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HERITAGE BEYOND SAVING

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Postpreservation

LOOKING PAST LOSS

> All the new thinking is about loss.
> In this it resembles all the old thinking.
>
> *Robert Hass, "Meditation at Lagunitas"*

A SOLITARY CHIMNEY STACK rises from a scrubby patch of open ground at the northern edge of our Cornish village. The tapered column of granite and brick pierces the horizon, as it has since the middle of the nineteenth century, when it was built. It has become so seamlessly stitched into the backdrop of village life that no one really notices it any more. When it was constructed, the chimney was attached to a masonry building housing a massive steam engine that pumped water out of mine shafts driven deep into the hill. The ground around the structure was a busy industrial yard; the slopes below, now woodland, were loud with the grinding of waterwheels and ore crushers, and with the trundling of carts that hauled granite from the quarry at the head of the valley to a quay below on the Helford River. These sounds are silenced now, and the scrubland around the remnant chimney is choked with brambles, nettles, gorse, and buddleia— but also sloe, wild roses, and poppies.

Although the chimney appears solid enough from a distance, on inspection its advanced age becomes apparent. The mortar in the granite rubble stonework is friable and loose;

overhanging masonry sections jut out along the seam where the engine house wall once attached, and only thick nets of ivy appear to hold them in place. The shaft inside is packed with branches and sticks deposited by generations of jackdaws. The integrity of the structure appears to be symbiotic, a weave of root and rock, rather than singular. One day when I was poking about in the ruins of the structure's crumbled flank I found a small stoneware bottle. It stood about three and a half inches high, with straight sides and a flared rim, dingy and clogged with soil. At home, I cleaned it to reveal an uneven orange glaze and the mark of a potter's thumb on its shoulder.

The chimney itself can also be understood as a vessel of sorts, holding material memories of the industrial past in this place. Depending on how you look at it, however, in its current state the chimney is either half empty or half full. The school of half empty would see the chimney as a threatened object, its significance gradually eroding as its condition deteriorates. English Heritage (the U.K. public body responsible for the national system of heritage protection) listed the chimney as a feature of "special architectural or historic interest" in 1988, but it is privately owned, and no active measures have been taken to stabilize it.[1] If, at some point in the future, someone happened to notice that the chimney is near collapse, it is likely that proposals would come forward to save and secure it—to strip off the ivy, repoint the mortar, clear the base, and install an informational plaque with a potted history to justify the expense of intervention. The structure would be infilled with official memory and asked to perform as an object of heritage.

Another way of looking at the chimney in its current limbo state would posit that the feature's ongoing decay, rather than threatening to hollow out the memory and the

meaning of the structure, instead has its own productive relation to the past. Since the chimney stopped performing its original function at the end of the nineteenth century, it has been caught up in a variety of processes, from opportunistic salvage of the engine house stone for use in other building projects to gradual, spontaneous colonization by equally opportunistic plant and animal species. It is possible to see a fullness in the current state of the structure as it sheds one arrangement of matter to adopt another. As the chimney becomes less legible as an object of industrial heritage, it becomes possible to read other narratives out of its remains, to trace the granite blocks from their source in the Cornubian batholith to their temporary enrollment in this structure, to follow the ivy roots into the seams of the stone to learn how they find nourishment in mineral mortar, to envision a future in which the chimney no longer stands but something of its substance and its story persists nonetheless—to understand change not as loss but as a release into other states, unpredictable and open.

We live in a world dense with things left behind by those who came before us, but we only single out some of these things for our attention and care. We ask certain buildings, objects, and landscapes to function as mnemonic devices, to remember the pasts that produced them, and to make these pasts available for our contemplation and concern. The language that we use when an object or structure is recognized for its potential contribution to cultural memory work immediately presumes a threat, a risk of loss.[2] We speak of vulnerable places and things needing protection, conservation, and preservation. Action is required to restore or maintain the physical integrity of the threatened object and ensure its survival. Intervention and treatment aim to protect things from outright destruction or neglect as well as more indirect

processes of erosion, weathering, decay, and decomposition. But what happens if we choose not to intervene? Can we uncouple the work of memory from the burden of material stasis? What possibilities emerge when change is embraced rather than resisted?

