ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXERCISES IN POSTINDUSTRIAL REFLEXIVITY

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In 1986, the biggest and most productive European coal mine, Zollverein in Essen, was shut down after almost one and a half centuries of operation. Seven years later the remaining part of this huge industrial complex, the coking plant, was also turned off. This gigantic machine, a powerful, if not omnipotent, social actor that directly and sometimes brutally shaped the existence of millions of people over decades and generations in Germany, Europe, and all over the world, was silenced forever. This was nothing out of the ordinary: many other engines of modern industrialization and sociocultural modernization in this part of the globe had to be stopped with the rise of the "postindustrial era." Or, more pragmatically speaking, with the exportation of the dirtiest, hardest, and most dangerous (both for people and nature) production to distant places, preferably located outside Europe and the United States—places where resources are (still) rich and most people (still) very poor.

The shutdown of Zollverein was not exceptional then—and neither unexpected nor sudden. Politicians, economists, and engineers planned and controlled the process, enforced it gradually, and spread it out over years. What was unusual and new, however, was the fact that the plant—from the beginning of its industrial end—was protected from destruction and dismantling and preserved for "postindustrial times." Within a couple of years it had been transformed into a vibrant center for art, culture, and *creative* industry. The significance of this transformation, officially dubbed "preservation through conversion," was recognized in 2001, when the Zollverein Coal Mine Industrial Complex—altogether 100 hectares of land with several mineshafts and the coking plant—was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The next milestone in this successful conversion came in 2010, when the impressive Ruhr Museum was opened in the original, albeit attractively redesigned, building of the former coal washing plant. When in operation, it was a huge-scale machine that sorted, classified, stored, and distributed hard coal. Its architectural shape was fully subordinated to these industrial functions. Today, this former *machine* (since changed

into a *building*)[1] houses an impressive museum and cultural center. Its main exhibition, spread over three spacious floors, fascinatingly narrates the story of the Ruhr area—from the oldest fossils and other paleontological discoveries to the ethnographically observed and sociologically mapped newest forms of human creativity and imagination, including myths and stereotypes, of this postindustrial region. What intervenes in-between and connects archeological findings with current observations is, of course, industrialization, which has reshaped this world completely.

But this breathtaking museum is trying to narrate much more than the local history of a specific German industrial region—even if one so well-known and economically important. Curators of the exhibition invite us to explore this concrete historical example—the story of mankind, at least one possible version of it, one of many stories but not deprived of universal significance. And despite all reservations, the story it tells is a story of success. Zollverein, once an engine of modernity and modernization, today serves as a friendly and fancy space where people can learn, perform, and make art—but is first of all a place to consume culture without destroying the surrounding "natural" environment, which has in the meantime been recultivated. The latter can be admired from the roof of the museum building—chimneys are gone and trees cover the mild, pleasant landscape of the Ruhr area, not long ago one of the most industrialized regions of the world. Statistics support these postindustrial impressions (or illusions): 1.5 million visitors come to Zollverein every year; hundreds of art, design, theater, and other cultural projects take place there. People do come in masses—not to produce (with the exception of artists, performers, and other employees of the "creative industries") but to enjoy and consume impressions. And to reflect on the industrial "heritage of mankind."

The following texts can be understood in a similar way—as exercises in postindustrial reflexivity. This reflexivity can be understood anthropologically as a double hermeneutics—we reflect on how people in different cultural contexts reflect on their industrial past—as well as the past of the places they live in. However, our exercises refer to less spectacular examples of postindustrial social worlds and tell less "successful" stories of overcoming burdens of the past. A quarter of a century after the silencing of the Zollverein complex, we are today much less optimistic about our chances to perform such positive "conversions" and simultaneously much more convinced about the ambiguity of their outcomes. When we look at these processes globally, we see that the transformation of the Ruhr area should be treated as an exception and not as a representative example of successful postindustrial transformation, and we recognize that the picture of postindustrialism cannot be painted in black and white.

