Recording Loss: film as method and the spirit of Orford Ness

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the use of film as a method to explore themes of change and loss which emerged during the recording of archaeological features at Orford Ness, UK. Owned by the National Trust, Orford Ness is an exposed shingle spit off the Suffolk coast recognised for its natural and cultural heritage. The research discussed in this paper engaged with a community archaeology project which has been recording features on the shingle spit as they are altered and erased by erosion and other coastal processes. The authors experimented with film as a method to investigate the work being undertaken by practitioners and volunteers in this dynamic landscape. We conclude that, within interdisciplinary heritage research, experimenting with film as a method facilitates the representation of embodied practices and exposes processes of meaning-making. We frame our discussion about the active production of meaning through an analysis of the way that film engaged with qualities articulated in the National Trust’s Spirit of Place statement for the site.

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Introduction

In the coming decades, it is anticipated that climate change and sea level rise will have a significant impact on coastal archaeological and heritage assets, in the United Kingdom and beyond (Fluck and Wiggins 2017). The Coastal and Intertidal Zone Archaeology Network (CITiZAN) is a UK-based community archaeology project founded in 2014 ‘in response to … dynamic threats to our island heritage’ (CITiZAN website 2018). One of the sites selected by CITiZAN for their recording work is Orford Ness, an exposed shingle spit off the Suffolk coast recognised for its natural and cultural heritage significance. From 2015–2018, the authors partnered with the National Trust (NT) and CITiZAN to explore the heritage practices involved in managing and recording Orford Ness’s dynamic landscape. The investigation at Orford Ness involved the first author (Nadia) in ongoing observation of archaeological training and recording sessions which CITiZAN organised for community volunteers and her participation in various related meetings. Nadia worked in partnership with CITiZAN’s lead archaeologist at Orford Ness, Lara Band, to film activity associated with the recording of the site’s at risk coastal structures and features. The filming process resulted in the creation of a short film titled ‘Recording Loss’.

For the purposes of this paper, it is important to specify why film was initially selected as a method in the context of the research at Orford Ness. The work carried out by the authors stems from the AHRC-funded Heritage Futures interdisciplinary research programme. The research programme was designed, in part, to experiment with alternative methods for heritage research, such as visual and material ethnography, as well as other creative practices – including...
filmmaking. As such, the four researchers on Heritage Futures were enrolled in a bespoke week-long intensive film training developed and run by Rough Glory Films in Bristol, UK, in collaboration with Antony Lyons (Senior Creative Fellow on the Heritage Futures programme). There, they were provided with recording equipment: a Panasonic Lumix DMC-GH3 digital mirrorless camera with a 14–140 lens; a Zoom H5 recorder, and Sennheiser SK100 G3 roving microphones. With no prior experience in film-making and no prior background in film theory, the four researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds experimented with the ways through which film could be used as a method in their research practices (with ongoing support and encouragement from Lyons).

This paper seeks to fill a gap in the literature for heritage researchers working in an interdisciplinary environment who wish to experiment with film. Adopting a new method can be a daunting task for any researcher. The use of film as method involves not only developing technical expertise, including familiarity with visual and audio equipment and editing software (in this case, Final Cut Pro X), but also requires developing skills in carrying out ethnographic research while remaining attentive to issues of storyline and aesthetic effect.

In our own discipline of geography, film has been used to ‘help geographers achieve a better understanding of how we experience our lived environment’ (Jacobs 2016, 453), although some have argued that, ‘the discipline has yet to realize the full potential of video as a research methodology’ (Garrett 2010, 521). Notwithstanding the challenges it presented, we set out to experiment with film as a method to discover how it might allow us to frame and foreground reflections about the experiential qualities of a complex and dynamic site, and the anticipated loss of features on its changing coastline. As a visual product that can be easily shared online and through social media, a film was also seen as a way to create an accessible output for the volunteers featured in the film, the wider public and, most significantly, our practitioner partners on the Heritage Futures programme. The desire to ‘give something back’ to our partners, CITiZAN and the National Trust, became an underlying motivation for the production of this particular film output. (The Heritage Futures programme also produced other films at Orford Ness, discussed below). With these goals in mind, Nadia set out to film on Orford Ness with doubtful technique and unstable hands, engaging in a process which led to the production of ‘Recording Loss’.

In writing this paper, however, Nadia also reflected on the practice of filmmaking and, by doing so, engaged with literature that fostered a deeper understanding of the processes involved in making film, and the ways that filmmaking is implicated in the production of knowledge. However, this reflexive process occurred after the creation and distribution of the short film. As such, the intention of this paper is not to engage in depth with film theory and related scholarship, but to describe and reflect on a situated research process and its implications for heritage research methodologies. Presented as a discussion of how researchers experimented with the use of film as method, this paper focuses on the process of conducting and presenting the research, from initial encounters with Orford Ness and its heritage management, through partnership with CITiZAN, and finally through discussion of how the practice of filmmaking facilitated a learning process that opened up new understandings of heritage-making in place.

The paper is structured in three parts. The first section provides a brief contextual orientation to Orford Ness, and introduces the Spirit of Place framework which the NT developed for Orford Ness in 2015. At Orford Ness, this ‘spirit’ statement attempts to articulate the character of the site, and the way its ongoing changes expose inherent tensions between the past, present and future of the site. The second section considers the processes of recording that took place at Orford Ness, through both film and archaeological practices. As a community archaeology project, CITiZAN provided the authors with an opportunity to appreciate how the public can become involved in understanding and shaping local heritage (Moshenska 2009). The final section explores the production of the short film that arose out
of this engagement, and the framing of audio-visual juxtapositions that attempt to capture encounters with the ‘spirit’ of Orford Ness in the field. The last section is predominantly a reflexive account of how the use of film as method can generate new forms of situated knowledge, and enable researchers working in an interdisciplinary environment to enrich their understanding of heritage-making practices in place.

