

A DAY SOMEWHERE BETWEEN VANCOUVER & BRISTOL

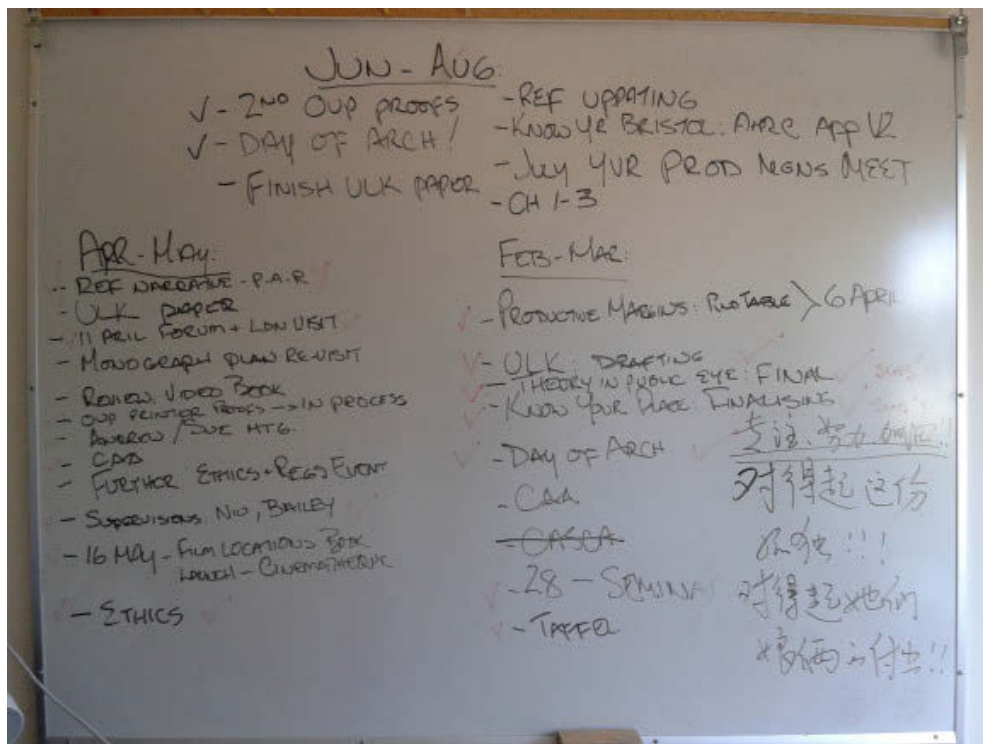
July 26, 2013 Angela Piccini Archaeological Media, Community Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2013 Academia, Anthropology, Archaeology, Canada, Department of Music, Museology, Museum of Anthropology, United Kingdom, University of British Columbia



I'm very privileged to be on sabbatical at the moment (supported by a University of Bristol Institute for Advanced Study Research Fellowship) and I'm spending my time as a Visiting Scholar in the Anthropology Department at University of British Columbia (<http://anth.ubc.ca/>). While my PhD was in Archaeology & Prehistory from Sheffield, I have always focused my research on the expressions and performance of archaeology in the contemporary world, paying specific attention to archaeology and the moving image. That means I research and write about TV documentaries, the archaeological information in home movies and video, the ways in which artists engage with archaeological themes, places and material in their film and video practices, and even the archaeology of screen landscapes. So, it's really archaeology on screen and the archaeology of screens. While I'm employed by University of Bristol in the newly renamed Department of Music, Film, Theatre (previously, Drama: Theatre, Film, Television), I co-run the MA in Archaeology for Screen Media with colleagues in Archaeology & Anthropology.

My sabbatical is meant to be focused entirely on writing up my research on the screen landscapes of the Vancouver and London Olympic Games and I try to maintain a blog on this and everything urban screen related (<http://aapiccini.wordpress.com/>). However, the ease of networked communication means that my days out here in western Canada are not so different from my days in western England: a mix of administration, communication, fragmented writing, editing, proof reading, commenting on others' work, maintaining research networks, struggling with universities' conflicting network preferences, supervising PhD students, applying for funding and looking for new opportunities, having meetings, coordinating

social media, and sending resource requests for next year's teaching. Before the days of constant communication, I could focus on a single task but now it's all about multi-tasking and ensuring that I'm circulating that information more widely. Often just beginning one thing on my 'to do' list will generate ten more things that all seem to need to be done simultaneously. However, I take heart in being reminded of Walter Benjamin's essay on 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in which he argued that distraction and the mass absorption of art by the people had a more progressive political force than the studied attention to aesthetics (see Paul Graves-Brown's blog <http://slightlymuddy.com/kuriosum/?p=183>) and also in Jonathan Crary's great book, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (2001, MIT Press). While we might want to follow Guy Debord (*The Society of the Spectacle*, 1967) to criticize all this spectacle, it's useful for me to remember that focused attention is historically and politically contingent, too.



