



MODERN CANADIAN INTERIORS

Photography by Alejandro Valencia, Colin Savage, Kevin McBride,
Martin Helmut Reis and Richelle Forsey

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Contents

Foreword	7
Industrial	10
Residential	58
Devotional	78
Institutional	84
Sites	104
Last Wound up at New York Pork	108
Index	110



Foreword

By Andrew Shaver

Modern Canadian Interiors, the first published collection by Toronto's TLR Club, is dense with images of crumbling industrial sites, decrepit residential rooms, and poignantly empty church halls; the photographs at first review arrest the viewer with a force of documentary. The entire project appears to be a sort of archive of surplus modernism, complete with tantalizing clues about the people who once worked, lived or prayed in these fast-decaying structures.

But how is it that these images are so attractive? Especially since they speak of a failure to survive, a survey of the losers in the new economy, both financial and social: the factories that were shuttered as jobs left North America, the low income households in sub-standard buildings now abandoned as beyond repair and destined for demolition, or the religious spaces whose congregations thinned to zero over the course of a few generations.

And still, despite the implicit tragedy evoked by so many of these images, they remain aesthetically beautiful. The tension between the images we see and how they make us feel, the material decay set up against the photographic beauty, is just one of the paradoxical qualities to be found in the work of the TLR Club.

The TLR Club's work is not easy to categorize: their process integrates documentary photography, guerrilla infiltration, artistic creation, and ultimately a sort of post-industrial tourism that aestheticizes the derelict architectural residues of progress, making something beautiful out of the discarded remainders of our late capitalist society.

Susan Sontag, in her well-known collection of essays "On Photography," wrote of photography's power as an "elegiac art," that captures something temporal and ultimately mortal in its subjects. In her words:

"An ugly or grotesque subject may be moving because it has been dignified by the attention of the photographer... All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt." (p.15)

But in the current urban environment, time is marked by new development, a restless engagement with our material surroundings that are constantly undergoing renewal even at the expense of continuity; a place is renewed without necessarily acknowledging let alone incorporating its history.

To even the casually observant pedestrian walking the streets of any large urban centre, constant changes in the cityscape are everywhere to be seen. Old brick warehouses that encircle working class neighbourhoods, abut rail lines or dot waterfronts are being tricked out with street-level retail, high-priced office space and trendy loft interiors and rebranded as the new 'it' locales for modern living. To be fair, these repurposed and converted industrial spaces are almost always more environmentally friendly developments than the dreaded glass-encased high rise towers that have come to overtake modern downtown cores. Unlike those towers, these restored industrial buildings have the added benefit that they retain something of the historic feel of any given neighbourhood. Of course they also create a saleable "lifestyle destination," the "authentically urban" downtown lofts that the young and well-heeled love to call home. Yes, gentrification this way lies.

Invariably, the repurposing of industrial sites in urban neighbourhoods is a sure-fire way to kick start economic renewal, an idea of an urban future built on expanded high-end business areas, guided by corporate monoculture ("a Starbucks on every corner!"), and, at least in the beginning, animated with cries from both displaced long-time residents and migrating young urban professionals that nobody should have a monopoly on downtown real estate.

And yet we would do well to avoid overtly politicizing the work of the TLR Club. Although there is, within the club's membership, a degree of activism that is evident in the choices of photographic subjects, theirs is an implicit, not explicit, argument. In their work it is a dissonance between the decay of a place and its evident photographic beauty that is the seed of a healthier and more robust approach to urbanism.

Because before the developers have transformed the derelict into the desirable, or have bulldozed crumbling subsidized housing to infill with high-priced luxury townhomes, or at best before old churches are transformed into new cultural centres, there is a small



