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Patina: A Profane Archaeology

Kent Mathewson, Nadia Bartolini, Tim Edensor, Bradley Garrett, Sandra Jasper, Samuel Merrill & Shannon Lee Dawdy

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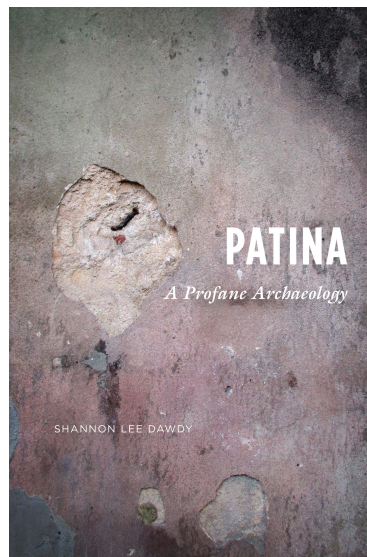
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BOOK REVIEW FORUM

Patina: A Profane Archaeology

Shannon Lee Dawdy. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016. xv and 195 pp., photos, diagrams, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$82.50 cloth (ISBN 9780226351056), \$27.50 paper (ISBN 9780226351193), \$27.50 electronic (ISBN 9780226351223).

Introduction by Kent Mathewson, Department of Geography and Anthropology, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.



Louisiana State University's Atlantic Studies program as one of our guest lecturers, followed by a reading of her *Building the Devil's Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (Dawdy 2008). This convinced me that her excavations and constructions of New Orleans's past were both technically and intellectually as well wrought as anything yet that had been done—what a nonpareil place like New Orleans not only deserves, but should demand. Her work on French colonial New Orleans yielded prestigious honors and grants, including the esteemed MacArthur Fellowship. I reacted with pleasure and anticipation when I learned she had published a second book on New Orleans engaging both the past and the

It had been suggested to me that the *AAG Review of Books* sponsor a special lecture, like many journals currently do at the American Association of Geographers (AAG) meetings, and then follow this up with a publication. As a publication devoted solely to reviews, publishing a lecture in the *AAG Review of Books* doesn't exactly fit the format. The book review fora, however, devoted to showcasing a book and publishing critical commentaries with the author's response, fits the bill well. For the inaugural *AAG Review of Books* special session, at the New Orleans meeting, I felt that it should be a recent book on New Orleans or the Gulf South. A number of candidates came to mind, including Campanella's most recent books—*Bourbon Street* (2014), and *Cityscapes of New Orleans* (2017), or Davis's (2017) acclaimed *The Gulf: The Making of an American Sea*. Perhaps none, however, was more timely and lively than historian and archaeologist Shannon Lee Dawdy's *Patina: A Profane Archaeology*. I had come to know Dawdy's Louisiana research through

present. I was even more pleased when I begin to read Dawdy's presentation of empirical reportage buttressed with solid theoretical scaffolding producing astute reflections. Not only do Marx, Freud, Durkheim, and Mary Douglas assist in her survey of New Orleans's material and immaterial patinas, but at more specific sites and intersections, Baudelaire, Baudrillard, Benjamin, Bourdieu, and Svetlana Boym (to not go beyond the "Bs") instruct and help conduct the transects. I was delighted when Dawdy said yes to my invitation to join us at the AAG's 114th annual meeting for an Author Meets Critics session. Then I was faced with coming up with the other participants—the critics. Karen Till, *AAG Review of Books* Associate Editor, ably assisted in identifying potential commentators. I couldn't have asked for a better multidisciplinary cohort—all enthusiastically agreed to attend the meeting and participate in the session, and as the reader will see, all offer insightful and incisive comments from an impressive range of perspectives.

This book review forum has been republished with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the book review forum.

Commentary by Nadia Bartolini , *Environment and Sustainability Institute, University of Exeter, Cornwall, UK.*

Shannon Lee Dawdy's book plunged me right back to my own memories of New Orleans. In the late 1990s, I was doing a master's degree in literary geography looking at the representation of New Orleans in Anne Rice's "Vampire Chronicles" series. Dawdy's book is an evocative study of the stuff that makes New Orleans—that prompts us to recall, makes us want to relive, and keeps us coming back to New Orleans.

Talking about vampires and Dawdy's book might seem a bit out of place, but there are synergies between the two. Rice's most famous vampire characters are French, coming to the New World and bringing with them a particular sense of aesthetic, and one could say "high culture." Rice's vampires love New Orleans and make it their home, and this is expressed through mundane everyday life, like smelling the bougainvillea and walking the animated French Quarter at night. Vampires are also immortal (well, they can die, but it's hard to kill them). What Anne Rice did was enable readers to experience New Orleans through the eyes of vampires; that meant that we could time travel with them, from the moment they arrived in 1791 to the 1990s. If Anne Rice uses fiction and vampires to explore issues of religion, psychology, and colonialization in New Orleans through a temporal framework, Dawdy uses artefacts.

Because the focus of the book is archaeological, the metaphor used is also material in nature. Patina refers to a surface appearance that changes over time resulting in "an aesthetic quality with connotations of age," yet also evokes "a signifier of certain social habits, and can be artificially created, or faked" (p. 11). The use of the metaphor references both how interviewees responded to the stuff in the field, as well as the process of patina that is emblematic of layering of time on objects.

For me, this is the strength of the book: The metaphor is both a product of the field and useful in its meaning. The same can be said of Dawdy's terminology of "critical nostalgia," which is drawn from Boym's categorizations of nostalgia that didn't quite fit with what Dawdy was looking at in the field. I sympathize with this: This is similar to what happened to me in my research in Rome. It was often mentioned to me that Rome was a palimpsest and although some of it is, what I was really interested in was what didn't fit with the palimpsest metaphor, so I found a new metaphor, brecciation, to explain what was going on. The point is that when one is embedded in place, there are

observations, experiences that give character to a place, so it is important to be attuned to how the field helps us broaden our understandings and that we find words—or metaphors—to adequately communicate our findings, and hopefully at the same time transmit our excitement and enthusiasm about the place.