Heritage management and spirit of place at Orford Ness

The NT acquired Orford Ness from the Ministry of Defence in 1993 in recognition of its nature conservation value, and the unique habitats offered by the marshes and the shingle ridges. The NT was also presented, however, with the remains of decades of military activity on the spit, mostly associated with top-secret research and development of weapons technology, from the First World War through to the Cold War nuclear programme. The abandoned military remains presented them with a dilemma: some advocated for clearing the site to allow it to revert back to a more natural state, a ‘wilderness’; others encouraged appreciation of the site ‘on its own terms’, and recognition of ‘the order in disorder and the beauty in ugliness’ (Wainwright 2009, 136). At the time, it was decided that a philosophy of non-intervention (also called ‘continued ruination’) would be adopted to let the massive concrete structures associated with the Cold War nuclear programme decay and the surrounding natural environment revitalise itself (DeSilvey 2017; Wainwright 2009). Other historic structures on the site were demolished, and a handful of buildings were repaired and restored for use in management and interpretation activities. The rest of the NT’s property on the shingle spit, including a strip of grazing marsh and mudflat, would be managed to restore natural habitats and ecosystem function, in recognition of Orford Ness’s unique status as ‘one of the three major shingle formations in the British Isles’ (Wainwright 2009, 134).

A quarter of a century after the acquisition, the continual negotiation of the balance between natural and cultural heritage at Orford Ness has been recognised as an important aspect of the site’s character. During the last decade, the NT has adopted guidance as to the development of ‘Spirit of Place’ statements for each of its properties. In the organisation’s guidance document, Spirit of Place is described as being ‘at the heart of how people feel about and experience our properties and why they are relevant’ (National Trust 2013, 1). The NT’s definition of Spirit of Place stems from the (ICOMOS 2008) Québec Declaration of the Preservation of the Spirit of Place:

 SPIRIT OF PLACE

What is notable about the Spirit of Place definition is that in its desire to evoke ‘the unique, distinctive and cherished aspects of place’, it provides scope for expression of a broad range of possible qualities, both tangible and intangible. According to a NT staff member, ‘[S]pirit of place is . . . about preserving the individuality of the places so that we don’t get a sort of ubiquitous National Trust stamp’ (Interview, 10/05/2016). To produce a property’s Spirit of Place, the NT carries out an ‘audience insight’ exercise, in which it invites contributions from staff and volunteers, as well as a number of other heritage and conservation interest groups and stakeholders (National Trust 2013, 3). Once this is complete, a Spirit of Place statement is written, although, as the guidance highlights, the text is arguably of lesser importance than the process of producing it (National Trust 2013, 3). The most recent iteration of the Orford Ness Spirit of Place dates from 2015 (Box 1).
The Spirit of Place statement for Orford Ness uses lyrical, evocative language to articulate aspects of the place’s unique character, as perceived by those who experience it. Curiously, the statement attempts to present a collective expression of apparently solitary experience – the individual ‘lost in the vast scale… liberated… but oppressed.’ The ‘spirit’ referred to in this statement is not easily defined, but can be understood, in part, in relation to geographical scholarship on phantasmagorias, ghosts, and hauntings, as expressions of hidden traces and residues of past memories (Edensor 2008; Maddern and Ady 2008; Pile 2005). The sense of desolation at Orford Ness can be seen to index traces that once were, and are yet not completely forgotten, and persist in contemporary memory. In reading the statement, one can almost visualise the iconic decaying Cold War structures, appearing to float as ghostly apparitions on the flat landscape, producing an aura of both alienation and enchantment (Bennett 2001) and a pervasive ‘eerie atmosphere’ (Richardson 2009). In Orford Ness’s post-military landscape, the sense of what remains from the past is tangled with the anticipation of more loss to come, as the wind and the sea continue to batter the coastline.

However, as much as the expression of ‘spirit’ can evoke a sense of loss, it may also express a sense of energy and potential. The Spirit of Place statement for Orford Ness therefore also attempts to represent the dynamic combination of different elements that make the site unique: the material, ineffable, historical, scientific, atmospheric, and changing landscape is condensed into a written text. By assembling these various elements, the authors of the statement have attempted to identify what makes Orford Ness distinctive, but the text remains open to other readings of the site and its meaning. In this way, the ‘spirit’, through its assemblage of elements, produces its own agency and vitality (see Bartolini, MacKian, and Pile 2017).

Spirit of Place as a concept, and the way it has been applied at Orford Ness, emphasises the tensions present in this place – between nature and human intervention, beauty and brutality, change and stillness, creation and destruction. The tensions highlighted in the text are not drawn out explicitly, but are set in juxtaposition to one another, combined as in a process of brecciation, where seemingly disparate parts come together to form a whole (Bartolini 2013, 2014). What is also evident in the textual statement is the recognition of the interleaving of natural and cultural heritage: habitats and myths, non-human and human co-existence through time.

