

10 years

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Online Journal in Public Archaeology

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FORUM:

CHATTING ABOUT THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY

With the tenth anniversary of the journal we wanted to take a deep breath and look into the future.

This forum consists of short pieces from colleagues around the world that discuss general and specific issues regarding public archaeology in the coming years. We asked for an open format, trying to grasp a fresher approach than the one usual academic writing permits.

As with other forums in the journal, we will keep it open from now on in case any of you want to participate too. It is a good occasion to debate the current and coming role of public archaeology and we hope this selection of papers helps to foster it.

We originally invited 50 people to participate. However, these difficult times made it difficult for some to do so. Nevertheless, we have a good set of contributions that will be of interest to you all.

Enjoy it (and participate if you feel you have something else to say).



Laugh now,
but one day
we'll be
in charge.

BONESY

**FORUM: Chatting about the future of public archaeology
FOR A SOLIDARY AND ACTIVIST [PUBLIC] ARCHAEOLOGY
IN THE AMAZON**

Marcia BEZERRA

To think about public archaeology in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic is a task which forces us to deal with frustrations and challenges imposed, by the current moment, on all of us. One of the most profound effects of the pandemic is the social isolation and the prohibition to our most human relations of closeness. Distancing rules have created a 'pandemic sociability' (Toledo and Souza Junior 2020) in which fear of the virus, of contact, of death, of the very possibility of being vector of the disease dictate the movement of bodies and, at the same time, dislocate our view towards other realities around us.

The search for health security and for subsistence led to the construction of solidarity networks and the strengthening of collective and humanitarian actions throughout the world. Facing this scenario, it has been inevitable to think about the extension of our social and political role as archaeologists and of the actual possibilities of the discipline in contributing to the solution of problems originated or dramatically aggravated by the pandemic. Covid-19 can be seen as a "total social fact" (Mauss [1925] 2002: 4) and, as such, articulates "multiplicity of social 'things' that are in a state of flux", amongst them, science. Archaeology is one of the "social things" and is interrelated to people, places, institutions, and phenomenon of every nature. We and Archaeology are entangled with the Covid-19 pandemic. Its effects go much beyond the immediate consequences on the discipline's ordinary activities. Archaeology, like the other spheres that constitute this "total social fact" – the pandemic – has had to think, see, and engage itself with the world based on new experiences. Its public face – public archaeology (PA) – can have an important role in this rethinking of the discipline, because it acts from a privileged perspective: as an insider (when practiced and thought by us) and as an outsider (when practiced

and thought based on other regimes of thought). I do not intend to discuss the theoretical aspects of the field of PA (see Richardson and Almansa-Sánchez 2015), but I consider that it is necessary to say what I understand to be public archaeology.

Briefly I turn to the reflections of a Brazilian researcher (Bezerra de Meneses 2007: 54) who argues that “it can only be socially good a physics, an agronomy – an archaeology that is good as archaeology (...) it is not usually spoken of a “public physics”, or of a “public agronomy”, although they are disciplines which widely interfere in the lives of all of us (...)” (my translation). He states that the need to qualify the discipline may be the sign of an “incomprehension capable of inciting antinomies (...) such as between academic archaeology and other archaeologies, and consequent differentiations of agents” (my translation). It is in this sense that I chose to place the word [public] between brackets in the title, to affirm that all archaeology should be public. Public archaeology is the counterface, committed to the establishment of *dialogues* between the discipline, other agents and modes of production and use of knowledge about the past. The past is a key to situate ourselves in the world.

In many places, such as the Amazon, it constitutes the present in a lived and daily form. Archaeology in the Amazon is long-term indigenous history, it is the deep history of the peoples of the forest. Each little piece of the Amazonian forest carries in itself the ingenuity of these populations who constructed its bio-sociodiversity and the ways of ‘management of abundance’, as has stressed the archaeologist Eduardo Neves (Lima 2020). When we watch the destruction of the Amazonian forest, we are not seeing trees being burned; we are seeing the destruction of the human lives, and of the wealth of experiences and knowledges produced, accumulated and transmitted, throughout thousands of years, by human societies who lived in the Amazon in the past and that, effectively, gave life to the ecosystem that we know today. These knowledges have persisted through time and guaranteed the maintenance of the forest and of the peoples who live there to this day. As stated by the archaeologists Anne Py-Daniel and Claide Moraes (2019), they promote positive impacts for the existence of the forest and for this reason they should be heard in the elaboration processes of policies directed towards the Amazon. To think of public archaeology from this context, cruelly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, and to project its future in ten years is a difficult and painful task.

