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Reply to comments

Nicolas Zorzin

I greatly appreciate that four colleagues agreed to contribute to a constructive discussion of the degrowth movement and its potential implications for archaeology. The comments proposed by the reviewers are overall rather encouraging, notwithstanding the identification of some blind spots which will need to be developed and discussed further. The discussion also brought new ideas, and in so doing, despite some disagreements on the use of terminology, highlighted the difficulty of representing ourselves clearly, and projecting that representation into capitalist organizations, collapsing capitalist societies, or a post-capitalist world. Degrowth is axiomatically defined by this progressive transition until the advent of a post-growth society. As such, it is not a dogma defining a path but a range of possibilities that make it impossible to ‘contemplate what archaeology may look like’ (p. 28) in the future. As I am offered this last window for answering comments, I would like to take the opportunity to clarify and extend some of the views presented in my original article.

First, a note should be added concerning the circumstances of this publication: a turning point in my relation to archaeological fieldwork occurred in the United Kingdom in 2015, following my

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participation in a salvage archaeology contract. It is not an overstatement to say it was a traumatic experience, and I cannot imagine how the working conditions I experienced could be physically and mentally bearable for an average human being in the long term. After reflecting on that experience and after a first phase of analytical writing (Zorzin 2016b), I decided to submit a manuscript to *Archaeological dialogues*, not aiming to deconstruct a specific case, but rather to propose a transition towards actions. I did so because we were collectively in desperate need, as expressed by the frustrations of my interviewees in the UK in 2015 (and my own), of tangible solutions. Yet, as Flexner underscores in his answer, without any connections between us at that stage, and with very different personal and professional experiences, we were following the same train of thought and reaching relatively similar conclusions. The synchronicity of our proposals seemed to indicate that such reflection in archaeology might be necessary, challenging and fruitful. As far as I know, the subject has been already developing, as illustrated in 2018 by the Colloque sur l'éthique en archéologie, in Paris (Pasquini and Vandeveld 2019), bringing together scholars and non-scholars. As such, degrowth did not and does not constitute a new 'academic niche', but simply represents the desire for action of many of us, often echoing our pre-existing involvement in community activism (social, ecological, etc.).

Furthermore, to define the attempt to connect the degrowth movement to archaeology, I could not have picked a better term than the one proposed by Flexner in his answer, seeing us as *bricoleurs* (from the French for handyman). The term carries numerous meanings, which I think illustrates particularly well our approach: a *bricoleur* is a person who patches things together, attempting to create something possibly useful and meaningful for the community, and potentially aesthetically satisfying or somehow provocative. *Bricoler* (as a verb), or *bricolage* (as a noun) implies a certain degree of amateurism, of learning through trial and error, and even though the concept has been regarded increasingly as futile or even as a nuisance in capitalist society, it echoes the idea of the coming of the 'age of low tech' of the French engineer Bihouix (2014). *Bricoler* implies a philosophy favouring modest (but meaningful, or even vital) achievements with modest means, and, through the making or the repair of artefacts, it represents the quintessence of a logic conflicting frontally with the values of the consumerist society and opposing the fetishism of new shiny and expensive gadgets. To *bricoler* objects or ideas is a form of decolonization, moving away from capitalistic concepts and practices. What might be an obvious routine activity for some, for many of us, in contrast, *bricoler* is mostly an abstraction, as we have only learned to dispose and consume. As a result, and this should not be underestimated, we need to relearn *bricolage* to imagine and create, and almost from scratch.

Although the explicit interconnection made by Flexner between the degrowth movement and science fiction is in fact a crucial element of the degrowth approach consisting in 'awakening the imaginaries' (Damasio 2020), I did not dare to state it as frankly as Flexner did, but I do see the future of archaeologists in a very similar way, i.e. as 'shadowy saboteurs, subverting the surveillance systems of the powerful to scavenge for valuable resources to contribute to our communities' (p. 18). Echoing Flexner's definition above, a very influential novel (not translated from French), *La zone du dehors* (Damasio 2009), should be mentioned here. The book also describes a dystopic colonized world hierarchized and defined by scarcity (like the 'exterminism' model of Frase (2016), introduced by Flexner), where a small community of *resistants bricolent* at the margin of the colony with the dumps of the consumerist core (which they hack), while attempting to establish the new basis of an anarcho-degrowth-inspired society. This is surely fiction, but it might give us a glimpse on how archaeology could play a role 'in a future living with the ruins of capitalism' (p. 18), as suggested by Flexner. Here, I should mention that a few months ago, a MA student I supervise (Dong-Yo Shih 施東佑) proposed writing his archaeology thesis (which I cite here with his consent) on 'Toxic heritage and contemporary archaeology. Electronic waste at Erren river' in Taiwan. To continue his research project, he proposed publishing a catalogue of the waste excavated and set up an exhibition in collaboration with both an artist and the local community. Despite some resistance among members of the archaeological community who

consider it ‘not archaeology’ and threaten him with ‘unemployability’, this transition of the focus of our profession towards the ruins of capitalism is obviously already in motion.