The presence of tensions that appear as binaries in the landscape is nonetheless part and parcel of understanding this ‘spirit’; a complex set of atmospheres that trigger the senses, and make Orford Ness what it has become. These tensions, if understood through the metaphor of brecciation, push and pull together to create a whole. Of the archaeologists and volunteers taking part in the CITiZAN Orford Ness training in July 2016, 82% responded that they considered ‘the whole site’, including the natural and cultural elements, to be ‘heritage’ (survey responses 03/07/2016). Seeing Orford Ness as a ‘whole’ enables an appreciation of the management complexities at this site. From this perspective, ‘everything’ is deemed important since all of the elements present are emblematic of the landscape’s spirit in some way (see also De Nardi 2014).
We suggest that, alongside the textual form, film is another means through which landscape brecciation and the ‘spirit’ of Orford Ness can be explored and expressed. Film allows for a focus on specific visual elements of place, but also provides opportunities to use movement and depth of field to draw out senses and textures (Marks 2000), and access affective and emotional responses to place. As contemporary heritage studies moves towards a more critical interpretation of practices and processes involved in heritage-making, there is an acute awareness of the need to consider ‘more-than-textual, embodied approaches to heritage research’ (Tolia-Kelly, Waterton, and Watson 2017, 1). By facilitating an engagement with practices in place, film has the capability to gather together affectual and embodied understandings with other ways of knowing. In exploring ‘affective atmospheres’, Anderson notes that

For me, the concept of atmosphere is good to think with because it holds a series of opposites – presence and absence, materiality and ideality, definite and indefinite, singularity and generality – in a relation of tensions. (…) Atmospheres do not fit neatly into either an analytical or pragmatic distinction between affect and emotion. They are indeterminate with regard to the distinction between the subjective and objective. They mix together narrative and signifying elements and nonnarrative and asignifying elements. And they are impersonal in that they belong to collective situations and yet can be felt as intensely personal. (Anderson 2009, 80)

The tensions Anderson recognises as involved in the production of ‘atmosphere’ align, to a certain extent, with the intentions of the NT’s Spirit of Place framework, and the attempt to express tangible and intangible aspects of place, and collective and personal experience. In this context, we see how when film is approached as both method and representation it can broaden and enrich discussions of affect and emotion in heritage studies, by linking elements that affective geography and non-representational theory usually split apart: ‘affect from thought, and thought from its representatives’ (Pile 2010, 16). In the study of the relation between the past and the present in place, the moving image can evoke emotions and register tacit responses, awaken memories and produce atmospheres. Our understanding of the way that film can evoke atmospheres of place was enriched by dialogue with Antony Lyons, who assembled his first impressions of Orford Ness in a creative research film piece titled ‘Orford Ness Atmospherics’. As this discussion suggests, film opens up possibilities for heritage research practice that complement and supplement textual approaches (Piccini 2014).

In the next section, we consider Orford Ness’s dynamic coastal environment as a key element of the landscape, and discuss how CITiZAN became involved at the site. We then discuss the concept of recording through the perspective of archaeology, heritage and film.

**Making the record, making heritage**

As a community archaeology project, CITiZAN’s involvement at Orford Ness stems, to a certain extent, from an endangerment narrative, which perceives valued heritage features to be under threat and in need of ‘saving’ (Vidal and Dias 2016). CITiZAN highlights that ‘[t]he coast of England is under constant threat from wind, waves and winter storms. These threats wreak havoc on England’s varied coastal and intertidal heritage, not only exposing these sites but washing them away before they are ever seen’ (CITiZAN website 2018). The physical record of past human activity is perceived to be threatened with disappearance through erosion (Fluck and Wiggins 2017), with the anticipated effects of climate change only adding to the urgency of the endangerment narrative. CITiZAN’s mission at Orford Ness, therefore, conforms to a ‘heritage at risk’ perspective (Rico 2016). By ‘actively promoting site recording and long-term monitoring programmes led by our active volunteers’ (CITiZAN website 2018), CITiZAN is enlisting the wider public in the endangerment sensibility. Our research with CITiZAN in the field, however, also exposed a much more nuanced appreciation of the ways in which apparent loss can open up opportunities for discovery, and the generation of new connections between people and place.
At the first community archaeology training session attended by the authors, CITiZAN archaeologists stressed the importance of gaining the skills required to record and monitor features on the eroding coastline. Measuring tools, pens and paper, cameras and digital devices (to facilitate the use of a CITiZAN app to upload information about recorded features) were all put to use in precise ways in creating the record. The insistence on the importance of the record lies at the heart of archaeological practice, with the record consisting of both the physical aspects of a site (the stratigraphy and materials) and the context (Shanks and Tilley 1992). It is well recognised that while the intention of archaeological excavation and recording practice is to expose and preserve knowledge of past cultures, these practices may also destroy the very material that archaeologists seek to record (Lucas 2012). Indeed, the idea of ‘preservation by record’ is premised on the assumption that ‘archaeological remains can be recorded prior to their destruction and the record preserved as an archive’ (Andrews, Barret, and Lewis, 2000, 527). Archaeological recording and interpretation is an inherently subjective process that involves selection and uncertainty (Andrews, Barret, and Lewis 2000). The work taking place at Orford Ness, we argue, was as much about the making of future heritage as it was about archaeological recording.

