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A Gradual Departure

Photographs by John Bartelstone

The standard way to photograph architecture, whether new or historic, is to present a subject as pristine in appearance; and publication of a historic place is usually a catalogue in pictures and words of what is left, with structures in chronological order. But when the purpose is not to provide a catalogue but to evoke a sense of place, a photograph can do that by providing evidence of relentless and inevitable change with time. On these pages the place in question is the Brooklyn Navy Yard, where the United States Navy built ships for 165 years before leaving in 1966, and where 4,500 Brooklynites still work, many in non-ship-related activities.

John Bartelstone, the architectural photographer who took these pictures, has approached the yard as a personal project for some thirteen years. There was change over the years in which the Navy built ships here, as there has been in the years since it left, and particularly in the years when John has photographed. Sometimes the sight of change in his photographs is simply a reminder that time is passing in our own lives, say in the form of the Trade Center towers seen in the distance over one dry dock. Sometimes it is visible where old equipment is turned to present-day uses: in one picture a modern tugboat is being serviced in a granite dry dock originally built in 1850 to assist in construction of Navy line-of-battle ships.

The sense of place is strongest when we see incongruence: truck tires thrown at the foot of a massive salt-water fire pump; a former Naval machine shop where a World War II poster still urges safety on Uncle Sam's behalf, but where giant hydraulic presses were recently stored by a machinery trading company; an originally exterior, one-story brick structure of the 1870s under a high

roof (with air vents), probably from 1904; and a cannon, which at the end of the nineteenth century was retired for use as a bollard, and is now seen accidentally uprooted. Sometimes the changes can be construed as simply "development": a heating radiator stands to one side of a coal fireplace under fluorescent ceiling lights in an interior view of the Naval hospital, built in 1834.

— *Cervin Robinson*

1. Dry Dock 5, of the early 1940s, with a crane of the 1950s or '60s, taken in 1996.
2. Dry Dock 1, of 1850, taken in 2006.
3. Salt-water fire pump, of about 1960, taken in 2001.
4. Building 128, main machine shop, of 1904 and 1917, with Uncle Sam poster, taken in 1995.
5. Building 128, taken in 1997.
6. Brick structure of the 1870s, under a roof of the early 1900s, taken in 2005.
7. Uprooted bollard near dry dock 2, of 1890, taken in 1994.
8. Interior, Navy Receiving Hospital, of 1834, taken in 2006.



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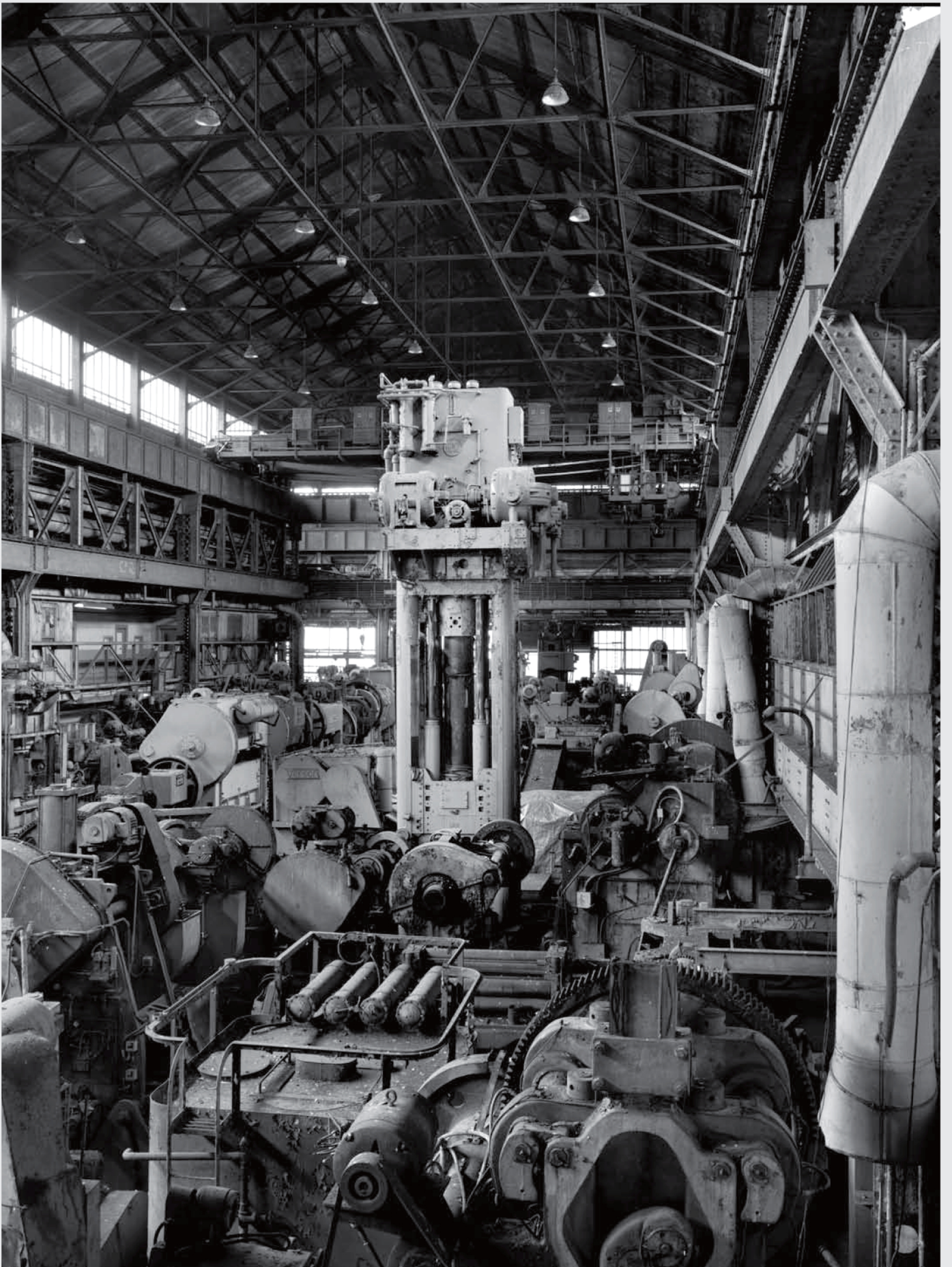




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