It is increasingly necessary to ask, "Why does archaeology matter?" (Sabloff 2008), *why* does public archaeology matter? Or with *what* and with *whom* does it matter? (Pyburn 2011). I also recognize that we must think of alternative forms of socializing knowledge produced by archaeology – task which is attributed to PA. The search for new means for sharing narratives – from archaeologists and other human collectives – about the past is part of the transformations through which the discipline will undergo along a decade. From a methodological point of view, such changes will demand the *advancement* and the update of digital technologies for: the dissemination of archaeology through social networks, the improvement of educational materials, the creation of virtual environments for the visitation of archaeological sites and museums (Cascon 2020). We know, however, that not everyone has access to this digital materiality. The digital exclusion exposed during the pandemic is expressive and was exacerbated by the adoption of remote teaching in schools and universities around the world. It is necessary to take care that public archaeology, already informed by controversial issues – such as its relation to heritage education in the domain of environmental licensing in Brazil and the problematic concept of "public" – does not become an amplifying agent of asymmetries. As the Uruguayan intellectual Eduardo Galeano (1997:3) affirms, "development develops inequality"; and technology can do the same. To search for new ways of communicating archaeology is part of PA's future, but its main purpose should go far beyond that. To reflect about the future of public archaeology in the Amazon demands to think about archaeology in the present.

Amazonian archaeology has undergone important changes in the last decades. Considering the scope of this essay, the more relevant transformations are: 1) the growing recognition of the importance of archaeological knowledge to the current debates about the management of the Amazonian forest; 2) the emergence of activism as a practice in archaeology (Rocha et al. 2013); and 3) the new generation of indigenous and black archaeologists who have received their academic degrees from Amazonian universities (Leite 2014; Wai Wai 2017; Hartemann and Moraes 2019; Munduruku 2019). These are three movements which indicate the increasing and beneficial porosity of the frontiers of the discipline; it is as if we were, at last, *touching the world*. The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (2002: 30) used to say: "No one can be in the world, with the world and with others in a neutral form. One cannot be in the world with gloved hands and only observing" (my translation).

We must remove the gloves and practice a “sensible archaeology” (Lima 2019, my translation), an archaeology as “practice of meaning and sensing material traces of the past” (Cabral 2015: S5). This has been a collective effort of colleagues who act in Amazonian archaeology. In the last months, several events organized by local institutions expanded the spaces of communication of the discipline with other collectives (such as online courses, virtual visits to archaeological storage rooms, live streamings about archaeology). However, what has marked Amazonian archaeology in the context of the pandemic is its involvement and mobilization for the rights of the peoples of the forest. The Amazon is at the epicenter of an environmental crisis generated and worsened by public policies, which have been characterized by the devastation of ecosystems and of the ways of life which have sustained them for thousands of years. The pandemic increased the mechanisms of exclusion of these populations. Because of this, several collective actions have been conducted and/or supported by Amazonian archaeologists in the scope of their projects but outside these as well (Rocha and Loures 2020).

This has demonstrated the strength and the relevance of collaborative actions in the fight for social justice. But in order for this to become a permanent mode of action in public archaeology, it will be necessary to constantly practice: 1) humility (decentering of the Western perspective of science); 2) listening (to other systems of thought, to other existences), and 3) solidarity (the empathetic recognition of common concerns and necessities). An important indigenous thinker and leader, in Brazil, Ailton Krenak (2020:8) declares that: “It has been a long time since I do not program activities for “after”. We must stop being *cocky*. We do not know if we will be alive tomorrow. We have to stop selling the tomorrow” (my translation). I do not know how public archaeology will be tomorrow, but whatever is our expectation of change, it should start now. I hope that public archaeology, in the next decade, avoids at all costs transforming itself into solely a digital technology of dissemination of archaeological knowledge, although I understand that we need to recognize the existence of new virtual territories. bell hooks (2010: 10), when speaking about the importance of a critical thought in education, argue that to fight for this is a “(...) commitment [that] requires much courage and imagination”. I extend this thought to our practice: we need courage and imagination to deal with the future challenges and to promote a solidary and activist [public] archaeology.

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¹ bell hooks was born Gloria Jean Watkins but has adopted the name bell hooks as a tribute to her grandmother. Aiming to draw a distinction, and claiming that most important is the "substance of books, not who I am" (Williams 1996: 1), she does not capitalize her name. I respect her choice and have asked the editor to keep her name in lowercase letters. Williams, Heather. 2006. "bell hooks speaks up". *The Sandspur*, 112 (17): 1-2. <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/cfm-sandspur/2685/>

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AP: Online Journal in Public Archaeology

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Tenth Anniversary Edition

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ISSN: 2171-6315

AP Journal is a peer-reviewed journal devoted exclusively to Public Archaeology. It is freely distributed online on the Website:

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