

Chapter 9

Archaeology and Capitalism: Successful Relationship or Economic and Ethical Alienation?

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A New Ethical Perspective on Archaeological Practices: A “Political Ethic”

In the last three decades, ethics in archaeology have been more intensely debated (Scarre and Scarre 2006; Vitelli 1996; Wylie 1996; Zimmerman et al. 2003), and especially after the capitalist acceleration at the end of the 1970s, characterised by growing privatisation, which led to the creation of commercial archaeology (Lynott 1997:589–590).

As a result of an increasing pressure on archaeological remains incurred by economic growth, and paired with an increasing interest of populations in heritage protection (Lowenthal 1999), a large number of codes of ethics and codes of deontology have been promulgated and applied worldwide since the 1980s (Society for American Archaeology 1996; World Archaeological Congress 1990; The Institute for Archaeologists (UK) 2010—revised; European Association of Archaeologists 2009—revised) also called “normative ethics” (Wylie 2003:4). In these codes, not only the ethical obligation of archaeologists towards the record of archaeological data and the obligation towards the scientific community were considered, but they combined with new ethical obligations towards the public as well as policies aiming at the protection of the material remains themselves.

However, a satisfying answer towards ethics in archaeology cannot be a fixed and universal one (Wylie 2003:13). Codes of ethics should be continuously challenged and revised to avoid the danger of stagnation, and of the “bureaucratisation” and “instrumentalisation” of ethics (Hamilakis 2007:20–22). The term “ethics” should be applied to fields of practice where the norms and the rules of behaviours have to

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be endlessly negotiated and reinvented. The definition of ethics for archaeology should be then based on a thoughtful collective consideration of its outcomes and on its significance for groups of people in their specific spatio-temporal and socio-economic context.

To practice an archaeology following this basic ethical statement, it is essential to understand the context of production of archaeological outcomes and the very nature of those outcomes. To do so, archaeologists need to have a better idea of who wants what from archaeology, and for what motives, because archaeologists deal necessarily with the present and not only with the past (Holtorf 2005:159). To this end, archaeologists need to place archaeological projects permanently in arenas of political debate, to scrutinise power relationships between the actors involved, and to fully understand socioeconomic dynamics.

I suggest here that the process of contextualising archaeology in modern society constitutes an ethical approach to the discipline in itself. As such, the practice of an ethical archaeology could be defined as: the combination of both: (1) a practice conforming to the basic definitions of ethical/standard behaviours in every archaeological community while remaining critical of these standards, applying them to each specific situation while explaining how and why this critical process should be achieved. The first step in practicing an ethical archaeology is thus a reflexive process; (2) a production of archaeological outcomes fully connected to the present realities, i.e. not only based on accumulating and managing data, but involving archaeologists in a close commitment to the present. The second step is thus an active process.

From this perspective, a new project for archaeology has emerged, defined by the idea of the “political ethic” (Hamilakis and Duke 2007) or “political action” (McGuire 2008), which could be both described as a new praxis for archaeology, and which could be implemented in order to produce ethical archaeological outcomes. As suggested by Hamilakis and McGuire, this new praxis in archaeology could be achieved by:

- Criticising the practice of a commodified archaeology as a potential device of the late capitalist logic.
- Scrutinising archaeological organisations, their networks and their socio-economic environment, which could generate an archaeological product that will justify and sustain this device (Hamilakis 2007:33–34).
- Eventually, combating capitalist alienation by reconnecting the subjective past created by archaeologists with the realities of the present world in order to promote social justice through contestation, education through the dissemination of knowledge and consultation and collaboration with the populations primarily concerned (McGuire 2008:7–8).

To this end, the way to engage in “political ethic” has been for me to explore the political-economy of the commercial archaeological practice, with a case-study conducted in the province of Quebec (Canada) between 2008 and 2010. The “political-ethical approach” (Hamilakis 2007:35) applied in the case of contract archaeology allows us to (1) explore the political economy of archaeology units and deconstruct

their internal and external sociological, political and economic dynamics and (2) test the capacity of commercial-archaeological entities to produce an ethical outcome as defined above.

Contract Archaeology and the Neoliberal Paradigm

Contract archaeology—the result of the transformation of archaeology within the neoliberal paradigm—as governed by a capitalist economic system, has fundamentally altered how the contributions of archaeology are brought about and disseminated. As defined above, the objective of this paper is to contribute to current criticisms of capitalist market logic by posing the following questions: does the implementation of a neoliberal economy in archaeology sustain the accomplishment of a meaningful and ethical (Cf. definition in previous section) archaeological activity?

Part of this paper was presented for the first time in a conference in Halifax (Nova-Scotia, Canada), in 2011, during the CAA annual symposium, and the contents are drawn from my doctoral thesis. Consequently, this paper focuses on how archaeology articulates itself within capitalist logic, and the impact of that logic on the practice of archaeology and on the professional lives of those who participate in its political economy. The central idea developed here is that the use of the capitalist logic in archaeology seems to lead to different levels of alienation of archaeological work from society, and also to the alienation of its practitioners.

Archaeology should not be perceived solely as a technical profession but as a socio-political actor in itself; a social actor that is an integral part of modern communities. This position necessitates a critical analysis of the construction of the archaeological product and most importantly its outcomes in those communities. As suggested by some archaeologists, archaeology could be seen as a philosophy seeking justice, and aiming at a better shared future for struggling communities (Hamilakis 1999:74; McGuire 2008: xi; Shanks and McGuire 1996: 85–86; Zimmerman et al. 2003: xi–xvi). Perceiving archaeology as such implies that it might not gain from its integration into the neoliberal economic system because social values and “community ethic” (Wylie 2003:4) are simply not encouraged within a neoliberal framework. As suggested by Bourdieu, the logic of profitability creates competition between commercial entities and between individuals within the companies, destroying all values of solidarity and humanism, and reducing relationships to the violence of the all against all (Bourdieu 1998:98). Moreover, even the archaeology practiced in academia (Gill 2009; Hamilakis 2004; Rainbird and Hamilakis 2001), and in centralised public organisations (Coppens 2003:20; Lauzanne and Thiébault 2003:25–27; Ralite and Jack 2003) appears to be currently at risk by following this economic logic.

To contextualise my argument on the recent capitalist conversion of archaeology against a solid background related to archaeological realities, I use a case study in Quebec (Canada), where contract archaeology represents almost 75 % of all

archaeological activities (Zorzin 2010:7). I intend here to deconstruct how the alienation of work is extant within archaeological communities (i.e. the people involved with activities related to archaeology, heritage management and most of all the archaeologists themselves).

