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Images of ruin: Decay in a post-industrial world

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Images of Ruin.

Decay in a Post-Industrial World.

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2000

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis will examine the significance of ruin and decay in today's society, particularly the sites of industrial ruin in a post-industrial environment. It will explore the ways in which sites of ruin have been used and represented by competing cultural interests in the past and present. A focus will be on the industry of photography and its effects upon our understanding of sites of ruin, revealing possibilities for change in our aesthetic awareness of these sites. I will also include a portfolio of my own images reflecting my views and interests on a decaying industrial landscape.

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge or belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree, or
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text, or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

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Introduction

Ruins are a huge source of fascination for modern mankind, a fascination that can result in many and varied uses. They provide an aesthetic appeal for the romantics and poets, enable science to uncover their inherent secrets through archaeological processes, and provide societies with monuments they can uphold as symbols of history and continuity. Seen this way, once a structure reaches a state of ruin it does not necessarily infer that it has reached the end of the line for use and meaning but rather it has achieved a fresh state where all the various cultural implications of 'ruin' can be applied.

The Oxford Reference Dictionary (Hawkins, 1986, p. 721) provides a definition of ruin as:

1. severe damage or destruction; a destroyed or wrecked state.
2. complete loss of fortune, resources, or prospects.
3. the remains of something that has suffered ruin.

While the Oxford Reference Dictionary equates ruin as a complete loss of fortune, we can also contend that a culture may apply new values to a ruined structure that can enable a reversal in its fortune.

It is perhaps an aesthetic attraction that provides an initial fascination towards ruined objects. 'A ruin strikes a romantic chord in all of us' (1964, p. 1) writes L. Sprague De Camp in the introduction of his book that journeys through the most popular ancient ruins of the world:

Standing in the shadow of a moonlit pyramid, gazing across the battlements of a timeworn castle, or watching the sunset redden the marble columns of a Doric temple, they dream of a heroic past in which all men were mighty, all women beautiful, all life adventurous, and all problems simple. (1964, p. xv).

Although De Camp's reading may appear excessively romantic, it does provide an indication of the aesthetically attractive qualities that time bestows upon ruins, a quality that can act as a trigger for memories and thoughts for the past.

While the ruin attracts many heroic qualities for De Camp, for Romantic poets such as Percy Bysshe Shelley tragedy is an inherent element. In his poem 'Ozymandias', Shelley believed the ruined remains of a colossal monument from ancient Egypt mocked the desires of the king who once laid claim to eternity through the sculpture. Young writing on Shelley's poetry says 'all that remains of the monument are two vast trunkless legs of stone that form a "colossal wreck" taken over by sand. The dramatic quality of the ruined monument [evoked] both the tragic loss of the past as well as the hubris in believing one could survive through time' (1998, p. 274). The ruin for Shelley was an

iconic symbol of the way of all things, namely, nothing lasts forever, neither man nor his creations.

Ruins, as indicators of the passing of time often refer to ancient structures from antiquity and beyond. However buildings, monuments and other structures do not require centuries of time to begin showing signs of decay and ruin. More recently the passing of the industrial age has allowed symptoms of decay to inhabit many industrial regions throughout the world. Marx (in Berman, 1982, p. 20) recognised these forces of ruin at work back in the throes of the industrial revolution:

On the one hand there have started into life industrial and scientific forces which no human history had ever suspected. On the other hand, there exist symptoms of decay, far surpassing the horrors of the latter times of the Roman Empire.

These symptoms still remain as the wheels of industry turn again, away from the factories of mass production experienced by Marx towards the offices of segmented production which gather and transfer information (Jencks, 1989, p. 47), resulting, in some cases, large areas of industrial ruin and decay. As an example, the heavily industrialised Ruhr region in Germany has been a virtual graveyard for the equipment and structures from that country's once vibrant industrial heartland (Dettmar, 1999, p. 34).

Political change can also be the demise of buildings and spaces. The resurrection of the Berlin Wall at the height of the Cold War and its subsequent fall three decades later represents the changing political landscape for the German capital. This political revolution has created areas of ruin and decay along the former frontier of communism and capitalism.

Ruins created by recent political and industrial changes often do not contain the romantic notions of beauty and mystery attributed to those from the Ancients. Yet the meanings attributed to them can be just as significant, if not more so, as they speak of recent times and spaces, spaces in which we have lived in and used within our own lifetime. Brian Ladd questions why Berlin is special: 'certainly not for its beauty or its state of preservation. Berlin is fascinating, rather, as a city of bold gestures and startling incongruities, of ferment and destruction. It is a city whose buildings, ruins, and voids groan under the burden of painful memories' (1997, p. 3). Ladd attributes the importance of these spaces precisely because 'they are the symbols and the repositories of memory' (1997, p. 4). They are spaces that represent competing and collective identities.

Similarly, spaces of industrial ruin often provide little encouragement for their preservation on a purely aesthetic level. As an example, the Heritage Council of Western Australia (1994, p.1) in its assessment of the East Perth power station wrote 'there is no obvious evidence that the power station is generally valued for its aesthetic qualities'. It, too, would derive value not from appearances, but rather from recognised social and historical values. Whether other structures from our industrial period continue to survive will depend on the strength of such perceived values.

The role of photography as an industry of aesthetics would seem to have a limited role in recording sites of little visual appeal. However, a perceived lack of aesthetic value in the physical world need not translate completely to the image. Forms, tones and colours can be reassessed through the viewfinder, creating new possibilities for spaces of industrial ruin. Photography has an ability to increase our awareness of our environment and perhaps reveal to us the visual prejudices we carry when we view sites

many consider banal, decayed and ruined. By re-presenting the visual possibilities of decaying sites, photography's role may not appear so limited, rather it has an opportunity to criticise and counter cultural apathy towards sites of modern industrial ruin.

This thesis explores the ways in which we make sense of ruin and decay in today's society. It will examine how 'spaces of ruin' have been recorded by photographers, and the effect their images have had upon the wider cultural landscape. Just as importantly it will also examine what effect our cultural landscape has upon their images. My examination will incorporate spaces that have fallen to ruin and neglect through industrial changes. How these structures from an industrial age are seen, treated and remembered can provide an insight into our cultural prejudices and leanings, particularly as these spaces are generally the domain of working class memories.

Chapter 1

Space: The Ruined Frontier.

In his book Postmodern Geographies, Edward Soja suggests we need to assert the importance of space in the sphere of social theory and analysis. Rather than concentrate solely upon historical sequences of events, the spaces and geographies where these events occurred should be regarded as equally important. An understanding of time as well as space is needed to attain a proper analysis of societies and cultures. Space for Soja is 'fundamental to the analysis of power' (1990, p. 19) and he is critical of historians who neglect geographical perspectives in their analyses.

Time has been the dominant platform for many cultural theorists whether their critical orientation is 'sociological, political, anthropological, phenomenological or existential' (Soja, 1990, p. 14). This trait is recognised by Foucault in his comments on the prevailing space/time relationship in cultural theories: 'space was seen as the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary was richness, fecundity, life,

dialectic' (Soja, 1990, p. 10). As a consequence, Soja argues for the insertion of space in cultural analyses to reveal elements of power previously hidden from view:

We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spaciality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology. (Soja, 1990, p. 6).

Soja stresses that an examination of geographies is as necessary as histories for they both equally contain within their respective boundaries the evidence of life, activity and human relations, which can ultimately lead to a greater understanding of the relations of power, from its numerous sources and its effects upon all of us.

Space - as power

Ruins have within themselves the ability to connote time and history. Through Peirce (Fiske, 1990, p. 46), we understand that signs can be an index to an object. As smoke is an index of fire, ruins, bearing the marks of decay and erosion are an index of the passing of time; ruins are direct signifiers of history. From Foucault's assertion that time represented 'richness, fecundity and life', Europe had access to a rich source of cultural authenticity through its supply of ruins. Its rich history could help maintain an authority over the many cultures it chose to dominate globally.

This authority is perhaps enhanced by the apparent innocence in the way time can attack structures. One must remember that sites of ruin do not occur innocently devoid of human intervention, but result through conflicts in ideology and often dramatic cultural shifts. As Shelley points out, a ruined monument was a mockery to a past king and his claims for eternity, so it is perhaps an ironical gesture that a culture should claim a

temporal advantage over others through its ruins. Ruins are often created through a lack of lineage, discontinuity and conflict in a nation's history.

This hasn't stopped other cultures following the trend set by the Europeans. As the USA began to assert its presence in the world in the 19th century it could not compete with Europe in the field of culture. Europe dominated America with its rich and vast cultural heritage, and America floundered with a comparatively short history with which to obtain a unique identity. America then discovered its natural landmarks were comparable to the built monuments and structures in Europe. As Sascha Jenkins writes (1999, p. 208):

In America, natural sites were presented as signs of heritage and unique culture. For example, the 'discovery' of the Yosemite Valley in the 1850's was seen as proof of America's natural pre-eminence (Sears, 1989: 122). The impressive size of the cliff faces in the valley were compared to the size of great European monuments. What America had seemingly lacked in architectural heritage, was made up for in the discovery of these natural monuments.

Additionally, in a journal titled, 'The Discovery of Yellowstone National Park', Rod Giblett (2000, p. 11) quotes through Paul Shepard that the author of the journal, Nathaniel Pitt Langford, viewed this landscape as 'anything but wild... The natural forms and vegetation of Yellowstone resembled certain humanised landscapes plus objects that were considered an improvement on wilderness, such as ruins'. Through these sites the USA could have its ruins after all, and access to all the cultural kudos that go with them. The USA could secure an identity in contradistinction to Europe through what Alfred Runte calls 'the reliance on nature as proof of national greatness' (Giblett, 2000, p. 9). With their own 'natural ruins' the USA had access to the same processes and

understandings that Europe relied upon to create, rather paradoxically, cultural difference and unique identity.

With the invention of photography, these 'naturally ruined' sites could be captured on film and distributed to a wider audience, enhancing the reputation of the American landscape. Photographers such as Ansel Adams have built successful careers re-presenting these sites to the public. Adams' focus was primarily on the landscape of America's west, and most famously Yosemite National Park.

