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ARTICLE

Degrowth and a sustainable future for archaeology

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Abstract

It is increasingly acknowledged that 21st-century archaeology faces serious challenges from a variety of directions, ranging from the theoretical to the practical. Above all, the discipline's entanglement with capitalism, capitalist ideologies and capitalist institutions is simply unsustainable. The concept of *degrowth* involves a reconceptualization of archaeology's possible future(s) in terms of a withdrawal from capitalism and an emphasis on collective and caring praxis looking towards both a sustainable future and the possibilities of the immediate present. A degrowth approach to archaeology can provide a useful supplement to existing critiques and proposed alternatives to current practices. Degrowth proposals such as reorienting economic behaviours towards cooperative, convivial and *dépense* (communal use of surplus) activities while freeing people to pursue work they find meaningful have potential applications in archaeological practice that address some of the problems currently facing the discipline.

Keywords: Degrowth; cultural resource management; heritage; capitalism; sustainability

There is something wrong with archaeology. Or, more precisely, there is something wrong with capitalism, and as a result archaeology is being suffocated by a combination of neo-liberalism, austerity and anti-intellectual politics. With pressing and immediate concerns in such an environment, many archaeologists have stopped considering what futures our present actions might construct (Högberg *et al.* 2017). Archaeologists have recognized that something has been wrong with the discipline for some time. A variety of critiques have been proposed, particularly of contract archaeology, where the discipline is perceived as most problematically entangled with capitalism (e.g. Gnecco and Dias 2015; Hamilakis 2015; Hutchings and La Salle 2015; Shepherd 2015; Zorzin 2015a).

One key point in these critiques is that much of the strife in the archaeological profession stems from the nature of life in growth-oriented capitalist societies (Victor 2015; Zorzin 2015b). The problem is not archaeology or archaeologists, it is capitalism! Governments, corporations and often individuals want more each year. Bigger houses, nicer shopping malls, production of consumer goods and 'experiences' often necessitate the destruction of archaeology. Archaeologists are thus contracted to carry out (controlled) destruction as required by heritage legislation. Universities likewise increasingly operate according to a corporate model in which they expect more 'production' (in the form of larger class sizes, profitable external grants and prestigious publications) from their employees. Degrowth scholarship proposes a way out of this situation, an opportunity to break the endless and unsustainable cycle of economic growth and individualistic consumerism. It proposes to reorder society in a way that favours the collective, caring and convivial aspects of life while ending and eventually reversing the environmental damage capitalism has wrought on Earth (D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis, 2015; Kallis 2018).

Archaeological knowledge production, whether from academic or contract archaeology, developed in and follows a capitalist model. Productivity in the discipline is driven by organizing labour

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into hierarchical structures based on varying degrees of experience and expertise, for the creation of end products such as reports and journal articles (I'm quite aware of the irony here). These products are then 'consumed' by various audiences – students, academic colleagues, developers – and simultaneously used to justify further work via the next grant or contract. Caraher (2019) points out that the logic of logistics has permeated much of archaeological practice, especially since the emergence of 'big-data' approaches to research. People, commodities and knowledge are mobilized on a mass scale to produce more and more at an ever-accelerating pace.

We must know that this situation cannot persist forever. The carbon and mineral footprint of the apparently infinite demand for computing power, the continuous wearing down of enthusiastic young people by the constant demand for productivity, the endless and exhausting competition for resources and recognition are all patterns of unsustainable practice. Various proposed alternatives include the long-standing application of Marxist tenets to archaeological theory and practice (e.g. Leone 1995; McGuire 1992; 2008; Spriggs 1984). Other positive interventions include calls to activism (Atalay *et al.* 2014; Stottman 2011); an infusion of anarchisms into archaeology (Borck and Sanger 2017; Flexner and Gonzalez-Tennant 2018; Rathbone 2017); indigenous-led, decolonizing archaeologies (Atalay 2006; Gonzalez, Kretzler and Edwards 2018); and proposals such as 'slow' and 'punk' approaches to the discipline (Caraher 2019; Caraher, Kourelis and Reinhard 2014; Cunningham and MacEachern 2016; Morgan 2015).

