto per la cultura materiale e l'archeologia industriale), which predominantly operated on an institutional and educational level. In Lombardy, the first systematic census of regional historical-industrial heritage was conducted, but the launch of a scientific journal endorsed by the Micheletti and Feltrinelli foundations of Brescia and Milan respectively, with the help of important social and industrial historians (from Franco Della Peruta to Duccio Bigazzi), was short-lived.[36]

The longest-lasting project was coordinated by the architecture historian Cesare de Seta, in collaboration with the Neapolitan Association for Industrial Archaeology. This project paid particular attention to a reevaluation of the manufacturing history of the South. The group developed an original approach to industrial archaeology based on a division into periods not limited to the

[34] For a first evaluation, see Renato Covino, *Archeologia industriale in Italia: ambito disciplinare, termini cronologici*, "Quaderni storici", 1980, n. 43, pp. 218-229; for a more recent assessment, Augusto Ciuffetti, Roberto Parisi (eds.), *L'archeologia industriale in Italia. Storie e storiografia (1978-2008)*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2012.

[35] Francesco Chiapparino, *Dall'archeologia al patrimonio industriale. Le linee di un dibattito*, in A. Ciuffetti, R. Parisi, *L'archeologia industriale in Italia*, pp. 55-77.

[36] Alberto Garlandini, Bruna Micheletti, Pier Paolo Poggio (eds.), *Il patrimonio storico-industriale della Lombardia. Censimento regionale*, Brescia, Fondazione Luigi Micheletti, 1991.

age of Industrial Revolution; the aim was to demonstrate that nineteenth- and twentieth-century industrialisation had cancelled the traces of a technologically skilful and innovative South, devastated by a precocious and forgotten deindustrialisation.[37]

The Neapolitan project came to an end in 1993, just when the very first university courses in industrial archaeology were being offered. In his last editorial, de Seta expressed his bitterness about the tendency within the sector to focus almost exclusively on conducting censuses of "sites of interest", at a time when the "dramatic reality of deindustrialisation that is happening in our country (the South, in particular)" was causing unprecedented problems concerning the safeguarding and re-use of extremely vast areas.[38] Reading between the lines, it isn't difficult to note a reference to the dismantling of the major iron and steel plant of Bagnoli (Naples), heading towards closure in that very moment.

In 1997, scholars of industrial archaeology founded the Italian Association for Industrial Archaeological Heritage (Associazione italiana per il patrimonio archeologico industriale, hereafter AIPAI), which nowadays represents Italy in the TICCIH. It plays a consulting role in the selection of sites to be included in the UNESCO's World Heritage List. The AIPAI reflected an interest that went beyond the boundaries of industrial archaeology in a traditional sense. However, the focus was again placed on the "classic" age of the Industrial Revolution, with occasional digressions beyond the 1930s, whereas the importance of economic-social research shrunk to the benefit of an approach centred more around the history of technology and architecture, and around problems related to the transformation of sites into heritage, the creation of museums and the conservation of sources, with specific attention being paid to industrial photography and corporate archives.[39]

Yet, as the years passed, the problem of the still smoking ruins of "Italian-style Fordism" started entering the discussions of heritage professionals. It is noteworthy that they found commonalities with environmental history, another relatively young and cutting-edge discipline within Italian historical studies. As Augusto Ciuffetti has written, the contribution of environmental historians is revealing to be crucial for the consolidation among heritage professionals of a division into periods "that initiates with the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation of the late nineteenth century and ends with the dismantling practices of the last decades of the twentieth century".[40]

[37] Gregorio E. Rubino, *Industrialismo e archeologia industriale. Riepilogo metodologico*, "Bollettino dell'Associazione per l'Archeologia industriale", 1993, n. 35-37, pp. 1-13.

[38] G.E. Rubino, *Industrialismo e archeologia industriale*, here p. 1.

[39] *1997-2007. Dieci anni di Aipai*, "Aipai Newsletter", 2007, n. 0.

[40] Augusto Ciuffetti, introduction to *Città, industria, ambiente*, monographic section of "Patrimonio industriale", 2010, n. 6, pp. 6-9, here p. 6. See also Salvatore Adorno, Simone Neri Serneri (eds.), *Industria, ambiente e territorio. Per una storia ambientale delle aree industriali*

The stages of industrial dismantling mark an improvement in quality when it comes to environmental awareness within communities. Decontamination projects require studies that can offer new knowledge about the historical and orographic stratifications of industrial pollution. The decline of the promise of factory work often coincided with the end of the "long period of silent acceptance" of the environmental costs of industrialisation, whereas public debates about the purposes of the most compromised areas generates antagonist memories or the resurfacing of pre-existing alternatives.[41] Yet, the emergence of experiences and knowledge that had remained hidden during the stages of expansion are accompanied by new forms of forgetting. Thus, the role of trade unions in the negotiation of the crises — which often resulted in the acceptance of an "environmental compatibility proposed by the property" — has overshadowed important periods of "labour environmentalism".[42]

While historians consider deindustrialisation an embryonic theme, it is gaining increased interest. Political and economic historians have thus started taking stock of the situation, attempting a conceptual clarification.[43] Over the last few years, historians, anthropologists and sociologists alike have launched research groups dedicated to the memory of work in areas of industrial decline, confirming the fact that the theme of deindustrialisation is grounded in specific geographic contexts: a global phenomenon whose repercussions can be assessed only on a local level, and which can be approached from different disciplinary perspectives. From Piombino (Tuscany) to the Sulcis region (Sardinia), from Sesto San Giovanni (Lombardy) to Termini Imerese (Sicily), many research projects have started to engage with international Deindustrialisation Studies without overlooking the issue of heritage, and even considering it a point of departure.[44]

in Italia, Bologna, il Mulino, 2009. It is no coincidence that one of the journals that is most interested in environmental history first devoted a special issue the *Aree deindustrializzate*, "Meridiana", 2016, n. 85. See in particular Gabriella Corona's introduction, *Volti e risvolti della deindustrializzazione. Alcuni interrogativi sulla contemporaneità* at pp. 9-34.