In its classical formulations (see, e.g., Touraine 1971; Bell 1973; Block 1990; Hage and Powers 1992), the rise of postindustrial society has been described in terms of the growing importance of the service sector, knowledge economy, rapid

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[1] The transformation was neither "accidental" nor influenced by any particular "architectural direction"—we just use here the phrase, proudly repeated by museum founder and former director Ulrich Borsdorf to stress that what today is a museum *building* used to be a huge industrial *machine*. Hence our "reading" of this architecture is subordinated to its industrial/social/cultural functions.

and wide-scale technological advances, and the increased importance of higher education. Due to the fact that spatial-economic restructuration has had a profound impact on people's everyday lives, postindustrialism has also been associated with changing patterns of social relations, new understandings of community, and post-materialist values centered on self-expression and quality of life. Participants in the first wave of discussions on postindustrialism in the 1970s and 1980s, mainly political scientists and sociologists, focused less on the direct impact of industrial shutdowns and prioritized more abstract deliberations on the shape of "postindustrial times." As such, considerations of the end of the industrial era fitted into the broader context of "afterology" (Hann and Hart 2011:142; cf. Sahlins 2002). Yet whereas many such theoreticians were inclined to recognize postindustrialism's social and cultural potential, describing it as an age of convivial, more equal, affluent, and creative societies, others rushed to document persisting inequalities, increasing consumerism, detrimental technocracy, and economic costs related to manufacturers' decline. Although the first set of arguments has been by now widely discarded due to its monocausal, simplifying, and by and large utopian view of social change, it would be hard to claim that the latter analyses provide a fuller picture of postindustrial transformation. Rather, scholars investigating experiences of the postindustrial era recognize its Janus face, demonstrating that the positive and negative aspects of the "postindustrial revolution" are in fact deeply intertwined (see Nelson and Cooperman 1998).

A glimpse at currently realized projects shows that a project or a publication featuring postindustrialism is likely to focus on precarity, underclass struggles, and degradation as much as it is likely to describe artistic production, new patterns of leisure, and burgeoning neighborly practices—simply because the latter is preconditioned by the former. In documenting the fascination with "postindustrial ruins" and the afterlife of urban working-class neighborhoods, one cannot help but engage with the question of who wishes to inhabit such ruins and "produce" for them a new identity (once their former identity, connected precisely with *production,* is gone), and to what extent this refashioned identity can be shared by new and old inhabitants of the neighborhood. Similarly, in analyzing the development of creative economies and the "spirit of flexibility," it appears impossible to fully comprehend their nature by focusing only on the beneficiaries in the postindustrial West and not on the associated costs in the rest of the world—"the rest" indicating not just the faraway sites of outsourcing but the West's own unemployed and underemployed workers (Kester 1993:79), and the class, racial, and ethnic divisions with which those costs are intertwined. In investigating the manifold practices of the industrial era's memorialization and "heritization," one cannot take into consideration the social actors performing such practices while passing over those who are silenced and excluded.

As obvious as these observations may sound, they are rarely articulated in literature on the subject. Even if we leave aside the highly criticized utopian versions of postindustrialism indicated above, it becomes clear that more critical and nuanced studies also often fail to grasp the social experiences of postindustrialization.

Interestingly, this is often the case in works which combat Daniel Bell's and his followers' reductionist views of social change and which, in their attempt to focus on postindustrialization's "losers," tend to use equally reductive categories of the "poor," the "unemployed," and the "working class." In making this point, we do aim not to question the necessity of categorizing and classifying but to expose the risks of losing sight of the specificity of actual contexts, historical moments, and studied communities. In this short introduction and in the following articles and reviews, we highlight the importance of an anthropological perspective in the study of postindustrialism, which, through a sharp focus on what is specific and particular, opens the field for broader reflections.

