Leaving post-industrial urban studies behind?

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Abstract

In this forum paper, we question the lasting utility of the framework and language of urban post-industrialism. We suggest that, while such conceptual metaphors are useful to understand economic, social and cultural change at specific times, post-industrial may obscure more nuanced explorations of the realities of today's multi-faceted, planetary, and digitally-mediated urban processes and socio-spatialities. Post-industrial speaks primarily to dramatic and violent changes that happened in the twentieth century, and continue to happen today, but, we suggest, the story is more complex. Specifically, we bring forward a few critiques of the post-industrial, that a revitalized agenda might begin to move beyond. Firstly, is that industrialisation is always-ongoing, and not something that can be fixed into place. Where it is absent, it continues to haunt. Second, is that over-use of post-industrial as a descriptor and critical lens can lead to territorial, class, racial/ethnic, political, and world-regional stigmatizations. In particular, it can reinforce colonialist hierarchies of prototype Northern/Western cities versus those in the majority world, and certain assumptions about linearity and path dependencies about industrial trajectories. Thirdly, we suggest post-industrial frameworks can calcify gender binaries and obscure counterhegemonies and fluidities, especially given the realities of global urban industrial labour today. Finally, we propose that moving beyond the post-industrial might open more radical space for vibrant art and politics, from cross-spectrum alliances and solidarities (like revitalized labour movements), to joyful artistic expression that transcends rust, decay, and ruin. We do not propose throwing away post-industrialism, but rather, to invite other possibilities to coexist.

'Look at what they still call us…Post-industrial. How the hell are we meant to move on when the only way we talk about ourselves is what we aren't anymore? How are my grandkids meant to

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imagine a future beyond that?' (Lesley Manville [Julie Jackson]), Sherwood, Episode 6 (BBC, 2022).

Introduction: The post is never dead: *It's not even post*

In this forum paper, we consider what critical opportunities are being obscured under the essentiality of 'post-industrial' in understanding today's global urban mosaic. We question the lasting utility of this conceptual metaphor. More broadly, we use this paper to reflect upon the power of language in structuring urban understanding, and how language can be simultaneously useful (ontologically) and stigmatising, capable of producing new knowledge whilst reinforcing stereotypes and eclipsing subaltern and emergent trajectories. There are moments in time when certain new languages are required to describe what Stewart (2007) calls the 'ongoing present'. For urban scholars, these moments happen when it becomes clear that existing language is insufficient in describing actually-existing urban life. Soja (1989, 1996, 2000) believed this to be the case at the end of the twentieth century, calling for a post-modern language to begin the exploration of the 'post-metropolis'. We suggest that, 30 years after the post-modern turn in urban studies, we have perhaps arrived at another such moment of re-interpretation.

We write this dialogue from our respective homes in two hegemonic post-industrial urban settings: Newcastle and Glasgow, where, on a daily basis, we encounter the post-industrial in one way or another. In these cities, we are told that we are surrounded by post-industrial landscapes, culture, politics, and histories. We are told this in popular media, political discourse, and tourism literature, not to mention academic journal articles and books, conference sessions, and all manner of policy interventions.

Confronted by such a cacophony of structuring forces, it is easy to take on the mantle of post-industrial subjectivity. After all, we see (and feel) evidence of old industry everywhere we look, from the ruins on our riverfronts, to the haunting residues of previous uses of warehouses turned into art galleries, offices, flats, Cross-fit gyms. As Miller (2023) notes, these ruins represent an 'ongoing crisis' of haunting post-industry, a ghostly spectacle. The industrial ghosts, though, are not finished: ruins, as Miller (2023) describes, can return at any time. The ghosts of industry haunt us, residually. Gordon (1997: xvi) notes, haunting is 'where the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's in your blind spot comes into view'. Much remains visible in the rear-view mirror. In Northeast England, *Google Maps* still indicates the location of coal mines, closed for decades, and coal still washes up on beaches, ghostly reminders of processes past. Here, we live atop tunnels, industrial earthworks. Rotting stews of toxins and chemical residues from industrial soils filter into our water, gardens, and brains. Ask the children of Flint, Michigan, today, cursed with drinking water from rotting lead pipes, if the industrial is finished, and no longer haunting, or still ongoing and becoming?

These were great industrial cities!, we are told, we then tell, teach others, we write in books and poems and pop songs. But pausing for a moment: perhaps we ought to consider whether there is an alternative story, a less-totalising language, an ontological space of greater possibility than what post-industrial contains as an urban identifier, category, code. Kintrea and Madgin (2020) suggest that Glasgow (one hegemonic exemplar) might be re-written *beyond* its typical post-industrial identifiers, and that such revised 'urban biographies' might extend to other cities as well. Following them (Kintrea and Madgin, 2020), we ask, how does the post-industrial limit our urban conversations, and close what could otherwise be open? Borrowing Faulknerian phrasing, *is the post-industrial even post?*

Or, in other words, did de-industrialisation really ever take place? We suggest the answer is contradictorily both *yes* and *no*. Yes, de-industrialisation occurred, particularly across quintessential North American and European cities as prototypes of de-industrialised spaces (think of the American Rustbelt, or the German Ruhr). But also, no, de-industrialisation did not occur, if we consider planetary urbanisation as always-relationally

industrial, where (relocated, rescaled) industrial production *elsewhere* provides the material resources for the (alleged) post-industrial development of American and European cities. And even in those cities most impacted by industrial decline, what do we make of urban re-industrialisation processes which may not resemble previous forms of industrial production but which, nevertheless, are *industrial*? (e.g., Novy, 2022). Dis-used factories can be re-animated; shuttered power plants can be switched back on. Furthermore, even if industrial processes end, or more likely, move elsewhere, industrial infrastructures live-on, as re-used buildings, as ruins, or as leaky soils or polluted waters. Even in death, industrial infrastructures have life (Graham and McFarlane, 2014). These questions, we suggest, deserve some deeper exploration and, perhaps, different languages.

The ongoing fetishisation of post-industrialism as an essentialised Northern/Western condition is not only ontologically counterproductive, given planetary realities, but also has a neocolonial tendency in reinforcing the 'methodological orthodoxy' (McFarlane and Robinson, 2012) of the prototype 'usual suspect' city and all its associated images, materials and affects. There are, we propose, alternative conversations to be had, both regarding these prototypical cities, and emerging in new forms, elsewhere, otherwise. We suggest that the concept of post-industrial, whilst categorically/conceptually useful, is open for abuse (for example, by divisive populist politicians), and can (re)produce territorial, class, racialised, and gendered stigmatisations and subjectivities. Beyond that, we suggest, post-industrial is inherently oxymoronic, and a conceptual 'trap'. The term fixes into place (spatially, temporally, and conceptually) something which is always moving, emerging, in a state of constant transformation and re-scaling. After all, as Massey (2005) surmised, place is never finished, but constantly-in-motion. Cities and their associated industrial processes expand and collapse, extend and re-scale, and relationally-connect across global polarities, in real-time, via flows that are, increasingly, algorithmically-driven. If we can accept, as has been the critical consensus in recent urban studies, critiques notwithstanding,

that urbanisation is planetary (Brenner, 2018; Brenner and Schmid, 2015; Goonewardena, 2018; McLean, 2018; Oswin, 2018), then urban industrialisation is likewise, planetary (and therefore, always-ongoing).

