

CLOSING TIME

July 24, 2015 Giuliano De Felice Archaeological Media, Digital Archaeology, Education, Explore
Posts, Illustration, Italy, Museum Archaeology, Public Archaeology 3D, animation, communication, creative
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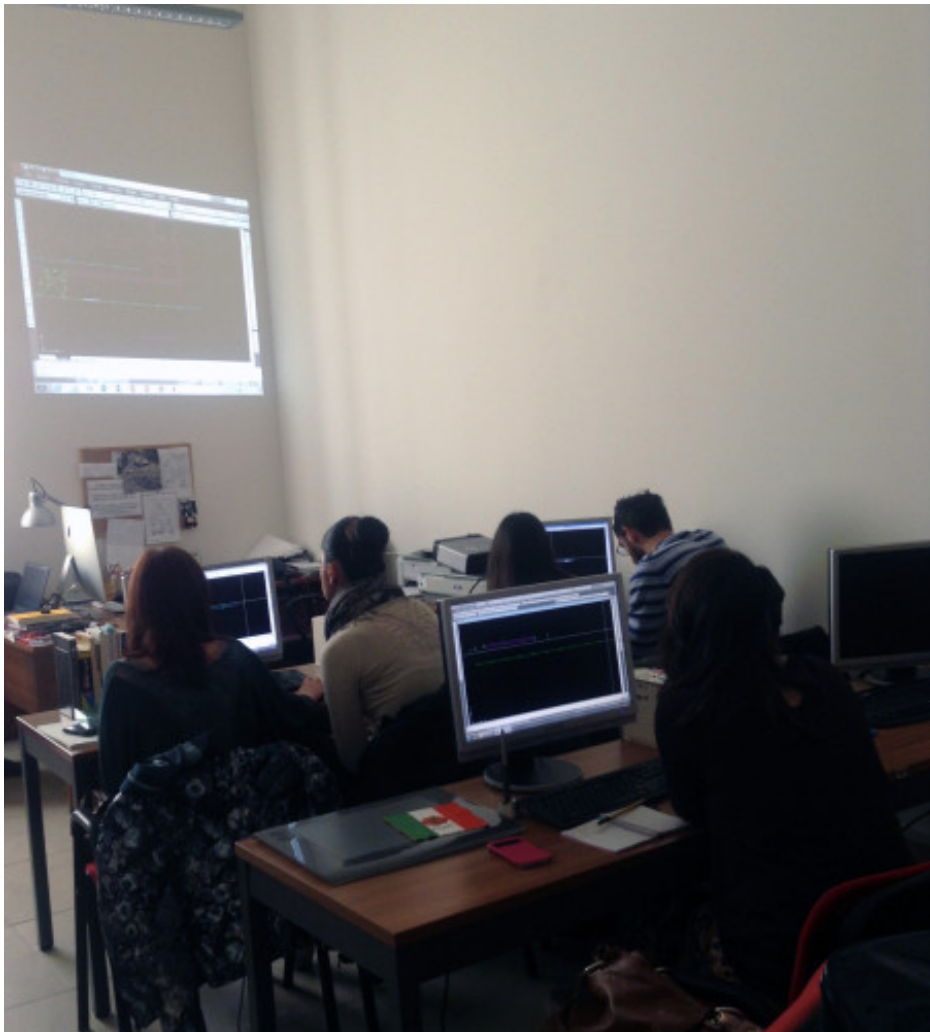
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Archaeology is nothing without a narration: aghat's why I spend the most of my teaching and research activities trying to figure out how to connect archaeology and communication.

Day 1, in the classroom



One day, in the classroom ...

Me: "... And if today it is impossible to imagine archaeological communication –and any archaeological activity- without the support of digital technologies, the question always bouncing in my mind is: what are the terms of this growing interaction and what can we expect for archaeological communication in the future?"

Class: "Better instruments, growing precision, more integration!"

Me: "Sure, but a real evolution is not to be confused with technological development, which, as we can easily imagine, will keep on growing enormously, but rather has to be pursued experimenting new and richer integration forms which aim to make the archaeology of the future a shared, public and sustainable one".

Class: "Ok. And then?"

Me: "The starting point is that, as a side effect of the 'digital' approach to archaeological communication, archaeological heritage has swiftly become a collection of finds and monuments from which to choose, case by case, the one that will most enhance the technical capabilities of computers and software".

