Revolution is the New Black: Graffiti/Art and Mark-making Practices

Ursula K. Frederick, Research School of Humanities, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia
E-mail: Ursula.Frederick@anu.edu.au

ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been a strong resurgence in the production and visibility of graffiti/art in Australian cities. This paper considers what we may learn about this practice by adopting an archaeological approach to its study. The results yield interesting insights into two contemporary phenomena of graffiti/art production that offer intriguing links to Australian rock art. The study considers the significance of contemporary mark-making and explores how this practice may inform our approach to rock art research.

Résumé: Ces dernières années il y a eu une recrudescence forte dans la production de graffitis ou d'art pictural dans des villes australiennes. Cet article considère ce que nous pouvons apprendre de cette pratique en adoptant une approche archéologique de son étude. Les résultats rapportent des aperçus intéressants dans deux phénomènes contemporains de la production de graffitis et d'art pictural qui présentent des liaisons intrigantes à l'art du rock australien. L'étude considère la signification de ces projections de marque contemporaine et explore comment cela peut informer notre approche du rock et de la recherche.

Resumen: En los últimos años se ha producido un fuerte renacimiento de la producción y la visibilidad del arte del graffiti en las ciudades australianas. Este trabajo trata sobre lo que podemos aprender de esta práctica adoptando un enfoque arqueológico para su estudio. El resultado proporciona interesantes perspectivas sobre dos fenómenos contemporáneos de la producción del arte del graffiti que tiene sorprendentes vínculos con el rock australiano. El estudio plantea el significado del dibujo contemporáneo y analiza cómo podría conformar nuestro enfoque sobre investigaciones del arte del rock.

Introduction

Once upon a time in the seventies a mother and her child went for a weekend walk. Their course took them through the child's empty schoolyard and as they passed by the portico entrance to the school they saw four letters scrawled on the wall near the doorway. It was the 'F word' in large thin capitals. Seeing this the mother took out her keys and proceeded to scratch into the wall's surface. The child watched as her mother made marks that bridged the lines to transform the word before her. The F became a B the U and C became Os and K was left untouched. Happy with her work the mother put her keys away and the two returned to their afternoon stroll. As they neared the school fence the child said she knew the word 'book' but didn't understand the other word they had seen. The mother explained the word with delicate honesty and they continued on their way, never mentioning the incident again and living happily ever after.

I begin with this illustration because it reveals how our everyday lives may be punctuated by spontaneous encounters with graffiti. It shows how graffiti is a voice *and* a response open to multiple significations and slippages. The story is a demonstration of how marks may be made and meanings changed and how individuals may be agents in that process. Graffiti is also a place of public engagement that invites collaboration in its production and in its reading. Moreover it can be a source and site of play, learning and value-creation. This vignette is also a personal memory and a glimpse into my future. In this paper I aim to substantiate what my mother's actions showed me: that graffiti may be made into a productive text worth reading.

Archaeologists and others have long been intrigued by the marks and images made by prehistoric peoples. Increasingly, art produced in historic periods, during times of cross-cultural interaction and in contemporary contexts is also a source of interest and interaction for archaeologists. In recent years this scholarship has reoriented the focus of study away from the idea of interpreting cultures at a distance (spatial, temporal, ideological, etc.) to also incorporate an examination of the visual cultures generated within our own societies and even those concerning our own discipline (Holtorf 2005; Molyneaux 1997; Moser 1992, 1998; Renfrew 2003). Emerging out of ethnoarchaeological studies and the so-called 'archaeology of us' (Gould and Schiffer 1981), the present dynamic in 'art and archaeology'

research benefits from a rich interdisciplinary field. This paper is in keeping with a contemporary archaeology that recognises different modes of cultural production and research practice as avenues of investigation. As such it works at the intersection of art and archaeology to explore contemporary graffiti/art. The purpose of the study is twofold. First, I set out to consider how an archaeological approach may contribute to an understanding of contemporary graffiti, and what that may communicate about social spaces and meanings. Secondly, I use the study as an exercise for reflecting on how rock art researchers may approach evidence for past mark-making practices.

Graffiti, Graffiti/Art

Graffiti in the broader contemporary context is a complex mark-making phenomenon, that may be seen as a kind of drawing or painting and, because it commonly employs language text, also as a kind of writing. Its sculptural forms and intervention in the surface textures and appearance of buildings make it an element in the liquid architecture of a mutating metropolis. However, the term 'graffiti' is most often applied to any form of unsolicited marking. Graffiti is generally understood as text and/or images that is made in shared spaces where it is generated and viewed publicly, be that a privately owned building, public transport or an alleyway. It is otherwise difficult to characterise graffiti because it is a mode of expression and communication which comprises a vast array of media, technique, subject matter, form, *and* meanings. Yet despite the fact that people 'do graffiti' in different ways for different ends, it is most often typified as an act of vandalism or anti-social behaviour. For this reason much of the academic literature emphasises the actions and affiliations underlying graffiti through the lens of youth, subculture studies and the discourse of the disenfranchised (Abel and Buckley 1977; Best 2003; Hall 1975; Rafferty 1991). Graffiti is a familiar resource in the study of gangs and 'deviant' behaviour, territorialising practices (Rowntree and Conkey 1980; Wise 2000), criminal justice (Halsey and Young 2006; Schaefer 2004; White 2001), and urban space (Ley and Cybriwsky 1974; Neef 2007). And while graffiti as art now offers an enormous range of glossy publications (far too many to list here), critical graffiti research largely remains the domain of sociologists, criminologists and cultural geographers.

