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VOLUME 2 / 2018

Topic of the Year: The Sublime Triangle

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REVIEWS





Review: Strength and ethics of the context: Giving a true meaning to History and to our lives

Daniele Manacorda

Roma Tre University, daniele.manacorda@uniroma3.it

La forza del contesto. Andrea Carandini, Rome-Bari, Laterza 2017, 254 pages, paperback, 18 euros.

A book which looks ahead, a veritable Janus curious about the past and the future. This is La forza del contesto (The strength of context), the latest work by Andrea Carandini, as reviewed by Daniele Manacorda. Two great Italian archaeologists comparing ideas.

∂ Open Access ■ Translated by: Flavio Bacci

Neywords: Andrea Carandini, La forza del contesto, landscape, context

For archaeologists like ourselves, context is a bit like water is for fish: we cannot survive without it. And we cling to the illusion that a world more mindful to the context, in all its forms, would probably be a better or at least a more informed place.

In its stratigraphical features, context is a fundamentally static concept; in its functional aspects it is rather a dynamic event, a complex mechanism; in its cultural aspects it takes on aesthetic and ethical values as well. And, in any case, it presupposes a quantitative component - which we measure in space and time - and a qualitative one, by giving context historical and human meaning.

Looking away from individual objects isolated from their context and - instead - seeking their style in the relationships connecting them, the culture of context can interpret reality reconciling aesthetic pleasure and historical pleasure. It shifts attention from what is unique and exceptional to that which most directly pertains to its contextual nature, thus overcoming the apparent randomness and entrusting it to the future.

Towards an ethic of context

Andrea Carandini's book helps us to discern the lines of an ethic of context which is almost a mental form, through which reality appears to us as a tangle of coherent traces, where silent things come alive and catch our attention, dragging us through time and restoring to us the fantastic image of how we were, how we are and how we shall be, almost as if it were the only possible form of immortality.

This is why we cannot live without context, and when we lose sight of it we are compelled to attempt to recover it. The visible and invisible bonds that bind animate beings to things give meaning to our lives: they are the colours and shapes of life's weft and warp.

This is the decalogue

The book offers a wealth of ideas, often arranged along a thread of memories intertwined with current events. A page from the history of Italian archaeology, the text is enjoyable both for those who have lived through its different seasons and for those who - younger – will be able to enjoy the first hand testimony of one of its main protagonists.

Here are a few points worth mentioning, as an invitation for further thought:

- the liberating confession that at once we all are, and yet no longer are, what we once were: this is not stating the obvious, but is the very meaning of movement and future, where the fullness of everyone's existence may perhaps be found;
- the effort that the author makes to free himself from his own professional

expertise – and we all know how massive that is – in the hope of freeing others from theirs: it is the fascinating ledge along which runs the path between specialization and a holistic view of reality and ultimately of oneself;

- the emphasis on the smaller values of private life, contained in homes and furnishings (without which even architectures have neither life nor meaning), and on the art of living, perhaps the most important of the arts, since it is - as Carandini writes supremely contextual;
- the ideal continuum that keeps historical and aesthetic value together, one inseparable from the other, and the emphasis on the beauty of good, wellmade objects: art - I would venture to say - is not 'a beautiful thing' but 'something well done;'
- a sense of the only possible form of eternity granted to us through transmission of the memories in which objects are steeped and hence - in the background - the relationship between happiness and serenity;
- an awareness that fortune is always in our own hands. Exemplary is the lesson of FAI, the Italian Environment Fund presided over by Carandini with unanimously recognized authority for years now. A lesson telling us that the a few good people can achieve much and that the many, following their example, can bring a nation in difficulty back on its feet;
- the emphasis, therefore, on people, after an exclusive passion for the cultural object had marginalized the subject, e.g. the individuals who perceive it or who do not perceive it, the communities which give body and soul to places, protecting and enriching them, or which neglect and degrade them;
- the bold and deliberately provocative critique of the word, indeed of the very concept of, 'museum,' a zoo-museum that shelters, as if in a long-term care institution, things that are torn away, like exotic animals, from their original context (and this without wishing in any way to detract from the immense work of cultural dissemination carried

- out by museums since they were first established);
- but also key role that the art of valorisation should play, as a specific and promising new profession, to be imagined and created from the ground up;
- an emphasis, then, on the nature and the spirit of places, in contrast to any mandated uniform strategy of valorisation and management, which run the risk of remaining indifferent to the internal logic of the sites and their vocations --elements that should, instead, be discovered, nourished, and brought to life.