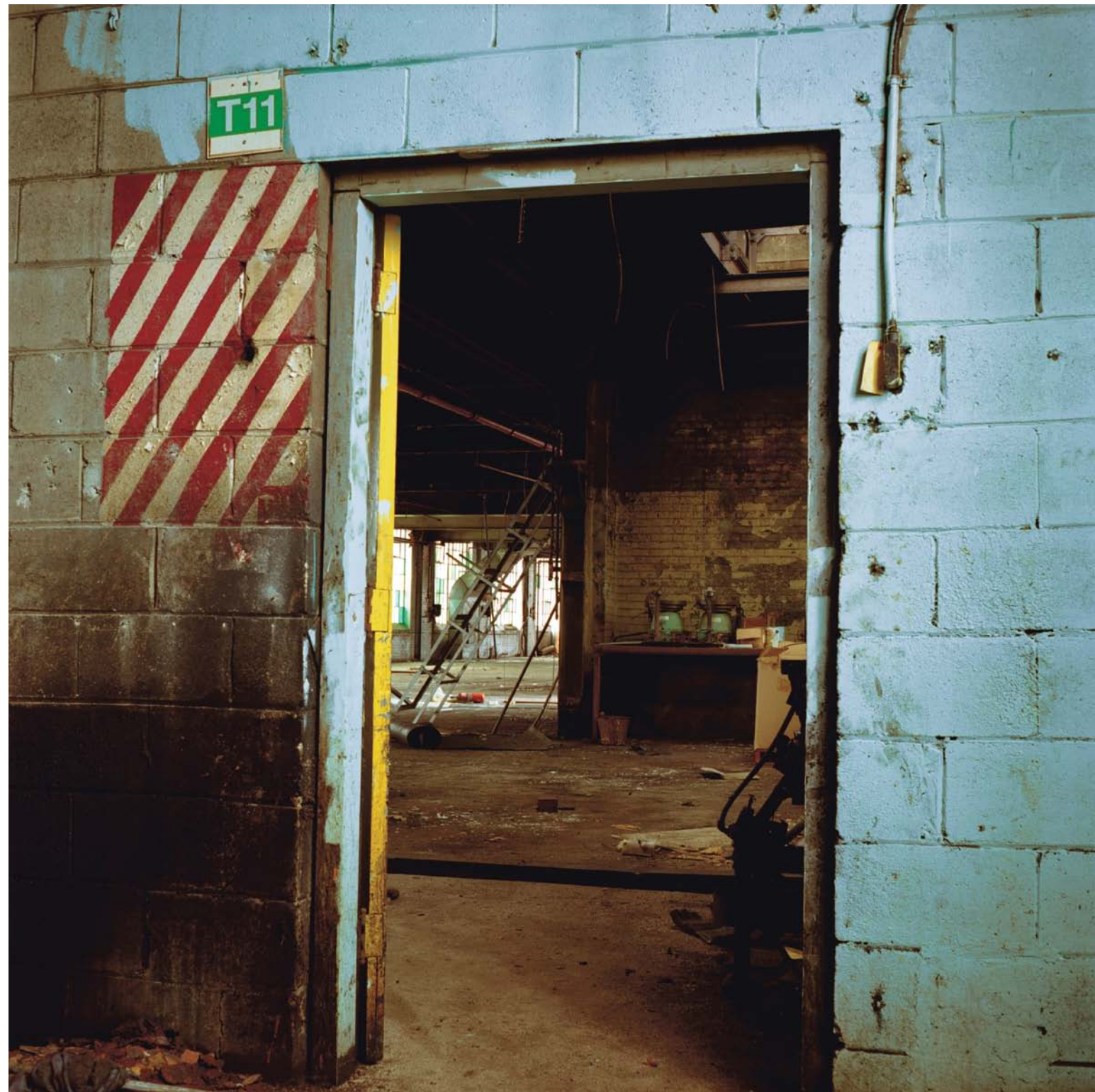
window of opportunity. It is the opportunity to see these spaces as they are, discover clues about their past uses, and capture a moment between one use and another, between one social order and the next. It is in this space that the TLR Club inserts itself, covertly, illegally and effectively to explore, frame and bring back these images that are a kind of documentary art practice mixed in with activist performance. Suddenly everything is up for grabs, buried history is revealed, and we are let into our surroundings without any hope of financial gain, only aesthetic enrichment and conceptual freedom.

And that is where a feeling of voyeurism creeps in. Through the work of the TLR Club we are being admitted to a precious limbo, an in-between state of being that most people never see. Modern Canadian Interiors undresses the urban landscape, laying bare its subjects on the verge of transformation, imbuing them with Sontag's dignities of "mortality, vulnerability, mutability," and granting us access to places rich in past and potent with future, though suffused with photographic beauty in their fragile present.