Our interest in the process of making the record is twofold. First, we aimed to consider the recording process as an explicit engagement with heritage-making. CITiZAN’s aim to preserve a record of something, rather than the thing itself, recognises the transient nature of the coastal historic environment. By engaging with record keeping, CITiZAN and its volunteers contribute to the creation of a shared memory-trace for future generations. This process is actively engaged with in the present, bounded by the CITiZAN project’s funded period, in the hopes that trained volunteers will continue to monitor Orford Ness in the future, because the assumption is that the process of monitoring and recording potentially never ends. Second, by focusing on the process of making the record we were able to appreciate the emotional, affectual and embodied aspects of experience as they unfolded in place. As such, in this case, film as a method allowed us to encapsulate and record these disparate elements – from material and intangible to recorded and representational. Here, we are particularly concerned with whether the practice of filmmaking can assist in constructing new meanings and representing elements of the ‘spirit’ of Orford Ness.4

The authors viewed the collaboration with CITiZAN as an opportunity to experience Orford Ness as it was temporarily populated with a group of engaged locals and volunteers. As a landscape that is devoid of permanent human residents, the site often attracts artists drawn by the aesthetics of anxiety, mystery and emptiness (DeSilvey 2014; Wilson 2017). For us, engaging with Orford Ness alongside a group of people with a purpose catalysed a shift from the more common experience of this place, which involves a solitary visitor attending to the site’s atmosphere in a mode of visual attention. Through the collective, embodied activity of recording, the site came alive: stories were told, laughter was shared as the ever-present wind cast up comic struggles, and debates took place as we gathered around the structures being recorded as they gradually disappeared. A new ‘spirit’ emerged with the activity of the CITiZAN staff and volunteers: meaning-making emerged from the practice of recording, in the context of anticipated loss, and in the presence of a camera as witness.

In the course of the first community archaeology training session at Orford Ness in July 2016, Nadia had to choose between doing the archaeological recording or recording it. The choice was an important one, because by choosing to ‘record the recording’ the focus of the ethnographic fieldwork would shift the balance from participation to observation, and to eventual representation on film. Importantly, we viewed film as an approach that would allow us to investigate the making of heritage in place, rather than as a means to understand archaeological practice as such. The film’s principal aim was not to visualise the professional practice of archaeology, or ‘archaeological seeing’, as a means to help archaeologists examine and reflect on their own practices (Morgan 2014, 326, emphasis in the original). Rather, we sought to develop an interdisciplinary methodology with broad relevance for critical heritage studies. For Nadia, using film as method facilitated navigation between insider and outsider perspectives in the process of recording features at Orford Ness. The use of the camera contributed to a sense of being an insider, as it
encouraged physical proximity to the embodied practices of measuring, note-taking, using the CITiZAN app, and engaging in discussions around the structures. Yet, the camera also created a barrier, and therefore enhanced an outsider perspective: rather than simply seeking to create a document of archaeological skills in action, Nadia engaged with filmmaking as a practice of aesthetic and conceptual framing, oriented to processes of loss and to the active production of meaning.

The short film produced through the research is a representation of how the film maker as producer makes specific decisions to drive a filmic narrative. Much like the insider/outsider perspective outlined above, the ‘dual role of the researcher, being both the “reader” and the “producer”’ (Jenssen 2009, 60) involves a careful selection of audio-visual materials. While video clips were purposely selected, ordered and assembled by Nadia, some scenes only revealed their significance at the time of editing. Arguably, it is during these moments when film practice can be perceived as method: when new knowledge is created through juxtaposition, making cuts and setting elements in relation. This and other reflexive aspects of filmmaking in the making of ‘Recording Loss’ will be discussed in the next section.

Recording ‘Recording Loss’

In 2016 and 2017, Nadia captured a number of video clips at Orford Ness during CITiZAN’s recording events. The video clips ranged from 10 seconds to 10 minutes on a single take, and Nadia also produced a series of still photographs. In this section, we reflect on the process of filmmaking, and outline four ways through which the practice and resulting film enhanced our understanding of Orford Ness and its Spirit of Place.

Embodied practices

The majority of filming during the community archaeology days at Orford Ness involved observing the archaeologists and volunteers engaging in recording practices. The process required careful engagement and collaboration, with volunteers assisted in their tasks by CITiZAN archaeologists (Figure 1). Tasks observed by Nadia included taking photographs, drawing

Figure 1. Screenshot from ‘Recording Loss’ of volunteers engaging in archaeological recording at Orford Ness, supervised by CITiZAN archaeologist Lara Band (second from left).
stratigraphic outlines, and measuring archaeological remnants (see Jones 2017). Recording also involved other practices, such as photogrammetry (Figure 2(a)) and uploading information onto the app so that a database could be compiled and a map produced of the area (Figure 2(b)).

After the first year of attending the CITiZAN trainings, Nadia started to shift her perspective from observer to producer, and to consider how to organise her film record into a broader narrative structure. The material gathered up to this point in the project (and conversations taking place outside the filming process) suggested an emerging theme around loss and transience, and the recognition of coastal change as something potentially productive, as well as destructive. The authors decided to structure a film around the idea of ‘recording loss’, and to highlight the different perspectives on the topic held by practitioners and volunteers involved with recording activity on the site. The decision to focus on this specific theme gave the film clear direction and purpose while anchoring the narrative. It also brought more focus to subsequent filming sessions.

Many of the video clips collected up to this point showed repetitive scenes. While the accumulation of similar images and sequences may be an advantage in some instances, by offering alternative scenes to choose from when a preferred scene is not shot in focus, in this case more variation was needed in order to sustain visual interest and construct a narrative. Upon returning to the field with CITiZAN, Nadia started conceptualising sounds and images in relation to the theme of recording anticipated loss, and she encouraged CITiZAN staff and volunteers to articulate their views about the notion of loss in relation to their work.

