The Impact of Material Culture and Modernity:
Views of weapons: ideologies and functions: a case study from the American War of Revolution until World War I.

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"There is a very special relationship between a man and his gun - an atavistic relation with its deep roots in prehistory, when the primitive man's personal weapon, so often his only effective defence and food provider, was nearly as precious to him as his own limbs."

Franklin Orth, executive vice president of the National Rifle Association, 1968.¹

¹ Bellesiles, M., 2000 <http://chronicle.com/free/v47/i05/05b00701.htm>
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Abstract

This essay attempts to understand the hiding dynamics and symbolisms that societies use to identify weapons, and especially firearms. I examine how the post-enlightenment pretensions of modernity led to the pursuit of the industrialization, mass production and technological perfection of firearms. Also, how ideals like the defence of the nation, honour and heroism in the battlefield, created specific social meanings and an “intimate” relationship between humans and weapons, different than any other type of machinery. These aspects need to be taken into account by the archaeologist in his attempt to interpret the contemporary military past.

Keywords

firearms ♦ modernity ♦ American Civil War ♦ World War I ♦ revolver ♦ rifle ♦ machine gun ♦ military archaeology
1 Introduction

It seems that like blood, there has been a lot of ink spilled over the “intimate” relationship between humans and guns. Historians, anthropologists, criminologists and psychologists are only few of the scholars who scrutinised the 19th century Enlightenment narratives and still argue how these narratives led to the creation of a specific cultural image of weapons which continues to inspire today’s gun culture.

A vivid example of an “imaginary past” can be found in the blockbuster film “the Patriot” (2000) when Mel Gibson “as the reluctant patriot with five flintlock muskets, one pistol, a tomahawk, and two underage sons ambushes and annihilates a raiding party of British Redcoats earlier shown to deserve everything they got.”\(^2\) I do not want to argue on the historic accuracy of the specific scene. More importantly I want to show that the ideals of liberty, freedom and justice which are clearly depicted from the Patriot’s firearms are parts of an artificial ideology created by the mid 19th century’s expression of modernity.

Modernity as a term contains ideals such as liberty and human rights in a wider context of a continuing progress. It is also an expression of optimism, in addition to the pre-Enlightenment period. Technological innovations, industrialisation and mass production of weapons, were part of this state of progress during the second half of the 19th century.\(^3\) Unfortunately, this blind pursuit and acceleration of weapon industry had disastrous consequences and left millions of people slaughtered on the modern battlefields. New weapons were created with the “best intentions” of their inventors; however, the results were horrendous. Dr Richard Gatling believed that his machine gun would not only defeat the Confederacy and end slavery, but would also help to stop wars. Yet, instead of gaining

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\(^3\) Lawrence, P., 1999:5.
victories, the machine gun was a major factor for the stalemate and the trenches of the First World War.\footnote{Raudzens, G., 1990: 403,417.}

It is also significant that this ideology which identified weapons with traditional values like gentry, bravery, liberty, was created at the same time of the 19th century capitalistic expansion. I will support this opinion using as example Samuel Colt’s promotional campaign of his firearms.

In the name of a progress encouraged from modernity’s ideas, capitalism and ideology led to an increased production of weapons based on modern, by that period, industrial techniques. The First World War was the prelude of the end of the post-enlightenment ideology of progress. As a result, technology which was supposed to be the epitome of progress turned on itself. However, the disillusion created of the Great War, did not discouraged the romanticization of weapons. Thus, technology was accused for the tragedies of war but weapons continued to contain social meanings, providing a romantic perception of the past.

The aim of this study is to describe ideologies and technological innovations of the material culture of weapons as part of capitalism. A capitalism as “a social organisation which concretely articulates the order of consciousness of modernity”.\footnote{Lawrence, P., 1999:4.}

Separating weapons from ideologies and symbolisms seems difficult rather than impossible. I agree that weapons can contain more functions than killing people, but at the same time we cannot overlook this devastating reality. This reality is not always appreciated from communities which may have identified weaponry with meaningful values or specific moments in their contemporary history.