Although in present-day Euro-American heritage contexts such questions have a whiff of heresy, it has not always been so. The prevailing preservation paradigm, which declares that certain objects must be retained for the benefit of future generations and asserts the moral imperative of material conservation, only emerged in the late nineteenth century.[3] As part of a broader cultural shift toward the disciplining of knowledge and expertise, objects of presumed historic value became subject to new standards of classification, recording, and documentation.[4] Once safely contained within schedules, lists, and inventories, artifacts and structures fell under the presumption of protection. Graham Fairclough writes, "The obsession with physical conservation became so embedded in twentieth century mentalities that it is no longer easy to separate an attempt to understand the past and its meaning from agonising about which bits of it to protect and keep. . . . The remains of the past . . . seem to exist only to be preserved."[5] A rash of legislation in the early part of the twentieth century secured expectations that all reasonable attempts would be made to protect designated entities in perpetuity.[6] Other perspectives, more accommodating and appreciative of material transience and change, were silenced or sidelined.

In recent years, some have called for a reevaluation of our commitment to perpetual material protection. "Our heritage system is constipated," argues Maria Balshaw. "It is time for a no-blame conversation about letting some things change and even letting some things go."[7] Rodney Harrison writes of a

"crisis of accumulation" in heritage practice and the need to make "active decisions to delist or cease to conserve particular forms of heritage," lest we become overwhelmed.[8] Some scholars frame the "forgetting" catalyzed by acts of deliberate deaccession as an essential constituent of a dynamic and productive relation to the present and the future. Mark Augé observes, "We must forget in order to remain present, forget in order not to die, forget in order to remain faithful."[9] Others, however, have been keen to point out that cultural amnesia does not necessarily follow from material erasure, and encroaching absence may paradoxically facilitate the persistence of memory and significance.[10] Þóra Pétursdóttir, in her work on disused Icelandic herring fishing stations, observes that abandonment can be understood as termination, or "an evolving and dynamic context in its own right."[11] In his discussion of the destruction of a twelfth-century Norwegian church, Cornelius Holtorf asserts that processes of change and creative transformation may actually help maintain a connection to the past rather than sever it.[12] It is possible to perform remembrance through transience, although this may require a willingness to find value in alternative material forms.

In this book, I explore the implications of a set of unorthodox premises: the disintegration of structural integrity does not necessarily lead to the evacuation of meaning; processes of decay and disintegration can be culturally (as well as ecologically) productive; and, in certain contexts, it is possible to look beyond loss to conceive other ways of understanding and acknowledging material change.

Each chapter in this book considers a site where exploration of alternatives to material conservation has been deliberate and considered (rather than a post hoc rationalization of benign neglect). I should make it clear that I am primarily interested

in places where original function has given way to post-production recognition of historic value. I visit the Montana homestead where these ideas first took root; a nineteenth-century Cornish harbor; a remote Cold War research complex; a postindustrial landscape park; a modernist Scottish seminary; a derelict gunpowder works; an abandoned mining camp; and an imperilled lighthouse.[13] In each of these places, I try to explain the thinking that informed the decision (or intention) to reserve repair and defer maintenance. In some of these places, decay has been allowed to run its course out of an appreciation for its aesthetic effects. Other sites were ceded to allow natural process to return to a previously managed landscape. Underlying these philosophical grounds are, inevitably, pragmatic considerations about the availability of resources and the feasibility of continued investment. What characterizes each site, however, is some form of improvisation and innovation in the face of uncertainty.[14] In each place, I trace the tangle of why and how, and I try to extend the potential for doing things otherwise, for acknowledging (historic) significance without arresting process, by proposing my own experiments with curatorial and interpretive practice. Each chapter presents a snapshot in time, a discrete interval that is, by necessity, truncated midstory. All of these places are caught up in currents of continued change, and this means that by the time this book appears in print, they will have moved on—either to be drawn back into the "safe" harbor of heritage protection or to pass further over the threshold into accelerated decline.