The alienation of humankind was defined by Marx, in the fundamental sense of the term, as the loss of control, but he separated the concept of alienation into four different aspects: the alienation of human beings from (a) each other; (b) nature; (c) their “species being” as members of the human species and (d) their own productive activity (Mészáros 2005: 360). It is essentially the last aspect of this traditional Marxist definition of alienation that I will develop here, but some facets of the three other aspects percolate throughout the analysis.

In this paper, alienation within archaeology refers primarily to the undermining of any attempt by archaeologists to assume their role as researchers, as producers of knowledge about the past, and, by extension, their critical and reflexive role as social scientists and intellectuals (Hamilakis 1999:74), which should constitute the bases for the practice of an ethical work. Through this definition I argue that the product of archaeological labour is not a measurable economic and material output, but is instead an abstract set of productions, based on a long term construction of knowledge and understanding of the past interrelated with the present.

Social responsibility is now perceived as essential by some part of the global archaeological community (e.g., Duke and Saitta 1998; Hamilakis 2003; Hamilakis and Duke 2007; Little and Shackel 2007; Sabloff 2008); however, until recently archaeology showed no interest in its consequences for modern populations. Since the 1930s, and as suggested by Stout (2008:4–5, 10–11), archaeologists adopted a certain disdain for communicating the results of their research to the masses. This practice has evolved, particularly after the processualist period at the end of the 1980s, and archaeological representations and communications are now a focal point of concern for many archaeologists (Moser 2001:262–263). Since then, many archaeologists have chosen to place social responsibility and implications at the core of their archaeological work and research activities.

What Is Contract Archaeology?

An Ethnography of Commercial Archaeology

The main methodological tool used during my doctoral research was ethnography. I interviewed 52 individuals involved in archaeology from a total estimated population of around 300 individuals within the province of Quebec (Zorzin 2010:4–5). Most were archaeologists, but some were individuals who had opted out of archaeology, and others were representatives of First Nations peoples. The sampling process was based on the relative proportions represented by each category of workers in the population: that is to say, a majority of people selected were working in contract archaeology (56 % of my sample, representing 20 % of Quebec archaeologists working in the private sector), of which I interviewed managers, senior archaeologists,

assistants and technicians. To have a more accurate vision of archaeological realities in the Canadian Province, I also obtained interviews with government representatives, company employees charged with archaeological obligations, archaeologists involved in non-profit activities, and various academics. The interviews were semi-directed, that is to say they were conducted without a rigid structure and without a predefined questionnaire. The overall goal of these interviews was to make archaeologists freely express their perceptions and expectations about work. The encounters had an approximate duration of two and a half hours and a large range of subjects in line with the interests and experiences of the interviewees were broached. To study how contract archaeology was articulated and shaped by the current dominant political-economy, I interpreted the results of my studies mostly within the framework of a new reading of Marx's theory of alienation (Fischbach 2009; Haber 2007).

Contract Archaeology: A “Modernisation” of Archaeology?

Since the 1980s, the process of “modernisation” (Thomas 2004) forced a separation of a rational, technical and rigorous archaeology from society, which eventually, according to Shanks and McGuire (1996:83), could lead to an alienation of archaeological work. In the last three decades, archaeology—which is still mostly perceived by developers as a source of disturbance in the process of development (Demoule 2010:14; Joukowsky 1991:16)—has been then addressed by the solutions formulated by technology.

As such, archaeology was perceived by promoters, managers or some civil servants as a technical problem within the planning process, and the solutions proposed by archaeologists were technical and technological. Instead of focusing on producing meaning, archaeologists started to produce quantifiable records, and, in the end, technical reports in accordance with clients' expectations and needs. This commodified and standardised method of practicing archaeology operates today within the primacy of an unregulated market, which privileges these technological answers that are, according to Harvey (2005:68), the fundamental principles of neoliberalism: “This drive becomes so deeply embedded in entrepreneurial common sense, however, that it becomes a fetish belief: that there is a technological fix for each and every problem”. In the end, this technological answer has established a collective of professional archaeologists, for whom activities were shaped by the neoliberal framework, and resulted in the creation of the first archaeological companies conceived as businesses.

Contextualisation: A Case Study in Quebec (Canada)

In the Quebec system, the primary client of archaeological services is the developers, essentially because they have to comply with specific laws protecting material heritage. Thus, developers hire the services of archaeologists, not because they really

need this service within the building process, but because of legal requirements. Archaeological interventions performed by firms are now embedded within this process of development, and consist in the removal or preservation in situ of all material traces of the past before potential destruction or disturbance. One of the main clients of private archaeological firms is the government (Ministries of Culture, Transport or Environment, and public corporations such as the electricity producer Hydro-Quebec) which pays for most fieldwork activities (Zorzin 2011:123), and tries to establish or maintain high standards for the practice of a professional archaeology through the control of permits, released by the Ministry of Culture (Zorzin 2011:124).

The number of individuals active in Quebec archaeology is estimated by the archaeological community as being between 100 and 150 individuals (Lord 2011). However, according to my research the archaeologist population of Quebec could be estimated at around 300 individuals involved at various levels of competences and lengths of employment, in a territory of 595,391 sq. miles (Fig. 9.1). It should be noted here that the tendency to underestimate the number of people active in archaeology within the community is a latent problem and is not limited to Canada. This results from, as emphasised by Everill (2007:126–127) for the UK, a complete denial of the existence of many diggers, whom he called “invisible diggers,” and which literally constitute an archaeological proletariat or “labourer class” within private archaeology firms. According to Everill, they are invisible mostly because they are interchangeable individuals, underestimated and paid no more than a “labourer” (not in the negative sense, but in the sense of an unqualified manual worker). These are mostly students working on occasional contracts, young graduated students accumulating short contracts with various companies, and professional diggers (in the long term) alternating periods of fieldwork activities and periods of unemployment in a ritualised/seasonal year schedule.

Some Results Based on a Quantitative Analysis

A fundamental characteristic of the current situation in the archaeological profession was revealed in studying the entire population in detail: the radical disengagement from archaeology of numerous individuals in their early thirties. Archaeologists and apprentice archaeologists are relatively young, and women dominate the profession for the age group between 20 and 34, but participation in the archaeological work force diminishing radically after age 35. The figure here graphically illustrates the dramatic drop in all staff numbers for persons in their early thirties (Fig. 9.2).