There's a lot to say about this book, but my commentary focuses on two themes: spirituality and heritage. First, let me explore spirituality by engaging with ghosts, as they are mentioned numerous times throughout the book. Dawdy points out that "The past is both spectral and real in New Orleans" (p. 8). Ghosts aren't strange in this city, and they're not part of some other; they are amidst the mundane. There is an interview excerpt with Brenda in the book that I enjoyed that describes a familiar ghost every time they smell cigarette smoke—because none of the living people there smoke. They talk to the ghost, and say things like "Could you lay off the cigarettes now?" This anecdote is mentioned by Dawdy as being brought up in a "matter-of-fact way" (p. 75). For me, this is indicative of the normality of the paranormal (Pile 2005; del Pilar Blanco and Peeren 2013). This is similar to research I was involved in on spiritualism in Stoke-on-Trent where people experience everyday life in a particular way when they can see, hear, and feel spirit within it. In the book, there's a recognition that New Orleans has a gothic reputation (p. 76). There is an eeriness appeal that has always been present throughout literature and tourism in the city: The dead are part of life in New Orleans. They live in the same houses, and they give meaning to some of them. Some interviewees think that New Orleanians "seem more sensitive to the paranormal" (p. 77). In the book, the association with ghosts and the paranormal is often brought back to the materiality of the city—so there are ghosts because of the preservation of the architecture, because of the heirlooms and the artefacts, and this is perhaps because of the material focus of the book.

This brings me to the section on the fetish on page 137. Although there is an appreciation in this section that says that anthropology has always been fascinated by other worlds and therefore by the ontological, there is a sense that the argument around the antique fetish highlights one particular ontological in New Orleans: one that sees objects as being animate, with "mana" as one interviewee puts it. So I was wondering this: What about other ontologies, such as how are objects vehicles to understanding spirituality, and how would the metaphor of patina relate to this? This again comes from doing research with spiritualists where an object never possesses oneself or has spirit within itself because objects are simply a tangible way for spirit communication to be evidenced. One of the ques-

tions I have is whether objects would be seen differently through people's spirituality, and that this line of questioning during interviews might pose a challenge when taking into consideration the contingencies of ontologies in place.

As much as patina is about layers through the acknowledgment that archaeological evidence is categorized through a stratigraphic time frame, there is also a recognition in the book that the past is present and binds people to certain times and traditions. One thing that the focus on the material—specifically the French material—does is to bring back the focus on a past, a past that is originally French, a Quarter that is French, an area that is historically associated with the core of New Orleans. In a way, the focus on French artefacts and French objects is a selection process, and as we know, selecting, collecting, and ordering is part of heritage practices. These practices can take mundane items like the old rouge faience pots and give them unique status and attribute value to them. This potentially exemplifies and reaffirms a particular type of New Orleans and gives it that aura of antique French fetish. Yet as Dawdy points out, the city is not just French; there are other influences that make up New Orleans because there is a “foggy sense of pastness” (p. 60). This brings me to my second theme: heritage.

Heritage, mentioned a few times in the book, is a slippery concept (Harrison 2013) because it is often associated with tradition, preservation, and conservation. These terms are mostly tied to a fixed past: a specific period, a particular architecture, and the desire to arrest time through materiality. As we know, there's been an eagerness in the last decade to move toward a critical heritage perspective (Harrison 2013) that destabilizes these notions and appreciates that heritage is not just about the past, but also about acknowledging how perceptions of the past change over time. In other words, heritage is not necessarily a fixed, bound entity; it is mutable, and so are its materials. This is especially true when faced with destruction.

Hurricane Katrina is described as a rupture by Dawdy, an event that cut through time and destabilized a continuity, a habitus. Through this rupture, there is a fear that takes hold: a fear of losing the material that evidences tradition, preservation, and identity with particular pasts (pp. 63, 141). What drew my attention is the mention of Katrina provoking four alternative futures for New Orleans (p. 63): (1) a Pompeii frozen in a moment of death, (2) a reconstructed Disneyland or Vegas-type faux imitation of its former self, (3) a phoenix rising from the ashes with a renewed sense of cultural value, and (4) that New Orleans might just return to a version of its old self, with its stubborn social stratigraphy of economic and racial disparity.

One could posit that all of these alternatives are in some way happening, and have been happening for a long time in various parts of New Orleans. Although “the future” is a period of time that remains undefined and that might provoke an anxiety toward uncertainty, there are various ways to cope with this uncertainty, such as collecting objects as a form of archiving for the future—as interviewees Harry and Margaret mention on page 135. Yet amidst the uncertainty for the future and the fear of loss, it is often forgotten how persistent New Orleans has been throughout these ruptures, such as fires and hurricanes, that have occurred and reoccurred in the city since 1718. One of my favorite sentences in the book is on page 30: “Peter lives in a neighbourhood that has both changed and not changed.” This is something that touches on familiarity and tradition as well as notions of transformation. The metaphor of patina could potentially play with these concepts, and capture more prominently the variegated entities (living and nonliving) that are combined in producing familiarity through change. It is the balancing of these concepts that I think creates a link to the past and a process of becoming—perhaps by creating new memories and heritages for the future, a process that is ongoing and never finished.

For me, this book is a valuable addition to deploying a metaphor that provides a New Orleanian twist to cities seen as a chronological layering of time, a palimpsest. There is a lot of merit in appreciating the ways that objects can have an effect on place. By the end, though, I could not help thinking that the book attempts to suggest that there is more to it than this. If there is, then one way to move forward might be through the two themes I set out in my commentary: first, through a more profound appreciation of spirituality, and second, to adopt a more critical assessment of heritage that could be useful in engaging with the tensions that shape New Orleans. These tensions speak to the city's diversity, highlighting how changing (as well as familiar, persistent, and divided) it can be, as it combines religions, spiritualities, and ethnicities. Recognizing this diversity would decentralize the French Quarter and perhaps “defetishize” the antique Frenchness it is associated with. It would also move perceptions away from its imperial past to appreciate how, through time, New Orleans and New Orleanians have been decolonizing themselves.

Commentary by Tim Edensor , School of Science and the Environment, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK.

As a teenager, my first experience of backpacking abroad took me to small village in a quiet valley in France's Cen-

tral Massif. The locals were preparing for a festival the next day. Bunting marked out areas of play and fairground attractions were being erected. I walked up the steep valley side to gain a view of the whole village, and walked down again, hearing the sweet chirruping of birds and the soft clanging of machines being assembled. As I reached the village, an unholy racket streamed out of a gigantic speaker situated in a field. Blasting across the landscape at high volume were the massively distorted strains of the Animals' "House of the Rising Sun." The vivid memory of hearing this incongruous, deformed, overamplified rock classic in the quietude of this bucolic rural setting has served as the soundtrack for my progress through *Patina*, a recurrent refrain that resonates with the repeatedly reemerging mythic tale of the long-vanished brothel to which the song pays homage. I emphasize this powerful stimulus to my own memory to highlight how powerful texts that engage the heart and mind can conjure up a tumble of associations of other times and places, allowing ideas and impressions to alight in other geographical contexts.

