



## VITTORIO DE FEO

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### Preface. Vittorio De Feo, 1928-2002

*Francesco Dal Co*

Vittorio De Feo's career was complex and representative of post-war Italian architectural culture: that is the aim of the essay of Francesco Dal Co, who was a friend and critic to him.

Dal Co recognizes in the competition for the Chamber of Deputies in Rome the turning point of De Feo's poetics, from which some fundamental works are derived: the Technical Institute in Terni, the public libraries of Nocera Inferiore and Torre del Greco, the project for an Esso gas station. De Feo's projects are not merely a proof of his path, but stand out as the recovering of a cultural sedimentation. Lichtenstein, El Lissitzky, Kahn, Perret, Le Corbusier, Venturi and Stirling were the references for his personal way of composing. Dal Co's essay interlaces references between the literary and historical production of De Feo, his architectures, drawings, paintings, and engravings. With time, De Feo became an avid reader of Ernst Jünger, in whom he found a support for his affection to the sites of ancient cities.

## DEBATE

### Remembering a Friend. The Pleasure of Architecture

*Alberto Campo Baeza*

Alberto Campo Baeza begins Vittorio De Feo's memory quoting a Shakespeare's sonnet, since he asserts that the Italian architect devoted his life to the search for poetry in architecture.

He knew Vittorio De Feo's architecture through the Japanese magazine «a + u», in which in 1977 were published the Regional Administrative Center of Trieste and the project for a Monument to the Resistance. In addition to the beauty of the drawings, Alberto Campo Baeza is struck by the precision of those projects. Afterwards he reads «the pleasure of architecture» and knows other De Feo's works. In 1980, he invited him to hold two lectures on his works in Madrid. Numerous students, but also the main architects and teachers of the Faculty of Madrid, attended the event that offered an occasion for an intense debate on architecture.

### In Conversation with Vittorio De Feo

*Maria Argenti*

Using a past and never published conversation with Vittorio De Feo, the text analyses his widespread use of geometric references.

Is geometry a theoretical model capable of generating diverse forms? Or is it a concrete tool that serves to configure otherwise abstract ideas? The answers offered by De Feo help us to comprehend his architecture and how he conceived of it.

Geometry is an instrument and not a model. A means of composition (or recomposition, connection) and never an end. Furthermore, perspective (a view we do not experience in a two dimensional world) is what brings us closest to reality, helping us understand that – as Bernini told us – an object is not valid on its own, but in relationship to other objects near it.

«Unlike the Purists – De Feo affirms – I am not seeking a fundamental image that excludes all others. If anything, I seek to include as many figures as possible».

The works of architecture mentioned during the conversation include: the project for the school at Catlabrighe; the library in Nocera Inferiore (Salerno); the competition entry for the Town Hall in Legnago; the competition design for a typological Esso petrol station, a reference to El Lissitzky's «Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge»; the large square courtyard buildings in the Roman periphery of Valmelaina.

### Anna's House and Other Beautiful Stories

*Claudia Conforti*

Vittorio De Feo was a cultivated architect, interested in art, literature and curiosities. In 1989 he was given a book, *La petite maison*, by Jean-Francoise de Bastide (1724-1798). In the plot a petite mason becomes the means through which the Marquess of Tremincour wishes to seduce the socialite Melite. De Feo was impressed by Bastide's description of a sensuous architecture. Since the 70's he had been pursuing an idea of architecture against the currents of the time, as the title of its book *Il piacere dell'architettura* suggests. De Feo replicated the story of Bastide, setting it in a building of his own: *La casa (e Anna)*. The main characters are Anna and the architect Giovanni, who is tormented by the love for her. He decides to seduce her in his country house. De Feo, was fluently wandering through drawings and writings. His perspective of the Esso station is a symbol of the marriage between architecture and Pop Art. He was even a brilliant writer of short stories. In memoria becomes a historical research on a real roman building, which hosts on the top a right hand pointing at the sky. De Feo collects a series of clues, identifying the committee in the circle of the «giordanisti», followers of Giordano Bruno's theory. The short story is full of characters taken from existing documents and historical figures, that were simply not matching with the time. The mysterious façade is indeed a monument to honor, just one hundred years later, the sacrifice of Giordano Bruno, whose philosophy dealt with «such a great truth that cannot be represented but through imagination, depicted with new symbols».