Nadia had initially obtained informed consent to shadow CITiZAN’s community archaeology training at Orford Ness; subsequently, some volunteers also agreed to being interviewed on camera, sharing their insights and perspectives. When asked why he volunteers in community archaeology, Mike Williamson explained:

CITiZAN just brings it so much more closer, more tangible: instead of reading about it, you’re actually doing it; you’re getting the feel of stuff, walk the ground. (Video recorded interview, 20/01/2017, 01:16 in film)

When it was time to produce the film, Nadia decided that Williamson’s words could be complemented with a scene where volunteers are seen in practice, ‘doing’ the recording. Nadia wanted to merge the tone of Williamson’s voice when he stresses the term ‘doing’, the abstract notion of his wish (he wants to be there ‘doing’) and the embodied practice. Williamson also mentions that volunteers are ‘getting to feel the stuff, walk the ground’. Nadia combined this statement with the use of other visuals, such as cutaway shots of volunteers touching the features and walking on the shingle shoreline. This ‘linking montage’ technique which logically associates scenes with ideas (Barry and Seward 1997, 203) enabled Nadia to juxtapose the volunteers’ embodied heritage practices with an experiential sense of place. This ability to combine and contrast themes and material is what sets film apart from audio-recorded interviews. For Nadia, film enabled Williamson’s enthusiasm to be represented as situated, embodied experience.
This simple example, illustrating the juxtaposition of Williamson’s words with moving images, communicates aspects of the concrete, grounding experience of being ‘in the field’. Film enables what could be seen as private or closed field experiences (in this case, by academics and CITiZAN staff and volunteers), which are subsequently transmitted to the wider public. Rather than presenting a desolate landscape, the film enabled us to capture an Orford Ness that is populated with people who are there now, for the sake of recording remnants that are disappearing. This, for us, was one way that film complemented and extended the qualities expressed by the Spirit of Place statement for the site, by accessing aspects of both personal and collective experience, and evoking atmospheres created through encounter with the shifting and dynamic landscape.

**Aesthetic and syncretic juxtapositions**

From a researcher’s perspective filming *in situ* can enhance a sense of place; however, it also presents challenges when a researcher is also the film producer, and responsible for logistical and practical arrangements. Prior to conducting the interviews with volunteers, Nadia asked CITiZAN archaeologists if it were possible to find time during one of the archaeological recording days to make a detour to one of the buildings on Orford Ness. Initial conversations between Nadia and Antony Lyons about sound recording challenges on the exposed site led to the selection of the Bomb Ballistics Building for interviews, as it provided shelter from the wind and was conveniently located between the seaward side of the shingle spit and the NT main office (see Figure 3).

On the day of the interviews, Nadia positioned each of the volunteers in different areas within the concrete structure. Fixing the camera to a tripod, Nadia wanted to have different shots of the volunteers: some interviews were close-up, some were mid-shot, and some were longer range, enabling diversification of the interview scenes in the film. By positioning the volunteers during their interviews, Nadia was able to frame scenes in such a way that she could play with the light and the background patina of decaying concrete and flaking paint (see Figure 4).

As Jacobs points out, the film editing process can result in the creation of ‘new understandings from the resulting juxtapositions’ (Jacobs 2016, 453). This aligns with how linkage montage and dialectic montage is explored in film theory through the Soviet school, in particular in Vsevolod Pudovkin and Sergei Eisenstein’s works (Barry and Seward 1997). It was only during the editing process that Nadia recognised the Bomb Ballistics Building’s emerging prominence in the creation of the film: firstly, because all the volunteers were interviewed there, and secondly, because the Bomb Ballistics Building is a Grade II listed building. According to Historic England’s

![Figure 3. Screenshot from ‘Recording Loss’ of the Grade II listed Bomb Ballistics Building.](image)
designation, the Bomb Ballistics Building was constructed in 1933 and modified in the 1950s. The reasons given for its Grade II listing were summed up in three categories: architectural interest, historic interest and group value (Historic England 2014). The justifications provided for the listing align with an authorised heritage discourse (Smith 2006), through which experts and professionals determine a building’s significance, and thereby contribute to it being perceived as ‘official’ heritage.

When it came time to compile the scenes and create a narrative, Nadia found that the volunteers’ interviews would be one way to pace the short film, with the human voices driving the narration. During the editing process, Nadia decided to insert a scene from each of the volunteers who consented to be interviewed inside the Bomb Ballistics Building. This had a dual effect: it enabled each volunteer interviewed to be seen and named in the film (enabling recognition of the project collaboration with CITiZAN), and it showed the Bomb Ballistics Building repeatedly, albeit at different angles. For Nadia, this gave new meaning to the practice of film as method. As Piccini highlights, film is not a neutral practice: ‘the act of image-making is a framing that includes and excludes; it is also a practice of making the world intelligible’ (Piccini 2014, 4). In the making of the film, the Bomb Ballistics Building revealed itself to have more meaning than originally anticipated. The inter-war building’s materiality was brought to our awareness through film as Nadia invited its recurring presence, and the building became a representation of the character and condition of the military structures remaining at Orford Ness.

