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Reinvention of the city. Essential to this mode of permanence resides in the persistence of its form of something existing—is exchanged for a mode a scenario in which repetition—as a reiteration of plurality. In his version of archipelago contract underlying the condition background upon which the islands float.

The repositioning of the architectural object as central to, but not identical with, the processes that constitute the city has been at the core of much of Ungers's work on the city. The explicit focus on the singular architectural intervention in Grossform, against which these processes are read, makes it a pertinent model beyond its historical status as precursor to the green archipelago. Containing coinciding opposites within, Grossform shifts the pluralistic endeavor from the archipelago to the island itself. Where the archipelago relies on its diacritic islands as much as the “sea”—the neutral grid as the great equalizer and shared common ground of the urban enterprise as such—Grossform implies a scenario in which this common ground is absent.25 Today, as civic contracts that enable the equal unfolding of pluralistic enclaves are progressively falling prey to privatization, unhindered growth, or economic depression, this scenario increasingly becomes reality. What planners are left with is the island itself. If Grossform provides the theoretical blueprint for a new project of the “pluralistic object,” Tempelhof is its forgotten in situ experiment. It affirms Ungers's thesis of the continuous programmatic reinvention of Grossform itself, but more importantly equally demonstrates how, over time, it can facilitate the continuous reinvention of the city.

The scenario of retreat to the architectural scale as last bastion of pluralism may seem daunting. But it may also hold opportunities to overcome the persisting dichotomy between “object” and “city” haunting today’s discursive landscape. Recent discourse echoes, to an extent, the paradigm shift of the sixties, from which Grossform emerged against the systems thinking of Ungers’s contemporaries: maybe as a reaction to the boundless expansion of architecture into networks and (digital) flows since the nineties, issues such as architecture’s disciplinarity or “objectness” (as perpetual prototypes that follow a logic of software development. They are facets of a pervasive “smartness mandate” that calls for optimizing humans’ ability to adapt to the urban environment by means of extensive computational infrastructures, as much as it delivers a “political imperative that smartness be extended to all areas of life.”26 Considering the significant impact of smart policies on the extant fabric of cities around the world, the smart city is not only a developmental but increasingly a re-socialization process. The mandate to retrofit industrial cities with digital infrastructures and recondition their citizens as smart subjects is coextensive with the processes of urban financialization, real estate speculation, and gentrification. The smartness mandate’s effect on the Fordist-Keynesian industrial fabric is nevertheless aesthetically compelling. As epitomized by the rise of the Hudson Yards “quantified community” next to and following the completion of the High Line in New York City or the consolidation of Amazon’s (first) headquarters, located in Seattle's South Lake Union, the environments of speculative digital futures are full of reminiscence of the industrial past (fig. 1).

Restoration-as-ruination

Introducing the concept of restoration-as-ruination, this essay examines the practice of restoring industrial built fabric by exposing and accentuating signs of its dereliction. It then explores the ways in which the atmospheres of simulated industrial past foster, by way of inversion, the post-Fordist political economy and its smartness mandate. Can we think of the disrepair by design as an aesthetic proof of the passing of the industrial society? How does the current vogue for so-called ruderal landscapes present as inevitable the societal model built around data infrastructures?27 Restoration-as-ruination is a familiar strategy of urban cultural revitalization. One finds a succinct definition in Robert Smithson’s 1967 assertion that “installations should empty

statute (Gesetz zum Erhalt des Tempelhofer Feldes) forced the city to refrain from implementing plans that would have privatized the area and restricted the erection of permanent structures, thereby keeping the airfield in its entirety open to the public. In 2016, the statute was amended to allow for the relocation of refugees housed in the hangars into temporary container villages on the apron, prompting fears that the necessary site developments implemented to this end could be the first step toward furtive development. Tempelhof’s future remains open, as the airport continues to spar with the forces of the city’s culture, economy, and everyday life.

In Tempelhof, the opposites of permanence and reinvention are entangled at both the scale of the artifact and between the artifact and the city. Pertaining to this issue’s debate on “repeat” worlds, concepts, and buildings, Tempelhof offers a scenario in which repetition—as a reiteration of something existing—is exchanged for a mode of “permanent reinvention.” Tempelhof’s permanence resides in the persistence of its form as much as its modus operandi—the way in which its event character channels the continuous reinvention of the city. Essential to this mode of reinvention is not the exclusive agency of an architect-author, but the artifact itself.

