

15 June 2017

Dalziel Conference Paper



## Intro

- I work as a wood engraver. I use contemporary materials, methods, blocks and traditional hand engraving tools and techniques. I consider myself to be reinterpreting methods from the past within a contemporary practise.
- I will be extending previous research focused upon the everyday phenomena of home and place to begin to understand the role of narrative and archival material within the creation of place.
- Two narrative threads are interwoven in order to build place. Our daily experiences, understood as experiential narratives, and narratives from a place, understood to be histories, which enrich, reinforce and extend our understanding of place.
- Narratives can exist as rumour, folklore, geology and archaeology. Narratives are to be found in archives. It is here that I begin to build an understanding of archives in relation to the construct of both personal and collective places.
- Whilst presenting my thoughts I will show examples from the construct of home and place project and then go on to give brief examples of three projects where archival material impacts upon the outcome. I will also consider the impact of a particular print from the Dalziel archive.



Here practice based research is concerned with the construct of place and how archival artefacts impact upon the notion of place and home.

How can it be that works with a particular historical placement or form can construct a contemporary understanding of place?

Historical event, narrative and collective memories are held and imparted within objects, artefacts, things and archives. The narratives we hold, discover and make inform the memories and experiences that construct a sense of place.



### **Place and Sense of Place Construction**

Space and place are directly related to each other.

They can be seen to exist in the same location, or as completely separate components made and remade in a process of overlapping states. The conceptualisation of our location and environment is a complex undertaking involving an understanding of space, perception, place, and a set of values and processes generated and facilitated through experience, memory, emotion, identity and narrative.

“In the space mode, people perceive the landscape primarily in terms of their biological needs; that is, they focus on the (instrumental) use of the landscape. In the place mode, however, people perceive the landscape primarily in terms of self-reflection (experiences, achievements) and social integration (values, norms, symbols, meanings).” (Kienast, Wildi and Ghosh, 2007, p.49)

Two ways of being are seen to impact on space and place depending upon ones ability to attach value, experience, or knowledge to a location. We exist within space and orientate ourselves through our understanding of these spaces. We locate and orientate ourselves through what Yi-Fu Tuan describes as a sensory informed “coordinate frame centred on the mobile and purposive self” (Tuan 1977, p.12) It is spatial cognition that allows us to operate as we move through space between points or locations in space that have value. Locations of value in space are vital within our survival strategy. The savannah theory of landscape offers the notion of security being able to see, survey, plan, identify resources and move through landscape spaces to locations of value. Territory and landscape space equates to resources, so the notion of spaces of value, or places, is inherent within the human condition.

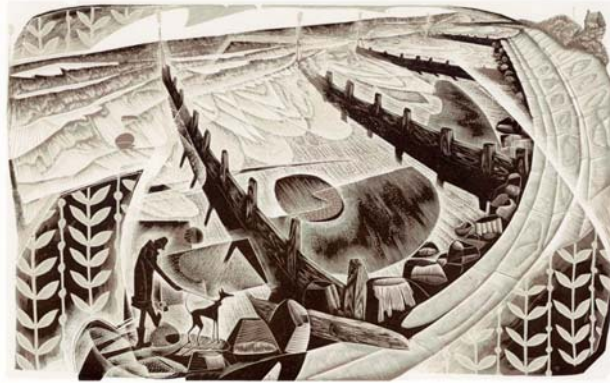
Yi-Fu Tuan writes of space “What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (Tuan 1977, p.6)

Space and landscape spaces are physical territories we exist in and move through. Place is something made and felt. We exist in space, but we make place through experience, memory, narrative and identity.

### **Memory, Narrative and Identity, in the role of Place Making**

Research in the field of neuroscience and spatial cognition provides evidence for the role of memory, narrative and emotion within the construct of place. The hippocampus is the part of the brain where long term memory and emotion is regulated. It is within this region of the brain where John O’ Keefe discovered place cells which become active within different place fields when receiving stimulus from neural code. A place field directly relates to a particular geographic location where a place cell becomes active. The same place cell can be seen to be active in different place fields, suggesting that associated value sets or memories are being accessed within our constructed perception of where we are.

We can interpret this phenomenon as evidence for connectivity between memory, narrative, experience and emotion within a sense of place. Where we live and who we are is encompassed within the notion of home and place and the concepts of place identity and place attachment.



## Memory

Memory defines who we are - without memory, place can't exist or be made.