**Affectual encounters**

In one of the interviews in the Bomb Ballistics Building, volunteer Nigel McBeth commented:

> What I do feel sad about is when something isn’t recorded properly; I’ve recorded buildings in the nick of time before they were destroyed. (Video recorded interview, 20/01/17, 00:04 in film)

McBeth’s comment signal the ‘ordinary affects’ that can emerge from encounters with heritage sites (Stewart 2007; DeSilvey 2012). At the time of editing, this statement proved to have an anchoring effect for Nadia by drawing out a subtle, yet poignant way to express the discontent McBeth feels when artefacts or structures are not ‘saved’ in time. Initially, Nadia had inserted this scene after the Williamson interview, and within the group of volunteers being video recorded. However, when watching the moving-images side-by-side, Nadia decided to sever the audio from the video and insert McBeth’s statement at the very beginning of the film. For Nadia, McBeth’s
voice and comment expressed a passion and a moral responsibility towards heritage practices that could set the tone of the short film. McBeth highlights the importance of recording now: because there is an imminent threat. Amidst the profusion of audio-video clips reviewed for the creation of ‘Recording Loss’, it was this statement that most clearly expressed the justification behind why ‘preservation by record’ is being done at Orford Ness, as well as why the volunteers are doing it.

McBeth points to having recorded ‘in the nick of time’, alluding to the anxiety that can be generated by the threat of material loss. While this threat can be associated with erosion or a conflict situation, Nadia chose to insert another statement made by McBeth later on in the short film when he describes the difference between decay and destruction:

I like industrial landscapes. I like to go to places where there’s decay; I think that’s different perhaps from destruction. I think decay is something natural. (video recorded interview, 20/01/17, 01:58 in film).

Seconds after he pronounces these words, the video recording continued, and McBeth shrugs, laughs and says ‘that’s just my feeling’ (video recorded interview, 20/01/17). At the time of the interview, Nadia had applied a technique that was mentioned during film training: keep rolling and stay silent for at least five seconds after an interviewee finishes speaking. This technique is useful during editing as it leaves room to manoeuvre and splice scenes at a chosen moment. That said, during the interview, this technique felt odd to Nadia: as an ethnographic researcher, her instincts fall back to engaging in ongoing conversation through semi-structured interviews. Pausing required a re-wiring from researcher to director. So, Nadia started developing a different mode of engaging with interviewees as ‘[t]he presence of the camera during fieldwork undoubtedly affects the relationship between the researcher and the informant’ (Jenssen 2009, 11).

Prior to filming, Nadia started preparing interviewees so that they were aware what to expect during the filming process: she would let them speak without interruption, and there would be pauses between different ‘takes’.

During the editing process, therefore, Nadia had the opportunity to cut McBeth’s scene, but chose to keep it to the end of the pause. Selecting this scene was a judgement call based purely on intuition. In film theory and practice, Murch discusses editing and the process of ‘cutting out the bad bits’ (Murch 2001, 10). For Nadia, this scene was important, even if initially, she was not sure why. It certainly did not constitute a ‘bad bit’; in reality, it was one of her favourite scenes because McBeth’s emotional expression conveyed a familiarity, a sense that he is just expressing his views, not knowing whether or not Nadia would be in agreement with him. This scene, set against the decaying backdrop of the Bomb Ballistics Building, illustrates how film can convey emotional and affectual registers in the moment as well as in place. As Murch highlights in his Rule of Six criteria for an ideal cut, ‘[e]motion, at the top of the list, is the thing you should try to preserve at all costs’ (Murch 2001, 18) (Figure 5).

We consider this scene as bringing together thought and representation. Here, the scene captures words expressing threat, loss, decay and destruction at the same time as McBeth shrugs and laughs at his own distinction between different forms of material loss. Film visualises the different registers in play, and as such, enables the recording of the tension between these emotions – as a snapshot, represented in time and place.

**Dynamic memory of place**

When considering the remaining interviews to be included in the short film, Nadia had initially put volunteer Coote Geelan’s and archaeologist Oliver Hutchinson’s interviews side-by-side because they both engaged with the concept of change. Geelan accepts that coastlines are dynamic environments, yet, he also acknowledges that this dynamism produces opportunities:
Because the coastline is changing constantly, there is always that likelihood that things that are there one day will be gone soon after, and particularly this area of coastline, that’s very true of because (...) the coast recedes so quickly (...). It just indicates how so much is being lost, and of course, in the same way, so much is being revealed: as one thing gets washed away, something else gets revealed, and the cycle moves on. And it’s just a very dynamic and fascinating process. (Video recorded interview, 20/01/17, 02:29 in film)

Geelan appreciates that there is a cycle to what is occurring: as some elements are lost, others are revealed. For us, this suggests an archaeological potential in the future as the coast recedes and exposes new materials. This is particularly pertinent in coastal environments; yet, the past can also resurface in areas affected by climate fluctuations or natural disasters. Geelan acknowledges change, but also how change – and conversely, loss – can lead to the discovery of new pasts.

This sentiment parallels Hutchinson’s thinking when he discusses how his approach to loss has been modified during his employment on the CITIZAN project:

I suppose my approach to loss since joining this project has perhaps changed a little bit because the places that I’ve worked and the things that I’ve seen, loss has actually been a process of discovery, I think, because we’re losing, I suppose, little bits of landscapes, but what that is doing is revealing more information about those places and maybe even the people that were living there, working there, doing whatever. So loss is not necessarily a bad thing. (Video recorded interview, 19/01/2017, 03:31 in film)

Hutchinson goes further in unpacking the dynamism that characterises the process of archaeological loss and renewal: he draws a link between the loss of landscape and the resurfacing of memories of place. Rather than focus on the preservation of materials, Hutchinson considers how future archaeologies might expose new knowledges about the people who lived and worked there. The material is not explicitly referred to, but it is assumed as a vehicle through which human activity can be understood. For us, Hutchinson’s words suggest that the tension between loss and gain is not seen through opposition, but through reciprocity and renewal, as the dynamic coastline ebbs and flows in a process of material disintegration and discovery.