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the grid itself becomes the true hero of his narrative of Manhattan. 26. The upcoming 10th edition of Architectural Discourses of Architecture annual meeting (Black Book: Articulating an Architect’s Core in the Post-Digital Era), for example, is entirely dedicated to the question of what constitutes architecture’s disciplinary core today. With regard to objectness, one can think here of the impact that philosophies of object-oriented ontology have had on architectural discourse in recent years.

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MAROŠ KRIVÝ

MAROŠ KRIVÝ is a research fellow at the Department of Geography, University of Cambridge, and Director of the Graduate Program in Urban Studies at the Faculty of Architecture, Estonian Academy of Arts. He is a writer, urbanist, and architectural historian whose work explores environments of architecture ranging from cybernetic media to wastelands.


rooms, not fill them." The principle lies less in what architecture does than in what it does not do: "My job was not to screw it up," said Frank Gehry of his Temporary Contemporary project (Los Angeles, 1983); "I did not do anything there. I swept the floor." The High Line, for the architect Elizabeth Diller, is "about nothing, about doing nothing." Restoration-as-ruination does not disrupt atmospheres marked by battered walls and pockmarked columns, rail tracks embedded in floors, and baroquely defunct fragments of industrial machinery; it does not so much fetishize ruins as the process of ruination.

A distinct strand to what architectural historian Daniela Sandler describes as "the appropriation of decay as design" under the guise of counterpreservation, restoration-as-ruination is a peculiar blend of John Ruskin's plea against touching derelict monuments and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc's restoration-as-completion approach. To touch is, for Ruskin, to disturb the building's perfection, whereas for Viollet-le-Duc, it is to perfect its imperfection. Restoration-as-ruination perfects the imperfect as imperfect. By speeding up the rusting process, for example, the architect-conservator touches to evoke a sense of incompleteness, as if laying bare the marrow of historicity.

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THE SMARTNESS MANDATE, BALTIc STyLE

How do these questions play out in the context of Estonia, a small Baltic country described by pundits as Europe’s Silicon Valley? The country has distinguished itself by aggressively assimilating into the public sector the strategic objectives, structural logics, and governing rationalities of the smartness mandate, including computational networks such as blockchain. Though riven with


fig. 3  Above, Kavakava Architects, Kultuurikatel, 2009. Axonometric showing circulation (above) and section (below). Courtesy of Kavakava Architects.


fig. 5  Below, Main façade of Kultuurikatel after restoration, 2017. Photograph by Kaupo Kalda.
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fig. 5  Below, Main façade of Kultuurikatel after restoration, 2017. Photograph by Kaupo Kalda.
glitches and contradictions, the alluring vision of “the country as a service,” or simply “e-Estonia,” remains virtually undisputed among the elites. These policies date back to the heyday of neoliberal economic reforms introduced after the collapse of the Soviet Union.13 In the early 1990s, the government of Prime Minister Mart Laar, a devotee of Milton Friedman, quickly privatized most public assets, and Estonia soon became the first country in the world to introduce a flat tax.14 Declaring the Soviet rule illegal and restoring legal continuity with the prewar Estonian republic (1918–40) effectively annulled the citizenship of a large number of mostly Russian-speaking residents.15 Transforming economic and ethnic relations in favor of private capital and ethnically Estonian labor, these reforms ushered in the ideal of a digitally networked society: a model of governing antithetical to neoliberal social thought, which had been based on an industrial economic model; centralized and bureaucratically managed ownership of the means of production; extensive but controlled labor migration; and state-developed “proximity of the ‘failed model’ of a political state socialism as such—a tangible backdrop for governments around the world, including in Canada, Singapore, and Jamaica.16