Graffiti is regularly interpreted not only as a record of human presence and the social construction of space but as a function of efforts to make claims *over* space. Despite some evidence to the contrary (e.g. Adams and Winter 1997), this view of graffiti's purpose—as a means of marking territory—prevails in academic literature and in the popular imagination. It is also supported in the oral accounts of some graffiti practitioners

(Dew 2007). If we consider graffiti more broadly as a marking practice—as a form of trace and a manner of performing one's presence and place in the world—then graffiti has been practiced for millennia. On these terms graffiti may be more effectively aligned with ideas of how human beings perceive and interact with their living environment; how they signal their inhabitation of or transit through place; and how they gesture to ownership, occupation and even, or especially, arrival. Graffiti, as a mark of arrival, is a particularly symbolic action when considered in light of historical circumstances of exploration, colonisation, war, migration and settlement. Like most researchers of graffiti I employ a broad definition but in adding the term art I wish to emphasis graffiti's long history of association with other visual forms relevant to this study. These include rock art, print media, propaganda posters, corporate advertising, political murals and graphics. Secondly, 'graffiti/art' acknowledges the creative capacities of graffiti that are often overlooked in place of the destructive force by which it is officially regarded. Like the terms 'post-graffiti' and 'neo-graffiti' used by others (Manco 2002; Dickens 2008) 'graffiti/art' points to a period of renaissance in graffiti that is enjoying increased legitimacy as street art. The term re-asserts the productive intersection between graffiti and art that has been forged by artists like Basquiat and Haring and which has played an instrumental role, following Pop, in challenging art history and theory. Moreover graffiti/art recognises that many practitioners of graffiti see themselves as artists and cultural producers. Their practice is informed not simply by wanting to be seen, as with 'tagging', but in having their work visually appreciated.

Graffiti/Art Scholarship in Archaeology

It was the emergence of hip-hop and the so-called subway-style graffiti of 1970s and 1980s America that first urged scholars, journalists and others to develop an attentiveness to the potentials of graffiti as a cultural practice and artistic form (Austin 2001; Ferrell 1996, 1997; Rahn 2002). The twenty-first century has seen a marked increase in graffiti production across the globe. This is measured by the scale, frequency, diversity and distribution of graffiti/art evident in our streets but also by the attention that these mark-making practices have attracted from within local governance and the mainstream media.

The popular appeal and institutional validation of graffiti/art that is currently taking place is evident in exhibitions (Lombard 2007), the establishment of government funded graffiti/art festivals and in legislative efforts to protect contemporary graffiti/art as cultural heritage (http://www.abc.net. au/news; MacDowall 2006). The shift in perception that is occurring has allowed anonymous graffiti/artists to become celebrities (Banksy 2006) and

transformed local histories into legends. In the Australian context one need look no further than Sydney's millennial celebrations when the Harbour Bridge was emblazoned with the word *Eternity*. This single word was the signature graffito of Arthur Stace. Stace became renown for his early morning ritual of writing *Eternity* in chalk on the pavements of Sydney. He wrote this word repeatedly for over thirty years and avoided arrest on several occasions. More than three decades after his death the National Museum of Australia (NMA) celebrated Stace's actions by developing an Eternity gallery (see www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions). By reclaiming Stace's message from the chalk dust of *Eternity* the NSW authorities and the NMA elevated the act of drawing on the street to a new iconic status.

Despite the global prevalence and material riches of graffiti today, as a discipline archaeology has been shy to indulge in its investigation. Archaeologists make reference to graffiti/art but few have made it the subject of their research. The most one can generally find is a sound bite from a media interview or a vague reference to it as an 'on-the-side' research interest. There are of course exceptions (Blake 1981; David and Wilson 2002; Haviland and Haviland 1995; Orengo and Robinson 2008) and in Australia much of this effort is reflected in the work of John Clegg (1993, 1998, 2000). Thus far archaeological enquiry into graffiti/art practices has followed three lines of thought: historical graffiti (as cultural heritage); contemporary graffti (as cultural resource management issue); contemporary graffiti (as analogous to rock art).

For the most part archaeological research has focussed on historical graffiti rather than contemporary mark-making activities (Rivera-Collazo 2006). These studies have contributed to our understanding of culturally unique mark-making processes as well as reinforcing the temporal depth of graffiti practices. Even so, the interpretive emphasis on graffiti/art of the past is often dismissed as vandalism or idle unstructured scribble (but see Watson 2008 for a refreshing take on doodles). Archaeological reporting and procedural site management studies describe contemporary graffiti/art as a significant menace. It is not surprising, in the context of rock art, that graffiti/art is usually posed as a problem that requires prevention rather than as a source of mark-making behaviour worthy of study in its own right. Indeed much greater attention is given to recording contemporary graffiti as a threat to rock art conservation through the auspices of cultural resource management (CRM) (e.g. Hartley and Vawser 2002). There is no doubt that graffiti in the form of rock art defacement should be discouraged. Yet the study of mark-making as an enduring human behaviour is an intriguing course of inquiry. The human desire to make marks and images finds expression across different cultures and temporal frameworks. Undoubtedly, such behaviour may reveal a variety of different impulses: to reflect upon life; to connect with place; to communicate with others.