The landscape as an organism

From these premises Carandini moves on to provide several invaluable insights on the theme of landscape, the privileged setting for the concept of context itself. A certain landscape rhetoric tends to link landscape to idyllic views of mountains, rivers, hills and cliffs as yet untouched, images which are contrasted with the many eyesores around us. As if landscape were our bad conscience as the planet's misguided inhabitants.

But what, in fact, is landscape if not the cultural, that is, historical, aspect of the environment in which we live? Landscapes are true organisms, complex systems, where forms of human settlements have been overlapping over the centuries, adapting to natural components and yet shaping them. They are the result of the work and imagination of many generations, which have given Nature a recognizable order to meet their needs.

Landscape, therefore, is the product of a collective activity, where Nature, history, work and art have intertwined, forming a recognizable image of the life of entire communities over lengthy, sometimes very lengthy, periods of time. We encounter this intertwining in varying degrees: in an archaeological layer when we observe its intimate composition, in an architectural setting with walls and furnishings as they have been organized over time, in monuments towering over or hiding in our panoramas, in the roads crossing and connecting them.

Thus landscapes are primarily contexts, where everything exists in a system of relationships with everything around it, above it or below; where everything has a significance, sometimes immediately perceptible and sometimes requiring study to be recovered. Because landscapes, however slowly they may morph, do change their appearance and in so doing preserve their long-standing characteristics and announce new ones.

We see this every time we find, in our countryside, an infinite number of old buildings, abandoned or in a state of collapse or being restored; they remind us of obsolete agricultural regimes, the depopulation of the land, the development of second homes for inhabitants of urban landscapes. Or when we see a shapeless thicket taking the place of once well-tended fields or vineyards and, thinking it something created by nature, may even try to protect it, when it is actually only a sign of abandonment, a sign of loss of equilibrium, like - according to an evocative image given by Andrea Carandini - mold on a book or a painting.

Landscapes are the people who live them

This is why we sometimes wonder whether some cultural-heirloom attitudes (forgive me this term), which favor artistic beauty in itself and treat masterpieces separated from their context, can actually succeed in grasping the role of nature in historical landscapes. The beauty of those contexts lies in the fact that they contain both the normality of usefulness and the exceptionality of the superfluous, but it is only because they live off relationships they endow the former with the aesthetics of utility, and the utility of beauty to the latter.

Even today, the exciting debate about the destiny of our cultural heritage has to reckon with attitudes which tend to isolate the individual contents of a context, selecting manifestations of art from the landscapes that contain them, as if to rescind the bonds that unite those particular products of human

labour, the artistic things, to the system of relationships which made them possible.

Every artistic discipline (art, architecture, archaeology) has followed its own path, separate from the others, but the landscape contexts do not conform to the boundaries of our disciplines: they are all together at the same time and something more, because they represent not only the world of products (the popular 'cultural heritage') but also the world of relationships. This is why we now understand that it is no longer enough to protect a monument or a fenced site within a degraded landscape, abandoned to its destiny.

Landscape contexts cannot live without the people who testify to their deepest soul, thanks to that 'awareness of place' which is slowly developing also in Italy and which gives us hope for a future in which both public and private initiatives will cooperate in ensuring the good health of past and future landscapes.

How may this happen? By encouraging the management of historic sites and abandoned areas by those having the passion and ability to propose new forms of socialization and use, as has been the case, for some time now, of the amphitheatre of Catania, brought back to life by Iban-Cnr. Or by encouraging the recovery of depopulated settlements, reviving them through new economic and social - but no less vital configurations of use. Or by the reinstatement of traditional but economically-sustainable farming and livestock keeping, in which environmental, historical, anthropological and artistic awareness - combined with attention to civil and social progress - are engaged in the common defence and fruitful recovery of the human value of the contexts in which we dwell. This so that they can also welcome future generations. Because this is a book that looks ahead, a true Janus, curious about the past and the future, with a sentiment pervading its pages: the value of mildness, of optimism and of good humour! Three Graces which enhance all our lives.