This situation is not unique. A comparison between the Quebec case and the British case for the same periods (2007–2008) reveals the following (Figs. 9.2 and 9.3): in both contexts the employee population falls for those in their early thirties, though results were markedly different in Quebec compared to England (Everill 2007:127). In Quebec, both male and female archaeologists almost disappear from the roster, which means that Generation X has almost no presence in Quebec’s



Fig. 9.1 Topographic map in French of Quebec, Canada, with 2000 census cities. Author: Eric Gaba—Wikimedia Commons user: Sting, Source for Boundaries: Canadian GéoBase (2009). URL: http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Quebec_province_topographic_map-fr.svg

archaeology. In England, the scenario is the same, but the big difference is that the fall in population numbers only affects women. The male population remains perfectly stable until the forties bracket, while the female population loses approximately 60 % of its representation by the time it reaches this age bracket.

The results of my survey illustrates that over the last three decades one of the most immediate consequences of the systematic implementation of neoliberal policies in

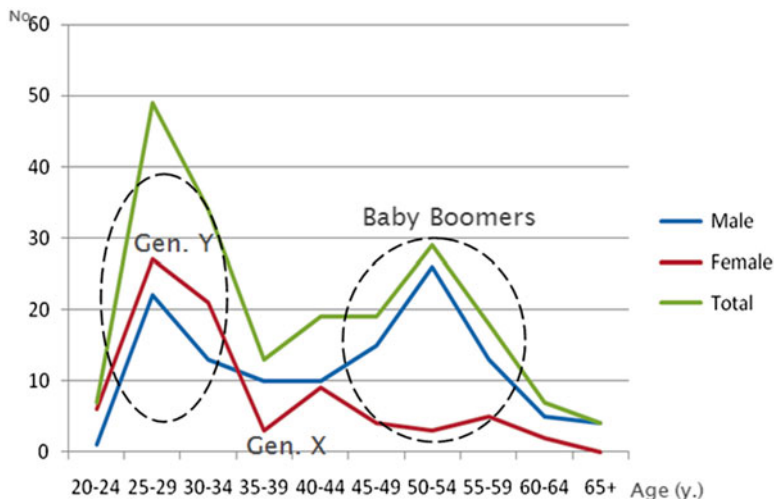


Fig. 9.2 Age and gender of archaeologists in Quebec in 2008

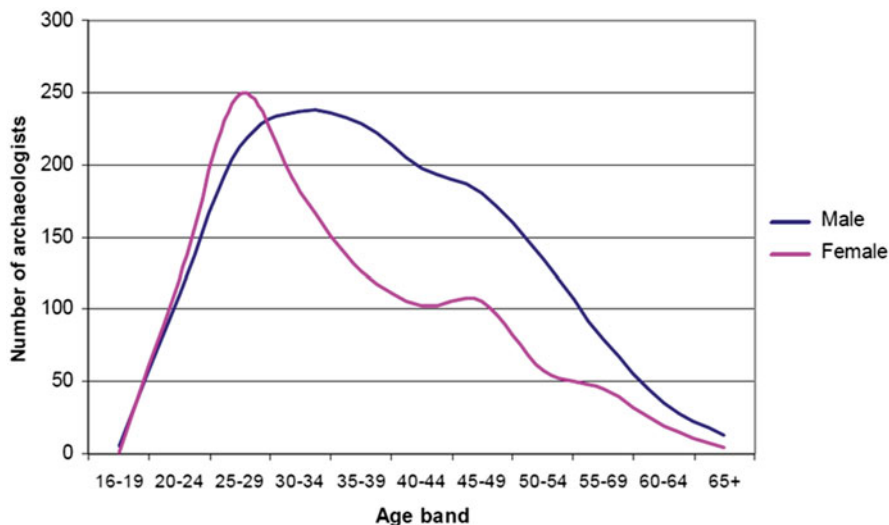


Fig. 9.3 Age and gender of archaeologists in England in 2008 (Aitchison and Edwards 2008:49)

all sectors of the economy has been, according to Bourdieu (1998), a “generalisation of precariousness”. This phenomenon can be defined by the systematisation of short-term contracts which have become the new intermediary redefining the relationship between employees and employers (Bourdieu 1998:96–98) This form of precariousness has had the following consequences on people’s lives: the disintegration of existence through dispossession of lifetime aspirations (e.g. generational or progression of professional or social status), and destroying any possibility of rational hope for the future.

Table 9.1 Sector distribution of the main actors in Quebec archaeology

In 2008	Commercial archaeology	Governmental and para-governmental	Academic and museums	Others	Total
Number of archaeologists	143	64	47	10	265
% of Employees by sector (%)	54	24	18	4	100
% of permits by sector (%)	73	7	15	5	100

Sources: Personal data collection & Tableau du suivi administrative des demandes de permis de recherché archéologique, *Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et la Condition Feminine, Quebec*, 2008, 8p

Table 9.2 Distribution of full time, part-time, and contract work, all staff

	Full-time		Part-time		Contracts (short term)		Total	
All staff in Quebec	100	39 %	17	7 %	136	54 %	253	100 %

In Quebec archaeology today, the precariousness of jobs seems to have become the rule, particularly for the contract sector. In 2008, the data collected shows that 73 % of archaeological field activities in Quebec were conducted in the contract archaeology sector, which accounts for 54 % of all jobs in Quebec archaeology (Table 9.1). Also, 54 % of the jobs occupied by archaeologists over all sectors were short-term contracts (Table 9.2); that is to say without any guaranty of continuity on an annual, monthly or weekly basis. This young and precarious population has de facto become a “reserve army” (to use an expression from Bourdieu 1998:96), considering that the large majority is employed only on short-term or part-time contracts.

This “proletarianisation” has contributed to the instillation in every digger and archaeologist of the sense that he or she is dispensable, that his or her right to work is a privilege and a fragile and permanently threatened one to say the least. Furthermore, the effect of out-casting part of the workers in archaeology has been amplified by the surplus production of graduates, which means that highly educated and well-trained individuals can be found at the lowest level of competences and technical qualifications in units. Thus, the currently prevailing precariousness of working conditions in archaeology means that archaeologists do not have any way of perceiving a potential future within the profession. The ability to visualise future possibilities is, however, the condition per se for making rational life choices. Without options, archaeologists are not in a position to challenge the present system of organisation, nor to take any ethical decisions on the fieldwork. Here, ethical decisions could consist of, for example, challenging the legitimacy of a development project based on their archaeological expertise and their critical point of view as citizens, thus conflicting with corporate obligations, which in turn could potentially threaten their position in units and compromise their career.

Jason [25, digger in Contract Archaeology]:

Listen, I need to eat. If it only depended on me, the River [Name] won't be diverted. The problem is that [Corporation Name] ... their development project ... they will do it anyway. At this level, I am neither a politician nor a lobbyist, and I have no means to challenge them

or make them change their mind. So, in this imposed framework ... yes, I have no choice to go and do the archaeological excavation.

