

The background of the cover is composed of large, expressive brushstrokes in various shades of teal and blue. A dark, textured square is positioned in the center-right area, overlapping the brushstrokes.

COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

DEL ORIGEN DE LA MODERNIDAD A LA ERA DIGITAL

eug

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TOMO I

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del origen de la modernidad
a la era digital

TOMO I

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(EDS.)

COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

del origen de la modernidad a la era digital

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Exploring Landscapes through Visual Narratives: Between Cartography and Figurativeness

Explorando paisajes a través de narrativas visuales: entre la cartografía y la figuración

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Abstract

Este artículo examina las formas de representación visual del paisaje, centrándose en su significancia operativa para comprender y diseñar paisajes antropogeográficos. Siguiendo las principales evoluciones históricas que llevaron a las convenciones de representación cartográfica en contextos italianos y europeos, se subrayan las limitaciones que la experimentación contemporánea busca superar. El estudio se adentra en experimentos actuales de representación del paisaje con el objetivo de ampliar el alcance interpretativo. Presenta diversas experiencias y medios visuales que complementan los conocimientos cartográficos tradicionales con capas culturales, experienciales, colectivas e individuales. Partiendo de gráficos, pinturas, fotografías y fuentes históricas, el artículo destaca innovaciones tecnológicas que han descubierto nuevas capas de comprensión del paisaje (“hypeobjects”) e introducido visualidades innovadoras, multi-escalares y multidimensionales.

This paper examines forms of visual representation, focusing on its operational significance in understanding and designing anthropogeographic landscapes. Tracing key historical evolutions leading to cartographic representation conventions in Italian and European contexts, it underscores limitations that contemporary experimentation seeks to overcome. The study delves into modern experiments in landscape representation aimed at expanding interpretative breadth. It showcases varied experiences and visual media that complement traditional cartographic insights with cultural, experiential, collective, and individual layers. Starting from graphics, paintings, photographs, and historical sources, the paper highlights technological innovations that have unlocked new layers of landscape comprehension (“hypeobjects”) and introduced innovative multi-scale, multi-dimensional visualities.

Keywords

Paisaje, narrativas visuales, cartografía, figuración, hiperobjetos

Landscape, visual narratives, cartography, figurativeness, hyperobjects

Introduction – Representing the Landscape

Inextricably linked to images, as well as the architectures that shape them, landscapes manifest, evolve, and reverberate in the collective imagination through visual images. When scrutinised critically as an operative and interdisciplinary approach, visual media permeates the stages of comprehension and acts as a channel towards fostering shared knowledge and imaginary of the landscape.

This paper seeks to probe visual media as tools for understanding and designing landscapes from an operational standpoint, focusing on the transformation of anthropogeographic landscapes. Representations aim to

strutturare in senso significativo l'insieme dello spazio fisico che l'uomo abita sulla terra, non solo lavorando ed operando in modo estetico nella costruzione del manufatto, ma conferendo senso estetico anche ad insiemi la cui presenza al mondo è, per così dire, precedente alla nostra azione diretta.¹

Assuming the anthropogeographic landscape can be conceived as an aesthetic object, visual media are utilized operationally by landscape architecture in the process that attributes aesthetic value to environmental traces. Images thus become tools aimed at the goal of operating translations, through which our perception of the landscape turns into aesthetic perception. In this way we become aware of the landscape's figurative quality: by extracting parts from the context and depicting them via various forms and tools, visual media enable us to recognize it as a figure.

The graphic investigation process identifies an initial indeterminate situation as its starting point, where the real world, with all its problematic elements, is shown to the observer who hasn't yet activated the cognitive and interpretative processes essential for discerning and understanding the information cluster. Visual representation tools, therefore, aims to pinpoint those issues and, simultaneously through re-elaboration, to elucidate problem-solving approaches.²

Representation thus serves as an active tool, that's not merely narrative and aimed at knowledge acquisition, but inherently design-oriented. In this framework, the variety of analytic processes for graphic representation, traditionally hinges upon the conventions of cartographic representation. This allows a measurable reproduction of reality; the cartographic approach involves graphically rendering the physical features of landscape components via conventional vertical projection. This simplification and abstraction process leads to a first recognition of contexts as accomplished physical facts with morphological

¹ [to meaningfully structure the entirety of the physical space that humans inhabit on Earth, not only aesthetically crafting artifacts but also bestowing aesthetic sense upon domains whose existence, so to speak, precedes our direct action] Vittorio Gregotti, “Progetto di paesaggio”, *Casabella*, n.º 575-576 (1991): 2.