Industrial



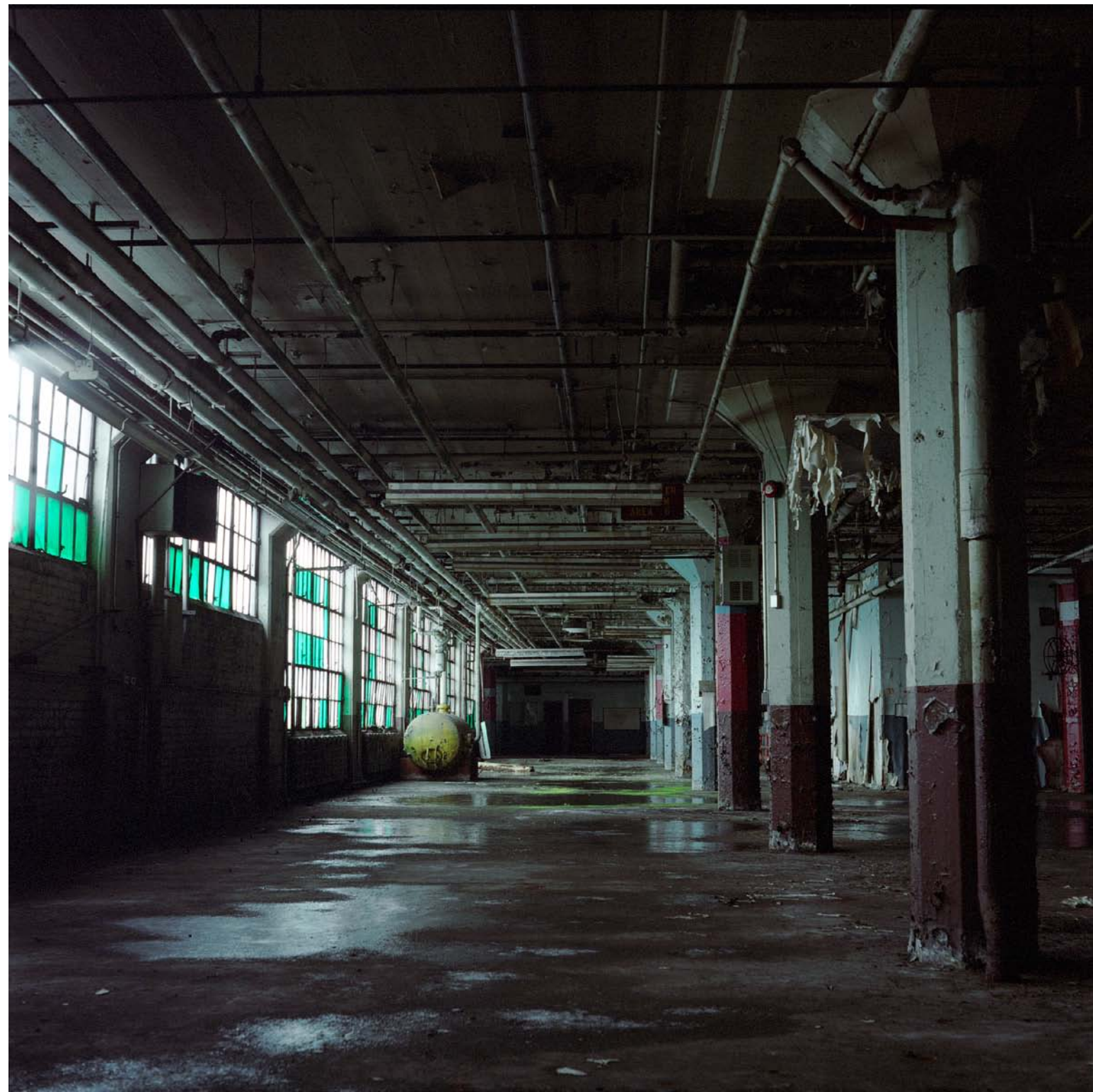
Barber Paper Mill
Bunge Canada
Canada Linseed Oil Mills Ltd.
Canadian Northern Railway Locomotive Shop
Cadet Cleaners
Concord Floral
Crowe Foundry Ltd
Don Valley Brick Works
Firestone Tire and Rubber Company of Canada
General Electric Canada Royce Davenport Works
Houghton Canada Ltd.
Kodak Canada
Laird Parking Garage
McCormick's
National Rubber Industries/Technologies
New York Pork & Food Exchange
Richard L. Hearn Generating Station
Somerville Yard
Symes Transfer Station
Tower Automotive



National Rubber Industries, Toronto, ON



Barber Paper Mill, Georgetown, ON



The Firestone Tire and Rubber Company of Canada, Hamilton, ON



Cadet Cleaners, Toronto, ON



National Rubber Industries, Toronto, ON



Symes Waste Transfer Station, Toronto, ON



left - right: Don Valley Brick Works, Toronto, ON / Laird Parking Garage, Toronto, ON



left - right: Laird Parking Garage, Toronto, ON / Don Valley Brick Works, Toronto, ON