This article explores the possibilities in the expanding field of 'degrowth' scholarship (e.g. D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis 2015; Kallis 2018) for archaeological practice. Far from being an introduction to new ideas for the sake of newness or academic branding (cf. Ribeiro 2016), degrowth is a relevant body of scholarship, praxis and action external to the discipline of archaeology precisely because it has numerous *practical* implications. Degrowth scholarship is about exploring specific reasonable alternatives to capitalism and its 'growth' ideology, in the long and short terms and across a number of fronts. It provides a 'middle-range theory' (*sensu* Raab and Goodyear 1984) to connect the possibilities of an optimistic future with the necessary hard work to be done in the present.

In addition to its problematic relationship with capitalism, archaeology has a complicated relationship in many contexts with nationalism and nationalist projects. While nationalist archaeologies have been widely criticized and are often viewed as obsolete, there are still elements of nationalism present in the form of funding schemes and heritage protection (Brück and Stutz 2016). Archaeological heritage has also been appropriated by new ethno-nationalist right-wing movements, in Scandinavia, for example (Niklasson and Hølleland 2018). In the 21st century, nationalist projects are to some extent indistinguishable from capitalist ones. Nations measure their wealth through metrics such as gross domestic product (GDP) (O'Neill 2015). Continued growth is perceived as representing a strong economy. A strong economy requires 'development', and development projects (mines, dams, highway systems) require contract archaeology (Jofré 2015; Ribeiro 2015). Degrowth recognizes that the personal, corporate, national and international obsession with growth will render the planet uninhabitable or at least seriously unpleasant within the coming centuries, if not sooner. Growth as traditionally defined and measured by economists is no longer desirable (Kallis 2018, 1–2; Victor 2015).

As Kallis (2018) outlines, degrowth is not a single body of theory, and does not belong to a particular discipline, though it is most commonly discussed within the fields of ecological economics and political ecology (e.g. Paulson 2017; Sekulova *et al.* 2013; Weiss and Cattaneo 2017). Degrowth offers a 'concrete [in the sense of solid] utopia' (Kallis 2018, 124). It provides a vocabulary of concepts that offer alternatives to current assumptions about economy and society (D'Alisa, Deriu and Demaria 2015). Archaeology can integrate degrowth concepts while also providing critical historical perspective on how the growth-oriented global political economy emerged (though this will be less of a focus in this paper) and can be imagined as a valued activity in a degrowth future. While degrowth is not necessarily explicitly pitched as an 'anarchist' movement, one possible corollary to a degrowth ethos is the shrinking of state bureaucracies in the long

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term, reducing the 'governmentality' of archaeology (Plets 2016) where the state is no longer needed to manage growth-oriented capitalist development. Core tenets of the degrowth movement will be outlined below, especially where specific concepts can be related to current and future archaeological practice.

Degrowth and archaeological labour

Degrowth offers a complementary field of scholarship for some of the attempts at crafting a radical alternative to an archaeology being simultaneously strangled by austerity and steamrolled by runaway growth-oriented development. The comprehensive introductory volume on degrowth in English, which provides short essays covering the theoretical and practical aspects of the movement, is *Degrowth. A vocabulary for a new era* (D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis 2015). The main thrust of the argument is that a growth-oriented capitalism cannot continue on its current path on a resource-limited planet (see also Barnosky *et al.* 2012; Frey 2019; O'Neill *et al.* 2018). To survive and thrive in the future, humanity needs to find a new way of thinking about economic behaviour in a way that promotes a reduction in scale, particularly in the wealthiest countries, while also considering the quality of life through a lens other than consumerism as encapsulated by concepts like GDP (O'Neill 2015).