² Antonella Falzetti, *Isity. Dispositivi progettuali per la statale 16 di Senigallia* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2018), 22.

autonomy, within the continuity of the territory.³ Recognizing a series of parts or specific facts represents the first design advancement in reading a landscape.

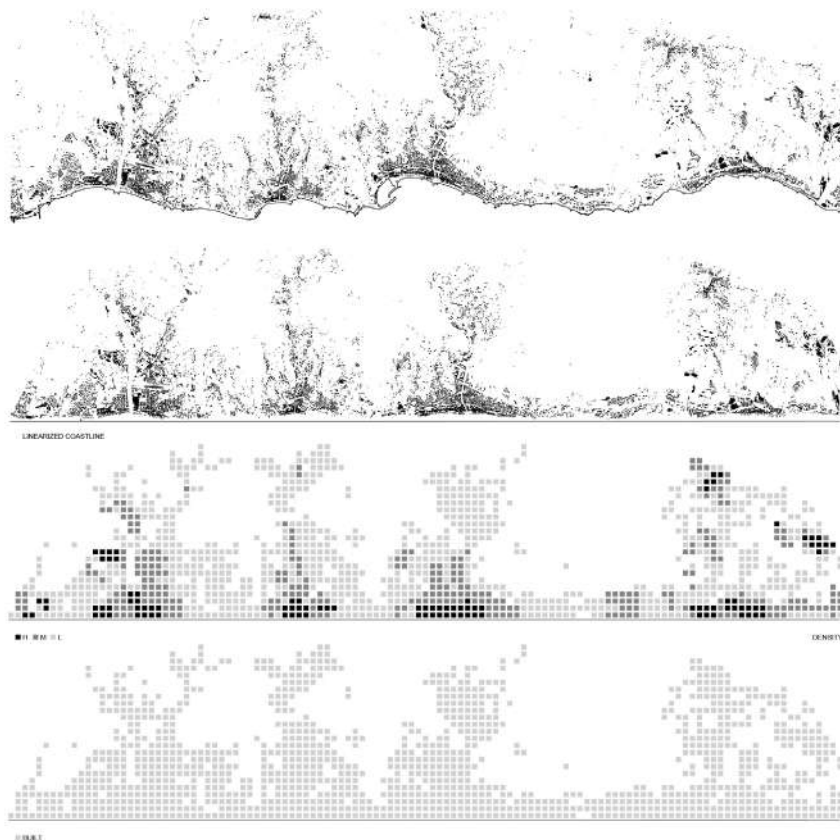


Figure 1. Coastal built landscape GIS elaboration, Giulio Minuto.

However, the cartographic approach alone falls short of grasping the landscape's depth and complexity. Capturing immaterial qualities implies visual representation capable of integrating various aspects that don't strictly relate to its physical form; through graphitizing these aspects in relation to space, it is possible to detect patterns, interrelations, and singularities, thus discerning landscape underlying patterns.

³ Lamberto Amistadi, *La costruzione della città. Concetti e figure* (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2012), 16.

The Issue with Cartographic Vision

In truth, for centuries, landscapes have been depicted through distinct images via various visual testimonies. From the early nautical charts and portolanos to geographical works like Abraham Saur's *Theatrum Urbium*, cartographies seamlessly combined diverse information with creative experimentation, fusing measurable and perceptual aspects.



Figure 2. M. Minzoni, Il Golfo di La Spezia, 1747. Source: Genova, Biblioteca Universitaria.

However, beginning in the mid-19th century, took place a semantic impoverishment of landscape content in cartographic representations. A stark distinction emerged between artistic and topographic drawing. The zenithal projection, devoid of the *illusory art* of perspective typical of vedutism, became dominant. As a result, the geographical image was left to the topographic view, conflating the concept of landscape with the cartographic image.

This shift, marking a definitive period in cartography, can be traced back to Italy's 1875 approval of the law for the Completion of the topographic map of Italy. This event followed the 1802 commission convened at the Dépôt de la guerre in Paris (to simplify and standardize the symbols and conventions used in maps and topographic drawings) and its diffusion across Europe, riding on Napoleonic military successes.