John Szarkowski (1985, p. 6) rates Adams as 'perhaps the last important artist to describe the... remnants of the aboriginal landscape in the confident belief that his subject was a representative part of the real world'. However, some criticise Adams' lack of balance in not addressing the impacts of settlement upon this landscape. Robert Sobieszek (1993, p. 33) argues that nature in Adams' work 'was seen as something completely antithetical to civilisation, something to be revered, preserved, sequestered from human reach, and viewed as if it could remain apart'. His images of the American west often featured areas seemingly uninhabited and unaffected by colonisation.

Yosemite for Adams represented the untamed American frontier that he hoped could be maintained, yet the area had already been conquered. Humans are often viewed inaccurately as cultural beings outside of nature, and Ansel Adams effectively incorporated this myth into his images. Sobieszek writes (1993, p. 35) 'Yosemite is more like an urbanised wilderness with its electrical outlets for campers, and its clothes lines hung between the pines'. Adams simply chose to ignore these scenes. The tourist coaches and 'Winnebagos' would also need exposure for a more accurate representation of this space.

The effect Adams had on the photographic and natural world is illustrated rather comically by Jerry Uelsmann's portrait of this recognised master of landscape photography. Ansel's face sits exposed and embedded into the monumental Half Dome of Yosemite National Park, seemingly as if presidential status had been assigned to him. Realistically, Uelsmann recognises Adams' influence in our understanding of this landscape. While Adams rarely incorporated signs of human activity in his landscapes, he ultimately left traces of himself in everyone of them.

It was in the 1970's that many photographers returned to America's former frontier in the west and reassessed the landscape. They recognised the changes that had occurred upon the landscape since colonisation, particularly as it increasingly evolved into an urban landscape. Photographers such as Robert Adams and Lewis Baltz, a part of the 'New Topographers', provided with their images an alternative view of this area. According to Jonathon Green (1984, p. 63) this frontier landscape had been for several generations been the 'pictorial repository for all the possibilities and fantasies of the American dream', a complex symbol of nationalism, democracy, economic abundance, self-reliance and spiritual regeneration. As photographers such as Ansel Adams fantasised about the landscape and its possibilities for America, newer photographers focussed on the physical frontier between nature and culture. Green (1984, p. 63) explains:

The early photographers of the land stood with the civilised world behind them and looked out toward the wilderness. In the latter half of the seventies the new breed of photographers reversed this orientation. They stood in the open land and pointed their cameras back toward the approaching civilisation (Green, 1984, p. 63).

With a new understanding of the landscape, the photographer could include the tourist coaches and winnebagos within the frame of the viewfinder. James Alinder's image of Mt. Rushmore, Black Hills, South Dakota does just this.

The work of Robert Adams and Lewis Baltz pictured a homogenised American culture and its impact upon these new lands. They witnessed the arrival of large scale industrial parks, housing estates, shopping malls, mobile homes and all the symbols of modern society in its unstoppable advance upon once wild territories. Green (1984, p. 68) explains:

They photograph the meeting point of land and settlement in such a way that the landscape and the buildings assume qualities traditionally associated with the other... the land and the architecture are usually banal, sterile, bleak and scruffy. Yet ... the grace that has departed from the land often becomes an attribute of the approaching civilisation. Tract houses, industrial buildings, and developments under construction become surrogates for the glowing, monumental western landscape of the past.

In these images 'art, nature and industrial form become inextricably tangled' (Green, 1984, p. 67). We cannot make clear distinctions between them because one element impinges on the other. These images reveal to us that we cannot rely upon singular myths previously perpetuated by the likes of Ansel Adams ignoring other possibilities and realities for this space. Robert Adams and Lewis Baltz have shown as much as nature and industry appear diametrically opposed, our understanding of one will affect our reading of the other. We may visualise clear boundaries between these elements of nature, industry and culture, but a battle will always be waged on the borders, blurring the distinctions.

Ansel Adams exploited the common mythology surrounding the landscape of America's wilderness as a repository of the American dream to good effect. It has helped in the preservation of areas of America's wilderness for posterity. However, a singular reading such as that supplied by Ansel Adams is not effective in realising other impacts the landscape plays upon our lives and of our impacts upon it. Photographers such as Robert Adams have provided us with alternative readings of the same space and shown us some of the ways our culture interacts with nature. He reveals more clearly that our natural heritage is not void of culture, but is tied to it, each affecting the other. In his images, nature, industry and culture collide, as they always have, leaving an imprint that is as visible as Ansel's face on Uelsmann's half dome.

The re-writing of a prominent American space is a part of a process that should continue if we are to further understand our relationship to the spaces that surround us, particularly in our urban environments where the mass population resides.

Urban Space

As America gained access to the past through its natural ruins, it was simultaneously seeking a place for itself in the future. The USA was caught in the thrust of modernisation along with much of the western world, ultimately to create a 'new world' on the back of emerging technology. The past gave way to the seemingly limitless possibilities of the future. 'Why should we look behind us, Time and Space died yesterday' (Potts, 1996, p. 15) declared the Futurist Marinetti in 1909. Tradition was to be overtaken by technology and science would become the new God. The rush for the future would result in the old being discarded and left to ruin. Destruction was seen as a

necessary means to a utopic end. As Harvey (1989, p. 14) pointed out, 'how could a new world be created... without destroying much that had gone on before? You simply cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs... A whole line of modernist thinkers from Goethe to Mao have noted [this]'.

Marshall Berman (1982, p. 346) also describes the modern experience effectively:

To be modern is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one's world and one's self in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: to be a part of the universe in which all that is solid melts into air.

Berman, with the help of Marx, saw the modern world reaching for a utopic ideal promised by new technologies, carving a path forward, indiscriminately discarding elements that did not meet the expectations of the future. The changes viewed by Marx and Berman made them realise the impermanence of all things, much like the poet Shelley had earlier. For Modernists this was the right path, for the modern world was a world of life. Marinetti (cited in Potts, 1996, p. 16) states 'progress is always right even when it is wrong... because it is movement, life, struggle, hope'. To be modern was to always be right. Such a forthright attitude blinded many to the mechanisms of ruin and decay within modernism.

Marshall Berman (1980, p. 293) recounts the story of Robert Moses a successful developer in his native New York. He laments the building of Moses' divisive expressway that cut through the heart of the Bronx where he lived. No longer could he walk freely from one end of town to other, this insurmountable obstruction denied life and movement for the pedestrian on the street, leaving many structures to decay and ruin; the success of the expressway had not extended to all the areas it had replaced. Jane

Jacobs noted this condition in her book The Death and Life of Great American Cities. In it she claims 'there is a tendency for outstanding success in cities to destroy itself ... downtowns continually shift their centres leaving much inner-city stagnation and decay' (Jacobs, 1965, p. 256). Moses would agree with Jacobs unintentionally, by stating 'when you operate in an overbuilt metropolis, you have to hack your way through with a meat axe, there are more houses and more people in the way, that's all' (Berman, 1980, p. 293). Moses however would just view his successes and not the destruction.

Robert Moses often had critics who recognised the destruction that ran parallel with his creations. Once when criticised for his work he replied 'am I not the man who blotted out the valley of the ashes and gave mankind beauty in its place' (Berman, 1980, p. 312). Moses spoke in reference to a successful project at Long Island that replaced an old dump with a recreation area. Marshal Berman would agree with that project's success but noted Moses 'did not really wipe out the ashes, he only moved them to another site. For the ashes are part of us, no matter how straight and smooth we make our beaches and freeways' (Berman, 1980, p. 312). Ultimately, the smooth face of modernism would always have its flip side in the rough textures of its discarded objects and ruins. Berman argued that to revisit these redundant sites, could effectively reunite us with our past and counter some of the destructive habits of modernism.

Chapter 2

Heritage: Culture in Ruin

'Buildings matter... because they are the symbols and repositories of memory' (Ladd, 1997, p. 4).

Trash – Ruins of Consumption.

Ruin exists in many different forms within the sphere of modernism. In the culture of consumer capitalism, it regularly inhabits the space of trash, the by-product of consumption. While trash is often the shell or packaging of the product, from chocolate wrappers to empty beer cans, it is also often inherent in the product itself. Every consumer item is potentially deferred trash. After all 'planned obsolescence [is] a production strategy: why drive last year's car when this year's is so much better' (Potts, 1996, p. 17). Products are continuously updated, creating value in the new and depreciating value in the old. This process of constant renewal could feed the production/consumption cycle so necessary for the wheels of industrial and consumer capitalism to remain turning.

For Marx 'a product becomes a real product only by being consumed' (Stallabrass, 1996, p. 172). This is the point where a product reaches its full potential and

promise. However, once used or abandoned only a husk remains, a symbolic ruin for the consumer age. 'To enquire about rubbish' for Stallabrass (1996, p. 174) 'is to ask what happens to commodities when they cease to become commodities, but which for a time retain their form as objects'. Such an enquiry may provide an understanding of 'ruin' in a consumer capitalist world. Stallabrass explains (1996, p.175):

Objects gain and lose something when they are abandoned as rubbish. What they lose is related to their presentation by advertising as desirable commodities: newness, utility, wholeness, a distinction from other objects... what they gain is a doleful truthfulness, stripped of mystification. It becomes a reminder that commodities despite all their tricks, are just stuff, little combinations of plastics or metal or paper. The stripping away of branding and its attendant emotive attachments reveals the matter of the object behind the veneer imposed by a manufactured desire.

Once a product reaches its final stage as trash, Stallabrass suggests the fake sheen of the product disappears to reveal a more truthful object. Naked and without marketing hysteria we view the object through its physical and aesthetic qualities. The consumer capitalist culture aligned with the voice of modernism, through the likes of Marinetti, screams that 'progress and newness is always right', while Stallabrass suggests that a greater truthfulness lies elsewhere, in the objects that are left behind. Marinetti may have perceived an alternative future to the one we have now attained when he viewed technology as liberating us from the past. However this same technology has united mass production and mass communication which promises a future tied to the ideologies of consumer capitalism. Where Marinetti denied the past any relevance, now perhaps we need it again, to liberate ourselves once more, this time from a future of facades and fakery provided by a consumer capitalist culture.

The impact photography has had in creating the consumer culture is undeniable. Photography aligned with advertising industry exists as an organisation intent on creating and enhancing the many façades of consumer culture. Together they promise a unique experience from each product they promote. Dean McCannell (1976, p. 23) suggests the 'commodity has become a means to an end'. That what we desire most from a product is an 'immense accumulation of reflexive experiences which synthesize fiction and reality into a vast symbolism', a symbolism which reflects the modern consumer world itself. Once the experience has been fully attained the product is no longer useful. However, as recent ventures into community recycling programs have taught us, alternative uses can be found for trash. The commodity can retain meaning despite the withdrawal of its façade upon consumption. Perhaps one day, photography could be just as successful in promoting the experience of recycling.