Degrowth proposes to repoliticize environmental activism (Renou 2015; Swyngedouw 2015), providing a call to action to rebuild economies around renewed notions of commons (Helfrich and Bollier 2015), care (D'Alise, Deriu and Demaria 2015), happiness (Sekulova 2015) and conviviality (Deriu 2015b). Importantly, degrowth seeks to move beyond the purely hypothetical or idealistic to think critically through the specific policies, praxis and theories that can be used to construct a better future via action in the present (e.g. Foster 2017; Kallis 2013; Lorek and Fuchs 2013; Sorman and Gianpietro 2013). The goal here is not to completely summarize the degrowth movement and related debates in all of their complexity (for a recent synthesis, see Kallis 2018). Rather, I want to point to a few key tenets that might be interesting for reconceptualizing archaeology in both the long and short terms. Specifically, some of the degrowth concepts surrounding labour seem imminently applicable to archaeology as a field of practice.

One of the important concepts from degrowth is the idea that humans not only need to reduce consumption (though we need to do this too – Barnosky *et al.* 2012; O'Neill *et al.* 2018). We also need to reconceptualize the way that we think of employment and the production of goods and services. A necessity of contemporary, growth-oriented economies is the proliferation of administrative and bureaucratic make-work jobs, and related support services (24-hour food preparation and delivery, privatized for-profit childcare and so on). Graeber (2018) terms 'bullshit jobs' those careers that provide no discernible social good and no meaning for the people who have them. They are simply a way to earn an income but offer no real value for individuals or society.

Perhaps the alienation or cynicism many practising archaeologists feel results from the fact that deep interest in the past has largely been subsumed to bureaucratic process for much of the field (Zorzin 2015a, 128–130). Worse, current weekly working hours produce unsustainable levels of carbon dioxide, because of both the carbon outputs of labour activities and the consumption habits that drive people to work long hours. Arguments aimed to dismiss critiques of archaeology and capitalism on the basis that the profession offers merely a 'solid, middle class salary' (Hutchings and La Salle 2015, 702) ring somewhat hollow when viewed from this perspective. Reducing the length of the working week both is necessary to combat climate change and will increase employment levels as well as worker happiness (and not just for archaeologists – Frey 2019).

Degrowth scholarship simultaneously recognizes that nonetheless people do need to have some form of work to provide meaning and structure for their lives. Mass unemployment is not a positive way forward for a shrinking economy. Ironically, one of the things the degrowth literature suggests is that a reduction in working hours related to the kinds of unnecessary jobs mentioned

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above might free people to pursue meaningful work in precisely the care and maintenance-type services oriented to communities and the environment that are currently undervalued and underemphasized in growth-focused economies (D'Alise, Deriu and Demaria 2015; Helfrich and Bollier 2015).

One recommendation to solve the issue of meaningful use of people's time is some form of 'jobs guarantee' that seeks full employment while at the same time reducing the number of working hours per individual (Alcott 2013; Unti 2015). Laying aside the macroeconomic arguments here, one of the goals of a jobs guarantee and related concepts like a basic and maximum income (Alexander 2015) or work sharing (Schor 2015) is to free people to pursue the kind of work they find interesting and fulfilling. It shifts an economy in which labour is conceptualized as drudgery and misery to one in which unpleasant but necessary work is shared more equitably, while interesting and enjoyable work is more prevalent and widely available (Nørgård 2013).

Surely this would be a positive outcome for archaeology. Consider how many sincerely interested people don't pursue a career in the field because they don't see paid employment in it, or leave after a few years of feeling unappreciated and underpaid (see examples in Zorzin 2015a; 2015b). A degrowth labour economy would give people the autonomy (Deriu 2015a) to decide for themselves how much of their time, if not all of it, to use in the pursuit of meaning, through work or leisure. At the same time, archaeology could be decoupled from the development-oriented state bureaucracies that currently drive most professional work. We could lose the worst parts of the kind of work we do (the dull, procedural and administrative elements of archaeology), while keeping the best (the exciting, fascinating, collective pursuit of researching the human past).