The remaining piece of the puzzle was how to insert Taylor’s interview into the short film. Out of all the video recorded interviews, only Taylor’s had poor sound. At the outset of the interview with Taylor, Nadia could hear interference in her headphones. Stopping the interview, she quickly made a series of checks with Taylor: repositioning the roving microphone, checking if he had a mobile phone on him that could cause interference, moving the tripod and camera to another area, and restarting the camera and microphones. Nothing seemed to eliminate the noise. Nadia, hoping for a post-production solution, proceeded to interview Taylor. Ultimately, upon reviewing the entire interview, only one segment seemed to have relatively low interference:
[Doing archaeology at Orford Ness] really brings it back into context; it really brings it back to living memory. Cause I can remember working here, I can remember talking to the guys in the pub who worked here. (Video recorded interview, 20/01/17, 03:21 in film)

Fortunately, the interview segment proved useful as the themes raised by Taylor resonated with Hutchinson’s words. Taylor links his present activities on the site with experiences he had in place in his own lifetime. Being local to the Orford Ness area, Taylor exhibits a sense of belonging because of the relationship he had with people who worked at Orford Ness. For Nadia, this scene with Taylor looking directly into the camera generated a sense of intimacy. With Orford Ness having been a military site deemed secret for most of its twentieth-century existence, Taylor’s words were linked with an image of workers at Orford Ness. For us, however, Taylor’s words also allude to the more mundane ways that these secrets are conveyed in everyday life: through chat on the job, and speaking to the guys in the pub. These mundane rituals of daily life impress upon people’s attachment to place, and as such, can assist in people’s participation in heritage-making practices. During editing, Nadia ultimately decided to insert Taylor’s interview between Geelan and Hutchinson for two reasons. First, Taylor’s comments suggested that while his memories are still present, the action of recording could imply that the materials, as well as the place, are changing. This related to how Nadia wanted to end the short film: with the theme of loss and change as opportunities. The second reason is that Taylor refers to ‘the guys in the pub’. For Nadia, this idea linked with the visual of Hutchinson’s video recorded an interview that took place in a local pub in Orford. The pub, therefore, became a spatial connector between the past and the present.

At the time of editing, all three video recorded interviews are paired with a number of scenes combining archaeological recording practices alongside the features that are being lost and revealed (see Figure 6).

Nadia was able to capitalise on Geelan’s use of the word ‘reveal’ to include objects that were washed up or scattered around Orford Ness. From this perspective, focusing on a particular word mentioned in an interview would correspond to engaging in discourse analysis in an audio-recorded interview. What film enables, however, is to ‘see’ this word deployed through juxtaposition. For Nadia, sifting through the moving images and reflecting on what could be revealed (without the use of an overarching narrator in the film), felt like an archaeological process, digging through the visuals, going deeper, and ‘not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter’ (Benjamin 1932/1997, 314).

Figure 6. Screenshots from ‘Recording Loss’ that capture a process of erosion (a), recording (b), revealing (c) and washing ashore (d).
These selected context shots were a series of random images that Nadia had encountered walking up and down the shingle spit while the archaeologists and volunteers were tirelessly recording features. The images selected ‘gently guide thought’ (Barry 1997, 203), and enabled Nadia to emphasise both the coastline and the structures on it, evoking the site’s unique atmosphere. Some of those objects could have originated from Orford Ness, such as the ceramic fragment with the anchor motif, while other objects might have come from elsewhere, such as the U.S. manufactured Hypothermia Prevention & Management Kit. The inclusion of these context shots worked to put into (film) practice the metaphor of brecciation. For Nadia, these variegated ‘parts’, originating from unknown sources, nonetheless contributed to creating a whole, and as such, to resonating with the spirit of Orford Ness.

The many possibilities thrown up by the creation of ‘Recording Loss’ speak to the character of film as a medium located at ‘the interface between documentary and construction’ (Jenssen 2009, 74; see also Bruzzi 2000). While some of the scenes in the film were shot with the intention of observing archaeological practices, the layering of audio-visuals and the resulting juxtapositions made along the way by the producer resonates with Nichols’ point: ‘The fact that documentaries are not a reproduction of reality gives them a voice of their own’ (Nichols 2001, 43). Film and video can be ‘data’, but not simply so; they are also a medium through which ‘ethnographic knowledge is created’ (Pink 2001, 77), and a means to share the filmmaker’s perspective. We recognise that ‘recording the recording’ does not translate into an unfiltered view of archaeological practice: we are also not archaeologists ourselves, and, as noted earlier, this film was not primarily the result of the authors’ embedded participatory research in a community archaeology project. Instead, we were more concerned with witnessing and deriving meaning from a variety of engagements and encounters at Orford Ness, and exploring their resonance with heritage-making practices. As a result, ‘Recording Loss’ does not neatly fit any single film categorisation: it is not resolutely a documentary, a visual ethnography, or an artistic endeavour. Rather, we consider ‘Recording Loss’ to blend elements of all these categories as it attempts to provide multi-vocal and multi-sensory perspectives (see De Nardi 2014) directed through a particular filmic narrative based on loss, place and heritage-making. Nadia opted not to use a narrator, as she wanted the short film to be an open invitation for heritage scholars and practitioners, and the wider public, to question, debate and perhaps reconsider some of the themes considered.