Don Valley Brick Works, Toronto, ON



Kodak Canada, Toronto, ON



left - right: Symes Waste Transfer Station, Toronto, ON



left - right: Symes Waste Transfer Station, Toronto, ON





Barber Paper Mill, Georgetown, ON



National Rubber Industries, Toronto, ON



Canada Linseed Oil Mills Ltd., Toronto, ON



Canada Linseed Oil Mills Ltd., Toronto, ON



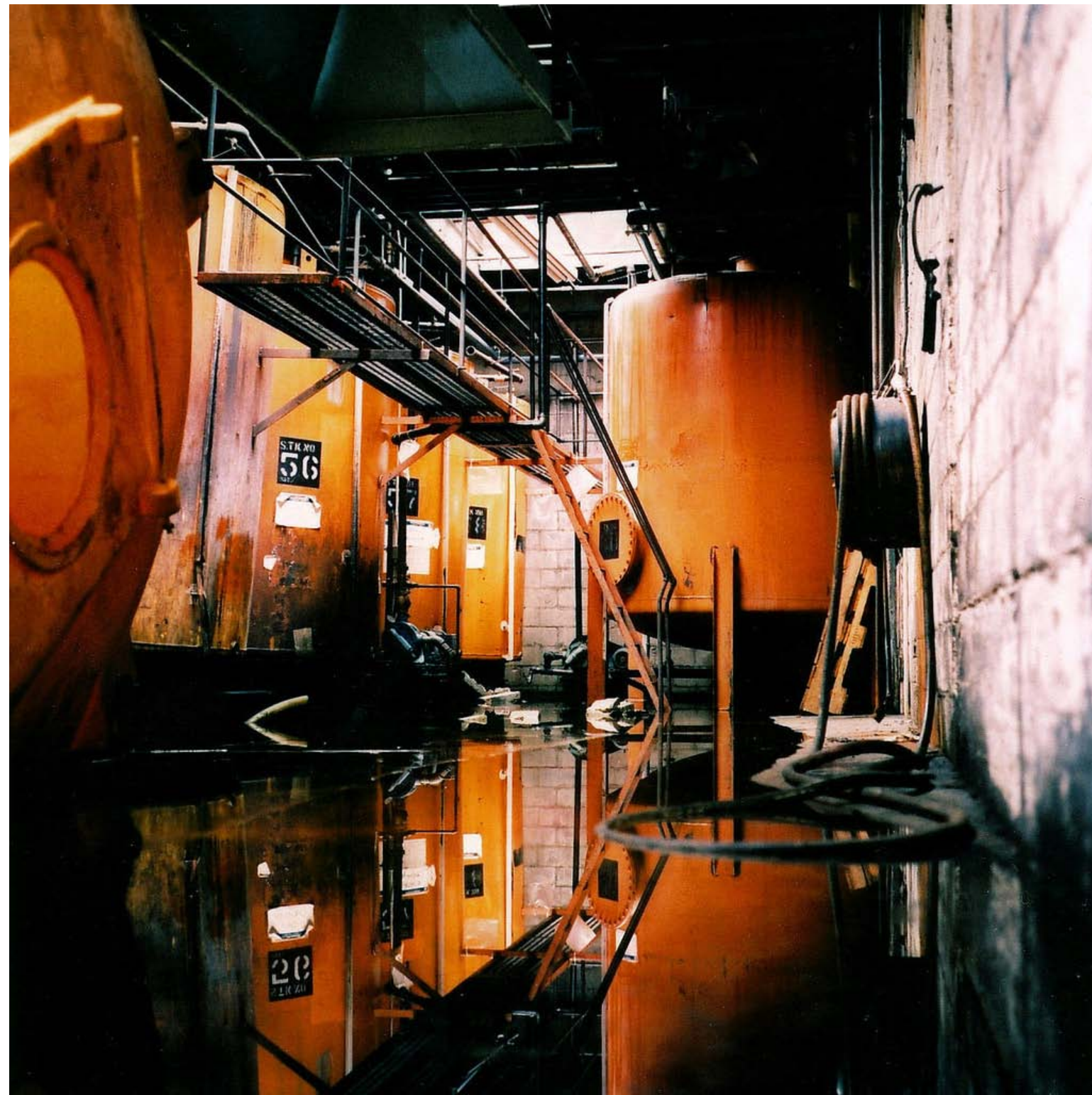
left - right: Cadet Cleaners, Toronto, ON / Bunge Canada, Toronto, ON



Kodak Canada, Toronto, ON



Crowe Foundry Ltd., Cambridge, ON



Houghton Canada Inc., Toronto, ON



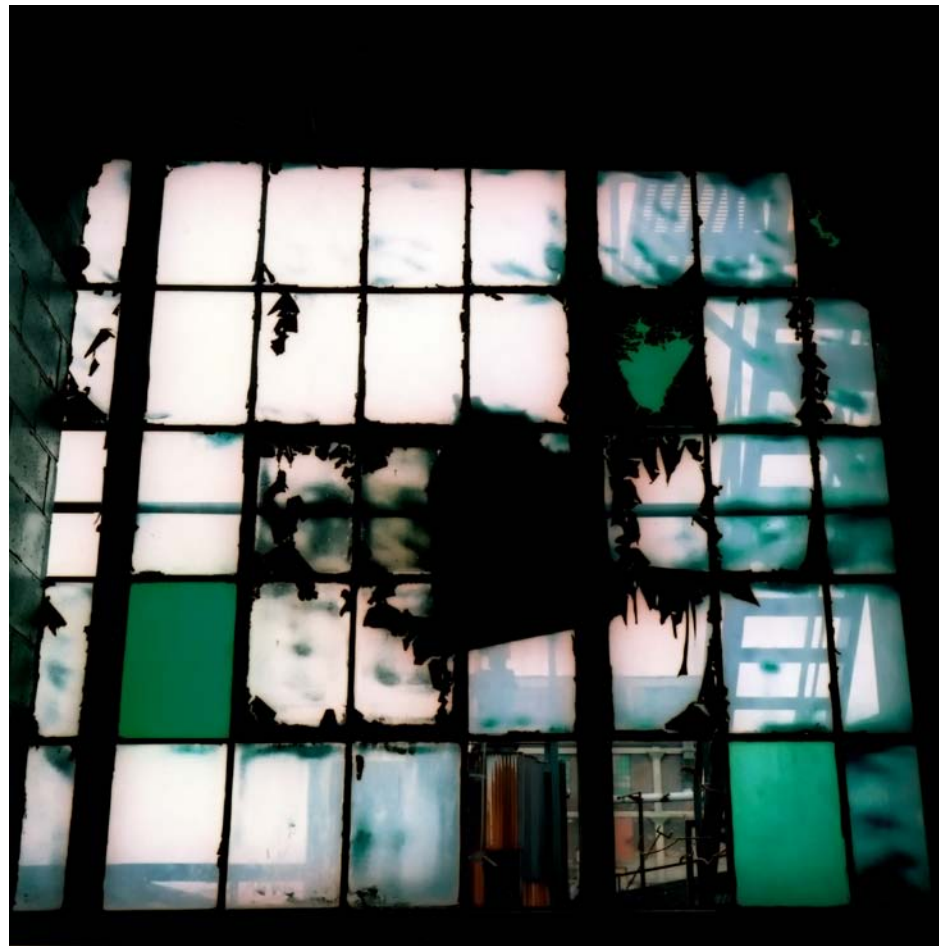
left - right: Canada Linseed Oil Mills Ltd., Toronto, ON / Symes Waste Transfer Station, Toronto, ON