Extended, *planetary urban industrialisation* happens in myriad forms. Drones deliver blood to rural villages in Central Africa; huge mines are dug in the Australian Outback by automated machines; predictive algorithms produce digital content, viewed on urban dwellers' phones in any city. These processes are distinct, yet interrelated. On urban fringes, hulking warehouses employ humans and robots alongside each other to wrap gifts and send out parcels. *Post-industrial*, in other words, does not seem to capture what is occurring, or as Stewart (2007: 1) describes the current moment of Anthropocenic interruption, 'the ongoing present'. We again refer to the hauntological perspective, nodding to Derrida (e.g., 1976) who argued that all meaning is contingent on time and space but importantly, that meaning, time and space can return at any time, always (re)emerging in a world of constant becoming. So, then, as urban scholars, what shall we call this situation, if post-industrialism has outgrown its utility? Can, should we move beyond?

Furthermore, we argue, the lasting ascription of post-industrial urbanism assumes a certain underlying *post-political* condition (Swyngedouw, 2018). Though the notion of the post-political aptly captures the managerialism and technocracy of the late-stage neoliberal city, we suggest that such assumptions obscure the conjunctural urban P/political possibilities and radical openings, affects, potential solidarities and inspiring coalitions that are emerging and (re)animating a contested urban democracy. Indeed, Closs Stephens (2022) illustrates how the post-industrial continually-produces a powerful affective (and aesthetic) politics, which structures everyday life. In other words, we propose that neither the post-industrial or post-political trajectories are necessarily linear: the industrial, and the political have the capacity for revitalisation and reincarnation.

In the paper that now follows, we first address how and why conceptual metaphors and linguistic

devices (like post-industrial) are prevalent, and useful, in urban studies, and advance some arguments for what differentiates a good, versus limiting, urban-metaphor. Following this, we look more closely at the concept of post-industrial, and how it has been critically developed within urban studies in the twentieth century and continued, somewhat awkwardly, into the 21st. We then take a closer look at the alleged *post*-industrial realities of cities by arguing that those cities often portrayed as post-industrial have, in fact, simply *re*-industrialised. The fourth section focuses on the power of the label post-industrial and associated processes of territorial stigma production. This is followed by a section which scrutinises the often-uncritical mobilisation and imposition of the concept to majority-world urban geographical contexts *outside* of the Global North, from where the notion originated and is often (conceptually, discursively) deployed. The sixth section debates the problematic gender assumptions intrinsic to the idea of post-industrial spaces, particularly focusing on problematic hegemonies and imaginaries of (working)-class subjectivities, whiteness, and masculinity in conceptualisations of the post-industrial as a descriptor of urban reality. The final section utilises the lens of art and politics of possibility to think about opportunities to move beyond post-industrialism. This discussion will be continued in the concluding remarks where we provoke urban researchers to consider whether the post-industrial notion still holds value in describing and analysing urban realities of the here and now.

The utility and traps of the urban 'discursive turn'

The 'discursive turn' in urban studies (Jonas et al., 2018) has opened new opportunities to scrutinise the role of language and discourse in the (re)production of (hegemonic) conceptions of space and the urban. From conceptual metaphors (Wilson and Wyly, 2023), urban redevelopment rhetoric (Schwarze, 2023b; Schwarze and Wilson, 2022), to discursive practices of territorial stigmatisation (Luger and Schwarze, 2021; Schwarze, 2022, 2023a; Slater, 2021), to name a few, the ways in

which city spaces are described and analysed matter and foreground how language and discourse are important in understanding how researchers speak about the city.

Urban scholars frequently use definitional buzzwords and metaphors to describe urban phenomena and realities. Think, for example, of the notion of 'gaps' which served Neil Smith (1979, 1982) to explain gentrification and urban change and which, 40 years later, continues to influence the ways in which urban development is described and analysed (Wyly, 2023). Writing on the power and usefulness of conceptual metaphors, Rogers (2023: 167) argues that '[a] good conceptual metaphor has an explanatory power that moves our understanding of an urban process, issue, etc. forward. It opens new conceptual vistas, or it brings into focus new conceptual stakes, or it paths the way for new types of empirical investigation in the field.'

New urban linguistic devices can be useful and have catalysed many critical discussions in urban geography in recent decades. The postmodernist Ed Soja coined 'post-metropolis' to 'accentuate the differences between [then]-contemporary urban regions and those that consolidated in the middle decades of the twentieth century', where, 'the prefix "post" thus signals the transition from what has conventionally been called the modern metropolis to something significantly different, to new postmodern forms and patternings of urban life that are increasingly challenging well-established mode of analysis' (Soja, 2000: 1). Domosh (2013) revisited Soja's thesis, with some updates as-suited for the rise of 'tech.2.0' and the post-9/11 security paradigm, suggesting that 'Soja's six discourses […] certainly do live on in our security-obsessed, post-9/11, post-Katrina, post(perhaps) financial crisis, and post-metropolitan world' (Domosh, 2013: 481). But Soja (and Domosh), in proposing that new languages are necessary, do not presuppose an end to urban industrialisation.

Other examples include 'creative urbanism', which opened up new ways of thinking (and legions of critiques) about the shifting nature of neoliberalism, and what arts districts, Michelin-starred restaurants, museums, and hipsters meant for

processes of urban change (like gentrification and displacement) (e.g., Wilson, 2023). 'Platform urbanism' was a useful container for the multitudinous impacts of 'technology 2.0' on cities, and the algorithmic waves circulating from satellites to smart phones to streetlights (more recently re-christened as 'dracula urbanism' by Wilson and Wyly, 2023, their name for the parasitic/extractivist nature of platform-meets-urbanism). Good conceptual metaphors therefore allow for unlocking new doors for thinking about urban processes, even if the processes themselves (e.g., capitalism, technological change, redevelopment, inequality, displacement) are old ones.

Frequently, these new monikers for cataloguing the vicissitudes of urban life utilize post-industrial as a juxtaposition and/or reference to whatever 'new' process is occurring. It is put forward both as a temporal framing, situating urban discussions in a certain time and position vis-à-vis late capitalism, but also as a kind of ontological language for certain .(rusted) landscapes, certain (working)-class subjectivities, and certain world regions of which particular cities and urban forms become prototypes (e.g., Detroit, Manchester, Essen, etc.).

However, there are often, through these languages and metaphors of the urban, neocolonial tendencies and a reassertion of the Northern/Western optic within these metaphors as having certain essential qualities, certain patterns to look for. Urban languages, useful as they may be in making sense of the city, can just as easily be traps within which it becomes difficult to see the ongoing present. Stewart (2007: 1) was onto this years ago, noticing that other languages were required to illustrate the affective conditions they experienced through exposure to landscapes 'caught in a present that began some time ago', where 'the terms neoliberalism, advanced capitalism, and globalization that index this emergent present, and the five or seven or ten characteristics used to summarize and define it in shorthand, do not in themselves begin to describe the situation we find ourselves in'. In other words, concepts and metaphors run the risk of anchoring and affixing urban processes which are always moving, always-ongoing and not-yet complete.

