CONTEMPORARY RUINS.
REMAINS OF THE 60'S AND THE 80'S ITALIAN ARCHITECTURE

Index

Introduction.
Rejects, refuse, ruins. Specific new landscapes of the contemporary city.

1. The Italian Contemporary Ruins. The failures of Italian architecture between the 60's and the 80's.
   1.1. Text Anthology and ruins summary: inquiry into causes and reasons of the architectural failure.
   1.2. UTOPIA vs RUIN. Errors of Modern Architecture in Italy and abroad.

   2.1. Sciacca's Popular Theatre. The script of an eternal unfinished. Giuseppe and Alberto Samonà (Sciacca)
   2.2. Marchiondi Spagliardi Institute. Vittoriano Viganò (Milan)
   2.3. EUR Velodrome. Cesare Ligini, Dagoberto Ortensi, Silvano Ricci (Roma)
   2.4. ENEL-SIP Summer Residence. Giancarlo De Carlo (Riccione)
   2.5. Church in Gibellina. Ludovico Quaroni (Gibellina)
   2.6. The student's house. Giorgio Grassi (Chieti)
   2.7. St. Christopher's Station. Aldo Rossi, Gianni Braghieri (Milan)
   2.8. Sports Arena. Vittorio Gregotti (Cantù)
   2.9. Air-Terminal Ostiense. Julio La Fuente (Roma)

3. Conclusions
   3.1 Modern ruins and contemporary design.

Bibliography

Introduction.
Rejects, refuse, ruins. Specific new landscapes of the contemporary city.
This research studies the "contemporary ruins", signed architectural projects, that proved to be unsuccessful and unable to achieve the purpose for which they were made. The interest in this topic moves from an obvious presence in Italy of these "ruins", remains of the Italian Architecture between the 60’s and the 80’s and destined to die from the birth, unable even to begin their life cycle. In those years, in fact, in Italy several failed projects were realized, that were unfinished, or completed but never used, demolished even before work; today those projects are skeletons of concrete, like corps of the contemporary, real scars on our landscapes.

These realities are the new materials of the architectural project, which, far from the concept of "tabula rasa" and from the trust of the Modern, has to deal with the existing, with waste and ruins of a very recent past. In the Italian Pavilion at the last Venice Biennale Architecture, 2008, the team Albori exposes the corpse of Aldo Rossi's and Gianni Braghieri's unfinished architecture, using it as a palimpsest for new housing. A corpse of the Modern put under the spotlight and offered as a last frontier for design's experimentation: the tabula rasa and the new construction are now distant realities, the contemporary project seeks strategies of reuse and recycling of these abandoned skeletons, and can not ignore these disused spaces and urban waste, which are now the only occasions for contemporary architecture. Besides a "necessity" matter, since now, especially in Italy, they are the only "soft tissue" on which the project can intervene, the interest in these things moves from their mobility condition, to be spaces in hold, without a fixed and established meaning; their ruin status is not a permanent dimension and in the ability to absorb and be absorbed it is manifested their "attitude to transformation." This is a new archaeology in which ages and transformations change these modifiable spaces that, by virtue of their unresolved and unfinished status, are better in absorbing new meanings and new values. Attention to these realities is parallel to a line of interest of the contemporary that studies the presence of waste, scrap and architectural corpses in the contemporary metropolis, no longer regarded as an "accident", an exception to the rule, but now recognizable in a system, a specific landscape waiting to be re-signified. The concept of "waste" of refusal, is now a category of reality interpretation, the city itself is a refusal, a junked-space "the product of modernization is not built modern architecture, but the Junkspace ... what that remains after modernization has run its course, or, more precisely, what coagulates while modernization is in progress, its fallout." 1

In the "The third Landscape's Manifest" Gilles Clement often uses the adjective "délaissé" (refusal), referring more to the urban context that to the agriculture one, using it to define the space with several meanings: "Space resulting from the abandonment of land previously used" "Refused spaces in the organization of the territory" "What remains on the territory after use and before another use." 2

"The Generic City" by R. Koolhaas includes the "Third Landscape" as well as dismissed areas, abandoned containers, abandoned carcasses awaiting demolition or re-meanings "the generous city, like a sketch that is never developed, is not improved, but abandoned. The idea of stratification, of completion and improvement is foreign: it has no layers ... The great originality of the Generic City is simply in abandoning what does not work (what has survived his own use), breaking the asphalt of idealism with jackhammer's realism, and accepting whatever grows in its place." 3

The term "reject" becomes the current description of the contemporary thought: Zygmunt Bauman, in his latest essay "Lives of scrap", writes that the acceleration of time and the Modern's thirst for news will lead to a past's removal, that reminds us to something that was just fashionable but now, as old, is a waste, that must be eliminated.

In this moment of contemporary thought and design these realities can not be ignored, particularly the "ruins of the modern" in Italy have to be investigated and studied: is necessary a detailed knowledge of the new materials available to the architectural project, so as to be able to interact and work with these resources. Parallel to these reasons the interest in these modern ruins is also because of their looks, charm toward the suffering, inorganic, deformed aesthetics, which features contemporary art from the early twentieth century.

Ruins have always attracted and fascinated the human mind. Already in Piranesi's drawings the ruins are hollow spaces, which represent a descent into the intimate psychological dimension, they become the metaphorical image of mental

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1 R. Koolhaas, Junkspace. Per un ripensamento radicale dello spazio urbano, G. Mastrigli (editore by), Quodlibet, Macerata 2006, pag.63
2 G. Clement, Manifesto del Terzo paesaggio, Quodlibet, Macerata 2005, footnote 6 pag. 83
3 R. Koolhaas, La Città Generica, in Ibidem pp. 37, 56
labyrinths; in this representation of broken down spaces, reassembled, without meanings and functions, F. Purini identifies the origin of modern composition.

Among the other edition of Piranesi’s Prisons, in 1759, Edmund Burke publishes “The Origin of Inquiry upon our ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful”, a turning point in the final conceptualization of the Sublime. A new anticlassical aesthetics will re-evaluate what the official handsome had darkened, and so the ugliness, the shapeless, the incompleteness, because they are able to act in the human deeply, arousing feelings of discomfort, pain and fear. So the ruin is no longer seen with that calm and distant eyes of the landscape’s painters of the 1700, for which it was essentially an aesthetic experience of a “distant” reality, but is perceived as something terribly close and immanent in the perception of the transience of time and the inevitability of death. The contemporary thought collects this ruin’s perversion, the seduction for the unresolved, undetermined and disturbing image.