2 The imaginary past

The dramatic increase of criminal use of weapons in the United States in the late twentieth century, led the scholars to adopt a specific theory for the modern gun culture. This theory explains the nation’s gun affection as a descendant of America’s frontier heritage; it was the
American frontiersman who, with a gun in his hands and enough bullets in his belt, conquered the wildness and created modern America.\(^6\)

The imaginary past suggests gun use in almost every human activity from food supply to self defense and this image is so intense, that continues to affect the global perspective of the American culture.\(^7\)

Plate 01. Mel Gibson, as the ultimate American Patriot.
(Source: http://www.movieeye.com/store/movie_posters_plus/Posters/War/2592.html)

Dealing with all of these clichés, it was probably a shocking moment for Michael Bellesiles, a professor of colonial history at Emory University when, while searching hundreds of probate records from the frontier sections of New England and Pennsylvania from 1763 to 1790, found that only 14 percent of the men owned guns, and more than a half of those guns were unusable.\(^8\)

His interesting research sums up to a completely different interpretation of the pre-Civil War America. Gun ownership was exceptional in the 18\(^{th}\) and early 19\(^{th}\) centuries, simply because firearms and

\(^6\) Bellesiles, M., 1996:426
\(^7\) Bellesiles M., 2000 < http://chronicle.com/free/v47/i05/05b00701.htm>
\(^8\) Wills G., 2000 < http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/09/10/reviews/000910.10willot.html>
ammunition were expensive and ineffective to provide food by hunting; traps were much more suitable for that purpose.\textsuperscript{9} Hunting animals with gun was a habit for the prosperous, same as the collection and ownership of weapons.\textsuperscript{10} Guns in that period meant muskets, which were imported from Europe, equivalent of two months payment of a skilled artisan and inaccurate for target shooting. The musket had the bad habit of misfiring frequently and its delay in reloading made them dysfunctional for self-defence. As murder weapons, firearms were also not popular. Murderers preferred the advantages of the axe or the knife.\textsuperscript{11} The militia especially, suffered from lack of weapons and ability in their use.\textsuperscript{12} Also, in the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century, weapons were made mostly of iron and required constant attention to keep them from rusting, an attention that militiamen failed to provide.\textsuperscript{13}

The above conclusions indicate the unwillingness in ownership of weapons and not an intense relationship between the American and his weapon. The majority of the firearms of this period were state controlled and their conditions of storage and maintenance, poor.\textsuperscript{14}

Although Bellesiles’ thesis raises a lot of questions and many historians and critics accused him for selective use of resources,\textsuperscript{15} the significant point for a material culture scholar is the adoption of a symbolic meaning of the firearms and the acceptance of the idea that guns and liberty are synonymous.

However, Bellesiles overlooks the fact that during the revolutionary period, America witnessed for the first time the ideological effects of

\textsuperscript{9} Bellesiles M., 1996: 439
\textsuperscript{10} Bellesiles M., 1996: 443
\textsuperscript{11} Wills G., 2000 < http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/09/10/reviews/000910.10willot.html>
\textsuperscript{12} Bellesiles M., 2000 < http://chronicle.com/free/v47/i05/05b00701.htm>
\textsuperscript{13} Bellesiles M., 1996: 434
\textsuperscript{14} Wills, G., 2000 < http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/09/10/reviews/000910.10willot.html>
nationalism, as a military instrument. Influenced from the principles of the French Revolution, Americans used their weapons inspired from the ideal of the nation, same as their French revolutionists. A lot of factors contributed for the final victory of the Americans during in the Revolutionary years. However, the accuracy of the American patriot or the quality of his rifle, maybe are not as important as it is believed. “The romantic nonsense purveyed over the years by numerous historians has exaggerated beyond credence the role of the American rifle in the War of Independence.”

3 Liberty, Modernity and a new military society

The Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars in the early 19th century, initiated a phenomenal waste of armies and ammunition. It has been always assumed that industrialization was the main cause of this new war order. Moreover, closer to the truth, seems to be the theory that industrial production and manufacturing techniques were part of the West’s need to improve military instruments. Thus, according to Franklin (1988:5) “the cultural basis for the constant upgrading of weapons technology was present at the beginning of the industrial age”. It also seems that the idea of liberalism encouraged the militarization of society. The bigger supporter of this unusual combination of industrial progress and liberty was undoubtedly the newborn nation of the United States of America. As Philip Lawrence has put it, “the 19th century America seemed to be a completely de-militarized society, yet many of the most deadly military innovations of the period originated in the United States.”