Shannon Lee Dawdy has written a book that scrutinizes the material culture of one city, New Orleans, but also introduces a battery of ideas that help us consider how more broadly, relations with the past are being reconfigured as disillusionment with commodity-capitalism spreads. Dawdy's love for New Orleans shines through her far from dry academic account. Although rich in theoretical provocations, a cavalcade of stories, things, and local characters emerge across the book's pages, supplemented by a host of evocative material fragments that are unearthed by digging down into the earth at selective sites. These bountiful empirical examples are assembled to reveal locally circulating histories of New Orleans that rebuke and resist the reductive presentations of the heritage industry and the commodification of the city's past.

Succeeding chapters draw on these expressions of historical identity to explore these distinctively local configurations of relating to the past. Locals embellish both well-worn and obscure tales; in fabulating and surmising, they swerve away from reiterating the fixed versions of heritage that shape New Orleans as a tourist product while contributing to the production of a vital, storied sense of place. Dawdy shows how this is further articulated by their deep fascination with the city's old houses, and in their enthusiasm for French things that are replete with associations of bohemian sensuality, historical romance, and worldliness in contradistinction to the puritanism and pragmatism of other U.S. cities. This sense of exception also resonates through the circulation and curation of antique souvenirs, keepsakes, and heirlooms. Such items often possess little

monetary value and are of dubious authenticity, yet they solicit intense emotions, conjuring up family histories, long-deceased figures, and archaic styles that are collectively shared by many residents.

A key notion in *Patina* is critical nostalgia. Nostalgia is often characterized as a sentimental looking back toward an imagined, idealized past, signifying a conservative refusal to face the advent of social change. Yet as Dawdy convincingly argued, nostalgia is multiple in its manifestations and might express more progressive, even utopian impulses in mobilizing critical perspective toward the seductiveness of the continuously new that pervades U.S. life. Negative appraisals of nostalgia also fail to take account of concerns that things of value might be lost, and that durable elements transcend the contingencies of fashion and style. In challenging those taste makers who assert what is of value, foregrounding the novel and the "cutting edge," residents of New Orleans persistently value the outmoded, the worn, and the shabby in collectively proclaiming a unique aesthetics of place.

Pervading Dawdy's discussion is an overriding concern to demonstrate that time is multiple and heterogeneous and can never be encapsulated by reductive narratives about progress and the over and done with. Meanings shift, involuntary memories unexpectedly surge, habits are replayed but also mutate, things slowly decay and suddenly vanish, objects and ideas disappear and reappear, historical tales are retold and embellished, and material debris that might be modern, ancient, or indeterminate mingles promiscuously. Dawdy suggests that the reiterations through which elements of the past congeal and reemerge in peculiar combinations is integral to the social stratigraphy of New Orleans. Certain refrains conjure up the baleful period of slavery; venerable furnishings, garments, old phrases, and myths circulate among the city's inhabitants. These intensely social, shared engagements with the past are supplemented by that which is unearthed in the material stratigraphy of the city, embedded in the city's ground.

These notions of the stratigraphic and the ways in which they reveal a fragmentary history of the city are fascinating. The layering of the matter of the cities is deposited in various ways and at various times in certain kinds of spaces. This brings me on to the role of the nonhuman in the material constitution of the city. Although Dawdy acknowledges that in defining social stratigraphy she means that "human and non-human elements of the landscape are conformed, layered and deep" (p. 45), the nonhuman rather disappears from the story. This is particularly curious when we consider that Katrina—maybe partly attributable to human actions but nonetheless a mighty nonhuman

force—will have also contributed to this material deposition of layers, stripping away some layers while adding layers of silt and detritus elsewhere.

The nonhuman is also peculiarly absent in discussions about patina. Again, Katrina will have contributed to the ongoing production of New Orleans's patina, coating buildings with muck and scouring surfaces, and once more, Dawdy recognizes this in identifying what she calls "Katrina patina." Yet we obtain little sense of this vital force in the coconstituting the city's patina. Indeed, in her brief genealogical excursus into the meanings of patina, the nonhuman agencies that are largely responsible for the appearance of patina are neglected. Patina arises due to the actions of water, temperature, air, pollutants, chemicals, insects, mosses, and birds, as well as the material properties of building materials and coatings that have been used in construction. Such multiple agencies produce distinctive patinated forms. Indeed, processes of decay in general are productive of the individuation of materialities and objects. In research I carried out several years ago that focused on the aesthetics and histories of British industrial ruins, manufactured objects that littered loading bays and had been made as uniform, standardized commodities that were identical in appearance. Through processes of decay, however, each item had taken on a highly distinctive, singular appearance, escaping the realm of the homogeneous (Edensor 2005).

In further considering patina, it is also important to consider how it can contribute to the aesthetics of a commodified style. For patina can be curated. In Melbourne's trendy suburb of Fitzroy and in the gold towns of Victoria, patina has become an integral feature of gentrification. The distressed surfaces of hotels, shops, and cafes have not been covered in shiny new paint, but retain surfaces characterized by peeling paint, faded advertisements, and discoloration despite the expensive items and services retailed within. This surface texture has become part of a postindustrial chic that transmits the allure of historical depth, urban grittiness, and characterful locale. Whatever the carefully devised aesthetics and instrumental reasons for this curation, however, patina remains excessive. It retains the potential to conjure up a faraway world in which such textures emerged and were produced, marking age and the passage of time and provoking imagination.

Finally, I want to commend how Dawdy celebrates indeterminacy, a much-neglected quality across the social sciences. Perhaps one of the sites that she and her team excavated was indeed the original House of the Rising Sun, but maybe not. This acceptance of indeterminacy speaks back to the archaeological disposition to expertly identify,

categorize, and classify everything that is discovered. Yet so much is unknowable. I particularly enjoy the speculative approach of the book, a conjectural form of enquiry that must be adopted in endeavoring to account for the unfathomable. This also resonates with my work on industrial ruins, for during my visits to derelict factories, I came across a range of objects that were wholly inscrutable: commodities never sent, parts of things never assembled, residues and off-cuts of the industrial process (Edensor 2005). In *Patina*, besides providing compelling accounts that identify the significant ways in which the city's residents engage with its past, Dawdy shows that the potent mysteries of New Orleans's history continue to enchant visitors and inhabitants.