[41] Augusto Ciuffetti, *Dallo sviluppo industriale ai processi di dismissione: ambiente e industria nell'Italia contemporanea*, in *Città, industria, ambiente*, pp. 10-17, here p. 11.

[42] Salvatore Romeo, *L'acciaio in fumo. L'Ilva di Taranto dal 1945 a oggi*, Rome, Donzelli, 2019 here p. 287. On working-class environmentalism see Stefania Barca, *On working-class environmentalism: a historical and transnational overview*, "Interface: a Journal for and about Social Movements", 2012, n. 2, pp. 61-80.

[43] Luigi Vergallo, *Una nuova era? "Deindustrializzazione" e nuovi assetti produttivi nel mondo (1945-2005)*, Rome, Aracne, 2011; Carlo Fumian, *Traiettorie del declino economico italiano* and Roberto Artoni, *Le interpretazioni del declino economico italiano*, both in *L'Italia contemporanea dagli anni Ottanta a oggi*, vol. I, *Fine della Guerra fredda e globalizzazione*, edited by Silvio Pons, Adriano Roccucci, Federico Romero, Rome, Carocci, 2014, pp. 85-114 and pp. 115-136; Luciano Segreto, *Un nuovo fiume carsico. La deindustrializzazione in Italia nel dibattito pubblico*, "Passato e presente", 2016, n. 99, pp. 13-40; Roberta Garruccio, *Chiedi alla ruggine. Studi e storiografia della deindustrializzazione*, "Meridiana", 2016, n. 85, pp. 35-60.

[44] As this paper does not aim to provide a literature review of recent Italian scholarship on deindustrialisation, I would like to mention a selection of relevant works, with apologies for

In literature, as well, we may identify some elements that are not unlike the themes covered by the historiography of deindustrialisation. Ermanno Rea paved the way over 15 years ago, with his novel about the closure of Bagnoli's steelworks, *La dismissione* [The dismantling], which offers an insightful analysis of the psychological implications, of the divided nature of working-class solidarity and of the consequences of deindustrialisation for collective identity and post-industrial generations.[45] Nowadays the works of a successive generation, namely the "children of deindustrialisation", are conducting a real re-elaboration of working-class heritage, coming to terms with both the grief the factory has inflicted upon them and the sense of belonging that it still bestows upon them, even after its disappearance.[46]

These sensibilities have started to prompt an explicit resistance — not only within academic circles — to the acknowledgement of an "Italian deindustrialisation", which was made possible by national capitalist developments. By the 1980s and 1990s, when deindustrialisation was by now a reality in the capitals of the "industrial triangle", economists, sociologists and political scientists turned their attention to the "Third Italy" and its successful alternative model to Fordism.[47] At the same time, following a long militant phase focused on times of conflict and organisation, labour and working-class historiography entered a period of decline, undoubtedly also as a result of the dismantling of the major factories.[48]

The issue re-emerged at the start of the new millennium, still suffering from heavy burdens. Sociologist Luciano Gallino, who was very close to the world of labour, even in his tirade against "the disappearance of industrial Italy" judged the concept of deindustrialisation inappropriate and even harmful, because it was unsustainable from a global perspective — the most suitable framework for understanding contemporary capitalism.[49] Giuseppe Berta also

any involuntary omissions: Roberta Garruccio, Sara Roncaglia and Sara Zanisi on the Falck company of Sesto San Giovanni; Annalisa Tonarelli on the steel plants of Piombino, Tommaso India and Elena Di Nubila on the Fiat factories of Termini Imerese and Melfi respectively; Giovanna Rossi on Taranto's Ilva; Liliosa Azara and Eloisa Betti on the Sardinian coal mines. Additionally, a fascinating book in this field of research is that by Alessandro Portelli on Terni: *La città dell'acciaio. Due secoli di storia operaia*, Rome, Donzelli, 2017. See also the literature review by Roberta Garruccio and Gilda Zazzara (eds.), *La rivoluzione deindustriale*, "Passato e Presente", 2018, n. 105, pp. 177-203.

[45] Ermanno Rea, *La dismissione*, Milan, Rizzoli, 2002.

[46] Alberto Prunetti, *Amianto. Una storia operaia*, Rome, Alegre, 2014 (I ed. 2012); Stefano Valenti, *La fabbrica del panico*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 2013; Eugenio Raspi, *Inox*, Milan, Baldini & Castoldi, 2017; Simona Baldanzi, *Figlia di una vestaglia blu*, Rome, Alegre, 2019 (I ed. 2006).

[47] Scholarly literature on these themes is extremely vast, and I will limit myself to mentioning Francesco Bartolini, *La Terza Italia. Reinventare la nazione alla fine del Novecento*, Rome, Carocci, 2015.

[48] Stefano Musso, *Gli operai nella storiografia contemporanea. Rapporti di lavoro e relazioni sociali*, in Id. (ed.), *Tra fabbrica e società. Mondi operai nell'Italia del Novecento*, "Annali della Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli", 1997, n. 33, pp. IX-XLVI.

[49] Luciano Gallino, *La scomparsa dell'Italia industriale*, Turin, Einaudi, 2003.

adopted a critical position, calling it an "import product", an instrument of political controversy even within an American context, though utterly inappropriate for Italian history; in Italy, he argued, it was Fordism that faded away at the end of the 1970s, certainly not the country's manufacturing sector.[50] In Paolo Frascani's study of economic crises, the term "deindustrialisation" isn't used as a heuristic concept, even if Frascani speaks of "the slow top-down decline of the industrialisation process".[51]

Trade unions have long contributed to the failure to legitimise the idea of an "Italian deindustrialisation". In the 1970s, the first signs of crisis within the Fordist system were interpreted exclusively as the result of capitalist restructuring and anti-worker actions.[52] After the defeat of Fiat's working-class in 1980, industrial restructuring was largely negotiated with the help of state financial support for the displaced workers, mainly via redundancy programmes and early retirement agreements. Industrial restructuring and closures resulted in widespread local confrontation and resistance to such an extent that the 1980s merits scholarly re-interpretation as a period of social peace; however, on a national level they did not generate emergencies.

