Reviews

Enrico Cicalò, Valeria Menchetelli,
Michele Valentino (a cura di)
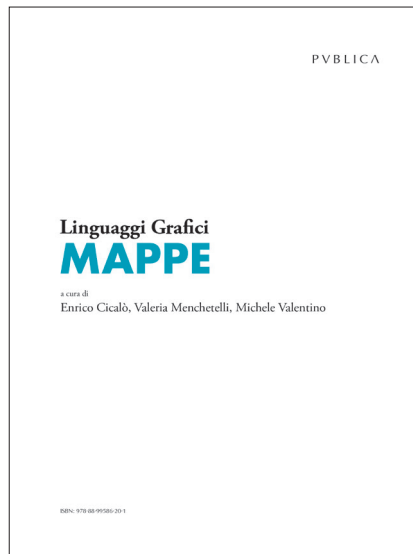
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The collective volume *Mappe* (*Maps*), the second in the *Linguaggi Grafici* (Graphic Languages) series, is proposed as a space for reflection on maps, considered among the most widely used graphic devices with transversal and different purposes, with the intention of exploring their various typologies, functions, uses, modes of expression and symbolic languages while investigating their potentialities, roles, areas of application and research perspectives.

Mapping is, in fact, the act of representing complex realities, phenomena or systems through a drawing based on a code aimed at graphically mediating the correspondence between reality – whether perceived, planned, measured or imagined– and its representation.

In its wealth and variety of facets, the topic dealt with is well-framed in the opening essay by the three editors, who already in the title *I linguaggi grafici delle mappe: ragioni, funzioni, evoluzioni e definizioni* (The graphic languages of maps: reasons, functions, evolutions and definitions) well express the meaning and contents of the volume: "a collection of viewpoints on the world of maps, a diversified mosaic of approaches that document their historical-cognitive value, that analyzes them as graphic artifacts, employs them as a method of inquiry into the past and the present, or interprets them as privileged views oriented toward future planning. A mosaic that in turn constitutes a mapping of the many uses and roles that maps play in different fields of knowledge" [p. 17].

The volume brings together 61 essays, many of them having multiple authors and coming from various disciplinary fields, even those not directly related to the area of Drawing; subdivided into 11 sections, they touch on themes ranging from the reading of the map as a cartographic image intended for the study of the territory and its transformations, but also as a medium for the interpretation of complex phenomena, implemented through the analysis and visualization of data, up to the map in the sense of artistic experimentation, with even metaphorical meaning, thanks to interdisciplinary research supported by recourse to the mapping of scenarios and to their representation.

Fundamental to understanding this topic is the map's ability to recognize its own constitutive reasons in the act of transcription, that is, the encoding of information in a language other than the source language, and specifically in a graphic language, in perfect adherence with the definition of representation; emerging forcefully in these reflections is the theme, always very topical, of the relationship between signifier and signified, in the construction of a graphic code based on the selection of signs, as the map never establishes a relationship of exact correspondence with reality, but of similarity under a specific interpretative key, influenced by the author's culture and the context (geographical, chronological etc.) in which and for which it is developed.

The map, as a visual device that makes use of different graphic languages, can, moreover, assume a multiplicity of functions. Among these, there is certainly the need to orient oneself in a place: medieval pictorial allegories, portolan charts, road maps, illustrated atlases from the Renaissance, cartographies and urban representations of various typologies and representative categories, are only a few of the solutions produced for this purpose; in the volume, these are dealt with in several of the categories corresponding to the thematic sections that the contributions are divided into.

Given the complex reality of the world's manifestations, a further task entrusted to maps is surely that of analysis; the use of this device has determined its application in various fields of knowledge ranging from medicine to graphic representation, from sociology to geography.

Of great interest and consistency is the study of the evolutions that maps have undergone over time, and numerous references can be found in this thematic vein: suffice it to think of, for example, the *itineraria picta* (illustrated or depicted road maps), the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (Peutinger Table), and the *mappa mundi* (world maps).

The evolutions of cartography have outlined a path that seems to be articulated precisely along the two previously identified parallel tracks: on the one hand, the map as an image of the world, that is, as a transcription, as objective as possible, of reality; on the other hand, the map as a symbolic representation of the world, that is, as a synthesis of the complex of values which constitute it through the map's own representative autonomy.