This observation shows that Bellesiles’ thesis, even being overwhelming, that during the post-revolution era, Americans were unwilling to join the Militia forces and unfamiliar with the use of weapons,

16 Lawrence, P., 1999:10.
is probably not far away from 19th century reality. Then, why American Society turned to adopt a military agenda which ended-up to the Civil War?

According to Stjepan Meštrović (1994:62), America became the greatest representative of modernity, as a result of two factors, related to each other:

First, the conquering optimism of the period in every part of scientific and industrial activity, which appreciated any development of military instrument, was easy to grow in the virtually empty American canvas.

Secondly, one of the main cultural American values is the “clear hegemony of a modernist creed of progress.”21 One of the most enthusiastic supporters of this naïve, cruel and greedy capitalistic modernity was Samuel Colt.

4 Samuel Colt and Gun promotion

In the second half of the 19th century, the military industry met all the conditions to reach a production level that could serve profitable any capitalistic vision. A new trend led to mass production of weapons, interchangeability and lower prices and at the same time to the reduction of the necessity of skilled labour in gun production.22

The large productivity, created simultaneously the demand of a larger market. From the previous decades (1830-40) there were a lot of efforts especially of the media of the period to prepare the public for the appreciation of the use of weapons. Thus, hunting promoted as the appropriate gentleman’s hobby. The hunting literature started to describe weapons with a variety of expressions which linked guns directly to romantic affection. The middle class found a way to separate itself from the mass, starting to imitate the habits of the British elite.23

Samuel Colt, who was mainly a successful salesman than the original inventor of his firearms, was the most important industrialist of his

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21 Lawrence, P., 1999:16.
times.\textsuperscript{24} In a short period, he managed to create one of the most successful American gun industries, using for that purpose, the latest technological innovations and an intelligent promotional campaign.

At the beginning, he appealed to the prosperous consumers introduced his Colt revolver as a useful all-purpose weapon. His aim was to replace the previous symbol of manhood, the sword, with a personal firearm, which would mark the real gentleman and the real man, with other words, the epitome of manliness.\textsuperscript{25} For that purpose, he produced a deluxe series of revolvers, especially made for gentlemen or the authorities, hiring a leading artist of the period, Gustav Young, for the engravings and the decoration of his firearms.\textsuperscript{26} Scenes of heroism, hunting and self defence were the favourite topics of these engravings. The eastern newspapers were full of his advertisements which were identifying his revolver with the romance of the Wild West.\textsuperscript{27} Samuel Colt used any, legitimate or not, channel to promote his firearms. Even when his brother, John C. Colt murdered a rival using an axe, he took advantage from the publicity of the trial to demonstrate the superiority of his revolver as a murder weapon.\textsuperscript{28}

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\textsuperscript{24} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Colt

\textsuperscript{25} Bellesiles M., 1996: 447

\textsuperscript{26} Nickel, H. et al, 1985/6:21.

\textsuperscript{27} Bellesiles M., 1996: 448

\textsuperscript{28} Bellesiles M., 1996: 442
But middle class and Southern aristocracy weren’t enough for Samuel Colt’s ambitions. Hoi Polloi were included in his market extension plans. According to Howard (1937: 643), Colt was responsible not only for the first mass produced revolver, but also for the successful commercialisation of the revolver, having as advantage the relatively low selling price based on specific industrialized production-cost economies.\(^{29}\) As cited in Fries (1975:384), by the end of 1850, Colt managed to reduce the direct cost of each of his commercial revolvers to $6.

Despite the fact that his pistols had no significant military or hunting use, the new industrial methods in the production and the successful promotion of his products laid the foundation of the American gun culture.\(^{30}\) Bellesiles is being caustic when he mentions that Samuel Colt printed instructions in the cleaning rag that came with every Colt firearm, because he was aware of the inability of his potential buyers to use weapons\(^{31}\).