Attention to the ruins, to the “architectural corpses” in 19th century triggers new thoughts: the interest is not only aesthetic or figurative, but more complex issues about the history come into play: a correct ethics and attitude in preserving these ruins. Viollet Le Duc believed strongly in their value as a witness, suggesting a “stylistic” restoration, adding and retaining to return to an unified appearance, similar to the original one; on the other side John Ruskin considered the passage of time and the right to die as essential to define the character of an architecture, which was to be able to complete his cycle, becoming ruined, and returning to the original membership of the Nature.

And this state of ruin as a disclosure of an original nature arouses the interest of the Romanticism. In “Die Ruine” Georg Simmel describes the ‘going in ruin’ as the point at which the equation between the forces of nature and those of the spirit, is resolved to the benefit of nature. Simmel says that when the nature’s mechanical forces take back the work deleting the spiritual will, this passage is resolved in a “cosmic tragedy”, so that the man places each ruin on “the shade of melancholy.” “In other words, the charm of the ruin lies in the fact that here a man’s work is seen ultimately as a nature’s product, the destruction of the spiritual form through the natural forces is seen as a return to “the Good Mother”, as Goethe called nature.” 4

In the 18th century it is interesting the Albert Speer’s position, the architect of the Third Reich in 1934; he writes in his “Memories” “The Theory of Ruin Value”, a set of “rules” in an attempt to build monuments that during the years, even in a state of decline, however keeping their power and their aura, becoming new ruins able to impress and remember the glorious empire of the Third Reich. Already during the sketches design, the architect must already have in mind what would be the image of the building with the passing of the years, in order to plan and design the image of the monument once gone to ruin: then he must not think about preserving or “protecting” it from the ravages of time, but rather studying and “designing” the process of deterioration.

If the Modern rejected the ruins, the ghosts of the past, as the negation of the “tabula rasa” and of the new lines of the present, the Contemporary seems to recover the sense of time and memory, also founding it in the image of the ruin, in the seduction of an unsolved and indeterminate aesthetic of the fragment.

The Modern has developed a reformist aspirations in changing the present and a strong aspiration to the future, which could be obtained only with an elimination of the past, and in a functional and rational response. “To forget, in the case of Le Corbusier, was to erase, literally and figuratively, the city itself, in favour of a tabula rasa, stating the nature on a disperse urban planning and creating their own monuments starting from life modern’s functions: the bureaucracy skyscrapers.” 5

The Modern destabilizes the perception and memory, and the relation to what “remains”: “modern architects when they entered the old town expecting to find the modern, ... they were sure that modernity was already there. It was with that expectation that they considered the old city, which was organized immediately in the background ready to accept modernity as a form.” 6 So the tension of the Modern Movement against the remnants of the past is similar to the case of

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4 G. Simmel, Die Ruine, Philosophische Kultur.Gesammelte Essays, Klinkhardt, Leipzig 1911
5 A. Vidler, Il Perturbante in Architettura. Saggi sul disagio nell’età contemporanea, cit. p. 199
6 Ibidem, p.202
Proust, "the nostalgia of a when projected forward to an event ever occurred." 7

Postmodernism loses determination in the resolutelyness of the Modernist predecessors. The Modern finds its energies in the trust, rational and utopian at the same time, of a procedure to the modification of reality through a design of order. Contemporary thought, in contrast, loses all faith, all hope in a drawing for a change: the future is not an achievement but a threat, an uncertainty that stimulates, then, an introverted attitude to recall memories and traces of what we have been. In this uncertainty of the future we need to identify with the past, or rather with a perception of time and memory that still places humanity in history.

The art and ruins, writes M. Augé, become a device to retrieve the very essence of time passing. In the perception of an art work there is always a gap, a lack between the disappeared and the present perception, and by this distance we perceive the passage of time, of what was before us. Similarly, the ruins, showing “a lost and massive functionality” speak of a multiplicity of past memories, which lead to anything, not the time of history or dates but the “time pure”, the essence of life. Today there is a need to perceive this time, the only way to be conscious and to understand the story in an attempt to exorcise the anxiety for the future.

Alongside this need for recovery of a language that belongs to the past, there is a strong aesthetic attraction that the image of the ruin has always exercised in human sensitivity, strongly recovered in recent attentions of contemporary culture, especially with regards to the art. If the past produced ruins, able to revive many memories and echoes of past and preserving the essence of time, the modern world has produced only remains, residues unable to tell, to communicate. If the ruin implies a capacity to remember, debris lead to a desire to delete the past, they tell no story, belong to a past to remove, to replace.

In this scenario, the contemporary art becomes a device in discovering the meanings and significance of the contemporary ruins: the Augé’s “hasty replacements” joins an art system that sees in the “ruins” a potential for reuse and redevelopment, through the “creative disposals” able to revitalize these dead bodies, often modifying their identity.

Since the early 70’s it is evident an attention and a creative tension in the art works in disused and in abandoned architectures, spaces “other” in which intervene.

In the 70’s several Americans artists work on abandoned buildings, dismissed places. Attracted by the ability of space to influence the feelings of man, they find an interesting issue in the ruins, abandoned spaces, in which the functional intent, the ‘use’ of the building disappears, leaving the scene for new meanings and new readings of those spaces. In particular, these American artists work on the communicative value of the spaces: buildings created to “work” that had fallen into disuse, acquire other meanings and telling skills; so no more “architecture” to be used, but charming spaces to benefit emotionally. In this context we can cite Gillo Dorfles’s intervention “the Mythopoetic Value of some urban elements”: “An architecture no longer habitable becomes a vegetable sculpture, and is, perhaps, the first custodian of that mythopoetic character that the intact building today hardly possesses. [...] Of course: every wreck, even that of a rusty machinery, of a working tool now unusable, acutely expresses this peculiar symbolic value far more than does the machine in perfect working order or the newly constructed building. This feature is due to the emergence of immaterial forces, indefinable charm,”. “He finds this phenomenon wherever it occurs the transformation that he defines “metabolè semantica”, “only in ruins, in the wreckage of buildings now almost returned to the vegetal conditions of crumbling walls covered with ivy, you can find the charm of an ‘Imaginary Architecture’.”

The abandoned building thus becomes a parallel architecture, a space free of functional requirements, offering different meanings that can be interpreted in multiple ways.