The Baltic country’s millennial transformation is a perplexing but exemplary case of reactive path dependence.17 Time and again, Estonian post-socialist elites have summoned the Soviet past as a legacy to be repudiated in order to perpetuate a “zombie socialism” that has functioned as a foil to harsh neoliberal reforms, digital boosterism, and ethnicultural nationalism.21 In that same year, it featured creative bricoleurs, and enterprising selves. The unfettered aura of worn surfaces and boarded-up assembly halls attests to qualities requisite for post-Fordist labor: flexible workers, creative bricoleurs, and enterprising selves. The concept is epitomized by the restoration of a former municipal power plant in Tallinn, the host venue of the 2017 Digital Summit of the European Union, powered by coal and oil shale (the latter of which is abundant in the country and still supplies more than 90 percent of its electricity), the plant was opened in 1912 and expanded in stages before and after the war. It was relegated to disuse in 1979, after a new plant was opened on the city’s outskirts. In that same year, it featured in Andrei Tarkovsky’s Stalker (1979) as the entrance to the film’s otherworldly Zone. Lying dormant for two decades, the plant came to house a theater workshop in the early twenty-first century. Triggered by the announcement of Tallinn as the 2011 European Cultural Capital (ECC)—the EU’s leading initiative to promote the so-called cultural power bole15—and organized, in 2009, a national architectural competition centered around converting the building into a multipurpose cultural center.22 As the competition drew to a close, the municipality ousted the NGO and took over the project, thus recognizing the symbolic significance of the power plant, whose convenient location near the city center and waterfront would amplify the historical narrative integrating technological modernization with city- and nation-building (fig. 2).16

The competition was won by Tallinn-based office Kavakava (Siiri Valner, Indrek Peil), with offices and meeting rooms organized around a series of hollowed-out cores. In the initial design, the building was divided into four segments according to the level of disrepair, from the east-facing representative façade to the “ruin garden” in the west, where the architects intended to amplify the process of ruination (figs. 3, 4). The original concept placed emphasis on flexible programming inside and openness outside.23 The architects described their approach as one of master planning, but they also drew on the metaphor of a conveyor belt moving things in and out of the building. Cultural production was conceived of as a form of urbanity: a synthesis of the city and the factory.24

The reverted Kultuurikatel, funded jointly by ECC program funds and Tallinn municipality, with support from the government agency Enterprise Estonia, was opened in 2015. Missing the ECC target date, the new management (headed on
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In 1996, Toomas Ilves (then ambassador to the United States and later president) initiated a program to equip schools, libraries, and other public buildings across the country with computers and internet access. As a pun, it put it at the time, “Estonia’s...non-developed structures represent advantages. We don’t have rigid governmental structures [non]social welfare mechanisms.” Since the 2007–8 European financial crisis, Estonia’s economic turnaround has been further normalized as a blueprint for municipal and national development.17 In the Estonian variant of austerity economics, “restorative” and “facilitating” aspects of neoliberal state building were granted legitimacy under the guise of a start-up nation. The so-called e-government, which sanctions the apparently virtuous union of the incorruptible public sector and innovative entrepreneurs, is rapidly becoming a template for governments around the world, including in Canada, Singapore, and Jamaica.

The Baltic country’s millennial transformation is a perplexing but exemplary case of reactive path dependence.18 Time and again, Estonian post-socialist elites have summoned the Soviet past as a legacy to be repudiated in order to perpetuate a “zombie socialism” that has functioned as a foil to neoliberal reforms and to mobilize social cohesion.19 These policies date continuity with the prewar Estonian republic to the Soviet rule illegal and restoring legal identity.20 Without the war. It was relegated to disuse in the nation building (fig. 2).24 Though countless factories and warehouses were demolished across post-socialist Estonia, many others have been restored, often as retrofitted ruins bearing witness to the foreclosures of the industrial society. Tattered walls and corroded surfaces retrospectively “naturalize” state socialism as a political-economic dystopia and lend a utopian credence, as their constitutive outside, to post-industrial visions of immaterial, data-driven production.

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The renovated Kultuurikatel, funded jointly by ECC program funds and the government agency Enterprise Estonia, with support from the European Cultural Capital (ECC)—the EU’s leading initiative to promote the so-called cultural industries—the coordinators formed an NGO in 2006, came up with the current name, Kultuurikatel (literally translated as “cultural power boiler”), and organized, in 2009, a national architectural competition centered around converting the building into a multipurpose cultural center.22 As the competition drew to a close, the municipality ousted the NGO and took over the project, thus recognizing the symbolic significance of the power plant, whose convenient location near the city center and waterfront would amplify the historical narrative integrating technological modernization with city and nation-building (fig. 3).21

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fig. 6 Above, Interior of Kultuurikatel before restoration, ca. 2009. Photograph by Arne Maasik.

fig. 7 Below, Interior of Kultuurikatel after restoration. Photograph by Tõnu Tunnel.

fig. 8 Kultuurikatel boiler hall after restoration. Photograph by Kaupo Kikkas.
Above, Interior of Kultuurikatel before restoration, ca. 2009. Photograph by Arne Maasik.