An examination of 'trash' can provide an insight into what our modern culture perceives as valuable and a glimpse into its mechanisms. However, such an insight will not likely undermine the prevailing consumer culture and its attributes. We exist within its structure and often unconsciously play by its rules. A better understanding of its processes only creates a possibility for release from the prevailing culture. Marx believed that the demystification of such processes would enable culture to be replaced as the 'ultimate expression of human values' (McCannell, 1976, p. 22). However, McCannell (1976, p. 22) points out 'as modern left- wing Marxism is trying to teach us, culture prevails and the revolution must learn to operate in and through it'. Similarly, the consumer culture will not be overcome by knowledge of its apparatus. Change will only

take place if the façade it offers is deemed unsuitable for proper living, if the experience it provides is no longer worthwhile.

Our experiences with the ruins of consumer culture are perhaps indicative of our experiences with the ruins of wider modern culture. This discussion serves an example of the characteristics of modern ruins and the possibilities for discovering alternate uses for them by working within a modern culture that will invariably prevail.

A Ruined Heritage

Modernism is recognised as an urban phenomenon. With industrialisation came the explosive growth in cities, enhanced by the migration of many folk from rural to urban areas. The influx of people created densely populated areas in need of a secure social structure to allow capitalism to function effectively. Harvey (1989, p. 18) explains ‘the pressing need to confront the psychological, sociological, technical, organisational, and political problems of massive urbanisation was one of the seed-beds in which modernist movements flourished’. Modernism was to become an ‘art of the cities’.

Its ‘art’, however, began as a process without evaluation. Cities would often grow without reflection on what they were destroying. Perth experienced this phenomenon in its recent history during the mineral boom that began in Western Australia in the 60’s. Many older buildings were laid low as modern buildings were erected in their place to service the financial hub of St. Georges Terrace (Seddon, 1995, p. 145). Ironically buildings such as Council House, an icon from the 60’s boom, have recently struggled for their own survival as its style goes out of favour with much of the population 30 years on.

It was in the 1960's that Marshal Berman recognises the emergence of the first voices of discontent with the project of modernism. A celebration of urban vitality provided resistance to modernism's 'growth for growth's sake'. 'The essential thing was to find beauty where it is not supposed to be found' (Berman, 1980, p. 319), mainly beauty in the decay. Old neighbourhoods like SoHo in New York were transformed. Cheap rents due to a failed Robert Moses project allowed many artists to move in, creating a new intensity and vitality to that area. Additionally, the new modernists were 'forced to find themselves by remembering' (Berman, 1980, p. 332). People began recognising their ethnic backgrounds, minority groups gained prominence and recycling grew in popularity, a process of 'finding new meanings and potentials in old things and forms of life' (Berman, 1980, p. 337). During this period the past began to be acknowledged; cultural heritage mattered after all.

Today, 'heritage' often has high value and can increase a city's reputation. In Fremantle, the mayor Richard Utting boasts his city 'is the best preserved 19th century port in the world ... [and] has the greatest number of heritage buildings of any city in Australia' (2000, p. 1). Building preservation has provided Fremantle with a unique identity which allows it to effectively market itself as a cultural and tourist attraction.

Fremantle had remained largely overlooked for development during the mining boom that had affected Perth, leaving much of it in decay. However, it was 'rediscovered' in the 80s as a place with unique character mainly as a result of being ignored for so long. With the influx of tourists expected for the America's Cup yacht race in 1987, the decaying buildings were quickly covered with fresh paint and renovated to make the city presentable to an international audience. As Perth continued to grow as a

modern city, Fremantle nearby, having been shrugged by recent modern development, could redevelop its own history to ensure future prosperity through growing industries such as tourism. Fremantle would become modern again by turning to its past; cultural heritage is, after all, a product of the modern world.

Berman's hope for a modern world that revisits its past appears to have come to fruition. However, as many of the progressive sentiments of modernism still remain, the future must now accommodate elements from our past. With limited space in urban environments the new and the old must often compete for the same space for survival. Often it is the case of economic interests versus 'cultural' interests, as witnessed in the recent battle over the North Fremantle silos. People opposed to its demolition argued that the silos were culturally significant to Fremantle through its size, aesthetics and important history as a 'link between the development of Fremantle and agricultural regions' (Davis, 1998, p. 10). Those in favour of demolition supported the economic interests of the stevedoring company, namely to use the space taken up by the silos for container storage. In this case, economics interests won out, however economic factors do not always have to compete with cultural interests over the use of urban space as they often work together.

Hawkins and Gibson (1999, p. 221) suggest that 'culture' has been put on the urban agenda by economic forces rather than urban planners and bureaucrats. They cite the fact that 'new urban investment companies of late capitalism have taken an extraordinary interest in cultural developments such as tourism'. This situation perhaps best describes the redevelopment of the city of Fremantle in the 1980s. Developers realised they were in a unique position to renovate and market Fremantle internationally as a historic port city. One way our modern capitalist society could remain modern and

incorporate the demands of cultural heritage was to organise it around a profitable industry like tourism.

Economic forces did not however place 'culture' on the urban agenda as suggested by Gibson and Watson; economic interests are rarely that game. Large amounts of capital will rarely submit itself to something that does not yet exist. It is more likely that planners and bureaucrats recognised a community concern for cultural heritage and subsequently began supporting the preservation of cultural history. Once the trend towards 'culture' is recognised by market forces, the capital will follow. Modern capitalism will often appropriate cultural concerns for its own benefit when it can.

Cultural heritage, previously unrecognised by economic forces, now exists with the threat of the market place dominating its agenda. Often cities can be regenerated by the influx of cultural capital, yet we must be careful that the capital follows culture and not the other way round, otherwise Berman's desire for history to counter the aggressiveness of modernism will fail and our cultural heritage will only serve the flow of capital.

Cannery Row, a street in Monterey, California stands as an example of capital controlling culture. John Steinbeck describes Cannery Row in his novel of the same name in 1945 as:

A poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream... [it] is the gathered and scattered, tin and iron and rust and splintered wood, chipped pavement and weedy lots and junk heaps, sardine canneries of corrugated iron, honky-tonks, restaurants and whorehouses, and little crowded groceries and laboratories and flophouses (Powell, 'Dear John...', 2000).

Since then Monterey has promoted Cannery Row on the back of Steinbeck's successful novel, however the street described by Steinbeck no longer exists. The sardine cannery that supported his description has long disappeared. In its place instead explains Sian Powell ('Dear John...', 2000) is 'an advertising slogan, a plastic bag, a souvenir cap, a crowd, a quality of retailing, a parking station, a mess, a blight, a shame'. Where Steinbeck describes an environment dominated by a working class culture, Powell's description of the same space is a consumer culture catering to the desires of cashed-up middle-class tourists. Promoters of cultural heritage should be aware that culture and capital can exist together, however when capital begins to dominate, cultural heritage may suffer.

Industrial Heritage

Mining and other heavy industry has played a big part in forging Australia's working class heritage. However, as yet it does not feature greatly in the spectrum of our built heritage. 'By its very nature mining poses several problems for the preservation of its heritage. Firstly, mining is an environmentally ugly process' (Davison, McConville, 1991, p. 162). Additionally, as its industry generally lies miles away from urban centres, it does not have the advantages of proximity that Fremantle offered to attract the capital of interested developers. It does, however, exist as an opportunity as an escape from urban life.

It has often been the role of nature to provide an escape from urban life. The popularity of many of our national parks will attest to this. With the popularity, however, come the conveniences of urban life, which can often impinge on the illusion of escape,

Sobieszek's example of Yosemite as an urbanised wilderness comes to mind. Sobieszek (1993, p. 35) offers the degraded sites left in the wake of mining and industry as an alternative to popular nature parks. After all, these sites, without the penetration of urban sentiment, have a greater ability for providing an escape from modern urban life 'and a greater possibility for solitude'.

Sobieszek was speaking in reference to the photography of Robert Smithson, who often explored the aesthetic possibilities of ruined and decaying industrial sites. The industrial photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher introduced Smithson to Germany's Ruhr district, 'the largest industrial region in the world' (Dettman, 1999, p. 31), in 1968. Here he discovered, according to Sobieszek (1993, p. 35):

A truly industrial geography... one made up of valleys of unspecified cracks and fissures, rubble, and molten forms, surrounded by hills of slag debris littered with shards of corrugated steel, wires, pipes, and cardboard cartons, and punctuated by dunes of potsmelting gangue.

Sobieszek describes a scene particular to a working steel industry, much like Steinbeck did with Cannery Row and its industry. These sites within the Ruhr have since then suffered the same fate as Cannery Row with the closure of much of its steel industry. Many of the structures were left to decay for decades as the sites found little use.

Recently, the local authorities have begun a complex process of renewal for the region that utilises the industrial cultural heritage of the area. Their aim is to develop the 'potential of industrial culture for recreation and tourism' (Topos, 1999, p. 124). The difficulty lies in balancing industrial heritage with the desires of new industries like tourism. Care must be taken so the capital interests of tourism do not overtly impinge on the built heritage of the space, changing the space completely as happened in Cannery

Row. A main focus of the renewal process was to work with the decay that had appeared as a result of years of disuse.

The newly created Landschaftspark in Duisberg-Nord is a space which utilises the ruins of industrial architecture to 'retain the atmosphere of abandoned industrial territory despite reconstruction' (Diedrich, 1999, p. 69). The space, however, almost turned out differently. A Parisian landscape architect had plans to create a French symbolic garden that represented the landscapes of different eras, the preindustrial, the industrial and the postindustrial. The large costs of this project were avoided when another designer, Peter Latz, took a more pragmatic approach. He turned 'as little as possible inside out and [left] as much as possible of what had been formed, first by industry and then by decay and pioneering plants' (Diedrich, 1999, p. 69). The original architect was to comment on the Latz's work 'But you aren't even doing anything'. The ideas for a grand garden had been rejected for a space that in its current form was already grand. Planners realised that the structures from the industrial age, together with the decay imposed by neglect, and the subsequent return of nature, had created a unique space that required little work to present to the community an effective cultural space that still retained its heritage.