In 1975 Matta Clark in “Day’s End” transforms an old pier of 1870, abandoned and unused for years, cutting a big hole in the wall, so as to bring the light and turn the old ruin into a new space. So no longer the pier in disuse, but a new space, which is contaminated with the sky’s view and the water’s glare, and it becomes an open space for new interpretations. In the work it can be seen the passing of time, even in the same lights transformation during the day; but the intervention of Matta Clark gives a new look to the old pier, now immortal in its ability to be pure spatial experience, independent from its history and its materials.

In the same year in Paris, in the district of Les Halles, in “Conical Intersect” he cuts a 17th century building, letting enter inside a “cone-shaped vacuum.” So the building is opened and accessed by this void, which articulates the space in a new and more complex vision of its interior. In Matta Clark’s poetics this building becomes a Non-ument, a monument that preserves inside it the idea of ruin, and that instead of creating a perception of collective and shared ideas of

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7 Ibidem, p.203
permanence and stability, it is open to individual perceptions and aware of the idea of decline and transience.

Matta Clark is acutely aware of the 'obsolescence' and mortality of architecture and for this reasons despises the architects, and their claim to build forever: "What I do, you could never achieved, since that presupposes accepting ephemerality, whereas you believe yourselves to be building for eternity. But architecture has only one destiny, and that is, sooner or later, to go down to the chute, because it is waste."

Another artist contemporary to Matt Clark who works on this topic is Robert Smithson: we can cite "Partially Buried woodshed" a cabin that he builds in 1970 and then puts on the cover a pile of debris, so that it collapses, and then he photographs the process of decay in several phases. We note that the aging, the "pathology" of an architecture, which in this work is ostentatious and becomes the topic theme, in modernism was a taboo, something that had to be hidden and completely prevented by the use of materials "always new", good at disguising the traces of time.

In this brief overview, it should be mentioned the text "Architecture and Disjunction" written by Bernard Tschumi in 1996. In this book appears an unusual description of Villa Savoye, immediately before the restoration: "the squalid walls of the small room at the service Ground Floor, stinking of urine, smeared with excrement, and covered with obscene graffiti." It is quite strange that the subject of this description is just the raw building, icon of purity and perfection of the Modern Movement, which always had wanted to deny the past time.

Tschumi writes that Villa Savoye was never so poignant as in the moment when the bricks were discovered original plaster "was never so moving as when plaster fell off its concrete blocks" and says that the real architecture time is time decay, in which architecture is life and death at the same time, and experience of space becomes its own concept. So the point of decomposition as a point of tangency of the architectural concept and sensual experience.

It is evident an interest, an attention to the "body" of architecture, meant in biological terms, keeping a genesis, an age, a history, a sense of time that more deeply stays in the real essence of the work, that can be perceived more when the work is stripped of the uses and roles for which it was designed.

From the 70’s we arrive until today, with numerous art installations that work on abandoned spaces, on places full of errors and without meaning: new subjects and scenarios, more and more frequent in contemporary art. The 'uncanny', the feeling of displacement of these spaces is collected by the art who becomes a response, an interpretation of these spaces, in a boundary between a past or present dimension, between architecture and art.

For example the Haikyo is a photo-current born in recent years in Japan who chooses as subjects only Japan’s ruined industrial buildings; particularly favourite topic is the island of Hashima, which up to thirty years ago housed the residences of miners and pits, and today, has become a wasteland of rubble because of the closure of these mines, and now is a non-set for these photographers.

We could cite also the artist Anselm Kiefer in the installation of 2004 "The Seven Heavenly Palaces" in the hangar Bicocca in Milan: seven ruined concrete towers clearly unstable, decaying, seem captured an instant before falling, but also load symbolic values, as to reveal a path to the afterlife.

It is clear that the search for a ruin aesthetics has its roots in searching the "sublime", and the desire to shake, excite, anguish man feelings; so, despite a distance of thousands of years, charged with new and different meanings, the ruins continue to captivate and stimulate the human spirit.

"Having lost the finish or the skin, .. (ruins) .. show us the parts with which they are built. Indicate spaces without defining them, allowing us to fantasize about the kind of life that may or actually took place within them. [...] Of course, the ruins do not conform to the rules and regulations of the architecture, as it is implemented by the practice. Models instead offer a different type of construction. The ruins have been the subject of poems, romantic paintings and provided a scenic backdrop for tragedy. Yet they have had a role in architecture."10

8 A. Bois, A User’s Guide, p.191
9 B. Tschumi, Architecture and Disjunction, p.75
10 A. Betsky Interrogativi sull'architettura: meditazioni sullo spettacolo lì fuori, Marsilio, Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia, Venezia 2008, p. 16
Aaron Betsky

Abandoned architectures, signed projects never used, neglected buildings destined to be demolished shortly after the end of the yard, are a phenomenon of many European countries: in the Netherlands, Germany and France there many examples of “contemporary ruins”. However it is interesting to investigate what binds and holds together the various Italian realities, products of the same age and same cultural thought. Indeed, the political culture of those years in Italy is reflected in the architectural production that, even in various personalities and different experiences, is however a complaint of a substantive close, at least in the fortunes of the works, which, for various reasons, were mostly unsuccessful.

These are signed projects, realized in the same years, with the same Welthanschauung and the same cultural context, and then destined to fail in a common destiny. The number in our country of these “scars” suggests a widespread phenomenon, and not sporadic cases, and the fact that they are all signed architectures, which all belong to the same thought and the same architectural culture, makes possible a global reading of this phenomenon.

Today these realities are particularly pronounced, and many cities have to interact with these giants of cement, paralyzed from the years in which they were born, between 60’s and 80’s; actually abandoned and dismissed, shelter for desperate people, they are real wounds to remember the mistakes of Italian architecture of that time, and the management’s inability and of modern times.

Despite the power of visual images of these ruins, which can “disrupt” or seduce, there’s a little talk about them, however, and the press seems to ignore them, pretending not to know this fact, as if the courage to denounce the issue is lacking. Probably behind this attitude there is a desire of removal of a past that, due to the recent results, should be kept quiet, a chapter of Italian architecture readable on the books that now, silently, manifests errors, failures and contradictions. The thought, the architectural culture in Italy matures and seeks an identity in those years, when architects, critics and magazines are trying to find an “Italian way” in that cultural landscape. And if the texts and drawings seem to find a consistency and a force, instead the outcome of those projects are visible only today, in their realization that, in most cases, has yet to be completed. After the “History of Italian Architecture 1944-1985” published in 1982 by Manfredo Tafuri, it seems that nobody has no more words to comment on those texts and those projects, and to write a new history, filling a void, a hole, a missing piece in the history of our country. So these “contemporary ruins” of a recent past, are very strong evidence of this dark period of Italian architecture, and should be deeply studied, identifying the possible causes and reasons that led to the failure of that approach to the architecture.