This is one critique of hegemonic dialogues in urban research, and certainly not a critique that is new. Postcolonial, feminist, and queer theorists have made this point for decades, by, for example, advocating for a comparative urbanism that provincialises the 'usual suspects' and gives greater emphasis to the subaltern, overlooked-urban (Nugraha et al., 2023; Robinson, 2011; Teo, 2023) and with a perspective shifted to the urban margins, *looking in* (Oswin, 2018). From the outside, then, a concept like post-industrial becomes complex: what does it look like, and is it even an adequate descriptor, if we are not focusing squarely on the hegemonic (Northern, Western) urban models that dominated discussions in the twentieth century? As Robinson (2006) notes, 'an urban hierarchy based on certain "global indicators" reinforces and reifies the developmental and colonial languages, thereby perpetuating colonial ways of thinking the "global"' (Robinson, 2006, cited in Domosh, 2013: 478). More importantly, does post-industrial even apply when considering a majority-world urbanism of great hybridity and emergent fluidity, that is either still industrialising, or, where industrialisation does not resemble previous trajectories and morphologies at all? We will return to these questions further below.

For now, the concept of post-industrial, we contend, does *not* have any of those helpful qualities or explanatory powers that Rogers (2023) suggests useful conceptual metaphors should have, and therefore may no longer be appropriate language to describe urban life. We suggest that post-industrial may be a conceptual trap which overly-fixes urban thinking on certain temporalities, models, and stereotypes, and obfuscates critical considerations of the otherwise and overlooked. We also suggest that, perhaps, post-industrial was a false descriptor to begin with, since the global project of industrial capitalism has not (as of this writing) entered a 'post' phase, but indeed, intensifies and thickens, geographically shifted and relocated. In other words, post-industrial fails to make sense of the 'situation we find ourselves in' (Stewart, 2007: 1). This 'strategic hypothesis' (Lefebvre, 2016: 111) guides this forum paper, which now continues with a brief reconstruction

of the history of the post-industrial notion and how it became part of our established vocabulary in urban geography.

The post-industrial in urban research

The notion of post-industrial has become the denominator in urban geography to describe processes of economic and societal change beyond Fordism. Bell's (1973) seminal work is considered to be the most in-depth and detailed analysis of the post-industrial. According to Bell (1973: 14),

> The concept of the post-industrial society is a large generalization. Its meaning can be more easily understood if one specifies five dimensions, or components, of the term:
>
> 1. Economic sector: the change from a goods-producing to a service economy.
> 2. Occupational distribution: the pre-eminence of the professional and technical class.
> 3. Axial principle: the centrality of theoretical knowledge as the source of innovation and of policy formulation for the society.
> 4. Future orientation: the control of technology and technological assessment.
> 5. Decision making: the creation of a new 'intellectual technology.'

Bell's (1973) account of what the post-industrial denotes was groundbreaking at the time of his writing, for he observed and described a transformational process of economic restructuring which started to gain pace in the 1960s in the United States (and had already begun elsewhere, like in Britain and Northern Europe). The emergence of a new knowledge class, as he described it, would become the most dominant workforce in the United States (and elsewhere) which would also result in a shift from manufacturing to service industries, with the accompanying changes to the character of work itself. Saskia Sassen (1991) later picked up this discussion in her analysis of Global Cities as nodal points for the global service economy and the territorialisation of global capital. For David Harvey (1989), this shift represented a new era of 'postmodernity', with a 'new economy', insofar as capital had developed a need to discard many of its old industrial trappings and assumed new, more flexible shapes emerging out of the ruins. The new economy, with its service-class, would adopt many more nicknames as scholars turned their attention to it, from 'cognitive-cultural-capitalism' (Scott, 2014), to the 'creative economy' (Florida, 2005) to the 'informational economy' with its 'hacker class' of workers (Wark, 2004), and, as we noted before, the proliferation of many more urban metaphors.

While Bell's (1973) conceptualisation proved to be critical in introducing new vocabularies into debates around changing economies and societies, doubts and criticism as to whether the post-industrial does, in fact, exist, soon followed (Stanton, 2017). Shaw (2001: 284), for example, has argued that while the notion of post-industrial has its rightful place in historical conceptualisations and analyses of city transformation over the past two centuries,

> it is not yet sufficiently articulated to justify a name and nomenclature of its own that defines it in a manner other than as a reaction to the cities of the recent past. The use of 'post-industrial', then, represents both a sense on the part of observers that we have crossed a significant development boundary, and that the precise nature of the terrain on the other side is still largely unknown.

Indeed, as we argue in this forum piece, the notion post-industrial fails as a conceptual-analytical framework today, for it was developed, first and foremost, as a concept to make sense of a historical process of economic readjustment and change in the United States and Europe. It was used to describe specific changes in the labour force of transforming economies in the 1950s and 1960s which saw significant increases in the number of 'white-collar workers', a change that also meant a new demand for a knowledge class that had the necessary skills and knowledge of newly emerging technologies, such as computers, electronics, and optics (Bell, 1973). For describing this specific period, the notion of post-industrial clearly served its purpose and has offered a helpful analytical lens.

In our critique of the current utility of the concept, we do not discount or negate the important and pathbreaking work of urban scholars who have engaged with the post-industrial in recent decades. Post-industrialism has been, we reiterate, a valuable critical lens for understanding processes of urban change, daily life, inequalities, and the facets of historical, social, cultural, economic, and political geographies in particular contexts. In fact, such studies opened up conversations and new perspectives, and helped to advanced incisive critiques, as fitting with the neoliberal paradigm and the dramatic and violent shifts taking place from the 1970s through the 2000s. Juxtaposing the advent of 'creative urbanism', for example, on the backdrop of the post-industrial city, brought to light the way that industrial aesthetics (e.g., old factories), industrial economies and labour were refashioned (or not) in the post-Fordist economy. Speaking of the changes Detroit, for example, has experienced amidst the decline of its automobile industry, and the corresponding flight of much of its industrial labour force, would be incomplete without reference to the post-industrial (see Millington, 2013); likewise, an appraisal of the 'loft living' trend (observed by Zukin, 1982), is predicated on a post-industrial urban habitus. The same could be said for a circumspect analysis of a recent political issue like Brexit, in the United Kingdom, which is intimately tied to regional historical narratives and trajectories of industrialisation, de-industrialisation and post-industrialisation (Dawson and Goodwin-Hawkins, 2020). And, of course, Brexit tells a wider (global) story about the entanglement of place, populism, and the post-industrial imaginary as a populist signifier with implications for class, identity, and P/political ideologies.

However, today, the use of post-industrial in describing cities is, we suggest, a heritage of the twentieth century, and uncritically attaching this category to today's urban landscapes, we argue, is analytically misguided. We are certainly not the first to make this critique, and we view this forum paper as a continuation and extension of previous attempts to scrutinise the relevance of the post-industrial. For example, Kintrea and Madgin (2020: 280), in their study of the post-industrial narrative in Glasgow,

correctly pose the question whether it is a 'retrogressive step to continue to think of and theorise cities using the same tropes that were current at the end of the twentieth century?' Moreover, does the perpetual mobilisation of the post-industrial label inhibit new and more appropriate frameworks for analysis? For them (ibid), the analytical categories of time and place are more suitable to understand how cities, in their case Glasgow, transform. These analytical foci, they (ibid) argue, are also helpful in developing theoretical and conceptual frameworks that are rooted in specific local contexts, while simultaneously offering value for developing novel ways of knowing within urban studies writ large. They conclude that 'Glasgow's experience since the 1980s shows that "post-industrial" should not be used as a backdrop or as a descriptor of a finite state that comes neatly bound with a set of universalist characteristics that can in turn be applied to other cities' (Kintrea and Madgin, 2020: 291). Instead, the focus should be on deciphering the city's particular and individual stages of transformation to emphasise the different facets of the city (see also Lever, 1991).