left - right: General Electric Canada Royce Davenport Works, Toronto, ON



Canadian Northern Railway Eastern Lines Locomotive Shop, Toronto, ON



left - right: Firestone Tire and Rubber Company of Canada, Hamilton, ON



General Electric Canada Royce Davenport Works, Toronto, ON



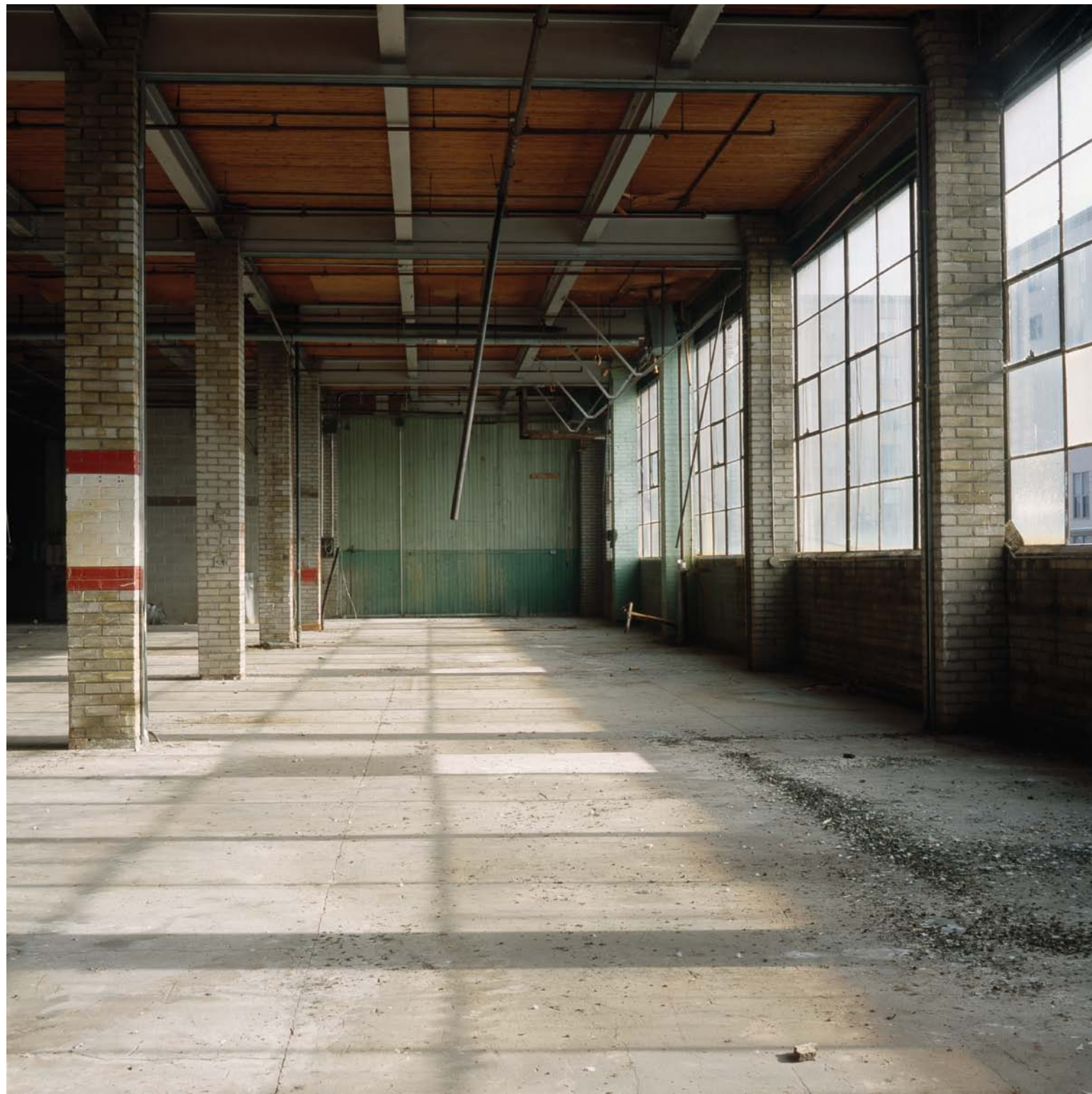