In order to describe what is happening in these perforated places, I need to draw on new ways of storying matter—surfacing meaning that extends beyond cultural frames of reference, and inviting in other agencies and other narrative forms. I locate my analysis in the fine grain of materials,

where interpretation stitches down the ragged line between presence and absence, here and gone, object and process. In the telling, an inevitable tension arises between my desire to understand and articulate the intentions of the human subjects responsible for these places and my simultaneous interest in identifying expressions of material and ecological sovereignty. I describe the metamorphosis of the material fabric in these places and tease out the stories that are generated through processes of colonization, dissolution, and disintegration. To borrow a phrase from Jane Bennett, I come to these places with an "anticipatory readiness . . . a perceptual style congenial to the possibility of thing power."[15] In my desire to be as precise as possible about the processes I observe at work, I am often forced to draw on bodies of knowledge that are outside my expertise—ecology, chemistry, materials science. I may risk failure or misinterpretation, but I seek reassurance in the awareness that potent moments always involve some form of perplexity, a recognition that forces beyond my ken are at work and that all I can do is describe what I see within the limits of my understanding.

I take heart from other thinkers who accept that there are worlds that lie beyond the borders of our ability to articulate them. Bennett writes of our encounter with a world of "entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics."[16] Luke Introna proposes that we allow ourselves to be affected by forms and substances that we do not attempt to control or order, cultivating "an affective mode of comportment towards the other that refuses to turn the becoming of the other into containable things or wholes."[17] Associated with this cultivation of openness and uncertainty is a reluctance to rely on notions of nature or culture as stable categories to which objects can be intuitively allocated.[18]

If we understand "heritage as an emergent property of the *dialogical* relationship between human beings and a range of other human and non-human actors and their environments," as Rodney Harrison has proposed, then our analysis must attend to these relationships rather than reify them.[19] This is not to say that we can do away with these categories altogether; such a move would risk blinding us to the ways in which concepts of nature and culture continue to scaffold distinctions between different heritage forms. Shiloh Krupar writes helpfully about the "trans-natural . . . as that which is always questioning and undoing the natural as a thing or a category, *and* that which is emerging beyond the natural but still in relation to it."[20]

One of the purposes of this book is to provide a plausible rationale for experimental heritage practice that sees its objects of concern as temporary arrangements of matter that shuttle between durability and vulnerability in response to social and physical forces often outside our control. I use the term "heritage" advisedly to refer to the complex of practices and policies that structure our relationship to the material past. Unlike other related terms, such as "historic preservation," heritage as a concept does not assume that its relationship to the past must, by definition, involve acts of physical stabilization. Although it comes to us with a complex baggage, the term retains within it the potential for redefinition and reorientation, as well as critical reflection on the choices that we make in its name.[21] My analysis deals only obliquely with what might be called the macropolitics of heritage and the forms of institutional authority that are associated with and perpetuated through preservation practice.[22] I work instead with a micropolitics that emerges in the management of specific places, adopting an "intimate distance" in relation to my subject that allows me to acknowledge contradiction

and inconsistency as well as control and compliance.[23] If we frame "heritage" as a verb, a continual achievement rather than a fixed object, then we are perhaps better able to explore the mismatch between rhetoric and reality produced through messy practices of managing and making do.[24] The practitioners whom I consulted in the course of this study are acutely aware of how the inevitable, inexorable forces of material transformation alter the objects and the places they are responsible for, but in their professional roles, they are often obliged to apologize for these changes or to pretend that they are not happening, rather than seeing change as an opportunity for engaging people and acknowledging vulnerability.

The book also aims to contribute to wider conversations about critical and culturally sensitive heritage practice.[25] Within heritage scholarship, there has emerged over the last few decades a recognition that a focus on heritage as physical product often does not translate well to cultures that frame their relation to the past through ongoing process and expressions of value that may (appear to) be intangible and transient.[26] Archaeologist Siân Jones has argued that the persistent emphasis on "material fossilisation" in British and European contexts blinds us to the ways in which we also produce meanings through engagement with the dynamic social and organic lives of monuments and artifacts. She suggests that we need to be more open to the processes through which things "grow, change, rejuvenate, collapse and decay," and attentive to the meanings and values that are produced along the way.[27]

My own argument is one part provocation, one part intuition. I'm not sure that what I'm proposing is actually possible. To the extent that it is, it will rely on a radical willingness to find positivity in processes that are currently framed in largely

negative terms. Two distinct but related terms—entropy and decay—have particular relevance for the discussion I unfold in the following chapters, and it is worth spending some time unpacking them here.