This special issue of *Laboratorium* is an example of such a reflexivity and an invitation to its anthropological exercise. Such an exercise must be based on solid ethnographic research, on rich data collected out there, "in the field." In the following pages we are taken to several such postindustrial fields—each one very different from the other and at first glance having little in common. Each, however, is a product of deindustrialization. Or rather, less deterministically: each is an example of postindustrialism's long-lasting social consequences, on the one hand, and attempts at symbolic confrontation of its legacy, on the other. Both of these processes—and many others in-between—despite all their diversity are strongly interconnected, even though one is anthropologically "caught" in an American industrial museum, another in a mosque built on the site of a disused dairy in London, and the third in a distant Russian postindustrial monotown. What links them together is their orientation towards the past. Whatever new social constellations are built in these places, whatever new forms of cultural representation are being developed, people live and act there in the shadow of that industrial heritage, its blessings and its curses. The factories may be switched off, but their continuous, real and symbolic, work in people's lives endures, and, consequently, people cannot narrate their (life) stories without them.

In discussing the merits of such anthropological exercises, we wish to highlight a few aspects that make ethnographic methodologies and sensibilities particularly apt for the study of postindustrial processes, helping to mitigate the risks of analytical reductionism. First, while the perception of anthropology as specializing in the study of non-Western societies has long been questioned, it is within anthropology that one is still most likely to find in-depth studies of non-Western social worlds. These allow us to consider the different paths of (post)modernity and (post)industrialization, to become familiar with a variety of human experiences of and responses to those processes, and to recognize how different sociocultural contexts may both underpin and infringe upon those responses. As such, they provide an important corrective to the often ethnocentric accounts of postindustrialization in the West and invite us to reflect on the translatability of the concepts used. At the same time, they complement rather than offer an "alternative" view of postindustrialization, unveiling its global dimensions. For instance, James Ferguson's acclaimed work on the Zambian copperbelt (1999) tells the story of a paradoxical perpetuation of colonialism, evinced in the decline of local mines, which once again become the property of

a British firm. The environmental anthropologist Jerry K. Jacka (2015) paints a dramatic picture of adjacent postindustrial and industrial realms, the coexistence of which is determined by the demands of global resource extraction and the subsequent uneven development of the Papua New Guinea highlands. In her overview of the cities of the Global South, Loretta Lees (2014) similarly shows that the processes of gentrification often occur not in postindustrial realms but, rather, in unevenly developed urban locales that simultaneously experience preindustrialization, industrialization, and postindustrialization. Such works demonstrate the potential, and increased need, for studies that shed light on the complex entanglements of global (post)industrialization.

In light of these remarks, it seems clear that scholars interested in Eastern European postsocialist contexts have an important role to play here (as Jeremy Morris's article on a Russian monotown in our volume convincingly demonstrates). Quite surprisingly, however, postindustrialism in postsocialist Europe (and in the postsocialist world more generally) has thus far received relatively little attention. Filling this gap is extremely important, as it may shed light on yet another face of postindustrialism, the fact that people's experiences of the gradual decline of industries coincided with the industries' privatization and all sorts of new phenomena—work patterns, norms, values—that privatization brought about. The latter aspect is discussed by Adam Mrozowicki (2011) in his study of Polish working-class representatives, who appear both vocal and capable of successfully facing new constraints. Similarly, Tomasz Rakowski's work (2009) on Polish unemployed miners and homeless people traces their transformation from helplessness to resourcefulness, while Felix Ringel (2014) discusses people's efforts to keep alive a quickly declining former East German town. An investigation of postindustrial realms in postsocialist states brings enriching comparative insights, which contribute both a novel perspective and material suggesting the similarity of workers' experiences under different sociopolitical regimes (regarding, for instance, the relation between work and self-fulfillment, or familial ties among factory workers). Despite, or perhaps because of, the declining interest in postsocialism, more works on its postindustrial aspect are likely to come.[2]