The space is now utilised by climbers who scale the iron-ore bunkers, divers who practice in water-filled bunkers, visitors relaxing in the beer garden, people exploring the architecture and others attending cultural events in the newly created Piazza Metallica in the heart of the steel mill. The Landschaftspark was primarily shaped by the industrial heritage that surrounds it in collusion with the market forces of tourism; tourist capital did not dominate the agenda. When the planners realised that working-class industrial heritage was unique, not only culturally but also aesthetically, the Ruhr region could be

reconstructed to be a part of German industry again, this time in the modern industries of culture and tourism.

The Ruhr region in Germany stands as an example of a landscape regenerated through a reassessment of its meanings and possibilities. This is not a new process as it happens continually throughout history. America's original interpretation of its wilderness frontier during colonisation and subsequent reinterpretation with a post-industrial perspective is an example of this. Giblett (2000, p. 24) provides an interpretation of wilderness areas as 'post-industrial reconstructions of the pre-industrial', if so, the new industrial parks in the Ruhr are comparatively post-industrial reconstructions of the industrial.

Australia's working class heritage also has the possibility of gaining prominence through its industrial structures. Perhaps by following the example offered by Germany's reinterpretation of its industrial zones, our industrial ruins would not lie idle much longer. Overcoming the stigma of 'ugliness' attached to these sites should be a primary objective, by re-evaluating our aesthetic prejudices we may move closer to this goal.

Photographic Ruin

Photography sits comfortably alongside the modern industries of cultural heritage and tourism. Price and Wells (2000, p. 60) argue that photography is a 'direct way through which our experience of the past is constructed'. By scanning images from photographic archives, heritage councils can construct versions of history that support the interests of cultural heritage. Similarly for tourism, Horne (1984, p. 12) explains photography 'can be the main reason for our tourism. It allows us to convert the places

we visit into signs which we can then possess'. In these two cases, photography exists to provide and control meaning to the spaces we inhabit. Subsequently, if we are to expand our understanding of industrial heritage and its meanings, photography is a valuable tool available to us to perform this task.

The Heritage Councils report on the East Perth power station is testament to the lack of aesthetic appreciation of many industrial sites. 'There is no obvious evidence that the power station is valued in the general community for its aesthetic qualities or indeed that it is particularly well known' (Heritage Council of WA, 1994, p. 1). A re-examination of our working class heritage with the camera could perhaps reveal the prejudices we harbour when viewing industrial landscapes. By reworking some common landscapes, like the New Topographers did with the American West, the impacts of industry upon these spaces could be reassessed, freeing itself from just being an environmentally ugly process. With the help of visual propaganda, the industrial culture of the working class may play a more recognised role in our cultural heritage.

The camera's ability to discriminate between various elements within a landscape gives us an opportunity to re-present our cultural heritage. Many photographers have attempted to do this in varying degrees. Grant Mudford approaches ordinary structures with an aim of finding unique characteristics within each subject. By selectively cropping the subject it allows details to surface, which may not always be immediately apparent. Mudford (1989, p. 121) believes his images of forgettable pieces of architecture can reveal new elements within the structure. While he is not a photographer of ruins, he reveals a method employable to picturing industrial ruins that could reveal an aesthetic quality generally not appreciated by much of the public.

Other photographers such as Jan Staller have recorded industrial landscapes and the many strange relics industry leaves behind. He photographs mainly at night, taking advantage of the odd colours and tones dispersed by industrial light onto unfamiliar flotsam and jetsam. His images of industry are suggestive of strange alien landscapes witnessed in science fiction, hence the title of his book, 'On Planet Earth'. Staller's inventive approach to industry and its relics allow for a more aesthetically interesting reading of industrial landscapes.

Bernd and Hilda Becher, who initially introduced Robert Smithson to the Ruhr district, have a more traditional approach to the industry they photograph. They've captured 'blast furnaces, cooling towers, coal silos, gas tanks, water towers' (Bussmann, 1995, p. 5) and industrial facades. Their large format monotone pictures allow them to concentrate on both the details and magnitude of their subjects. They present their work often in a mundane uniform style, which has the impact of reducing any subjective influence. What the viewer sees is the subject plainly as itself, allowing the many forms and fine details to come to the fore, to eventually reveal a subject that is not so plain after all. The large volume of their work allows the viewer to compare the many collections of gas tanks, facades, and other industrial elements throughout the world. But as much as their work is a study in comparative vision, it is also a 'contribution to the social history of industrial work' (Bussmann, 1995, p. 5). Here, industry is no longer a 'blot on the landscape' but another culture which is bound by its own unique aesthetics and structures.

Nick Waplington is a photographer who has been interested in industrial ruins most of his life. In his images in Other Edens he utilises elements of the tourist snapshot

in many abandoned industrial locations. By placing himself in the frame of every shot, Waplington is accessing a trait common to many tourist photographs, except his locations deny a reading of his images as simple tourist snaps. Rather than sites of famous monuments and thriving city life, Waplington's monuments include vacated warehouses, industrial junkyards, swamps and gravel pits. He applies himself as a tourist, taking possession of the space through photography, and thus creates, rather ironically, some significance to these forgotten sites. 'Waplington is bent on showing us the Edens man has built and lost, the other Edens humankind has constructed in its image, only to have lost them, once again' (Wiggins, 1994, p. 11). Waplington is not seriously suggesting that there is tourist potential in his industrial sites, but his playful approach reveals the construction behind culturally recognised monuments of tourism. Perhaps, then, constructing wider cultural interest in monuments of industry, as in the Ruhr, is not so out of place.

Photography can also, of course, be critical of the effects of industry upon the landscape. Richard Misrach has utilised the annals of desert photography in his images of ruined nuclear testing grounds. The sacredness of the landscape assumed by much desert photography (Bowden, 1998, p. 75) is broken by the impact this wartime industry had on a remote desert in America. The final days of the Second World War and subsequent cold war programs weigh heavy upon the landscape through the ruins that remain from that era. For Misrach, industry is a destructive force guilty of environmental misuse, the effects of which could take years to overcome.

My suggestion for greater recognition of industrial culture and its associated working class culture is not at the expense of ignoring the impacts it has had upon the

environment. Equally the effects of industry upon the lives of working class people should not be forgotten in an attempt to appease the damage industry has lain upon the natural landscape. Working class culture exists as a result of a large capital outflow to many industries, which required the efforts of this culture to keep industry sustained. The environment and working class culture should be viewed collectively as subjects of industry, often used with little regard to their consequences. Ruins associated with the decline of the industrial age serve to remind us of the impacts on both the environment and working class culture. To remove these icons of the industrial age will remove the visible signs of this impact and would hinder the endurance of working-class memory.

Photography exists as a medium that reflects our current understanding of the spaces that surround us. Used effectively it could also enhance our perception of spaces we largely ignore or regard with little enthusiasm. Our ruins from a greater industrial age could perhaps be salvaged from simple descriptions of 'ugly' with an efficient application of photography to re-present these sites as places of interest and value. Aesthetic value may yet transfer into cultural value. Through photography, as a tool for providing and controlling meaning to the spaces we inhabit, our industrial heritage may yet endure.

Conclusion

A comparative study in the historical use of ruins, from antiquity to the present day, reveals the potential for modern industrial ruins to gain a prominent place in the lexicon of cultural history. Ruins of ancient civilisations often tend to enjoy a greater share of appreciation and cultural value; time invariably enhances their reputation, by adding elements of the mystical and romantic. Some ruins from rediscovered cultures also impress and surprise us with the scale of their creation. The ‘rediscovery’ of Angkor in Cambodia, in 1860, by Henri Mahout provided responses of awe from both the colonialist and local people; ‘it is the work of giants’ was one noted phrase (Sprague De Camp, 1964, p. 163). An eventual rediscovery of our industrial ruins may not trigger such a profound response. However, with time and an appreciation of the scale and unique aesthetics of much industrial culture, these sites of ruin may compare one day with those of many ancient civilisations. Romantics can then apply their trade to an alternative site; the language stays the same but the setting has shifted:

Standing in the shadow of a moonlit steelmill, gazing across the timeworn escarpment of iron-ore tailings, or watching the sunset redden the timber columns of a Cossack jetty, they dream of a heroic past in which all men were mighty, all women beautiful, all life adventurous, and all problems simple.

As a domain of much working class culture, sites of industrial ruin deserve to be maintained for posterity. While the world maintains the pace set by early modernism, urban space and its uses will continually change; competition over this space will be unavoidable. Spaces occupied by industrial ruin must justify their continued survival over other potential uses for the same site. Generally, heritage groups have been one of the few voices heard speaking their case.

For industrial heritage to gain greater recognition in the wider community, the battle for acknowledgment needs to be fought in the arena of a modern capitalist culture. However, by attracting the capital of new industries like tourism, there is danger in losing the unique qualities of industrial heritage sites. One cannot avoid the inclusion of capital interests in the survival of industrial ruins; as post-Marxists have noted - the revolution must occur within the prevailing culture. Care must be taken that the agenda is not controlled solely by the interests of capital. With this in mind perhaps a balance can be attained whereby industrial heritage and capital can both prosper.

Epilogue

The scale and unique aesthetics attributable to many industrial sites demonstrates their photographic potential. With the addition of decay, prevalent in many disused industrial structures, their potential is further enhanced. The photographs I have provided to support this thesis have attempted to take advantage of these unique properties.

My focus has been on industrial sites in urban settings mainly around Perth and Fremantle. Most feature prevalent signs of decay through the effects of time, hashed repair jobs, and graffiti and vandalism. It is the combination of the industrial aesthetics mixed with the onset of decay which attracted me originally to these sites. The patterns, shapes and details I find in the structures are often enhanced with the use of a large format camera and a diffused light from early dawn or sunset.

Not all the images are of sites marked with years of decay and neglect, some recently vacated, are particularly striking for their sheer size. The superphosphate sheds in the heart of Bassendean's industrial area dominate the surrounding landscape. No

longer in use they present the photographer with an opportunity to explore their features in a setting which reflects the solitude and urban escape Sobieszek (1993, p. 35) referred to in Smithson's industrial sites. The changing effects of season and light can also provide an interesting accompaniment to the final image.

I have also included images of discarded objects and trash from various sources, including industry, consumer culture and mine sites. These are presented to accompany the larger structures of industrialism to imply the uniqueness of decay in many of the objects discarded by a consumer culture.

