The volume *abecedario. La grafica del Novecento* by Sergio Polano and Pierpaolo Vetta, published in 2002 for Electa, is considered a “classic” in the history of 20th-century graphic design for at least two reasons. On the one hand, for the credibility of its authors who, with their editorial choices, have defined a methodological model for the treatment of both textual content and images; on the other, for the success that it continues to have among professionals, researchers and students alike: today we are at the seventh reprint. All this without being a proper survey book on history. Indeed, as Sergio Polano repeatedly stresses in the preface, the book is an anthology of essays, a collection of partially published works.

This contribution considers that the originality of the volume lies in the very act of recollecting these writings; the volume in fact analyses some of the texts previously published in the magazine *Casabella*, which, from the mid-nineties under the new direction of Francesco Dal Co, became one of the places in which the debate on the historical and critical issues of graphic design took place. Moreover, the paper explores the genesis of the project – precisely in the special integration between texts and iconography; it analyses the central role of typography in Polano’s own approach to the theme, as the structural unit of graphic design; finally, it makes a comparison between *abecedario* and its sequel *sussidiario. Grafica e caratteri moderni*, placing them in the different historical moments in which they were respectively published.

Questo articolo è disponibile in Italiano