Review: Exploring public archaeology

Francesco Ripanti

Center for Public Archaeology Studies 'Archeostorie', f.ripanti@archeostoriejpa.eu

Key Concepts in Public Archaeology. Gabriel Moshenska (ed), London, UCL Press 2018, 250 pages, Free Enhanced Digital Edition, Open access PDF, Apple App, Android App, hardback - £40, paperback - £20, epub - £5.99.

3 Open Access

Keywords: public archaeology, Gabriel Moshenska, University College London

For those in search of current perspectives on public archaeology, "Key Concept in Public Archaeology", edited by Gabriel Moshenska, is a must-read. The book originated through lecturing the Master Degree's curriculum in Public Archaeology at the University College London (UCL). It is a collection of papers that exhaustively introduces the various topics related to public archaeology. Since the contributors are amongst the scholars who helped to affirm public archaeology as an established academic subject, this book is an invaluable starting point for both students and practitioners "who want to better understand this point of contact between archaeology and the wider world, and for those who want to work at that interface" (p. 3).

The first nine chapters were originally published as an 'enhanced digital book' on the UCL press website (February 2017), with further chapters added over the following months. This innovative version is still available online (ucldigitalpress.co.uk/Book/Article/22/47/0/) and turns out to be an interesting experiment for a book related to a public field of study. The reader has the possibility to add bookmarks, highlight the text, take notes, and share the contents via social networks and export citations via email. I would appreciate having the ability to enlarge the figures and seeing popups with references on bibliographical citations.

As curator of the volume and co-organizer of the Master Degree, Gabriel Moshenska introduces the book by delving into the definition, the meanings, and the challenges of public archaeology. After quoting the most-

known definitions proposed over the last twenty years, he offers a new, comprehensive one: public archaeology as practice and scholarship where archaeology meets the world" (p. 3). Stressing the all-encompassing and hybrid nature of public archaeology, this inclusive definition works out as the main framework for the book: public archaeology does not refer only to specific fields as communication, education, or outreach but addresses different categories, which often overlap with each other. The typology 'Some Common Types of Public Archaeology,' arranged in the form of a graphic composed of coloured squares, offers a very effective overview of the various elements included in each category (p. 6). With translations in different languages - including Italian and Spanish - the typology was already very popular on the Web and, in my opinion, succeeds in "make people aware of the breadth of possibilities within public archaeology, the range of approaches and methods that can be selected, developed, and put into practice." In my opinion, along with the fluent explanation, the inclusion of the graphic contributes to making this chapter one of the most comprehensible and complete introduction to public archaeology ever published so far.

The main body of the book is dedicated to deepen the readers understanding of areas where archaeology meets the world. Probably due to the overlap of the different areas, the chapters are not grouped in sections. Examining the table of contents, it appears the topics are not organized logically. However, the topics roughly cover the various categories presented in the typology; they are aligned with

the inclusive definition of public archaeology proposed by Moshenska. Ranging from community archaeology to the market for ancient art, including very actual themes as economics, education, nationalism and digital media, each chapter provides the readers with textbook-level introductions and some relevant case studies, arranged in boxes.

Especially in those countries where the study of public archaeology is growing, these introductory chapters are helpful in many ways. For instance, these chapters create common terminology, highlight the most popular debates and controversies, and define some research methods.

The creation of unified terminology is a fundamental starting point for discussions and confrontations. In Chapter 7, "Presenting archaeological sites to the public," Reuben Grima provides precise definitions concepts such as archaeological site, public, interpretation, presentation, accessibility, and sustainability. In Chapter 5, "Digital media in public archaeology," Chiara Bonacchi examines two different modes of digital engagement: "broadcasting" and participatory approaches. The definitions of "broadcasting" and participatory approaches specific traits and boundaries and the description of compelling examples are useful for understanding the differences and starting to deepen this field, which is likely to increase its influence and its area of application (pp. 61-70).