In the goals of this work there is a sort of critical anthology of texts written before, during and after the implementation of such projects, so to reform the critical apparatus by searching and comparing what has been written about it. So that a bibliographic survey that is able to show thought and criticism of those years regard to these projects, in an attempt to understand whether and how much awareness there was in the errors and results that this kind of architecture was making. The research tells the story of these failures, placing the individual events on the same background, in an attempt to identify the constants and common causes. The various case studies will be detailed in a sort of “investigation”, a reconstruction of the project’s history, of its “necessity”, of the assignment, the architect and his thought in that cultural context, the project, the drawings and theoretical value, the implementation, the response and reactions to the project failure and the process of “going bust”. Along with this look back, the ruin is then contextualized in its aspects of contemporary ruin, analyzing what is now the attitudes toward these realities, in an atmosphere of tension between a confused revulsion toward these abandoned architectures, an attitude of laziness and removal of these difficult situations hard to manage, and the emergence of a new interest in these ruins of modernity. The stories are then compared in order to identify themes and recurring issues, and to identify a common ground, a common mistake.

**SCIACCA’S POPULAR THEATRE. HISTORY OF AN ETERNAL UNFINISHED**

The Italian Architecture between the 60’s and the 80’s saw the creation of many failed projects that now are abandoned architectures, finished and unfinished buildings but never used, often going to be demolished before starting their life cycle.

This is a widespread phenomenon and not a rare circumstance, sharing either a huge quantity, there are a lot of these ruins, either a qualitative aspect, because are signed projects and not abuse, either the same cultural context, since all were realized in Italy between the 60’s and the 80’s, as a products of the same Welthanschauung and the same architectural culture.
The stories of these “ruins” give a glimpse of the history of Italian architecture, that in the 60’s goes through a difficult and restless period trying to find an identity, an own language in the cultural landscape of those years. The desire to take themes of the modern language in the Italian architecture, and the comparison with its regard to the history, to the genius loci and the local situation, will lead to a rich and confused cultural scene, that results in the production of these architectures that often felt into disuse, and prove a failure of those years. Today these realities are a real problem, as the Italian and European cities have to interact with these abandoned architectures, paralyzed projects from the moment that has determined their end. In Italy these architectures are abandoned, forgotten or intentionally removed, paralyzed by a lack of sensitivity to the problem, and by the inability to manage with them.

This is the situation of the Sciacca’s Popular Theatre, one of the ruins analyzed: the project was designed in 1976 by Giuseppe Samonà, the construction site was opened in 1978 and then frozen in 1982 without ever being completed. From 1982 till today the theater expects to be completed and used, in a state of abandonment. The impact of this concrete ruin is pretty strong, seen rising on a promontory overlooking the sea, alongside a complex built in 20’s; many people wish it demolished, others suggest the completion, but the problem of the management for a city like Sciacca is a very worrying one and stifles any initiative.

The result is a passive inactivity, a removal of the problem that, with the exception of a conference organized by IN/ARCH and the magazine Antithesi in 2002, has inadvertently declared the status of contemporary ruin, and it seems that this will continue to be the fate of the Popular Theatre, now motionless and indifferent to the progress of events.

Sciacca in the 70’s: The context in which develops the Samonà’s project for the Popular Theater in Sciacca

The design for the Popular Theatre in Sciacca is part of a plan of ”Drafting of detailed plan for a thermal area outside the town” that the city of Sciacca entrusted to Giuseppe and Alberto Samonà in the early 70’s for the development of this zone.

In those years, the fate of the town of Sciacca (40,000 inhabitants in the Province of Agrigento) seems to depend on the development of tourism, thanks to the presence of thermal water sources in the neighbourhood of the center. According to political interests, is looming, in fact, a regional and national develop of Sciacca as a tourist-spa center in a very short time. The program management provides the establishment and adjustment of hotels and spaces for relax, including a theater from 1500 sits, to add to the existing Thermal center built in 20’s. Then was decided to refurbish the old town-center and some degraded areas on the outskirts of the city: Samonà designed the detailed plan of the historical center of Sciacca.

Among the documents of the Sciacca’s Local Council, the theater is never explicitly stated, the decision and the funds came from the Regional Councilor, On. Calogero Mannino, and the total absence of debate in civic institutions suggests the assumption of a “work dropped from above”. Far from being integrated within a cultural life of the city, the theater was designed as a device for development of the tourism’s facilities: in an article of the journal Kronion of 1956, concerning the demolition of Theatre Rossi, in the 50s, it is written about the need to build a new theater for tourism and for the city: ”the theater was to meet the needs of ever-increasing influx of foreigners”, and the On. Mannino writes that ”a place well equipped must offer tourists other opportunities beyond the sea, spa and golf.”

After 11 years, in 1986, the first results of this project begin to show: Sicily Region invests additional funding for other equipment, sports facilities and renovation of the old structure, but few results were for that effort of trying to redraw the urban “architecture of the city”, which in reality was not a design but a business project11:

_ only four hotels, designed in the plan, were realized;
_ the plan to recover the illegal area of the city remains just a draft on paper;
_ the detailed plan for the historical center of Sciacca, by Giuseppe Samonà, will never be drafted because of some misunderstanding between management and designers, with the false excuse of a pre-existing local plan rejected and never paid.

The works for the construction of the theater according to the project Samonà begin in 1976 and in 1982 the construction site is blocked, and only in 1985, after 11 years, the Region allocates additional funds to be invested in

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12 Vittorio Gregotti, Moderno e nuova modernità, in Ibidem, pp.240-241
electricity and technology, paving, steps and coatings, for a total of 5 billion lire. Beyond these actions, without results and utilizations, in those years begin creating a climate of skepticism and hostility to the theater by the urban culture and the government, that figure out the difficulties in the effective management and future employment of the building. This situation will last until today, with the result of a value architectural work not completed and added to the landscape of the “Sicilian Unfinished”.

Giuseppe Samonà

Giuseppe Samonà was born in Palermo in 1989 he graduated in Civil Engineering in Palermo with E. Basile, and in 1927 he worked as assistant professor with E. Calandra. In 1936 was called by the IUAV, then headed by G. Cirilli, with a conservative and academic imprint, and there Samonà obtained the professorship in 1939 and in 1945 became director of the IUAV until 1971.