“It is memory that provides us with the continuous narrative of who we are. It is memory that serves as a record of our continuous self in that sense it is memory that lies at the very heart of identity. In the words of the neuroscientist Steven Rose - lose your memory and you, as you, cease to exist” (Gelfand, 2017)

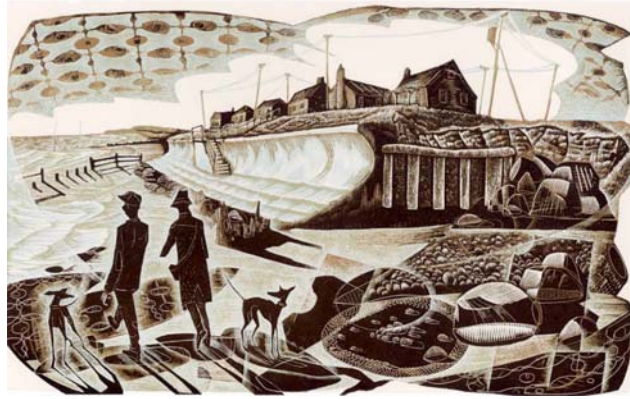
“Casey states that identity is created both internally in the mind, and through the body's interaction with the outside world - there is no place without self, and no self without place” (Hauge 2007)

Our memories are our identity, our identity and memory form place, and memory and identity are made concrete through the physicality of landscape spaces.

Memory, identity, narrative, and knowledge are active within the interpretation of the physicality of place and things. When considering the impact of memory as narrative upon the physical, we can look to Yi-Fu Tuan as he cites Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg:

“What is a place? What gives a place its identity, its aura? These questions occurred to the physicists Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg when they visited Kronberg Castle in Denmark. Bohr said to Heisenberg: isn't it strange how this castle changes as soon as one imagines that Hamlet lived here? As scientists we believe that a castle consists only of stones, and admire the way the architect put them together. The stones, the green roof with its patina, the wood carvings in the church, constitute the whole castle. None of this should be changed by the fact Hamlet lived here, and yet it is changed completely.” (Tuan 1977, p.4)

Our memories and identity are active within our ability to interpret the physical to make sense of place and object.



Memory, identity and shared histories are documented, held and imparted within physical spaces, artefacts and things. Hannah Arendt understands that remembrance and memory are vital components for the translation of knowledge:

“deeds facts events and patterns of thoughts or ideas, must first be seen, heard, and remembered and then transformed, reified as it were, into things...into sayings of poetry, the written page or the printed book, into paintings or sculpture, into all sorts of records, documents, and monuments”. “The whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember, and, second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things.” (Arendt 1998, p.95)

The archive is a repository of knowledge encapsulated and imparted in to things and mediated through memory, narrative and history. This knowledge is interpreted through memory as identity, identity as place, as there is no identity without memory, there is no self without memory and there is no place without self.

Memory allows for the interpretation of knowledge contained within the artefact. Memory allows for the construct of place through the interpretation of landscape spaces and things. Things and artefacts held in archives. Archives of things can be used to generate new knowledge that can be understood as sites of landscape knowledge or landscape space that possess the possibility to form place.

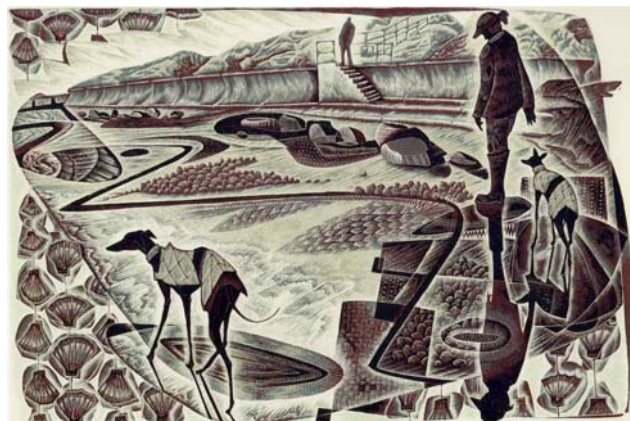


Anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler allows us to understand archives “as epistemological experiments rather than as sources” and “scholars should view archives not as sites of knowledge retrieval, but of knowledge production” (Stoler 2002, p.87)

It is through memory and identity that the archive of knowledge has the ability to be re-imagined within the creation of new places. Places that can never be revisited. Memory and narrative can be seen to operate within the self and others in order to construct place “Places represent personal memories, and because places are located in the socio-historical matrix of intergroup relations, they represent social memories (shared histories)” (Breakwell, as cited in Hauge 2007)

It is through memory identity and self that we can re-interpret the archive, a site for knowledge production in order to recreate collective places, to make the intangible tangible to make new things that construct place.