Nevertheless, a whole mythology has been created about the practical and the symbolic use of the Colt revolver. Or, as Richard Steuart\(^{32}\) (1934) has put it: “The Colt was the ideal weapon of the Sheriff, plainsman and cowboy”. But he then adds: “Their readiness to shoot has been grossly exaggerated. It was a powerful weapon…and could send its bullets straight through the buffalo.”

The real use of the Colt revolver at least according to its inventor’s heavily advertised multi-functionality, is questionable. The fact is that the revolver’s participation in the Mexican War was negligible.\(^{33}\) However, Samuel Colt managed to receive, the essential for the establishment of his business, military order. None of these factors discouraged the spreading of the Colt legacy. By the beginning of the Civil War, Samuel Colt’s and his

\(^{29}\) Uselding, P., 1974: 567
\(^{30}\) Bellesiles M., 1996: 449
\(^{31}\) Bellesiles M., 1996:448
\(^{32}\) As cited in Grancsay, S., (1942:32)
\(^{33}\) Wills, G., 2000 < http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/09/10/reviews/000910.10willot.html>
fellow gun makers’ efforts to create the illusion of necessity of firearms in the American society, came in fruition. The number of guns produced for the civilian market was several times larger than that produced or procured by the military.  

5 American Civil War: a prelude of what was to come

The principles of the 19th century modernity were successfully applicable to the political and military agenda of the American Civil War. The Union combatants used their weapons, according to the most convenient historic option, in the name of the abolition of slavery which prescribed the greatest humanitarian values of liberty and emancipation.

On the other side, the technological advantages of the Union acted catalytically for the final victory. The American Civil War marked the take off point for the American gun industry. Progress as a by-product of modernity and a “deep fascination if not obsession with technological means of destruction” created a situation of absolute violence. Inventors and engineers improvised their weapons of mass destruction, inspired from ideas of pacifism and freedom. New destructive weapons like the Gatling battery were creations of this paradox. His inventor, Richard Gatling believed that “If I could invent a machine, a gun, which could by its rapidity of fire enable one man to do as much battle duty as a hundred, that it would, to a great extent, supersede the necessity of large armies, and consequently, exposure to battle and disease be greatly diminished.” However, this early form of machine gun was in an embryonic stage to be a significant factor in that conflict.

The improvement of smaller firearms, like the rifle musket led to dramatic changes in the battle maneuvers. Before the rifled musket came into use, the typical battlefield characterized by frontal assaults of massed forces, supported by direct-fire artillery and quick cavalry changes. The

34 Howard, R., 1978: 634
35 Lawrence, P., 1999:16
36 As cited in Raudzens, G., 1990:418
37 Moorehead, R., 2004:61
infantryman was just a part of a firing block, instructed not to aim but to synchronize his shooting since volleys relied on mass impact\textsuperscript{38}.

Plate 03. "New rifle musket ball caliber 58-inch. This final version of the Minie bullet resulted from experiments conducted by James H. Burton at the Harpers Ferry Armory during the early 1850s." Year: 1855. Image Credit: Smithsonian Neg. No. 91-10712; Harpers Ferry NHP Cat. No. 13645.

The rifled musket upgraded the previously underestimated infantryman to a respectful opponent. The rifle's longer range made the infantryman able to defend successfully against the artillerymen and the cavalrymen\textsuperscript{39}. Thus, aiming and shooting abilities were now appreciated and encouraged the creation of a strong engagement between the soldier and his rifle. The sharpshooter who could make a clear shot from 1000 yards and kill an officer of the enemy, soon became the ideal warrior.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{38} Wills, G., 2000 < http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/09/10/reviews/000910.10willot.html>