This will be a decisive event in his career, it was the opportunity for a true "school construction”; in IUAV Samonà is virtually the only operator that has to build the School of Venice. The faculty is all to be done, and he has to choose, virtually alone, the new professors on the whole Italian scene; he calls L. Piccinato, B. Zevi, G. Abstaining, F. Albini, I. Gardella.

During those years he devoted himself to Town Planning's studies and research, and in 1959 he writes “L’urbanistica e l’avvenire della città”, a kind of program-research for urban planning, pooling together the experiences, theories, reflections of almost 10 years of study and professional careers. In these writings he exposes the concept of “unity between architectural and urban planning”, which is its deepest reflection on the need for a new approach to the plan design, no longer based on the splitting of the two disciplines, legacy of rationalism, but within a complex thought, that in a “creative fusion” of two realities, is able to take into account issues of public and private, individual and reports, individual and collective life.

Between 75's and 80's, during which he designed the Sciacca's Theatre, G. Samonà is involved in drafting the Plan of the historic center of Montepulciano, 1975-1978, the Plan for the historical center of Sciacca, 1975, and late the Project for the historical center of Palermo, 1983: all experiences of research and urban design who offer him the opportunity to criticize the “normal urban planning” and the traditional approaches and tools for planning. Samonà proposes a “reform” of urban planning practice, which makes the design more careful in reading the contexts, more sensitive to the psychology of social groups and community life.

The criticism that moves to urban planning is that of “a priori” and abstract approach in studying the humanity and the landscapes: the naturalistic conception of human and social relations, and the claim to interpret the reality with imposed categories, have meant that the plan would become an “ideological superstructure that rests on the city without adhering completely.” He emphasized the need to understand, interpret and analyze their specific local contexts. So it is crucial the role of “perception”, the representation of space as an icon, embracing the object and the contaminations between this and the “presence”. Samonà is in constant tension in “recognition of concepts and universal, and really typical and unique” to the limit of the boundary between the attitude of "Modern", and research traditions, habits and "lifestyles" local.

Before the Sciacca's Theatre Giuseppe Samonà has already built several building, especially in Sicily, with his son Alberto, and Egle Renata Trincanato, his assistant at IUAV since 1939: in 1930 he won the Competition with Autore for the Palazzata a Mare in Messina, in the 1933 he realized Post Office in Rome and in the early '50s Scimemi's House in Mondello; he designed and realized Borgo Olivia District in Palermo, and Inail Office in Venice, in 1952, with marked contrasts between a “modernist” plan and more traditional decorative motifs, and these contrasts are also reflected in the realization of the plans for SGES Offices built between 1956 and 1961 in Palermo e Siracusa.

The Popular Theater of Sciacca in the work of Joseph Samonà: “a project obscurely only mental”

The theatre rises on a promontory to peak on the sea; the position of the project Samonà is very discussed, both for the environmental impact, because of the proximity to the coast, both for the architectural context, respect the contrast
between its "modern" structure and the preexisting Thermal building built on the 20's. The landscape and the consequent insertion of the project, are very important themes to the mind of Samonà, particularly in this project. During the elaboration of the sketches for the Theater, Samonà attentively analyzes the "context": the coastal landscape that surrounds the Thermal complex; from a synthetic reading of the characters of the site he reaches a monumental geometry, that should tell the ancient and modern image of the city of Sciacca. Despite the "modern" registry, Samonà’s project does not renounce to a monumental aura, suggested by this hill on the sea, not far from the Selinunte’s temples of and Eraclea Theatre.

"With the drama of Sciacca for the first time I found myself having to deal with nature .. that gave me improper, coarse suggestions.. the shape of the theatre was founded on these suggestions. I think we should deepen, with critical intelligence, our sense of identifiability with infinite nature and, at the same time, the sense of differentiation within its materiality, the sense of us as individuals, by the nature that surrounds us ... The recent tradition of the Modern Movement saw the man .. out of time and space, a meta-biological man, based on a boundless faith in the material of nature ... We no longer have the sense of the images, the gesture that we respect God. Historical materialism has led to a relationship with nature that was not there before."

The search for a sublime relationship with the landscape, of an order which is owned by a deep harmony between man and space is also present in the thought of Le Corbusier: "There are times when men, living in certain positive conditions, can approach to the sacred .. They go where they can explain, where they can be loved, where you can live in harmony with oneself and with others, where they can put their bodies in harmony with the spirit." Samonà looks for his project lines in the landscape, and the site of Sciacca strikes him as "just part of nature, indeed, is very artificial, with distant monumental presences, which have their influence of artificial architecture death for the use, but strongly present in some monuments that have a symbolic weight and create a certain atmosphere, making this landscape "predisposed" to be read in certain intellectuals conditions." For this project Samonà works on the aggregation and decomposition of multiple volumes. The structure of the theatre is divided into 3 shapes: a pyramid, a truncated cone and a parallelepiped, all exposed concrete, but absolutely recognizable in their plastic identity ... "The idea was to build three volumes: reflected that, functionally, what we should be in, but at the same time have an elegance that could give to this work the value of its monumental theatre." The references to the Le Corbusier’s architecture are fairly obvious, both in the choice of pure forms, both in the will that they remain autonomous and recognizable from each other "The eyes are made to see forms in light. The primary forms are the forms beautiful because you read clearly."  

The stage is contained within the rectangular prism, the great hall is in the cone angle and the smaller hall is placed in the pyramid with a square base, with the environments around that make it a multipurpose structure. The building introduces a new dimension in the fabric of the Old Town, Mount Kronio behind them and the surrounding coastal landscape. The contrast between the three volumes, the exposed concrete face and such brutal forms show a