As memory and identity allow the transformation of knowledge, “history strives to be objective and impersonal, its primary purpose is to record what actually happened. Memory is by definition personal and subjective. Its interest is not primarily what happened but why what happened is meaningful and worth remembering” (Gelfand, 2017)



Fact and data is given value through the interpretive power of remembrance, identity and memory.

“Artists are inveterate cultural borrowers who harvest ideas from the whole realm of human experience. A visual artist encountering a work of art will look to see if there is anything of use for their own practice, be it in terms of process, idea, material or tendency” (Charman and Ross, 2004)

The re-imagining of archival knowledge within new works is inherent within creative practise. New works come about, not through total cultural isolation, as the practitioner is part of the “realm of human experience” (Hauge 2007)



We stand on the shoulders of others when we create as all perceived external experiences are conceptualised within cognition and made concrete through hand and action, whether we are conscious of it or not, we remake through the self, through the personal.

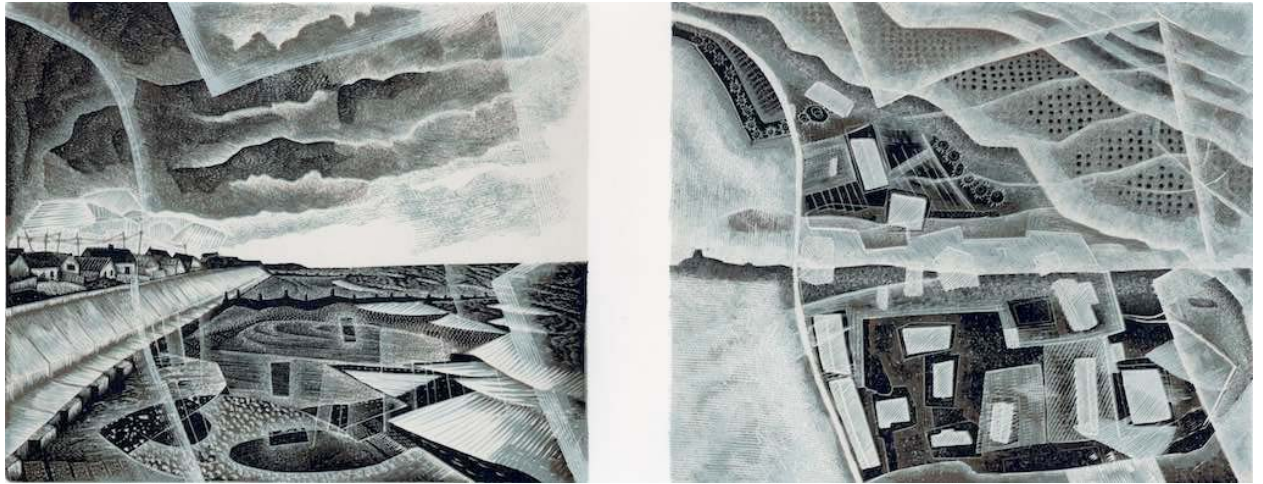
“Taking the personal approach as the first framework for looking is a principal located within constructivist learning theory which posits that the construction of meaning depends on the prior knowledge, values and beliefs of the viewer, who finds points of connection and reference between these aspects of themselves and the art work” (Charman and Ross, 2004)

We interpret the archive through our own identities, memories and values. We look through the personal, through the subject, through the object and through the contexts for the work. We can consider multi-faceted readings and reconstructions of the work. However, a measured approach should be considered. It is essential to differentiate between initial responses and reflective responses and as knowledge is remade, ethical and moral questions are raised as to the notion of truth about place.



**The Broads Project**

Here archival material is being repurposed within a contemporary approach to engraving in order to construct a sense of place and as such interrogate the notion of place in a wider context. Despite extensive empirical research conducted through walking, drawing and making, place can be understood to be operating in a different state. I live within walking distance of the Broads National Park. The water that falls as rain and drains from my roof passes through this landscape. It is fragile, low lying, by the sea, and imparts a sense of uniqueness yet it is a different territory that is being made within practice. This place is a place, but it's not home.



### The Walcott Prints

The Walcott Prints use archival maps as a way of exploring lost territories and draw parallels between what exists now and what existed before. This dynamic and fast changing coastline evokes an overwhelming sense of temporality, fragility, and loss. These prints use archival material in order to explore geographical narratives, social stories and narratives that form place and impact upon the notion of identity and memory along a fragile coast. These prints act as new memories that not only speak to individual coastal communities, but also speak globally within the context of climate change and rising sea levels.