Thus, Stanton (2017) has urged researchers to scrutinise simplistic narratives of post-industrialism and to explicate the underlying power dynamics in such framings. We build on and expand these critical commentaries and readings of the post-industrial by foregrounding four inter-related shortcomings of this notion. First, its inability to reflect the urban reality of industrial production today; second, its stigmatising and essentialising qualities; third, its hegemonic Western-centric nature which eradicates perspectives from outside of North American and European contexts and perspectives, and fourth, its gendered connotations which foreclose class pluralities and P/politics.

Scrutinising urban de-industrialisation

As outlined in the previous section, one of the key claims underlying the post-industrial notion has been some form of de-industrialisation of local economies with a decline in industrial production

and a shifting towards service sector economies. While it is undoubtedly true that North American and European economies have undergone a drastic change in their economic foundation where industrial production has, in fact, made way for a more service-based economy (Sassen, 1991), the claim of an entirely *post*-industrial economy, however, also misses the complexity of economic production today. Not only are many so-called post-industrial cities still heavily industrial, but they are also re-industrialising in new forms, textures and processes not adequately captured in existing research or in a broad notion such as post-industrial (Banks, 2023; Novy, 2022).

For example, industrial production in Rustbelt cities in the United States has shifted from traditional manufacturing to more technology-driven industries. In the context of Pittsburgh, Armstrong (2021) demonstrates that the city has managed to attract leading technology companies through strategic and well-designed state spatial planning. High-tech innovations have replaced old manufacturing factories here, resulting in new forms of *industrial* production. At a smaller scale, warehouses are re-used for new forms of industrial production which differ from stereotypical imaginations of what industrial production looks like, such as heavy manufacturing industries, automobile production, or steel mills. The Amazon-fulfilment warehouse, for example, which have become a ubiquitous feature on the edges of many cities around the world, both resemble and do not resemble the twentieth-century industrial warehouse. It is a site of labour and industrial production, in a sense, but the way it is algorithmically-driven and highly automated represents something new.

For Wark (2019), this formation of algorithmic-urban landscapes represents industry (yes), but a 'vectorialist' form of it, more resembling a computing 'stack' than traditional capitalism vis-à-vis the importance of digital information. Or thinking even more post-structurally, what of the ways that 'industry' is often paired with 'beauty' or 'tourist' or 'travel', especially as stretched and networked via social media? For example, think of the global industries of experience, embodiment, representation, and other facets of consumer culture not

traditionally associated with tropes of 'factory' or industrial production. Sometimes, industry (as a word) becomes a code, a cultural signifier, in context-dependent forms. In Silicon Valley, 'the industry' can refer to all-things technology; in Los Angeles, 'the industry' is entertainment; in the City of London, all things finance. These 'industries', rooted in these places as they are, specific to their individual histories, are also diffuse, highly-globalised and trans-boundary. Take the film industry for example, where ideas are drawn up in Los Angeles boardrooms, filmed-on-location in Romania or New Zealand, and translated into Korean or Hindi. Humans and artificial intelligence are both involved in these processes of production, one of the grievances of the strikes by film industry labourers at risk of replacement by generative AI.

Therefore, the idea of a post-industrial urban economy or society is reductionist and totalising, for it suggests that the decline of manufacturing industries in the Global North and West stands exemplarily for the decline of industrial production *in toto,* which is simply not true. This is also important to emphasise in the context of an ever-increasing global connectivity of economic production where economic spaces are interwoven into complex, multi-scalar networks of capital flows and fixations. Considering the planetary scale of urbanisation (Brenner and Schmid, 2015), then it might be argued that Detroit relocated, or *extended,* along new circuitries of capitalism, labour markets, supply chains, and technologies (e.g., stretching from General Motors headquarters in Detroit to new assembly plants in Mexico, all the way to the rubber trees in the tropics, with all manner of other materials and labour processes in-between, mediated online and offline and cutting across territorial borders and global trade alliances). These areas, scales, and processes were brought into Detroit, just as Detroit itself was (physically, socio-economically, demographically) hollowed out within its municipal borders. Detroit exists, at some level, everywhere a Ford is driven; a Motown song is played; or a Carhartt flannel shirt is worn. We do not suggest for a moment that rapid and violent industrial changes did not occur in Detroit. They did, and the impacts of these

changes, from de-population and municipal bankruptcy to the financial austerity which led to the leaking lead pipes in nearby Flint, Michigan, continue to reverberate.

Rather, we propose that *industrial shift*, *re-scaling*, or *extension/diffusion*, may be better descriptors than de-industrialisation and post-industrialisation. This is what Henri Lefebvre (2003) argued over 50 years ago when he identified that the city was simultaneously imploding and exploding. For Lefebvre (2003), cities are simultaneously central and peripheral through see-sawing processes of concentration and de-concentration between cores and peripheries. The globalisation of industrial economies has re-scaled such (re-)concentration processes towards the global interconnectedness of industrial production spaces where allegedly peripheral spaces (e.g., remote mining areas for minerals) are in fact central for global circuits of capital accumulation and industrial production elsewhere (Brenner, 2017; see also Arboleda, 2016; Keil, 2018, Luger and Schwarze, 2021). Thus, the label post-industrial simply does not adequately capture today's highly-intertwined global economy and its digital speed, flattening erstwhile North/South/East/West binaries which, as postcolonial theorists have argued for decades, were false binaries and territorial traps to begin with (see below).

Post-industrial urban stigma and the defamation of place

The label of post-industrial has become synonymous with economic decline, stagnation, and marginalisation which, in turn, has resulted in stigmatising representations and depictions of those places deemed post-industrial. Stigmatisation of place is thereby extended to the local populations (and lives) associated with these places, and within that, connotations (depending on context) for class, race, and gender, as well as certain political tropes and characterisations. Notably, as we will argue, the language of post-industrialism has been a structuring force for the construction and understanding of (working-class) whiteness, urban Blackness, and certain gender hegemonies and tropes like the 'tradesman'. Certainly, understanding the socioeconomic and socio-cultural implications of urban/industrial change for specific groups is important, especially within discussions of spatio-structural inequalities and environmental injustice. Urban industrial change has not impacted society equally, and industrial capitalism has been a violently structuring mechanism for class stigma, race and racisms, gender unevenness and other disparities.