Furthermore, and in contrast to the actual situation described above:

Michael [54, no-longer working in archaeology; retrained]:

At the end of the 1970s ... we had the space to have an ethical questioning, i.e.: "Do we accept to do that?" According to the projects, we contested how it was negotiated with the First Nations. We were also often dissatisfied with the fast pace of work because we could not conduct any serious in depth scientific studies both for the environment and for the archaeology. We were constantly debating if we should participate into the creation of a false representation.

Today, simply, out of this professional catalepsy, ethical void and long-lasting precariousness, most archaeologists are demotivated, and opt out of the profession. The risk is that, in the case of the Quebec scenario, when all the baby-boomer generation retires (around 2020), and with the non-participation of Generation X in the workforce, 40 years of competence, knowledge and know-how will be lost within the space of a few years. This phenomenon could pose a direct threat to the existence of archaeology itself if the profession is not supported, rethought and reorganised in depth. Indeed, the 2012, the federal government decision to move Quebec province's Park Canada services in Ottawa and to reduce drastically the numbers of employees, illustrates the threat of impoverishment of the archaeological community. During this process, out of 27 federal archaeologists and specialists, 26 were moved or simply dismissed from Quebec offices.

Archaeology: A Non-alienated Vocation?

What does the privatised version of archaeology mean for archaeologists? Is contract archaeology able to bring satisfaction or to produce an archaeological product that can give meaning to their existence as practitioners of their craft? In search of an answer to this question, this section examines the interviews with archaeologists conducted during winter 2007/2008.

For most of my interviewees, archaeology was not described as a job, but was seen more as a philosophy of life: sometimes a voluntary decision to live on the margins of society, a rejection of the global ideological dogma, a political choice, an identity seeking process, a passion converted into a livelihood, or simply a self-fulfilling experience. Whatever the reasons for choosing archaeology, the aspirations of those currently involved in the field appear to correspond to the definition of a non-alienating activity. As a result, I suggest here that there is a clear dichotomy between the goals of practicing archaeology and the actual conditions of the labour.

According to the neo-Marxist philosopher Haber, non-alienated work could be defined by the following two characteristics: (1) A bond exists between the worker and the "concrete object" of his work. (2) The worker can take responsibility for his/her professional activity. Work becomes a tool for an individual to achieve personal goals and a means to access happiness within a form of completeness. A human

being can recognise him/herself in their daily environment, and can attribute meaning to his/her life (Haber 2007:239). Are these characteristics present in the contract archaeology practiced today?

Based on the testimonies of my interviewees, something happened after the 1980s, which transformed the profession from being the practice of a craft to an alienated job; but what exactly happened? I would like to deconstruct the socio-economic signs of alienation of the work using five major characteristics which emerged during my interviews. Excerpts from some of the testimonies I collected will be used, though names have been changed to preserve anonymity, and authorisation for this use was obtained from all the individuals concerned.

Experiencing the Void: A Dead End Job

Chloe [30, no-longer working in archaeology; retrained]:

There are major reasons why I gave up on contract archaeology: there were almost no analyses and publications because of budget constrictions. Almost every winter, I was unemployed. I had almost no opportunities to work all year, unless I agreed to clean artefacts or do inventories. Some archaeological companies do a little more analysis but, as a general rule, no analysis is performed! The person in charge of the project makes his report and that is all. Nothing is really developed in any great depth, and thoughts go no further. It is also almost impossible to integrate research teams. I was under the impression that my brain was totally unexploited. I even managed to forget my cultural sequences ... i.e., I was no longer able to recognize the different types of artefacts because I was not using any of my competencies! [angry tone] I was almost ashamed to say I was an archaeologist. I did not feel my work was rewarding in any way. Also, the work environment was extremely competitive and people would do anything to demean each other. Between assistant archaeologists and technicians [i.e., diggers], the game was ugly! They were bitching all the time, it was ridiculous! [furious].

The inability to articulate archaeological activities within a scientific and social picture could be a strong indication that work has lost most of its meaning. What Chloe's discourse illustrates here in the way she accomplishes her work is that the aim of her activity had become unintelligible for her. Instead of deriving any satisfactory meaning from what she does, her work is performed mechanically. The contrast between the rigour of the standardised archaeological fieldwork operations and the futility of its aims makes the situation unbearable. Workers are unavoidably plunged into a crisis in their search for a purpose and meaning for the excavation. Today, the fragmentation of the production process and specialisation of work has made this kind of damage commonplace (Shanks and McGuire 1996:77).

Another important fact within neoliberal structures emphasised in Chloe's testimony, is that competition for work appears to be accompanied by competition within the workplace. This internal competition seems to be the basis for permanent battling between employees, which destroys any form of solidarity or human values. As a result, cynicism towards work is directly related to the political-economic choices which facilitate it, impose it and even reward it (Bourdieu 1998:98).

Lack of Means and Time Does Not Allow Archaeologists to Perform Well

Edward [40, Archaeologist/Digger in Contract Archaeology]:

It was a week-long contract. I was supposed to make an archaeological inventory on the location of approximately a hundred pools of a mining company [the client] ... To find the remote location of the future drilling spots, I had no satellite telephone, and no GPS. When I arrived, the spots had still not been officially defined. Equipped only with a map, I found some spots where the land had been cleared. As soon as the mining company employees realised I was able to find the drilling locations without their assistance, they stopped the clearing activities, waiting for me to go ahead. [This means that a decision was made to undermine the archaeologist's work, apparently judged as harmful for the mining company] ... I think the mining industry tried to obstruct the location of finds as much as possible and tried to obtain the widest possible permit for a zone considered free of archaeological material. In the report, I wrote that the zone had a lot of potential but I had only been asked to do a technical report ... I ended up sending an e-mail to the archaeological unit saying that I no longer wanted to continue working as an archaeologist.

According to Eltchaninoff (2010:48), the lack of means for accomplishing a task in the long term, and the lack of moral, technical and legal support from the archaeological employer, client or state, inhibits the production of any sort of satisfying archaeological product for the archaeologist. In the case of contract archaeology, flexible hours, periods of inactivity combined alternatively with periods of intense activities, and the necessity to adapt to multiple changes of positions and changes of companies, weaken the idea of the attainment of a valuable craft. It is then impossible to perceive archaeological work in long lasting terms.

According to Marx (1996 [1844]:8–9; 23–28), work can be an external and material expression of the self: you are what you make. Thus, in the case of contract archaeology, if the product of work is perceived as incomplete or compromised, the archaeologist will then feel dissatisfied, careless, poorly talented, or will see himself/herself as imperfect, unethical or simply as a failure. The feeling experienced here by Edward, describes well the issue of having no means to accomplish a task, seen as part of the long-term archaeological process. The first step of the archaeological process, consisting in preserving the past and recording it, is only the beginning of a long process aimed at understanding a complex human phenomenon. In the end, this lack of time and means undermines one's self-esteem and could lead to deep dissatisfaction.