Although the trade unions clearly sensed the problem of youth unemployment, of the expanding market of informal and unprotected labour, and the emergence of unprecedented forms of precarity, the employed Fordist working-class generation was widely protected over the course of its "exit" from the scene. Thanks to the centralised negotiation of crises in the sector and the achievement of solid "outgoing" benefits, labour organisations undoubtedly fulfilled one of their main tasks; at the same time, the strong industrialist character of Italian trade unionism shaped their political analyses in terms of a categorical rejection of deindustrialisation. If trade unionists even in the "virtuous" Ruhr area — capable of shifting, gradually and backed by consensus, from a coal-mining region to a favourite destination of industrial tourism — "saw industrial heritage as a job killer", it is understandable that Italian trade unions haven't even grappled with the problem of heritage.[53]

Criticised by scholars, contested or blanked out by trade unions, today deindustrialisation can no longer be considered a spectre or a curse. Given

[50] Giuseppe Berta, *L'Italia delle fabbriche. La parabola dell'industrialismo nel Novecento*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2001, followed by various updated editions in subsequent years.

[51] Paolo Frascani, *Le crisi economiche in Italia. Dall'Ottocento a oggi*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2012, here p. 236.

[52] Fim, Fiom, Uilm Emilia-Romagna, *Atti del convegno piccole e medie aziende metalmeccaniche industriali e artigiane* (Bologna, 9-10 October 1971), Bologna, Grafiche BG, 1972; Flm Bergamo (ed.), *Sindacato e piccola impresa. Strategia del capitale e azione sindacale nel decentramento produttivo*, Bari, De Donato, 1975.

[53] Stefan Berger, Jana Golombek, Christian Wicke, *Burdens of eternity? Heritage, identity, and the ''great transition'' in the Ruhr*, in Idd. (eds.), *Deindustrialization, heritage, and representations of identity*, pp. 21-43, here p. 25.

that the industrial sector in Italy is still important (we are "Europe's second manufacturing country after Germany, according to a worn-out but still trendy formula"),[54] we cannot deny the definitive transformation of whole regions and cities as a result of dismantling processes, especially after the 2008 crisis.[55] It is not a coincidence that trade union leaders' public invocation of deindustrialisation are increasing in number.[56]

From North to South there is a wealth of potential research material concerning the cycle of industrial transformations that initiated in the 1970s, which enables us to both shed new light on preceding models of development — the very premise of this cycle — and to understand the tensions that traverse our contemporary society and the political responses to an endless crisis. It would be worthwhile to establish a sustained dialogue between deindustrialisation scholars, heritage experts, social scientists and "intermediate actors", regarding two types of areas: those where the industry is dying in slow agony and in so doing dividing local communities, as in the case of Taranto, of which Alessandro Leogrande has highlighted the unexpected similarities with one of the capitals of the Rust Belt, Youngstown; and those where the "great-industrialist" cycle has permanently come to an end, though with surprising removals and "shadow zones" of memory.[57]

In the absence of recognition, analysis and discussion of deindustrialisation, is it possible to critically remember industrial heritage in ways that that are not purely aesthetic? Before focusing on my case study, I would like to briefly point to two symbolic places that seem to answer this question. One is Milan, the first Italian city to have been converted to a service economy: that is, the first to have deindustrialised. As Giorgio Bigatti has observed, the vanishing of industry from the Milanese urban landscape has been extremely rapid and without economic decline; indeed, it has resulted in a successful reconversion. Even if the urban space is scattered with places that evoke this recent past, the immaterial legacy of industry — in terms of culture, mentality, identity — seems to have evaporated. Bigatti writes that "if it wasn't for the inconvenient presence of some huge voids in the former industrial areas that haven't yet

[54] Giuseppe Berta, *Che fine ha fatto il capitalismo italiano?*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2016, here p. 149.

[55] Banca d'Italia, *Deindustrializzazione e terziarizzazione: trasformazioni strutturali nelle regioni del Nord Ovest*, di Antonio Accetturo e al., "Questioni di economia e finanza (Occasional Papers)", July 2015, n. 282, www.bancaditalia.it/pubblicazioni/qef/2015-0282/QEF_282.pdf (last accessed 15 December 2019).

[56] The most recent one — made while this article was being prepared — was that by the Cgil's secretary, Maurizio Landini, in an interview in "La Repubblica" of 8 December 2019.

[57] Alessandro Leogrande, *Fumo sulla città*, Rome, Fandango Libri, 2013, here p. 236, also cited in Giovanna Rossi, *Voci dalla fabbrica. Memorie ed esperienze degli operai dell'Ilva di Taranto dal 1960 ad oggi*, unpublished doctoral thesis in Social and statistical sciences, Università degli studi di Napoli Federico II, 2016-2017.

undergone transformation processes, no one would remember the industrial past".[58] A few years ago, Luca Mocarelli made similar observations with regard to the regeneration of the Pirelli area, the first of many great dismantlings in Milan. The architectural choices and purposes of the new neighbourhood were interpreted as "a systematic cancelation of industrial memory".[59]

More recently, Mattia Granata asked himself why — despite the city's many self-representations as a "capital" — the capital of industry and the working-class have completely been forgotten. The absence of a museum dedicated to industry and labour is striking.[60] Similarly, Roberta Garruccio described Sesto San Giovanni, in the metropolitan area of Milan, as the Italian symbol of deindustrialisation without any post-industrial transformation.[61]

A second exemplary case of the short circuit between deindustrialisation and industrial heritage is that of Bagnoli. As we have seen, Naples and its surroundings have been the object of a precocious archaeological project by industrial heritage scholars, and of a number of interventions of national importance, such as the Pietrarsa Railway Museum.[62] In the area of Bagnoli, instead, the post-industrial transition remains an open wound. When the steel plant closed it employed a mere 600 workers, from high of 7,000 at its peak, not long before. The history of this collective displacement has yet to be written.

