

Ouzman, Sven. 2019. Archaeology, Graffiti and Prisons. In: Mizoguchi, Koji and Claire Smith (eds). *Global Social Archaeologies: Making a Difference in a World of Strangers*: 207-210. London: Routledge.

BOX 7.2 ARCHAEOLOGY, GRAFFITI, AND PRISONS

When is the past 'past' and what are the limits of the material culture Archaeology may study?

Archaeology is arguably the only discipline that studies all of human history in all of its facets. But it has also been—and remains—a deeply colonial study. The grand claim that archaeology studies all of human history is a typical colonial—even imperial—arrogance. And yet archaeology is a powerful, if partial, mode of surveillance and is able literally and metaphorically to go beyond surface appearances. What then can archaeology—and more specifically archaeologists—do to de-colonise and then to cosmopolitanise the discipline? Many options are available and viable—such as greater involvement and co-production of knowledge and practice with Indigenous people, more interdisciplinary work, and a greater engagement with society at large. These options all have strengths, which are usually also their weaknesses. For example, David Lowenthal argues that the desire to make archaeology and heritage 'relevant' to society simultaneously makes us susceptible to political manipulation. Here I consider two options—'contemporary archaeology' and pedagogy. As a post-colonial proposition—if archaeology has been able to study 'other' cultures in other places at other times, it should work really well studying 'us' in the here and now. There is a risk that contemporary archaeologies become indulgent, politically lame enterprises that act as vehicles by which archaeology can also colonise the present—and even the future. Contemporary archaeology thus has to matter, has to have some kind of political stake and risk.

Words on the Street

I consider graffiti work an extension of rock art research. Over the last decade graffiti has moved firmly into archaeology's ambit, with a variety of often

elegant and gritty studies from across the world (see 2014 'Signs of the Times' special theme section in *Australian Archaeology*). Speaking theoretically to questions of how we define 'art,' 'rock art,' and 'graffiti' as well as how human place-making practices adapt to different epochs, graffiti are deliciously feral artefacts that transgress disciplinary sensibilities and social conventions. They evoke strong feelings and are a ubiquitous part of many people's daily lives. But they are typically eschewed or taken at face value. But, for example, recent work in Western Australia's Fremantle Prison (Romano 2014) shows that the prison's 'graffiti' (e.g., Fig. 1) encapsulates visual conventions ranging from fine art (visited on official tours) through to poignant and pointed comments on incarceration, racism, violence, spirituality, gang tags, and the like (not visited on official tours of this UNESCO World Heritage Site). Studying these artefacts carries real risks and ethical conundrums such as making visible private sentiments, potentially outing perpetrators (graffiti is a property crime), and exposing the researcher to physical harm. But it also gives a voice to the people history often chooses not to hear (graffiti is best conceptualised aurally than visually) and integrates graffiti into a wider continuum of mark-making practices. Ideally, graffiti research can dissuade authorities from spending money and resources—not to mention criminalising an activity—that is, in many ways unstoppable; though it is possible to direct aspects of it.

Prison Pedagogy

A known associate of graffiti, prisons, provide my pedagogic contribution towards a global social archaeology. Most archaeologists have no formal training in teaching, yet almost all archaeologists teach at some point. University lecturers can get away with appalling teaching practices because the narrow tolerances of formal literacy within the university system and students pay for a system of feudal indenture. But teaching archaeology—ostensibly all of human history—to a privileged few is an obvious contradiction. Teaching outside of the Academy—as well as being taught by one's 'students'—is a far riskier and more challenging exercise. Incarceration uproots a person from family and familiar into a eutopia or 'nowheresville.' Archaeology can be 'radical' in its original sense and longitudinally probe case studies of inequality to expose their roots. Critical pedagogy not only challenges the notional teacher and students alike. For example, designing and teaching a course on 'Ancient African History' as a 'white' South African male at San Quentin Penitentiary in California (see Panich and Cohen 2009), where most inmates were black, Hispanic and Asian, I was part of a performance of who can—and who may—speak on behalf of other people's histories. Students also had to accept, for example, African complicity in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Perhaps most importantly, a critical pedagogy provides students with a way

of thinking through problems using multiple strands of evidence and understanding especially how structural violence (cf. Galtung 1969, 1990) operates. Archaeologists should thus, as routine practice teach to and learn from non-standard audiences like street children, the homeless, ordinary publics, and so on. Combined with a greater commitment to understanding teaching as a liberatory practice in the sense bell hooks meant 'teaching to transgress,' these various publics may help us reconstitute archaeology as social and cosmopolitan, though 'global' is perhaps a large claim.

So . . . What?

Cross-disciplinary and public work is risky and seldom rewarded by orthodox structures. But archaeology as a largely 19th century disciplinary construct is long overdue a reimagining and redeployment. Considerable work on this front has happened, instigated by individuals and collectives. Each such instigation is small, and that is an appropriate scale for a cosmopolitan archaeology. The publics at large can weave the intimate details of these small stories into larger narratives, co-producing meaning for themselves and for larger groups.

Sven Ouzman

Archaeology and Centre for Rock Art Research + Management
University of Western Australia
Perth, Australia

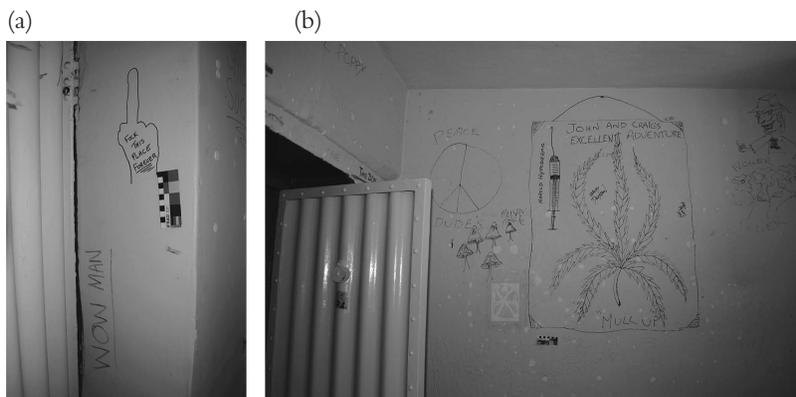


FIGURE 7.14A AND B Bath house excavation and men's section graffiti Fremantle Prison, Western Australia