The acquaintance with current debates is necessary to provide priority to specific topics and address them with full knowledge of the facts. One of the most reiterated debates in the book concerns the degree to which the social, cultural, economic, and legislative settings affect the relationship with the public in different contexts. For example, this topic is addressed by Suzie Thomas in Chapter 2, "Community archaeology" (p. 16) and in Chapter 8, "The Treasure Act and Portable Antiquities Scheme in England and Wales," with the entire chapter dedicated to describing a concrete solution for a universal problem as adopted in a defined geographic area.

In one of the first books dedicated to public archaeology, Merriman (2004: p. 5) stated, "In being about ethics and identity, therefore, public archaeology is inevitably about negotiation and conflict over meaning"; controversy is one of the key concepts of this book. In

Chapter 7, "The archaeological profession and human rights," Samuel Hardy focuses on the exhibition agreements between looted states and recipient institutions (pp. 99-100). In Chapter 10, "Commercial archaeology in the UK: public interest, benefit and engagement," Hilary Orange and Dominic Perring deal with the diffused perception of public engagement as an unnecessary delay (p. 145). In Chapter 12, "Archaeology and nationalism," Ulrike Sommer delves into the use of archaeological finds to illustrate past greatness (p. 181) and the unravelling of national origin tales and their ideological underpinnings (p. 183).

The use of proper research methods is one of the turning points for studying and analysing the interaction between archaeology and society in different areas. For example, in Chapter 2, "Economics in public archaeology," Paul Burtenshaw introduces this field of study and states that "methods to access this value can be broadly divided into two types – revealed preference and stated preference" (p. 34). The inclusion of a box reporting the case-study of the contingent valuation survey applied to valuing different road options for Stonehenge support the theoretical description with a concrete example (p. 35).

Although this book is based on an English perspective, the practitioners from the rest of the world may try to develop, think about, and evaluate their own experiences on the basis of the solid methodological and theoretical basis introduced in this book. This is not to deny national or even regional specific traits. However, an extensive application of the proper research methodologies and a greater attention on evaluation will contribute to highlight the differences, and will promote confrontations and discussions based on data, enriching the discipline.

Once fixed in the mind the encouraging perspectives promoted in the book, it would be valuable to go back and read again the last pages of the Introduction (pp. 11-13) where Moshenska states two areas of growth: interdisciplinarity and data. For the former, the author indicates the need for drawing from related fields of science communication and science studies in addition to exploring public archaeology as one component of 'public humanities.' For the latter, more data are needed because "we know startlingly little about the public themselves" and "public archaeology

projects need to become more proactive and consistent in gathering monitoring and evaluation data on themselves."

Addressing these two areas from a global perspective will be a challenge for the future.

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Review: Cinema in the Stone Age or a film about the Stone Age?

Alessandra Cilio

'Rassegna del documentario e della comunicazione archeologica' (Licodia Eubea, Sicily), alessandra.cilio@gmail.com

Quand Homo Sapiens faisait son cinéma. Pascal Cuissot & Marc Azema, 2015, produced by Arte France, MC4 and Passé Simple, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtMbTflosqM (FR version), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A25OXk38-qQ (ES version).

New hypotheses are revolutionizing the world of prehistoric research. After more than twenty years spent studying Upper Paleolithic painting and engraving, the French prehistorian Marc Azéma arrived at the conclusion that they might have been the earliest attempt to represent an animated visual narrative, addressed to an audience and set inside an immersive space with specific acoustic qualities – an anticipation of cinematography. In addition to laying out his hypotheses in academic papers, Azéma decided to share them with the general public through a provocative film entitled Quand Homo Sapiens faisait son cinéma, produced by Arte France, MC4 and Passé Simple in 2015. In less than two years, the documentary was screened at the most important archaeological film festivals and distributed via DVD, web and TV channels. This great success shows that public interest in archaeological films with both documentary and artistic qualities is in constant growth.

∂ Open Access

Keywords: cinema, stone age, Homo Sapiens

For over 150 years, we have known the world of the Upper Paleolithic through a profusion of paintings and engravings, mostly found in deep caves immersed in lush natural environments. Most of them portray a veritable bestiary of primitive fauna, including mammals like mammoths, bears, horses, bison and lions depicted in natural circumstances. However, the real meaning of these images is difficult for us to grasp.