Archaeologists have the unique opportunity to explore this activity through a multitude of lenses. One avenue I take up here is to contemplate the possible synergies between the study of contemporary graffiti/art practice and other archaeological evidence of mark-making (e.g. rock art, ground sculpture, antler bone).

Case Studies: Setting and Methods

After some years of observing and photographing graffiti and murals in different parts of Australia I undertook a detailed recording and preliminary analysis of graffiti at two sites in Melbourne and Perth, cities on opposite sides of the Australian continent. Unlike the urban drains, abandoned buildings, railway corridors and other industrial settings within which graffiti is commonly found, the walls selected for this study are situated within two inner city residential and commercially fashionable communities in Perth, Western Australia and Melbourne, Victoria. These particular cities were selected because of my personal familiarity with them, because of the vast distance between them and because graffiti/art had achieved some degree of notoriety within each community. The Melbourne graffiti movement has acquired a name for itself within the global graffiti network and the City of Melbourne actively celebrates a number of graffiti sites within its tourism promotions. By contrast, Perth is subject to some of the harshest anti-graffiti legislation and advertising in the nation.

Both the Melbourne and Perth sites are located in alleyways adjacent to the main streets of Fitzroy and Highgate (Figures 1, 2). Both suburbs were once working-class but are now subject to gentrification. Other graffiti sites throughout Melbourne and Perth were visited and photographed in addition to the locations recorded. Sites were chosen from different cities in the hope that they may form two locally distinctive case studies rather than for the purposes of comparison, per se. Not withstanding the influence of 'global' culture and the fact that many graffiti/artists are highly mobile and socially networked I was interested to see if graffiti/art was a situated practice. If so, how might local graffiti movements be generated?

A reconnaissance was first carried out in Sept 2006. The selected sites were recorded subsequently over several days in July (Melbourne) and August 2007 (Perth). My method was to document the graffiti/art as though I were recording rock art. A recording sheet was developed, building surfaces were sketched and photographed, and wall measurements were taken. The different types of materials and techniques in use, the number, size and range of subjects were amongst those variables I observed. The arrangement of 'motifs', their colour combinations and their superpositioning relationships were also noted.

Figure 1. Site view of the alleyway recorded in Perth, Photograph: U. Frederick

Figure 2. Detail view of the alleyway recorded in Melbourne, Photograph: U. Frederick

Analysis and Results—General Observations

My analysis of the recorded material yielded numerous avenues for exploration. Rather than discuss each site in detail I offer a synopsis of data before drawing out two trends for discussion. These trends are of interest because they appear as locally specific manifestations of graffiti/art practice and because they each have a connection of sorts with rock art traditions.

Both sites yielded diversity in materials and techniques (Figure 3). These included the application of stickers, marker pens, free form spray painting, stencil graphics as well as sculptural works and printed, photocopied or cutout paper, colloquially referred to as paste-ups. Collectively they exhibit a wealth of colours and colour combinations. In both sites, however, monochrome marks and the colour black prevails (Figure 3). The form and content of the marks vary considerably. Some subjects are repeated with little change (usually stencils and tag drawings). Others are replicated in different styles, colours or techniques within the same site (Figure 4). The most striking example of this latter point is present in the Perth site, which displays a total of 21 Wandjina type figures incorporating eight variations in scale, design and technique on the subject.

In terms of size, placement and superpositioning a number of patterns were observed. Posters or paste-ups are amongst the more recent instances of graffiti/art production. They are predominately black ink on white paper with a contrasting graphic appearance. Despite being the latest development in Australian graffiti/art they are also exceptionally fragile. They fade and easily tear or peel away. The weathered effect may well be a sought after aesthetic or it may be a direct riposte to the much-maligned advertising posters that take over good wall space. The paste-up's fragility reiterates the ephemerality of graffiti/art or the specific content of the graffiti artist's message—the fickle sentiment of trends (Figure 5). In practical terms the increase in paste-ups is linked to getting a large detailed piece up onto a wall quickly.