This is in some sense a return to the roots of the discipline, when archaeology was generally a leisure pursuit for well-to-do amateurs (Trigger 1989, 35–109). Unlike the elitist past of much archaeological practice, a degrowth approach would seek to expand and diversify opportunities for participation, and not just as manual or menial labour. In the short term this would not necessarily mean giving up the professional status of the discipline or our places as 'experts', but it would necessitate an opening up of archaeological practice to embrace alternative forms of engagement with the discipline in ways that don't necessarily fit capitalist norms of 'work'. In the longer term, a degrowth approach to archaeology would emphasize the communal, convivial aspects of fieldwork and research for diverse groups of people in an economy that was actively deconstructing and redistributing the massive amounts of wealth accumulated at the top of the system.

Archaeology in a degrowth economy

To understand one of the ways that archaeology would function in a degrowth economy, I add the concept of *dépense* (Romano 2015), originally formulated by the French scholar Georges Bataille (1976) in *La part maudite* (sections have been translated to English in Bataille 1998, 61–85). Bataille argued that human societies dispersed surplus resources, which are inherent to life on Earth, through communal and individual sacrifices of various sorts. *Dépense* refers to those social activities that exist to utilize ('spend') the excess energy produced as a result of physiological limitations and human productivity. Assuming that society produces more than enough to survive at the most basic subsistence level, the energy above and beyond that level must be put to some purpose. Currently, this energy is largely returned to individualistic consumption and thus the production system itself, so it can feed cycles of economic growth (Victor 2015). In a degrowth economy, the goal of *dépense* would be to use the excess energy for activities that offer collective experiences and assist in the construction of social meaning.

What is archaeology, if not a *dépense* activity? At their best, archaeologists come together in a communal pursuit of information about the past, through surveys, excavations, studies of museum collections and so on. At their best, these pursuits are done without any interest in economic or monetary gain; rather the goal is to create knowledge, engage people to think about

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their identities, and pursue a sense of community or sense of place. These practices can be enjoyable because they offer a sense of conviviality, a coming together of people to share a meaningful experience. Archaeologists drawing on Ivan Illich (e.g. 1975) have pointed to the ways that capitalism has interfered with society's convivial tendencies both historically and within our own disciplinary practices (Caraher 2019; Given 2018).

In outlining what a degrowth archaeology might look like I'd also like to point to the potential importance of modern-world archaeology (e.g. Orser 1996; 2010) to the field. If the last 500 years or more produced the growth-oriented modern capitalism that has been so damaging to so many ecosystems and communities, we might need another 500 years or more to work towards a true degrowth of that system. Archaeology provides a means to understand the material and historical dynamics of the emergence of a global growth political economy, and perhaps some perspectives on how to escape the old order.

It is thus possible to imagine what archaeology might look like in a degrowth future:

- Archaeology is no longer mostly developer-driven, as a degrowth approach to the economy does away with destructive, consumptive, unsustainable development based on economic growth.
- Academic archaeology has moved on from the 'publish-or-perish' paradigm; instead universities provide a shared and accessible space for people to pursue research interests with an end goal of co-publishing or publicizing knowledge for society.
- Knowledge produced by archaeologists is no longer hidden from the public behind paywalls as profit-oriented commercial presses no longer dominate the publishing landscape.
- Archaeology is a project of communal labour and cooperative praxis; its practitioners come together out of shared interests and work towards common ends.
- Archaeological work takes place in an environment that fosters appropriate sharing of knowledge and care for its practitioners and for heritage.
- Archaeology is pursued as a convivial activity, bringing people together both to learn and to gain happiness through the pursuit of understanding the past. This includes difficult pasts that need confronting so communities can heal from past injustices such as colonialism.
- While expertise would still be needed and appreciated, the archaeological process would be democratized and consensus-oriented.[1]
- There might still be professional archaeologists, but they serve as mentors and facilitators rather than as bosses or bureaucratic managers.
- Archaeological work would be a form of *dépense*; that is, a way for people to engage in a joyful, meaningful pursuit as a use of surplus resources available to society.

Prospects for the present: can we get there?