Finally, the archaeological unit is partially responsible for this situation, because its main obligation is to satisfy the needs of the clients, not to formulate long-term research queries. Clients pay for archaeological expertise, but their decision to hire an archaeological unit depends on the rules of market competition, so their decision is based on the minimisation of expenses, not on the quality of the work and its potential results and dissemination of knowledge among communities. This characteristic of free-market competition automatically reduces the time and the means given to archaeologists to accomplish their work, as the pressure for them is simply to obtain contracts and assure perennality.

Proletarianisation

James [32—Digger/Assistant Archaeologist in Contract Archaeology and NPO]:

Today, my goal is to retrain professionally as a school teacher, essentially because of the major financial problems encountered in archaeological units. I also want to free myself from the actual professional [i.e., contract] framework, to be able to dig, and only dig for fun! I am not into analyses or impact studies ... I know it is important ... but it's absurd because all artefacts will end up uselessly on shelves anyway without any research or any publications. The work is done purely because it has to be done, but nobody uses it. We work in a void, a one-way street to nowhere! I just want to be able to dig once in a while, even for free! I just want to dig out 'things' ... The truth is that I am in a relationship now, and we need to make a living at some point!

James, obviously disenchanted with professional archaeology, has now prioritised a good standard of living. From his point of view, archaeology should be relegated to a simple hobby if personal happiness and family life could be jeopardised by being involved within the profession. Among the individuals I interviewed from the Generation Y, I felt the same initial desire for adventure and mysteries in archaeology as older generations, but they were much more rational, realistic and cynical, mostly because of different economic realities.

David:

Because we want to be paid, the older generation tends to look on us as lousy fellows! ... What is paradoxical is this common idea that the older ones are fighting for better recognition of the profession, while the young ones are just looking to make more money ... But for us, nothing is easy and we have to fight to survive, with our debts, with everything getting more expensive, and with a social system in decline ... it is thus understandable that we should be more 'interested' in money!

In this case, the dispossession of the work process results in alienation from work for the workers, enacted by diverting energy from the primary task to attaining the productivity defined by capitalist rules (e.g., quantifiable reports), and towards an obligation for archaeologists to make enough money to sustain themselves.

Under these conditions, there is no space for them to understand the projects to which they contribute (or even to be interested in it). This process is perceived as one of proletarianisation, which corresponds to a loss of know-how, a divorce from what is done at work, and the comprehension of what is accomplished through this work. Today, the economic struggle for survival and permanent economic instability are preventing archaeologists from focusing serenely on their work, developing a long-standing and transferable know-how, and this in turn threatens the future of the practice.

As a result, we can see in archaeology what Harvey (2006:31) qualified as a "deskilling" phenomenon, when skills are eroded and when a theoretically intellectual work is emptied of its complexity to become a technical and manual task. The competitive system in which archaeology has been embedded has created a certain type of productivity of labour, which it has at the same time devalued and depreciated (reduced to time/price values). In addition, during this process archaeologists have lost their dignity, their sense of control over their work process, and have had to adapt to the dictates of the client's needs.

The “Narrative of Merit”

Nowadays, the “narrative of merit”, generally accepted in fully converted neoliberal societies, validates the false idea that one’s status in society is related to the “intrinsic qualities of individual” (Kingwell 2011:20). By “fully converted” neoliberal societies, I refer here to societies where all human actions are brought—or attempts are made to bring them—into the domain of the market (Harvey 2005:3), in the belief that the well-being of mankind can best be advanced through privatisation, deregulation, and withdrawal of the state. Societies could be defined as such when strong private property rights, free markets and free trade become common sense for all, and specifically in the way individuals conceive, live in and interpret the world on a daily basis (Harvey 2005:2–3). The precursors and most advanced examples are the UK, the USA, Australia and until recently Argentina and Chile, but new “fully converted” societies have also emerged in Asia.

Currently, knowing the precarious situation of most active archaeologists, the belief in the “intrinsic qualities of the individual” is highly problematic and sensitive in contract archaeology. It is even worse knowing that this “narrative of merit” is more and more common in young generations of archaeologists who have grown up with it, including myself as an early representative of Generation Y. This generation is trapped between two contradictory messages: first, archaeology is often seen as a professional and social failure if we refer to the capitalist symbolic that encourages and reveres economic success, self-help and a normative individualism as the only respectable and responsible ways to lead a successful life (Bourdieu 2001:28). Yet, archaeology, as a profession, can barely sustain the current high standards of living, or cope with the material standards of success expected by society from graduated, highly skilled, working individuals. Inspired by Fussell’s analysis of the American classes, archaeologists might belong to the upper-middle class (Fussell 1983:27), together with engineers or highly qualified technicians. However, low incomes, precariousness and absence of social protections irremediably disqualify archaeologists socio-economically from the current vision of success. In complete contrast, archaeology can also be seen by many as socially meaningful work, a philosophy of life and an intimately fulfilling profession.

As we have seen, when the second message is blurred by an actual void in archaeological production, archaeologists feel that they do not generate anything other than their own spectacle. As asserted by Ibáñez, when the “why?” and the “what is the point?” brutally appear, the impossibility to give a semblance of answer provoke: “a sort of nausea of disgust and of lassitude, which constitute the fall into a state of absurd conscience” (2011:19, my translation). Thus, when archaeologists start asking themselves what an archaeological unit produces, for whom, and for what, the answer often leads them to an aversion towards the profession. Other archaeologists will answer that “saving” the past from destruction by protecting and preserving it is the ultimate and valuable goal for archaeology. My first reaction to this answer is acquiescence; however, some fundamental components of archaeology seem missing from this definition. Again, by accepting the idea of being the stewards of the past, archaeologists reduce themselves to a very technical—but

rudimentary—task of saving and preserving ... but for whom? For what? And even for when? Without a clearly defined social outcome, I see this function as problematic and closely related to what neoliberal doxa prepare individuals for: i.e. to give a simple technical answer to every single problem/action in society.

Archaeologists also hear other interpretations of the meaning of their activities, provided by their clients, answers that mainly define archaeology as unimportant, a pointless constraint or costly whim which only hinders development. For example, in 2006, a municipality in France accused archaeology of “curbing development” and “acting against the community’s interests” (Aubigny (Mairie de) 2009). The last line of defence for the workers, who choose to ask themselves these questions, is to admit that “there is no point to what is being done, but it must be done anyway” (Kingwell 2011:20).