Hopefully together these images provide an understanding of the aesthetic possibilities of buildings and structures from our industrial culture. Although this part of our heritage is slowly gaining greater recognition, we may further enhance it by realising the unique properties of ruin and decay in aesthetic and cultural discourses.

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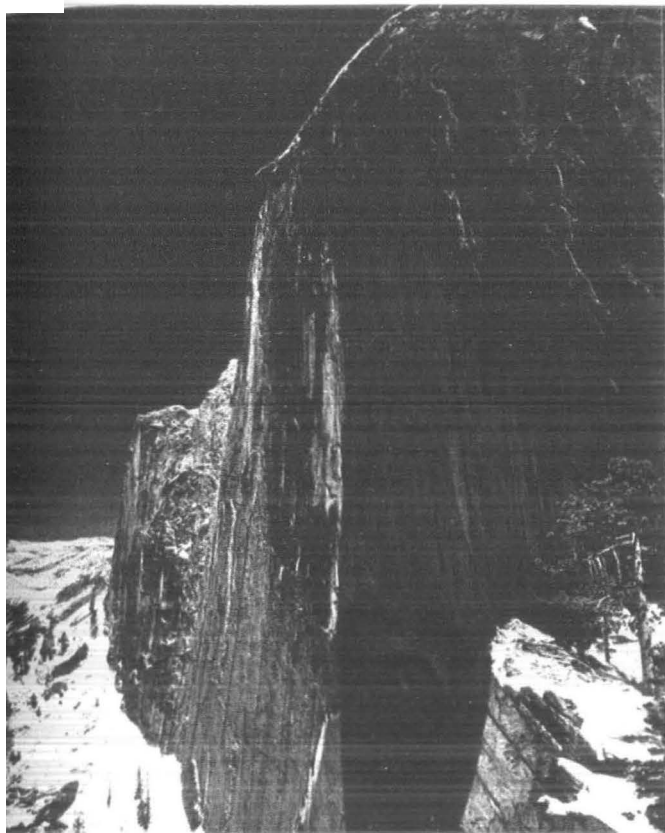
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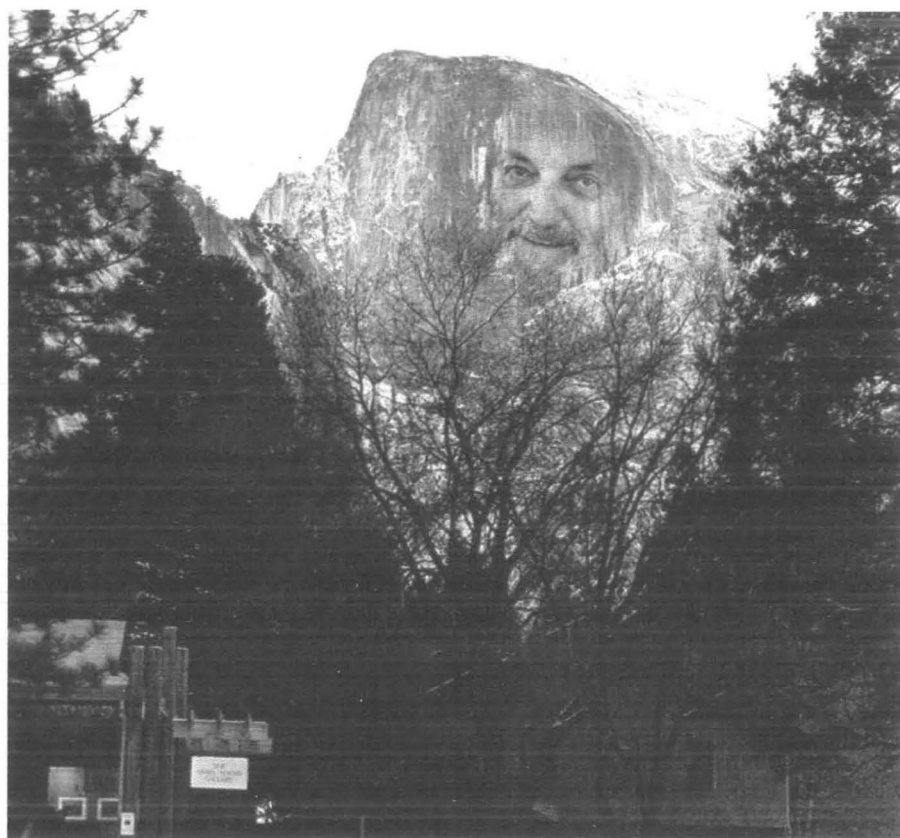
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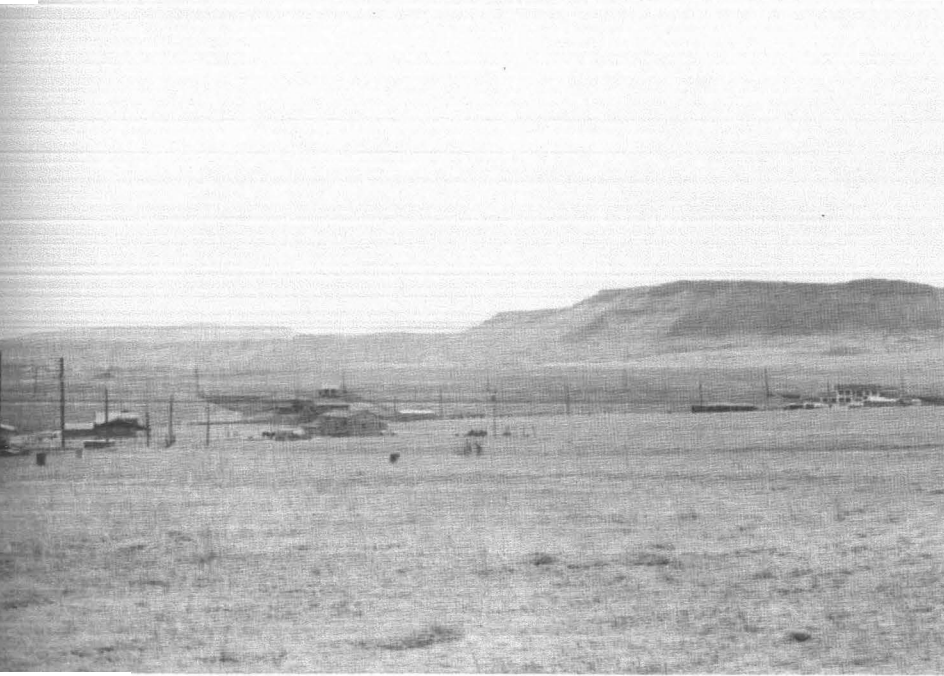
Images



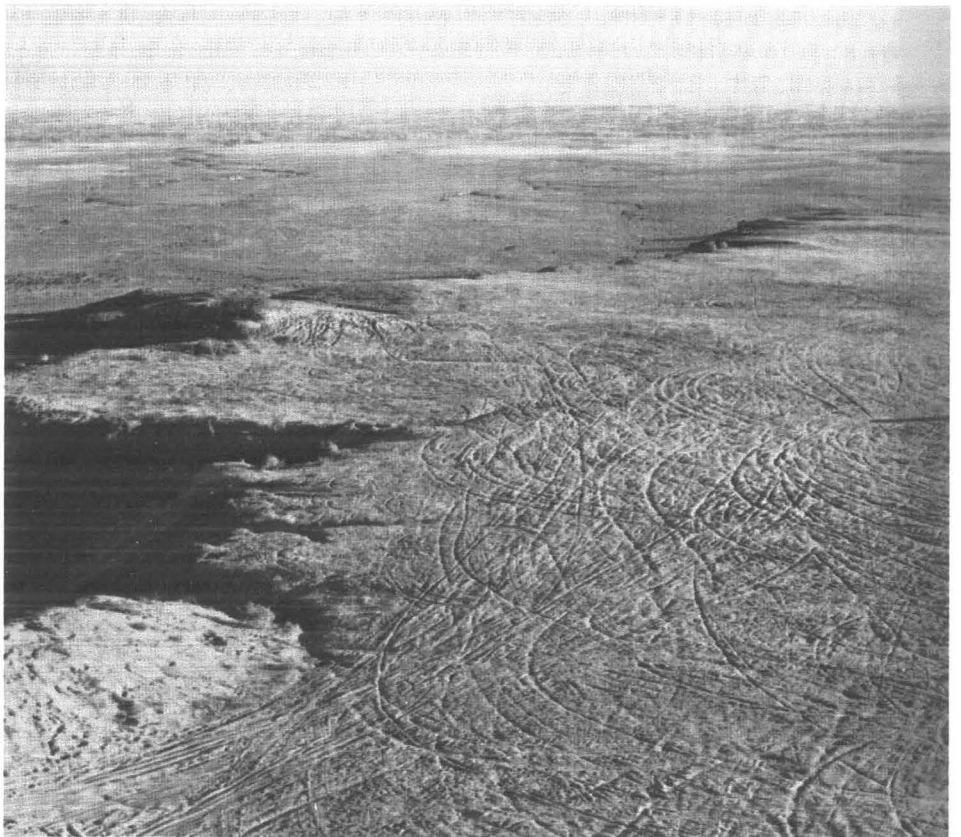
ANSEL ADAMS
Monolith, the face of Half Dome
Yosemite.

