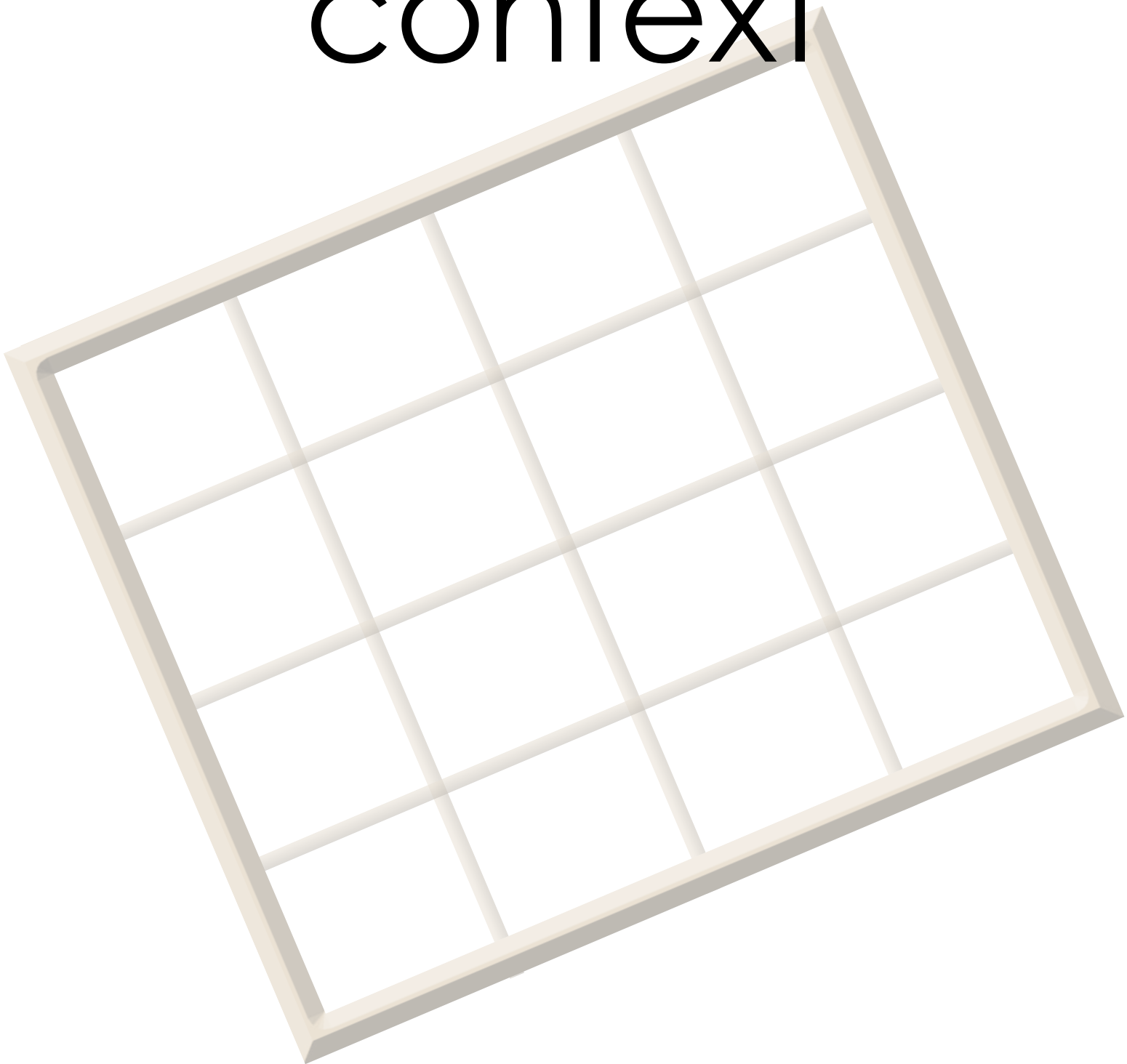


The grid in context



The grid in context

By Michaël Jasmin



The human fact par excellence is perhaps less in the creation of tool than in the domestication of time and space (Leroi-Gourhan 1965, 139).

Art – Archaeology – Landscape

I. Practicing Art and Archaeology

During my visit to the village of Măgura in summer 2010, I brought in my suitcase two areas of expertise: a university training in archaeology and an on-site artistic practice. This means that while looking at the landscape I can perceive it through the lens of an archaeologist: I contemplate places in order to isolate material culture remains from different pasts. But while looking at the landscape through the eye of an artist I will let my mind wander and produce more fictional images. Still, both approaches deal with telling: one with history, the other with stories.