In comparison, stencils accentuate shape by contrasting mass and void. While a degree of detail is evident within some of these, most operate by defining silhouette. Stencils range in size, however there is a consistent preference for the a5-a4 scale. Tags drawn with pen or crayon are generally very small but when spray-painted tags are quite large. The size rarely falls in between and would seem to be linked to the limitations of the media. Clearly it is difficult to make a small signature with a spray can and it is time consuming to make a large tag by colouring in space with a felt pen. Instead, smaller tags are simply repeated and large tags, which take more time to complete, are one-off treatments. In both sites fairly unsophisticated tags dominate the centre of the wall and one's view. The attention-grabbing position of tags is in contrast with the placement of stencils, which occur at different heights. In fact stencils appear most often lower than the waist or on the pavement itself. The spatial arrangement indicates stencil graffiti artists favour clean space and avoid obscuring other graffiti/ art, particularly other stencils. This positioning preference may be, in part, a mechanism for avoiding their work being overwritten later. By comparison, writing over other graffiti/art is a prevalent tactic with tagging. Names, initials or slogans made with crayon, pen, and even lipstick are consistently
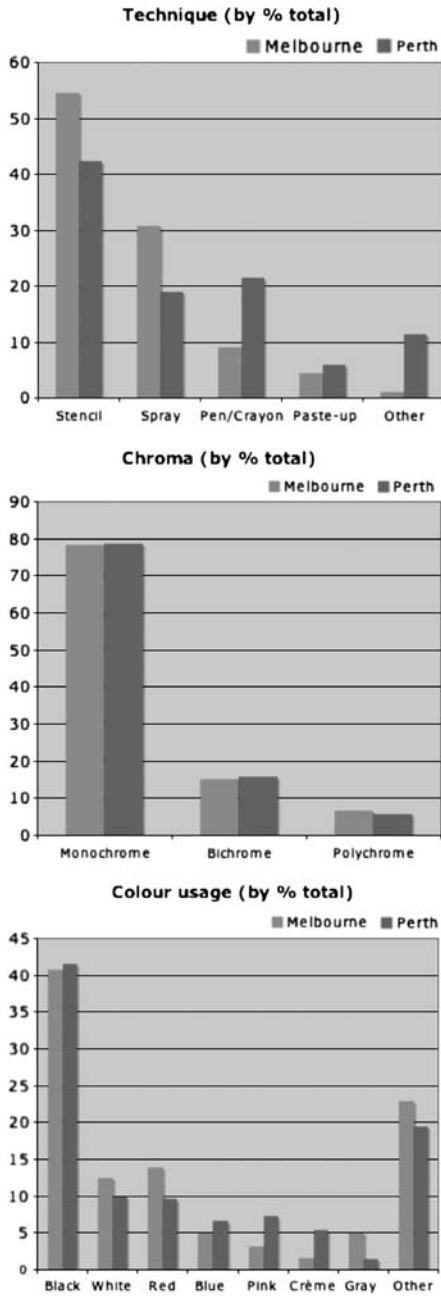
Technique (by % total)

■ Melbourne ■ Perth

Chroma (by % total)

■ Melbourne ■ Perth

Colour usage (by % total)

■ Melbourne ■ Perth

Figure 3. Frequency charts for technique, chroma and colour applications in both sites

Figure 4. Variations on Melbourne graffiti/art depicting Ned Kelly, Photograph: U. Frederick

written into existing graffiti/art designs while the larger tags can entirely obscure other work.

The first trend I focus on here is the dominance of monochromatic black graphics produced through the stencilling technique. In both sites stencilled images and text make up a large proportion of the assemblage (Figure 3). If we consider this data more closely we find a tendency towards the replication of particular themes or subjects. Key amongst these is the picturing of popular material objects or identities from the 20th

Figure 5. Stencilled paste-up located near the study site in Melbourne, Photograph: U. Frederick

century (Figure 6). Much of this imagery is ecognisable because it is re-sourced from other media. In many instances the appropriated images are re-purposed through alterations, new image combinations and word-play. This brings me to the second feature of my findings, that graffiti/ artists draw upon a vast visual history to create their work. The sites reflect the past in the present in different ways, yet both also generate a discourse that is unique to their Australian context. I discuss these localised modes of production, in the light of supporting material, as 'Stencil Revolution' and the 'Wandering Wandjina'.

Perth—Wandering Wandjina

One of the most interesting aspects of the Perth graffiti/art was the pres-ence of motifs that referenced rock art traditions. These included a stencil

Figure 6. A range of stencils represented at the two sites, Illustration: K. Hayne

reminiscent of the Northern Running Figure style (see Haskovec 1992; Mountford 1956) of Western Arnhem Land and multiple variations on the Wandjina figure of the Kimberley (see Crawford 1968). It is this inclination towards rock art imagery, and Wandjina in particular, that I want to discuss further.

To understand the significance of the Wandjina's appearance in Perth I need to flesh out its backgound. The Wandjina are spirit beings linked to the physical and social fabric of the western Kimberley region of Western Australia. They are powerful figures, in both an aesthetic and mythical sense. O'Connor et al. (2008:23) emphasise the significance of Wandjina as "the supreme spirit being of the Worrorra, Ngarinyin and Wunumbul people" of Australia. Wandjina are understood to have emerged from the sea and the sky and having created features of the landscape they then returned to the spirit world, leaving their own images on the rockshelter walls (Crawford 1968; O'Connor et al. 2008). Wandjina are in this sense embedded in specific sites and places yet their force extends to all manner of processes that maintain life in their country. In order that these spirits remain strong and alive their images were, and continue to be, maintained through a tradition of re-painting (Bowdler 1988; O'Connor et al. 2008; Sale 1992; Ward 1992). Specific individuals, in the past and today, are charged with the responsibility of keeping the Wandjina fresh.