Rudolf Clausius coined the term "entropy" from the Greek *entropein*, "transformation and change."[28] Outside of the disciplines in which it functions as a working concept (information theory, statistical mechanics, physics), reference to entropy is usually a shorthand invocation of a state of increasing disorder, chaos, or disorganization. Although definitions of entropy vary widely depending on the context in which they are applied, most scholars who use the term in their work would agree that the emphasis on disorder is misleading; entropy is more accurately defined as a measure of the multiplicity of potential arrangements of matter within a given system. Systems with a greater range of potential configurations are described as existing in a state of high entropy. For example,

> A tidy or ordered room is a room where the items in the room inhabit a small set of possible places—the books on the bookshelf, the clothes in the dresser, and so on— while a messy or disordered room is the set of all other configurations. . . . Thus, a messy room does not have higher entropy because it is messy or disordered but rather because there are more configurations [that would count as messy] than an ordered or tidy room. That is, its multiplicity is higher.[29]

In heritage contexts, a consolidated or conserved structure expresses a limited set of potential configurations (paint on trim, masonry pointed, roof in true); a structure that is caught up in active processes of decay and dereliction has many

more. The multiplicity that results when maintenance and repair is withheld is the measure of entropy in the structure, and it is inherently unpredictable and uncertain. Another standard definition of entropy holds it to be the amount of energy in a physical system that cannot be used to do work. In the systems this book is concerned with, "work" is allied to the work of memory. Massive amounts of energy are invested to keep heritage systems in a steady state so that the matter contained within them will continue to function as a cultural mnemonic device. Such work can involve freezing, irradiation, treating for mold, inserting borate rods, and any number of other preventive and protective techniques. In an entropic system, however, matter continually degrades, energy is lost, and an element of chance enters into the equation.

Perhaps, as some have suggested, entropy can best be described as possibility, rather than through reference to chaos and disorder: "Entropy is an additive measure of the number of possibilities available to a system. . . . As the constraints that inform a living organism dissolve, the entropy of the organism increases. . . . Yet even in the death, new possibilities are sown."[30] In its biological expression, as noted above, entropy is closely aligned with decay. Decay occurs when a complex of biological, chemical, and physical processes— each driven by specific agents and elements—combines to break down the integrity of a substance and to make its components available for enrollment in other projects. The decomposition catalyzed by enzymes and microorganisms, for example, releases nutrients and increases the fertility of surrounding substrates, allowing for the emergence of new forms of growth. As Jane M. Jacobs and Stephen Cairns point out, "Biological and ecological concepts of decay are full of activity, exchange, acquisition and redistribution. Decay is as life-giving as it is life-taking."[31] There is a whole field devoted

to the study of the biodeterioration of cultural heritage, but the focus of scholarship, for the most part, remains resolutely fixed on the destructive aspects of the decay process and on identifying strategies for protection and remediation.

Both decay and entropy carry potentially contradictory meanings, and depending on context they are inflected as negative or positive, generative or destructive. In relation to built structures and artifacts, decay is usually framed either through a "logic of loss" or a logic of renewal and rebirth.[32] Land artist Robert Smithson identified the "clashing aspect of the entropic tendency," which he defined as an irreconcilable tension between different perceptions and valuations of entropic process.[33] This tension was embedded within his own thinking, in that he sometimes described the "entropic mood" as a gradual collapse of culture toward the banal, the empty, and the vapid.[34] More often, Smithson asserted that a willingness to "recognise the entropic condition rather than try to reverse it" could generate positive reformulations and catalyze the continual remaking of matter and culture.[35] In one essay, Smithson cites physicist P. W. Bridgman: "Like energy, entropy is in the first instance a measure of something that happens when one state is transformed into another."[36] Jeremy Till has written about Smithson's collaboration with entropic process as a signature feature of works such as *Spiral Jetty*, a spiral of rocks reaching into Utah's Great Salt Lake, which is "at the same time natural/artificial, of the land/of the water, stable/decaying."[37]

What does any of this have to do with the prosaic practice of heritage management? As Gavin Lucas reminds us, "entropy is a social as well as a natural phenomenon," and our handling of the material record that has persisted from the past into the present is always a negotiation of the "virtual extremes of total preservation and total erasure."[38] A focus

on entropy allows us to look to the processes by which worlds are assembled and to accept that any given system, be it a granite chimney stack or an artwork, has the potential to unfold along multiple trajectories; what may appear as erasure on one register may be generative of new information on another. An attentive relation to material systems and their histories involves following trajectories of change and transformation rather than arresting them.