## Teaching on Stone Books

*Benno Albrecht*

Each project, for Vittorio De Feo, must be different from the previous one, setting a way to conduct his work absolutely suicidal, from media point of view. This is the precisely characteristic hallmark of every great architect and architecture connoisseur. Today we well know that it is worth, in order to emerge in architecture superficial world. You need to remain stationary, to do always the same thing in an obsessive way, so sooner or later someone will notice the manic sense of an architect. De Feo's «pleasure of architecture» was just the opposite of fixity obsessive personal style research. Pleasure is an ever-changing forms, different ways of displaying the architecture and design attitudes, which sealed his, also of his students, complete proud self-exclusion from any easy media disclosure of the architecture vanity fare.

## A Master of Architecture of Our Times

*Renata Codello*

The lesson of many years by De Feo has tempered the theoretical and operational tools, allowing me to deal with delicate and challenging projects, even on a large scale, in all of Venice. Armed with this training, the last decade I interjected fruitfully with prestigious Italian and foreign architects, called to give their contribution to the city's renewal. The expansion of the Gallerie dell'Accademia saw action Tobia Scarpa; the contemporary art center of Punta della Dogana is due to Tadao Ando; the construction of the Museum of Emilio Vedova is Renzo Piano; the Constitution Bridge by Santiago Calatrava and the auditorium of the Querini Stampalia Foundation Mario Botta. These and other new contributions Venetian architecture were published in «Casabella» and volume *Contemporary Architecture in Venice*. The realization of many contemporary architectures, completed relatively quickly, a one small space, what is the historical city, took articulated cultural strategies based on deep knowledge of the city, its real vulnerability, its mutability; a respectful and free gaze away from prejudices, to whom he educated me Vittorio De Feo, a great teacher, a great architect, a formidable witness of our time

## The Pioneering Study of Vittorio De Feo on Soviet Constructivism

*Anna Vyazemtseva*

The book *URSS. Architettura 1917-1936* by the Italian architect Vittorio De Feo was published in 1963 in Rome and became among first essays on soviet avant-garde architecture. It appeared in the same time when the avant-garde architecture of 1920s was discovered in USSR, after years of oblivion during the traditionalism of Stalin's dictatorship. De Feo based mostly his narrative on publications in Italian and foreign books and magazines of 1920s-1930s and on post-war analytical texts. Beginning with the artistic trends of the early XX century and pre-revolutionary avant-garde movements in visual arts, he analyzes the most important mo-

ments of the history of post-revolutionary architecture, main trends, schools, polemics, and competitions. He concludes with the establishment of social realism as a unique style permitted by the State and with the mention of the return of the interest to the post-revolutionary avant-garde in the Soviet Union.

The article investigates the sources of the research conducted by De Feo, the context when it appeared, and tries to identify the impact of the soviet avant-garde on the projects and buildings of the architect.

## Vittorio De Feo, Robert Venturi and the «Tragic Perspective» of Irony

*Lorenzo Ciccarelli*

In 1971 the architect Vittorio De Feo (1928-2002) wrote the seminal essay *Robert Venturi e il mito dell'ironia* that was the first Italian positive appropriation of the book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966) by Robert Venturi (b. 1925). The essay by De Feo witnesses the central role that the buildings and writings of Venturi played in the young Italian architect. After examining the opinions and the critics prompted by De Feo – in particular about the concept of irony and its application in architecture – the paper analyses the some buildings of the Italian architect – the Istituto Tecnico per Geometri in Terni (1968-1969); the Centro Culturale e Biblioteca in Nocera Inferiore (1969-1970); the Stazione tipo Esso (1970) among the others – deepening the elements that De Feo extracted from his analysis of Venturi.

## RESEARCHES

### The Church of Saint Thomas Aquinas and Other Projects

*Maria Grazia D'Amelio*

Vittorio De Feo spent the last weeks of his life developing a project for the Rectorate of the University of Rome «Tor Vergata». He had always preferred being a soloist, playing pieces to be performed with neither choir nor orchestra, and this occasion was no exception. In fact, De Feo conceived both the planning and its concrete realization as separate actions, the former to be carried out solo, the latter in cooperation with few trusted collaborators. It was a practice which he had been calibrating over time, by imprinting his works with complete autography.