Commentary by Bradley Garrett, School of Geosciences, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia.

About a decade ago, I worked on an archaeological excavation in Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula. We had been trenching systematic squares into a 1,200-year-old Maya Village site, pulling hundreds of pottery shards out of the ground every day. The excitement of discovery had long worn off . . . until I drew a random shard with a fingerprint on it. Suddenly, I was connected to the person who had made that particular pot, with his or her very human hands, many generations before I was alive. This visceral connection to the past is what many archaeologists seek, and patina, what Shannon Lee Dawdy beautifully describes as *the stain of time*, often acts as a conduit to those moments.

In *A Profane Archaeology*, the city of New Orleans is refracted through the lens of a "compounded temporality" of "heterogeneous time," in Dawdy's words. This temporality is Proustian—time juts out at unexpected angles, complicating simple linear or cyclical cultural narratives. Patina is also imagined here as more than material, in the ways it acts at the intersection of "time, materiality, and the social imaginary." Given her background, it might be unsurprising that Dawdy's archaeological and ethnographic investigations remain rooted in the past, but I would suggest they also work to frame the future with a particular political potency.

As an archaeologist turned cultural geographer, what kept occurring to me as I moved through the book was that as much as the past is inevitably part of the present, patina also acts as promise. This promise is a *memento mori*, an assurance of entropy and decay that is ever more salient under the orderly regimes of late capitalism enrolled in

creating spatial illusions that defy entropy, and thus attempt to deny us the ability to inscribe places with our own fleeting human presence. As Dawdy points out toward the end of the book, a Freudian read on human consciousness would suggest that it is a process of iterating scarification. Thus, these seemingly atemporal places being created, whether we think about the airport terminal, the shopping mall, the central business district, or the privatized public square, attempt to erase patina—time scars—in favor of illusory timelessness. What is missing from those places is what Dawdy describes as a “social stratigraphy”—the writing in the soil, metaphorical or otherwise, created by our experiences, that archaeologists and cultural geographers endeavor to read, albeit in slightly different ways. What interests me most about this idea is that when people become encircled by places where social inscription is discouraged, masked, and actively erased, many begin to fetishize patina, to the point that even apocalyptic imaginaries take on an exotic allure.

An entire genre of postapocalyptic art has sprung up in the past few decades, where the supposedly patina-free city has transformed into a swamp or a desert, the ribs of buildings quietly persisting at jaunty angles as future monuments to the hubris of the present. I am thinking here of the work of artists like Liam Young and the clutch of CliFi (climate fiction) novels that have been taken up by so many readers, but also of film and video game ruin imaginaries. We like to imagine, in these scenarios, that the fabric of society has unraveled, unveiling a poststate utopia. Yet the most terrifying part of those apocalyptic imaginations is the thought that the supposedly atemporal spaces dominating the core of our cities are simply nodes in a network, and so the destruction of the city is irrelevant. The placeless logic of perpetual evacuation means that the wealthy elite who once criss-crossed the glass bridges between buildings have simply been airlifted to a location not underwater while the rest of us are left to contemplate the soggy ruins. Solnit's (2009) heartbreaking account of the Hurricane Katrina aftermath in *A Paradise Built in Hell* makes it all too clear that the inequality we live with on a daily basis became a deadly political force during and after that storm.

That being said, many of the ever-resilient citizens of New Orleans did see this destruction as a cycle of renewal; it acted as a reminder to those who have lost faith, or never had it, in current sociopolitical configurations, that capitalism is a fragile fiction. In the most evocative section of *Patina*, Dawdy suggests that the artifacts of Mardi Gras—plastic coins and jewels—pity “the impoverished rationalism of Protestant capitalism.” At the end of the day, each person can walk away with an armful of booty, having

“committed no crime nor real labour.” This wealth then becomes junk, stuffed into trash bags in the corners of Creole cottages, eventually entering into the subterranean archaeological matrix to begin taking on a different kind of value while they lie in wait to time-travel some future archaeologist, just as that fingerprinted shard did for me. The patina of time, whether of slow entropy or the overnight ruination that created “Katrina Patina,” are each in their own way indications that an age of integration has given way to an age of disintegration, as it always has and as it always must.

The danger, of course, in romanticizing patina is that it itself becomes a commodity and is enrolled into the very system it once revealed as farce. This is a tension found in the ruin photography of urban explorers, for instance, where the experience of exploration, very much a search for patina, is relayed through a photograph that becomes increasingly severed from the experience as it circulates online, enrolled less as a *momento mori* and more as an aesthetic object valued only for its capacity to relay a sense of urban edginess or romantic ruin lust. This is the point at which *critical* nostalgia transforms into *restorative* nostalgia, Dawdy warns. I have suggested in the past, however, those images are still charged with a force—an aura, mana, or affect depending on your disciplinary background—that inspires a continued search for stains of time outside of the frame. Dawdy, in the end, agrees, suggesting that we not be so quick to dismiss any attempts to relay a sense of time-etched place, as “fake patina works just as well in some cases” to evoke a sense of pastness, to inspire further quests for it, and perhaps just as important, to relay a promise that the world always keeps: Patina will persist irrespective of our best efforts to scrub it.

Commentary by Sandra Jasper , Department of Geography, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK.

Shannon Lee Dawdy's book *Patina: A Profane Archaeology* opens with David Bowie's lyrics to “Time,” written in New Orleans in 1972, five years before he visited a place that would echo his music for a long time: West Berlin, where he recorded “Heroes” at Hansastudio in 1977. In her introduction, Dawdy argues that New Orleans shares with other cities, like Kyoto, Venice, Cairo, and Rome, an “antique aesthetic” and a temporality that works counter to the linearity of modernity, creating an appeal for visitors; an allure that endangers destroying the very unfamiliarity they are drawn to. Until very recently, Berlin was such a “slow zone.” The painting over Berlin's sand-gray, blistered façades shot through with bullet holes, and the most recent

sweeping away of improvised spaces and their alternative social imaginaries, exemplify the dangers of touristification touched on in Dawdy's book. Although not particularly "antique," Berlin's ruination has inspired geographical research on the aesthetics and politics of voids and wastelands. Excavations of material objects and buried memories have sparked readings of the city as a palimpsest. Dawdy's rich archaeologically informed study of New Orleans works through the stratigraphic layers of the city in a similar way. Thus, *Patina* exceeds the peculiarities of New Orleans. It is a book about time and the city, about the aesthetic sensibility of material things worn out, used, passed on, and tarnished, and the social imaginaries and lived experiences of New Orleans.