So, you get the picture that the academic archaeologist is always time-space shifting. We might have tasks to finish every day, but often those activities force us to occupy multiple times, spaces, scales. A bit like being in the field, except the trench is replaced by a strange assemblage of computer screen, office window and the illusion of mindful interior contemplation.

But what about today? What's specific about 26 July and how does that reflect my ongoing archaeological identity (it's a tricky one to shake off)? My day begins at 7.30am, when I check my emails and deal with all the urgent stuff while I drink a couple of cups of coffee and oversee my son getting ready to head off to his Mathematical Minds and Filmmaking summer courses. Today, I'm reminded that I need to update my information for the upcoming Research Excellence Framework exercise. Every 7 years (give or take) the UK engages in an extremely costly exercise that judges the value of the nation's research outputs, impact and institutional culture. A bit like a North American tenure process, I suppose, but rather than determining the length of a person's employment contract, it determines the allocation of core research funding from the Government to the academic institution. My department is one of the highest performing

in our Faculty and in the country so I'm lucky to have fantastic colleagues. My co-editors, Paul Graves-Brown and Rodney Harrison, and I have just finished signing off the 2nd proofs of the *Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Contemporary World* and I'm relieved that this beast of a book will be out in September and can be part of my REF submission. Before the day is out I need to edit and upload my contextualizing statement for my practice-as-research entry, which is a portfolio comprising video, exhibition and publication details for *Guttersnipe*, what now seems a very distant project.



Although I often work from home, especially on days like today when it's sunny and warm and I can make use of the wifi outside, today I'm going to UBC. That's partly because Jonathan C H King (von Hügel Fellow, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge) is giving a talk at the Museum of Anthropology about 'Ecstatic religion, modernisation, Arctic archaeology and the establishment of the Igloodik Mission in 1937'.

Abstract: *In the 1930s Oblate missionary Fr. Etienne Bazin (1903-1972) established a mission, in what is to to-day the thriving Inuit community of Igloodik in Nunavut. In 1937, the year he moved the mission to Igloodik Bay, Bazin was given by Inuit some 4-500 objects excavated casually from the pre-Inuit Dorset (pre AD 1500) site of Awaaja. These were presented to Graham Rowley (1912-2003), Arctic advocate, explorer and administrator, who in turn donated them to the University of Cambridge. Bazin had become a missionary after a visionary experience at the age of 18; while looking at a crucifix he was told: "leave everything behind, your family and friends, and come to Me." Central to Bazin's missionary work was countering, and yet working with, analogous belief systems, both shamanism, and syncretic forms of Christianity which developed in the Eastern Arctic in the early 20th century. This collection is well known archaeologically, and here is discussed in its ethno-historical context for the first time. Bazin, for instance, was celebrated by Cardinal Cushing, the prelate who married the Kennedys and buried the president, in his 1942 Boston tribute to the Oblates *The Battle of Hudson's [sic] Bay*.*



My other task for today is to complete a draft of a paper I'm writing on the University of Local Knowledge (<http://ulk.org.uk>), a collaboration between Knowle West Media Centre, University of Bristol, University of the West of England, Arnolfini and US artist Suzanne Lacy. As part of a much larger project, our bit of ULK was led by Prof Mike Fraser in Computer Science and I was one of the co-investigators. The aim was to take the 900 video interviews of community experts and develop an online learning resource from this, influenced by Mooc culture (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massive_open_online_course) and by work I'd done on the Into the Future project (<http://dedefi.ilrt.bris.ac.uk>). I'm co-writing an article with Knowle West Media Centre's Associate Director, Penny Evans, on the aesthetics, politics and ethics of the project, focusing specifically on the relationship between the video documents and website.

I am very privileged to be able to work in my home town, in the unceded shared and traditional territories of the Coast Salish people. The popular refrain in Vancouver is that it's a city with 'no history' and yet there's been 10,000 years of occupation. Archaeology here, like in many places impacted by ongoing colonization, is complex and conflicted. The British Columbia context means that archaeology in an Indigenous context is only 'officially' archaeology when it's pre-contact. This makes the whole idea of contemporary archaeology problematic here but I'm keen to work with others in the community to contribute to presencing the entangled pasts of descent communities and settlers as part of the archaeological narrative of the city. Archaeology is serious business here. Land claims, rights to resource extraction, hopes for a better future, community authority and de-colonization all rest on archaeological work. It's about money, power, knowledge, ownership, the environment, sovereignty, recognition, justice. Marina La Salle (<http://ubc.academia.edu/MarinaLaSalle>) and Rich Hutchings

(<http://ubc.academia.edu/RichardHutchings>) write powerfully about the ongoing (and often unrecognized) relationships between archaeology, capitalism and racism here. Their work is important and when I stop to think about my Day of Archaeology sitting in my office, the seaweed-scented breeze and the occasional hummingbird flitting by, I think about how my privilege comes about through these relationships of inequality. And all of this reminds me that while doing archaeology in the 21st-century academy is often a distracted assemblage of electronic pings into the aether, it really does still matter and I have a responsibility to attempt to account for this mattering in whatever way I can.