Of course, such an experimental heritage practice is at odds with conventional framings of the relationship between the material past and the memorial present. Objects of heritage are preserved, most transparently, in order to stabilize memory in material form and to stabilize associated identity formations.[39] At the scale of the collective, acts of preservation and designation enroll certain structures and artifacts to function as mnemonic anchors.[40] The memories associated with these monumental forms may be popular or elite, consensual or contested, but the link between material persistence and memorial function goes largely unquestioned.[41] On an intimate register, people use objects as memory prompts to materialize elements of identity and experience.[42] Conservation of the material past, in its most familiar mode, is an act of "self-preservation," an impulse that seeks to maintain the relation between self and surround.[43] While it is possible to make an intellectual or aesthetic argument for postpreservation heritage practice, such a proposal presents a fundamental challenge at the base level of self. The act of "saving" implicates us, as individuals, in the biography of an artifact—or, as some have suggested, we save things not "because they are valued, but rather they are valued because they are being saved."[44] With each act of preservation, the vulnerable object becomes (a little bit of) us, and its unmaking threatens to unmake our identities as well.

The transitive model described above links materiality, memory, and subjectivity through mutually reinforcing chains of reference. This model relates awkwardly to materials that are caught up in processes of change and transformation. Such materials yield their significance more readily when memory is framed as generative rather than transitive, a "culturally mediated material practice that is activated by embodied acts and semantically dense objects."[45] Objects with mnemonic resonance contribute their own resources and potentialities to an encounter, and these may exceed our ability to contain or comprehend them.[46] If memory is understood not as something that is deposited within material containers for safekeeping but as something that is "ignited in dialogue between mind and matter," then it does not necessarily need to rely on a stable material form for its expression.[47]

In the interface between materiality and sociality, different agencies—discursive and practiced, textual and tactile—may contribute to the production of memory. Remembrance in this mode involves a willingness to accept the unsettling of our sense of ourselves as autonomous agents and to think instead about the work of assembling meaning as a collaboration with an array of other materials, forces, and organisms. In this more dispersed and fluid understanding of subjectivity, materiality is not a static field of reference that awaits inscription from an active mind but is itself constitutive of (new forms of) human selfhood, as distributed through intimate relations with other entities—plants, stones, dust.[48] With regard to heritage objects, such a shift in thinking requires a more nuanced appreciation of the forces that lead to forgetting—acts of preservation obscure and eliminate certain traces of the past even as they secure others. It may be that in some circumstances a state of gradual decay provides more oppor-

tunities for memory making, and more potential points of engagement and interpretation, than the alternative.[49]

The potential to uncouple memory work from material stability—to question, as Aron Vinegar and Jorge Otero-Pailos have suggested, the "primacy granted to presence and materiality in preservation"—is the subject of this book.[50] The stories I tell, however, end up being as much about holding together as they are about coming apart. In each of the places I visit, I acknowledge the anxiety associated with surrender, with allowing processes of change to progress unchecked. It goes against the grain of human nature to step back and allow things to collapse; the urge to step in at the last minute to avert material disintegration is a powerful one.[51] For this reason, much of my discussion ends up being about the inevitability of intervention and the limits to radical innovation. Some of these limits are subjective, but many more are structural; "protection" in heritage contexts applies not just to the physical form of discrete objects and structures but to those who own them and those who encounter them. A thicket of laws and policies are intended to protect owners' liability and to protect publics from exposure to dangerous substances and risky situations. Sanctioned inaction is difficult to accommodate within existing regulatory frameworks, and in certain contexts the approaches I describe here would be entirely inappropriate—as well as illegal. In many of the sites that I discuss in this book, the laws that set expectations for the protection of built heritage also come into uneasy contact with legislation that applies to the management of ecosystems, as the opportunistic organisms that are the first to take root in abandoned sites and structures are frequently subject to control as invasive species. In other places, ecological arguments bolster management positions with regard to

cultural heritage objects, and invocations of "natural process" and "managed decline" play into other agendas and interests. There is a politics as well as a poetics to the approaches I introduce here, and much of the detail in the following chapters lies in my articulation of extended negotiations over who ultimately has the power to decide when to do things otherwise, and why.