The result of such logic can be summarised as follows. For those still working in contract archaeology, the most common option is to choose not to challenge or fight capitalist logic by accepting the “narrative of merit”. In doing so, individuals are trying to shadow the globally accepted perception of a productive, respectable and profitable private firm. Such logic results in the adoption of technicalisation and the application of the sacrosanct concepts of “quality assurance” or “quality control”, which are broad programs of planned and systematic controls for maintaining established standards, and for the measurement and evaluation of performance according to these standards. This approach is in complete opposition to the intellectual flexibility required by archaeologists to master the archaeological process from conception to analysis, from interpretation to dissemination.

Thomas [in his 50s, out/retrained as an archivist]:

In contract units, I think archaeology is no longer fun. I was very disappointed by this. Minimal publication of materials following excavations was even more disappointing. At the time, I was motivated to work and even to work for free to produce better and more consistent reports. The only way to produce a quality job was to do it in your free time, at night or during the weekend, and, without pay ... indeed. Nonetheless, nobody was really interested in the results. It was painful to produce a quality product, which did not serve any purpose ... Following the logic of the Ministry of Culture, and of the contract units following clients’ injunctions, the idea was more: ‘pick up the stuff, write descriptions’ and, that’s it!

I am not saying here that the systematisation of controls and implementation of rigorous work on excavations are wrong, but only that the application of such standardisation without consideration distorts the definition of archaeological work by removing any opportunity for thought and reflection. Instead, work is controlled by a simple ticking of boxes, which in the end, completely relieves archaeologists of all their responsibilities, apart from the obligation to “clean” the site in an appropriate, rigorous and technical way.

In the interviews, other archaeologists had chosen what could be defined as a cynical approach, which consists of them being aware of all the above, but choosing to give up on the original aims they had when they first started their job. They choose to transform the profession into no more than a banal economic activity:

Edward [40, archaeologist/digger in Contract Archaeology]:

As soon as I became distanced from my initial dream of archaeology, I saw my archaeological activities just as a task to be performed. It acquired a purely financial aspect. If I want to

continue in archaeology, I will have to maintain this financial and food security vision to avoid disappointment.

According to this testimony, the only way to survive in professional archaeology is to decrease expectations from work and to learn to respect even the most humble and absurd tasks, or to recognise the potential intrinsic value of any work. Furthermore, this approach enables archaeologists to protect themselves morally by conceiving the future hypothetical usefulness of their work as serving others. However, these processes clearly amount to alienation from work when:

1. The external requirements (i.e. those of the clients) are absurd, by only serving specific interests.
2. Archaeology is used as a commodity without any production and dissemination of knowledge (due to the lack of activities such as interpretation and synthesis, publication, conferences or public exhibitions).

A common reaction, as demonstrated in this chapter, is to opt out of the profession altogether (Fig. 9.2). Unable to deal with the two contradictory messages transmitted by society about archaeology and archaeologists, and unable to cope with the realities of work, archaeologists simply abandon the profession to do something more fulfilling in their early thirties.

Thomas [in his 50s, out/retrained as an archivist]:

... It is nice to have fun at work, but on \$20,000 CDN per year, with kids, student debts, and a doctorate, it sounds terrible! It is alright when you are in your twenties and single, but, later, it becomes far too difficult and everyone starts looking for something different. In fact, at around 30 the pressure increases and radical decisions must be taken.

In the end, other archaeologists simply retain their positions in the profession while suffering in silence because they no longer recognise or see any value in their work:

Henry [ca. 50, archaeologist consultant] (in an email to the author)

Unfortunately, I have to refuse your request [for an interview] because nowadays I am extremely wary about archaeology. I do not think you will learn anything interesting from me! I want something new, and I don't feel like talking about the situation in contract archaeology at all. I don't have any opinions anymore! This really annoys me and if I talk about it, it will depress me even more ...

Colonisation of Terminology

According to Kingwell (2011), one of the major problems encountered in resisting the changes enforced by capitalist logic is the colonisation of work vocabulary. This has resulted in the adoption of what he qualifies as “meta-bullshit”. For Kingwell (2011:21), “the victory of work bullshit is that, in addition to having no regard for the truth, it passes itself off as innocuous or even beneficial”.

A typical example in the case of contract archaeology is the use of the term “report”. The term initially engendered a certain respect, as the ultimate, legitimate and useful contribution of archaeology to society. The contribution of a report per se is now questionable. In reality, a report is the acknowledgment that an activity has taken place, which justifies payment for services to clients. This term “report” is then little more than a sweeping under the rug of the intellectual void of this minimalist operation, consisting mostly of the packaging and standardisation of the so-called preservation by records (Hamilakis and Aitchison 2009 April 4th, Radio 4—UK, online). The term “report” was then chosen and used to make the archaeological activities look beneficial in technical and professional terms. Some archaeologists have chosen to believe in this reassuring self-prophecy, but others have preferred to face the truth:

Thomas [ca. 50, no-longer working in archaeology—retrained]:

[In units] work was done in a minimalist fashion, without ever going further into research studies. We were doing work, which was almost identical every time. In the end, I found it pretty depressing.

Again, and crucially, I am not accusing contract archaeology and the managers of the archaeological units of being directly responsible for this situation. I consider the effective practice of contract archaeology more as collateral damage within the systematic application of neoliberal doxa to this specific sphere of activities. As a matter of fact, contract archaeology as part of that doxa, works in a small way to perpetuate it. It would be presumptuous to assume that archaeologists chose willingly, knowing where the neoliberal economic system had taken the profession, to embark on this type of self-destructive transformation. Indeed, professionalisation was and still is perceived as the only way to gain respectability, recognition and perennality for archaeology.

Ethics and Fieldwork Archaeology in a Commercial Environment

The Process of Reduction of Archaeological Ethical Responsibility Towards the Quantifiable

In this chapter, we saw how the economic context of the competitive market in which archaeology is now conducted does not allow archaeologists to produce a satisfactory outcome for any party. We saw that the frustrations, the disillusionment and the degraded work conditions often encouraged archaeologists to leave the profession. Now, another fundamental problem exists in this professional community that is ignored: the importance—in archaeologists’ decision to give up archaeology—of the failure in applying ethical codes defined by the archaeological community itself, and of the ethical void or incompatibility of archaeological ethics with the obligations of a commodified archaeological practice. On that matter, the following testimonies

illustrate the perceptions of some individuals who left the profession, took some distance from it or were planning to do so in a near future because of its ethical failures:

Alexander [50, Archaeologist—Independent consultant]:

From an ethical point of view, what do I do when I have a project with a 4 weeks excavation deadline (and, if I am lucky, 8 weeks to write the report), and suddenly I have to extend the fieldwork, but the budget and the deadline stay the same? In height weeks, I have just enough time to do a limited analysis... so if the report has to be cut further, what do I do with the archaeological interpretations? If I overlook it, the data is simply lost. It is a serious ethical problem in commercial archaeology. How many times I had to go over the dates of my contract... one week, two weeks to finish properly my report. Of course, this is an unpaid and voluntary work, financially unsustainable on the long term, but it is the only ethical answer I found for me.