On the contrary, there is abundant anthropological scholarship on the experiences of postindustrialization in the United States. In recent years there has appeared an impressive body of work covering a vast array of topics, including the memorialization of industry (Shackel and Palus 2006; Stanton 2006), relations between racial and economic inequalities (Adams 2010), gentrification and changing cityscapes (Lloyd 2006), the impact of deindustrialization and resultant unemployment on family lives (Dudley 1994; Walley 2013), as well as new forms of employment, exemplified by both elderly precarious workers (Lynch 2012) and the "model" personnel of the neoliberal era (Urciuoli 2008). Praised and widely acknowledged, many of these contributions have become key points of reference whenever a debate on "class," "suburbs," or "gentrification" takes place—an occurrence contested by some,

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[2] See, e.g., the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology's project "Industry and Inequality in Eurasia" (http://www.eth.mpg.de/3537102/industry_and_inequality).

but far from surprising in the context of the generally dominant role of American scholarship. Although some of the quoted works could be criticized for their ethnocentric perspective and lack of reflection on broader implications of the problems discussed, Kamil Luczaj's and Hanna Gospodarczyk's book reviews in this issue indicate that such omissions, reinforced by certain unfortunate formulations ("our American society"), should not obscure the fact that these carefully painted depictions of concrete families, neighborhoods, or communities are very telling about the human condition in a neoliberal economy at large.

We thus return to the earlier mentioned point on the "particular" and the "universal," the fact that our ability to better comprehend the lived experiences of postindustrialism relies on an ethnographic sensibility and comparative approach. In depicting the people suffering or benefiting from recent socioeconomic transformations, anthropologists present them as embedded in their communities and localities, and are therefore able to explore the variety of resources people draw on while responding to ongoing changes. For what stands out in ethnographies of postindustrial times is precisely the view of social actors—no matter if we are talking about leaders of "creative economies" or laid-off factory workers—as agents and not passive recipients, which in turn enables us to move beyond the dichotomy of resistance versus adaptation. Even if many of the protagonists of such accounts emerge as deeply attached to the past—emphasizing that past work, beloved routines, or lifestyles were "better" and "realer"—their acts of dwelling on the past do not necessarily denote inadaptability, but rather provide a framework for (new) actions.

The second important reflection that the reading of recent ethnographies provokes is the continuous importance of *work* as a source of meaning, deeply shaping one's subjectivity (see Morris, this issue; Luczaj, this issue), as well as the continuing importance of *class* in determining people's desires, opportunities, and life chances. Both these observations stand in striking contrast with early theories of postindustrialization that put forward both the "end of work" thesis and an overly sunny view of the "non-class of non-workers" (Gorz 1982). Challenging these predictions as well as the discipline's own traditions (cf. Smith 1984),[3] anthropology has recently turned to the exploration of class, demonstrating the strength of anthropological tools in understanding class differences, distinction, and reproduction (e.g., Ortner 2006; Jeffrey 2010; Durrenberg 2012; Walley 2013; see also Millar 2015). Ethnographies of postindustrial times contribute a great deal to this discussion through their exploration of how class continues to merge with other aspects of identity, such as ethnicity, confession, and gender, and how class is mobilized in the processes of exclusion from and belonging to new postindustrial spaces (Balzani, this issue; Pasieka, this issue).

Indeed, postindustrial spaces appear to be realms of class divergence and contestation par excellence. As evinced in our introductory story of the Ruhr Museum, the adaptation of industrial sites triggers a series of questions as to who benefits

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[3] Until recently, the study of class had not occupied an important role within anthropology, or at least it had rarely been addressed explicitly.

from the creative adaptation of old industrial locales and to what extent the newly (re)created neighborhoods and institutions reproduce old forms of distinction, albeit under different labels. Answers to these queries often make it evident that the new urban planning privileges carefully designed, segregated neighborhoods instead of investing energy into fighting homelessness and uneven development, and that museification transforms many formerly livable places into merely visitable ones (Rutheiser 2005; Vaccaro 2006). At the same time they account for a paradox, manifested in new inhabitants' wish to live in gentrified neighborhoods and their simultaneous complaints about cities' "lost soul" and identity—for the fact that they long for the past romanticized urban landscape but not for its former inhabitants (Zukin 2010). However, what is also a "typically" anthropological claim is the sturdily repeated conviction that "things are much more complex," which here translates into a warning against simplistic critiques of the new middle class, their neat neighborhoods and ecologically oriented mindsets, and the equally simplistic romanticization of working-class people's plights. Anthropological explorations invite us to revisit these well-worn dichotomies, foregrounding the ambiguous roles played by very different actors in reproducing precarity, contributing to environmental crises, and supporting inequalities.