The insights that I share in this book are aligned with a wider cultural recognition that we need to find ways to inhabit change rather than deny or deflect it, and to find meaning in transition, transience, and uncertainty.[52] If one accepts that we live in a world of ecological unraveling and rising seas, fragile economies and gathering storm clouds, then one is forced to admit that we may not be in control anymore, if we ever were. When Ernest Callenbach, the author of the 1975 novel *Ecotopia*, died in 2012, he left behind a document on his computer that included this prescient observation:

> Humans tend to try to manage things: land, structures, even rivers. We spend enormous amounts of time, energy and treasure in imposing our will on nature, on pre-existing or inherited structures, dreaming of permanent solutions, monuments to our ambitions and dreams. But in periods of slack, decline or collapse, our abilities no longer suffice for all this management. We have to let things go. All things *go* somewhere: they evolve, with or without us, into new forms. So as the decades pass we should try not always to futilely fight these transformations. . . . We can embrace this process of devolution: embellish it when strength avails, learn to love it.[53]

As Callenbach's comment suggests, when protection can no longer be sustained at the levels we have become accustomed

to, we will need new ways of making sense of the world and our relationship to it. While in one sense this observation may seem fatalistic, willing to prematurely accept an impending upheaval (that may or may not materialize), I would argue that the transformation of our relation to the material past is both a necessity and an opportunity. As I hope will become clear in this book, I am not advocating a position of acquiescence and indifference in the face of change. I am trying to muster the cultural and practical resources that will be required to think about process and transformation as openings, invitations to engagement and experimentation. We need ways of valuing the material past that do not necessarily involve accumulation and preservation—ways that instead countenance the release of some of the things we care about into other systems of significance.

A couple of years ago I had the opportunity to speak to an audience in Glasgow about my research. After listening to my presentation about the intentional accommodation of ruination at a Cold War military site, a writer friend commented, "This is either an incredibly old theme or an incredibly new one." Yes. A fascination with things ruined, decayed, derelict, and transient plays out on a continuous loop in Western aesthetic and intellectual traditions, inflected through each iteration with a slightly different emphasis, each meeting a different need. This inheritance forms a kind of undertow to the work I want to do in this book, an insistent tug that asserts the continued relevance of these older ways of seeing, now bundled into post hoc structures of feeling—Baroque, Gothic, Romantic, Picturesque. The labels signify cultural moments when people saw something of value in material transformation and disorder, rather than stasis; when sensibility was attentive to transience and titillated by decay.

Although these traditions are clearly relevant to the work I set out to do here, and I return to some of these precedents in the chapters that follow, my aim in this book is to try to articulate a way of relating to disarticulating places and things that exposes new possibilities for engagement and interpretation rather than reinventing inherited ones.[54] It may be that, as Robert Hass points out, "All the new thinking is about loss. / In this it resembles all the old thinking," and that it is impossible to disassociate my argument from its weighty antecedents.[55] But I want to try, and while I write about processes of ruination, I avoid referring to the sites I work with as ruins, partly because this label would fix their identity, and what I am most interested in is how these identities can remain unfixed yet still productive.

In this book, I follow processes of material dissolution and disintegration, and I attempt to describe the ecological and chemical processes that produce the effects we recognize as ruination. Throughout, I try to assemble resources that would allow us to locate our stories in the movement of matter. In the sense that this is an aesthetic project, it draws on a model of aesthetics akin to Eagleton's "gaze and guts" or Edensor's "emergent aesthetics."[56] My critical lens focuses not (only) on the surface layers but on attending to the way we encounter and apprehend things as they come undone and are drawn into other orders, other systems. This book is about locating the threshold, the point to which entropic process is allowed to run. It also asks what it would take to cross that threshold, to countenance finitude, complete dis-integration, and reclamation into other forms. In sympathy with Mark Jackson, I try to imagine how we might open ourselves to "decay . . . as an ontological ground for a post-humanist ethics."[57]

One of the things that I've come to realize is that receptivity to the kind of experimentation I'm proposing in this book

will vary depending on the scale of the objects under consideration. My ideas originated with work in the fine grain of matter, where things could be seen to be passing from one state to another but where the overall integrity of the surrounding environment was not challenged. I have found it more difficult to attempt to tell stories about the unraveling of bigger things—built structures, like buildings and harbors.[58] Our minds have a tendency to consolidate these things as cultural objects, and it takes an extra effort to see them as provisional gatherings of matter, on their way to becoming something else. I needed to train myself to see both the form of the structure and the substance that it was made of, and to learn how to trace the web of relations that extended out from that substance.