Below, Interior of Kultuurikatel after restoration. Photograph by Tõnu Tunnel.

Kultuurikatel boiler hall after restoration. Photograph by Kaupo Kikkas.
of its furlike asbestos protection only to boiler piping, which was painstakingly stripped from the concrete transmission pole and a corroded fragment of a steam turbine, is counterposed against the subdued industrial appearance. A case in point is the convoluted concrete walls and columns that have been carefully maintained “as found,” or exposed if necessary, revealing layers of paint, scratches, dents, and rebar (figs. 6, 7).

“It was a low-budget project, but I do not think we would have covered or painted or made it look cleaner if we would have had more money,” Valner told me. 29 Peil countered that the project’s budget was uncertain and ever-changing, rather than low, and explained that they had to argue for extra investments that the project’s budget was uncertain and ever-changing, rather than low, and explained that they had to argue for extra investments to maintain the “as found,” or exposed if necessary, exposing the worn and corroded steel (fig. 8). The restoration-as-ruination of Kultuurikatel exposed the worn and corroded steel (fig. 8). The restoration-as-ruination of Kultuurikatel might be therefore situated at the intersection of austerity economics and contemporary “infrastructural expressionism.” Boilers, turbines, pipes, and other components of the heat-generating process, their rust and corrosion diligently conserved, protrude from ceilings, walls, and floors, functioning as so many industrial ornaments. 27 Concrete walls and columns have been carefully maintained “as found,” or exposed if necessary, revealing layers of paint, scratches, dents, and rebar (figs. 6, 7).


“Siiri Valner, e-mail communication with the author, February 22, 2018.


“Out of phase with the more familiar case of Ruinenlust—similar to the more familiar case of Detroit, yet distinct insofar as it evokes, by way of inversion, the future as “smart,” optimized, and without ruins.”

DIGITAL, POST-INDUSTRIAL, INDUSTRIAL

For half a year, starting in July 2017, Kultuurikatel functioned as the principal meeting venue for the EU Council rotating presidency, when Estonia assumed the leadership position after the UK government abandoned its own term following the Brexit referendum. The highlight event was the Tallinn Digital Summit, which was attended by the heads of states of all EU member countries. What, then, of the distinctive interiors that enveloped public servants anxious to showcase and take in the country’s vigorous advance toward a data-driven society (fig. 9)?

When Kultuurikatel was hastily reprogrammed as the EU Council venue, organizers did little to disguise the arguably unconventional interiors routinely used for hackathons—where, during forty-eight hour periods, teams of students, designers, and IT professionals, powered by coffee and adrenalin, develop data-enhanced applications and gadgets and “pitch” them to prospective venture investors. The head of the event’s logistical planning described Kultuurikatel as “the epitome of flexibility,” while the specially commissioned digital-screen installation Flow accentuated, rather than offset, the industrial background, playing on the ambiguities between flows of data and nature (fig. 10). 28 In the interior design created specifically for the event, green, yellow, blue, and other colors reminiscent of nature were used to the same effect, juxtaposed against the subdued industrial palette. Describing the building’s makeover,.

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In the interior design created specifically for the event, green, yellow, blue, and other colors reminiscent of nature were used to the same effect, juxtaposed against the subdued industrial palette. Describing the building’s makeover, the project’s budget was uncertain and ever-changing, rather than low, and explained that the government privatization agency put the building to use as a high-profile rental venue, benefiting from its programmatic flexibility, while scrapping the idea of openness. Most curiously, however, the municipality embraced the aesthetics of restoration-by-ruination, which has since become the principal selling (or rather renting) point of Kultuurikatel. On the outside, a neatly polished limestone brick façade (limestone is considered the country’s national symbol), framed by a defunct concrete transmission pole and a corroded fragment of a steam turbine, is counterposed against the subdued industrial expressionism. Boilers, turbines, pipes, and other components of the heat-generating process, their rust and corrosion diligently conserved, protrude from ceilings, walls, and floors, functioning as so many industrial ornaments.

