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The Politics of Archaeological Labour: Pandemic Reflections on Knowledge Production, Epistemic Injustice, and the Material Turn in Archaeology

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PLAGUE AND PREJUDICE: ARCHAEOLOGY, COVID-19 AND THE RESURGENCE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

RESEARCH PAPER

The Politics of Archaeological Labour: Pandemic Reflections on Knowledge Production, Epistemic Injustice, and the Material Turn in Archaeology

Eponine Wong & Juan Palá Gutiérrez

Abstract: The biggest impact of COVID-19 on undergraduate archaeology students was arguably the lack of opportunities to undertake physical fieldwork. Despite the provision of digital alternatives, the pandemic necessarily resulted in the postponement of a crucial part of archaeological education for many students. As then-undergraduate students, whose first year was abruptly cut short by the first nationwide lockdown in the UK, with in-person instruction only resuming in the summer before our final year, the focus on theoretical training with the switch to online learning meant that when restrictions eased and excavations resumed, we were especially cognizant of the divide between the theoretical aspects of the discipline and the epistemic infrastructure deployed in the field – as well as the set of power relations in which fieldwork is embedded.

This article is premised upon Edgeworth's (2003) argument that the fundamental ritual of archaeological knowledge-making consists of practical transactions between practitioners and material phenomena, which take place during the process of excavation. Situating our discussion within the context of international research excavations, we argue that these material transactions are most often the domain of students and local labourers, who frequently possess privileged insight into the artefacts recovered, the excavation procedures, and the material environment which they form part of. Simultaneously, however, these are also the people who are the most disempowered within the academic discipline of archaeology, defined here as both intellectual discourse and social institution. In this article, we trace the theoretical and disciplinary frameworks upholding this particular division of labour – manual versus intellectual – and its epistemological and political consequences. We contend that, if archaeology is to survive its own moral and political fissures, we must not only advance towards a more distributed, heterarchical form of knowledge-making that transcends traditional disciplinary divides between theory and practice, but also towards a kind of action that goes beyond self-centred theorising, to challenge the political economy of archaeology.

Keywords: Archaeological Labour, Epistemic Injustice, Knowledge Production, The Material Turn, Colonialism

Introduction

COVID-19 represented, for many, a critical moment of reflection upon the ongoing legacies of colonialism and the failures of capitalism. The public health crisis had quickly devolved into a social and economic one, further exacerbating disparities between the Global North and South and, at the local level, deepening structural inequalities across various social and political identities. Furthermore, the recognition and reframing of professions, typically classified as 'unskilled', as 'essential' labour during the pandemic raised questions about how the meaningfulness of work is conceived under neoliberal capitalism.

It was within this atmosphere of arguably heightened political consciousness that we participated in our first archaeological excavations, as two then-undergraduate students, whose first year had been abruptly cut short by the first nationwide lockdown in the UK, with fieldwork only resuming in the summer before our final year. The switch to online learning during the pandemic had led to a strong emphasis on theory, as distinct from practice, in our archaeological training – the encounter between the two, in the context of fieldwork, was thus a particularly radical event for us. Not only were our illusions of neat categories, mapping cleanly onto archaeological features and stratigraphies, swiftly shattered by the many indeterminacies underlying archaeological excavation, but there was also a keen awareness of the field as a social domain in which the social, economic, and political underpinnings of archaeology are reproduced, negotiated, and contested (Hamilakis 2004: 288, 294-5). Most striking for us were the hierarchical forms of knowledge-making and division of labour that underlie archaeological fieldwork – specifically, the ways in which the labour and intellectual contributions of those carrying out the 'digging' often go unacknowledged and under-rewarded.

This paper represents our joint reflection on the epistemic structures that underlie international research archaeology, and its relationship to various academic and colonial hierarchies, at the point of the conclusion of our undergraduate degrees. Drawing on Matt Edgeworth's (2003) *Acts of Discovery*, we first outline current understandings of knowledge production within academic archaeology, which are premised on a distinction between the production of archaeological texts (termed