Conventions adopted by cartography ultimately distanced representations from both the perceptual aspects of the landscape and its dynamism, effectively closing off the fourth temporal dimension. The difference between figurative culture and cartographic culture should not be viewed only in relation to different graphic projections (horizontal projection or perspective) but mainly in relation to the temporal variable. Unlike landscape painting, which captures temporally defined images, cartography attempts (in vain) to produce a lasting image of a timeless landscape.

For topographic drawing, the unintentionally limiting nature lay in the fact that, by adhering solely to the principles of descriptive geometry, it could no longer recognize its own falsehood. This led to an increasing detachment from the truth, the landscape, and the flow of history.

Vorrei ardentemente essere condotto di nuovo verso il diorama la cui magia brutale ed enorme sa impormi un'utile illusione. Preferisco contemplare certi scenari teatrali, ove trovo, espressi con la sapienza dell'arte e concentrati in figura tragica, i miei sogni più cari. Queste cose, proprio perché false, sono infinitamente più vicine al vero; mentre la magioranza dei nostri paesaggisti mentono, appunto perché hanno tralasciato di mentire.⁴

Overcoming the Cartographic-Figurative Dualism

Per tutto il 1911 Boccioni è in gran daffare. Il progetto che lo attira non è di poco conto, e infatti sembra essergli sfuggito di mano. Vuole raffigurare lo spazio della vita urbana, cose ed avvenimenti e persone, emozioni e palpabili movimenti e tensioni, chi in quella vita è immerso, ed è sballottato, ma si muove seguendo una sorta di segreto, preciso, copione. È possibile raffigurare il gioco e le regole del gioco, contemporaneamente? Raffigurare la vita a caleidoscopio, e indicare le strutture di quel caos apparente? È una questione di sguardo, di visione costruttiva che intenda il moderno in modo organico: quella vita, il palcoscenico urbano della medesima, e le emozioni che ne scaturiscono, senza cadere fra le braccia di un banale realismo, e neppure di una simbolica più o meno astratta. Né illustrazione, né ideologia: si tratta di un progetto ambizioso.⁵

⁴ [I ardently wish to be led back to the diorama whose brutal and immense magic can impose upon me a useful illusion. I prefer to contemplate certain theatrical scenes where I find, expressed with the wisdom of art and condensed into a tragic figure, my dearest dreams. These things, precisely because they are false, are infinitely closer to the truth; while the majority of our landscape artists lie, precisely because they have neglected to lie] Charles Baudelaire, *Scritti sull'arte*, trans. Giuseppe Guglielmi and Ezio Raimondi (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), 265.

⁵ [Throughout 1911, Boccioni was deeply engrossed in his work. The project that captivated him was by no means small, and indeed, it seemed to have slipped out of his grasp. He wanted to depict the space of urban life —the events, things, emotions, palpable movements, and tensions, and those immersed in it, being jostled yet moving according to some kind of secret, precise script—. Is it possible to represent the game and the rules of the game simultaneously? To represent kaleidoscopic life and point out the structures of that apparent chaos? It's a matter of perspective, a constructive vision that understands the modern in an organic way: that life, the urban stage of the same, and the emotions that arise from it, without falling into the trap of banal realism or more or less abstract symbolism. Neither illustration nor ideology; it's an ambitious project] Paolo Fossati, "Il gioco della pittura", *Casabella*, n.º 575-576 (1991): 28.

Thus, in the field of graphic study of landscapes - given the undeniable validity of an initial cartographic approach —the need to expand the interpretation to further levels of reading becomes evident—. The analysis of the cartographic model is not exhaustive enough in characterizing and distinguishing landscapes from the undefined territory. It's necessary at the same time to investigate their recognizability on the experiential level. At this juncture, representation is required to integrate additional aspects related to perception according to visual experience, reclaiming perspectival visions. Perspective, which characterizes experience, shows relationships between parts, glimpses, connections with the landscape, alignments that are impossible to grasp through Cartesian representations.

Moreover, representation should not be limited to reproducing the physical facts, but must integrate other historical, cultural, experiential, subjective, and objective aspects. It should allow to unveil even what is not evident, going beyond the mere physicality of things and revealing their hidden structure. In landscapes, the physical features of the territory are strongly connected and interdependent with abstract and empirical cultural and social aspects. In lifting the veil of the physicality of reality, visual representations of a landscape take on the character of a *creative act* that presupposes a skilled ability to read a text made up of signs to be identified and deciphered.