Second, I am particularly thankful to Sadie Watson’s detailed and honest answer, herself operating within the contract archaeology sector in the UK. Here, I would like to recontextualize the contractual constraints experienced in the UK, which explained the issue of ‘participant observation’ mentioned by Watson, and which illustrates further the problematic management of the mega-project in question (Zorzin 2016b). A rather peculiar arrangement, consisting in half of the contracts signed directly with the developer, placed half of the archaeological team in a position of ‘mercenaries’, or atomized workers. This may have aimed to discourage horizontal solidarity among workers but in fact achieved the opposite (the developer underestimated the strength of the archaeological camaraderie tradition). Yet, from our workers’ perspective, this configuration placed the hierarchy in a blurry zone: was the power structure established by the developer or by the archaeological unit? Who was accountable to whom? As such, this situation forbade the development of a vertical ‘spirit of solidarity’ among the archaeological staff.

My proposal of ‘sabotaging’ some of our work might sound excessive, and wrongly directed against the archaeological unit itself. In any case, the night shift’s resisting attitude was not aimed at ‘sabotaging’ the work of the archaeological unit or opposing its regular staff, but rather at sabotaging the takeover by the developer and opposing the working nonsense we had to deal with. As such, the incentive of this unplanned ‘participant observation’ was born in opposition to the abusive injunctions of the developer’s contract: notably, not to discuss any topics concerning our work between us or with outsiders. This attempt at absolute control of communication unleashed a range of reactions among the staff; mine was to attempt to make public the developer’s managerial abuses and manipulations. As such, I agree with Watson that this ‘participant observation’ might not have perfectly followed *les règles de l’art* because it was both impromptu and could not be announced too widely (i.e. vertically). However, a balance was reached by revealing enough in the publication to make the case relevant and understandable while protecting the anonymity of the archaeologists, and I think both aims were achieved adequately.

For such a contribution to be relevant and not to fall into the category of ‘academic exercise, well-meaning but ultimately toothless’ (p. 26), it is crucial that these ideas are put into action, and to that extent I agree with Wurst’s critique. Yet one advantage for archaeologists that Wurst might have overlooked is that archaeology in academia gives plenty of space to implement a large range of actions on the fieldwork, which are unequivocally only possible through the coordinated actions of numerous actors. There is no such thing as individual action in modern and socially engaged archaeological fieldwork, and my intention in writing this article was not only to share and debate the potential alternative practices for archaeology, but also give myself and our future team possible guidelines to work with in developing a collegial project. The initial formulation of these ideas might have taken an individual form for now, but its transformation towards actions and solutions would only be conceivable as an anti-capitalistic community answer, including the crucial involvement of non-academics. This reflection could hopefully fulfil its potential in Greece (as mentioned before) with a long-term archaeological project where I intend to put into practice some of the ideas exposed here. Flexner and I will certainly fail in numerous ways in these collaborative and transformative attempts, but even though minimal or marginal, the little successes we will achieve should, hopefully, bring positive change.

Finally, I realized that not having developed a section dedicated to neo-liberalized academia where archaeologists are all currently trained might seem complicit with my own recent integration within academia. On that matter, I fully agree with Moshenska that the reflection should be urgently directed toward academia itself as well. To enact our degrowth lecture of archaeology’s future, we will indeed have to entirely redefine our teaching and its goals in a falling or post-capitalist society. As pointed out by Moshenska, the solutions are not straightforward and contain in themselves the seeds of an unwanted gentrification or *re-elitization* of archaeological practices, in complete opposition to our common goals. Attempting to decolonize the content of most

teaching is something I am seeking now. Anecdotally, but particularly relevant here, I was subsequently contacted by another department with an obscure agenda, to integrate one of my courses with their programme of ‘sustainable development’, a concept which I always strongly opposed, as it consists only of ‘green-washing’ unethical behaviours, attempting to maintain ‘business as usual’ and ultimately changing nothing. As such, neo-liberal academia is attempting to absorb divergent and alternative voices, branding them with trendy labels in order to optimize both visibility and recruitment, while neutralizing the initial goals of the voices challenging the capitalist order. I did not and would not comply with this.

As such, I cannot ‘retreat to my ivory tower’ but I must rather go back to a crumbling one. As suggested by Moshenska, despite a general rise in numbers of students, sometime increase in funds, and construction of brand-new buildings, etc., academia has entered a deep ethical and pedagogical crisis. For my colleagues and myself, a lot of time and energy would have to be dedicated to resisting, getting around or literally sabotaging what neo-liberal academia is trying to make us do against the interests of students (the tendencies are to form compliant technicians, not challenging intellectuals), against communities’ interests, against research quality and publications, and against the development of a critical and meaningful future for archaeology. So far, we have not had to deal with a direct attempt to control the contents of courses or publications. However, the pressure towards such control is perceptible, notably with the acceleration of digital tracking with the COVID-19 crisis that is getting closer and closer to the context of our work. It is still possible to ignore or bypass such control, but if it becomes unavoidable and effective in curbing critical content (see the recent case of the UK with ‘school guidance’ forbidding the use of ‘anti-capitalist material’; Busby 2020), my own moral integrity and social engagement would result in my resignation, but not before a fight necessarily involving a collective and solidary answer.

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