However, what we wish to highlight is the degree to which the language of post-industrialism reinforces these inequalities and leaves little room for exceptions, alternatives, or other, more nuanced depictions, leading to stereotypes and biases which can be difficult to overcome. Over time, post-industrial frameworks catalyse coded language which can become problematically reductionist, e.g., 'inner city' (which is often associated, especially in a North American lens, with ruined, de-industrialised landscapes and racial minorities). 'Inner-city' thereby is represented as a sort of inverse to rural-and small-town post-industrialisation, which comes to represent a deprived, 'left-behind' whiteness in popular and discursive imagination (e.g., the way that the author/politician JD Vance portrays the American small-town rust-belt in 2016's 'Hillbilly Elegy', or, the proliferation of Trumpism as an ongoing socio-cultural-political reality which feeds off of post-industrial stigma and wistful nostalgia). In truth, as we previously argued (Luger and Schwarze, 2021), 'inner city' and rural hinterland are co-constitutive and deeply entangled, as are the lives and identities that cut across them. Whole regions, which have vast arrays of diverse landscapes, economies, politics, and cultures are collapsed into post-industrial imaginaries (e.g., the sticky resiliency of 'The North' of England, as an envisioned uniform place of deprivation and problems-needing-solving). Similarly, the 'Mezzogiorno' of Italy, is often (mis)characterised as languid, slow, anachronistic, as opposed to the productive, fast-paced, industrial North.

Class and identity, which are fluid, intersecting and context-specific, are collapsed into reductionist (and populist) signifiers like 'Rust Belt' or 'Red Wall' and given meaning for academic dissection, political analyses, or, frequently, pop-cultural denigrations and jokes. The post-industrial framing also

reinforces urban hierarchies and stratifications between core cities and second /tertiary ones, insofar as core cities (e.g., London in the United Kingdom or New York in the United States) are not seen as post-industrial, and other, peripheral cities, are (e.g., our examples of Glasgow and Newcastle, or in the USA, Pittsburgh or Detroit). That so much of urban theory about the post-industrial was developed from hegemonic global 'core' cities – London, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Paris – further reinforces an Orientalism of sorts, feeding into the popular culture narratives of 'left-behind' places as symptomatically ruined, funny, or otherwise odd.

These divisions are unproductive and inaccurate. London and New York are rife with industrial processes of all kinds, including still-operating factories. Furthermore, as we proposed earlier, they are deeply entangled with heavy-industrialisation process in other places via the global circuitry of capital flows. And, finally, we note again how the economies, landscapes, politics, and cultures of secondary cities like Detroit or Pittsburgh, or tertiary cities (Huddersfield, Scranton) are far more complex than post-industrial, as framework, allows. This is part of the larger problem of a neglect of secondary/smaller cities in hegemonic urban research, too often overlooked altogether, or seen as special or exceptional cases, portrayed as quaint and quirky (Nugraha et al., 2023; Teo, 2023). Such issues are not limited to the West either: similar critiques could be made of how the Pearl River Delta cities (Hong Kong, Guanzhou, Shenzen) are sometimes juxtaposed with 'deep' Chinese cities which are seen as industrial exemplars (e.g., Wang et al., 2022). All this is to say that post-industrial does little to move beyond these territorial traps (Agnew, 2017) and stigmatisations.

While Wacquant (2007, 2008) predominantly focused on the 'black American ghetto' and the ethnically diverse Parisian *banlieues* in his conceptualisation of territorial stigmatisation, thereby foregrounding race and ethnicity in the production of advanced marginality, the post-industrial has become an important analytical lens to decipher the reproduction of and lived experiences with territorial taint. For example, Pattison (2022a, 2022b, 2023), in his studies on former coal mining communities in England, has demonstrated that while these communities once stood for national pride, identity, and symbols for the industrial revolution and foundation of the English economy, 'they are now stigmatised through characterisations of worklessness, poverty, and dependency' (Pattison, 2023: 1217). As 'left-behind' spaces of industrial ruination (Hincks and Powell, 2022), former coal mining communities are quintessential de-industrialised landscapes which, in public imageries, are not only peripheral spaces in a geographical sense due to their territorial remoteness but also imaginatively and symbolically as depressed, peri-urban enclaves. The importance of industrial communities and spaces in the UK and elsewhere for local and national economic development is often forgotten in today's spatial imaginaries which merely emphasise the negative effects of crumbling economic production, social welfare problems, crime, drug abuse, and other stigmatising labels. As a result, Nayak (2019: 944) concludes, '[i]t is evident that predominantly white, post-industrial regions and towns […] share many of the stigmatising tropes that surround the racialised 'ghetto'. They are constituted at a geographical remove as impoverished 'left behind' places, lacking in progress and modernity'.

Moreover, the association of post-industrial with economically-deprived spaces fails to appreciate and recognise that residents continue to strongly identify with, and feel pride for, their communities despite industrial and economic decline. For example, Emery (2018, 2019) describes how local attachments to places and feelings of belonging continue to be critical to (former, and descendants of) coal miners in north England. While deindustrialisation has disrupted former identity formations around industrial production and mining, local identities continue to be formed around nostalgia with deindustrialised communities (High, 2003: 66). Thus, industrial ruination and decline have not eradicated memories and lived histories with past industrial landscapes (Clarke, 2017; Walley, 2013), but rather result in 'intergenerational transmissions, declarative memories, and place-histories […] enacted in shared and personal spaces, bodies, and emotions' (Emery, 2020: 11).

Such rearticulations of former identities also take place through the creative reimagination and appropriation of 'industrial' norms, values, and behaviours. As described by Nayak (2006) in his sociological study of masculinity, youth, and class in a post-industrial city,

[d]espite major economic transformation and media rebranding, the cultures of the old industrial city and the identities therein refuse to be written out of existence. Rather, the post-industrial inscriptions of past cultures continue to be etched into the present, to be embodied by a new generation [of young men].

Older cultural and social behaviours associated with industrial modes of production, such as drinking patterns, enactments of specific masculine, embodied performances, or the upholding of traditional notions of 'respect', continue to be important for the social spaces of de-industrialised communities. Nayak's (2006) analysis complicates the ways in which the post-industrial label is often, rather carelessly and in a totalising fashion, attached to and imposed upon specific spaces. As a result, industrial production is reduced to its economic component, disregarding that specific socio-cultural norms and values, too, characterised and are associated with industrial communities and which often continue to exist even after industries have left and declined. In this understanding, then, the post-industrial obfuscates and silences important social and cultural components and elements of everyday life in de-industrialised spaces, homogenising communities as economically-deprived and marginalised, disregarding local identities and senses of belonging which continue to exist in these communities despite transformed local economies.

These insights foreground how the label post-industrial itself is complicit in the defamation of places and communities, and the reinforcement of calcified (post)colonial power geometries. The mobilisation of the post-industrial in everyday language to describe specific areas is today synonymous with negative connotations and imaginations, such as decline, advanced marginality, poverty, and crime. It is not necessary to explicate what is meant and

suggested when post-industrial is attached to places and communities, for it is common sense that it signifies such negative descriptors and prescribed hierarchies of urban spatiality. It thereby becomes a classificatory denominator to emphasise negative characteristics of spaces and places. The upholding of class differences is implicated in the post-industrial, for it is particularly a concept that is used to describe former working-class communities with the aim to *differentiate* and *demarcate* these spaces from more economically prosperous areas of service sector industries and the informational economy. In the next section, we outline how these binaries and demarcations are expanded and misappropriated globally/hemispherically.