Within the disciplinary field, experiential data related to the collective and individual perception of landscapes (natural and urban) are of paramount importance, as evidenced by the ongoing research aimed at studying the *public image* of the city. By working in this direction, it is possible to overcome the limits of topographic representation by integrating a sensory and evolutive reading of the landscape, with the possibility of constructing maps that represent relationships between objective and subjective levels of reality, between scientific rigor and the depth of the artistic gaze.

The search for visual integration between different levels of the landscape recalls the examples of the disruptive representations of Archigram and Superstudio, which, between the Sixties and Seventies, broke the orthodoxy of the plan-prospect-section sequence, generating a form of “multilevel comprehension” that did not exclude an experiential component from representation.⁶

In this scenario, the focus is on representation methods that, relying on the possibilities given by informatic tools, allow the integration of different data in relation to their territorial distribution. Qualitative information or perceptions, which do not possess physicality in the real context, can be included by attributing geometric features such as shape and size. Or they can be used as force fields capable of deforming the representation of reality to return a meta- projectual reality capable of inducing a new understanding of the relationships between parts and the whole.

A notable example in this field is the experimental graphical experience of Anuradha Mathur and Dilip Da Cunha, intertwining the topographic vision and the description of the

⁶ Donald Appleyard, “Understanding Professional Media: Issues, Theory, and a Research Agenda”, in *Human Behavior and Environment: Advances in Theory and Research*, ed. Irwin Altman, Joachim F. Wohlwill (New York: Plenum Press, 1977), 71.

landscape components of places, in a graphical composition that collect the complexity of the investigated landscapes (fig. 3).

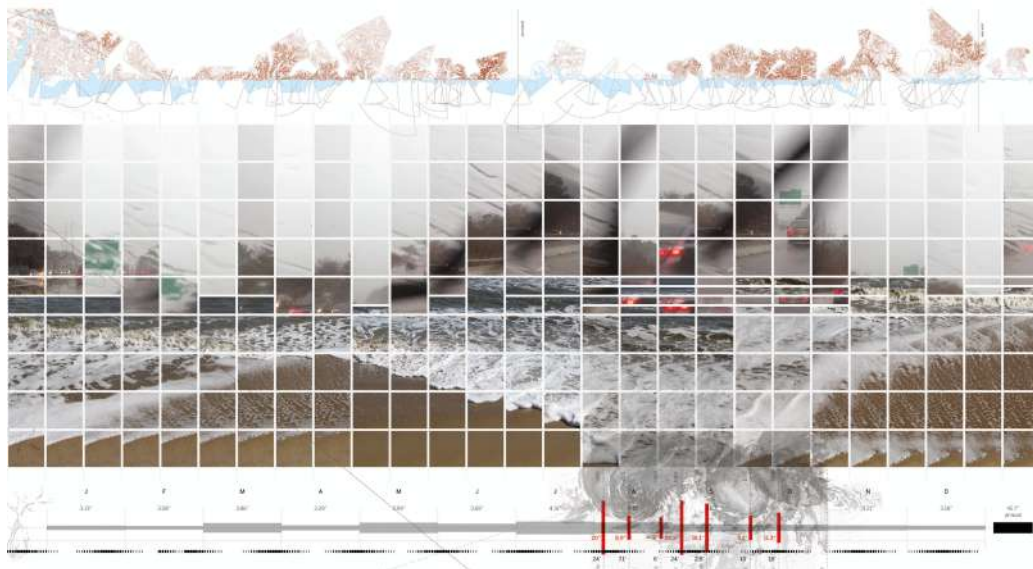


Figure 3. Graphical composition: design of by for inquiry, Dilip da Cunha.

In the Italian scene, an approach to overcoming the dichotomy between optical (landscape elements) and geometric quantities (horizontal distances) is aptly represented by the work of Antonella Falzetti and Luigi Ramazzotti *Paesaggi da decifrare. Gli sguardi del progetto*.⁷

Within the increasingly polysemous nature of the landscape representation, which embraces both physical and immaterial aspects, video and audio media becomes pivotal in representing the sensoriality of the landscape. The soundscape⁸, resulting from the interaction between the three main sound categories in the landscape (geophony, biophony, and anthropophony), represents a powerful component of placemaking.⁹

Photography also stands out as an important visual medium for landscape study, both as an operational tool and an essential documentary source. Photographic sequences allow for a visual recomposition of landscapes, leading to the identification of common traits.