'acts of inscription') and the materially-mediated processes of excavation (termed 'acts of discovery'), with the importance of the latter often overlooked. The textual assumptions upon which archaeological epistemology is premised, coupled with the social importance of the authored text within the research community, has obscured the intellectual labour involved in 'acts of discovery', resulting in an arbitrary classification of 'acts of inscription' as intellectual labour and 'acts of discovery' as manual and menial labour. We then consider the wider academic and political structures that such an epistemological divide rests on and reproduces. 'Agents of discovery' on international research digs are, in our experience, most frequently undergraduate students and local labourers, with their classification as manual workers further exposing these groups to the hierarchical and exploitative structures they are already vulnerable to. We therefore argue that, while a reconceptualisation of knowledge production within archaeology, through greater theoretical emphasis on materially-mediated processes, is essential, it is insufficient. The task of dismantling the academic and colonial asymmetries within academic archaeology requires more than a theoretical shift from within, and instead requires that archaeology wholly surrender its status as professionalised discipline.

Acts of Discovery

Post-processualism problematised the conventional empiricism that had previously characterised archaeology – the belief that the nature of knowledge production within archaeology is simply an act of 'reading' the archaeological record, which is itself assumed to preserve and contain within it a set of objective facts. Hodder (1987) argued that the way in which the archaeological record is read is determined by the positionality of the 'reader' and the wider cultural and historical contexts they are situated within; there is no single, objective past to be discovered. The post-structuralist philosophy of Shanks and Tilley (1989: 3-4) challenged the notion that the past is discovered through 'reading' the record, but built upon Hodder's analogy of material remains as text and his challenge to empiricism, arguing that the past is produced through the act of writing in the present day. In the same way that reading is highly subjective, writing, too, is a practice influenced by contemporary social, cultural, and political factors (Edgeworth 2003: 2-3). For post-processualists, archaeology is not a neutral, objective science; instead, the nature of knowledge production within the discipline is of an interpretive nature.

This seemed straightforward enough to us: we had taken a theory course and were aware of the ways in which the present, through the medium of textual discourse, influences the interpretation of the archaeological record and the construction of narratives about the past. As we entered the field, however, it quickly became apparent to us that we were no longer dealing with abstract objects of thought and social constructions, but with a set of concrete, material environments – unfamiliar objects and procedures, clearly predicated on very different infrastructures of knowledge. These required a set of skills that could only be acquired through embodied, non-discursive praxis: defining contexts and artefacts with a trowel, identifying new stratigraphic units, or discriminating between pottery sherds. One of our constitutive experiences in the field was witnessing the transformation of a yellowish-brown mass of rubble into collapse debris, its subsequent identification as the product of secondary deposition, and finally its putative linkage to ritual house-burning. To us, this came across as the product of a series of wildly underdetermined inferences, an exercise in abduction (*sensu* Marila 2017: 72–5) for which seminar readings left us ill-prepared; it was, nevertheless, clearly central to how the interpretation of the site developed.

Evidently, knowledge production within archaeology is heavily dependent on material practices, in the practical setting of digging and physical labour: the manipulation of material evidence and its physical constitution as 'facts', to then be inscribed, is crucial in shaping and constraining interpretation and theoretical analysis (Edgeworth 2003: 5-6). While this is obvious to anyone who has ever worked in the field – and few archaeologists today would try to deny the intellectual component inherent in excavation – the discipline as it is structured continues to take for granted these 'acts of discovery', rendering them as nothing more than the uncovering of material evidence. Reading and writing remain the fundamental material practices within archaeology (Edgeworth 2003: 3) – the practical mastery of language and rhetoric are the basic entry requirements for access to academic archaeological materials and practice.

Edgeworth (2003) attributes the erasure of 'acts of discovery' within archaeology to the use of the archaeological record as structuring metaphor within the discipline. Archaeological theory, whether operating within an empiricist or post-processual framework, has conceptualised material remains as a record, an object with text-like

properties. The empiricist framework sees the material record as containing 'facts' that can simply be exposed and recorded, collapsing the materiality of archaeological evidence into its textual representations; in positing these 'facts' as neutral and value-free, the importance of 'acts of discovery' in physically constituting 'facts' is downplayed (Edgeworth 2003: 4-6). Within the post-processual framework, the archaeological record becomes a 'multi-dimensional "text" with a plurality of meanings' (Shanks & Tilley 1989: 5), and it is through rhetoric that these different meanings are arranged into a coherent interpretation of the past, again resulting in the exclusion of 'acts of discovery' from the interpretive, and hence knowledge-making, process (Edgeworth 2003: 2-6). As Edgeworth (2003: 6-7; see also Lucas 2001: 38-40) points out, empiricist and post-processualist conceptualisations of the archaeological record only emphasise the object and subject, respectively. This means that the transaction between the object and subject, taking place precisely during 'acts of discovery', when diggers encounter material evidence, is overlooked in theoretical discourse, its importance within academic archaeology thus underplayed.