13 G. Samonà, I disegni per il portale del Teatro di Sciacca, Marina Montuori (edited by), Giuseppe e Alberto Samonà, Officina Editions, Rome2000  
15 G. Samonà, I disegni per il portale del Teatro di Sciacca, Marina Montuori (edited by), Giuseppe e Alberto Samonà, Officina Editions, Rome 2000  
16 Ibidem  
17 Le Corbusier, Verso un’Architettura, Longanesi, Milan 1984, pag.13  
18 Ibidem, pag.16  
19 G. Samonà, I disegni per il portale del Teatro di Sciacca, Marina Montuori (edited by), Giuseppe e Alberto Samonà, Officina Editions, Rome 2000  
20 V. Gregotti, Moderno e nuova modernità, in Studi in onore di Giuseppe Samonà, pag.238
plastic energy heavily impacting with the surrounding landscape: “The architectural abstraction has this peculiar and magnificent: the brutal fact rooted in the spiritual, because The brutal fact is nothing but the materialization, the symbol of the possible.” Le Corbusier is one of the constant references in the architectural research of G. Samonà, and also for his son Alberto Samonà, which marks the 100th anniversary of Le Corbu’s birth with the exhibition “The House of Le Corbusier”, at the Palazzo Braschi in Rome in 1987, and shall ensure the publication. In numerous writings Giuseppe Samonà speaks of the need to “humanize” the structure of the theatre using the decorations and the functional elements (canopies, railings, stairs) in red iron, which would “soften” this architecture. The development of form is documented by a series of sketches and prospects made by Samonà. During drawing’s exhibition of the Portal of the Theatre of Sciacca, edited by F. Taormina in 1982 in Naples, Samonà says he was almost immediately sure of the three volumes, and of their relationship, and that he had to try, instead, to find solutions which satisfied him in the relationship between the three volumes and context: “I felt the need to find tentacles stop this purity ... this urban scene was shut out of the theatre, get out of the space inside, and I used the stairs to find ... an eloquent gesture of respect: from the ground to the tunnel itself.” The Sciacca’s Theatre, as well as other projects of that time, shows what were the impulses of Italian architecture toward the language of “modernity”: the use of exposed concrete, the articulation of clear and recognizable massing, the “large scale design” which recalled the mega structures, are all echoes of the Modern Movement. In Italy, however, entering into modernity becomes more complex, contaminated and disturbed by the relationship with the “history”, with the culture of the country. The inefficiency of a sterile and empty codes of functionalism, gradually led to an history’s recovery in Italy, “a mother's womb, such as continuous flow and thus a place of reconciliation with the past.” So we can cite the Grassi’s and Rossi’s experiments in backing modern architecture to a historical memory, by an evocative abstraction incorporating classical themes and elementary forms stripped of all decorative and reduced to mere formal essence. So Samonà for his theatre chooses a modern image, which reiterates the wise the “rigorous and magnificent game of volumes assembled in light “, with concrete surfaces and dimensions which remembered the great architecture of Le Corbusier. The attention toward the context, the ability of an architecture of “knowing how to touch,” written in the texts of the Swiss architect, becomes almost an obsession for Samonà in the first phase of the design for the Theatre of Sciacca. He’ll write a lot about the site of the Theatre, a headland just outside the city center, with Mount Kronio behind and overlooking the sea. But for Samonà the context has also other values, recall echoes of the past and the myths of Sicily, and therefore a great attention to the genius loci, and against the choice of a form completely different from that context, that is a result of a progressive mind, of a modern thought, quite distant from those ancient myths. This contradiction is also clear in the project’s drawings, that identified several images of the theatre but any images with the context, it seems that the pencil stops in its plan, and never comes to trace the outline of what’s around. The same floor plan seems to deny any relationship, any comparison with the guidelines of the context, but the gesture does not have the strength to be a turning point that stands in contradiction with the existing one. Samonà probably chooses that inclination thinking about the view of the Theatre getting down from Via Agatocle, discovering the theatre’s volumes with the background of the sea which opened behind him. Perhaps his attention to the context hid what was a real tension in the project itself, so it seemed that the context was for the project, and not vice versa. The relationship that the project established with the adjoining thermal complex of 20’s, is not that of a contrast, a search in the relationship between two strident languages, but it seems a juxtaposition in which the theatre has just to show himself. Since it was realized the Theatre is seen as a giant, a UFO in the landscape, alien even to the social context of a city like Sciacca that would have required a 100-seat theatre, not a double room one, with that size and that capacity. Samonà tries to find “that new song with nature”, to achieve that “divine” harmony between nature and artefact, but his effort is not always successful, because in the end he goes far from that nature, betraying both its modern myths, that perhaps in a country like Sciacca never had place, both its local and ancient myths, destined to disappear behind the image of the project. And in 1982 shortly before the construction site was closed, he wrote “I wanted to do a work that reflected this new song, but the best part is left in me obscurely only mental.”

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21 G. Samonà, I disegni per il portale del Teatro di Sciacca, Marina Montuori (edited by), Giuseppe e Alberto Samonà, Officina Editions, Rome 2000
23 In Ibidem
The design of Samonà’s Theatre, even if not upset in its final image, is altered again and again, from variations and changes that were more functional for enterprise’s profit that for aesthetic and employ’s quality: “The building has two rooms, one for 980 spectators (now increased to 1200 with the construction of a tunnel at a height of 9.60), the other for 230 spectators (now 290), linked together by the volume of equipment from the scene.” 22 As a result of geological surveys is stated to move the building so as to gain an entire floor; plus is added a gallery in the main hall, and that determines the inclusion of two external staircases. If in the original plan were provided reinforced concrete ribs in the Great Hall, either for plastic, either for acoustics reasons, and in the conference room were provided beams converging for a ceiling on a central pillar, the works led to changes, as Alberto Samonà says, “a considerable entity of modifications both in the structural design, both in the general project design.” 23 In 1982 Giuseppe Samonà, during the presentation of the exhibition his speech ends with these words: “.. to finish the theatre still miss two iron staircase, which are seen in some perspective; when they will be implemented, if they will, I think it will be an answer to the kind of problems I mentioned just now”24; it was in 1982, the same year the works on site are blocked for ever. In the same year Casabella N°480 publishes the project as complete and “ready to work”, the text begins: “At a short distance from the sea … arises the “Popular Theatre with double room”, today finally built after a design and construction story lasted for seven years, starting from 1975.”25 From the photos published in the article is clear as the Theatre has remained virtually the same since 1982, as frozen, beyond the signs of abandonment and neglect, to witness the years that have elapsed; the building appears exactly as shown today, as if that work, for a character inherent in its project, “does not contemplate the possibility of a process but only the fixity of his time.”26 The cause of the interruption of the yard are still not very clear, there is talk of finished funds, of corruption and waste, of a theatre with impossible costs even if complete, and enormous costs for possible removal. In 1986 Sicily Region allocates other funds for the completion of the theatre, which were invested in technological and electronic works, for a total of 5 billion spent between 1986 and 1990. The theatre remains incomplete and abandoned until 1992, when Alberto Samonà draw up a project to complete the works. Between 1993 and 1998 are carried out surveys and installations, technical updates, but in that period we can read about the involvement of the firm that had won the contract in the investigations Tangentopoli. From here, few print, and an attitude of “repression” and neglect the problem until 2002, when the magazine Antithesi and IN/ARCH Sicily organize in Sciacca a conference to raise awareness, inviting professors, critics and architects to reflect on the problem of the unfinished project in Sicily. Still the theatre expected to be finished with the project completion of 1992, who in 2005 obtained from the Sicily Region

24 G. Samonà, I disegni per il portale del Teatro di Sciacca, Marina Montuori (edited by), Giuseppe e Alberto Samonà, Officina Editions, Rome 2000
25 In Ibidem
26 G. Zordan, Il Teatro di Sciacca, Il Municipio di Cadoneghe e il Re di Svezia, Marina Montuori (a cura di), Giuseppe e Alberto Samonà, Officina Edizioni, Roma, 2000
€ 8,620,327.00 in funding; the work should have been finished more than a year ago, but still delays and postponements are announced, without adding explanations.