¹⁰The photographic documentation process is not limited to the production of material but also relies on the possibility of accessing the vast iconographic mass production through

⁷ Antonella Falzetti, Luigi Ramazzotti, *Paesaggi da decifrare. Gli sguardi del progetto* (Rome: Gangemi, 2012).

⁸ As defined by Raymond Murray Schafer.

⁹ Marco Cillis and Antonella Velentini, "La rappresentazione come necessità", *Ri-Vista Research for Landscape Architecture* 18, n.º 2 (2020): 10.

¹⁰ Gabriele Basilico, *Architetture, città, visioni* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2007), 57.

geolocated image databases (online databases, mass media, social networks, etc.). This second approach allows for the knowledge of places with an anthropological perspective, investigating through the quantitative data of the iconographic repetition of certain elements, which are the most recognizable and identifying features of a landscape.

Another source of knowledge lies in historical-artistic iconographic material, which, arranged as a sequence of snapshots referring to previous situations, make it possible to overcome the misleading and only apparent immobility of the present.

Landscapes are, indeed, phenomena *in fieri*¹¹. Viewing them from the point of view of the present would, as previously stated, lead to a significant oversimplification from the outset. As Giovanni Romano reminds us, one critical note is essential when appropriating visual testimonies from the past. Artistic documents are historical texts that require rigorous philological study before they can be integrated into a functional discourse. Artworks become historical evidence when we can identify and isolate the message from the complex structures built around the artist's creative act.

Beyond paintings, drawings, engravings, cadastral surveys, land registries, maps, aerial photos, etc., Romano already in '91 suggested, the problem could be turned on its head, focusing instead on graphic testimonies of landscapes design of the past. This material is rarely exposed in museums and biblioteques so Ministries of Public Works, Defense, Merchant Navy, and Agriculture become fundamental sources, so as photographic archives of the Soprintendenze, the technical offices of the Regions, and Municipalities etc.¹²

New Technological Horizons

In an attempt to abandon the distinction between the cartographer and the poet-painter, information technologies prove to be a powerful tool, that allows integrating the objectivity of representation with additional aspects related to perception, the time flow, and new types of available data. The new possibilities offered by the evolution of computer tools both allow and at the same time impose a refinement and integration of traditional graphic investigation techniques. Aggregating diverse information paves the way towards novel cognitive scenarios with experimental associations.

The complex of the information that currently layers the knowledge of landscapes, and more generally of environmental systems, necessitates relational and multi-scalar representation techniques.

[...] landscape architecture and urban design [...] today also include questions of ecology, energy transition or 'metabolism', in a context of increasing participation and coproduction. Which new ways of analysing, designing and discussing do these new issues lead to, and which drawings are being developed? How do drawings help to 'spatialise' the multitude of information from all these disciplines and problem fields and to make it accessible for spatial interventions?¹³

¹¹ Cfr. Emilio Sereni, *Storia del paesaggio agrario italiano* (Rome: editori Laterza, 1961).

¹² Giovanni Romano, "Iconografia e riconoscibilità", *Casabella*, n.º 575-576 (1991): 27.

¹³ Frits Palmboom *et al.*, eds., *Oase 107 - The Drawing in Landscape Design and Urbanism* (Rotterdam: Nai publishers, 2020): 1.

The relevance of this theme is expressed through various international experiences developing non-traditional visual representation processes, tying tangible and intangible data to display meaning and importance in landscape terms.

This approach also leads to overcoming apparent immobility including the additional fourth dimension of time. Aware that what we see as a landscape is only a snapshot of a continuous evolutionary process, digital tools allow to map these flows beyond the point of view of the present. This approach is even more relevant today when climate and environmental changes demands us to design with a more dynamic understanding.

In this regard, the visual maps by Laura Kurgan are of interest, intersecting territorial data and social processes in a series graphical experiments using new GPS technologies and GIS mapping (fig. 4).