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27. The ornamentations are “residues of necessities from earlier phases of production that have survived,” according to Theodor Adorno, Aesthetics, ed. Eberhard Ortland, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999) 181.
28. Siiri Valner, e-mail communication with the author, February 22, 2018.

fig. 9 Above, Kultuurikatel, contrasts of program and palettes. Photograph by Aron Urb for the EU2017EE.
fig. 10 Below, Urmo Vaikla, Tüüne-Kristin Vaikla, Mikk Meelak, Flow (concept), 2017. Courtesy of the architects.
the presidency website rehashed economic, ecological, and aesthetic imaginaries of the country, noting that the “historic building” was adapted “into a modern working environment with a startup feel,” that “the industrial atmosphere characteristic of Kultuurikatel” was “enhanced with the addition of a digital level visualizing the dynamics of nature,” and that “modern design solutions” employed in the process were “inspired by the untouched forests and yellow rapeseed fields of Estonia.”

During the event, the EU heads of states discussed how “to make the EU the best platform for the digital economy” surrounded by gigantic boilers, while instructions as to how to access the conference Wi-Fi network “FreeTheData” were displayed on digital panels juxtaposed against pockmarked and graffiti-filled walls (fig. 11). The event’s official photo stream was dominated by a flood of images of smartly dressed, high-level officials and delegates conversing and lounging set against the backdrop of walls worn by decades of heavy-duty use and disuse (fig. 12). Epitomizing an “Instagrammable” aesthetic, industrial architecture was represented in these images in an idealized and intensely sanitized form, tailored for social media circulation. Impeccable as it is, this photo stream is not only an absorbing research archive but part and parcel of the restoration-as-ruination event to new geopolitical heights.

In 2015, in a curious precedent to the Digital Summit, Kultuurikatel hosted an architectural exhibition under the semantically bivalent title “Self-Driven City”: it evoked both a city of self-driving cars and the neocybernetic trope of the smart, self-organizing city at once. Opened by Estonia’s then-President Ilves and curated by the government’s so-called national digital adviser—an architect and the chief innovation officer of sorts—the exhibition made much of the putative “Third Industrial Revolution,” eulogized in the identically titled 2011 book by economist Jeremy Rifkin. Showcasing an unsurprising blend of architectural fabrication, data-driven urban planning, and new transport technologies, the exhibition was dominated by Paracity, a modular installation by Finnish architect Marco Casagrande that explored how “spontaneous communicative reactions” might lead to “self-organized community structures” in cities of the Global South.

In a characteristic display of industrial remains as a foil to the post-industrial utopia, Kultuurikatel’s defunct boilers were parasitized by Casagrande’s wooden platforms, atop which dressed-down prophets of the digital future proclaimed its imminent arrival. Such theatrics urgently demand that we critique the ways in which evocative tropes of spontaneity and amorphous metaphors of self-organization are recast over and over from one cultural, political, and economic context to another. How meaningful are these constellations of words and things, beyond signaling a more fundamental rupture with the industrial as such, sinking into techno-utopian fantasies of full automation?

Ironically, the 2017 Digital Summit made much of the “Fourth Industrial Revolution,” a historical break proposed by World Economic Forum founder Klaus Schwab in a 2016 book of the same name. Scenes of summit delegates running into automated delivery robots roaming the Kultuurikatel’s halls (an “expo” complement to policy debates) pose questions about ways in which pseudo-industrial architectural environments normalize the putative post-industrial age—never mind if second, third, or fourth.
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During the event, the EU heads of states discussed how “to make the EU the best platform for the digital economy” surrounded by gigantic boaters, while instructions as to how to access the conference Wi-Fi network “FreeTheData” were displayed on digital panels juxtaposed against sockmarked and graffitied walls (fig. 11). 13 The event’s official photo stream was dominated by a flood of images of smartly dressed, high-level officials and delegates conversing and lounging set against the backdrop of walls worn by decades of heavy-duty use and disuse (fig. 12). Epitomizing an “Instagrammable” aesthetic, industrial architecture was represented in these images in an idealized and intensely sanitized form, tailored for social media circulation. 14 Impeccable as it is, this photo stream is not only an absorbing research archive but part and parcel of the restoration-as-ruination event. 15

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There is a conspicuous disjunction between the literal meaning of “Kultuurikatel” as “cultural power boiler” and the name “Creative Hub” adopted in its official English-language communication. The Estonian term echoes the EU’s cultural industries initiative that prompted the power plant’s refurbishment. The official English translation, in turn, underlines a more expansive idea that everyone, not just artists and cultural producers, has the potential to harness creativity.