Individual Wandjina images may vary in size, colouring and in the delineation of form but they are consistently striking figures. They often appear in a full-length anthropomorphic formation, with a torso arms and legs, or alternatively in a bust-like fashion comprising head and 'shoulders'. The head commonly features eyes, a nose and an aura-like band with radiating lines surrounding the head. Wandjina lack mouths but regularly incorporate an oval shape that appears below the neck. These features characterise the Wandjina's appearance as an iconic image that is no longer confined to rock art but which also occurs on canvas, boab nuts, and board (Morphy 1998; mowanjumarts.com.au; O'Connor et al. 2008; Pilkington 2006).

It would be fair to say that many Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, are familiar with the appearance of Wandjina as represented thru contemporary artworks and installations or as rock art images in the public domain. Undoubtedly many people may share an appreciation for the Wandjina figure as a visual form without knowledge of its socio-cultural and cosmological importance within the Kimberley. Perhaps the visual gravitas of these figures goes some way towards explaining the fascination many non-Indigenous people have with Wandjina. This allure has also found expression as speculation and contestation over the origins and maintenance of Wandjina paintings (Grey 1841; Redmond 2002; Walsh 1992). To some extent this mystique resurfaced when Wandjina graffiti first began to appear in Perth. The sudden occurrence and anonymity that graffiti/art upholds fed into the mystique that Wandjina have long held for those to whom they are not understood. As they multiplied under different guises (stencils, paintings, ground sculpture) and on various surfaces (walls, plants, trees, dumpsters), they were also reproduced on blogs,

flickr, and in media reports. Commercial television sensationalised their presence as if they had come out of nowhere.

Wandjina-spotting became a local exercise in tracking down new Wandjina graffiti/art, reporting the sighting online and uploading its geographical coordinates so that others might visit it on the ground. Unknowingly the graffiti artist(s) responsible had birthed a bizarre phenomena that was part survey, part treasure hunt. Sighting Wandjina became a variation on sports of exploration (geo-caching and orienteering). Excited participants were even interviewed on television. So the Wandjina was now a game to be played for those unwitting participants who might not realise the Wandjinas' power. The internet played a unique role in facilitating the promotion of Wandjina watching activity but it also allowed what was happening in Perth to be scrutinised from the Kimberley (O'Hare 2007; Pilkington 2006). Needless to say, after some time (and controversy) the production of Wandjina in Perth ceased.

This scenario presents an interesting inversion of the idea that the graffiti/artist asserts control by actively resisting hegemonic discourse. Under these circumstances in fact the graffiti artist(s) responsible for the Wandjina lost control of the counter-hegemonic voice and were unable to mediate the way it was received or co-opted by others. Their work, whatever its original intentions, became a commodity displayed by the commercial media and a cause for concern with the Wandjinas' proper spokespeople, its Kimberley custodians. While the graffiti/art itself may have led to two kinds of law being broken, this reversal in the challenge over who has the right to speak was not directed at the graffiti/art as a criminal act. Rather it was directed at the graffiti/art as culturally (il)legitimate representation. Perhaps "Who owns the past?" is not a question that graffiti/artists ask when they mine it for the richness of its images. Or is it?

Closer analysis of the Highgate alley graffiti/art suggests that some degree of consideration and response to the appropriation of Wandjina took place from within the graffiti/artist community. The word 'stolen' was stencilled directly on top of a Wandjina figure (Figure 7). I interpret this act as a subtle defiance over the (mis)use of this spirit being. This particular occasion of stencilling shares formal similarities with other applications of the word 'stolen' applied elsewhere on the same wall. In these other instances the word is used in association with the image of an Aboriginal child's face. This is clearly an allusion to the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their homes and families. At the time of recording, this aspect of Australian history had not been officially recognised by the federal government. One inference to be made is that the person who is highlighting the history of the 'Stolen Generation' is also commenting on the use of Wandjina iconography. Interestingly both the Wandjina and the

Figure 7. A 'Wandjina' type stencil reinscribed with the word 'stolen', Photograph: U. Frederick

stolen generation motif employ imagery appropriated from the domain of Aboriginal visual heritage.

Melbourne—Stencil Revolution

The Melbourne graffiti/art assemblage similarly incorporates references to other times and places in its imagery. Easter Island moai are included alongside the infamous Victorian bushranger Ned Kelly (Figure 4). The latter stencil is attributed to local graffiti artist HaHa (Dew 2007; Smallman and Nyman 2005) derived from a photograph in the Melbourne University archives (UMA/I/5203 1880). Like the Wandjina of Perth, Ned's image now appears in the city. However, both characters are borne of and belong to the cultural landscapes of the Australian bush.

Figure 8. Graffiti/art mural in Melbourne commenting on the status of graffiti as crime, Photograph: U. Frederick

Ned Kelly was an outlaw of the late 19th century who has acquired an heroic Robin Hood status in the Australian popular imagination. The life and death of Ned and his companions (the Kelly Gang) has endured as multiple re-presentations in cinema, paint and song (Dusty 1996; Harris 1972; Jordan 2003; Nolan 1946; Richardson 1970; Tait 1906). HaHa's rendering of Kelly instils a local (Victorian) flavour into the mix of identities stencilled in Fitzroy. Furthermore, the outlaw status embodied by Kelly offers some parallel with graffiti/artists themselves. Lawlessness is often integrated into the iconography of graffiti/art as a response to its criminal status (Figure 8).