JERRY UELSMANN
Ansel





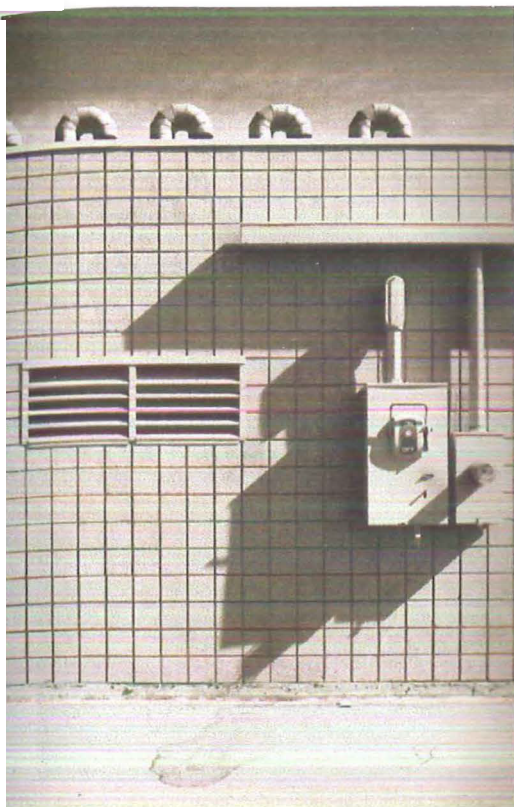
ROBERT ADAMS
Quarled mesa top
Pueblo County, Colorado



ROBERT ADAMS
North Table Mountains
Jefferson County, Colorado



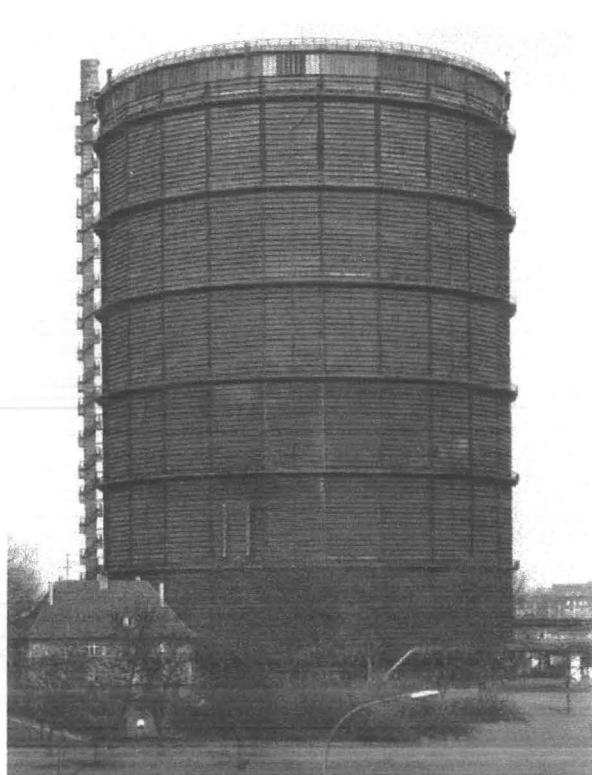
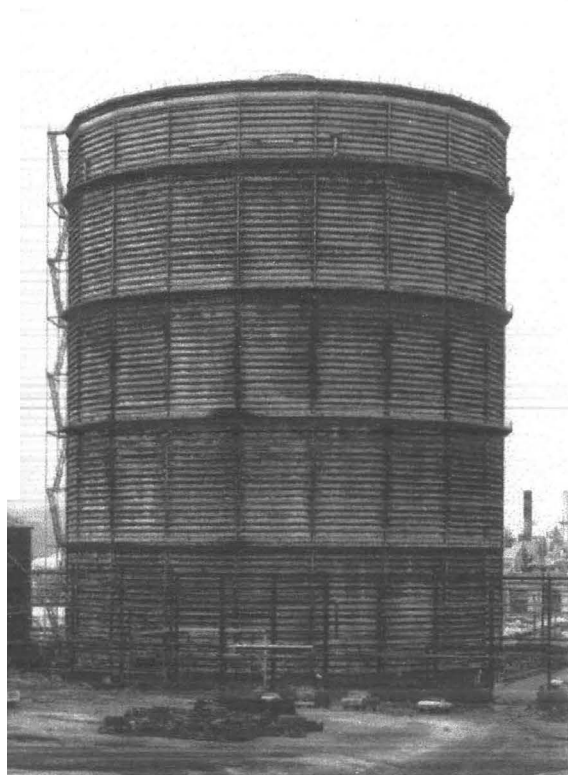
JAMES ALINDER
Mt. Rushmore
Black Hills, South Dakota



GRANT MUDFORD
Denver

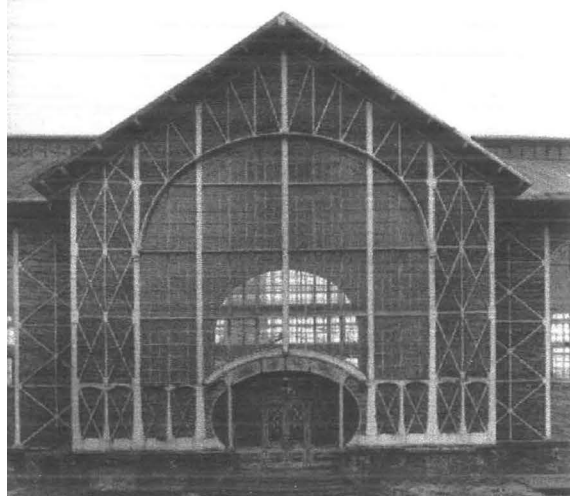
JAN STALLER
Dormant Steel Mill
Buffalo, New York





BERND & HILDA BECHER
Gas Tanks

BERND & HILDA BECHER
Industrial Facades





NICK WAPLINGTON
Other Edens



Photographs

South Fremantle Power Station

Container Pallets -- Fremantle Wharf

Fremantle Silos

Ascot Kilns

Superphosphate Sheds - Bassendean

Midland Railway Workshops

Superphosphate Sheds - Bassendean

Midland Railway Workshops

Midland Railway Workshops

Trash 1 (2 pages)

Trash 2 (2 pages)