Edgeworth (2003: 7-14; 2011) proposes the alternative metaphor of material remains as raw material. Quoting Roy Bhaskar (1989: 61), Edgeworth argues that the labour of excavation is best understood through the metaphor of 'a sculptor at work, fashioning a product out of the material and with the tools available.' Work consists of a practical transaction between subject and object – material evidence is created and shaped through the physical activity of creative subjects, to conform to or challenge established ways of thinking, but there is also a hard materiality to material remains that exercises a constraining role. Facts are socially manufactured to a certain extent, but there are also limits imposed by an external reality (Bhaskar 1989: 77-8; Edgeworth 2003: 7-14; 2011; Lucas 2001: 42).

For Edgeworth, therefore, interpretation does not occur within some free-floating system of meanings, as post-processualists would argue. Interpretation, and by extension knowledge production, occurs, first and foremost, within the practical setting of work, grounded in material transactions between practitioner and object. 'Acts of inscription' are always preceded by 'acts of discovery': the latter involves direct engagement with material phenomena that are dynamic and polysemic; the former fix these phenomena into static forms and put them in relation to other elements of an emerging textual representation of the site. The process of inscription

is mediated by a series of standardised procedures and technologies (e.g. Munsell charts, context sheets, section drawings) that de-temporalise and effectively write out, as it were, most 'agents of discovery' (Edgeworth 2003: 94-107) – but the process of constructing archaeological narratives is impossible without reference to the actual materiality of the site. The rendering of excavation as a purely manual enterprise is tenuous. Excavation relies on a deep bodily engagement with the object of research, something which involves elaborate analytical and theoretical manoeuvres. In addition, as we experienced during fieldwork, this on-site materiality is often fragile and ephemeral: whether it be a drying section or a disappearing edge, material features demand an immediate intervention that entails both manual and intellectual components, and is critical for the interpretation and recording of the site.

The continued oversight of 'acts of discovery', then, has significant implications within archaeological epistemology. More importantly for our discussion is that the failure to acknowledge the intellectual components inherent in 'acts of discovery' poses a formidable obstacle in the recognition and reward of labour within the discipline. The construction of material remains as record has eliminated 'acts of discovery' from the circuits and disciplinary mechanisms of reward and power, with 'agents of discovery' typically regarded as 'unskilled' workers, their intellectual labour going unrecognised. The following section explores the various mechanisms that have been used to downplay the crucial role of 'agents of discovery', and their entanglement in an array of academic and colonial hierarchies.

The Division of Labour on Archaeological Excavations

International research excavations are often structured around a hierarchy, with academics and researchers from (often Euro-American) universities at the top, acting as directors and supervisors, and those carrying out the physical labour of excavation on the bottom. In light of the above discussion, this division of labour, we argue, rests on the failure or refusal to adequately recognise the act of excavation as intellectual enterprise. This has resulted in an imagined distinction between intellectual and manual labour, within which the contributions of 'agents of discovery' to archaeological knowledge-building are never given due recognition monetarily, socially, or intellectually. Importantly, 'agents of discovery' on research excavations are most frequently students and local labourers, who, independently of their role on archaeological excavations, are already embroiled in structures of

academic hierarchy and, in the case of local labourers, colonial asymmetries. An important point of consideration is the ways in which the present configuration of knowledge production within academic archaeology, which valorises 'acts of inscription', both stems from and upholds these hierarchical arrangements (Edgeworth 1991: 51).

The use of the textual metaphor to conceptualise the object of archaeological enquiry (and, by extension, the primacy accorded to 'acts of inscription') is closely linked to archaeology's status as an academic discipline. Textual discourse serves as the setting, product, and *raison d'etre* of academic existence (Edgeworth 2003: 3-4). 'Expertise' within archaeology is exclusively the possession of those able to participate in the field of textual discourse and navigate academe (Edgeworth 1991: 51). It is therefore frequently academics and researchers, operating within a textual realm, who are granted decision-making power on research excavations. It is also only their intellectual contributions that are recognised and appropriately compensated – in the monetary sense, and/or in that they are the ones who gain prestige and symbolic capital through their participation in archaeological fieldwork (for instance, through publications). It is true, however, that there are also a lot of academics and researchers who participate in fieldwork on a voluntary basis, with no expectation of immediate or direct financial remuneration. We should point out that the symbolic and social capital academics and researchers derive from their involvement in field projects is crucial in navigating an increasingly competitive and precarious academic job market, where prospects of permanent employment are severely limited; the factors that lead to success in obtaining a permanent post are so elusive and unpredictable that all one can do is gain as many qualifications, connections, and experiences possible (Cramb *et al.* 2022).

