

## **Imagining and illustrating the archaeological record**

### **Gheorghiu Dragos and Jones Georgina**

Throughout the last decade, the concept of archaeological imagination started timidly to appear in the archaeological literature (see Shanks 2012); in experimental archaeology it was earlier accepted, but covertly, as re-enactment.

In current archaeology the definition of 'illustration' has expanded to include multimedia approaches stretching from graphic design layouts to three-dimensional computer modelling. Illustration has become an influential tool used to increase the imagination of anyone who is interested in the subject. This paper will show the results of the work of an experimentalist and of an illustrator, focused on the problem of archaeological imagination.

In the present paper we will present a study case of a research project that tries to offer a solution to the problem of imagination, by trying to mix the two current approaches mentioned, or in other words, to mix science with art. In recent years we witnessed the discovery of art as a potential source of inspiration and refinement of the hermeneutical discourse. Due to its possibility to use symbolic thinking, art could become a tool to approach the reality of the Past, functioning on the principle of analogy like experimental archaeology or ethno-archaeology, this new approach being recently accepted in archaeological professional meeting, to cite the last EAA Annual Meeting 2013, and the present TAG conference.

The research project mentioned ("The Maps of Time" PN2 Idei; [www.timemaps.net](http://www.timemaps.net), Director D.Gheorghiu) which intends to mix science and art, is at the same time a project of experiments and experientiality, which studies prehistoric and ancient technologies from both these perspectives in order to expand first the imagination of the experimentalists and then of the large public. Since we believe that the sensorial experience as well as images could act as an efficient instrument to augment the imaginary of the individual, we designed a mixed approach which will be presented from both the objective/ethic and subjective/emic perspectives, i.e. from the perspective of the experimentalist and of the actor-illustrator (figure 1), and where the different types of experientiality of the actor (in virtual and real space) were firstly recorded and presented to the public, and also transferred in images/illustrations by the actor illustrator, and complementing the scientific research.