There are many ways to imagine an ideal archaeology in a utopian future, but coming up with concrete strategies to arrive at such a future can be more difficult. Degrowth is a form of utopian thinking, but scholars have understood for a long time that utopianism is a necessary counterpoint to ideologies which aim to maintain the status quo (Mannheim 1936). If a dramatic revolution, violent or otherwise, is unlikely, and probably undesirable,[2] then degrowth provides a usable philosophy of everyday action that can complement some of the other radical proposals for the field of archaeology, and for society. If capitalism and the state are unlikely to go anywhere in the immediate future, degrowth can provide some ideas for how to act within the political economy that we do have, even if the end goal is the dissolution of that system (hence the notion above that it provides a kind of middle-range theory). The seeds of a degrowth-oriented archaeology are, in a sense, already planted in some fields of disciplinary practice. This being a relatively new concept, there is little archaeology explicitly engaged with degrowth, but some extant practices and tendencies could be built upon in the future. Above all, we need to find

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the ways in which archaeologists are able to resist the commercialization and bureaucratization of our discipline, then cultivate, strengthen and support those areas that might contribute to a degrowth future.

Much of what is described above overlaps to some degree with concepts of 'public archaeology' (Matthews, McDavid and Jeppson 2011; Moshenka 2017) and 'community archaeology' (Marshall 2002; Truscott 2016), including the building of communities within the discipline (Carman 2018). Arguably in some cases the notion of collaboration with communities has been coopted for the purposes of a colonialist business-as-usual approach that treats community as another tick-box to clear the way for development (Carman 2011; La Salle and Hutchings 2018). One way forward, particularly in settler colonial societies, is through situations in which indigenous people themselves take the lead in establishing the parameters for archaeological work (e.g. Acuto and Corimayo 2018; Gonzalez *et al.* 2018; Kawelu and Pakele 2014). In other contexts, various groups of people should have access to the archaeological decision-making process, and where possible we should be seeking out the most marginal voices to contribute to the discipline. As Kallis (2018, 121) describes, degrowth economies will involve collective, 'unproductive expenditures ... festivals and carnivals, an expansion of the humanities, Dionysian festivals or unprofessional Olympic games'. Many archaeologists will have fond memories of field schools, archaeology open days, lab work and even university seminars where we were able to pursue interesting research or discussions about the past, its meaning and its relevance for the present. Further, particularly in fieldwork, there are already elements of conviviality and in some cases a 'festival' atmosphere involving both the participants and public visitors exploring and celebrating a local past.[3]

More broadly, the archaeological decision-making process has to be moved in some way out of the purview of both private developers and governments whose primary view of archaeological heritage is as a nuisance to be cleared away, or a 'resource' to be used to bolster nationalism or produce a profit, through tourism for example. In both cases archaeology is primarily transformed into information so that development can go ahead and economies can grow. In some cases, communities see economic growth as beneficial and archaeology as getting in the way of something they desire. While archaeologists need to respect community wishes, there is also a space for negotiation and debate about how to best deal with heritage. A degrowth perspective could provide the argument not only for a better treatment of heritage, but also for the need to transition to a degrowth society more broadly.

Outlining archaeology's problematic relationship with capitalism is not the same as proposing to do away with the commercial heritage industry immediately. The immediate cessation of contract archaeology would in many cases mean that archaeology is simply destroyed by developers or governments who patently do not care, even in the face of public outcry (Ribeiro 2015). At least in the current state there is some bureaucratic recourse, even if it is imperfect. Contract archaeology can be one area of direct action and confrontation with development, but it only works well when archaeologists have the time to properly understand and act on local concerns, with relevant communities having the autonomy to decide how a project might move forward (see Colwell 2016 for an example of things gone 'wrong'). Ideally, contract archaeology can leverage its position to help communities work with the archaeologists to be in a place to rebut or offer resistance to developers or governments as needed.

The notion that archaeological knowledge can be used in some simple way for 'public education' needs to be challenged, as many communities have different priorities and different ideas about knowledge, its uses and its values (Bezerra 2015; Thompson 2011). A degrowth approach would suggest that rather than considering archaeological information as a commodity (in the form of videos, websites or pamphlets) to be 'given' to local communities, knowledge should be co-produced in an environment where community perspectives take precedence, and where the time can be taken to work together in a way that goes beyond the 'tick-box' of 'consultation'. What this requires above all is *time*, and a commitment by archaeologists to accept a 'slow' approach to our research that allows for real relationships to emerge rather than rushing to

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produce the next outcome and then on to the next project (Caraher 2019; Cunningham and MacEachern 2016).