As opposed to the professional academic, the role played by students on archaeological excavations, who typically carry out the physical tasks of digging, is rarely formally acknowledged through citations or other common forms of attribution within academic settings. Perhaps more concerningly, students are hardly ever financially compensated for their labour (intellectual or manual), and sometimes even asked to pay in order to participate in a field project. This lack of financial compensation is justified through the argument that students' participation on archaeological excavations contains a transaction, wherein students are 'paid' through

the opportunity to acquire experience and social capital (Holtorf 2006) – the assumption being that students will one day gain the necessary qualifications to participate in the field of textual discourse and become 'experts' themselves, at which point their contributions to archaeological knowledge-making will finally be appropriately rewarded. This logic is, of course, completely flawed, as experience and social capital only benefit students from very specific backgrounds, who can afford to take on unpaid work in the first place (Hamilakis 2004: 289-290).

For local labourers, who typically exist completely outside of academic contexts, and whose engagement with the discipline of archaeology is more frequently strictly confined to 'acts of discovery', the lack of recognition and compensation for their labour becomes a much bigger issue. Local labourers receive even less formal recognition than students, their intellectual (or manual, for that matter) contributions in the field rarely even addressed in acknowledgements sections of publications, much less cited (Mickel 2021: 155). Certainly, this raises a separate question, of whether academic recognition is necessarily the way in which local labourers would want for their intellectual contributions to be recognised. More importantly, however, while local labourers are paid, they rarely receive significant monetary remuneration, and are most frequently paid minimum wage, the underlying assumption being that they are merely performing 'menial' labour (Mickel 2021: 155). Indeed, the precarious economies of the (post)colonial contexts in which academic archaeology frequently operates means that local labourers are generally paid significantly less than the value of their labour. Granted, this is not necessarily due to project coordinators' malice or lack of conscience, but typically a consequence of small budgets derived from increasingly scarce funding sources, where labour exploitation forms part of a cost-cutting strategy.

Furthermore, unlike students, local labourers are frequently completely alienated from the outcomes of their labour (which are confined to academe), and by consequence are unable to achieve a holistic articulation of their identities as active and intellectual contributors to archaeological knowledge (Mickel 2021: 109). Mickel (2021: 109-110) has pointed out that site workers at both Petra and Çatalhöyük purposefully downplay their knowledge of archaeological methodologies, local contexts and environments, and artefacts, preferring to present themselves as passive, menial labourers. This self-marginalisation expressed by local labourers in

(post)colonial contexts goes beyond issues of labour management on archaeological projects and is tied to the ongoing legacies of colonialism which underpin archaeological work. Mickel (2021: 110) draws on Herzfeld's (2004) concept of a 'global hierarchy of value', which refers to the production of marginality enacted by colonialism. As places, ideas and social actors are cast as marginal, any resistance to this among marginalised groups only serves to reinforce this very same status. In presenting themselves (and the types of labour they perform) in conformity with the expectations of marginalised communities as unskilled and uneducated, local labourers at Petra and Çatalhöyük are capitalising on the wider colonial logics within which archaeological excavations are embedded, to make themselves more attractive to archaeological employers.

While this manifests differently across different social and cultural contexts, the erasure of the intellectual labour involved in 'acts of discovery' clearly upholds and reproduces certain colonial dynamics. Indeed, the practice of archaeology in (post)colonial contexts, and its division of labour, has the capacity to create and permanently alter social forms, the most striking example being found in modern-day excavations in Egypt, which continue to preferentially employ Quftis (native to the Upper Egyptian town of Qift), descendants of the workmen that composed the core labour force for Flinders Petrie's excavations in the late 19th century (Quirke 2010; Doyon 2015). The existence of a differentiated social stratum in the present day, rooted in the organisation and management of labour on a field project taking place over a century ago, should make us particularly vigilant of the reverberating social effects that archaeological practice has beyond the discipline.