These start from the representation of spatial phenomena to land on social militancy; in this way maps build the physical and simultaneously communicative, political, archival, and commemorative space.¹⁴

Data retrieval and its comparison with the spatial dimension of the territory are closely related to innovations in the field of capture tools, as well as policies for disseminating this data. The abundant availability of georeferenced thematic information and growing potential in the use and interpretation of big data define a new field of exploration.

Research has indeed refined landscape observation techniques, providing us with new input recorded by technological sensors. A variety of new information is available thanks to drone photography, satellite photography and surveys with sensors on different spectra, as well as data from increasingly broad and sophisticated networks of terrestrial sensors.

One of the contemporary goals in the field of landscape representation is to define forms of graphical representation for these environmental processes that digital technologies allow us to experience through multiple additional sensors. Visualizing environmental processes and relationships that are largely invisible to the human eye, things that “we know to exist, but of which we can only see fragmentary evidence and are difficult to engage with”, known as “hyperobjects”.

Hyperobjects expand our imagination to new extensions of space and time, resulting in novel aesthetic expressions that intersect science and art to explore these extraordinary and emerging aspects of landscapes, integrating cultural and technical insights.

Regarding this trend, we can highlight the work of Christophe Girot (2013), who creates digital graphic processing capable of simultaneously showing various systems with exceptional sophistication (fig. 5).

¹⁴ Cillis and Valentini, “La rappresentazione come necessità”, 10.



Figure 4. Graphical elaboration: number of displaced people due to Colombian conflict, Laura Kurgan.

The information conveyed through his images is dense and connects topography, climatic data, infrastructure, geological data, etc.¹⁵

These pioneering representations made with tools and on multidimensional and multi-scalar computer supports drive the understanding process of the landscape towards greater fluidity. As we move beyond traditional paper, the holistic layering of new multi-dimensional representations promotes the fusion of styles, leading to new experimental languages.

Recompositions, Associations, and Comparisons

The integration of cartography with the mentioned qualities (emotional, cultural, technological) and the extension of the domain of observation points requires new graphic strategies

¹⁵ Daniele Stefano, “Representation and Landscape Architecture: Towards a New Language? The Semiotic and Cognitive Value of Representation as a Relevant Issue for an Aware and Evolving Culture of Landscape Architecture”, *Ri-Vista Research for Landscape Architecture* 18, n.º 2 (2020): 46.

to recompose information into frameworks that allow for interpretation. The association of contents can occur at different levels: by superposition, juxtaposition, and sequential arrangement.

The superposition allows for the synchronous observation of diachronic versions of the same landscape images, while juxtaposition enables the gathering within a single frame of different representations of the same subject, for instance, in the form of a collage (fig. 6).



Figure 5. The Unexpected View, Gotthard Landscape.

Sequential arrangement, on the other hand, stages a narrative, capable of connecting different representations in an ordered succession, as propositions. At all levels of association, digital processing techniques are particularly versatile tools, able to enhance the operational attitude of visual media through the precision and speed development.

Moving towards the aforementioned new forms of experimental representation, which reveal or even integrate perceptual aspects invisible to the human eye, it's vital always to keep the physical consistency of reality in its original phenomenological richness. This means that graphic processing must be united methodologically by the iteration of the cognitive act, which repeatedly shifts between the complexity of reality and its forms of graphical conceptualization.

The current wide availability of satellite photographic reproductions and photorealistic three-dimensional models of the territory translates into the possibility of considering the exploration of such faithful reproductions of reality as a reapproaching a form of approximate but realistic experience of reality (even if not on the same level, since even perspective—or even the interactive vision of 3D models—is an artificial view of space, distinct, as Panofsky teaches, from psycho-physiological space) (fig. 7).

This situation suggests an important opportunity for knowledge. Within the iterative process of observation-representation-rereading, the chance to maintain a faithful reproduction of reality, alongside schematic representations, allows extending the understanding of the subject through combined reading and the constant comparison between reproduction (faithful) and representation (schematic).

This privileged condition of juxtaposition between complexity and its schematization, allows the designer to gradually bring out new information. This doesn't deny the importance of ideas and figurations settling around a specific graphic transfiguration, fundamentally essential for the formation of the design idea. Instead, it recognizes the iterative nature of the investigation process and the consequent need for a continuous comparison with the indefinite condition of reality or its representation.