The impressive decorations of places like the Chauvet, Lascaux, Niaux and Altamira caves have attracted the attention of many scholars. But these have focused mainly on motifs and symbolic interpretation, neglecting all the technical aspects concerning the way primitive authors represented movement, and the relation that scenes might have with each other, as part of a narrative sequence.

Marc Azéma's research aims to fill this gap. He thinks that examining these aspects can help archaeologists interpret such subjects and open new perspectives on Paleolithic cave art and craft production.

The French prehistorian has spent over twenty years examining images from all the most important Upper Paleolithic sites in order to marshal evidence that primitive artists sought to represent a sequence of events, developing techniques to show the movement of characters by the superimposition or juxtaposition of successive images. By means of these two methods, prehistoric men prefigured one of the fundamental characteristics of visual perception, the persistence of vision, well ahead of the inventors of the first optical toys and cinematography during the 19th century.

This revolutionary interpretation, already made available in articles and academic publications by the author, is at the core of the documentary film *Quand Homo Sapiens faisait son cinema*, produced in 2015 by Arte France, in collaboration with Passé Simple and MC4. The film directors are Pascal Cuissot and Marc Azéma who, besides being an archaeologist, is also a good filmmaker.

The title is captivating and provocative by itself. It brings together two seemingly antipodal realities; on the one hand, we have the term 'Homo sapiens', which signifies in a nutshell the dawn of civilization, and on the other hand we have the term 'cinema', which clearly represents the modern world.

What bond exists between these two

epochs? According to Cuissot and Azéma, the *trait d'union* consists of the need to describe the world in its true form, by means of an animated graphic narrative. The link, then, is an 'aspiration for cinema' recognizable in over 20,000 years of Paleolithic art.

Homo sapiens was also 'Homo cinematographicus', then. He was able to invent tools for showing short animated stories and to depict narratives inside places that made multisensory experiences possible. Deep caves might have been used as immersive places, where the sequences were presented by the flickering light of torches, and rhythmic sounds echoed due to the caverns' acoustic qualities: a kind of pre-cinema, conceived by creative minds for a community, or better, an audience.

The film *Quand Homo Sapiens faisait son cinéma* belongs to the genre of docu-drama. The protagonist is the author of the study, Marc Azéma, who guides viewers step by step through his research. It is not the story of a sudden, sensational discovery; it is rather the narration of a progressive intellectual journey, composed of reflections, tensions and final goals. Archaeological research is often difficult, made up of intuitions and afterthoughts, and a cinematic narrative can help to show the audience the tensions within this process.

The documentary hits the nail on the head. Marc Azéma takes us on a journey to the most astonishing Paleolithic caves in France, Spain and Portugal; we see him working in his office or trying out 2D and 3D renderings; we join him in passionate debates with other people, not only enthusiastic colleagues, but also skeptical cinema historians.

The involvement of scholars from other fields of study clearly shows Azéma's need to not remain trapped in his discipline, but to have a continuous debate with other experts. These are prehistorians such as Antonio Baptista and Jean Clottes; historians of cinema such as Dominique Willoughby and Laurent Mannoni; ethologists such as Craig Packer; musicologists such as Iègor Reknikoff, and experts in reconstructing prehistoric artifacts, like Gilles Tosello and Florent Rivère. Each one of them adds a piece to the archaeological jigsaw puzzle created by Azéma, stressing the importance of an inter-disciplinary investigation. Sometimes these specialists are interviewed; more often, they talk directly with the protagonist. The use of dialogue as a means to represent the process of building knowledge is very efficient in documentaries. It lets the audience clarify difficult concepts while giving variety to the story, since every participant has a different physicality, timbre and gestures.