By juxtaposing official heritage with the informal, vernacular, affectually-inflected practice at Orford Ness, the film provides a means to reflect on themes of loss, change and heritage along the dynamic coastline. CITiZAN staff and volunteers, as well as Orford Ness National Trust staff were all invited to view and comment on the draft film prior to it being made publicly accessible. Comments received related specifically to the clarification of details in captions and obtaining consent for the use of images; no further changes to the film’s content or narrative were suggested at this stage. CITiZAN contributed to the film’s distribution through their blog site, social media account, and archaeology conferences. CITiZAN’s Lara Band indicated that participation in the production of the film enabled them as archaeologists to reflect on their work beyond the immediate delivery of their tasks, and that the finished output provided a ‘very accessible archival legacy for the project, for us and for the volunteers’ (personal communication 05/12/2018).

Conclusion

This paper considered the capacity of film to explore and expose the practices of heritage-making which emerged through a community archaeology project at Orford Ness, UK, in which volunteers monitored and recorded vulnerable coastal heritage features. An early decision to film the volunteers’ archaeological recording process prompted the authors to investigate how the practice of filmmaking can function as a method to better apprehend the emergent, collective character and ‘spirit’ of Orford Ness.
Although the material remnants exposed on the foreshore will themselves erode and gradually disappear, the practice of ‘preservation by record’, and the resulting interpretation, is premised on the goal of preserving a memory trace and making it accessible to future generations. The present-day process of archaeological recording documented through the film recording provides a different perspective on this practice. As volunteers dedicate time to monitor, record and shape local heritage through community archaeology, they make Orford Ness come alive, and they actively make heritage for the future. More than this, film – as a vehicle through which the practices of heritage can be observed – captures the significance of embodied and tacit affectual engagements in place. The reflexive accounts in relation to the practice of filmmaking enable us to highlight four ways that the process of creating ‘Recording Loss’ enabled a better appreciation of the spirit of Orford Ness and the processes of heritage-making.

First, film provides an illustration of the embodied ‘doing’ of community archaeology and the various media used to record archaeological data. Second, by establishing the volunteers’ interviews as the narrative driver, the editing process juxtaposes and re-orders voices and images and generates novel and unexpected framings, in which, for example, official heritage is layered with contemporary vernacular engagements with the past in place. Third, film has the capacity to represent tacit emotional and affectual registers at play, through individual reflections on life stories, emotional attachments, personal motivations and the satisfaction derived from the labour being performed. Fourth, film is shown to be an effective medium for reflecting the dynamism of this place, as the shifting coastline is set in relation to processes of loss and renewal that are altering cultural artefacts and remains. As things get washed away, other materials are revealed, and the cycle continues. Memories of the past sit alongside future archaeologies yet to be discovered, providing a glimpse of a continuous heritage-making process, not confined to the past or to material persistence.

As the NT Spirit of Place Guidance (2013) indicates, the resulting text is arguably of lesser importance that the process of producing it. This may also be the case with film. Rather than categorising the short film as a documentary, we prefer to see it as an experiment in using a new method in an interdisciplinary project. The film had many purposes, including giving recognition to the work of our partners, exploring debates in heritage, and generating an academic output that can be accessed by the wider public. While researchers may be reluctant at first to learn the technical and theoretical aspects of filmmaking, we came to appreciate that the practice of filmmaking is a valuable method that can create new meanings and generate new forms of knowledge. Film enabled us to take stock of all the varied ways that heritage is being made through communicating, debating, measuring, note-taking, remembering, categorising, valuing, technological uploading, debating, reflecting. Rather than simply documenting archaeological practice, film enabled us to express a more-than-archaeological way of seeing, sensing and creatively articulating heritage-making practices.

Notes

1. The short film can be viewed on the Heritage Futures Vimeo site (https://vimeo.com/240373151) and the Heritage Futures website (https://heritage-futures.org/recording-loss-orford-ness/).
2. Since the 1990s, there has been an extensive body of literature from different disciplines that considers processes and practices of heritage-making from a critical perspective, including (Brett 1996; Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000; Harrison 2013; Harrison et al. 2016; Harvey 2001; Holtof and Piccini 2009; Labadi and Long 2010; MacDonald 1997, 2009; Merriman 1999; Smith 2006; Winter 2013).
3. Antony Lyons’s film can be viewed on the Heritage Futures Vimeo site: https://vimeo.com/142825286. Antony also produced ‘Orford Mist’, a film which plays on mist/mystical qualities of the nature-culture entanglement that manifests on Orford Ness.
4. The recording aspect of filmmaking at Orford Ness could also be considered to be heritage-making in its own right. As a recording device, the camera records events witnessed, and as such, the resulting film creates a record of past experience. In the Heritage Futures programme design, there was some thought given to the technical equipment required to store visual material, such as hard drives, university servers, and online...
repositories. Vimeo was considered to be the most stable online platform to host our film experiments as the site would continue to be publicly accessible once the Heritage Futures website was retired.

5. For instance, hidden pasts were revealed during the 2004 tsunami in Chennai, India, and at the time of a heatwave in Oxfordshire, UK in August 2018. See: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Millennium-old-sunken-town-found-off-Tamil-Nadu/articleshow/51465600.cms; https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/aug/15/millennia-of-human-activity-heatwave-reveals-lost-uk-archaeological-sites accessed 07/09/2018.

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