\textsuperscript{39} Moorehead, R., 2004:61

\textsuperscript{40} An actual event took place on 9 May 1864, when a Union’s Army Major General John Sedgwick fell at the beginning of the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House. Confederate sharpshooters were about 1,000 yards away and their shots caused members of his staff and artillerymen to duck for cover. Sedgwick strode around in the open and was quoted as saying, "What? Men dodging this way for single bullets? What will you do when they open fire along the whole line? I am ashamed of you. They couldn't hit an elephant at this distance." Although ashamed, his men continued to flinch and he repeated, "I'm ashamed of you, dodging that way. They couldn't hit an elephant at this distance." Just minutes later,
For the above reasons, rifle became the basic weapon in battle and replaced the bayonet and the sword, which were previously considered as the ultimate “heroic” weapons. During this war, the warrior who trusted on his bayonet was in most occasions, a desperate and out of ammunition Confederate soldier, exposed to injury or death in a significant higher rate than the Union soldier. The importance of the volley, as opposed to individual heroics, had returned now in a new guise, as the representation of the hero himself. The Confederacy officers who were mostly daring and imaginative members of the Southern gentry defeated from Union’s massive industrial superiority and maybe from less familiar with the art of War enemy officers. A new ideology was born and expressed with the post-Civil War saying: “Abe Lincoln may have freed the man, but Sam Colt made them equal.”

In conclusion, the acceptance of firearms as part of the American culture promoted from the gun industries in the 1840s, accelerated during and after the Civil War. By the end of the war era, the ability to use a gun, seemed to be synonymous with patriotism, and Americans were definitely willing to be able of defending the nation’s liberties. Also, in 1865 the army allowed Union soldiers to take their firearms home with them. The rifle, the soldier’s loyal companion in battle, was now hung over the mantelpiece in every home, ready to be taken down when needed. This romantic picture of early America, which according to Bellesiles, was partially a product of Colt’s successful promotional campaign, became real at the late 19th century.

he fell forward with a bullet hole below his left eye. He was the highest ranking Union casualty (the most senior by date of rank of all major generals killed) of the Civil War.

(Foote, S., 1974:203)

41 Wills, G., 2000 <http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/09/10/reviews/000910.10willot.html>

42 Wills, G., 2000 <http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/09/10/reviews/000910.10willot.html>

43 http://www.cedarhillcemetery.org/Colt.htm

44 Bellesiles, M., 1996:452

45 Wells, R., 1975:108

46 Bellesiles, M., 1996:448
century and firearms became an “unquestionable member of the American family.”

One of the most famous devotees of the gun ideology originated from the Civil-War Era and also linked with the Colt legacy, is William M. Harnett’s painting, “the Faithful Colt” (1890). It is one Trompe l’oeil canvas, an art technique which involves extremely realistic elements which was popular during the post Civil-War period. According to Grancsay (1942:32), the “Faithful Colt” symbolises the role that the Colt revolver has played in the American history. It is not a coincidence that many of the period’s military-inspired paintings have been accomplished with the use of the specific technique. Cécile Whiting in her article “Trompe l'oeil Painting and the Counterfeit Civil War” gives an explanation of what these paintings meant for the 1890s American audience.

In the first auction in 1893, the text under the painting claimed that the depicted firearm was a “genuine old Gettysburg relic”. The purpose of this text was to evoke the Civil War battles to a new generation of viewers that did not actually served to the conflict. A conflict, “in which revolvers of this sort had, in the language of myth and reminiscence, so faithfully served.” The portrayal of highly detailed war artefacts like the “faithful” .44 caliber Model 1860 Army revolver, presented with clear signs of wear and use, as actual battle scars and usually created a romantic, polemical and either mythic illusion. Audience and critics fell in the artist’s trap; “they frequently mistook the images of these items, with the real thing.”

This depicted “glory of the past” was so powerful, which placed the revolver in the top of the American values. During the Second World War, the most brilliant military leader of the American Army, General George

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47 Bellesiles, M., 1996:455
48 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trompe_l%27oeil
49 Whiting, C., 1997:251
50 Whiting, C., 1997:252
Patton, used to demonstrate his highly decorated Colt 45 revolver to increase the moral of his men.  

6 WWI: the end of the innocence

Being in a state of unconsciousness, after the Napoleonic Wars, Europe continued, for almost a century, to enhance the military technology and accepted, with great naivety, the pretensions of the post-enlightenment ideology of progress. Even the American Civil War, which was an early example of the potentials of destruction of the new military technologies, did not discourage the European nations. They used, instead, their military superiority to accomplish their imperialistic visions to Asia and Africa. As Philip Lawrence has put it, “in the 19th century armaments ascendancy was the cutting edge of colonization and modernization, but its victims were mute.” (1999:24).