Genesis of a modern ruin. Ambitions of an oversized project.

After the closure of the construction site, the Theater becomes a political arm, that the Sicily Region and the town Council of Sciacca used to accuse mutually of errors and carelessness. The theater presents a complex matter, not only the urgency of finding funds for the completion, but mainly the capacity of a community like Sciacca to be able to handle a work like that.

Indeed the work is immediately oversized, a giant theater for a city where "still lacked the sewers, where the water came with a dropper, without services and facilities. That the theater could remained unfinished was easily predictable, since there were no minimum starting conditions to realize it. Today it makes no sense complete it according to the original plan ... such a theater can be managed in a city like Sciacca without causing holes in the budget?" 

The first public occasion on which the city has the opportunity to discuss the fate of the theater along with the directors and the architectural culture, is the conference organized by the magazine Antithesi and IN/ARCH Sicily in 2002 at the Cloister S. Francis, near the Theater. During the Congress "Conversations in Sicily. The value of modernity" many architects, critics and professors were invited to reflect on the practice building in Sicily, particularly with regard to the large number of unfinished projects.

At the conclusion of the conference, the architect Gianni Ranaulo decided to donate to the town of Sciacca a project of reuse of the theater, a transformation in the "Spa of the Mind", a multipurpose structure, which provides for the involvement of private funds. The theater was designed as a relaxing area, the structure of Samonà is maintained, but the three volumes become places of meeting rooms, bar, restaurant and outdoor cinema.

After that that IUAV send a press release with an appeal to save the theater, proposing to follow the plan for the completion of Alberto Samonà: "It would be a real suicide to let to die another masterpiece of Italian architecture", signed by Caesar Ajroldi, Guido Canella, Luciano Semerari, Francesco Tentori, Gianugo Polesello Franco Purini and the Rector Marino Folin.

But, beyond controversy and accusations, nothing was done, no Ranaulo project, no completion project, excluding the 2 billion lire spent between the 80s and 90s for paving, steps and cladding, and 3 billion used for the technological and electrical works (in addition to 20 billion lire spent on the project execution) for the Theater Samonà, since 1982, was not lifted a finger, until the announcement in 2005 by the Mayor Turturici, of obtaining funding from the Sicily Region of 8.5 million euro for the completion of the work.

Today in the offices of the Sciacca Council is a whole shelf filled by folders of drawings, documents, and estimates for the "Final design and execution of works for completion of the Sciacca's Popular Theater. Amount of € 8,620,327.00, Agrigento, 2005." 

The Report describes the process of adapting to existing legislation, the upgrade in economic terms, the additions in the draft prepared by Samonà in 1992, and the preliminary work of reorganization and digitization of information technology project documents. In the description of the project is written about a reclamations, done in 2000, which led to different solutions from the original plan in the distribution of accesses, with an additional gate on Via Agatocle, replacing the Samona 's stairway and the adjacent public space called "Theatre's Square". The report also describes the state of degradation of the structural components, but also of all those "accessories" works that have been subject to theft and vandalism. In the Verbal approval in October 2005 as well as a description of the project completion with structural consolidation works, services and lifts for the disabled, arrangement of outdoor areas, modification and integration of equipment, purchase of furniture and the need for mechanics Theater, is indicated the total amount of work, amounting to € 8,620,327.00.

A document of 2005, which is located among the documents of this completion project reports: "Final draft for updating and adapting the rules of the completion project of Sciacca's popular theater". Following the disclosure in October 2006, of the publication of the announcement for the completion works, we read in an act of 2006 "for the Final design and execution of works for completion of Sciacca's popular theater... is notified that all procedures have been initiated to carry out the tender process, and it is sent the invitation to tender with the necessary additions ".

This document is sent by UREGA, the Regional Office for the completion of tenders for public works, declaring therefore

27 A. Montalbano, Arrivano i soldi, si ma per fare cosa?, in L’Otto e Mezzo, 2002
completed all the necessary procedures for the completion of the race, and for the drafting and implementation of the project executive. The document continues: "Therefore Codest station contracting. ... Will ensure the publication of the extract of the notice to the G.U.C.E and the GURS to the Department, to the Regional Center for Public works, to journals and newspapers ... ", and there are two fixed dates: 
_18.01.07_ 10.00 for submission of tenders
_24.01.07_ For the completion of the race.
Following the notice is transmitted.
In October 2007 the UREGA invites the Ing. Pirrone of the Regional Office for Public works to appear for the delivery of proposals and related documents. Still in the 'Association in October 2007 the joint venture ATI, formed by COCI and ICEI from Palermo, won the contract integration, and end in December signed a contract for the work of design implementation.

On February 2008, the document object is "integrated contracts for the executive plan and execution of works to complete the popular theater. Delivery of areas." The text, signed by the Ing. Pirrone, announced that on February 12 will proceed to the delivery of the areas allotted to the firm ICEI and COCI. Meanwhile is set to start work in May. On the occasion of the deliver of the construction site, officials from the region stated that the work will shift to September, just after the 120 days required by the Company for the completion of the executive project, and that the work will last from 18 to 24 months, executed under the direction of Technical Inspectorate. In October 2008 the Mayor Turturici announced a further delay of works, then postponed to November, without adding another word and give explanations.

Even today the situation is the same, the keys are in the hands of the yard to the firm, but nobody comes, nobody will care, financing, project completion, the debate, all seems forgotten.

In a recent interview sent on RAUNO, the journalists F. Marimpietri asks reasons for two years of delay, and the Mayor Turturici responds explaining the slow procurement process because of the company must submit the project in the region, expects the project to be approved and then proceeds with the start of work. And both the mayor, both Luigi Gentile, commissioner for public works of Sicily Region, reiterated that now they will begin a few days, most within a month, although it is now clear that these 8 million are no longer enough, because the problems are in addition other 5 years of neglect and abandonment. So other 3 million to be added to funding that the Administration has to find; then a step back, to find other funds, which once found will light as many debates, and then hang, and accumulate more years to worsen the economic situation and policy of this modern ruin.