While traditional cartography pertains to the first context by remaining predominantly anchored in the geographical discipline, relating to the second

context are the results of all those forms of mapping that go beyond geography to offer themselves as points of observation and interpretation of interdisciplinary studies, assuming a decisive role in the evolution of critical thought, starting from artistic discourse.

The numerous articles that structure and enrich the volume, organized, as mentioned earlier, in thematic sections (categories), are positioned in the table of contents so that they can be read (in the editors' intentions) not only as individual presentations of research, but also in a linear reading that runs through and relates them in a consequential manner; a reading favored precisely by the order of the articles, which makes this edited volume not a mere collection of texts, but a collective volume with a monographic slant, potentially readable from beginning to end as a unitary work.

The categories, being precisely such, are purely an expedient used to give an order; this expedient does not intend to confine the contributions within rigid containers, but to help in the structuring of precisely that unified reading path, starting with *Sguardi* (Views), a category that includes studies on mapping and data visualizations and the relationship between tradition and innovation, and then moving on to *Geometrie* (Geometries), a category that takes up, by analyzing them, several cornerstones: de' Barbari's *View of Venice*, ideal cities, the city of God, and celestial maps. All of these maps being suspended between opposite and complementary dimensions: the scientific and the artistic.

And then the category of *Rotte* (Routes), which analyzes and studies portolans and nautical charts; that of *Confini* (Borders), which reflects on *cabrei* (cadasters), private land registries, notarial maps; that of *Strati* (Layers), which

analyzes the link between knowledge and representation that emerges in another cornerstone map such as Giambattista Nolli's *Map of Rome* and, more generally, in thematic maps.

Then again, the mapping of the *Reti* (Networks), in which we find as precursors the *Itineraria picta* and the *Peutinger Table*, but also maps for subways and studies on the structuring of new codes for infrastructure maps.

The category devoted to *Significati* (Meanings) is highly articulated. It explores maps that convey the thinking of artists, sculptors, illustrators, designers and graphic designers, thanks to maps which become exploratory tools that enrich the image of the world with further meanings, up to real graphic abstractions; almost an evolution of this section is *Informazioni* (Information), aimed at exploring the data flow produced by the network and its need for adequate forms of representation to support the critical understanding of the complex reality of the world. In this category emerges the peculiar need for a solid graphic-visual literacy specific to infographic maps, supplementing narrative and graphic devices capable of increasing awareness of the content to be conveyed, also through conceptual and mental maps such as visual organizers useful for representing knowledge.

Decidedly peculiar is the category *Corpi* (Bodies), in which, through anthropomorphic geographic maps, the relationship between body and territory is explored as a figurative metaphor, going so far as to investigate the extraordinary potential of medical imaging as a precise mapping of the different parts of the body in its innermost, hidden parts.

Finally, the categories *Tecnologie* (Technologies) and *Media* include contri-

butions that start from innovations in the technological sphere and from the stimuli to reinterpret, through experimental forms of mapping, the different aspects of reality, of both material and immaterial territories (implementable 2D and 3D information archives; multidimensional, multi-temporal 3D GIS etc.) which, by delineating digital maps as multilayer tools of analysis and understanding, choose GIS as a tool of synoptic overlay of architectural, urban and territorial elements, as well as landscape conditions, also through reactive and interactive mapping, up to investigating the use of maps in videogames and the relationship of maps with different communication and narrative media.

At the end of the long review of the meanings and functions that maps can assume, a new definition of the concept of map itself comes to the fore, which places, between representation and documentation typical of cartography, the extended and transdisciplinary interpretation referring to all those contexts of application in which the map becomes a tool for managing the complexity of a phenomenon, whether historical, anthropological or cultural.

Obviously, a definition of the map cannot be given in the absence of graphic language, which must be selected in an appropriate manner, coherently with the specific purpose for which the map itself is made.

For this reason, the editors propose a definition that makes it possible to classify the map by distinguishing it from other forms of representation: "the map is a form of visual communication resulting from the reading of complex subjects and their subsequent disposition capable of producing an overall view, in which graphic languages are used according to a specific interpretative key" [p. 32].

Chiara Vernizzi

Author

Chiara Vernizzi, Department of Engineering and Architecture, University of Parma, chiara.vernizzi@unipr.it