One of the related issues at stake in the degrowth literature is the question of what is an acceptable level of development, particularly considering the massive disparities in global wealth. Surely some poorer communities (in the 'Third World', 'global South', or whatever euphemism is preferred) deserve to have a better standard of living than they do now. One point from the degrowth literature is that as the wealthiest countries scale back production and consumption, there should be some redistribution of resources so that human life everywhere has some level of comfort, and of course there are debates about what that level could or should be (Kallis, Demaria and D'Alisa 2015, 5–6). For archaeology, we have to ask in many cases whether our pursuits are in fact compatible with local priorities. For example, there are tensions between the assumptions that indigenous people are interested in their archaeological heritage in the same ways that archaeologists are, and a lack of basic resources in those same communities (e.g. Thompson 2011).

At the same time, there is a space for capacity building aimed at better understandings and uses of heritage in parts of the world with fewer resources to contribute to such pursuits (for examples from the Pacific see, e.g., Bedford *et al.* 2011; Flexner and Spriggs 2015; Smith 2007). This is one space where both commercial archaeologists and academic archaeologists have much to offer. While we have to be very careful of reproducing colonial or imperial inequalities (providing our expertise to the benighted masses), there is something to be said for working alongside under-resourced communities, including those in very wealthy countries (the many groups of Indigenous Australians, for example; see Greer 2010), to create new understandings of local pasts, especially where local people shape or even lead the research agenda (though this still needs to be approached critically; Zorzin 2015b, 794–797).

While not explicitly about degrowth per se, the pursuit of archaeology in Vanuatu, where I do much of my fieldwork, to some extent anticipates one possible model of a more convivial archaeology. Local indigenous communities formulate ideas for research, then with Vanuatu Cultural Centre fieldworkers as interpreters and guides, outside archaeologists are engaged to provide technical expertise and knowledge (see Bedford *et al.* 2011). Research is not disengaged from community relationships; rather it relies on a foundation of reciprocity between shared fieldwork activities, meals, stories and exchanges of contemporary valuables (Flexner 2019). Vanuatu Cultural Centre archaeologists have also been instrumental in the promotion of the discipline through local festivals oriented towards cultural renewal and sustainability, such as the annual 'slow-food' festival (Guiomar 2016). It's not a perfect system by any means, but it's an example of how indigenous-led research and practice can take us towards a better future for the discipline (see also Gonzalez, Kretzler and Edwards 2018).

Importantly, degrowth literature suggests that the goal of raising the level of wealth in poorer communities is not to free up resources so that 'developing' countries can follow the same path as wealthy countries did in the past. Rather, degrowth seeks to free up a space for many nations to explore a variety of other possible cultural frameworks for political economy (see Gudynas 2015; Ramose 2015). For archaeology, this might mean ceding the traditional dominance of Europe and the anglophone settler colonies for the ways that archaeology is practised (Trigger 1996's 'imperialist' mode). What this might look like is to be determined, but one promising direction is collaborative approaches to historical archaeology that aim to take indigenous historicities on their own terms, beyond the 'pre-/post-contact' divide (Flexner *et al.* 2016; Lightfoot and Gonzalez 2018; Schmidt and Pikirayi 2018). A large component of this transformation will require training more indigenous colleagues to take on a leading role in transitioning the discipline away from a Western capitalist economic productivity mode.