Regarding the film's direction, Cuissot and Azéma seem to observe the main rules of cinematic grammar. Long shots, closeups and sequence shots appear pleasantly molded together by the editing process. Scenes have been shot with drones, steady cam and hand-held camera. Drone sequences fill the documentary with spectacular scenes, offering broad views of natural cave landscapes; we see pristine places, which still maintain the environmental characteristics that attracted the primitive communities there, more than 30,000 years ago. Steady cam is used for interviews and long shots, while the hand-held camera is preferred for rapid action and close-ups. When the experimental archaeologist Florènt Rivere builds the replica of a prehistorical artifact, the camera zooms in on details. Rivere's hands, fingers and eyes, his actions as well, all fill the whole frame, highlighting the effort made by contemporary man to catch a glimpse of a 12,000 year old craft technique.

Lights and music are also fundamental for increasing emotions and atmosphere. Inside the caves, real people become shadows. They are backlit when they speak, while painted lions, horses and bison emerge from the rock in all their majestic colors and movements, stressing the contrast between reality and imagination, between present and past. The original soundtrack, composed by Renauld Barbier, is an interesting medley of classical and tribal sounds. Piano, choirs and bass, as well as percussion and lithophones, have been mixed with natural sounds such as birds singing, rivers flowing, wind blowing through trees, echoes and the sound of water dripping inside the cave. Such effects intensify the magical atmosphere that these ancient places have always had for human beings.

Its peculiar subject, effective script and the technical care employed have all contributed to making the documentary a remarkable success. During 2016 and 2017 the docu-drama was screened at public events held in cinemas, museums and universities, and distributed via DVD, web and TV channels. It also competed in the most important archaeological film festivals in Europe and the United States,

winning acclaim such as the 'Città di Rovereto –Archeologia Viva' and 'CinemAMoRe' awards at the XXVII Rassegna Internazionale del Cinema Archeologico in Rovereto (Italy), the Jury Special Award at the XIII Festival International du Film Archéologique in Nyon (Switzerland) and the Jury Award at the Festival du Film d'Archéologie d'Amiens (France).

The Stone Age in cinema, or cinema in the Stone Age, then? Maybe both.

Judging from the success of this documentary, a prehistoric topic can be advantageously developed through a powerful cinematic plot. Prehistory has always attracted different types of people, because of its associated aura of mystery, which surrounds this era due to the lack of written sources. Nevertheless, we can

easily imagine what that immersive experience in the womb of the earth was like. A kind of proto-cinema, when a graphic story was narrated to our prehistoric ancestors with visual frames, light and sound effects. We can feel their strongest emotions rise when they see in those drawings references to the circumstances of their own lives, represented allegorically by peaceful herbivores struggling for survival, as well as the ferocious predators with whom they shared the role of being hunters. Those primitive humans do not look so distant from us. They are maybe closer than we might expect - filled with fears, expectations and creativity, exactly like us. It just depends on which way we decide to point the camera.



Review: Father and Son: Videogame or emotional experience?

Giuliano De Felice

'University of Foggia, giulianodefelice@gmail.com

Father and Son. Produced by the National Archaeological Museum of Naples and created by Tuo Museo, lingue disponinili: Italian, English, Chinese, Russian, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Neapolitan dialect, available on App Store and Google Play, free to play.

2 million downloads in 10 months: Father and Son, the videogame produced by the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, is the media sensation of the year. An analysis.

3 Open Access

Keywords: videogame, Father and Son, National Archaeological Museum of Naples, communicating archaeology, digital archaeology, creativity

The news was hot for weeks about the extraordinary success of Father and Son (http://www.fatherandsongame.com/),

the videogame produced by the National Archaeological Museum of Naples and created by Tuo Museo. "The first videogame in the world to be published by an archaeological museum," as the claim rightly states, in the highly efficient publicity campaign promoting the whole operation. The figures speak for themselves: 2 million downloads in 10 months, translated in 7 languages, with other versions (including Neapolitan dialect) on the way, as well as a theatre performance, a video and a novel, all inspired by the videogame. It is the media sensation of the year, and not just in the field of archaeology.

I was curious too, so I embarked upon this fascinating voyage between past and present, and after a good hour or so I emerged from this enchanted world, thrilled on the one hand, but with some doubts and quite a few questions, on the other.