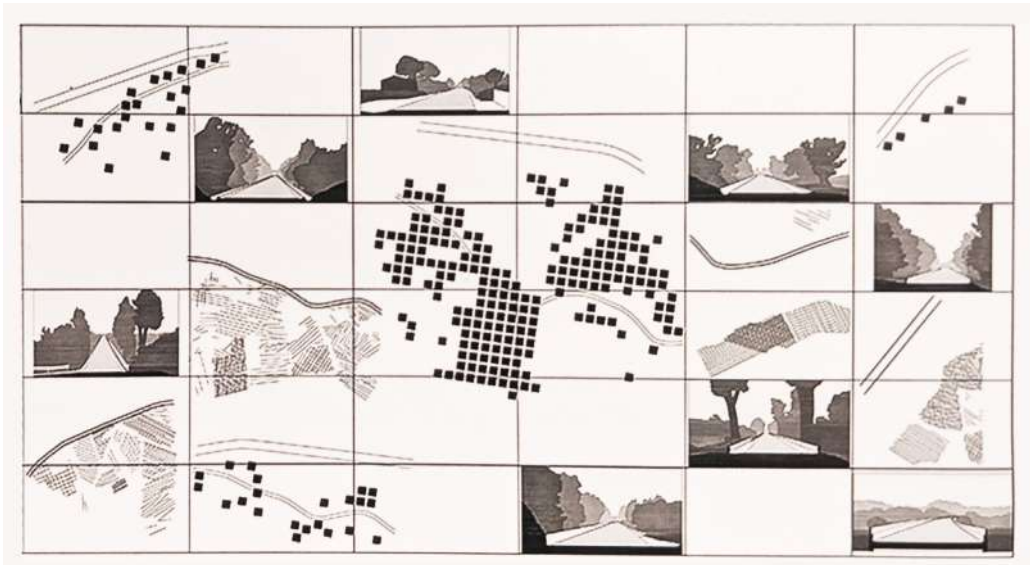


Figure 6. Graphical composition: interpretative framework, Antonella Falzetti.

Conclusions

In this process, suggestions, insights, and re-elaborations follow one another, with the evolving awareness matured through representation. As the process progresses, new details emerge, refining previous graphic elaborations. “[...] Per capirci qualcosa bisogna avere pazienza, tenere a bada quel sentimento di conquista, quella vertiginosa sensazione di possesso che un’immagine troppo rapida e furtiva può restituire”¹⁶.

¹⁶ [...] to understand something, patience is required, holding back that feeling of conquest, that dizzying sensation of possession that an overly rapid and fleeting image can return] Gabriele Basilico, *Architetture, città, visioni* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2007), 42.

The considerations and examples provided suggest an advancement in the possibilities of reading and understanding the landscape through visual representations, defining new areas of graphic investigation and methodological discovery.

The evolution of the analysis process, and a consequent deeper understanding of the landscape through visual media, facilitates the transition to the phase of design invention. This is understood according to the derivation of its etymological root from the Latin term *invenio*, meaning discovery.

The refiguration of information, carried out through representation, becomes a new narrative, a controlled fiction through which a new imaginary is built—a prefiguration that projects towards the design phase—.

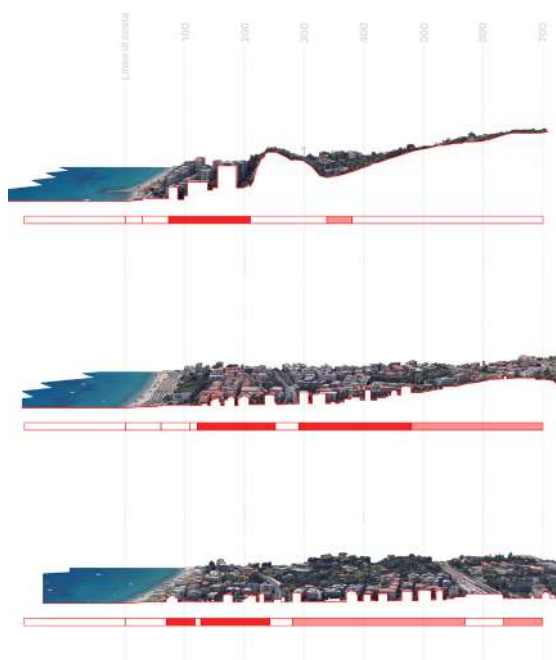


Figure 7. Graphical composition: three-dimensional sections - landscape perspective view, Giulio Minuto.



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