Developments over past decades in digital techniques of data recording and storage have been presented as providing a certain measure of multimodality beyond the text-form, and therefore argued to allow for the more explicit incorporation of 'agents of discovery' into processes of interpretation, and by extension systems of recognition and reward within academic archaeology (Hodder 1997). We would argue, however, that digital technologies merely create new sources of differentiation, which maintain the hierarchy between groups typically classed as 'agents of discovery' and those classed as experts. Who designs, controls and maintains the flows and storage of data, and who curates it? Who gets to acquire the appropriate level of digital literacy to record or access data, and how does this come about? What is the

relationship between digital objects and the final report or research article (Caraher 2016)? Digital developments have arguably only resulted in the emergence of further intermediaries and Latourian 'black boxes' (Caraher 2016) between the embodied activity of excavation and 'acts of inscription' (even if they involve database entries and geo-referenced information). Ultimately, without a change in the social fields upon which research archaeology rests, digital technologies only go as far as changing the medium of inscription.

We should emphasise at this point that our argument in this article is mainly concerned with academic archaeology. Commercial and community archaeology, though participating in the authorial politics and value regimes of research institutions, operate under different constraints and display other hierarchies: the (textual) production of knowledge is not self-governing there. In commercial archaeology, excavation and knowledge production is subject to the further aims of the development project, and thus to the unruly temporalities of the market and of capital in a way that is different from research excavations that exist within the framework of academic capitalism (for a discussion on the division of labour on commercial excavations, and its relationship to neoliberal capitalism, see Hamilakis 2015). In community archaeology, knowledge production is tied to the engagement initiative. Importantly, while the inclusion of non-experts is the main source of value within community archaeology, interactions with stakeholders in most cases still hinge on the symbolic capital associated with expertise and the mediating role that professional archaeologists end up taking (e.g. Kyriakidis & Agnastopoulos 2015). Regardless, the resulting products of commercial and community archaeology have different audiences and truth conditions than academic archaeology (especially within an international context).

Outlook: Can Epistemic Injustice in Archaeology Simply be Addressed through a Theoretical Shift?

In drawing on Edgeworth (2003), our argument thus far – for the enhanced visibility of 'acts of discovery' as fundamental practice of archaeological knowledge construction – can be said to be situated within the so-called material turn that has emerged in archaeological theory in recent years. Broadly speaking, this theoretical paradigm gives precedence to how materials and objects also exercise agency and 'act back' on human subjects (Olsen 2012). In considering how to dismantle the academic

and colonial hierarchies inherent in academic archaeology, upheld in part by the textual assumptions underpinning knowledge production, it may be tempting to argue that what is needed is a theoretical paradigm shift, to highlight more balanced relationships between people and things. After all, the '(re)turn to things' within archaeology was largely inspired by a widespread worry of imposing 'western' assumptions about the nature of being (or 'ontologies'), which stress the primacy of human subjects and human agency, on contexts in which this may not be completely applicable (Fowles, in Alberti *et al.* 2011: 898); some have argued that alternative ontologies challenging human exceptionalism are more compatible with non-'western' and Indigenous worldviews, and this compatibility is crucial in encouraging further integration of non-western and Indigenous perspectives into archaeology and increased collaboration with marginalised groups (e.g. Cipolla 2021).

The assumption of some rigid distinction between 'western' epistemologies and ontologies, as embodied by academe, and the epistemologies and ontologies of non-'western' or Indigenous communities, however, is completely arbitrary (for a full discussion, and criticism of the 'ontological turn' in anthropology, see Graeber 2015). As this article has shown, much of what we think of as 'western' knowledge has benefitted from the contributions of those from what are typically thought to be non-'western' contexts. Even arguments advocating for the integration of 'alternative' perspectives to unsettle that of the 'western' academic rest on the assumption that 'western', academic knowledge constitutes a distinct, bounded unit in the first place, but this in itself can amount to an act of epistemic violence (Graeber 2015: 21).