Beyond Ned, the theme of resistance is reiterated in the representation of other revolutionary figures, communist leaders, protest slogans and symbols. These include Lenin, Trotsky and the revolution's poster boy, Che Guevara. The political mood of the Melbourne stencil movement is captured in explicit anti-war text and images and in numerous allusions to social reform, anti-authority, anti-corporation and anti-war slogans.

Alongside the military iconography and visual references to 'fighting for freedom' the image content and text reinforces a need to take up arms (by cutting out stencils). The technique has been adopted as a platform for culture-jamming/reality hacking and politically motivated messaging (see Figure 6 for examples). The use of revolution as a metaphor permeates not only form and content it is implied also in the manner by which stencils are distributed and the 'actions' to which they contribute. This discourse is conveyed not only in the subject matter, symbols and text of specific

stencils but in the very accessibility and raw aesthetic of the medium itself. Unlike the coded legibility of 'wildstyle' tagging the graphic boldness of the stencil form is an appealing quality of the mass-distributed message.

Stencilling has a long legacy as an instrument of political protest and propaganda. The graphic handmade appearance of the stencil removes pretension, thereby aligning it with the aesthetic sensibilities of both functional symbolism and no-nonsense grassroots activism. The tendency for some stencils to appear set apart, singly or in small suites, extends this analogy. Where they do stand alone they are reminiscent of the protest and political poster (see www.politicalgraphics.org/home.html). Stencilling continues to be used as means of conveying 'under the radar' messages and as a mass-distribution tool for the disenfranchised.

The current of activism and resistance running through these stencils is explicitly reiterated by graffiti/artists in their self-appointed identification with the name Stencil Revolution, a movement which has come to represent the Melbourne graffiti/art community on the world stage (Dew 2005; MacDowall 2006; Smallman and Nyman 2005).

Interestingly, the personalities and concerns expressed in Melbourne stencils articulate a politics of global intonation played out in the local arena. This is unlike the murals of Northern Ireland, for instance, where graffiti/art is employed in the struggle over local ideologies and politics (McCormick and Jarman 2005). This is not to say that Melbourne graffiti/ art is not of local political relevance. It could be argued that all graffiti—as a right of reply (Cover 2002) and a form of "off-kilter resistance" (Butz and Ripmeester 1999)—is inherently political at the local level by virtue of the fact that is locally constituted and because it is a defiance of local ordinances. The struggle encapsulated in the Stencil Revolution is a struggle for the right for alternative voices to exist, a "fighting not to win, but to fight again" (Wendt quoted in Butz and Ripmeester 1999:2).

The belief that graffiti can effect change may sound naïve, but there are examples where it has done so. The Neistat Brothers' short film *iPod's Dirty Secret* (Neistat Brothers 2003) is a case in point. This three-minute 'public service announcement' is an entertaining account of how the filmmakers made a stencil and used it to graffiti Apple iPod posters lining the street. The text of the stencil reads 'IPOD'S UNREPLACE-ABLE BATTERY LASTS ONLY 18 MONTHS.' The film tracks the movements of 'Jason' as he reinscribes poster after poster with this informative message. He uses white spray paint to mimic the advertisement's original text. Meanwhile the audio track plays the song 'Express Yourself'. *iPod's Dirty Secret* is a sharp representation of graffiti/art's unassuming aesthetic and protest legacy. This short film gets to the heart of the anti-commercial ethos that pervades graffiti/art and it

reveals how graffiti artists see their work as a freedom of speech, and a 'voice of the people'.

The Neistat Brothers made their statement in the public domain of the street. But by filming their actions and circulating it as a Quicktime movie, via email, their message made its way into the private realms of home and office. By coupling the reproducibility of the stencilled image/text with the viral marketing tactics of the internet they effectively doubled the exposure of their statement. Such acts of culture jamming are not uncommon in graffiti/art and in this case it was an effective tool for ensuring Apple's attention to their concerns. This case also illustrates how the process of graffiti/art spreading on the streets is mirrored in the online environments of the web. The replicable nature of the stencil, in particular has found a renewed dynamism in the information and communication technologies of the digital era. Stencilling is *on* the streets but it is most actively promoted on the net. Photos of real world stencils abound on Flickr, and the methods of stencilling are circulated as templates and online tutorials. Memorable or outstanding works are profiled and tips on improving technique are discussed in web forums. The ability to share files and sentiments has helped to create and cement a stencilling community. The utopian ideals often aligned with a rhetoric of 'revolution' are enhanced by the illusion of the web as a democratising agent. At the same time, a sense of freedom from the Western capitalist project gains momentum because advice, images and instruction is passed on, not as paid for commodities, but as *gifts*.