So, how can such a double archaeological and artistic approach interact with the observation of landscape? How do they give way to the production of images that will challenge our perception of the landscape?

In the specific work realised at Măgura I was interested in anchoring it in archaeological procedure. So I oriented my work to create a dialogue within the archaeological sphere. This background determined the development of my on-site creation.





Art – **Archaeology** – Landscape

II. Archaeological procedure between research and creation

TIME and SPACE in archaeology

Anyone dealing with archaeology feels intimately that TIME is central to the discipline. Indeed, archaeology appears embodied into the past. The times encountered by archaeologists are heterogeneous, stratified and interpenetrated. So it seems that archaeology is fundamentally and merely about Time. Although this is quite correct, even more fundamental to archaeology is SPACE, and how time coagulates, mixes and physically alters space and matter. The relationship of archaeology with the concept of space also oriented my work around the village of Măgura. This is a way to remember that, before dealing with TIME, archaeologists are first of all dealing with the SPACE around them and its measurement and localisation.

My work relates to the concepts of space and landscape on three levels: the natural landscape within the regional Teleorman valley; the cultural landscape within the village of Măgura; and the archaeological settlement tell seen as an artefact (i.e. as the expression of a past and present cultural production).

Space and context in the village of Măgura

One aspect of my intervention at Măgura is the importance of the concept of GRID in archaeological practice. Grids are widely used in archaeology from large-scale (invisible) grids to map the sites, to small-scale grids (1 by 1 metre) used to draw excavated features and objects.

Archaeologists use at least two separate levels of grid. The first allows us to locate a place on a map using a shared international geographic system (e.g. as UTM (Universal Transverse Mercator), or WGS1984 (World Geodetic System) for the GPS system). The second level of grid is a local one. A grid (or carroyage) is installed by surveyors to cover the excavated site using, for example, 5 by 5 metre squares. This grid enables archaeologists to localise every excavated area and to map the objects inside the archaeological space.

These grids help archaeologists build perceptions of regional and local space. They allow archaeologists to organise, separate and then categorise these spaces. Grids are instrumental in enabling archaeologists to contextualise. And CONTEXT is the cornerstone of the archaeological approach, allowing interpretation of the connections between excavated features and objects.

Finally, these grids help archaeologists to conceptualise, visualise and reconstruct the spaces of the past.







The present uses of the settlement tell

The use of the space of the settlement tell (or artificial hill) is central in the daily life and understanding of the villagers of Măgura. Its unusual shape and its location, very close to, but still separated from the village, make it something unique and particular. The multiple uses of the settlement tell are significant. The top of the tell has a church and a cemetery and is used for religious purposes. Consequently it is a place with a very specific role in the life of the people from the village (associated with fundamental moments in life and death). The tell is also obviously an archaeological site. And last but not least, it has been used as an artistic space: with an artist (myself) using the tell slope as a board for a message and a land-art creation.



Art – Archaeology – **Landscape**

III. Interventions in the landscape

During my residency in Măgura, I developed an on-site installation. This intervention in the landscape had two dimensions: a physical on-site intervention and a visual photographic approach. These two works were closely connected and explore the concepts of space and grid. They are two different ways to intervene in the landscape: by the hand and by the eye.

a. Transforming the landscape: “37097.48776”

In-context or out-of-context?

The installation “37097.48776” is an application of the concept of the grid exploring framing at the largest scale. These numbers, their size (5 by 20 metres), their location and environment (on the slope of a Neolithic site), seem to be totally out of context. At the same time, however, they are precisely in context as these numbers refer to the spatial location of the tell in the UTM (Universal Transverse Mercator) grid co-ordinate system.

So this work contains a double perspective on the meaning of on-site: first by its physical location and second through its information content. These numbers connect the local with the global enlarging the locally made digits to the size of an international shared grid. This intervention in the landscape, with its spatial information on the tell, translates a series of numbers into a worldwide reference.



Branding the tell

The removal of the first surface layer of the tell (the turf) without disturbing the archaeological layers beneath is also a way to brand the site. This is a direct parallel with archaeologists when they leave a site after excavation: the place is left as an open space with disturbed earth that can be seen as scars. This act of 'tattooing' the earth can also be considered as the first step of a landscape transformation.







b. Transforming our perception: the grid and the visualisation of the landscape

By looking at different places through a grid, or by using an existing grid like strings in the visual space, the four pictures of the village and the tell play with the idea of grid in the present village of Măgura and its surroundings. These images question our way of looking at the landscape imposing a translation of viewpoint from 'on the ground' to 'in front'.

For further information see Jasmin 2011.







Bibliography

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