What we liked

Apart from the pros and cons of the game in itself, which we'll discuss shortly, the real innovative aspect of the Father and Son software lies in its flawless promotion, which doesn't neglect any aspect, either in the product itself or in the bundle of services. An active

presence on social media, close attention to retailer feedback, meticulous monitoring of figures and metrics: the quality is indisputable on these points, and represents a benchmark for any future digital promotion of cultural heritage.

And, indeed, as we should remind ourselves, this is not a secondary aspect. The problem of the maintenance, conservation and management of cultural assets should not only involve the assets in themselves, but extend to the activities and products of enhancement and enjoyment, especially digital, which are all too often still connected to episodic and experimental solutions, devoid of any costsbenefits analysis or real monitoring. Each of us, at least in Italy, could give an example of the digital non-sustainability of our cultural heritage.

The important element of what I would call 'methodological innovation' can be flanked by another in terms of style and content: the launch of a contemporary creative language that is innovative and light. In an instant the visual style of Father and Son does justice to decades of laborious research on formal correctness and photorealism at all costs, which has poisoned virtual archaeology, and with it, a good deal of archaeological communication. And so we are teletransported to the present, close to the concept of how to present cultural heritage enshrined in the Faro Convention, which

asks us all to make it central to our activities, including 'digital' communicators.

Here at Archeostorie we've said it a thousand times: the digital in archaeology must support creativity above all else. Seeing how simple it is here to pass from a living city to its ruins, without indulging in over precision and accuracy, is more than satisfying, to say the least. And seeing it at Pompei, well, that's almost a heresy... a splendid heresy!

What gave us some doubts

The remarkable success and the media storm took me straight to the store with high expectations, which were promptly confirmed upon first opening the game: the meticulousness of the presentation, the aforementioned style, the easy use and simple and intuitive commands instantly captivated me. But after a few minutes a question started to buzz round my head: what am I supposed to be doing? I looked for an answer in the various actions available. Nothing. Then, after about ten minutes of going around Naples hither and thither, on foot or on a scooter, I sat down, got up again, went out onto the balcony, went back inside, and started to wonder whether I'd gotten something wrong.

The same sensation assailed me when I realised that the interactive dialogues, well, they're not really that at all. So I was suspended in a lovely, fascinating world that, nevertheless, remains a pure exercise in style, in which all the instruments that have been so well crafted are not fully expressed. I played the whole game (though I'm not in Naples and so I couldn't unblock the extra contents) and at the end of it I must confess that part of the initial allure had disappeared, especially because of the slow and monotonous interaction.

In the absence of any real dynamic action, the charm of the beautiful ambients disappears, and gives way to the frustrating sensation of feeling yourself channelled along a predetermined flow, on a guided tour which you cannot leave. Innovative, fascinating, virtual, but above all

guided. Even the cognitive and didactic aspects remain on the sidelines of this tour between past and present, entrusted, it seems, to the descriptive captions of some objects in the museum and to some of the dialogues between the characters.

In conclusion

What Father and Son really knows how to do well is to enchant us: like in the scene of the eruption of Vesuvius where the countdown is inexorable, and you understand that there's nothing you can do. A pure thrill, and an unexpected one too, I'd say, especially on your smartphone, thanks in part to a very high quality audio, which nevertheless risks not being appreciated (I was able to enjoy it only because I used headphones). From this point of view Father and Son is a perfect example of an intelligent use of technology and creativity as publicity tools.

So doubts about the actual playability tend to remain in the background, if one considers its merit of having contributed to raise the bar of production 'quality' and affirm the role of 'creativity' as a language which is as important as, if not more important than technology in presenting Cultural Heritage to the general public. Quality and creativity, two fundamental concepts, especially in the context of the Faro Convention, which seeks to increase the inclusive potential of cultural communication, opening the door to interaction, and so obviously to games and videogames, beyond the dominant formalism and notionalism.

But perhaps that is just where the problem lies, in the word 'game,' which, for my generation at least, suggests something else. Father and Son probably shouldn't be considered a game at all, but a new experience in the enjoyment of cultural assets. A thrilling and unexpected experience, and more especially, light years away from the sterile fascination of digital classicism, of which we've all had our fill by now, every time one speaks of digital communication in archaeology.