Following a first phase of factory demolitions and indiscriminate dismantling, major projects to relaunch the service, tourist and research sectors were undertaken, with important contributions from urban planners and industrial heritage experts. Mayor Antonio Bassolino found political support among the former workers, as the regeneration projects not only offered them new job opportunities but also a chance to leave behind the city's industrial history with dignity.

The outcome of this vision is underwhelming: the only completed piece of work within the urban park is a panoramic pier and the massive public and

[58] My gratitude goes to Giorgio Bigatti for giving me access to the text of his presentation at the international conference *Deindustrialization: the structural transformation of Nord-Ovest and the Ruhr in comparative perspective* (Istituto storico germanico di Rome, 18-20 April 2018).

[59] Luca Mocarelli, *Le aree dismesse milanesi o della cancellazione del patrimonio industriale: il caso della Bicocca*, "Patrimonio industriale", 2011, n. 7, pp. 69-75, here p. 69.

[60] Mattia Granata, *Creare a Milano un museo o una città del lavoro*, "La Repubblica", 5 February 2018, https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2018/02/05/creare-a-milano-un-museo-o-una-citta-del-lavoroMilano07.html (last accessed 15 December 2019).

[61] Roberta Garruccio, *"Hardly a cause for tears": job insecurity and occupational psychology culture in Italy. Oral narratives from the Falck Steelworks in Sesto San Giovanni (Milan)*, in Stefan Berger (ed.), *Constructing industrial pasts. Heritage, historical culture and identity in regions undergoing structural economic transformation*, Oxford-New York, Berghahn Books, 2020, pp. 168-183.

[62] Gennaro Biondi, Silvio De Majo, Augusto Vitale, *Napoli e l'industria. Dai Borboni alla dismissione*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2008.

European funds allocated to a company that was to decontaminate the area have been squandered. This resulted in a sensational bankruptcy and, what is worse, a further environmental disaster. After the arson attack of 2013, the City of Science — a restored district adjacent to the former steel plant — still awaits reconstruction. In addition to the ecological damage, the credibility of local authorities has inevitably been compromised, legal principles have been violated and the city's heritage is likely to become a problematic — albeit a shared — one.[63] As Rea confirmed in an interview published in the AIPAI's magazine, infinite dismantling "creates monsters, provokes lethal infections and produces Mafia, decay, underdevelopment, hate, resentment".[64]

Milan: a working-class capital without industrial memory, where forgetting appears virtuous and pain-free. Naples: industrial capital of the South and laboratory of industrial archaeology, with the risk that — instead of a history of the working-class — only the stigma of environmental disaster will remain. These two examples offer a space for historians to investigate processes of industrial decline, bringing to light the way in which these processes have corroded values, mentalities, the composition of social class structures, ties of belonging and the landscapes of many Italian areas. Moreover, they push scholars to contribute not just to public practices of industrial memory, but also to develop instruments capable of interpreting the challenges currently faced by numerous minor places, due to an increasingly aggressive globalisation. The latter "takes away work opportunities", and with it the possibility to place oneself in a shared history and to feel part of a community.

Porto Marghera, Venice

An interesting case study on the connections between deindustrialisation and industrial heritage is that of Porto Marghera, Venice's industrial zone. What links Marghera to Milan is not the success of the latter's transition to a well-structured service economy, tourist monoculture being the sole pillar of urban tertiarisation in Venice, but the weakness of its contemporary working-class identity. Its commonality with Naples, on the other hand, lies in the extent of the environmental disaster it produced rather than in any ambitious post-industrial reconversion plans.

Over the last 40 years, Porto Marghera has been subjected to changes that have reduced the number of employees from some forty thousand — the vast majority of whom were "blue collars" — to little more than ten thousand, less

[63] An optimistic approach is that by Giovanni Dispoto, Antonio di Gennaro, *Bagnoli: una dis-missione possibile*, "Meridiana", 2016, n. 85, pp. 133-154.

[64] Augusto Ciuffetti, *I miei fantasmi non sono bugiardi: una testimonianza di Ermanno Rea*, "Patrimonio industriale", 2013-2014, n. 12-13, pp. 176-179, here p. 176.

than half of whom perform manufacturing activities.[65] Contrary to the transformation that occurred a few decades before, which changed this part of the mainland facing the Venetian lagoon into one of the most industrialised areas in Europe, Marghera's most recent metamorphosis lacks a historiography or any other form of public narration.[66] Although this historical silence may be attributed to the temporal closeness of the most intense period of dismantlings — the 1980s and 1990s — and therefore to the timeless idea of history as "the owl of Minerva", the elimination of Porto Marghera's deindustrialisation from other "theatres of memory" calls for more structured explanations, which are deeply rooted in history.[67]

The industrial harbour was created in 1917, with the aim of conducting modern production activities beyond the physical boundaries of the historic city. This, it was believed, would restore Venice's role at a national level following a long period of economic decline. A vast portion of mainland — not just that reserved for the industries, but also some small residential areas, among which Mestre and the new Marghera district — was annexed to the Venice municipality. Chemical and metallurgical productions rapidly developed; thousands of farmers poured into the factories from the hinterland, triggering major processes of geographical and social mobility. Contrary to political expectations, the historical city's working-class refused to move to Porto Marghera; it was only during the second post-war period that the Venetians started accepting work in the factories on mainland, albeit in small numbers and at the cost of permanently leaving the insular city. As Porto Marghera turbulently expanded and developed itself, Venice saw its industries close one by one, while depopulation and tourist flows marked the start of a relentless decline of its city life, and its conversion into a "historical centre".