It is difficult in a brief book review forum to account for the exceptional number of stories and places on which the author draws. This long-term project brings together years of ethnographic and archival research, archaeological field work, and the personal experience of living in the city and working in the context of public archaeology and historic preservation. We move through many of Dawdy's excavation sites—physical places and archival sources—that propel the city's colonial past into the present. We encounter extracts of interviews with more than thirty informants, most of whom are invested in the themes of the book. They share a sensibility for antiques and collecting local things, or are in some way involved in heritage and tourism.

The idea of patina is invoked in several ways. Patina exists as a trace of watermarks, mold, and dirt left by the flood waves of Hurricane Katrina on the homes of New Orleans's citizens. Some residents keep a section of their wall unpainted, preserving a layer of "Katrina Patina" as an intimate memorial; others painted over the marks and wounds of the recent past. Although Dawdy begins her book with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina that interweaves every chapter and appears in most extracts of conversations—such as the antique dealer Tom, who moves from talking about the patina of old clocks to the gray and desolate surfaces of the post-Katrina landscape—its overall temporality and spatiality is not one of rupture and dislocation, as one would expect of a study of a city coping with the impact of a more than natural disaster. Rather, patina works as "critical nostalgia," a form of resistance or survival strategy providing a sense of place and continuity in the face of radical urban change caused by economic, political, and climatic forces that exceed beyond the local scale.

The conceptual framework developed in the introductory chapter and resumed in the conclusion is built around the idea of patina as an affective surface materializing different temporalities. The chapter "Ruins and Heterogeneous

Time," for example, uses the archaeological excavation of remnants of the Duplessis Plantation house of a former French colonial indigo plantation razed to the ground by mill developers in the late nineteenth century as an entry point to develop the idea that ruins and objects covered with patina create a sense of heterogeneous time. The colonial and industrial pasts are two of many stratigraphic layers embedded in the site. We learn how environmental and colonial trajectories have contributed to shifting ideas of good and bad patina. Whereas Dawdy productively uses the idea of patina to foreground the social relativity of time, patina's material force, its environmental agency, remains understudied throughout the book. If patina simultaneously refers to a quaint look and to the flourishing of health-threatening mold, how are we to differentiate different types of patina on different kinds of objects? To address the chemical, environmental, and biophysical dimensions of patina, Dawdy's research could have productively drawn on recent work on the nonhuman agency of environmental toxins, for example, the study of low-level chemical exposures in built environments by the U.S. historian Murphy (2006). I would have also liked to learn more about how social, environmental, meteorological, and climatic temporalities intersect. In the aftermath of Katrina, how is the city of New Orleans engaging with the future? Are projections of climate change and future flooding considered in contemporary urban planning and heritage discourses?

The underlying question of the book is what holds the city together despite its divides along lines of race, class, gender, religion, and ethnicity. Here, patina works as a political tool that "does two powerful things. It critiques and it bonds" (p. 143). Building on Boym's conceptual framings of nostalgia, Dawdy develops her evocative idea of "critical nostalgia" to emphasize how the nostalgia invoked through patina is an active "political force flowing through alternative circuits of value" (p. 7). This force can activate the past to transform the present. Although Dawdy's focus on the bonding capacity of patina develops a hopeful idea of New Orleans, it also leaves us wondering about absences, conflicts, and counternarratives. At times, snippets of alternative stories appear in the book. In Chapter 3, "A Haunted House Society," which focuses on the history and politics of tourism and historic preservation emerging in the midcentury in the French Quarter, Dawdy points out that although the urban fabric of the Quarter dates to the time of slave markets, the historical facts provided to tourists are often obscured. The story of college student Isaiah who failed to rescue his grandmother's house in the Lower Ninth Ward—an area with more than 90 percent African American inhabitants before Katrina—from demolition makes a critical point that preservation is not a

singular story of tourism and increasing real estate value. Preservation is also deeply engrained with racial politics as the “forces of white gentrification” (p. 65) and hampering bureaucracy made the preservation of this particular house impossible. Isaiah’s critical nostalgia was only initiated after Katrina. “I never really thought about those things, what a house could mean, or what artifacts could mean or what being in that geographic location just looking at everything could mean” (p. 65). Such narratives give us an idea of the uneven politics of patina that needs to be more deeply engaged with. In which ways is patina infused with class, race, and gender? As a material force, patina not only invokes a sense of place and bonding, but also conflict and divisions, especially considering how poorer black communities have been disproportionately affected by Katrina, and considering contemporary racial politics in the United States more generally. Here, seminal studies on environmental racism, such as Bullard’s (1990) *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* can productively inform Dawdy’s work.

There is also an absence of counterstories to the official narrative of New Orleans. We learn that even though the city went through various cycles of destruction and rebuilding prior to Katrina, locals imagine the French colonial past as stable. “The French Quarter is not even French” (p. 5), as archaeological and archival insights reveal. In which ways is the role of colonialism in the marketing of the city contested by heritage professionals and residents aware of the politics of the social construction of time?

An intriguing section of the book focuses on the connections between memory and the olfactory city through the examples of perfume and trees. New Orleans flora incites a “shared scentscape” (p. 100) that evokes strong memories. The presence of trees surviving the storm and predating the informant Agatha’s residence alludes again to different intersecting temporalities, such as seasonal variations or botanical time, that could be included in the idea of “critical nostalgia.” The question of how the senses, the vegetal city, and urban memory intersect in the context of radical urban change is one of the many avenues for future research this book inspires.

Throughout the book, we encounter a range of concepts and thinkers: mana, fetish, heterotopia, orientalism, milieu de memoire, imperialist nostalgia, affect, Benjamin, Durkheim, Freud, Einstein, Levi-Strauss, Foucault, Rosaldo, and Nora, to name just a few. At times, these concepts and thinkers appear disconnected from the very rich empirical narrative. We are left to wonder how these different concepts relate to and are challenged by a translation to the specific case of New Orleans. How do Benjamin’s

twentieth-century reflections on nineteenth-century Paris relate to contemporary New Orleans? There are tensions at play between the environmental, affective, and sensorial conceptions of patina and the idea that patina is a vehicle of critical nostalgia. Although the core of the book is informed by a material culture approach that draws on Marxian and psychoanalytic work, productive exchanges with nonhuman conceptions of agency and object-oriented ontologies could be further explored. These tensions provoke interesting avenues for future inquiry that the fascinating case of the patina of New Orleans has a lot to say about.