Architectural theorists are fond of stressing the unfinished qualities of architecture and the ways in which buildings' lives are extended through acts of alteration, amendment, destruction, and wear.[59] Moshen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow write of building weathering as a "form of completion" and ask whether "it is possible that weathering is not only a problem to be solved, or a fact to be neglected, but is an inevitable occurrence to be recognised and made use of in the uncertainties of its manifestation."[60] In the sites I discuss in this book, the unfinished extends to the point of unmaking; even in states of near collapse, however, ruination does not signal the "absolute annihilation of building and organisation" but instead opens out into radically "different forms of organisation and organising."[61] Weathering and ruination can be understood as a form of self-excavation through which a structure gradually discloses its internal properties and material constituents.[62]

We are accustomed to thinking about buildings as whole and complete the moment their construction ceases, and

preservation practice is largely oriented toward recovering this moment of wholeness and unity. If we accept that processes of aging and decay can be additive as well as destructive, then some form of temporal reorientation must take place as well. Almost all of the terms that are used to describe attitudes of care, toward both cultural artifacts and natural environments, assume the desirability of a return to a prior state: restoration, conservation, preservation, reconstruction. There are some more neutral terms in circulation, such as stabilization or consolidation, but for the most part, the gaze must snap backward to find its point of reference. In real terms, however, the people responsible for caring for both natural and cultural heritage often manage not recuperation but change, working with remnant ecologies and materials to produce conditions that draw on past precedents but move forward into new forms. We lack an appropriate language to describe this future-oriented practice, and reversion to the available terms often requires us to make excuses for invention and transformation rather than accepting it as a necessary condition. There are signs of a shift taking place in ecological circles, with an increasing acceptance of novel ecosystems and a departure from the attempted recovery of historic conditions to embrace the emergence of new trajectories.[63] In relation to cultured materials, the concept of adaptive reuse introduces a future orientation into heritage practice, but it stops short of countenancing uses by other-than-human organisms and agencies. Daniela Sandler's coining of the term "counterpreservation" to describe the deliberate cultivation of decay and decrepitude in reunified Berlin comes close, but a fully realized entropic heritage practice would require more sustained attention to the organisms and entities with which we share our world.[64]

I am fully aware that foregrounding entropic process in

our inherited structures and artifacts may be ultimately un-workable in practice. Rather than locating my argument in a theoretical space where I can make my point without in-terference from the clutter of the real, however, I want to follow experimental practice to the point of failure. Luke Introna writes, "The ethos of letting be is impossible—and so it should be. . . . It is exactly this impossibility that leads us to keep decisions open, to listen, to wait, and to reconsider again our choices."[65] This book is full of stories about the gap—the tense place between abandonment and attention. I try to imagine what it might mean to dwell there, and let things be unpredictable and permeable—not entirely known, or owned, by us.

Notes

1. Postpreservation

1. In 2015, a newly formed body, Historic England, inherited English Heritage's position as the U.K. government's statutory adviser and a statutory consultee on all aspects of the historic environment and its heritage assets.

2. Rodney Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2012), 7.

3. Cornelius Holtorf, "The Heritage of Heritage," *Heritage and Society* 5, no. 2 (2012): 153–73.

4. Tim Winter, "Clarifying the Critical in Critical Heritage Studies," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 19, no. 6 (2013): 532–45.

5. Graham Fairclough, "Conservation and the British," in *Defining Moments: Dramatic Archaeologies*, ed. John Schofield (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2005), 158.

6. Legislation included the United Kingdom Ancient Monuments Consolidation and Amendment Act of 1913 and the United States Antiquities Act of 1906.

7. Maria Balshaw, "The (Heritage) Elephant in the Room," Heritage Exchange 2014, http://www.heritageexchange.co.uk/.

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