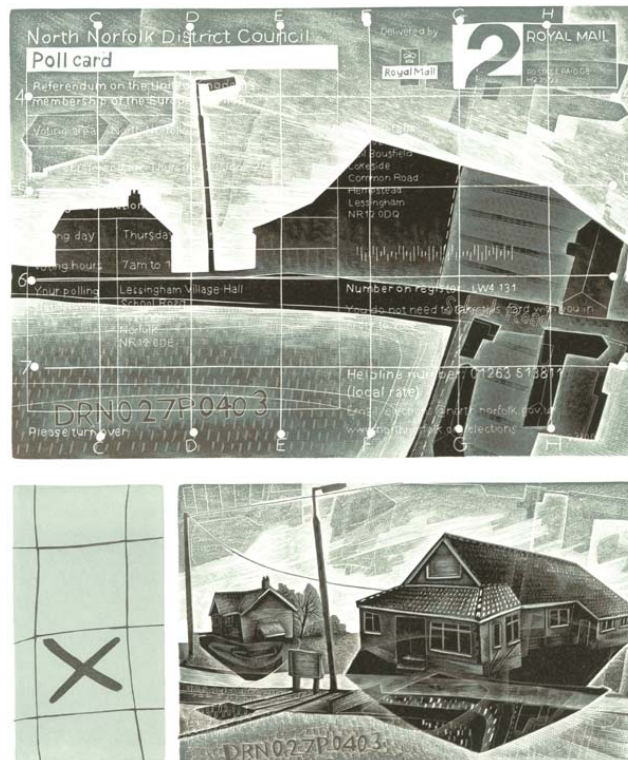
## Dalziel Print

*I know not the artist, narrative or souls involved.  
Personal, emotional, the response to subject, place and the sea  
Sight sound smell and taste  
Spray on the face, grey, cold, a biting wind  
Sound of the waves, crashing, breaking on cliff and rock  
A relentless pounding, a re-shaping of coast*

*Shipwreck, thousands have drowned in the devils throat  
a place of shifting sands,  
Four hundred died as one  
HMS Invincible, a ship, wrecked and broken on Hammond's Knoll  
One hundred and ninety-four lie waiting in Happisburgh churchyard  
Waiting for the land to give up its dead to the sea.*

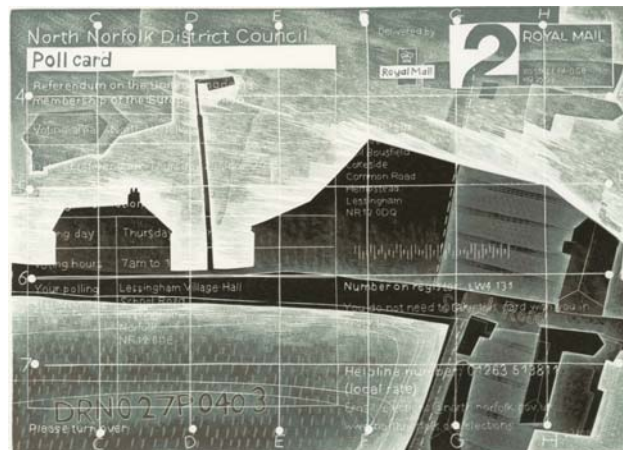
A personal and emotional reading of a work beyond the surface, beyond technique and media, the work here displays an unintentional grid, a structure that speaks the visual language of map, location and territory.

The work is translated through experiences, knowledge, memories and narrative. It is interwoven with threads of identity and memories from place and reforms new places. It is re-read by the engraver who resides within a coastal community and interprets the image as a layered memory map plotting narratives against a geographical location.



## The Ballot Print

The print here was made after attending the Dalziel archive workshop. The grid structure indicative of the visual language of mapping is harvested in order to site location and render place. This place is both my local polling station and an evacuation site as designated within the flood and evacuation plan drawn up by the environment agency.



## Conclusion

To conclude - the impact of the archive is to allow knowledge to be re-contextualised. It is to allow for the re-imagining of archival narratives within new contemporary places. This paper and presentation has come about as a direct result of reflecting upon the Dalziel archive, the Dalziel project and the workshop run and coordinated by Bethan and Georgina. New ideas and lines of enquiry are opened up for practice based research and are made visible. New works can be seen to be re-contextualising the archival past within today for the archives of tomorrow.

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