All this lies at the root of the controversial relationship between Venice and its "industrial periphery", a relationship that has become increasingly conflictual as the environmental damages caused by industrialisation became perceptible: first with the 1966 flood, then through the workers' protests against working environments' "noxiousness", up to the trial against the chemical company Montedison and the more recent problem of decontaminating the abandoned areas. These incidents have involved and mobilised segments of the urban population, social groups and different generational cohorts, each of

[65] See the last *Indagine conoscitiva sulle attività economiche presenti nell'area di Porto Marghera*, relative to the year 2016 at www.comune.venezia.it/it/osservatorioportomarghera (last accessed 15 December 2019).

[66] For an almost complete bibliography of this theme, see *Raccontare Marghera e Porto Marghera a cent'anni dalla sua nascita 1917-2017. Guida alle fonti e ai materiali bibliografici, audiovisivi, fotografici conservati presso la Biblioteca di Marghera e il Centro di documentazione di storia locale*, "Vedo", 2018, n. 14.

[67] Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of memory*, vol. I, *Past and present in contemporary culture*, London, Verso, 1994.

which has developed its own vision and narration of the industrial twentieth century.

For the residents of Venice, which was added — along with its lagoon — to the UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1987, the part of the city that should have made it modern and "normal" progressively turned into an enemy and a historical mistake, even a crime.[68] The residents of the mainland districts, which — together with the workers — paid the highest price in terms of health and pollution, have nurtured more complex feelings towards the industries, from rejection to nostalgia, from victim blaming to recognition. With regard to the workers, their dispersal across the territory, the absence of a clear urban identity and the discontinuity provoked by the disappearance of almost all the factories have contributed to make the public memory of industrial work fragmentary and sporadic in terms of public self-representation.

What still evokes most curiosity and emotional reactions is the negative judgement of an accelerated and traumatic industrialisation, as it is still the 1970s — the "suspended years" — that divide social experiences and political cultures born from the confrontation with the world of factories.[69] What prevails is a "satanic", "monstrous" or "exceptionalist" narration of Porto Marghera and its impact on community life, which hinders the idea that there may be both something else to add or remember, and something to conserve. From this point of view, Venice seems closer to the case of Glasgow than to that of Dortmund, closer to the American side of Niagara Falls than to the Canadian. In other words, it is closer to contexts in which the "social stigma" of the past expresses itself also in the difficulties of inscribing it in the present.[70]

However, the political context further complicates the memory and remembrance of the lagoon industry. Although Porto Marghera has benefitted from European structural funds devoted to depressed areas ever since the 1990s, and, though it was placed at the top of the list of "sites of national importance for decontamination" at the end of that same decade and was more recently declared the object of a "complex industrial crisis", there is no unanimity on its identity as a deindustrialised zone.

[68] Laura Cerasi, *Perdonare Marghera. La città del lavoro nella memoria post-industriale*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2007; Gianfranco Bettin (ed.), *Petrolkimiko. Le voci e le storie di un crimine di pace*, Milan, Baldini & Castoldi, 1998.

[69] See the documentary *Gli anni sospesi: movimenti e percorsi politici a Porto Marghera*, by Manuela Pellarin, Italy 2009, sold as part of the text by Devi Sacchetto, Gianni Sbrogiò (eds.), *Quando il potere è operaio. Autonomia e soggettività politica a Porto Marghera (1960-1980)*, Rome, Manifestolibri, 2009.

[70] Ralph Richter, *Industrial heritage in urban imaginaries and city images. A comparison between Dortmund and Glasgow*, in C. Wicke, S. Berger, J. Golombek, *Deindustrialization, heritage, and representations of identity*, pp. 65-84; Alice Mah, *Industrial ruination, community, and place. Landscape and legacies of urban decline*, Toronto-Buffalo-London, University of Toronto Press, 2012, pp. 37-68.

The first and main reason for this is that, contrary to Bagnoli or the working-class districts of Milan, in Porto Marghera industry never disappeared; certain industrial activities were relaunched and occasionally even prospered. Gallino would probably be among the critics of a "deindustrialist" or "declinist" perspective when confronted with a productive site like that of Fincantieri shipyard, which during its peaks of production employs 5,000 labourers (mostly immigrants and employees of contractors), or with a commercial harbour and airport that have increased trade and workforce considerably. Yet, the main opponents of any reconstruction that considers deindustrialisation an accomplished and — at least for some sectors — irreversible fact are trade unions and the local government, albeit with divergent aims and using different tones. The 2017 centenary of Porto Marghera's foundation has given ample proof of this.

Between two anniversaries

A collective reflection on Porto Marghera "after Porto Marghera" initiated at the end of the 1990s. Ever more observers realised that this part of the city had profoundly changed, and that all those factors that had determined a kind of — heavy and intensive — development had disappeared: the availability of low-cost energy and labour, public subsidies and the complete absence of environmental commitments. As the gradual closure of factories relieved residents from the fear of immediate industrial risks, new narratives of lived experience emerged.[71]

It was in this climate of reconsideration and reappropriation that the ninetieth anniversary of the harbour's foundation was celebrated in 2007. Marghera's borough council, in particular, endorsed the involvement of residents and associations, local artists and musicians, by coordinating a programme filled with debates, book launches, theatrical performances and concerts.[72] A photo and documentary exhibition recounted the district's history up to the present. Although the period of industrial crises wasn't clearly identified on the exhibition panels, the exhibition poster depicted a child on its tricycle playing under the ruined arches of the majestic paraboloid buildings that had once served as storehouses of fertilisers.[73] Marghera represented itself

[71] Among the most interesting contributions in this regard see the poetry collection by Antonella Barina, *Madre Marghera. Poesie 1967-1997*, Spinea (Ve), Helvetia Editrice, 2018, I ed. 1997.