Ascot Waters

Superphosphate Sheds - Bassendean

Superphosphate Sheds - Bassendean

Midland Railway Workshops

Mine Equipment -- Cue

Open Cut Mine -- Day Dawn

Mine Equipment -- Cue

Open Cut Mine -- Day Dawn

South Fremantle Power Station

South Fremantle Power Station

Tannery -- South Fremantle

Midland Railway Workshops

Superphosphate Sheds - Bassendean

South Fremantle Power Station

Midland Railway Workshops

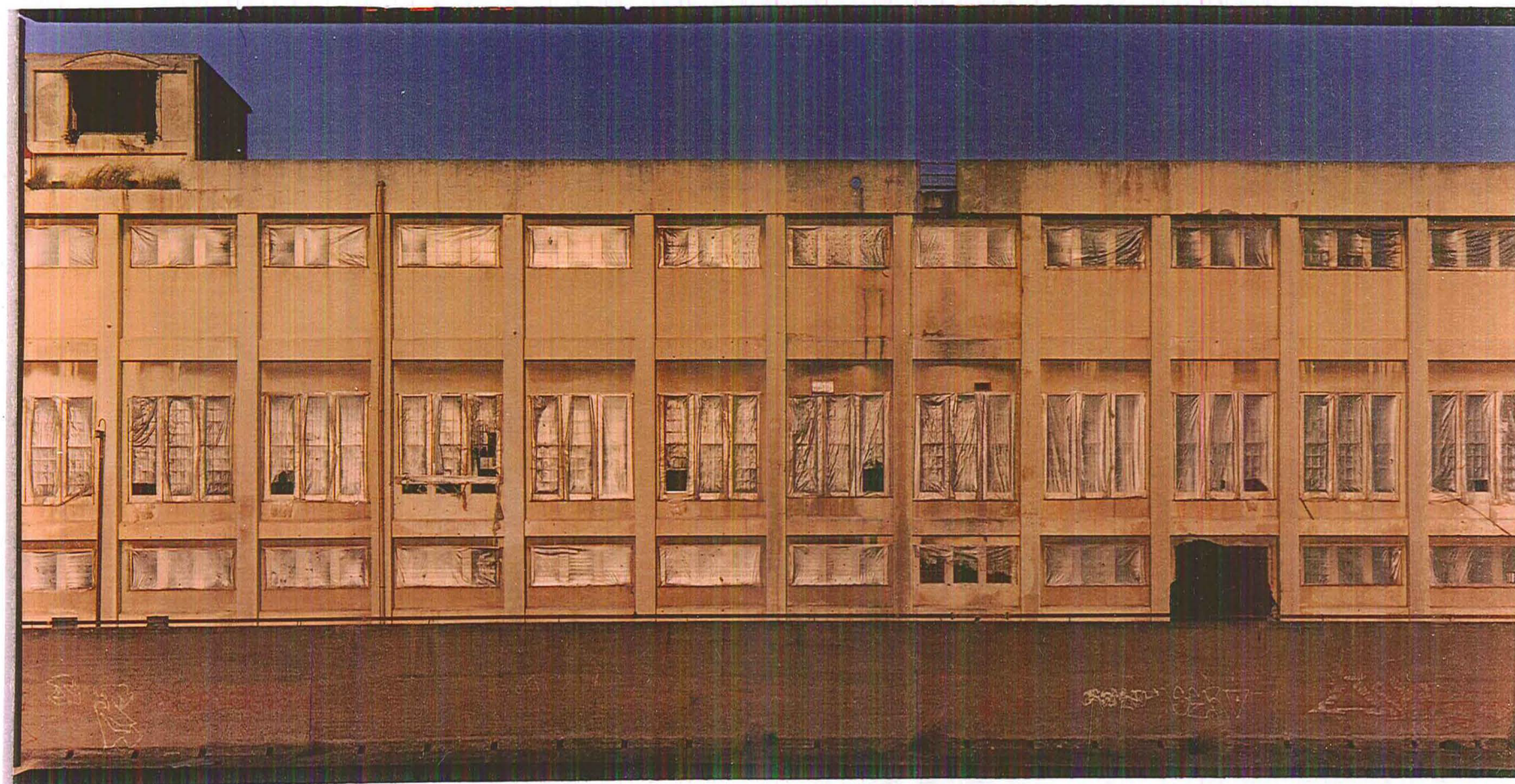
South Fremantle Power Station

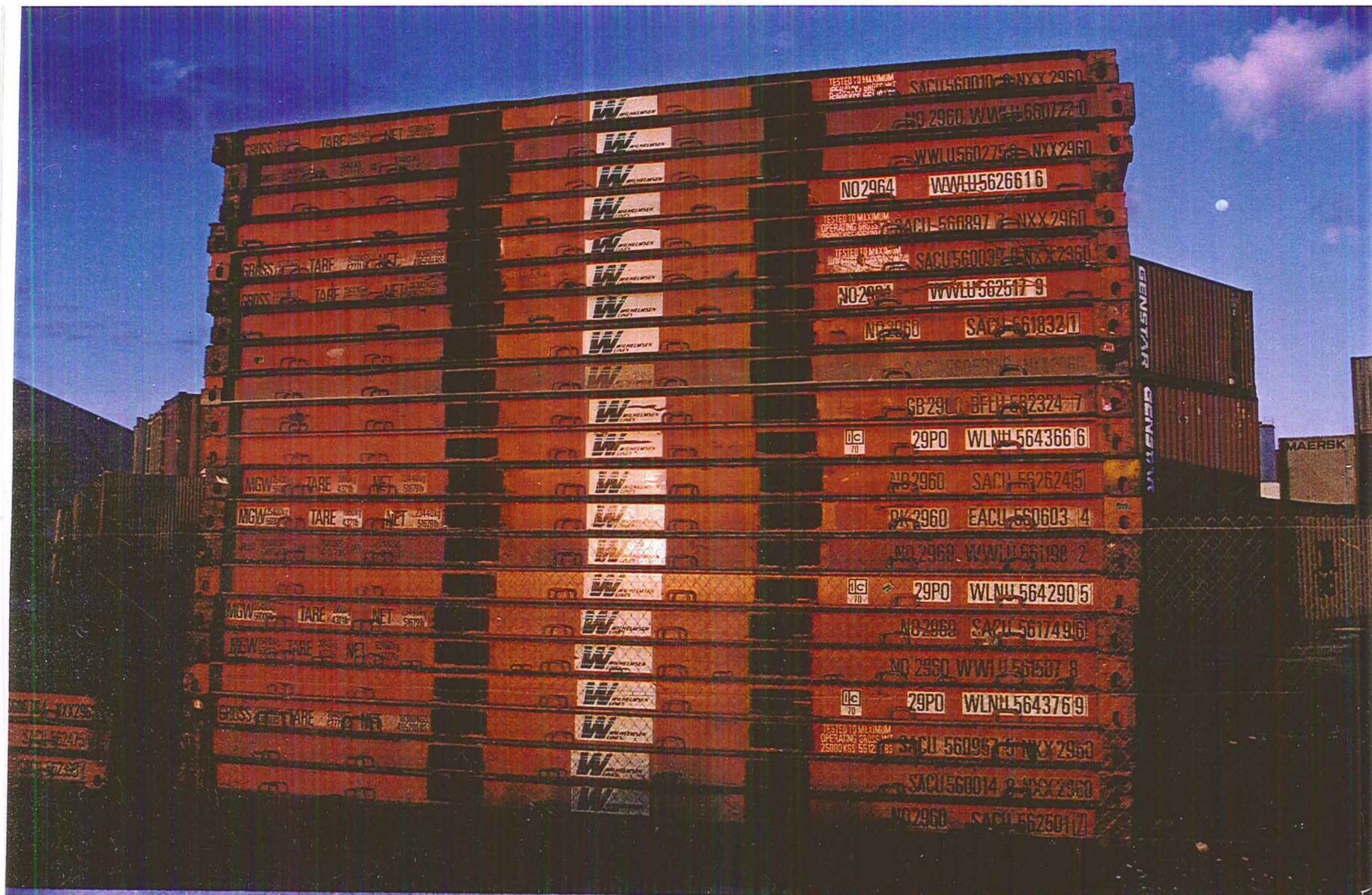
Superphosphate Sheds - Bassendean

Superphosphate Sheds – Bassendean

South Fremantle Power Station

South Fremantle Power Station



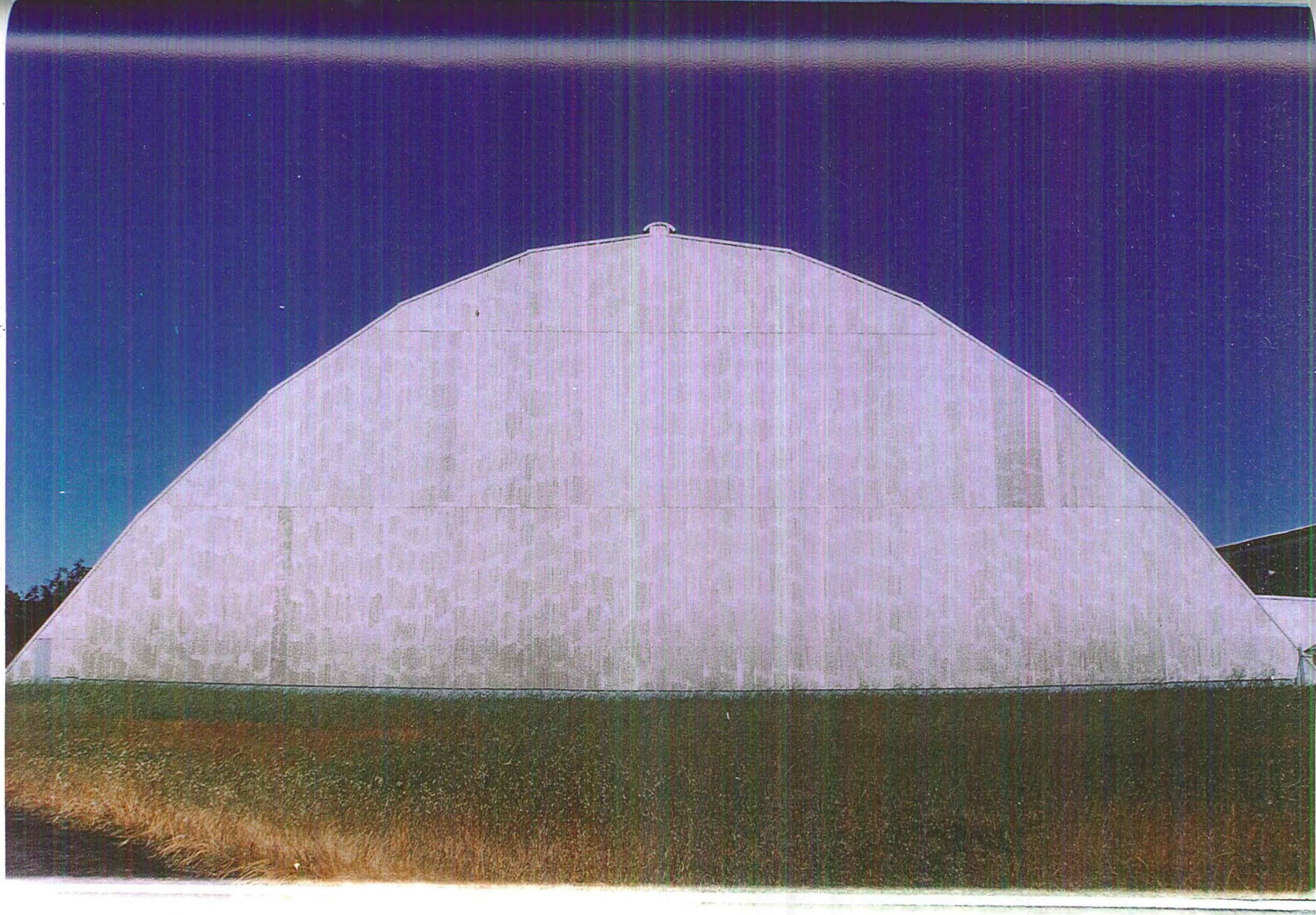












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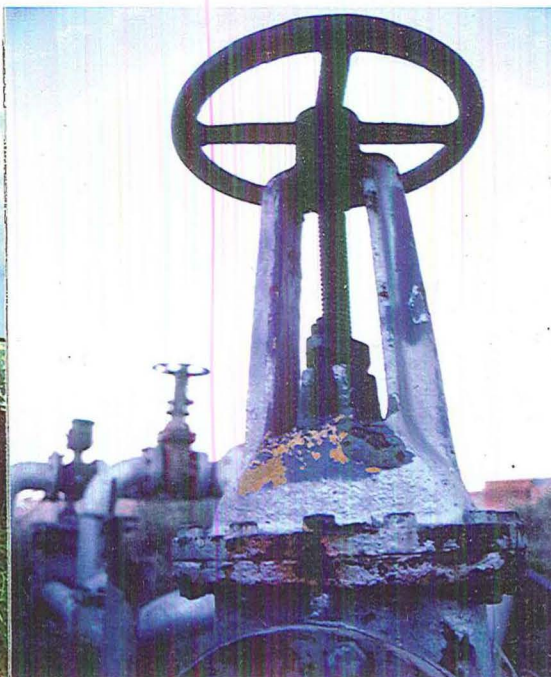
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His sex change