The European countries were more attracted to the idea of the military solution than to discourage it. The thinkers of the period suggested that although a war might be bloody, it would be brief, unlike the American Civil War model. All of these assumptions were about to be disproved.

The Great War marked the end of an era. At the beginning of the conflict, many soldiers believed in the war effort, which seemed to be ineluctable for the defence of their nation. Battle seemed to be an exciting adventure where honour and pride would be achieved. The illusions about

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51 General Patton, deliberately cultivated a flashy, distinctive image in the belief that this would motivate his troops. He was usually seen wearing a highly polished helmet, riding pants, and high cavalry boots. He carried flashy ivory-handled, nickel-plated revolvers as his most famous sidearm (a Colt Single Action Army .45 (aka colt 45) and later the addition of an S&W Model 27 .357). The toughness of his image and character appeared well-suited to the conditions of battle. His theatrics were admired by many, so much so that, upon his death, upwards of 20,000 soldiers volunteered to be pall bearers at his funeral. This came as a surprise to the American populace, as the media had often portrayed Patton's armies as disliking him.  

52 Clarke, J., 1977:262

53 Bull, S., 2002:4

54 http://www.richthofen.com/ww1sum/
the role of the cavalry, the saber, the use of the bayonet and the effectiveness of the open field battle, cost hundreds of thousands of dead soldiers in the Western front trenches.

The ideal of the heroic face-to-face gunfight proved suicidal in this war and the myth of the individual warrior transferred to the air, where a new era of war romance, the air battle, was born. In Joanna Bourke’s book “An intimate history of killing”, it is cited that, methods of fight like the above, although they were significantly considered as the ideal and heroic forms of combat, they were mostly creations of a war literature than real contributors of the 20th century battlefield.55

Nevertheless, the romanticization of the individual fighter was kept alive in several ways. The role of the single infantryman continued to be determinant, as the dependence and engagement between the man and his rifle. For example the German Field Regulations observed that “In tandem with artillery, its (infantry) fire will batter the enemy. It alone breaks his last resistance...makes the greatest sacrifices.... garners the greatest glory. Its actions must be dominated by one thought: forward against the enemy, cost what it may!”56 Declarations like the above continued to encourage the “individual’s will to succeed” accepting at the same time the increasing casualties in the battlefield.57

Although many of the portable and smaller weapons like the machine gun and the repeating rifle were already known from the American Civil War,58 these guns were now improved enough to redefine the war techniques.59

The machine gun especially, was supposed to be the spearhead of the armies. Its devastation in the African wars had already created a mythology of its potentials.60 Denis Winter explained that the main reason

57 Bull, S., 2002: 3
58 Gatling, J., 186?
of the effectiveness of the machine gun was the elimination of the human factor. Even a scared to death soldier could operate a gun like that and create a massive impact of firepower. 61 John Ellis in his “Social history of the Machine Gun” (1975) stated that if the machine gun wasn’t denied from the British aristocracy, it could have speeded the final victory. 62 It seems, however, than even “dishonourable” for the army gentry, the machine gun became extremely popular in the next decades of the 20th century. This popularity created partially from massacres like the battle of Somme, 63 despite the fact that by January 1916 the majority of the reported wounds in the Western front, were caused by artillery and trench mortars, than personal weapons and machine guns. 64

Plate 04. The Gatling Battery. (Source Gatling, R. J. (186?), pp.521

61 Winter, D., 1979, As cited in Raudzens, G., 1990:420
63 On July 1, 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the British Army saw the bloodiest day in its history, suffering 57,470 casualties and 19,240 dead. As an example of the tactics used this day, Tyneside Irish Brigade of the 34th Division started nearly one mile from the German front line, in full view of the defenders' machine guns, and was effectively wiped out before it reached its own friendly forward trench line (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Somme).
64 Bull, S., 2002: 3.
In summation, the WWI era was characterised by ambiguity in the role of the soldiers and at the same time in the actual role of the weapons. There is still an argument concerning the real contribution of the new technologies such as the machine gun or the sniper, in the final victory.65

7 The Disillusion of Modernity: Ideology versus Progress

The previous historical trace back of the evolution of the weaponry through the last two centuries can be summarised in the following aspects:

First, it is profound, that weapons are different forms than any other pieces of machinery. They have a different function which, although it is about killing, is also carrying social meanings and symbolisms. Societies used and continue to identify weapons with ideologies.

