

Curated Decay: Heritage beyond saving, by Caitlin DeSilvey, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, 240pp., \$108.00 (cloth), ISBN 9780816694365, \$27.00 (paperback), ISBN 9780816694365.

How can we conceive of heritage beyond saving? This is a timely question offered — and answered — in this deeply personal offering by Caitlin DeSilvey, which is a must-read for scholars coming to grips with the new materialism in the fields of geography and critical heritage studies. I would especially recommend it for early career scholars who will benefit from DeSilvey's working through the often abstract ideas of the materialist turn in the specific heritage contexts described here.

Why is it timely? The answer to this question is multiple. First, it is timely because DeSilvey is drawing on literatures that are at the forefront of the social sciences' reworking of our understandings of identity and subjectivity: the more-than-human, the affective, the Anthropocenic. And what is a clearer field for analysing the questions of who we (think) we are than the field of heritage? By working through the ideas of postpreservation — that is, heritage practices that do not seek to preserve structures but rather to manage the processes of entropy that bring about their disordering — DeSilvey calls into question the entire field of heritage, offering a glimpse of an alternative societal relationship to the past and the materials that constitute 'the past' in the present. Conceptualising 'heritage beyond saving' in this way will be, for some, like imagining dinner beyond food, or the internet beyond cat videos. That is, impossible. But DeSilvey effectively demonstrates that the bordering practices that separate culture/heritage from nature and its ecological processes are part of our own intellectual baggage. When reading this argument, I did wonder whether this argument might be weaponised by those who might want to de-fund heritage, or who want to engage in creative destruction to further the interests of capital. This is a hazard that DeSilvey notes herself in the conclusion. I agree with her though that the ideas are worth thinking through, and anyway vigilance is always required to defend heritage from these forces anyway.

Second, the volume is timely because the second way of reading 'heritage beyond saving' is in terms of specific sites that are too exposed to environmental processes to be saved (at least with the resources available to heritage conservators). Several of the sites discussed in this slim volume

are coastal in orientation, and as storms increase in intensity with climate change, so too does the erosion associated with it. From a harbour on the Lizard Peninsula to the lighthouse of Orfordness, DeSilvey sketches heritage sites that are too far gone, and are haunted by the ticking clock. How do we make sense of heritage sites that have been designated too important to 'let go', but which we cannot save any longer? Does postpreservation give us a way to think beyond failure to consider alternative ways of 'saving' that do not require the maintenance of a complete structure, pristine and with a gift shop? I believe so (although I do love a good gift shop).

These are all good reasons to read *Curated Decay*. But what I would like to highlight is a further reason which has little to do with heritage. Throughout the book, DeSilvey consistently draws connections between practices of heritage conservation and wider societal and cultural practices of holding on, resisting the processes of entropy that tie us to the natural world. DeSilvey writes in a very personal style that encourages us to see these connections. First, the volume covers the various projects through which her career has been made — as we move through the chapters we follow her on her various moves back and forth across the Atlantic, with the research tied into the sites where her studies were based. That is, it is clear that the book is the product of an academic *life*, which sprawls across the sites and enfolds other people as well: children are born, a grandmother passes away. The web of relations that sustained this research is laid bare, and like the author we have to think through the constant sense of loss that comes with movement in space and time. In one particularly touching passage DeSilvey discusses her last visit with her grandmother, and in that moment we can see both the necessity of letting go but all the reasons why we do not want to. It is a very human response to want to maintain all the things that have brought us joy and meaning, but it is the human condition to be unable to do so. *Curated Decay* sparked my meditation on these matters and I hope it will do the same for you.

Jason Dittmer
Department of Geography, University College London
j.dittmer@ucl.ac.uk