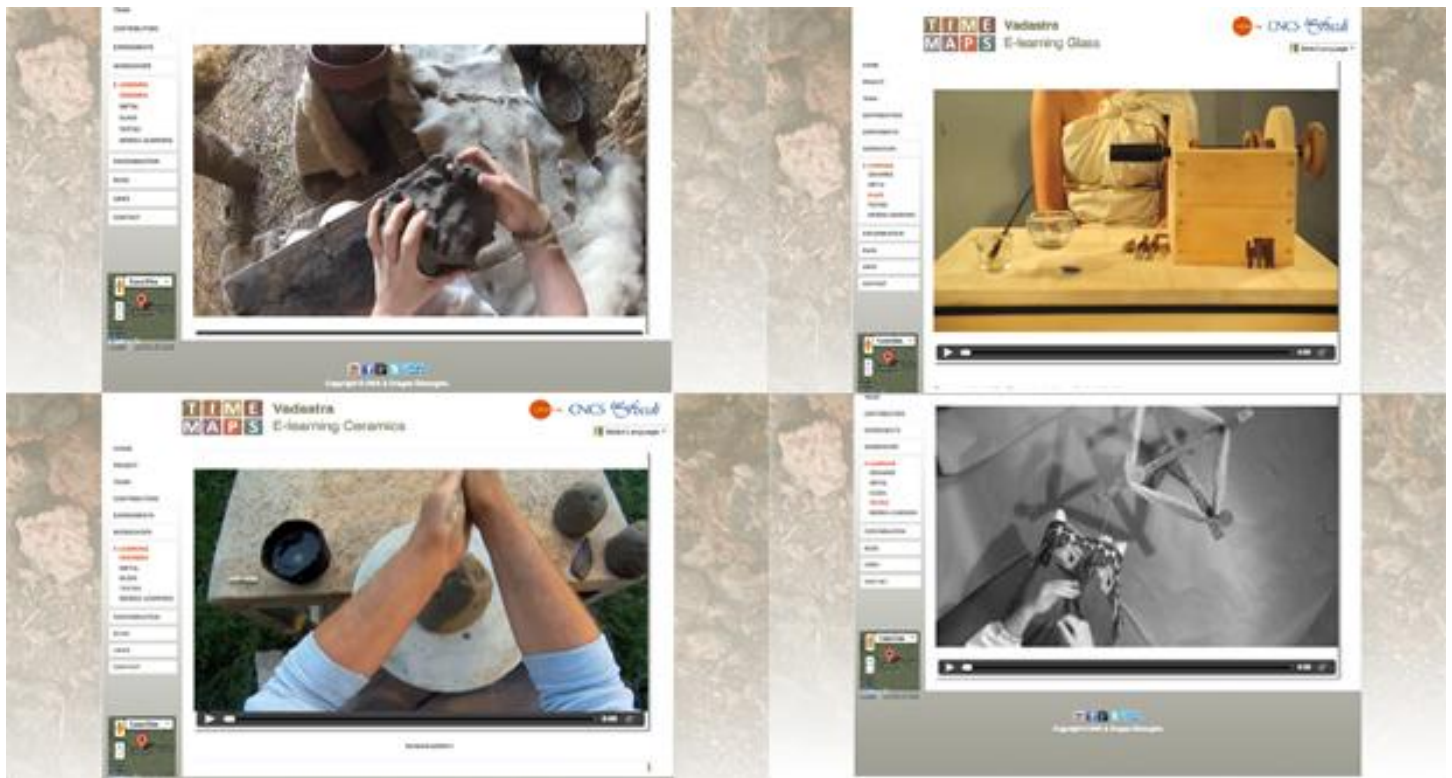


Figure 1.

The main study-case we present is Woodhenge, an icon of British archaeology, whose reconstruction still creates debates. Our goal was use only that part of the reconstruction that is considered to be “objective” (i.e. the existence of wooden posts), and to augment it with the experientiality of the actor and illustrator. The first experiments started in August 2012 in Vadastra, a Chalcolithic site in South Romania, where a series of important experiments of archaeology and of art-chaelogy were carried during the last decade (see Gheorghiu 2009a,b,c; 2012). To evoke a fragment of Woodhenge a series of wooden posts were planted on a field, and the actor-illustrator dressed in a neutral costume (but with the materials’ textures emphasized) carried a series of experiments of coil-building vases near this reconstruction (figure 2).



Figure 2

All the architectural features of the Woodhenge reconstruction in reality and in 3D Max were built and drawn very simplified, with all details excluded, to evoke only the built space and the spatial sensation of a passage through a space marked by the wooden posts (figure 3).



Figure 3

The purpose of the experiment was not the search of the archaeological realism, but to suggest a human spatial experience that could have happened in the past, to recover possible gestures and experientiality. In this case the actor exploited the potential of the corporal memory, which functions similar to the mental processes (Csordas 1999; Hamilakis et al. 2001), to approach prehistoric technologies and objects.

The actor was filmed in darkness, illuminated only by a single source of light, a bonfire lit near one of the wooden posts, to reduce the degree of representation and stimulate the imagination of the viewer. Finally all the visual material (3D reconstructions, video films and photos) was given to the illustrator, who saw her performance and was immersed in the virtual space as well as in the filmic one. The result of this mix up between the experientiality of a virtual experience with her own in reality was the ferment for her to imagine a part of the prehistoric site.

The actor-illustrator Georgina Jones utilized a second series of experiments to convey the subjective experience of making a Neolithic-style coil-pot to the audience. The resultant practice expressively illustrated the exercise as internal cognizance from memory. This was recorded through expressive and diagrammatic illustrations as well as through the use of photography.

Relying on pen and ink, which is the conventional medium used for archaeological illustration (Dillon, B. 1987), the artist was able to use semiotic principles to turn traditional scientific illustrations into allegories of the subjective experience (figure 4).



Figure 4

Illustrations have been used to draw the viewers' attention to the skill of making and the focal points of the fledgling craftsman's concentration (figures 5 and 6). Illustrations and photography also record the environment in which the object is made (figure 7). Tracing paper was used to manipulate the spatial sensation of the book allowing the readers to look through a series of images and across the breath of the pages. The book thereby introduces ideas of multi-dimensional visual narrative.