A final concept used in degrowth rhetoric that is relevant to archaeology is the notion of 'post-normal science' (D'Alisa and Kallis 2015; Funtowicz and Ravetz 1994). Post-normal science is a call for democratization of scientific knowledge and scientific processes. It is not a 'post-truth' reflection of everything-means-anything extreme relativism. But it does relinquish the monopoly

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of technologies of discovery, publication and knowledge creation from small groups of experts, valuing instead 'dialogue, value commitment, plurality of *legitimate* perspectives, recognition of uncertainty' (D'Alisa and Kallis 2015, 188, emphasis added). Post-normal science does not deny or eschew the value of scientific knowledge. It does, however, distribute recognition of authority and expertise, and embraces discussion and debate of reasonable ideas among a wider community of interested parties. Beyond the obvious and oft-repeated call for more open-access publication, broader availability of research data or better public outreach, I want to focus specifically on the ways in which a growth mentality has infected the academic publishing sphere.

In academic archaeology (and academia more broadly), scholars work in an environment that expects and rewards more and faster publication at every step in the research process. The resulting quantity-over-quality approach to publication results in a situation where scholars are offered less reward for careful thought versus productivity, and in which the stories we tell largely reflect and reinforce assumptions derived from the status quo (see discussion in Criado-Boado 2016). Put simply, in post-normative science, *storytelling matters*. What might emerge if we offered ourselves the time and space to think more carefully about the stories we tell, and how they might speak to a variety of audiences? Could a 'slow-science' model (Cunningham and MacEachern 2016), in which we took the time to not only gather data, but also discuss it widely with peers, colleagues, friends, villagers, locals, non-locals and so on, offer a way out?

For those of us lucky enough to find ourselves in academia, we can use our positions of influence to accommodate the varied pace of publication that comes from different levels of engagement with this possibility. We can avoid always recommending the job/promotion/grant for the person with the longest list of publications or the biggest 'impact factor' (or whatever metric is used) with an eye to improving the department's position in international league tables. Perhaps we can instead start to think of valuing the work of scholars who might appear less productive in the orthodox sense expected from a capitalist model of commodity production, but appear so because of the time they're taking to work with communities of people to produce archaeologies on their terms.

This goes for commercial archaeology as well. Communities that value archaeological heritage often don't realize the potential ability they have to disrupt and shape the development process. For example, in Sydney in the 1970s, trade unions initiated a series of 'green bans', refusing to work because of a perceived lack of respect for working-class heritage by developers and the government in the Rocks neighbourhood, halting roughly AU$4 billion in development (Lydon 1993, 33). Archaeologists were then sought to document and interpret that heritage with both academic and public outcomes (e.g. Karskens 1994). This represents one of the early examples for Australia of successful collaboration between communities concerned about heritage under threat, and archaeologists interested in researching and conserving materials from the past.

What undermines collaborations such as these most often in the present is a growth attitude in which, like any business, many heritage consultancies are expected to do more each quarter, year and so on, at a faster pace and for the smallest cost to the 'consumer' (i.e. the developer or government agency funding the project). Archaeologists are well aware of this problem, and, at worst, feel there is nothing to be done about it (e.g. Zorzin 2015a, 123, 127). Rather than aiming to offer the lowest number to the developer, more of us could aim to take seriously things like community consultation, public engagement and long-term plans for research and interpretation. This includes everyone from the senior consultant writing the tender to the field technician deciding whether there is time for a detailed scale drawing or not. Ethical decisions of these kinds can be leveraged towards producing degrowth tendencies within our everyday practices.

We should be considering how archaeological practices and knowledge can bolster things like indigenous land values or sustainability. In some ways, this is already happening (e.g. Owen 2015), and where it is, we should be working to reinforce this pattern. Rather than focusing on the notion of other archaeologists as competition, we should be banding together to face the very real threats derived from capitalism, as well as the state, to the heritage and the communities we care about.

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Perhaps one opportunity would be to gradually do away with private, for-profit contract-archaeology companies entirely, replacing them with worker-owned, community-based collectives or cooperatives (Johanisova *et al.* 2015) of practitioners, enthusiasts and experts. This could maintain the professional standing of the discipline while moving away from a managerial and growth-oriented corporate structure. It might be possible for archaeology to become the first degrowth industry in this way.