Commentary by Samuel Merrill , Department of Sociology, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden.

Before reading Shannon Lee Dawdy’s *Patina: A Profane Archaeology*, my image of New Orleans was mostly restricted to snapshots of its perennial Mardi Gras celebrations and the news broadcasts that captured the tragedy of the thousands of lives lost in August 2005 as a consequence of Hurricane Katrina and the flooding it caused. In this respect I was probably quite characteristic of many of the millions of people drawn to the city annually, including, no doubt, many of those scholars who attended the AAG Annual Meeting in April 2018. Should I ever visit the city, I expect my encounters with it to be shaped by *Patina*, prefigured by the many memories in absentia that the book conveys. For this I am grateful, not least because Dawdy’s book successfully pairs academic precision with readability while provocatively pointing to lines of inquiry ripe for further exploration.

In pursuit of her goal to understand New Orleans and its residents’ fascination with patina, Dawdy introduces her readers to a diverse array of places, things, people, and narratives in four empirically rich and analytically rigorous chapters, which are individually focused on the heterogeneous times of landmark sites, the city’s vernacular houses and their ghosts, “French” consumables turned artefacts, and antique collectors and their fetishes. These chapters are preceded by an introduction that establishes nostalgia and not only patina as one of Dawdy’s central conceptual terrains while revealing the eclectic application of sociological, anthropological, and psychoanalytical theories that comes to characterize the book as a whole. Benjamin’s *aura*, Ruskin’s *stains of time*, Freud’s *fetish*, and Durkheim’s notion of *mana* feature here, joined in places and later by the ideas of Marx and scholars including Levi-Strass, Foucault, Said, Nora, Lowenthal, Bourdieu, Boym, and Douglas. In theoretical terms the book itself is thus deeply stratified. Dawdy emphasizes the oldest layers of this conceptual

matrix to great effect, although the informed reader might have wished for more engagement with more recent academic works of relevance. Some such works do appear in the endnotes, helping to position Dawdy's approach within the growing subfields of contemporary archaeology and, more peripherally, critical heritage studies, even if her analysis is perhaps most reminiscent of historical archaeology. This position is also illustrated by Dawdy's methodological approach, which although revolving around a series of archaeological excavations carried out between 1995 and 2011, also relies on in-depth archival and literary research and thirty-two ethnographic interviews with New Orleans residents. Although the book's empirical chapters differ in the degree to which they use these methods, collectively they reveal some of the methodological commonalities shared by contemporary and historical archaeology and cultural, historical, and urban geography.

Indeed, there is much to be taken from *Patina* by geographers, and not just in terms of its interdisciplinary approach and use of those classic works already regularly applied within geography. For example, Dawdy's reference to New Orleans's multiple, palimpsestic, and heterogeneous space-times resonates with many of the geographic discussions surrounding the spatial production of memory and heritage in cities. More than this, Dawdy's attention to patina in its social and material sense and her findings regarding its ability to critique commodity capitalism and unite individuals and objects by inviting forms of "critical nostalgia" draws such discussions into new scales and surfaces of analysis. Furthermore, by allocating analytical influence to patinated things—including artefacts, antiques, heirlooms, and collectables—and connecting these to modes of individual and collective feeling and experience via, for example, spiritual notions of mana, numen, and fetish, Dawdy contributes to the neomaterialist turn in archaeology in ways that can also lend greater chronological depth and temporal complexity to the nonhuman, affective, and emotional research agendas currently pursued by many geographers. Reflecting the characteristics of those memories felt and experienced in the city, the book rejects ideas of linear chronology both conceptually and structurally, leaping between episodes spread across a 300-year time period that roughly spans 1715 to 2015. A trace of sequential temporality remains, however, in Dawdy's concept of social stratigraphy.

The idea of social stratigraphy not only has the potential to deepen geographic understandings of a city's space-times, but also offers the opportunity to integrate more critical perspectives into the study of the contemporary pasts conveyed by urban heritage and memory by capturing in-

grained and often unequal social conditions and stratifications, conditions and stratifications that in New Orleans are often characterized by a deeper social history of colonialism, orientalism, slavery, and racism. As Dawdy writes:

For generations, the majority of African Americans in New Orleans have been limited to low-paying service and labor jobs because the social landscape makes it exceedingly difficult for them to do anything else. Post-Katrina rebuilding has done little to change this pattern. The foundations of inequality laid during the colonial and antebellum periods are still settling and shifting. One could call these the social ruins of the past in which we dwell. Social stratigraphy signifies not so much a spoken-about tradition as a hard-to-shed quiet legacy that encompasses socioeconomic structures perpetuated through inheritance and an attitudinal habitus. (p. 45)

This, arguably the sharpest edge of Dawdy's social stratigraphy concept, could, however, have been more foregrounded throughout the book's empirical chapters. Its obfuscation is partly a consequence of Dawdy's writing style, which pleasingly aims to reveal an argument slowly in a manner akin to eating an artichoke (p. 19). Indeed, the book's concluding chapter does bring some redemption through, for example, the parallel discussion of the slave and antique trades. In the conclusion, though, Dawdy also notes how for some groups of New Orleans residents—often poorer, nonwhite residents—patina does not create cohesion but instead recalls trauma and as such is not venerated but shunned. The divisive capacity of patina stressed most in the book, however, places tourists and locals in opposition with regard to their recognition of authenticity while comments relating to the difference in appeal of patina to residents of neighborhoods with divergent socioeconomic statuses are more minimal. Here, an earlier engagement with the concepts of nostrophobia (the wish to escape the past) and postalgia (the longing for a better future) might have lent balance to conclusions that seem to overemphasize the positive effects of patina in ways that somewhat undermine the general critical perspective promulgated by the author.