[72] The various initiatives can still be consulted at the website www.marghera90.it (last accessed 14 August 2019).

[73] *Storia sociale di Marghera tra fabbriche e territorio*, photo and documentary exhibition by Daniela Rigon and Alessandro Nappi. The panels are visible on the website of the Documentary centre of local history in Marghera, in the section Mostre, www.centrodocumentazionemarghera.it (last accessed 14 August 2019).

as the resilient district of the deindustrialised city, thus giving value to its plural memories and its tradition of associationism, volunteerism and musical culture, which for some years had transformed it into a kind of "Italian Liverpool".

In that same year, the main cultural centre of Mestre — the other neighbourhood of the polycentric city whose transformations would be incomprehensible if detached from the industrial parable — hosted the exhibition "Mestre Novecento" (Twentieth Century in Italian) following a long period of gathering sources and archival documents. The exhibition was promoted by the Venice city council, with the involvement of associations and residents.[74] Mayor Massimo Cacciari praised it as the first part of a city museum that would have given space to "a memory that is, yes, conflictual and controversial, but dutiful, and must not be dismissed, not even in its darkest moments".[75]

The centenary celebrations of 2017 were of a very different kind: less participation from below and a more central role for a handful of "official" figures, implying that the changes of the last ten years had also strongly affected memory politics. In Mestre a major private museum was inaugurated, while only a hint remained of the "Mestre Novecento" project; M9 stands for Museum of the Twentieth Century, not a museum of the city but "of the nation […] where Italians and all those interested in Italy can meet, discover their origins and how the things that surround as evolved, sharing thoughts on how to project them onto the future".[76]

The "authorized heritage discourse" around Porto Marghera's 100 years of existence was promoted by a committee composed of representatives from national and local institutions, universities, cultural foundations and social actors. The trade unions' complaints about not having been involved from the start — as opposed to entrepreneurs — resulted in their eventually being invited as well.[77] In reality, the role of the various committee members has been rather insignificant, since Mayor Luigi Brugnaro — in his quality of president of the committee — strongly determined the anniversary's communicative strategies, pushing them into a specific direction. Elected in 2015 in a centre-right coalition, Brugnaro was an entrepreneur in the recruitment sector and owner of the city's basketball team. Among his most used symbolic resources was the fact that he is a "son of Porto Marghera". Indeed, his father is one of the best known and original leaders of post-war working-class

[74] Elia Barbiani, Giorgio Sarto (eds.), *Mestre Novecento. Il secolo breve della città di Terraferma*, Venice, Marsilio, 2007.

[75] E. Barbiani, G. Sarto, *Mestre Novecento*, p. 7.

[76] From the website of M9 https://m9digital.it/it, nella sezione *Museo* (last accessed 6 November 2019).

[77] See the joint public statement by the CGIL, CISL and UIL in protest against the refusal to involve the trade unions in the committee, at the website www.cgilvenezia.it/it/2-non-categorizzato/312-centenario-di-porto-marghera-il-sindacato-confederale-escluso (last accessed 14 August 2019).

protests: a labourer in one of the most important chemical factories, a heterodox trade unionist of the CISL (the second largest national trade union) and, most of all, a worker-poet who narrated the monstrosity of working in the chemical industry and — at the same time — the epic story of revolt against its noxiousness.[78]

The mayor presented himself as the embodiment of a (non-political) family history of upward mobility, to be read in parallel to Marghera's transition from an unhealthy and dangerous "industrial pole" to the ideal context of a sustainable and cross-sector economy. The underlying message of all the official initiatives was that Porto Marghera is not a place of death or decline, but of labour, development and potential "re-industrialisation".[79] This vision was driven not just by genuine personal convictions, but also by material interests — the mayor owns various free areas — and strategic alliances like that with ENI (the major Italian oil company), the sole sponsor of the centenary, which is making Porto Marghera one of the privileged sites of its campaign for "green chemical industry".

Among the first sponsored initiatives was a double exhibition at the Candiani cultural centre of Mestre. In one room, industrial photographs of the Porto Marghera refinery in the 1950s were juxtaposed with contemporary photographs, taken after its reconversion into a "biorefinery"; the other room exhibited pictures taken by two young photographers, depicting the wide dismantled spaces of the petrochemical area won back by comforting vegetation.[80] In sum, while one exhibition celebrated the victorious continuity of the chemical industry, the other stressed the appeal of available areas for new investors. Neither of the two leaked out any disturbing, unsettling or critical content.

The most successful initiative was the *Industriae* exhibition, set up in a former fertiliser storehouse of the Vega, the city's "scientific and technological park". Thousands of people visited it and participated in many guided tours through the still active companies, which were integrated into the exhibition.[81] At the centre of the space, a long "cage" filled with objects, instruments and products from the various types of manufacturing that have characterised Porto

[78] Ferruccio Brugnaro, *Vogliono cacciarci sotto. Un operaio e la sua poesia*, with an afterword by Italian poet Andrea Zanzotto, Verona, Bertani, 1975.

[79] See the interview with Luigi Brugnaro on the weekly magazine "Panorama", on 17 August 2015, where he states that "in Marghera I dream of reindustrialisation", www.panorama.it/news/politica/luigi-brugnaro-sindaco-venezia-intervista (last accessed 15 December 2019).

[80] *Figurazione di un luogo. Fotografia industriale dall'Archivio Giacomelli* e *PM 100. Un secolo di Porto Marghera: dalle fondamenta un nuovo futuro*, photos by Carlo Albertini and Alessandro Scarpa, both inaugurated in the presence of the mayor, on 1 September 2017. For all the initiatives that were sponsored by the Committee, see the website www.portomarghera100.it (last accessed 15 December 2019).

