Reviews

Enrico Cicalò, Valeria Menchetelli,
Michele Valentino (a cura di)
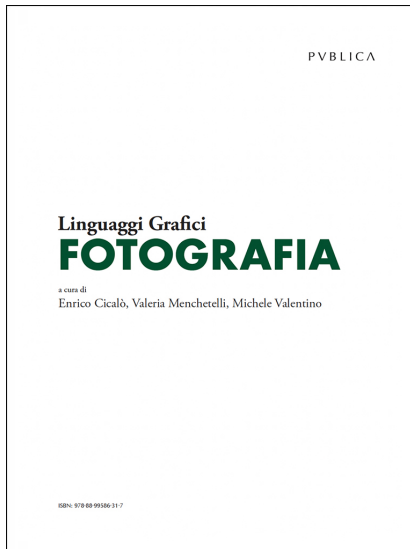
Linguaggi grafici. Fotografia
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Linguaggi Grafici. Fotografia, edited by Enrico Cicalò, Valeria Menchetelli and Michele Valentino, is the fourth volume of the annals, published by Publica and made available in open access, inaugurated in 2020 with *Linguaggi Grafici. Illustrazione*, which was followed by *Linguaggi Grafici. Mappe* and *Linguaggi Grafici. Decorazione* [1].

As scholars know who (like the writer) eagerly await the proposal of the new theme every year and who have participated in past editions, the apparent generic nature of the suggested topic should not be misleading. The themes proposed for the *Linguaggi Grafici* series –dryly identified by a single word, a lemma that could identify a generic topic– upon further examination always reveal themselves to be subtly problematic and seductive. The curators who, despite some constant presence, alternate at the helm of these editorial occasions, manage to involve the scientific community on topics that enable the authors to find a resonance between their own interests and the proposed theme, allowing them to establish autonomy the boundaries of one's reflection, defining a space for action within the broader framework of reference. In this way, personal interests, embryonic research, unexplored curiosities can find a specific form and place within the broader theme. Furthermore, the *Linguaggi Grafici* calls, concise and stimulating, do not foresee the organization into different focuses. The distinction into sub-themes which ends up forming the framework on which to organize the contributions collected in each volume seems to be rather the effect of a reflection carried out 'downstream', sensitive to the emergence of the different lines of research that emerge from the authors' proposals. The *Linguaggi Grafici* volumes are therefore the result of an authentic dialogue between curators and authors, of an open dialectic that informs the final structure which– even beyond the value of the individual essays –represents the most interesting outcome of the entire operation, capable of showing how the discipline of Drawing fits within the chosen theme and –vice versa– how this animates the lines of research in our field.

Not many arguments are needed to agree with the curators on the urgency of addressing the theme of photography. Just remember that there is currently a dizzying number of photographic shooting tools active in the world, over seven billion, almost entirely made up of smartphones, therefore devices that physically accompany every observer for the entire course of their day. Photography, as mentioned in the call, concerns one of the "most transversal and widespread cultural tools of investigation, representation and reading of reality" which has "revolutionized all areas of thought and artistic expression and creative", supported by the "democratic ease of access and use", allowing "experimentation with innovative graphic

languages and new lines of investigation" [pp. 10, 11]. Photography "has written a history which places us, today, faced with the impossibility of giving up its use, but which at the same time requires a reflection on the role that photographic images play in daily life". The volume, therefore, aims to present itself "as a space for reflection on photography as a form of graphic representation and visual communication, with the aim of exploring its cultural role, application potential, reasons, functions, uses, methods operational and expressive languages".

The substantial volume of 940 pages opens with two introductory essays from the editors. In the first [pp. 12-27], *I linguaggi grafici della fotografia: ragioni, funzioni, evoluzioni e definizioni* –using a structure already tested in the other volumes– a general exploration of the theme is proposed. In the part on *Reasons*, the current panorama of the distribution of the photographic tool is described, showing how it has practically spread pervasively in every field. The functions are examined below, giving an account of how the application areas are very different, "from the scientific one to the more purely personal one, from the documentary one to the artistic one" [p. 16]. In the paragraph on *Evolutions*, we take into consideration– in an essential but substantial way –the history of the instrument, the changes that have continuously crossed it even in its contacts with the world of figurative research. In the last part, *Definitions*, some 'verbal statements' on photography are examined and a specific definition is proposed that places it within the territory of graphic languages: "Photography is a form of visual communication in which the image is drawn with light through the combined effect of technical factors and an authorial intent,

which therefore provides a reproduction of reality mediated by a subjective interpretation" [p. 25].

The second essay, *I linguaggi grafici della fotografia: temi, sguardi ed esperienze* [pp. 28-43], also signed by the three editors, gives an account of the categories with which the various contributions were organized and offers a precious critical synthesis. There are six sections into which the interventions have been divided. In the first, *Languages*, contributions are collected that concern relationships with other forms of expression and those that address constitutive themes. In the *Views* section there are reflections that show how photography is not an objective form but how it depends on specific ways of viewing and the choice of precise points of view. The *Techniques* section collects contributions that deal with various application technologies as well as different methodological methods. The *Experimentation* part is dedicated, also from a historical perspective, to exploratory aspects, such as photo editing, photomontages, and the use of AI. Within the *Narrations* section, alternative forms of storytelling are addressed, such as haptic communication, the relationship with time, and the themes of photojournalism. In the last part, photography is addressed as a form of *Documentation*, therefore as a vehicle for accessing specific knowledge, as also happens in the case of historical photos.

The essays collected in the volume are 36 and involved 53 authors to which are added the three editors with their two papers. Upon closer inspection, this is a significant percentage of the scholars active in our disciplinary field, which makes this work fully representative of the interests and methods of approach that run through it. Although in this short note it is obviously not possible

to indicate, even briefly, the topics addressed in the individual contributions, it is important to point out how they cover a wide range of themes and how the multi-faceted investigation methodologies used within our area are able to outline an authentic inclusiveness, a consolidated breadth of views and a fertile disciplinary complexity.

A substantial part of the sixteenth volume of the *Einaudi Encyclopedia* [2], dedicated to indices, edited by Renato Betti in 1984, is occupied by information schemes in which the individual lemmas –systematically treated in the previous volumes– are placed in visual relation to each other through graphs, matrices, Venn diagrams, thus exploring the relationships between themes and topics. This type of approach, which by Betti's explicit admission is directly inspired by the idea of the labyrinth [Betti 1984, p. XII], in which the connections between the parts manifest themselves regardless of a hierarchical structure, shows analogies with the outcomes of the experiences of *Linguaggi Grafici*, in which investigations, definitions and connections between themes within a general topic intertwine, weaving connections between the areas of investigation explored in the different volumes. Now that the collection of essays for the next release is underway, the *Linguaggi Grafici* project shows that it has an overall horizon that goes beyond that of each individual volume and which will be able to support the construction of a conceptual map of the relationships between the topics that substantiate the graphic languages, towards which reflections, definitions and themes can converge, exploring other lemmas and other spaces, crucial for framing and specifying our range of action.

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Notes

[1] Cicalò, E., Trizio, I. (a cura di). (2020). *Linguaggi Grafici. Illustrazione*. Alghero: Publica; Cicalò, E., Menchetelli, V., Valentino M. (a cura di). (2021). *Linguaggi Grafici. Mappe*. Alghero: Publica; Cicalò, E., Savini, F., Trizio, I. (a cura di). (2022). *Linguaggi Grafici. Decorazione*. Alghero: Publica.

[2] Betti, R. (a cura di). (1984). In *Enciclopedia*, Vol. XVI. Torino: Einaudi.

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