Post-industrial urbanisms' north/south division

We can extend these blunt (mis)characterisations of place and territorial stigma beyond the Global North, as the majority-urban world often fills a similar purpose for stereotyping, reducing, and totalising the deprived 'other', deployed as an ontological foil for all that is 'not' in the Global North/West (e.g., Simone, 2013; Simone and Pieterse, 2018; in the tradition of the postcolonial understandings of the 'other', e.g., Said, 1978). Research on deindustrialisation and the post-industrial has predominantly developed within a North Atlantic context of urban restructuring processes in U.S. and European cities (High et al., 2017). As a result, as Schindler et al. (2020: 287) argue, '[t]he Global South remains a vague construct, which, when it appears at all, is as a homogenized recipient of offshore industry.'

Insofar as the notion of post-industrial was developed within geographical research on the North American/Northern European city, it fails as a conceptual framework and tool to capture and adequately reflect industrialisation and urbanisation processes within Global South/Majority-contexts. For example, research has shown that the common portrayal of the offshoring of industries from Global North to Global South contexts misrepresents the complexity of global capitalism and its drive

towards uneven geographical development (Harvey, 1989; Smith, 2010). For example, Rodrik (2016: 2) has documented that countries outside of North Atlantic contexts, too, 'have experienced falling manufacturing shares in both employment and real value added, especially since the 1980s', but that these countries have not experienced a similar increase in service-sector economies, with the exception of Asia. Building on these findings, Schindler et al. (2020) have shown in their comparative study on deindustrialisation in India, Tanzania, Turkey, and Argentina that processes of deindustrialisation have taken place in very distinct forms across all four countries, pointing out that broad-brushed conceptualisations of post-industrialism cannot capture the context-specific nuances of de-industrialisation.

In failing to adequately account for diverse experiences from Global South contexts, studies on deindustrialisation follow an all-too-familiar path within urban geography to either ignore urban contexts outside of hegemonic North Atlantic scholarship or impose Western-centric concepts and theories onto spaces and places *elsewhere* (Peck, 2015; Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009). As Amin (2004: 34) argues, such 'hegemonic territorial imaginar[ies] of the world' developed in Western contexts are uncritically and unreflectively imposed onto places outside Western hemispheres.

Robinson has long been wary of established urban hierarchies and binaries, such as (we feel), the industrial versus post-industrial versus industrialising. For Robinson, these urban dichotomies and 'longstanding categories […] have been translated into the apparently transnational accounts of global and world cities', and that 'so-called third world cities are interpreted through a developmentalist lens, and, where they are referred to at all, are framed in terms of "difference" or "irrelevance"' (Robinson, 2002: 531). Continuing to mobilise the Western-developed post-industrial label therefore means to prioritise and privilege cities from the Global North in urban theory. Robinson (2006: 108) has urged researchers to overcome this bias and to embrace the 'value of learning how to think differently about cities [and industrialism] by exploring different ways of life [and economic production] in other cities.' Robinson's (2006: 108) call

for viewing all cities as 'ordinary' – '[i]nstead of seeing some cities as more advanced or dynamic as others' – seems particularly pertinent and applicable for also overcoming the post-industrial label as hegemonic category to hierarchise and thereby stigmatise cities. Such categorisations, following Robinson (2006: 110), limit the scope of imagining possible futures of cities and their industrial development where alternative, informal forms of industrial production and development are ignored and excluded in urban theory and research.

Indeed, the imposition of post-industrialism onto spaces outside hegemonic Global North contexts conceals forms of urban informality which have long been attributed to the Global South. There is a vast cannon of theory on the precarious, desperate, ingenuity and survivalist practicality of 'slum' industry and 'do it yourself' Global-South urban life (Davis, 2006; Simone, 2013). While this critical urban literature takes cautions not to glorify majority-urban informality, it also somewhat overlooks the degree to which similar urban informality and industrial marginality extends not just from North to South but from South to North (and back again), foregrounding the relationality of urban realities and modes of production which cannot be captured conceptually through totalising classifications such as post-industrial. For example, even the wealthiest Global North cities – London, New York, Paris, San Francisco – experience informal forms of (industrial) production, from temporary housing encampments, 'do it yourself' adaptations amidst deserts of infrastructure and services, to all kinds of pop-up industrial activity (e.g., Kinder, 2016, on Detroit's fill-in-the-gaps daily life).

Moreover, the totalising language of the post-industrial Global North also obfuscates the spectacular industrial development across the majority world which both resembles, and does not resemble, previous formations and built environments. Twentieth-century factories and assembly lines proliferate, sure, but so, too, do forms not yet observed, new experiments made possible because of contextual circumstances. For example, technological leapfrogging, like the automated drones delivering blood-on-demand to rural doctors in Rwanda (Ackerman and Koziol, 2019; Ling and Draghic,

2019), to phone-based all-in-one payment systems utilized in parts of Africa or South Asia (e.g., Lai and Samers, 2021 on the new geographies of financial technologies) which, even if resulting from a lack of stable financial institutions, have not yet been put into practice in most Northern cities. Chinese cities exemplify this contradiction, home as they are to some of the largest-scale heavy industry and manufacturing (reminiscent of the twentieth-century), but also some of the highest-technology utilization anywhere (e.g., the continued expansion of the mobile services offered by apps like 'We Chat'). Thus, the notion of post-industrialism obfuscates such new forms of industrial production which offer important insights into how local economies adapt to and change in response to shifting 'glocal' advancements and innovations in technologies.

Such world-regional stereotypes also appear in climate change discourse, which crosses political spectra. For example, in simplistic portrayals of the heavily-industrialising areas of the world versus those regions with 'green' credentials, such as the contrast between, say, Cambodia and Denmark. The fact that industrial capital (and urban policy mobilities – e.g., McCann, 2011) runs between these (and all) places, and that idyllic life in 'green' urban oases relies on dirtier production outsourced 'elsewhere' (read: the majority world), often gets overlooked. But even more troubling is the inability to acknowledge 'dirty' industrial processes in the so-called 'green' North which misses the multitudinous advances and technological leapfrogs that have seen clean and green practices – sometimes at the small scale, sometimes the monumental scale – emerge in the majority-urban world. While raw sewage runs into British rivers and oceans, for example, Kigali, Rwanda has begun implementing a transition to a national fleet of electric motor-taxis. And there are many other examples that could be found.

Post-industrial urbanism's gender problem

Post-industrial urban discourse has a gender(ed) problem. We argue in this section that gender dynamics, and hybrid, fluid and dynamic roles,

identities, and positionalities/subjectivities, are far more complex in today's urban life than the post-industrial reveals. Cultural portrayals of industrial stories, and of post-industrial landscapes, frequently deploy the archetype of the 'left-behind man' (or trades-*man*) as a byproduct of industrial change. Women are frequently presented, rather reductively, as either pillars of strength, holding up deprived communities through sheer grit, or as hapless victims of emasculated and alienated (formerly) industrial men. Where gender non-binaries/fluidities, or counternarratives to heteronormative and gender-normative portrayals appear, they are often treated as humorous, exceptional or in some other way, dazzling. See for example the ongoing parade of films, plays, musicals, TV-dramas, songs, or books, in the genre of the post-industrial. A few blockbusters of recent years include 'Billy Elliott' (2000), the boy in (post-coal) County Durham, England, who wanted to be a ballet dancer; or 'Kinky Boots' (2005), the failing factory in the British Midlands which finds a second life making sparkly boots for drag queens. Or, from America, author (now right-wing politician) JD Vance's (2016) portrayal of aggrieved-men in post-industrial Ohio in 'Hillbilly Elegy', or more recently, Barbara Kingsolver's (2022) 'Demon Copperhead', a coming-of-age tale of drugs, death, and despair in post-coal Virginia, told through the voice of a troubled young man, saved by sturdy Appalachian women.