[81] Gianni Favarato, *Il Centenario chiude con 12 mila visitatori in poco più di 6 mesi*, "La Nuova Venezia", 27 maggio 2018.

Marghera in the past and present offered the possibility to admire 100 years of industrial culture. On the walls, large panels provided historical and technical data about the various sectors, whereas screens placed higher up broadcast brief interviews with former and current workers.

Thanks to the skills of the historians and industrial heritage experts that were involved in the exhibition's preparation and didactic activities, *Industriae* wasn't only the centenary's most attended but also the best documented event. Nonetheless, it hardly moved away from the official view that politics had imposed: based on productive continuities and entrepreneurial teleologies, focused more on things than on people and processes, and careful to soften the roughness of the past, using it as a lesson to help avoid repeating its errors.

The third initiative that the committee sponsored was the exhibition *Porto Marghera 100* at the Doge's Palace in Venice.[82] For the second time in a century, the industrial area penetrated a place of high culture within the city, following the photo exhibition held in Ca' Pesaro back in 1985.[83] A video-speech by a life-size mayor welcomed visitors, along with a portrait of Giuseppe Volpi, the politician-entrepreneur who had enabled the construction of Porto Marghera. Here, too, the exhibition focused on the industry's products, and specifically raw materials that had been dignified by their employment in sculptures by contemporary artists of undisputed fame: from Jannis Kounellis' coal to Mario Merz's neon, from Pino Pascali's synthetic fibre caterpillars to Tony Cragg's glass. Each room also presented a brief edited video — containing archival images, photographs and interviews — and pictures from John Gossage's reportage of the late 1990s, when Porto Marghera had been at the centre of a certain boost in landscape photography.[84]

Only the last room was dedicated to the representation of the labourer's work. It featured images printed on pierced canvases by the Norwegian artist Anne-Karin Furunes, whose works focus on marginal identities and highlight the fact that they are difficult to distinguish unless one takes the right distance. However, the images seemed to have been chosen indiscriminately, without any preliminary research on sources and context.[85] The predominant feeling after leaving the exhibition in the Doge's Palace was that one had passed through a patchwork of unconnected signs, but filled with direct and indirect messages — once again — about the potentiality, the resources and the vital elements of the industrial area.

[82] The exhibition was curated by the director of the Fondazione Musei Civici of Venice, Gabriella Belli, in collaboration with Paolo Apice, the director of external affairs in the municipal council. No catalogue is available, but the texts that accompanied the exhibition tour can be consulted on the website of the Foundation.

[83] *Porto Marghera le immagini la storia 1900-1985*, Turin, Musolini Editore, 1985.

[84] See the exhibition catalogue *Venezia_Marghera. Fotografia e trasformazioni nella città contemporanea*, edited by Paolo Costantini, Milan, Charta, 1997.

[85] Giacinta Gimma, *Foto "rubata" in mostra. Leso il diritto d'autore*, "Il Gazzettino di Venezia", 22 November 2017.

In this discursive context, the unions' complaints were weak and ambiguous; the by now ritual denouncement of politics' "failed responses" to Porto Marghera's crisis — a theme that has accompanied the process of deindustrialisation over the last 40 years or so — went hand in hand with a complete adherence to the mayor's "re-industrialist" discourse, up to the point that certain initiatives related to the centenary were criticised precisely for having "museumised" work. On various occasions, statements by trade union leaders reflected an objection to any interpretation made from a heritage perspective. For example, the CGIL's chemical federation (the most representative and influential organisation in Porto Marghera), made the following declaration:

> We are wasting time with photo exhibitions, long talks by "big shot professors", and even the Teatro La Fenice is interested in celebrating this centenary. But we have seen very few workers, few actual exponents of that history have been called to interpret themselves and demonstrate, in real terms, what they personally experienced.[86]

But what could Porto Marghera's workers ever have "demonstrated"? What situation had "they personally experienced" that they could narrate in the present, if not that of dismantling, the crisis, the fear of losing one's job and — more generally — of seeing one's class identity marginalised? So long as the experience of deindustrialisation remains a spectre or a taboo, so long as it isn't acknowledged, shared and included in the widest and most disquieting transformations of global labour, trade unionism will remain firmly on the defensive, incapable of creating new visions and inclusions, and inevitably dependent on current political powers.[87]

Deindustrialisation without industrial heritage and vice versa

In Porto Marghera, the shift from archaeology to industrial heritage and from the single relict to an industrial landscape will take a long time to complete. Throughout its metamorphosis, a very large number of landmarks — buildings, plants, towers, chimneys, portals, dock equipments, tracks — have been demolished at random, if only for the purpose of "making space".[88] Often what

[86] See the public statement *Comitatone come il centenario, Filctem Cgil: "Si rischia l'ennesima operazione di facciata a Porto Marghera"* on the website of the Filctem of Venice, www.parliamodilavoro.it (last accessed 15 December 2019).

[87] In this paragraph I have only considered the main official initiatives that were organised for the centenary, not all the accounts that circulated during the anniversary. Among the latter I would just like to mention the novels by Gianfranco Bettin, *Cracking*, Milan, Mondadori, 2019 and Michele Catozzi, *Marea tossica. Un'indagine del commissario Aldani*, Milan, Tea, 2019, and a documentary by Andrea Segre, *Il pianeta in mare*, Italy 2019.

[88] On the industrial landscape of Porto Marghera see Foscara Porchia, *L'evoluzione del porto industriale di Marghera dalle origini al secondo dopoguerra (1917-1963). Insediamenti, cicli produttivi, trasformazioni territoriali tra passato e futuro*, unpublished doctoral thesis

has been saved from the raging bulldozers lies in a state of decline. Even buildings that were renovated or reconverted to the "advanced tertiary sector" a few years ago, like the Torre Hamon (a cooling tower for metallurgical production), are nowadays empty and abandoned. A layer of postmodern ruins is thus being added to the layer of modern ruins. Furthermore, dismantling has also resulted in the dispersion of company archives, with only some being saved by chance or thanks to the good will of local associations or activists, but without any institutional support.[89] Hence, what is disappearing or deteriorating isn't only an industrial landscape, but a wider social history. As the Montefibre depots are razed to the ground to make space for a new harbour terminal, following the company's permanent closure in 2009, the works council's board room — with its murals dedicated to international working class struggles — is infested by brambles and mice.