Cadet Cleaners, Toronto, ON



General Electric Canada Royce Davenport Works, Toronto, ON



General Electric Canada Royce Davenport Works, Toronto, ON



General Electric Canada Royce Davenport Works, Toronto, ON



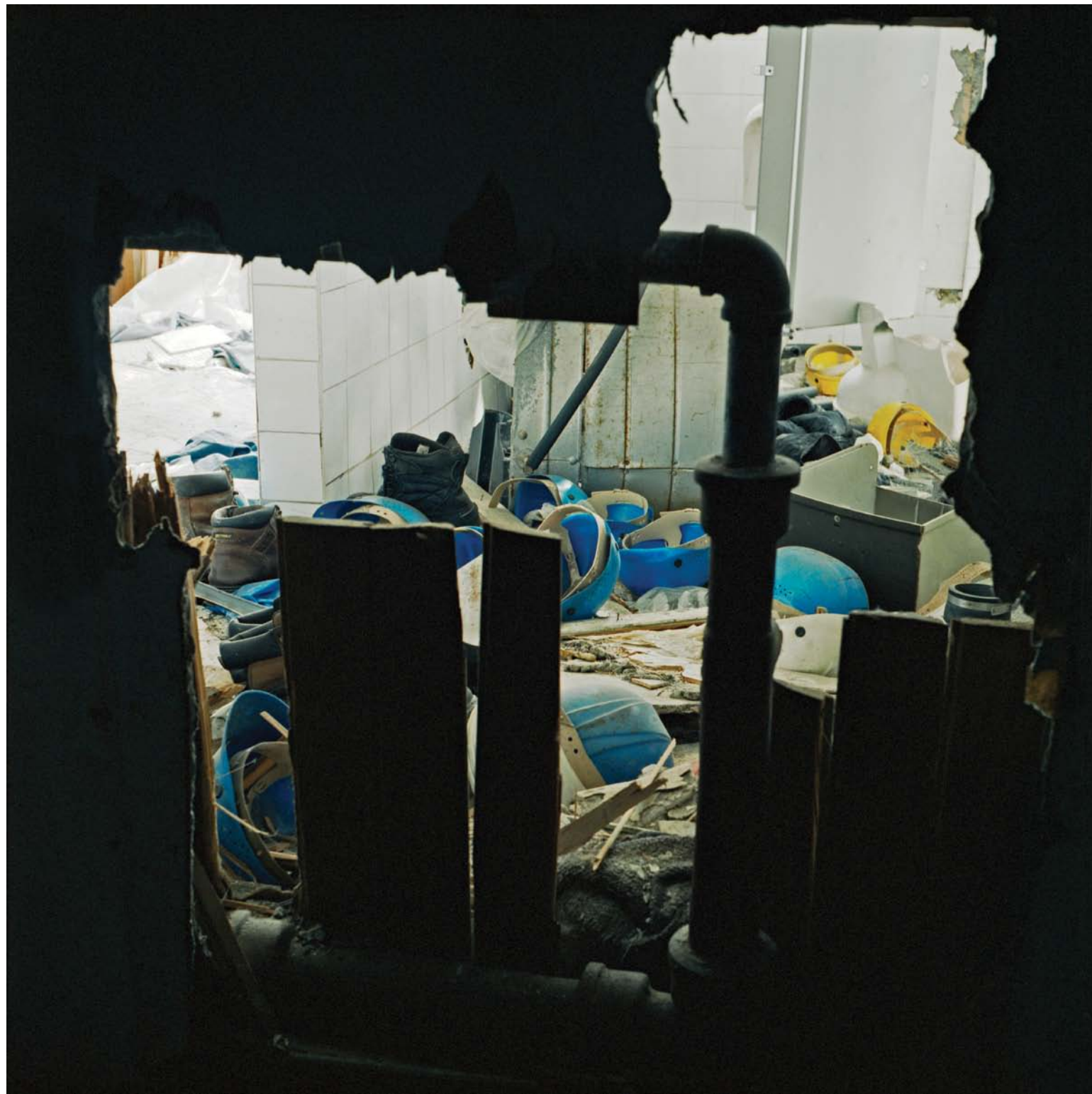
General Electric Canada Royce Davenport Works, Toronto, ON