We are not critiquing these cultural products, which have all garnered critical acclaim. Rather, we are suggesting that these exemplify the shortcomings of post-industrialism as a way of understanding contemporary gender dynamics and the gendering of urban space, labour, and daily life. We also point out how these cultural archetypes can be appropriated and abused by mass media (e.g., the 'manosphere') and populist politicians, exemplified by how the Trumpian rhetoric weaponized the 'left-behind-man' into not only a reactionary voting-bloc, but an angry and violent mob of 'Proud Boys' (and the like).

Significant shifts in late neoliberalism, including the rise of digital technologies, have transformed the ways in which urban labour is performed and more

broadly, have altered the traditional fixities associated with twentieth century gender roles. Bondi and Christie (2000) were onto these trends early, extrapolating that the rise of the FIRE industries (finance, insurance and real estate), along with consumer services (retail, tourism, e.g., the experiential economy), along with the growing importance of the healthcare sector (nursing, home and elder-care, etc.), was destabilising the relationship between gender, labour, space, culture, and the city. Men were less likely to work in traditionally-portrayed 'hard labour' jobs and more likely to work in service roles (e.g., in Harvey's, 1989 'new economy') that had traditionally been filled primarily by women. Gender as a societal construct, especially in the North and West, has become more fluid, and non-binary identities have become more commonly accepted as mainstream (we acknowledge this is highly-contextual, and also, that, even with greater visibility, gender fluidity and non-binary populations face huge headwinds in mainstream acceptance and are still greatly marginalised). Still, we suggest, that gender fluidity and hybridity necessitate new ways of thinking about industrial labour and its gendered nature.

Even more dramatic, though, has been the rise of the tech 2.0 economy where all genders are more likely to work in part-time, precarious, and/or 'flexible-DIY' labour roles (think: Uber or Amazon delivery drivers; or online service providers, like in the health and beauty industry; social media influencers, e.g., what Guy Standing, 2011, labelled 'the precariat'). For McKenzie Wark (2019) this 'precariat' is constitutive of a 'hacker class' of industrial labour that produces information and creative content, rather than hard products or materials. An all-night delivery driver; or, an online personal trainer or Yoga instructor, depending on 'likes' and media engagement for wealth: what do we call this type of industrial labour, these types of labourers? 'Tradesman' or 'tradeswoman' are archaic monikers. These are deeply gendered roles, but perhaps not in the same way as the post-industrial connotes. Adding to this is the fact that the traditional industrial trades are not dead. As technological and cultural shifts have disrupted labour and life, the trades – electrician,

plumber, joiner, and the like – remain vital, always in-demand as service providers to the urban professional classes. To speak of these alongside the post-industrial diminishes the ongoing need for these roles, and falsely renders them obsolete, archaic, quaint.

There are implications for gendered bodies. Taking the warehouse example discussed above further, what should we make of a vast warehouse gym, the kind which can be found in industrial parks at the edges of cities, which was once the site of the industrial labour, but has become the site of bodily labour, e.g., the industrial labour of building the body? This, too, is a form of industrial space, a type of factory, even though the labour processes and spatial textures speak to a more embodied, individual, and digital age of graft. Gibbs et al. (2022) explore the sociologies of the shift from 'craft' and 'graft' of industrial materials (metals, coal, ships) to the embodied labour of the gym-body in the context of Northern England, while Hakim (2019) likewise suggests that the crafting (and digital display) of the male gym body is a wider outgrowth of 'tech.2.0's neoliberal dimensions. Undoubtedly, the Amazon warehouse, or the warehouse gym, represents something resembling a factory, something *urban*. But is it post-industrial? For Wark (2019), a new language, or 'détournement' is required to describe the new (urban) landscapes of 'vectorialist' capital, e.g., flows of information such as those Amazon and other web-based companies extract for the facilitation of goods and services. For Wark (2019), this did not just represent a new phase of capitalism's 'spatial fix' (Harvey, 1989), but rather something new entirely: a global economic system assembled by/through the informational-industrial-algorithm complex, which Banks (2023) describes as the 'attention economy'. To conclude this section, we highlight how the stereotypical portrayals of post-industrial gender also problematically exclude the realities of industrial production in the majority world, and render invisible vast segments of industrial labour in the Global North. Women fill factories in China, South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa, assembling the world's textiles, I-Phones, and plastic things. Women, primarily,

populate a global industrial army of domestic workers (in homes) and service providers (in hotels, hospitals, restaurants and shops, and customer service). For these women (and the men in these roles), life is not post-industrial, but a daily graft of survival. That most of these industrial labourers are also non-white further stresses the need for deeper intersectional framings of gender, race, and class today.

The art and politics of possibility, *beyond post-industrialism*

There is a certain art-less-ness in the language of urban post-industrialism. Bleak landscapes are presented in greys and rust. This is often used for effect/affect in film, unquestioned and uncritically digested. For example, in Ken Loach's (powerful) 'I, Daniel Blake' (2016), set amidst the ruination of austerity and deprivation in Newcastle, UK, it always seems to be a sepia-tinted, cloudy day. There would appear to be no flashes of colour, no joy. The film tells a crucial story about neoliberal life and the shrinking assistance from the state and has rightly won many awards. We do not argue that life under neoliberal governance is not bleak: for many, it is a hopeless vortex of despair. But alongside films like 'I, Daniel Blake', there is room for visions of more colour, more sparkle, and more optimistic, emergent, political stories and trajectories than these depictions of post-industrial worlds frequently permit. Resistance, in other words, is the other edge of the coin (and indeed, powerful acts of resistance pepper Loach's film, and build to the denouement).

In this final section, we propose that three related aspects, art, politics, and resistance, are not given enough room for openings and surprising ebullience in a post-industrial framework. Art and culture are portrayed to be either greatly diminished, or, as nostalgic and backward looking, relishing in post-industrial histories and artistic mourning for things past. Politics, as we have discussed previously, are often reduced to convenient discursive and affective tropes like 'left behind', which take on site-specific meanings in different contexts (from 'Trump Country', 'Rust Belt' or 'Coal Country' in the United States, to 'Red-Wall' or 'Leave-Voting' in the United Kingdom, to other portrayals of ressentiment and reactionary-disillusion in post-industrial France or Germany and beyond). In these settings, post-industrialism becomes associated with negative political characteristics, from nativism and xenophobia to the support of far-right parties which are surging in many areas deemed post-industrial.