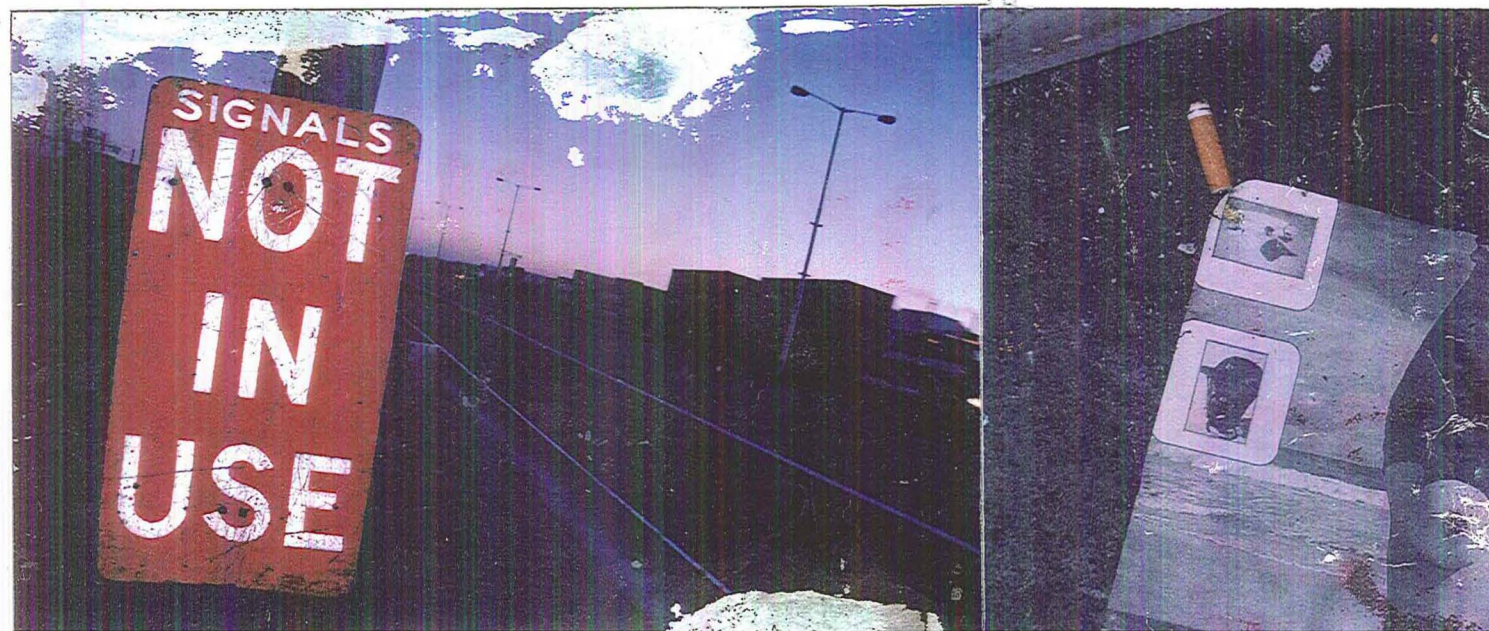
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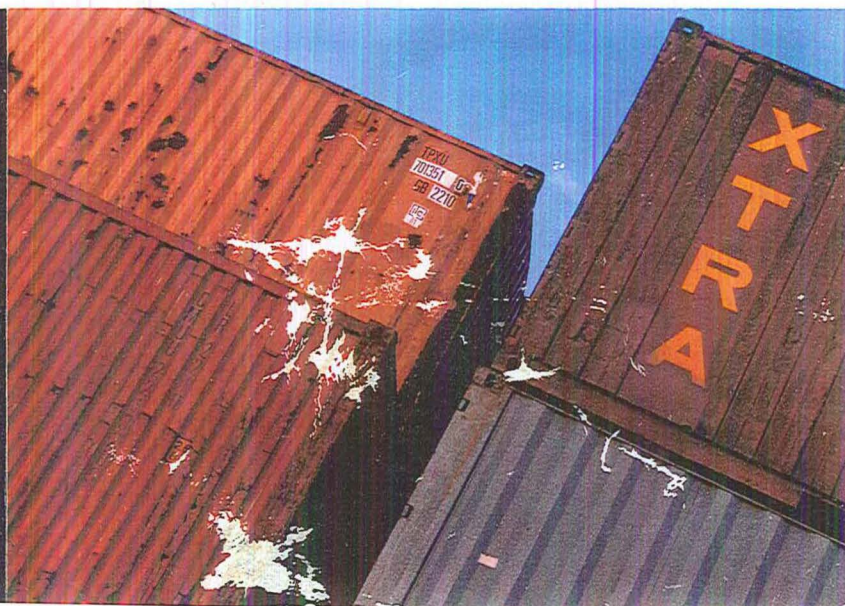
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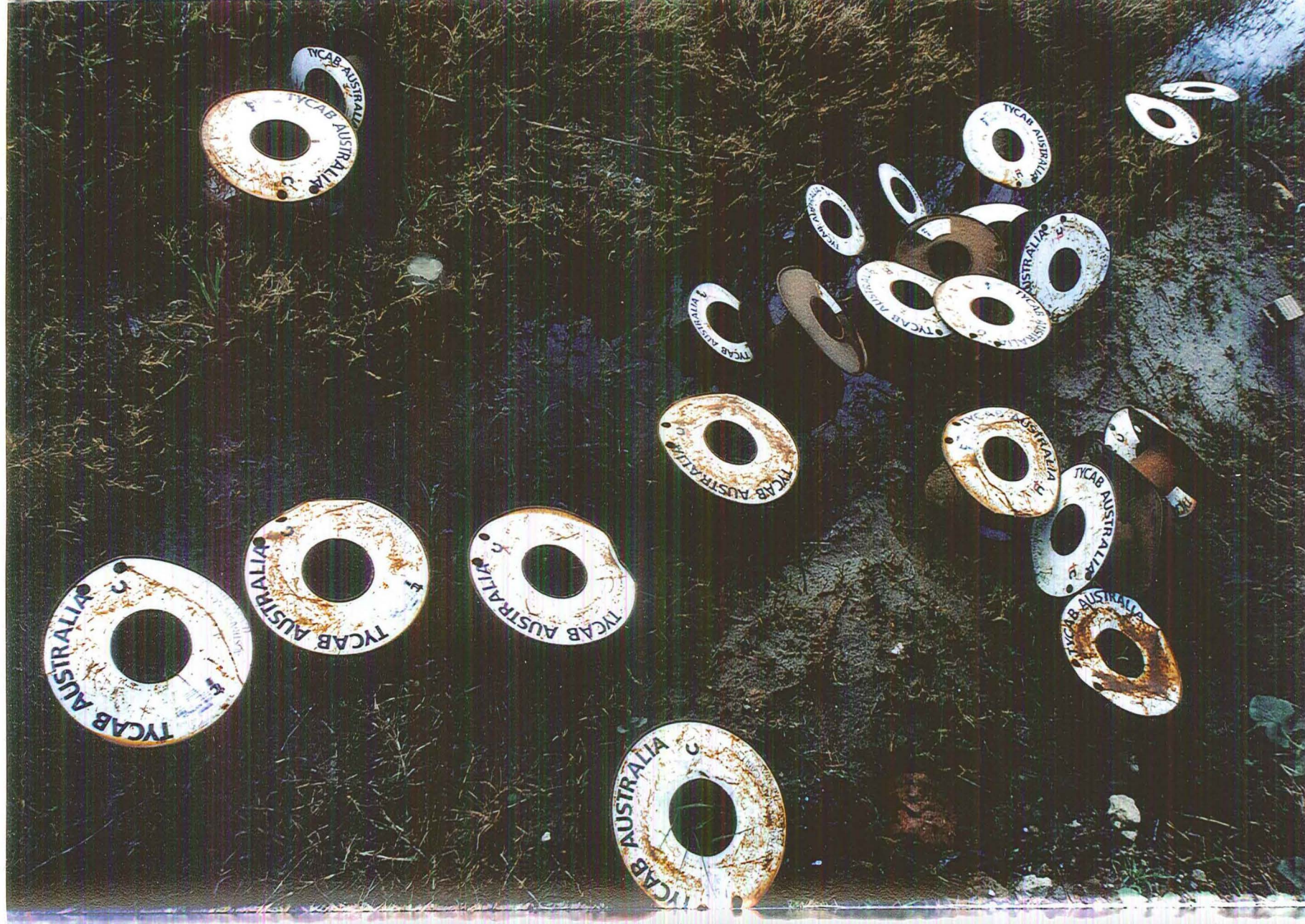




















4

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4A

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REALA

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REALA

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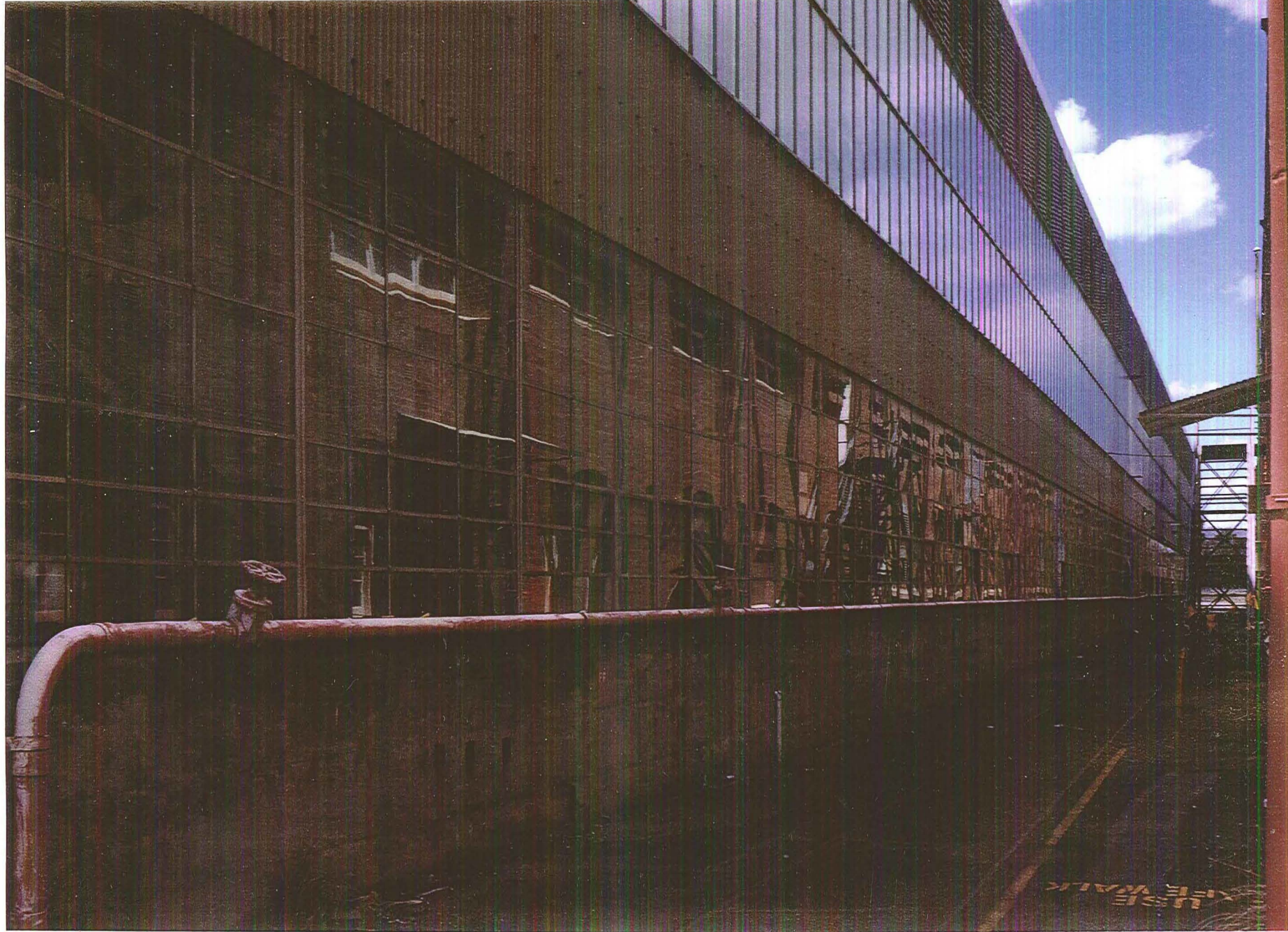






















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KODAK VPS 6006

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