Conclusion: archaeology and alternative futures

Archaeologists are notoriously hesitant when it comes to making predictions about the future. Our discipline is equipped to understand the past, but the same tools allow us to speculate at best when projected forwards in time. Imagining a degrowth future and archaeology's place in it requires speculation, mixed with reading the (contemporary) past backwards (Mrozowski 2014), suggesting one possibility for a better future for the discipline. One reason for this exercise is to challenge the cynical tendency towards 'capitalist realism', the idea that the current system is the only one that does exist and can exist in the future (Fisher 2009). I do not agree that there is no alternative, and I think archaeology is a rich field for expanding our practices as well as beliefs regarding what is possible in this and future worlds. As Graeber (2011, 19) notes, anthropologists, archaeologists and others avoid grand narratives at their peril, as doing so simply cedes the space to people who craft inadequate stories that are too easily harnessed to draw the wrong conclusions for the wrong reasons (see, e.g. critiques of Jared Diamond in McAnany and Yoffee 2009). Degrowth I propose as a grand narrative worth embracing in archaeology.

The key thing to remember when imagining a degrowth (or indeed any alternative) future for archaeology is that *we have a choice*. One of the interesting and positive things in many degrowth proposals is the extent to which participation is voluntary rather than required through legislation or other mechanisms. We can treat many of the challenges facing the field as opportunities we can address, and degrowth offers some of the possible tools to work on them. Archaeologists do not have the largest say in what happens to the global economy or international politics, but we absolutely control our collective actions within the discipline, the narratives we construct, the decisions we make about what sites are protected and conserved and the relationships our discipline maintains with various publics.

As archaeologists, we get to decide, collectively, what the discipline will look like in 10 years, 100 years, 1,000 years. The antiquarians of two centuries ago could not have imagined the shape of the discipline as it is today, and history is generally not deterministic in any simple way (Gould 1989). Our decisions shape the heritage of the present and this provides some direction to the possibilities of the future (Borck 2018). In the short term, actions towards a degrowth archaeology could include things like refusing to undercut and under-resource ourselves in the heritage-management sector, or trying to cultivate a friendlier culture of collective, cooperative praxis in academia. It could include lobbying for better resourcing overall to support archaeology, including at local and national levels.

But these should be seen as first steps, not end goals in themselves. As others have noted, our knowledge about the past does give archaeologists a special set of perspectives about the future (e.g. Kirch 1997; Mrozowski 2014). Archaeology may be seen by many as an unlikely source of contribution to movements like degrowth. While I haven't explored it in detail here, the idea that our discipline can offer useful diachronic perspectives to movements rooted in the search for social and ecological justice surely has merit (e.g. Flexner and Gonzalez-Tennant 2018, 216–217). One of the most important places we can apply those perspectives in the present is in imagining where our own discipline is going. If we want a sustainable, just, convivial archaeology, we can start with the present, but we must also keep our eyes focused on fairer horizons.

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Notes

1 One possible critique of 'consensus' is the notion that it can lead to ideologically motivated groupthink. Yet consensus-oriented societies and situations do not eschew or avoid robust debate and conflict (see DeMarrais 2016 for a useful discussion). Quite the opposite. Eddisford and Morgan (2018) specifically point to the dispersal of 'expertise' in single-context archaeology as an example of this dynamic, and anyone who has ever argued about whether that amorphous stain in the dirt is a pit or tree roots will know that there will always be plenty of space for spirited argument in archaeology.

2 I follow Scott (2012) in imagining that the state and capitalism are unlikely to simply disappear overnight (entrenched hierarchies don't willingly surrender control), while noting also that the history of catastrophic revolutions suggests that they rarely result in what was intended (usually something worse). However, small and large acts of individual and collective resistance are possible. This is where the notion of 'everyday anarchy' (Black Trowel Collective 2016) comes in; we need not have a 'the revolution' moment to nonetheless achieve revolutionary results.

3 I have to acknowledge that there is also a dark side to the field-school experience, as recent scholarship has shown the prevalence of sexual harassment and abuse in such environments (Clancy *et al.* 2014). This is, of course, a serious problem the field must urgently and diligently eliminate (Muckle 2014), but is somewhat outside the scope of this paper (see instead Meyers *et al.* 2018; VanDerwarker 2018).

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