Elsewhere in the book, reference to the concept of social stratigraphy in relation to the absence of nostalgia and examples of "bad patina" only appear fleetingly and could be critiqued for actually masking the inequalities that the concept might help reveal (pp. 107, 131). The moments when I believe the concept's critical potential comes most to the fore include those sections where Hurricane Katrina's more immediate aftermath is discussed. One of these sections relates to the demolition of the city's "projects" and "blighted" houses (pp. 63–65). It clearly reveals the limits of desirable patina and the inequitable access to such aesthetic and material privileges, yet the startling acknowledgment that public housing in the city has been reduced by 85

percent since Katrina remains consigned to an endnote. In fact, most of Dawdy's discussion, although illuminating and noteworthy, relates primarily to periods outside of the immediate post-Katrina years and often to those parts of the city that sustained more minor flood damage and had their recuperation prioritized due to their role within the tourist industry. For example, the French Quarter is spotlighted to such an extent that when readers are directed to reject Lowenthal's famous contention that the past is a foreign country, they are somewhat justified in believing it to be a foreign neighborhood instead.

The book's focus on just a handful of the city's seventy-two neighborhoods means it struggles to convey the spatial complexity of New Orleans, a shortcoming that might be particularly noted by those readers unfamiliar with the city, who at times might struggle to locate the numerous places that Dawdy discusses. This might have been avoided through the inclusion of some maps. This simple measure might also have helped convey how the social and indeed racial segregation of the city is vertical as much as it is horizontal, correlating with topographical elevation (BondGraham 2007). The French Quarter stands on higher ground than many of the more badly hit neighborhoods like Broadmoor, which lies in the "bottom of the bowl" and the Lower Ninth Ward, which Dawdy does refer to, albeit less frequently. Years after Katrina, hand-painted signs could be found in the latter berating the disaster tourists that passed through to view the damage without stopping.

Given the book's introductory focus on Katrina and its cover description, I had expected the post-Katrina cleanup and restoration to feature more prominently in Dawdy's exercise and could not shake thoughts of studying patina more closely in areas beyond the city's main tourist circuits and in the moments, days, weeks, months, and years immediately after August 2005. Inspired by Dawdy's meticulous handling of more historical periods, I wanted to know more about the "Katrina patina" of these more recent time frames to understand how it might have divided city residents, even when popularly conceived as a unifying force. An example that hints toward this capacity of patina relates to an element of New Orleans that is truly expected to connect: its public transport network.

Transport networks, as I have tried to show elsewhere, are wrought with social memories (Merrill 2017), and New Orleans with its famously antique St. Charles Avenue streetcar line is no exception. Although the city's vintage (and most patinated) streetcars avoided damage, the network as a whole was hit hard by the flooding and only returned to full service in late 2007. Until then buses took over many

streetcar services. Thereafter, however, the transport authority prioritized the extension of the streetcar network, partly because of its status as a defining part of the city's fabric, and a decade after the storm bus frequency and services remained far below pre-Katrina levels. At the same time as this disadvantaged the city's poorest bus-using residents, distances to returning streetcar stops influenced the city's reconstruction and led to the displacement of residential land uses by commercial properties (Guthrie and Fan 2013). This example highlights clearly how decisions informed in part by heritage values can contribute to the process of gentrification. Dawdy occasionally refers to gentrification and her work implicitly reveals how Katrina, like other ruptures in other cities, presented opportunities to accelerate socioeconomic urban change, but still more research is needed on how patina and indeed archaeological and heritage practices more generally can become complicit in such processes (see BondGraham 2007).

Dawdy's positioning of Katrina as the most recent of a series of ruptures that have led to the city's antique and patinated identity thus potentially underplays the influence of today's advanced state of neoliberal capitalism. In short, is it fair to say that sorts of patina valued, preserved, or manufactured after Katrina are equal in their defiance of commodity capitalism as those that followed earlier ruptures in the city's history? Answering this and comparable questions could ultimately complicate the rather optimistic view of patina presented by Dawdy in the book's conclusion and indicate further how although patina might help critique the logics of commodity capitalism, it is not necessarily immune to them. Numerous anecdotal examples from across the world suggest this is already the case, with patina now contributing not only to a commoditized postindustrial style but also a marketable aesthetic of informality, borrowed by Global North countries from those in the Global South, as exemplified by distressed driftwood furniture and eateries clad in reclaimed corrugated iron. For those interested in exploring such themes and questions further, *Patina* will unquestionably provide an important starting point, and for provoking and supporting these avenues of reflection Dawdy should be commended.

Response by Shannon Lee Dawdy, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL.

In New Orleans cuisine there is sort of an unwritten rule that you can stuff just about anything—crab claws, mirleton squash, eggplant, and even artichokes. Stuffed artichokes become, through a Sicilian-inspired treatment with

breadcrumbs, lemon, and olive oil, quite large. They are meant to be shared. This might seem a strange way to begin a response that is about a book that is not about food. A metaphor I used in the preface of *Patina*, however, was the artichoke—the argument of the book unfolds leaf by leaf. It was in part an apology to readers that they needed to be patient, that the sweetest stuff comes at the end. Now this metaphor is returning to me, transformed through the generosity of the act of reading and reviewing provided by my geographer colleagues. My artichoke has been made bigger, and shareable. I cannot overstate what a humbling honor it is to have attentive readers, however few and however critical they might be.

I am also grateful for the opportunity to return to the book that I turned over to the publisher nearly three years ago because a lot has happened in that time. The way in which my attentions in that book are squeezed between two ruptures—Hurricane Katrina and the Trump election of 2016—speak to the social relativity of time that is one of the book's themes. On the one hand, as I was putting the finishing touches on the final text, a “Katrina exhaustion” was creasing the brows of long-term New Orleans residents. The events tied to the tenth anniversary of the disaster in 2015 were met with a mix of outrage, scorn, and avoidance (many people simply left town). Only politicians seemed eager to talk about “resilience.” Most locals I spoke with talked about trauma and triggers. As Samuel Merrill notes, I could have done more to make the book about the aftereffects of Katrina, but I think I was sensitive (and susceptible) to that exhaustion, and unsure how durable any reflections would be on that brief but intense period.

Also in that year the (in some ways) surprising economic and demographic rebound of the city was just beginning to turn into a publicly acrimonious debate over gentrification. Not unrelatedly, Airbnb's portfolio more than doubled between 2014 and 2015, fueling widespread real estate speculation and commercialization of residential neighborhoods. In city council meetings over the last two years, residents have fought over the pros and cons of short-term rentals, but local long-termers appear to be winning, with waves of stricter regulations being rolled out. Still, New Orleans has gone from being one of the most affordable to one of the most expensive cities in the United States in terms of the ratio between medium income and housing cost. Rents in many neighborhoods are up 70 percent, even as wages are stagnant. As one friend, a musician and manager of a popular coffee spot, recently put it, “The only thing that hasn't gone up since the storm are my wages.” He now lives in a far corner of the city, squeezed between the railroad tracks

and the back of the cemeteries. I asked him what he would do if his rent went up there, too, and he said, “I don't know, I guess there's always Mississippi.”