In the last decades of his professional activity, De Feo's project attitude had used and merged primary geometric shapes, thus producing new spatial layouts. Sometimes they were juxtapositions; at other times, real collisions. In any event, the renunciation of each element's volumetric autonomy created surprising perspectives, unexpected geometric rotations, and syncopated height variations. The resulting spatiality is convincing both in terms of external dynamic figuration and of the concatenation of internal spaces. Ultimately, the content and the container match each other, beyond any possible «ideological naturalism».

This essay investigates De Feo's last works, where such sophisticated experimentations are more evident and fully settled.

## Projects for Abruzzo

*Vincenzo Di Florio*

The works of Vittorio De Feo for the Abruzzo that I introduce are benefitted in wide measure of original documentation, sometimes unpublished and nearly unknown, of which the architect many years ago elected me like «custodian» and that translated in digital format, I preserve «faithfully» in the file archive of my study. The design documentation has been orderly using notes and quotations drawn by the reports enclosed to the single projects filtered by the look of a young student, which I was then, that had participated personally to the events and the design vicissitudes, sharing the positive results of it and also the failures.

The projects for the adriatic Abruzzo, all developed in the second half of the nineties, represent a set of design occasions that explain further the meaning that De Feo attributed to the architectural intervention on the historical pre-existence: unique and unrepeatable architectures, declined in the historical stratifications of the place and correlated to the context.

The solutions adopted in the projects for the adriatic Abruzzo, like of others more important experiences, are inspired and attributable to a common methodological line. They surprise for the unusual customisable design and for their unique originality, so as to constitute extraordinary «lessons of architecture». The study of these projects helps to recreate a cultural and intellectual course that has characterized the composition and linguistic choices of Vittorio De Feo.

## Vittorio De Feo Invent. On «Stunning Atmospheres» for Perugia

*Paolo Belardi*

This paper offers a historical overview that frames the architecture of Vittorio De Feo in Perugia within the emotional framework of the teacher/student relationship. In this way, building on the author's degree thesis, which focused on the redevelopment of Fontivegge's former industrial area, and passing from the participation in the competition to reconstruct the Piermarini theatre in Foligno, the author highlights the cultural motivations (as well as the psychological concatenations) that inextricably bind the manipulated perspectives of the public housing at Ponte della Pietra (built in a peripheral area straddling between the town and countryside) with the virtuous geometric design of the church of Santa Maria Assunta (reconstructed in a serviced area at the foot of Villa Pitignano hamlet) and to the iconic evocations of the Marian oratory located in the perceived central hub of the Ex Conservificio Drommi in San Martino in Campo: where there is an epigram, composed by the aforementioned De Feo, that inspired the title of this paper.

## The Technical Institute for Surveyors in Terni

*Sergio Rotondi*

The Terni Technical Institute for Surveyors is part of a school designed by Vittorio De Feo and Errico Ascione, built between 1969 and 1982, which also includes the Commercial Technical Institute.

The plexus is located in an area of the vast park with public facilities south of the Historic Center, called Parco delle Grazie.

In the city's city plan the area was destined to school building; Terni Province, who was the owner of the area, in 1968 decided to build the two schools, taking advantage of the state funding. The Institute for Surveyors, the first built, was immediately considered as a turning point in the architectural poetry of De Feo: the development of a problem, already faced the previous year with the project of the Lyceum «Plauto» in Spinaceto.

The construction of the school was to proceed in two phases; in January 1969 it was presented the executive project for the first phase and in October 1970 for the second one. Between the two phases many changes have been made, not all reported in the official drawings used by De Feo for publications, as can be seen by comparing the drawings now stored, with the entire Archive of De Feo, at MAXXI in Rome.

The Institute for Surveyors consisted in a building with two parallel structures in the centre of which there was a main distribution gallery on the ground floor and a long terrace on the first floor. The outer faces of the two bodies were very different.