Benjamin [ca. 40, Archaeologist—Independent consultant]:

In Quebec, we discovered and excavated thousands of archaeological sites at the James Bay. However, the artefacts and the reports coming from these digs ended up in boxes at the Ministry of Culture and there will never be any or hardly any studies done whatsoever. We all know very well that, within the excavation process and the archaeological analysis, an archaeologist likes to control his own data. It is illusory to believe that archaeologists will study material collected by others. This is an aberration and a clear misunderstanding of the archaeological process! ... It is an aberration because the reports we produce are read by the developer-funder corporations whereas the reports should be evaluated by senior archaeologists at the Ministry of Transport or at the Ministry of Culture, who could give their informed approval for the continuation of a development project [reports are actually evaluated in ministries by trainees using preformatted forms]. Unfortunately, the ministries have nothing to say, and they have got completely disengaged from their social responsibilities, trusting the market to take care of the archaeology for them, supposedly professionally and ethically.

In such work configuration, the developer possesses the economic power as well, as explained here by Benjamin, to have the right of inspection on work accomplished by archaeologists. In such a situation, the developer ends up in a particularly inappropriate position by being both judge and jury. Here, it seems inevitable that the “quality” criteria of archaeological work will irremediably concern time and cost reduction, and that change in archaeological practice will be imposed through a multitude of managerial and legal policies, with the support of governmental entities (Zorzin 2011).

As underscored by Andrews et al. (2000:526): “Practical and managerial procedures separate excavation recording from post-excavation interpretation”. This process is a fundamental characteristic of the neoliberal doctrine aiming to impose fragmentation within professional communities, in order to dissolve critical thought and prevent resistance towards economic growth and generation of profit. Furthermore, the fragmentation process leads to the generation of a discourse of “aimlessness,” that is to say, a so called “apolitical” discourse, to be deemed socially meaningless, apart from the “narrative of the extreme” (e.g. the largest, the tallest, the oldest, etc.) (Mizoguchi 2006:135):

Laura [29, archaeologist/digger in Contract Archaeology]:

Budget and time is missing most of the time, and because of this, in archaeological units we often make not very ethically correct decisions. I think it is becoming true for academia as

well. Nowadays, to have money, you need to demonstrate that a site is old and it has to be already popular somehow, or related to a well-known popular story!

As such, a new praxis has been de facto imposed for archaeology, but a praxis in complete dissonance with the praxis suggested by many contemporaneous archaeologists, as defined in the beginning of this chapter. The inclusion of archaeology within the competitive market creates the conditions for precariousness and instability. Fear of unemployment isolates, atomises, individualises, demobilises and strips away any forms of solidarity (Bourdieu 1998:98); solidarity which could lead to resistance and a will to implement a praxis that conforms to the ethical obligations defined by the archaeologists, in close collaboration with each community they are working with.

The irony of this situation is that the policy of “preservation by records”—which converts remains into records and archives—presents the archaeological practice as highly ethical. In reality, this policy enables the destruction of the archaeological remains and refutes completely the crucial importance of research, analyses, interpretations, dissemination and social involvements. In such situations, the main objectives of archaeology are definitively lost (Andrews et al. 2000:527).

The emphasis in archaeology’s practices and outcomes has been on the record of archaeological data, which is the only ethical obligation that can really be measured in the short term. As such, ethics have been rendered compatible with management practices, and consisting of the constant evaluation of the “quality” of the work and the generation of evidence that “normative ethical” work is being conducted. The others ethical obligations defined in the introduction of this chapter are simply ignored or it is often suggested that they could always be postponed (See Benjamin). However, in certain cases, these obligations will be implemented, but they might serve some specific corporate interest as we will now scrutinise in the next section.

How Codes of Ethics Can Be Alienated to Legitimise the Neutralisation of Archaeological Practice: The “Ethics-Washing” Process, or the Failure of Normative Ethics

Embedded into a client-customer relation with both developers and governments (Zorzin 2010), I suggest that commercial archaeology is now involved into a process comparable to “ethics-washing” (based on the expression “green-washing”: “disinformation disseminated by an organisation so as to present an environmentally responsible public image”—Oxford Dictionaries 2012, online). Ethics-washing could be defined as a form of public relations in which ethical principles are deceptively used to promote the perception that an organisation’s activities are driven by morally superior principles. Whether it is to increase profits or gain political support, ethics-washing may be used to manipulate popular opinion to support questionable aims.

A Quebec Case: A Corporation as a Client/Employer

Jason [25, digger in Contract Archaeology]:

Somehow, we [archaeologists] clean the image of [H Corporation]. In their corporate ads, it said: “our work is made in collaboration with First Nations”. Hey! What exactly is this collaboration? In reality, in the morning, you pick up a member of a first nation group and someone explains him how to dig. Yet, in the evening, he is nagging about the job and he will never come back ... Is this the collaboration [H Corporation] is bragging about? I think this is false advertising! We hire first nations peoples, well [sigh ...] we only buy them to ease our conscience ... To ease the pain, I tell myself that, at least, I do my part of the job, because if all archaeologists refuse to do the digging and the recording for ethical reasons ... well, in the end, the [H Corporation] will flood the site anyway!

In the corporate environment, the terms “green-washing” or “ethics-washing” are indeed not used publically, but the concept of “corporate environmental social responsibility” certainly is. This concept could be defined as “initiatives that corporations undertake to improve their regulatory compliance or go beyond what regulations require either to reduce [social or environmental impacts] below mandated levels or limit their activities in areas that are not currently regulated” (Babcock 2010:21). As underscored well by Jason here, collaboration as it stands is not in fact particularly fruitful for anybody, but it does set up a positive image for the corporation towards both First Nations from which lands will be confiscated, and for Quebecers, consumers and international shareholders who will be able to believe that the dispossession was done ethically. The particular nature of this ethics-washing process, and the guarantee of its efficiency, consists precisely of making the ones implementing it, firmly believe in its fair-mindedness (for example, towards First Nations populations). As described previously, fragmentation of work considerably helps this process, by separating the various actors in fieldwork, limiting their tasks to technical operations and preventing anyone being able to get a glimpse of the broader context; context which might cause people to question the very existence of development projects.