Class: “Yes, we see that 3D visualisation is today the principal medium of archaeological communication: the demand for multimedia products in museums and parks or other cultural institutions remains high, while the pursuit of ever more beautiful and attractive products is in full swing. Today much of the communication game of archaeology involves the creation of breath-taking reconstructions and models”.

Me: “Yes. Today everyone can produce on a laptop a kind of content that 5 years ago was reserved to mainstream productions! But the rapid and uninterrupted development of computer graphic techniques seems to be taking archaeological communication toward a strange kind of a modern (and virtual) neoclassicism: the rest of the world still considers it as an adventurous occupation, delving into ancient secrets, strange objects and mysterious monuments.

Class: “Or else a dry and dusty routine of observation and cataloguing ...”

Me: “Right! 3D surveys of entire monumental complexes or ancient art objects, immersive models of famous archaeological sites, as well as high quality virtual reconstructions have drawn the attention away from that bunch of stuff you learn during your classes”.

Class: “...”.

Me: “I mean that every archaeologist perfectly knows that archaeology is not only concerned with individual finds or monuments; it deals every day with mute, dull and irrelevant fragments (of a whole that no longer exists) and seeks to squeeze them to reconstruct activities, stories, visions, cultures, of which those fragments are often the only traces. So, if the significance of an archaeological object is more complex than its material aspect and is profoundly linked to the story it conceals and yet could reveal, let’s try to narrate this story!”

Day 2-118. In lab, at home, in the train.

In the next days, I was browsing some books when I casually saw a picture of a museum display. A simple museum display containing a bunch of twenty little loom weights. And it was love at first sight. I had to tell their story!

So I started to develop a little personal project during my spare time: realizing a short computer animation movie, inspired by archaeology but linked with all day life, something that everybody could understand and, I hoped, love. That’s the story of *Closing Time*; someone could describe it as an attempt to find new connections between technical solutions and the expressive potentials of archaeology, investigating new languages and expressive forms ... For me it’s the attempt to raise a smile from archaeology.

The creation process has been a wonderful nightmare. I had to study a lot, learning to carry out a lot of activities, and to make a long and amazing journey through from the sweet lands of preproduction, through the stormy waters of production, to the not-so-still harbour of postproduction.

I started thinking about a subject, writing down a screenplay and then drawing and painting a storyboard

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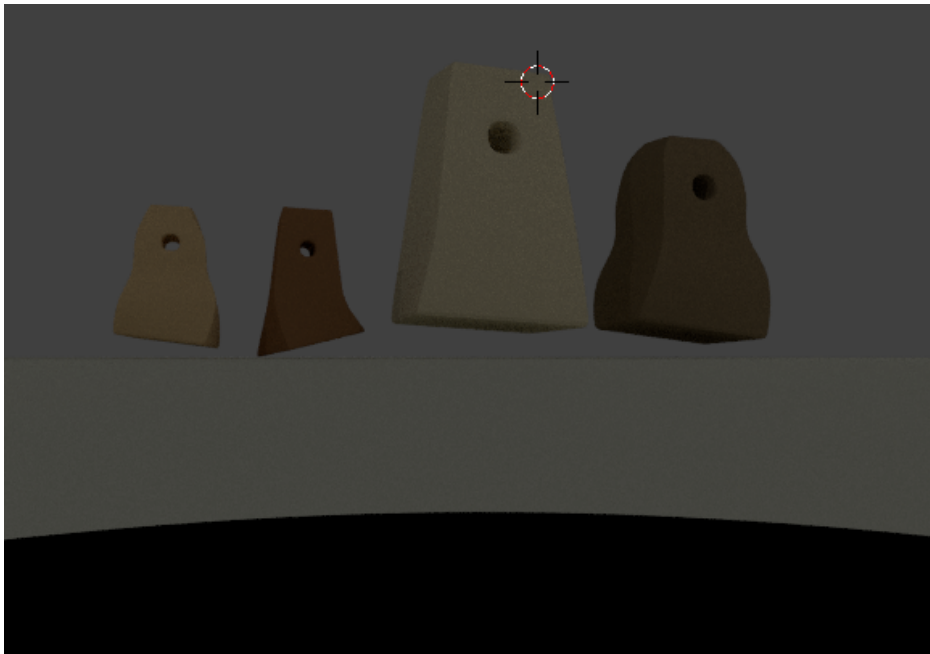


Storyboarding 1

... and animating a storyreel:



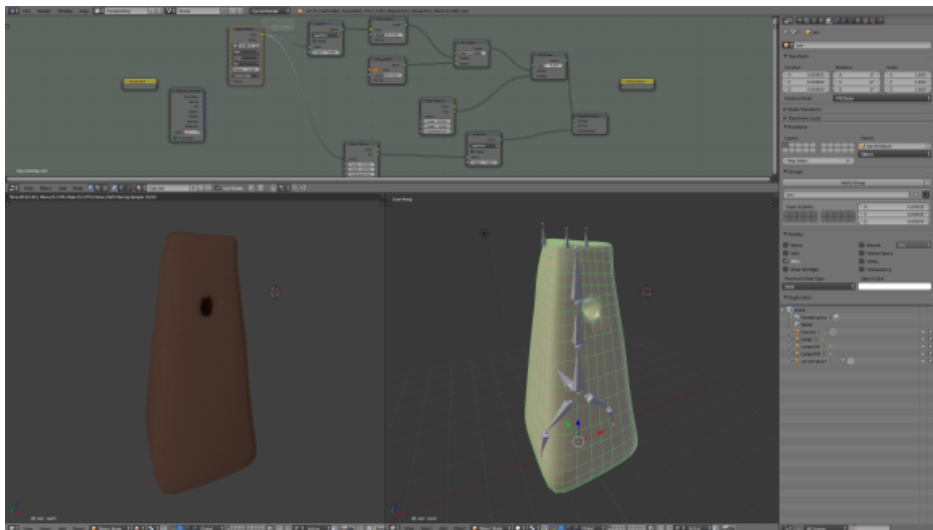
The storyreel



Characters begin to take shape

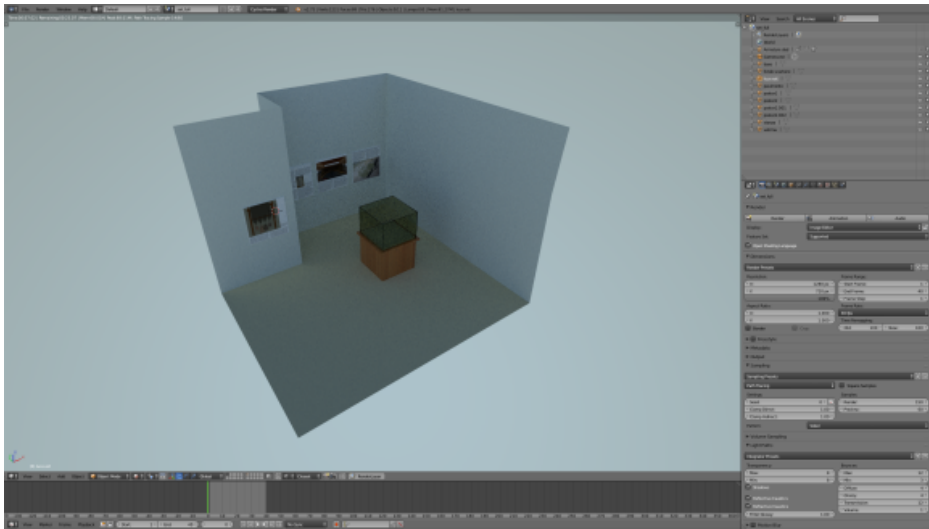
One of the first thing I decided to do was choosing music. This has been the most difficult and more exciting part: music helped finding the mood of the movie, imagining the duration of the scenes and setting up what I can call the rhythm of narration. Before adding music my project was totally static and boring; music *is* animation.

Then I drawn, modelled, skinned and animated the characters ...



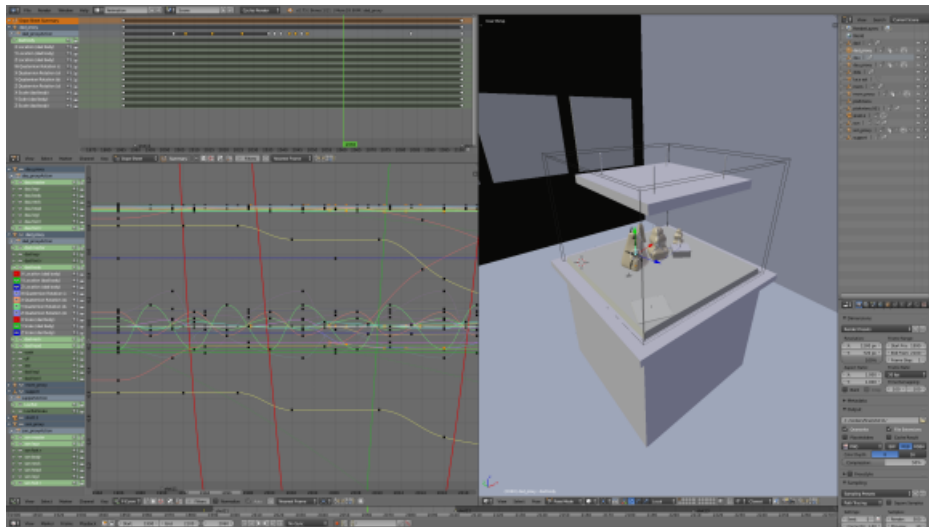
Modeling and skinning

After that I built a set ...



