Reviews

Adriana Rossi

Sant Cugat del Vallès. Verso l'accessibilità dei dati
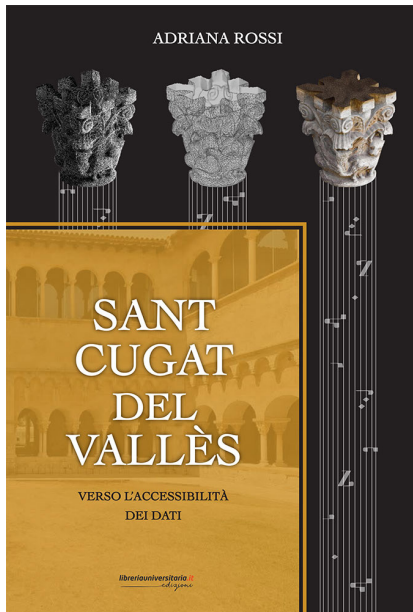
As often happens at the end of a deeply engaging effort, professor Adriana Rossi, has developed a keen sensitivity towards her subject of study which was also the aim of a previous research [Rossi 2014]. The acquired experience has thus become both a stimulus and a tool for further exploration. The book is the result of a new work, and it has been completely rewritten according to the author's own words. The text, published in December 2023 with the invaluable collaboration of Pedro Cabezos, publicly presents digital representations developed during a joint research project conducted in 2016 at the University of Campania [1].

The advancement of computer sciences has guided both theoretically and practically the optimization of ongoing objectives, gradually transforming the original goal. The focus of this latest volume is on the third chapter, *Rl-trovare*, where the authors explore the possibility of combining graphic and visual sciences to dissolve traditional dichotomies in the realm of representation: material/immaterial, analogue/digital, real/virtual.

The first chapter provides a key to interpreting the architecture of the Benedictine monastery, located at the Abbey of Sant Cugat del Vallès (Barcelona, Spain), founded in the 11th and 12th centuries. The study centers on the square of the monastic cloister and the analysis of its construction elements. Building on the studies of the esteemed ethnologist and musicologist Marius Schneider [Schneider 1946; 1955], the author clearly and convincingly outlines and argues the connections among the iconic fragments sculpted on the cloister's capitals. There are 72 paired columns, with various reference classes marking the rhythm of monastic life and prayer. The text reveals an integration of different levels of spatial interpretation: technical, aesthetic, philosophical, and religious, making it challenging to read. Additionally, the lexical and stylistic choices are very meticulous and can be fully appreciated only upon a second reading, along with the scholarly citations and bibliographic references. Sometimes, these references may lead the reader to explore interesting but secondary paths to the main purpose of the work.

The original methods used to transcribe the highly concise and exclusively literary text by Schneider into images are noteworthy. Drawings, critical syntheses, video clips, and information systems recall the Eastern roots of a culture foundational to European identity, emerging along pilgrimage routes. The well-documented interpretation, supported by scholarly citations, avoids the risk of superficial judgments. This is not a narrative, or a fascinating array of visual, emotional, and intellectual associations conjured by the artifact's magic, but a culture –Sanskrit– considered the primary root and source of the West. The approach is not rigid but flexibly

oriented. The icons are not transcriptions of symbols, as common thought might suggest, but living signs within the sculpted actions, fragments of life that describe actions and reactions, capturing the ethical and aesthetic beauty of natural knowledge in a place of prayer, common in essence to all humanity. These layers of knowledge are managed by a single mind that reads and interprets based on personal experience. Consciousness is mutable, associating, intersecting, connecting, and dissociating relationships between concepts, prompting and facilitating thought. It is in this way that 'digital colors' emerge; the authors foresee the possibility of anticipating the logic that modern sensor systems promote an integration between analogue and digital.

The merit of the text goes beyond the pragmatism it proposes. The actions that were once at the forefront of experimental innovation now appear outdated. However, the commendable joint effort by Rossi and Cabezos to sensitize the reader to a more flexible and inclusive interaction remains noteworthy. Binary logic is no longer adequate for the nature of emerging applications. The value of computer science lies not so much in some computer graphics algorithm or the invention of some gadget, whether laser-based or photographic, but in a true cultural leap. This leap is based on the ability to intertwine, along the way, information that is not inherently intelligent but enlightening for the synesthetic experience, a logical consequence of processing many specific or elaborate details. Starting from disparate and battered fragments, even the slightest and most incidental interrelations with the tackled theme allow one to perceive their undeniable relevance to its specific domain, a characteristic otherwise unsuspected. In this way, one can discern in well-worn iconic fragments the precise identity of fundamental concepts, transforming them from enigmatic to indicators of advanced visualization.

Jorge Llopis-Verdú

Note

[1] The book is available in open access at the link: <https://edizioni.libreriauniversitaria.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/9788833596730_-Rossi_San-Cugat_ebook.pdf> (accessed 30 May 2024).

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