First and foremost, recent ethnographic contributions illuminate a *common* human plight. They reveal that while we have managed to create and maintain postindustrial social order here and there in the world (usually at the cost of other, less privileged people), we are just beginning to understand, not to mention to cope with, the global consequences of industrialization. The exploitation of resources continues, bringing immense and irreversible damages. As Roy Scranton (2015) convincingly shows in his piercing book, it is coal, the "black gold" that has been fueling our human expansion in the last two hundred years, that will be—in the form of carbon dioxide emitted into the air—the main reason for humanity's inescapable decline. Another such lesson is coming to us right at this very moment, as we write these words: hundreds of thousands of hectares of Indonesian forests are burning, a consequence of the absolute exploitation by the global food industry, emitting monstrous pollution into the air and causing irreversible damage to nature and humankind. Though much less tragic and focused on human resilience and agency, our examples are part of the same story. We do urgently need anthropological reflexivity to understand this connectedness—and our "postindustrial heritage" in general.

Our thematic issue comprises three articles and four book reviews. The first article, written by Jeremy Morris, offers a compelling account of the daily lives of blue-collar workers in a former industrial Russian town, Izluchino. In presenting local inhabitants' attempts to make the postindustrial realm "habitable," whether by means of strongly valorized social ties or a common identity as manual workers, the author challenges both widespread representations of depressed postindustrial areas and the academic discourse that contributes to such representations. Far from idealizing the postindustrial era or failing to recognize the dangers and insecurities it entails, Morris draws a vivid picture of the people "making the best of the postsocialist 'inheritance' of urban space" (Morris, this issue, 43). A useful comparative

foil for this article is Christian Koller's review of *Made in Sheffield: An Ethnography of Industrial Work and Politics* by Massimiliano Mollona, which depicts everyday struggles and kinship solidarity of the inhabitants of an English postindustrial (and post-Thatcher) suburb.

In yet another account of the United Kingdom, Marzia Balzani discusses a conflict over the use of an abandoned dairy and the opposition against its transformation into a mosque in a postindustrial London neighborhood. Rather than just presenting two sides of the conflict, Balzani maps a terrain marked by conflicting attitudes and interests of various, both global and local, actors: the transnational Muslim community and Islamophobic agents, municipal and religious authorities, affluent middle-class residents, and immigrants. Similarly to the authors of the edited volume discussed in the review by Alena Pfoser (*Reanimating Industrial Spaces: Conducting Memory Work in Post-Industrial Societies*), Balzani sees the contested postindustrial site as multivocal and identifies some of the manifold influences shaping it. Her analysis of the conflict serves here as a lens through which to investigate the complex interrelations between religion, ethnicity, and class in a postindustrial context.

In a similar vein, Agnieszka Pasieka uses the case study of an industrial museum in New England to discuss the continued relevance of class identity and the ethnicity-class nexus. The museum story she documents, which commemorates American industrial heritage, is in theory an inclusive "American story," yet in practice often an exclusivist one. By glorifying industrial times the museum ends up glorifying an ideal of "good workers"—and, consequently, good citizens—which is impossible to achieve for new generations and new immigrants. Many of Pasieka's observations are matched by two book reviews, Kamil Luczaj's review of *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago* by Christine Walley and Hanna Gospodarczyk's review of *Retirement on the Line: Age, Work, and Value in an American Factory* by Caitrin Lynch. The authors discuss at length the contradictions shaping the postindustrial American context that the books unveil and reflect on their implications for our understanding of postindustrialism writ large.

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