Severin Fowles (2016) has further identified the rise of the material turn within archaeology as coinciding with the increase in postcolonial critiques, wherein traditional subjects of archaeological research have begun to launch serious attacks against scholarly authority. Archaeologists have therefore become enamoured with material objects, as preferable subjects of research, because they cannot 'talk back'. While we would not necessarily go as far as saying that the material turn is strictly a reaction to the politics of representation (nor does Fowles argue this), it is worth pointing out that the decentring of the human and the analytical shift to a focus on things, arising from the material turn, runs the risk of eclipsing more urgent political questions within archaeology.

Ultimately, the question of epistemic injustice that we are addressing is not one that can simply be solved through the adoption of some new theoretical paradigm, purporting to be able to overturn 'western' common sense, within the discipline. The issue concerns academic praxis itself. Indeed, attempts to incorporate non-'western' and Indigenous perspectives and practices within academic archaeology, as advocated by proponents of the material/ontological turn, are fundamentally driven by the desire to challenge and thereby enrich interpretations *within the discipline itself*; any transformative potential that arises from the incorporation of these perspectives is fundamentally limited by the wider politics of knowledge that enshrine archaeology as an academic institution. Many have in fact raised the question of whether the material/ontological turn within archaeology and the social sciences more generally amounts to an appropriation of non-'western' knowledge, and a continuation of colonialism (Todd 2016; van Dyke 2021).

We therefore argue that an epistemological decolonisation would not only entail, on a theoretical and methodological level, the greater valorisation of 'acts of discovery', as we have argued thus far. It would also require properly political changes, in which academics cede their authority and control over archaeological practice and scholarship, to undermine the traditional dominance of Euro-America in dictating how archaeology is practised. We draw inspiration here from a degrowth approach, which hinges upon the idea of consciously reducing the scale of appropriation and consumption of the Global North, in a way that precludes any kind of ecological, social or cultural hegemony by any one group, and its incorporation into archaeology (Flexner 2020, 2021; Moshenska 2021). A degrowth archaeology seeks, firstly, to diversify opportunities for engagement with archaeology beyond 'manual' labour on archaeological excavations and capitalist norms of 'work'. Some have proposed that general redistributive measures, such as universal basic income, would allow low-ranked 'diggers' the freedom to pursue further education and research and thereby upskill themselves (Zorzin 2021) – but we find that this does not directly address internal hierarchies of knowledge. The appeal of a degrowth approach is therefore that it ultimately rests on and requires the complete surrender of the idea of 'expert' knowledge and of the professional status of the discipline (Flexner 2020: 162).

Conclusion

This article has argued that the primary reason behind the marginalisation of students and local workers on archaeological excavations derives from the framing of 'acts of discovery', most often the domain of these two groups, as purely manual enterprise. As Edgeworth (2003) has demonstrated, material transactions between practitioners and the site during excavation are, in fact, fundamental to the production of knowledge within archaeology; the physical act of excavation therefore involves both manual and intellectual labour. Archaeological discourse has thus far failed to acknowledge this, due to the textual metaphor which archaeology, as an academic discipline, by necessity operates within, resulting in the continued hierarchical organisation of archaeological excavations and the exploitation of students and local workers within this structure. It is therefore only through the valorisation of 'acts of discovery' (Edgeworth 2003) as fundamental material practice of archaeology, and through paying due attention to the core dynamics of archaeological knowledge production, as it happens in its primary theatre – the site – that we can begin to progress towards more heterarchical forms of knowledge-making and organisation of labour within the discipline.

Notwithstanding the above, we believe academia relies structurally on the figure of institutionalised expertise; ultimately, any division of labour that implies the mere existence of 'scholarship' would prevent a truly radical transformation of archaeology. Only the decoupling of the discipline from the logics of academic knowledge production will enable the field to move on from these issues. Arguably, a grassroots, non-academic archaeology would look unrecognisable – perhaps we would not be able to call it 'archaeology' anymore. But this is not a question that can be answered beforehand.

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Juan Palá Gutiérrez has a BA in Archaeology and Anthropology and MRes in Anthropology from University College London, as well as an MPhil in Holocene Climates from the University of Cambridge. His research interests focus on the phenomenology of time and historical experience; as well as on their intersection with material forms, particularly regarding the European countryside.

The pandemic occurred in the first year of their undergraduate studies, curtailing fieldwork opportunities for both of them until the summer before their final year. Their eventual shared field experiences in England and Greece led to the epistemic encounters that inspired this article. Eponine has also conducted archaeological fieldwork in Wales, Scotland, and Belize; while Juan has conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Spain.

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