The case of the Popular Theatre in Sciacca

The people of Sciacca have several opinions about the Popular Theatre. Somebody likes remember it as the place where you went when you skip school: "we spent all the mornings hiding in the theatre, dancing and performing like actors in what was left of the stage, or we hid among trees and get some fresh air until the bell rang. "Other citizens have bitter tones, they associate the Theatre to the Hotel S. Calogero and the dismissed Hospital, all unfinished works, going to remain in these conditions "because in Sciacca nothing can change."

The Director of the Library seems "attached" to the ruins, he confesses that he never loved that giant-sea of concrete "until an architect friend shows him the sight of the Theatre from above, from the Villa's Gardens, and from there, seeing how "placated with the sea and the city", he began to appreciate it.

Many inhabitants of Sciacca would never see it again, and they propose the demolition, rather than the completion.

In 2002, during the Congress, raises the question of the 'offer' and management of the theatre, once completed. In an article published in the weekly local magazine "Controvoce" about the proposed demolition of the theatre, is written: "It will be impossible to handle it, since the maximum Sciacca could ask for its resources and its local intelligence would be a 300-seat theatre, with dressing rooms and the minimum necessary to do shows, certainly not a theatre in double room from 1200 spectators."

In Sciacca until 2002 there was not a structure to "coach" to the theatre, to sensitize and make aware the inhabitants of drama and theatrical performance. So is asked to argue about the urgency of a training process and dissemination of what was the offer of such an operation, then begin to carry out research of texts, composing operas drama-opera, teaching theatre, lab management, etc. It is also suggested to look for companies willing to invest in Sciacca's in culture and entertainment, calling other companies (the Teatro Stabile in Catania, Palermo, companies that manage the cultural events of Agrigento), to form a group of consultants and partners that can check the proceeding of the work.

The same Ranaulo's proposal moves several criticisms about uselessness of a multipurpose structure for a center like Sciacca, then an oversized work also in the proposed of the reuse oh this building. The editors of the magazine Antithesi, in the person of Paolo G. Ferrara, now proposed to revamp the theatre in more times, maybe just a room to
call in function, so to start with shows and initiatives that manage to bridge the financial statements and to "reassure" the most skeptical, and then progressively upgrading the entire structure.

But still the Theatre Samonà, in his image of a modern ruin, expected to be completed. In 2009 the newspaper *Repubblica* an article reported on a visit of the director Werner Herzog to the Theatre of Sciacca: 

"(...) The German filmmaker Werner Herzog is so: irresistibly attracted by disasters. That is designed to stage the works of Richard Wagner in that disgrace without history or identity that is the theatre of Sciacca, in Sicily, "built a few years ago, probably with money from the mafia," he says. "It is a ghost theatre that has never been opened: no one works, no one has opened, has no past nor present nor future. It rises like a giant concrete covered with weeds and surrounded by a wire mesh as a lager. Perfect for the Wagner Ring of the Nibelung, especially the concluding chapter of the saga, Twilight of the Gods, where the flames devour the Walhalla decreeing the end of all Olympus. I just wanted to make the staging of the cycle in Sciacca, and if the project had come off I blew up the building before the last act of "Twilight", after the public settle the public, orchestra and singers at a safe distance. When the dust curtain fell, interpreters would represent the final over the ruins. I had already contacted a team of demolition experts who would come specially from New Jersey. But the cement with which the theatre is made is so solid, heavy and abundant that it would take a monstrous amount of dynamite throw down, and destroyed half the city (...)"

So the theatre, which has failed for the purposes for which it was expected, becomes in its image of ruin, "a poetic object", able to inspire a work of art, ironically, a drama work. Neglect and abandonment give to the concrete façade, to the iron railings and to the red curved wall of the room a surreal tone, totally alienating compared to what lies around. It is the otherness of the theater than the rest, in this condition extra-tempore, load it with new meaning: the monumentality, wished by Samonà, is reached in this new image, a ruin of contemporary, mythic and surreal-looking, and with decadent charm that any use, any function of that work would have denied.

Never used, never working, never experienced as architecture, the theatre has never known a rhythm, a life cycle; the time dimension is unknown to the work, stuck in time of its implementation and then never recovered.

Among the reactions to this article on Facebook network has started a blog entitled "Helping Werner Herzog to buy dynamite," which opens a debate on the issue of the theatre, supporting the demolition.

There are enough reasons to believe that the yard will never open, that the structure will never be demolished, but the theatre will remain there, born and destined to perish as a modern ruin.

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**SCIACCA’S POPULAR THEATRE. GIUSEPPE SAMONA’**

**LOCATION:** Sciacca, close to the Thermal zone, in front of the former Convent of St. Francis (Cammordino zone)

**CLIENT:** Sicily Region

**ARCHITECT:** Giuseppe Samonà

**COLLABORATION:**

- **manager:** Engineer P. Misuraca
- **Structural Calculations:** Proff. Greco, Lo Cascio, Ramasco (University of Napoli), Di Falco
- **Propert developer:** COGEPAR, with technical advice ‘s Engineer A. Rossetti
- **Company for technological systems:** CLIMAC Agrigento

**CHRONOLOGY:**

- **1974** Early design studies in a plan of "Drafting of detailed plans for thermal area outside the town"

- **1976** Drafting of project

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28 L. Bentivoglio, in *La Repubblica*, January 11th 2008
1977 Assignment of contract work
1978 Start of construction
1982 Construction site is blocked, works are interrupted
1983 Last year during with G. Samonà works for this work
1984 Review of the project
1985 The Sicily Region allocates funds for the restoration and adaptation of technological operations
1988 Reopening of the construction site, rehabilitation of electrical and technological works
1992 Project completion by A. Samonà
2002 The magazine Antithesi and the IN / Arch. Sicily organize a conference
2002 The architect G. Ranaulo presents and gives the City Council Sciacca a proposed reuse of the structure: from theatre to multi-purpose structure
2005 The Mayor Turturici and the regional deputy Cimino announce the acquisition by the Sicilian Region for funding of 8.5 million for the completion of the Theatre
2006 Publication of the notice for contract work
2007 The joint venture Icei Coci Palermo nominated and awarded the contract, Iano Monaco is the professional who will carry out the completion
2007 the company signed the contract: 120 days to the project executive, 18 to 24-month the duration of the work
2008 Delivery of the construction site
Completion scheduled for September 2008
Completion delayed until November 2008

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