In terms of public housing, the storm was merely a pretext for accelerating a neoliberal “reform” initiated under the Clinton administration to drastically reduce the number and type of units nationwide. In New Orleans, even if all the proposed replacement units are eventually constructed, they will comprise less than 40 percent of the pre-Katrina number. The topic of public housing and the history of segregation in the city is a book unto itself—an excellent one that I knew was in the works (see Gray forthcoming).

As Sandra Jasper notes, I mention but don't dwell on the counternarratives of “negative patina.” Locally, people don't find old things showing their age to be ugly per se, but some might associate them with trauma. As Samuel Merrill intuitively, there are strains of “nostrophobia” among a subset of my informants. *Patina*—or the signs of wear and tear—can reference not only past times, but painful times. This is obvious with the stains of Katrina itself. Some residents were quick to repair and paint over the scars and others wanted to curate them as a sign of what they had been through, and what had brought them together (see Dawdy forthcoming).

If I have one regret in terms of the decisions of emphasis I made with *Patina* it is with regard to racial disparities. The slow disaster of race in the United States erupted, as it periodically does, like a volcano with the Trump election. There are several reasons I did not center my attention on this kind of negative patina—the look of age as the sign of slavery and its reverberations through social stratigraphy. The first is another kind of exhaustion. The media storm after the levee breaks had made New Orleans the poster child for racial abandonment in the United States. A flood of academic and journalistic treatments of the city assessed and projected the many national problems of race against the backdrop of the city. Sometimes they were right; sometimes they ignored or vulgarized everything that is unique about it. Nevertheless, I wasn't sure that there was anything I could add. The second reason is that my informants themselves, who were about half white and half black, did not want to talk about race. Despite its prominence in the headlines, it is still not a topic that people like to discuss in face-to-face conversation. It is impolite and uncomfortable. They usually redirected me. I didn't push it, but I can assure the reader that I extracted all I could on the subject and put it into the book. Should I have pushed harder, pursued more interviews to extract the connection between race and historic preservation, for example? Yes, this is some-

thing I beat myself up about now. I worry that, indeed, the book comes across as too romantic and especially naive in the shadow of the white supremacist coup of 2016.

In fact, my proffered theory of critical nostalgia, in which I argue that an aesthetic valuation of old things and certain old-timey practices are used to implicitly critique the alienation and errors of contemporary capitalist society, cannot deal with slavery and Jim Crow. There is no way to be nostalgic for slavery and at the same time be critical of the present unless you are a white supremacist (and it is worth noting that at the height of Jim Crow in the early twentieth century, historic preservation practices in the South centered on plantation houses and dressing up in Civil War hoop skirts did just that). If I didn't make it clear enough in the book, let me make it clear here: The pastness that New Orleans evokes for tourists has to be vague precisely because if it starts to veer toward historic accuracy, the past begins to look a bit ugly. As I report, tour guides commonly offer apologies and redirections ("Creoles didn't treat their slaves as bad as Americans"). The historical consciousness of slavery and how it is experienced in Southern landscapes would make a lively book-length study that I hope someone will take up.

This is not to say that slavery and the hardships of racism are entirely missing from my informants' accounts; it's just that they most often take the form of ghosts. I can't offer a statistical analysis, but the haunted history tours that ply the French Quarter feature a large number of ghosts who were once slaves—perhaps the majority. As Nadia Bartolini notes, spirits of various kinds are a strong undercurrent of the book. Although the ethereal shape of *mana* (the life force that holds sentimental residents together despite their differences) is general and positive, the spirit of negative patina usually takes the form of slaves haunting the housing projects, or the old buildings converted to hotels where they were once overworked and frequently abused. It is as if the collective unconscious is dreaming of its ongoing racial trauma: Suffering, shame, and guilt gets cathected onto enslaved ghosts. New Orleanians can't talk about race directly in the present day, but they can talk about hauntings. The present gets displaced onto the past.

The future is another theme iterated by the reviewers. I think this is one of the implications I was not aware of at the time of writing, but has since overtaken my thoughts. Samuel Merrill's other neologism, "postalgia" (or longing for a better future), can be invoked here. I think among global literati and sci-fi fans, patina and ruination have a strong association with apocalyptic futures, but ironically, this doesn't seem to be strongly the case in New Orleans.

I say ironically, because due to projected climate change and sea-level rise, the future of the city, even without another hurricane, looks bleak. Even moderate predictions by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration forecast that by 2100 New Orleans will be experiencing near daily flooding with a sea-rise of three feet. An estimated 500,000 people will have to migrate out of the metro region (the city's current population is only 391,000). I am trying to wrap my head around the deniability of the future, particularly in a state that is one of the largest crude oil producers in the country—the consumption of which is the primary cause of climate change. Added to this global injury, the brutal slicing of coastal wetlands by oil and gas pipeline canals is a contributing factor to land loss in southern Louisiana. Bradley Garrett's suggestion that, "patina also acts as promise. This promise is a *momento mori*, an assurance of entropy and decay" seems spot on, at least when viewed from afar. If through the veneration of patina New Orleanians are subtly reminding themselves about their city's dim future, they are just as quick to suppress this awareness with local boosterism. Like the history of slavery, the future of climate change is pushed down below the surface.

Finally, I am moved by Tim Edensor's resonant reflections on patina, and also by his nudge to give the nonhuman its due (although I tried to do better in a spin-off article; see Dawdy 2016). His suggestions have me thinking that I was too nervous in making much ado about the mold and wet rot, as well as the periodic disasters, that are constitutive of Louisiana's swampy climate. I was afraid people would too be quick to say, "Patina is just what happens there." It's a local phenomenon that can't be translated elsewhere. On the other hand, the particular "natural" environment of the city could very well contribute to the human emphasis on patina, not simply because it is all around and simply a material fact, but because it condenses a kind of resigned relationship to the nonhuman. In New Orleans, people seem to know that natural processes and time will eventually get the better, not just of capitalism, but of civilization. Maybe people living in slow places do, consciously or unconsciously, take the long view.

ORCID

Nadia Bartolini  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0375-9413>

Tim Edensor  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4715-6024>

Sandra Jasper  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9292-9455>

Samuel Merrill  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9572-5922>

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