Joshua [53, Archaeologist]:

If [H Corporation] hires you; you cannot go against the interests of the company. You cannot even be neutral.

Archaeologists are well aware that their archaeological outcomes are often disregarded or undesirable to corporations. Their activities are only tolerated for a certain time and within certain areas as long as they do not put development and economic growth into jeopardy. In these conditions, archaeological ethics are rendered entirely ineffective, by being both politically and socially systematically neutralised to protect clients’ interests. Through the demonstration of the so-called collaboration with First Nations, for example, the corporation can then legally address issues of “social responsibility” and present itself as a group taking ethical and thoughtful decisions.

Edward [40, Archaeologist/Digger in Contract Archaeology]:

[H Corporation] uses archaeology as a colonial agent, like any other company which wish to polish its image in the eyes of First Nations ... In the end, it is not a land colonisation by

planting a Quebec's flag everywhere, but instead it is a form of colonisation by imposing a neoliberal society style. Nowadays, the way of proceeding is to place the archaeological data/archives on the side ... and wait that someone, some sort of Cree Messiah, turns into an archaeologist and makes good use of these data. However, even if in 100 years a Cree nation really emerges, the data would have lost already its potential political meaning because the capitalist system and its values will prevail.

This testimony illustrates another level of the process of “ethics-washing” implemented by corporations in close collaboration with government entities. Colonisation continues under the illusion of a fair and “ethical dispossession” (which is an oxymoron), made acceptable by so called environmental and archaeological “sustainable strategies”, and financial compensation for anything that will be lost. Dispossession is compensated by money, short term local employment, archaeological reports and collections of artefacts. Still, land dispossession in Northern-Quebec remains a hardly justifiable process of appropriation of natural resources, highly questionable, and comparable to a form of internal neo-colonialism (Harvey 2003:32). Edward's testimony here demonstrates how simple it is to use the argument of preservation by records to postpone research and yet forestall potential conflicts with First Nations emerging from the archaeological outcomes.

Finally, despite the chart of ethics in Quebec archaeology, its vibrant and engaged archaeological community, and government entities overseeing the—all too limited—ethical obligations, I believe that the economic system within which commercial archaeological units are embedded today has deeply alienated the ethics defined by the archaeological community of Quebec. This process of alienation has developed even further by the use of “quality control” in archaeological activities seen as evidence of “ethics” itself. I see this purported parallel as effectively a protection of unethical corporate interests and behaviours, and define it as “ethics washing”.

Conclusion: Taking a Distance from Contract Archaeology

Through privatisation and the organisational changes accompanying the process of economic transformation which came with neoliberalism, archaeologists began to lose control over their production and eventually ceased to be autonomous entities. The advent of contract archaeology seems to have contributed mainly to dispossessing archaeologists of both their initial way of life and their archaeological production, restricting their activities to mere technical operations. As it is configured, archaeology does not provide the means to proceed with the analysis or interpretation of data, which should normally lead to the fruitful production of a critical and complex set of thoughts. As such, archaeology has been alienated.

Moreover, as emphasised by the archaeologists themselves, another dimension of alienation has been the social exclusion of archaeologists through a combination of constant social and financial indignities. Through privatisation, many archaeologists were expecting to see a general increase in their income and improvement in work conditions. Instead, archaeologists were rewarded with a double penalty: the alienation of their profession and no observable improvement in work conditions.

Nowadays, the alienation of work has given archaeologists good reason to opt out of archaeology. In fact, there is a huge contrast between the renewed visions that archaeologists had of their discipline in the 1990s through the postprocessual turn—which had presented archaeology as a craft serving society—and the present commodified practice in units. This contrast probably makes the alienation even more difficult to deal with. In these circumstances, archaeologists are only producing a commodified representation of their profession. Shadowing the neoliberal narrative of productivity, the production of archaeologists only makes sense now if it is orientated towards exchange and profit (Fischbach 2009:203), perceived as fundamentals and obvious outcomes for the archaeological “product.”

Looking at the present situation, I suggest that the French concept of “cultural exception” (*l’exception culturelle*, see Regourd 2004) could apply to the future development or rethinking of archaeology. This expression was primarily formulated to protect French/francophone cultural production from Anglo-Saxon domination. The idea could easily be applied to archaeology to combat its recent systematic capitalist conversion. If treated as extraneous to the competitive system, archaeology could be preserved as a “cultural exception”, and as a result, be sustained financially by the state, patronage or local sponsorships (depending on the traditions of each country). If we pursue this logic even further, archaeology would, in certain cases, do better to re-integrate a national structure through public archaeological services, as suggested by Everill (2007:135) for the UK.

Nevertheless, what I suggest here for archaeologists, as a substitute to both the capitalist structure and the state model, is to adopt an alternative model based on an associative or cooperative structure oriented towards communities’ socio-economic interests, and leaded by them. Such orientation choices are developing in Quebec (Corporation Archéo-08; Coopérative Artefactuel; Institut culturel Avataq, Grand Conseil des Cris), and are sometimes designated as “collaborative archaeology” (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008). The idea that I am particularly sensitive to in this approach is that the archaeological process of removing the material traces of the past and obtaining intellectual outcomes from it should primarily benefit populations, instead of corporate clients’ interests as contract archaeology tends to be forced to do lately. To be able to accomplish this, a form of economic independence will have to be obtained from business relationships, and it constitutes one of the major challenges that archaeologists will have to face in the near future. The very existence of archaeological units is not a problem in itself, but the issue here is moreover the economic structure in which is it embedded. The problems for the archaeological industry have become the obligation to profit and the facilitation of the development processes—the intrinsic objectives in the current capitalist system, as demonstrated. These problems might be greatly counterbalanced by giving units the resources and legal tools as well as the obligations to practice an archaeology of which the product will be satisfactory for both archaeologists and communities.

Nowadays, reality dictates that archaeologists generally tolerate or integrate the fundamental ideas of capitalism (Matthews 2010). However, as demonstrated throughout this chapter, this situation arises ethical issues which still need to be

addressed: (1) Archaeologists are not in a position to consider the modern political-economy framework in which archaeology is produced to ensure a critical distance from an archaeology serving market interests and logic. (2) Some opportunities of resistance exist, notably with the development of an ethical based “collaborative archaeology”. This is however only if this collaboration is not only serving the interests of those who initiated the collaboration (developers/corporations), and not when it has the tendency to operate as an “ethics-washing” device aiming to facilitate processes of dispossession. Finally, in order to produce an ethical outcome within a new praxis for archaeology, archaeologists might have to work outside the influences of capitalist logic (Matthews 2010:196). Presently, the work configuration within which commercial archaeology lies is preventing this from being possible.

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