McCormick's, London, ON



McCormick's, London, ON



New York Pork & Food Exchange, Toronto, ON



New York Pork & Food Exchange, Toronto, ON



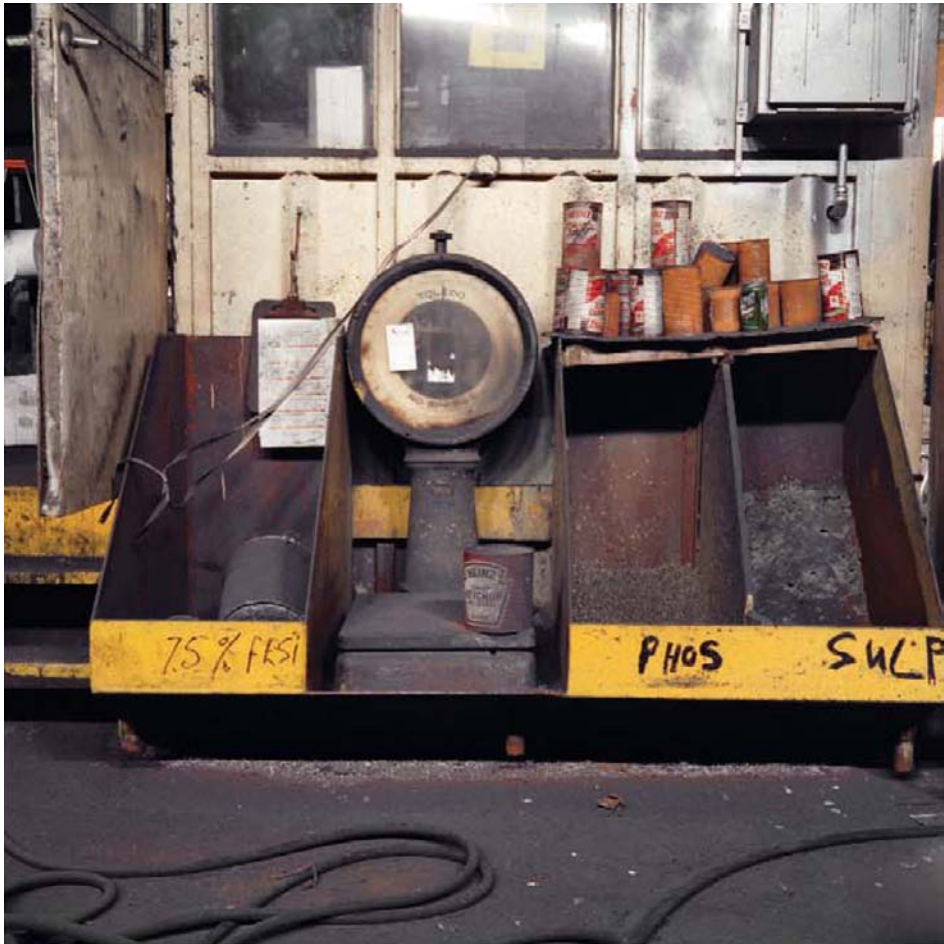
Somerville Yard, Toronto, ON



Canada Linseed Oil Mills Ltd., Toronto, ON



Canada Linseed Oil Mills Ltd., Toronto, ON



left - right: Crowe Foundry Ltd., Cambridge, ON / Bunge Canada, Toronto, ON

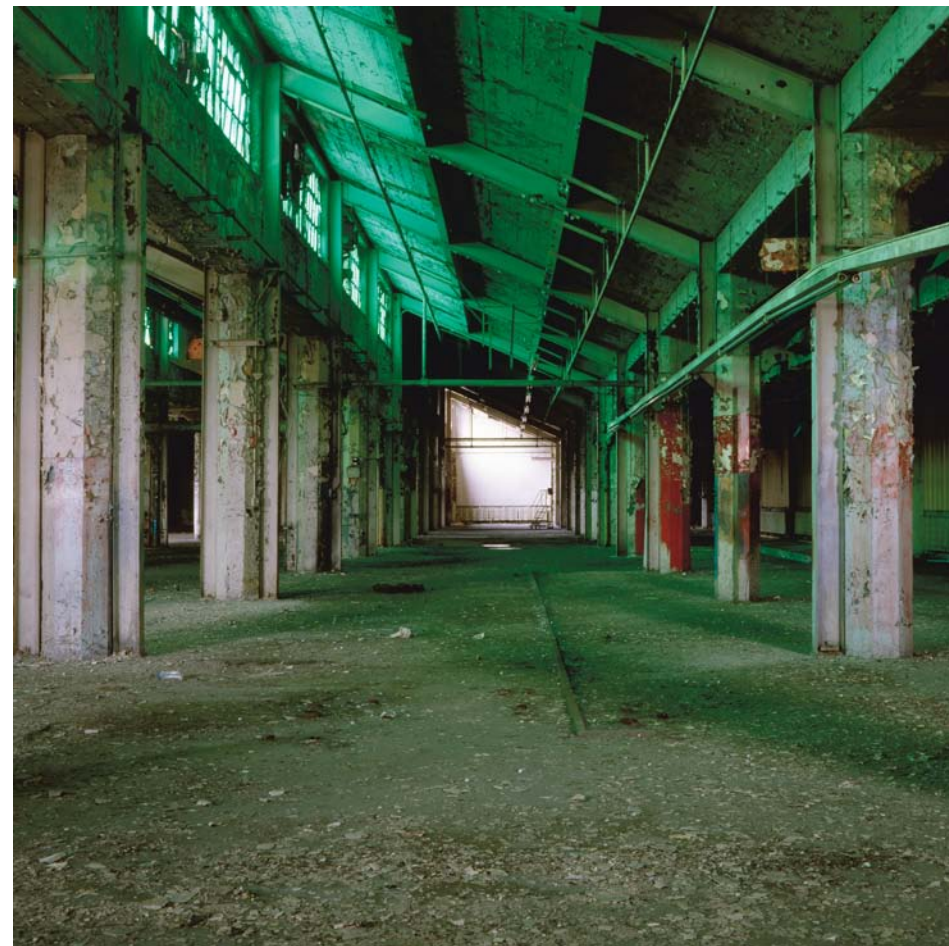