Secondly, my interest, focusing in the category of the firearms, has to do with the representation of modernity’s perceptions, which, as I described above, allowed a tremendous development of armaments, starting from the 19th century.

Anthony Giddens (1999) has described, using a simple figure, the four basic institutional dimensions of modernity and their interrelations:

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Surveillance
(Control of information and social supervision)

Capitalism
Capital accumulation in the context of competitive labor and product markets

Military Power
(Control of the means of violence in the context of the industrialization of war)

Industrialism
(Transformation of nature: Development of the “created environment”)
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Figure 01. The institutional dimensions of modernity (source: Giddens, A., 1990:59).

65 Raudzens, G., 1990:420
I mentioned above that industrialism was mostly a by-product of the military growth which encouraged from capitalism. The development of new technologies of destruction during the 19th century did not occluded from the mindset of the post enlightenment ideologies, because it was harmonized with the idea of progress, and at the beginning, the victims of this development were not considered as real human beings.66

Other parallel factors like the idea of the nation, or the gentry’s illusions of honour and heroism, worked as agents of surveillance and created specific ideologies for the military material instruments.

At the turn of the new century, things changed. For the first time the Western society saw a war dominated by dangerous new machines which replaced the old fields of honour with moonscapes of anonymous death. It was a shock, after almost 100 years of unparalleled peace which allowed the pursuit of every mean of technology, serving a greedy capitalism. The lessons of the American Civil War were not heeded by the Europeans until the illusions of progress and continuing development collapsed at the first weeks of the Great War.

It was now clear that “the business of war was becoming rationalized.”67 The industrialization of armament manufacture produced greater quantities of arms than ever before, and yielded dead and maimed in industrial numbers. In this sense, we can perhaps agree with Allain Bernède68 (1997: 91) that ‘the front . . . [was] . . . nothing but the continuation of the factory.’ Women and men had a distinctive relationship with the metals of war – it scarred them both, maiming men and leaving the women with yellow skin and orange hair, characteristic of TNT poisoning.69
The end of the war found technology and industry guilty for all the suffering that had occurred. Technology stopped to be synonymous with progress, as modernity indicated, neither beneficial.\(^\text{70}\)

It could be reasonably assumed, that the social meanings of firearms would simultaneously be affected by this climate of dissolution. Michael Bellesiles, speaking about the American society, mentions that the identification of firearms as icons of a savage civilisation is mainly a government effort, starting from the post Civil War period.\(^\text{71}\) This thesis is clearly linked with surveillance, as a dimension of modernity.

With regard to Europe, the ideals of honour, heroism and defence of the nation in conjunction with a need to justify the sacrifice of millions, kept alive the romantic representation of weapons. Literature, painting, cinematography and other forms of art contributed to romanticise the fundamental tension of war, whose direct carrier is every form of military material. The machine gun replaced the warrior’s honourable sword, but the meaning remained the same.

8 A Conclusion for the archaeologist

The researcher of the military archaeology has to deal with a variety of meanings and symbolisms which included in the excavated material culture of war. A lot of battle remains contain ambiguous meanings and they are sentimentally charged. The communities which inspired from created mythologies may find a different approach of their surrounding archaeology, unpleasant. People do not always want to know that “what has been made can be unmade.”\(^\text{72}\)

The recent military past contains taboos and isolated out-of-context approaches that can be proven dangerous. As Lipe\(^\text{73}\) has pointed out, “value is not necessarily inherent in any item received from the past, but is given to it by the contemporary society: it thus, depends on the cultural, intellectual,

\(^{70}\) Ellis, J., 1975, as cited in Clarke, J., 1977:263
\(^{71}\) Bellesiles, M., 1996:452 and 2000: <http:chronicle.com/free/v47/i05/05b00701.htm>
\(^{72}\) Bellesiles, M., 2000<http:chronicle.com/free/v47/i05/05b00701.htm>
historical and psychological frames of reference held by the particular individuals or groups involved.” (1984:2)

Weapons will continue to confuse communities and archaeologists hiding strong dynamics, even they are not in use.

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