Within this framework of decontextualisation, disinterest and even aversion to Marghera's industrial heritage, which the centenary paradoxically magnified, signs of different sensitivities have nonetheless emerged, albeit in a fragmented way. Thus, the National Department for Archaeology, Arts and Landscape intervened for the first time in an ongoing demolition, securing some elements of the old thermoelectric plant — including the last, partially dismantled, turbine — that is nowadays privately owned. Another example is that of a private society operating in port logistics, which recently fostered the renovation of the second cooling tower that remains in Porto Marghera. It was reborn under the ambitious name of Venice Heritage Tower, with the purpose of hosting events, although the tower isn't yet open to the public and it is hard to say if, and how, it will be used for cultural activities. Finally, two female architects of the Venice University Institute of Architecture (Istituto universitario di architettura di Venezia, IUAV) have completed a meticulous cataloguing project of the constituent elements of Porto Marghera's landscape; they have drawn up an atlas of its current state, which also identifies the many relicts of historical value that still await the implementation of protective measures.[90]

In the summer of 2017, the demolition was ordered of two towering industrial chimneys that were part of the notorious vinyl chloride monomer (VCM) plants, the chemical substance responsible for the death of hundreds of workers. A first attempt to bring the chimney down failed, and it was only

in Historical Science, Università degli studi di Padova, 2011-2012; for an early comparison between Venice's industrial heritage and that of Porto Marghera see Franco Mancuso, *Da Venezia a Marghera. Ambiente, fabbriche, dismissioni e pratiche di riuso: un primo bilancio*, "Patrimonio industriale", 2010, n. 6, pp. 24-35.

[89] For example, this is what happened to the Montefibre library, retrieved from the Università Ca' Foscari, and to a number of archives of closed companies, which were purchased by the Fondazione Gianni Pellicani of Mestre.

[90] Esther Giani, Irene Peron, *Porto Marghera Atlas*, Trento-Barcellona, ListLab, 2019.

thanks to the army — which was authorised to use plastic explosive — that the operation could be completed. Some commentators and various former employees of the chemical plant interpreted the demolition as a metaphor for the "resistance" of Porto Marghera's history, erasable only through military violence.[91] The ungraceful structures, clearly visible even from one of the most fascinating panoramic points of Venice, the Fondamenta delle Zattere, weren't simply a brand of "killer" industrialisation; they also symbolised the tenacious resistance against deindustrialisation. During an extremely long period of unemployment benefits, the last workers that were employed in those plants conducted a stubborn and original — in its communicative forms — battle, which counted among its most dramatic and spectacular moments the nine-day occupation, in 2010, of one of the chimneys, at a height of over 100 metres.[92]

Although no industrial archaeologist took the trouble of defending the industrial chimneys, the attention and emotions that they evoked when they came down raise at least one question: has the time perhaps come to include battles against industrial closures into the history of labour conflicts and working-class "moral economy", as has been done for those of the "economic boom"? And shouldn't we also start considering the extent of their agency and participation, along with the contradictions that those resistances bring to the surface (i.e. the defence of potentially harmful work)?

The critical contribution of deindustrialisation historians and heritage scholars can definitely go beyond the defence of material artefacts. Over 40 years ago, the journal of the Neapolitan industrial archaeologists commented the demolition of an early twentieth-century jute factory, which had just been closed down after a long crisis, with the exception of the chimney stack.

> Perhaps they wasted a chance, of use and memory, given that this case also fits into a practice without culture, which ignores the current debate about the use of urban voids generated by deindustrialisation, and which thinks it can protect the industrial monument by "saving" a chimney stack.[93]

The problem, now as then, is not to preserve what already has an aesthetic or artistic dignity — "saving a chimney stack" — but to dig deeper into the critical possibilities the heritage debate has to offer us, up to the discussion about what kind of work and which societal model has taken the place of what has disappeared over a very short timeframe. "I was convinced that this would

[91] Gilda Zazzara, *Smokestack nostalgia o della nostalgia del futuro*, "Clionet", 2018, n. 2, pp. 517-523.

[92] The Vinyls workers used a musical album and a theatrical play called *Vinyls 176. Marghera vista dalla luna*, among other things, to raise solidarity and draw attention to their controversy.

[93] Antonia Cocozza, *Ricordo di un monumento industriale: lo "iutificio napoletano"*, "Bollettino dell'Associazione per l'Archeologia industriale", 1983-1984, n. 7-9, pp. 40-41, here p. 41.

have remained the model of our modernity for at least 300 years", Vittorio Foa wrote in reference to the "spectacle" of places such as the Bagnoli steel plant. Instead, he continued, "after only 30 to 40 years it has become the past".[94]

Alberto Rollo echoes Foa's words at the end of a journey through his "Milanese working-class education", which seems only to exist in personal memories: "who […] would have imagined to see the T5 plant of the Falck Concordia besieged by weed, Ansaldo impoverished and turned into a museum, the Alfa Romeo factory in Arese converted into the Arese Shopping Centre, one of Europe's major retail centres?"[95] Among the most shocking lessons of deindustrialisation there is precisely that fallibility of human perception and uprootedness that the acceleration of change generates in those "who stay behind": no one better than the workers that have been written off, or are about to be, can give it back its depth and significance.

[94] Vittorio Foa, *Passaggi*, Turin, Einaudi, 2000, here p. 148.
[95] Alberto Rollo, *Un'educazione milanese*, Lecce, Manni, 2016, here p. 280.