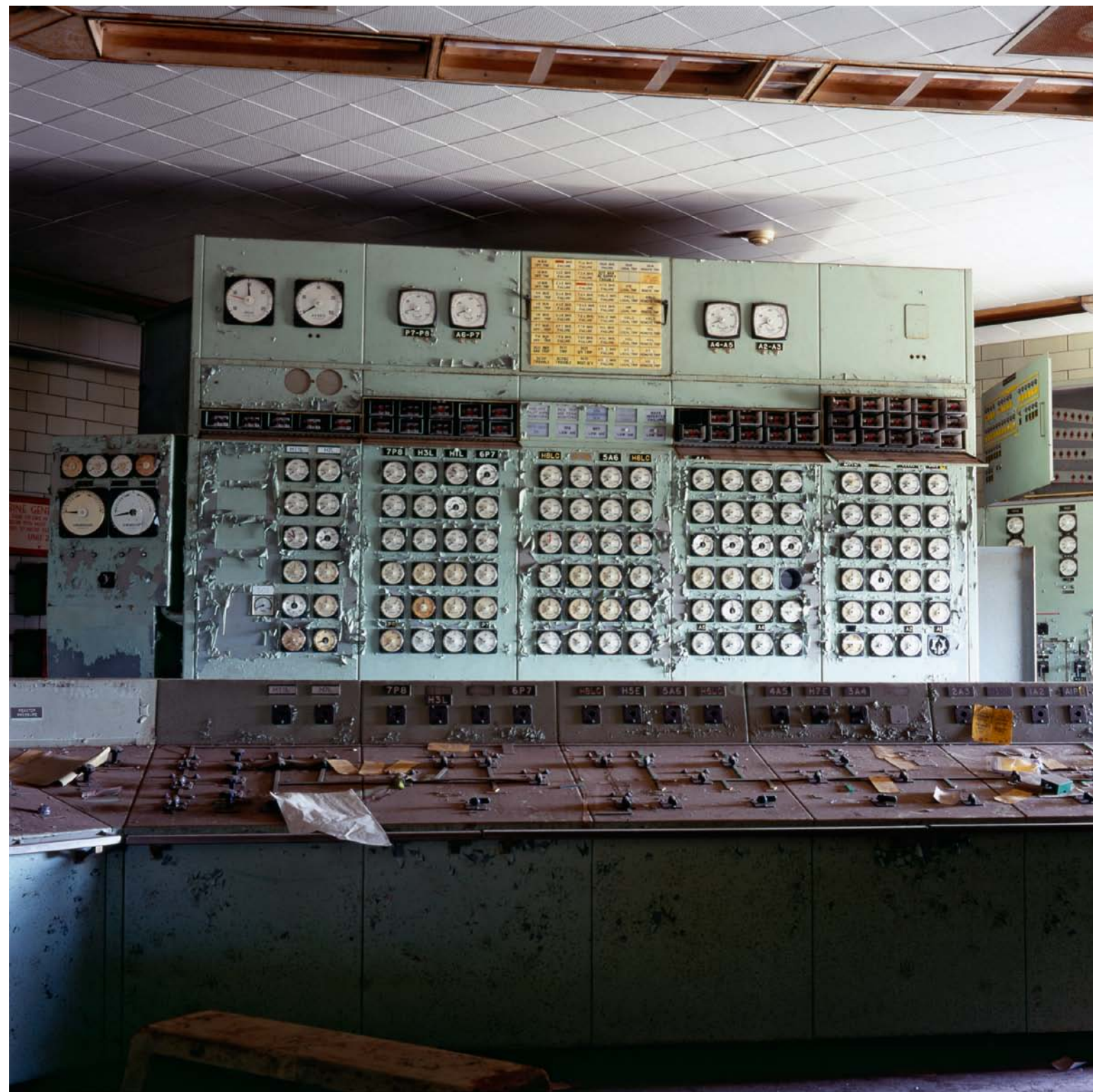
Tower Automotive, Toronto, ON



Concord Floral, Vaughan, ON



left - right: National Rubber Industries, Toronto, ON / Firestone Tire and Rubber Company of Canada, Hamilton, ON



Richard L. Hearn Thermal Generating Station, Toronto, ON



Tower Automotive, Toronto, ON



National Rubber Industries, Toronto, ON



National Rubber Industries, Toronto, ON



Cadet Cleaners, Toronto, ON