A block sequence, containing the various collective activities, were along the north and east faces. On the south side, however, a regular and continuous plot was the appearance of classrooms and other smaller spaces. The difference between the two facades was accentuated by the roofs of the blocks that, both north and east, consisted of an inclined plane, developed almost to the ground. Some skylights, circular, rectangular and bezel, almost all closed with glass-cement, also conferred a particular concreteness on the tilted surfaces. Among the changes made to the first project, the introduction of additional skylights on the top of the sloping roofs of the three special classes blocks was the most incident in the architecture of the school. Over time, however, several problems occurred in these north roofs, in particular abundant water infiltration through the added skylights. These were modified and the voids completely closed by panels that restored the continuity of the inclined surface. So the architecture of these blocks became as originally it was in the project of De Feo.

## Vittorio De Feo: An Archive of History and Design

*Margherita Guccione*

Almost fifteen years ago, in 2003, and just a year after Vittorio De Feo's death, his family decided to donate his entire professional archive to the MAXXI, National Museum of XXI century Arts. Since then, the MAXXI Architettura Archive Centre has preserved the content of the De Feo Archive, made it accessible for consultation and study and enhanced it through exhibitions and other

cultural projects. For De Feo «being an architect means perpetuating, in whatever way, a phenomenon that is verifiable only in relation to its own tradition, and which cannot be separated from its history»: a crystal clear synthesis of the true sense of his work, which was always balanced between actual designing and intellectual curiosity, between history and project. Vittorio De Feo's professional archive is a faithful mirror of this twofold approach, very thorough in his scientific delving into the history of architecture, with its many and not necessarily consequential layers, and at the same time simply right and fitting in its operative outcome, i.e. in the project. But perhaps in his tireless intellectual and creative wandering, we may find a steady point: Rome, where the architect found his physical and sentimental place of election, the topos of his being an architect, once again in the double role of scholar and designer, as well as that of teacher, drawing and writing of Rome and for Rome.

### The De Feo Exhibition in the Andersen Museum in Rome

*Erilde Terenzoni*

The article rethinks the 2005 exhibition Vittorio De Feo *architetture 1990-2000* hosted by the Andersen Museum in Rome. At that time the Museum housed temporarily the MAXXI Architettura's headquarter and was also a gathering place for architect and engineer's archives of XX century.

The exhibition showed projects, drawings, photographs, models and significant volumes, giving the chance to celebrate the donation to the State accomplished by the heirs on De Feo's will and made up of the archive and part of the architect's library.

As result of a fruitful collaboration between researchers, friends, relatives and museum officials united in the will to remember the architect, the master, the friend, the father, the exhibition aimed to focus the aptitude towards a tireless, meticulous, deep and rigorous research, which always led the architect both in designing ex

novo and in restoring. In fact, his restorations, cultured and accurate, deeply innovated places and buildings without distorting their inner nature, on the contrary bringing out their secret history.

As regards the recent projects, nine of the most representative were chosen to outline De Feo's poetics, among which: the renovation of the Italian Embassy in Berlin, the one of the new location of the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice, the restoration project of Santa Marta in Venice, which was rewarded in 2006 with the European Heritage Award for the Conservation category.

A cultural and moral legacy increasing values and new meanings through time.

### «The Game of the City»: Architectural Memories from the Archive

*Nicoletta Marconi*

The considerable historical interest of the De Feo's Archive was proclaimed by Archival Superintendence of Lazio in 1996. De Feo's Archive was put in order by me in 1999 and then by Ana Laznibat until 2000. After the architect's death (2002) his archive was entrusted to the MAXXI Architectural Archives Centre. Works and projects of De Feo's career have been the subject of accurate analysis and focused reflections. In this paper, I intend to share a passionate disciplinary and human memory. It has been brought back to life by the cataloguing work and by the free flow of memories. The oldest documents are dated by at the end of 40th; they show unripe academic exercises, the first competitions and built works. The selection and the space given to each project derived from De Feo's sympathetic degree for each project. Some of them have been described in detail by him; others, and those unrealized were just mentioned. The sequence of images and project outlines the main themes of a tireless design exercise, based on dialogue between invention and creation, building and history, literature and art. Here, many private residences and the project of the Lyceum Plauto in Spinaceto are reminded.