The re-purposing of corporate imagery, as exemplified by the Neistat film, is also evident in the Melbourne graffiti/art scene (Figure 6). It is a strategy deployed by graffiti artists to 'play' with the visual language of 'legitimate' media texts to dislodge prescribed significations or specificities of usage. In recent years however, commercial ad agencies are using this very strategy in a kind of culture jam reversal. They adopt the style of graffiti/art to promote their goods as cool. What's worse for graffiti/artists is that in the process of this infringement, corporate graffiti/advertisements often cover over 'legitimate' graffiti/art (for one account see Arise 2007, www.stealthmag.com). Corporate stencilling has been carried out by xbox, Absolut vodka and the producers of the film Borat. Many graffiti artists see these actions as illegitimate acts of piracy—graffiti is stolen from those who have 'the legitimate right' to the ownership, operation and sites of graffiti/art practice. This scenario adds another angle to the complexion of issues already identified in the Perth Wandjina. These are questions of image ownership, intellectual property, image reproduction rights and who has the authority to create images for public viewing.

Discussion

Both of the study sites displayed a diversity of styles, colours and techniques. Yet the archaeological investigation revealed a dominance of black graphics produced by stencilling. They equally included images retrieved from the past and reinvested with new meaning. Contemporary graffiti artists are aware of deeper mark-making legacies and draw upon the creative practices of the past for inspiration and legitimation in what they do (see for example Banksy's reconceptualisation of Palaeolithic art at the Cans Festival in Leake Street, Waterloo London 3/5/08 www.thecansfestival.com). This practice also demonstrates how graffiti artists are culture producers. They participate in the re-circulation of techniques and imagery of past visual culture traditions such as rock art. In the process they play a part in inscribing them with contemporary meanings.

Like a lot of contemporary graffiti/art both Perth and Melbourne locations are also pictured and mapped as electronic traces reiterated into online environments. They both show a variety of media and techniques. There are also examples where the arrangement of 'motifs', superpositioning and motif entanglement display a degree of reflexivity and group play. Yet alongside their similarities the two sites also demonstrate differences in the frequency, size, subject, media and technique. For example, the Melbourne stencils show a tendency towards celebrity figures while the Perth stencils depict objects and less recognisable personalities. While both sites reveal a political tone, the Perth graffiti is more oriented to a national agenda. Most reactionary imagery in Perth is directed internally—appealing either to the issues of the Australian community or specific local graffiti members. In contrast, the anti-war sentiment of Melbourne graffiti is focused on global concerns but the revolutionary metaphor serves to unite local graffiti artists with one another and with activists around the world.

In short, the material record of these two graffiti/art phenomena trace different trajectories in how traditions and images become a source of political intervention and play. Spotting Wandjina became a kind of recreation for some Perth residents while the Stencil Revolution re-purposes familiar images to poke fun and criticise the Bush administration and the forces of global capitalism. In both sites stencils were key tactics with a political purpose. Stencil Revolution serving on the one hand to consolidate solidarity within the graffiti/art community, and with politically likeminded members of an 'audience' public, as counter to hegemonic discourse. In Perth on the other it was used in a reflexive manner. A stencil of the word 'stolen' raises the question 'what is acceptable appropriation?' within a community that generally disdains copyright/intellectual property law.

Despite or perhaps *because* of its unsanctioned status, graffiti/art remains a pervasive form of human expression. The contribution contemporary archaeology brings to these case studies is in the demonstration that contestations involving graffiti/art may be more accurately framed as a concern over legitimacy rather than illegal behaviour, per se.

Remarks on Rock Art Research Emerging from this Study

Undertaking this study led me to an understanding of graffiti/art in an Australian context and it also raised a variety of thoughts about how rock art research is conducted. Key amongst these are the methods we employ and the assumptions we make in our analyses.

There are a number of ideas and provocations that graffiti/art offers to the way we conduct rock art research. In this particular instance some of the questions about rock art are stirred by this study's emphasis on stencilling as the dominant graffiti/art technique. For example: 'To what extent is the metaphor or meaning of a mark propelled by the formal qualities, functionality or historical usage of a technique?' The proliferation of Wandjina like graffiti/art raises another query. On the one hand, these figures were socially welcomed but on the other they were culturally unacceptable. If images may operate in this multivalent way today why do we so often ascribe a single interpretation to how rock art functioned in the past? Moreover, how might we look beyond the frequency, size or the position of display to determine which marks made in the past were 'legitimately' produced and which ones effectively went 'against the grain' of accepted convention.

Other investigations of graffiti/art may provoke different questions by virtue of their specific features. My point here is that examining contemporary graffiti/art can bring insight into the way we think about archaeological art sites. Creating a parallel between the archaeological evidence of mark-making and the practice of mark-making today not only challenges us to perceive graffiti/art differently it urges us to think in a new way about how palimpsests of marks are formed, maintained, or even erased.

Contemporary graffiti/art may be used as a point of reference for still broader considerations. How does mark-making work to distinguish public and private space? Many rock art studies have taken the view that rock art intrinsically denotes a place of significance because it is an embedded mark-making process. In some cases it may well be that rock art demarcates an extraordinarily special location. Or it may correspond with other spatially relevant activities such as boundary maintenance. Yet graffiti/art reminds us that mark-making practices may also be intimately connected to the experience of the everyday. At the same time, the replication of Wandjina in places where they don't belong has implications for graffiti/art

as territorialising behaviour. The Wandering Wandjina graffiti/art phenom-
enon casts a new inflection on past debates over re-painting (Bowdler
1988; O'Connor et al. 2008; Walsh 1992; Ward 1992) and on broader
re-marking processes and traditions evident in rock art (Sale 1992).