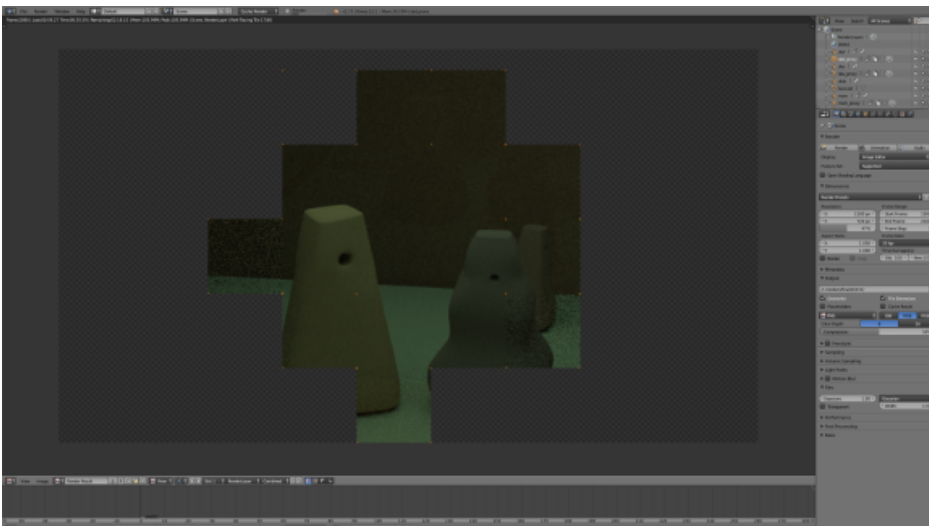
The set

...and animated every character, scene by scene. Doing, redoing, deleting, starting over, many, many times.



Animating

And then rendered. 3 weeks on 3 PCs to get the job done (5400 HD720p frames needed) ...



Rendering

And, at the end ... postproduction. That means for instance retouching the render output to achieve a good result, but also trimming scenes with precision, adding transitions and other video editing tricks, adding sounds, foley, titles. And of course easter eggs! You cannot release a CG movie without hiding easter eggs!



Postproduction!

Day 119, in the classroom, again.

Me: “Dear guys, please let me introduce to you the project that has been my main activity for the last 4 months. It’s my first short animation movie. 3 minutes of ...”

Class: “Wait wait wait ... 4 months for 3 minutes?”

Me: “Yes; but every single second is the hard outcome of struggle among creative issues, technical problems, temporary lacks of inspiration and all the things I taught during my course!”.

Class: “He’s gone mad ...”

Day 120. Today.

I believe that besides any kind of innovation what is really needed to renew archaeology is the creation of writing styles and narratives that can animate the bulk of knowledge scattered throughout the knowledge domain. Apart from requiring formal perfection in visualisation, we could require digital technologies to support a narrative plot, to tell a story, to help transmit cultural messages in different ways and forms.

I started this idea of *creative reuse* of archaeology last year with the 4 videos called *Pazzi da museo*. Those videos were deliberately ironic as the result of the choice to convey a message containing what

little knowledge we have, using a simple and ironic style (last year my post for DoA 2014 was dedicated to the realization of these videos, together with Matteo Toriello, a very capable digital animator). This year, Closing Time is a further step: not only because I did everything on my own, but also because there is no connection at all with archaeological knowledge; the characters could have been everything else than loom weights. The important point is that they are used as characters: they want to introduce themselves, come to life and narrate their story.

A simple story, because, in spite to common belief, only in few occasions archaeological finds are masterpieces or wonderful objects: in most cases they are common people, exactly like the rest of us.

Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of NewHouse Productions and *Pazzi da Museo*, please welcome Closing Time!

<https://youtu.be/dfX56mIB6E8>

All the other videos quoted in the paper are on Giuliano De Felice's YouTube channel.