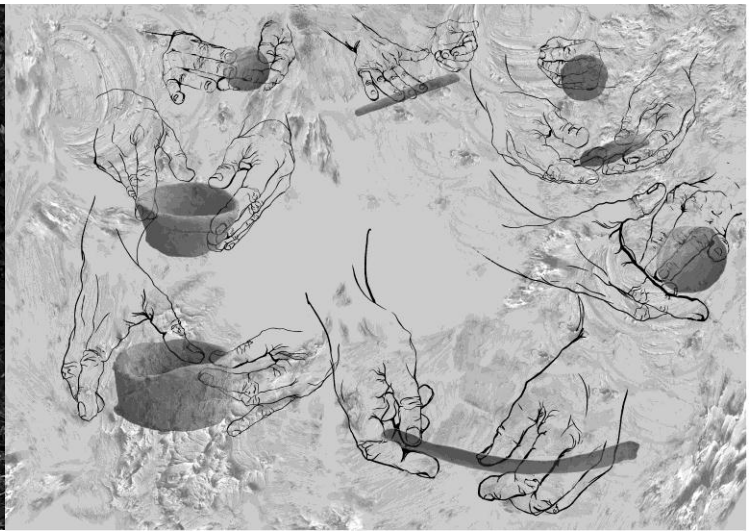


Figure 5

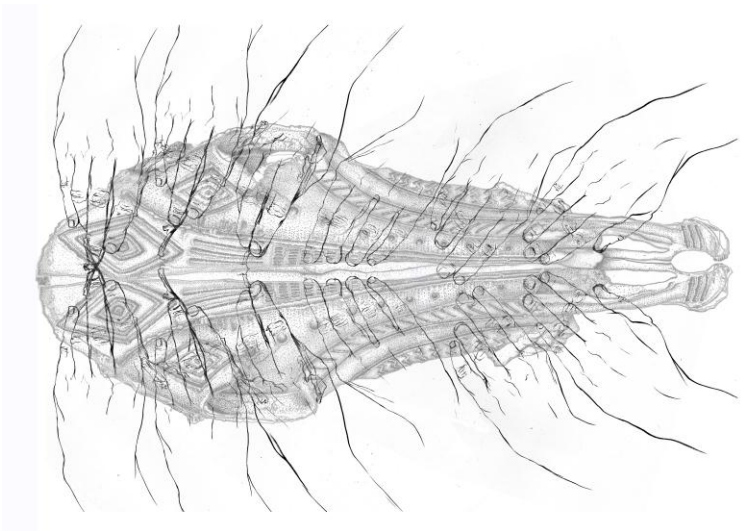


Figure 6

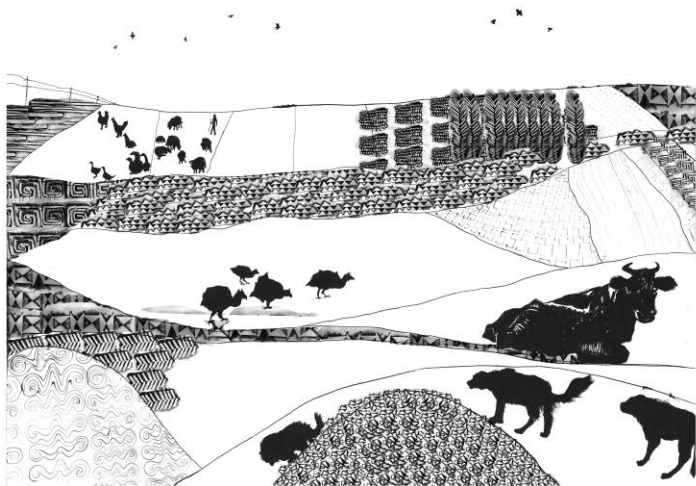


Figure 7



The resultant book presents the ancient artifact as a subjectively realized process. The aim of the book is not to present facts about the Neolithic pot; instead it presents the pot as an event and as a personal experience. Artistic imagination explores the potential of an artifact as well as the methods and modes by which archaeologists can present ideas to their audience.

## Conclusions

In conclusion artists are now practicing in the 'post-movement' era of their discipline, which encourages bold personal explorations of the ontology of modern society. The appropriation of archaeological principles into the artistic discipline adds to the potential interest and invigoration of archaeology in modern culture. The resultant discussions between the two disciplines, if archaeologists present art carefully as a source of inspiration as opposed to fact, can lead to new and inspiring imaginings of the past.

## Acknowledgements

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## List of illustrations

### Figure 1

Author's Own

2011-2013 Director D.Gheorghiu, *The Maps of Time*, PN2 Idei; [www.timemaps.net](http://www.timemaps.net)

**Figure 2**

**Author's Own**

2011-2013 Director D.Gheorghiu, *The Maps of Time*, PN2 Idei; [www.timemaps.net](http://www.timemaps.net)

**Figure 3**

**Andra Jipa and Inga Bunduche**

2013 Director D.Gheorghiu, *The Maps of Time*, PN2 Idei; [www.timemaps.net](http://www.timemaps.net)

**Figure 4**

**Author's Own**

2012- Jones, G. *Vadastra*. Unpublished. Masters Degree (Ma). Arts University Bournemouth

**Figure 5**

**Author's Own**

2012- Jones, G. *Vadastra*. Unpublished. Masters Degree (Ma). Arts University Bournemouth

**Figure 6**

**Author's Own**

2012- Jones, G. *Vadastra*. Unpublished. Masters Degree (Ma). Arts University Bournemouth

**Figure 7**

**Author's Own**

2012- Jones, G. *Vadastra*. Unpublished. Masters Degree (Ma). Arts University Bournemouth