Contemporary graffiti/art practices urge us to recall that there are other
cycles to consider with regard to human habitation patterns and the use of
space. Mark-making is not always so much about the places we occupy but
how we move through them. Furthermore, life is diurnal. The nightscapes
that graffiti/art inhabits (and makes) have their own socio-cultural histories
and meanings to be examined. Moreover, graffiti/art signals the presence of
the personal mark and makes a place for the individual (and difference),
within social and cultural collectives more credible.

Still other observations drawn from this study may be instructive to
rock art research. Tagging provides one example. In both the Perth and
Melbourne sites tags were visually prominent in size and polychromatic
substance. If we applied a common rock art assumption to the case of tag-
ging, namely that size and chroma matter, they may be attributed greater
significance simply by virtue of their colours and scale. We know from our
own societies, however, that although tags are evaluated differently accord-
ing to one's perspective few members of the public see them as symbolic
or revered attributes of our culture.

Other points for consideration may come through the examination of
spatial ordering of the marked surface. In the cases outlined in this paper
there is a tendency for stencils to remain apart rather than overlap. This
may be a practical measure on the part of the graffiti/artist to ensure that
the stencils are seen, but it also affects the way we view them as some how
floating apart from the wall as a whole. This has implications for how we
consider a rock art panel's overall composition and in how we choose to
think through superpositioning. Rock art research has a tendency to rely
on the layering of art to formulate chronological sequences rather than
how a motif's arrangement and position on the planar surface may be a
meaningfully selected attribute of data for us to consider.

There is a propensity for contemporary graffiti/artists to collaboratively
collapse the visual iconography sourced from different regions, times and
arenas of production into a single planar view. This challenges normative
approaches to rock art data and interpretations. That is, that rock art is
the product of a singular cohesive cultural vision or system. Notably, some
Australian scholars have drawn attention to the possibility of internal dif-
ferences (for example Mulvaney and Jones 2002) but for the most part we
tend to read rock art for cultural change over time rather than for social
diversity and difference operating concurrently.

I have outlined a few ways in which one investigation of contemporary
graffiti/art has stirred questions about how rock art research is conducted.

I do not suggest that there are direct equivalences between the mark-making practices of the past and the mark-making practices of today. However, I do believe that fruitful ideas may emerge from their mutual consideration. Of the many questions that may emerge for rock art researchers and graffiti/art scholars as they contemplate their subject, one is especially common. Why?

My final point addresses the motivation behind mark-making. How often do we feel the need to establish a single conclusive interpretation of our rock art data? Notwithstanding the distinct patterns revealed in my analysis, this project makes clear the potential for multiple meanings and ideologies to co-exist on a single wall. The marks themselves and the statements of practitioners suggest graffiti/art serves multiple roles within the rubric of messaging: play, protest, defacement, commemoration, response.

Just as graffiti/art has many motivations its meaning is perpetually regenerated. It is humorous, didactic, confrontational and offensive. Graffiti/art advances the proposition that meaning is in the eye of the beholder. Yet no matter where we stand in relation to the human presence behind the contemporary archaeology, some marks may never be deciphered. That is, even when we are less distant (culturally, temporally, spatially, ideologically) from its makers. This is the space of open signification that people find most threatening in graffiti/art (Cover 2002; Ferrell 1997). As archaeologists offering interpretations we should to be wary of filling up these open spaces simply because they appear as gaps in our knowledge. In other words, "Revolution is the new black" insists the t-shirt imprinted with a Che Geuvara pattern (Figure 5). Like the content coded in the t-shirt's message graffiti/art urges us archaeologists to be aware of fashionable paradigms. Certainly sometimes the fashion *is* the best fit, be it shamanism, a changing climate, resistance, landscape, information exchange or contact. Yet we should never attempt to squeeze our data into an interpretive box just because it's the latest trend. Precisely because it is done for so many different reasons graffiti/art urges us to rethink our predilections for seeking any singular motive or meaning in rock art, whichever paradigm you use to frame it.

Conclusion

My observations on two identified phenomena, the Stencil Revolution and Wandering Wandjina demonstrate the complexities of image-making practices and meaning construction. Archaeologists possess a unique set of skills and methods that places them in an exceptional position for close readings of graffiti/art as "a material account linking aesthetic continuities and shifts to broader changes in the conditions and contexts of its production" (MacDowall 2006). Archaeologists have an eye for reading materiality

and rock art research, as a specialist arm of archaeology, is concerned with mark-making as an explicit and intended practice. Its scholars bring an attentiveness to the way images and walls of images, with their multiple layers, are brought into being.

Like other contemporary archaeologies, graffiti/art offers unique possibilities for exploring the representation of ''the presence of the past in the present'' (Leone 1981:13) as well as for examining our own methodological assumptions. Perhaps as importantly, contemporary graffiti/art serves as a reminder that while we archaeologists are engaged with the study of traces that endure we must be mindful that it is not only in the material conditions of our world that images and ideas are carried forth. It is easy to forget that intangible networks, transitory encounters and the daily activities of dwelling also create stories with substance. It is our challenge—and opportunity—to consider how some marks and images, like fashions fade, while others remain.

Acknowledgements

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