The notion of creativity as a universal capacity—once unwarily proposed by artist Joseph Beuys and cunningly instrumentalized by urban economist and consultant Richard Florida—has been integrated in Estonia under the rubric of the “smart” rather than the cultural economy. Equating creativity with smartness is, of course, hardly unique to the Baltic country, especially as the precept of remaking cities for the elusive “creative class” was such a pervasive conceit that it has begun to lose much of its former credence. The Kultuurikatel, nevertheless, stands out as a novel type of architectural environment, the function of which is to incubate rather than to drive production under the overbearing guise of the smartness mandate.

As a power plant made over into a so-called creative hub, Kultuurikatel is a compelling example of what Italian autonomists described as a “social factory.” My reading of the case also adds a concrete architectural sense to this metaphorical concept, which accents the late-capitalist labor of self-entrepreneurs. In the social factory, according to Mario Tronti, “the factory extends its exclusive domination to the whole of society.” The very communicative capacity of subjects, as further elaborated by Paolo Virno under the rubric of immaterial labor, is proletarianized and made into a critical component of labor power. My discussion demonstrates that we can both draw on this analysis and maintain the architectural meaning of the term. With the social factory proliferating over networks, platforms, and other forms of planetary infrastructure, the restoration of former factories might seem a trifling matter. However, the fact that these factories have been restored as ruins is significant: that aesthetics upholds, as a constitutive outside, the edifice of the social factory and justifies, affectively, the mode of communication—and data-driven production under the overbearing guise of the smartness mandate.

Decontextualized from history and renaturalized by images of corrosion and exposed walls, the environments and atmospheres of former factories and other industrial infrastructures are convenient backdrops to the new social factory—the utopian epitome of which, today, is the smartness mandate and its pattern forms of intelligence. Industrial ruins, or rather exposed walls, are devoid of Herculean symbolism, and it is unlikely they could be monumentalized in any collectively meaningful way.
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Decontextualized from history and renaturalized by images of corrosion and exposed walls, the environments and atmospheres of former factories and other industrial infrastructures are convenient backdrops to the new social factory—the utopian epitome of which, today, is the smartness mandate and its pattern forms of intelligence. Industrial ruins, or rather exposed instances of ruination, are retroactive monuments to the fancied heroism of the digital age, whose infrastructural components— rural data farms, underwater sea cables, the Global South’s rare-earth metal mines, or, for that matter, any segment of the Estonian government’s “e-services ecosystem”—are devoid of Herculean symbolism, and it is unlikely they could be monumentalized in any collectively meaningful way.43

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MONUMENTS TO THE SOCIAL FACTORY

fig. 13 Stills from promotional video for the restaurant Juur that was designed by SOO4 Interiors in Ülemiste Smart City, Tallinn, 2017. Video directed by Maria Kivirand and Robi Uppin.


In the early twenty-first century, architectural modernism in Europe and the Soviet Union drew on images of US factories, reading into them universally valid forms of engineering rationality. “The meanings of a ferro-concrete building,” writes Owen Hatherley, were “overloaded with utopian and dystopian content.”43 Architects such as Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Erich Mendelsohn, and Moisei Ginzburg projected onto grain elevators and other industrial structures politically disparate dreams, ideals, and programs.

In the early twenty-first century, in Europe and the US, the institutionalization of industrial heritage has been conditioned by the global restructuring of the capitalist economy, accompanied by a rift between blue-collar and white-collar labor. The social factory has reshaped communicative, performative, and affective aspects of individual lives into a form of capital investment. This vision has been particularly appealing to Estonia’s neoliberal elites under the guise of the smartness mandate, sanctioned as an antithesis to the centralized Soviet state socialism (fig. 11). Early twentieth-century factories, such as the former power station in Tallinn, abound with utopian and dystopian symbolism today as much as they did a century ago. What they symbolize, however, has been turned on its head.