We do not challenge the electoral geographies which confirm that many areas that have seen industrial decline in the twentieth century have seen resurgent far-right politics in the twenty-first century; countless political geographic, economic, and sociological studies have explored the facets of this trend and why it might be the case. Rather, we argue that, simply, this does not tell the whole story, and that post-industrialism should not be used as such a broad descriptor in a way which totalises and essentialises these cultural-political analyses. This is because, for one, there are extrem(ist) politics and politics of ressentiment in areas that have not been 'left behind': we remind readers that Donald Trump, or the policy architects of the Brexit-referendum, were elites in New York and London (respectively), or that much far-right libertarianism emanates from the shining campuses of Silicon Valley (Smith and Burrows, 2021).

Secondly, there are far more complex politics, and more varied artscapes, in these 'left behind' places than depicted in mass media or popular culture. Not only are there radical progressive groups, causes and outcomes in the deepest pockets of post-industrial locales, but there are also surprising coalitions and solidarities between and across various political ideologies and spectra. We can point to the recent electoral successes of progressive candidates in Rust Belt states like Pennsylvania, Michigan, or Wisconsin, where pro-Trump candidates have faced defeat. Or the resurgence of support for unions and labour and anti-austerity strikes and protests which have been staged from Northern England to West Virginia to the streets of Paris (there, in the form of the yellow-vest movement, *Gilet Jaunes*). We can also point to the coalitions that form between left and right over the environment and environmental justice and the forms of 'green politics' that trouble

these fixed political binaries. Not all of these political hybrids are unproblematic: there are strains of conspiracism, nativist-right-populism and extrem(ist) elements in some of these hybrid political configurations. But the point is, they are complex, colourful, and far more textured than post-industrial portrayals provide.

Artists flock to cities deemed post-industrial for many reasons, but the lower costs of living (related to deindustrialisation and associated years of territorial stigma) are one large draw. The comparatively lower prices in these places and the availability of art spaces for experimentation (as compared to say, Manhattan, Amsterdam or inner-London) allow greater room for innovation, grassroots trials, failures. An artist, given the right tools, support and inspiration, likes nothing more than an empty lot or a vacant building. The possibilities! A tapestry, a performance, an all-night rave! It is no accident then that cities from Newcastle and Gateshead to Detroit and Dresden have become meccas for artists and creative producers.

This is not unproblematic, we acknowledge: the re-making of ruinous urban environments into artscapes raises new questions about urban rights, class, commons, and justice (critiques which are deeply explored in urban geography). Still, much of the art generated in and from these cities is imaginative, bright, diverse; in other words, transcending tired depictions of dead factories or rusted landscapes (e.g., more than 'ruin porn', Pohl, 2021). Changing working and living patterns following the rise of digital technologies, accelerated in the Covid-19 era, further divorced art producers from needing to be clustered in global art mecca cities. But artists, too, in all their forms, are a type of industrial labourer: they aren't just something extra that is added to an industrial landscape like a food seasoning. Wark (2019) groups artists alongside more traditional industrial occupations as part of a much larger, capacious, contemporary class of labour that is locked into a parasitic relationship with a vectorialist extraction of digital information.

And anyway, art takes many forms. For Lefebvre (1996), everyday urban life was a co-produced artwork, a tapestry of artistic and political possibility, always, forever, emerging. Art, as Toni

Morrison (2008) argued, is 'always political': it is notable that art has been a central theme of all manner of recent urban activist and protest movements, from #Blacklivesmatter murals and banners to pro-democracy, anti-war and anti-gentrification struggles, which often show up as street-art on the walls of industrial neighbourhoods undergoing processes of change. Art, too, plays a unifying role across the reinvigorated labour movements we mentioned previously. We note for example how strike action (in various industries, from bus drivers to nurses) often includes creative banners, songs, and #online/offline representations in-colour, a sort of poetic assemblage of workers' demands. Perhaps, by moving beyond the post-industrial, richer depictions of the urban tapestry of daily *oeuvre* will be more visible in overlooked places formerly known as 'left behind'.

Concluding remarks: Towards a more unifying language of industrial solidarities

Post-industrial falsely-signifies something that is neither *post* (e.g., we note that planetary industrialisation has intensified, not ended), and something which is stuck in place (e.g., the tropes of the ruined factory in a city like Detroit, or essentially-entrenched working-class cultures in 'rust belt' regions). As we write this, Detroit re-industrialises (albeit, in a different form, with electric batteries and driverless cars replacing the older models). Detroit's notoriously abandoned Packard auto plant, a ruin for decades, has already gone viral on Instagram, which represents an(other) kind of industrial process (e.g., reliant on server farms and other cyberinfrastructures, elsewhere).

In this forum piece, we have suggested that the binary of the industrial-versus-post-industrial fails to adequately reflect conjunctural urban realities today. The notion of the post-industrial is a replication of other false binaries and 'territorial traps' (Agnew, 2017) as intrinsically and essentially incommensurate and containing 'moral geographies' which inevitably elevate one over the 'other' (Koch, 2019). Furthermore, it is a label that tries to encapsulate and describe socio-cultural and

economic processes which are too diverse and complex to be subsumed under a single label. The nuances of local histories of and lived experiences with economic transformation are eviscerated through such totalising and homogenising classification, obfuscating differences in how de-industrialisation took place differently across places and spaces. Moreover, this terminology fails to provide an open space for social class-fluidity and hybridity by mobilising and reproducing racially-coded language which ascribes a certain trope of working-class whiteness, with associated gender hegemonies and depictions of simplified political ideologies and behaviours. Such characterisations preclude opportunities for difference, surprises, novel emergences, and crucially, the potential for radical solidarities and emancipations of class, race, and gender binaries.

Moreover, as we have argued, post-industrial as a conceptual device fails to re-centre perspectives on urbanisation from the Global South, which constitutes the urban-majority world. The Global South is not only overlooked in discussions on post-industrialism but the term post-industrial, which has been developed in a Global North context, is imposed uncritically upon Southern urbanism, along with certain assumptions of linearity of development trajectories. As we have noted, the language of post-industrialism typically refers to oft-portrayed exemplar cities and regions, such as Newcastle and Glasgow, Detroit and the Ruhr. However, processes of de- and re-industrialisation do not look the same in all places. Thus, deploying post-industrial as a broad-brush concept fails to encapsulate this multi-scalar relationality and local nuances and differences of urban realities across places around the world.

Class, and class politics too, are never fixed, and there is no consensus on what a so-called working-class looks like now (if such a thing still exists, it certainly does not resemble previous formations, as Wark, 2019 argues). Look at the reinvigorated labour movements of recent years, both in older industrial cities and in newer ones: unionisation drives at Starbucks for example, or at Amazon warehouses, by actors in the film industry, or academics, train drivers, nurses. These efforts are not always successful, or coherent, but still, demonstrative of new-industrial forms, new class positions, and new democratic demands, as we have shown in this piece. To trap in the post-industrial stifles and silences these efforts and precludes their potentialities. Perhaps expanding what constitutes the urban industrial, and accepting its ongoing nature, may likewise expand how labour struggles and forms of production share commonalities, solidarities, and possibilities.

While we think that our critique is important to expand critical urban research on the post-industrial, we do not intend to finish this piece purely by way of socio-spatial and conceptual critique, building on our conversation from the previous section on art and the politics of possibilities. So, where do we go from here? Do we invent yet another new conceptual metaphor to describe this paradigm of extended-urban-industrialisation, thereby following a trend in urban research to make sense of urban realities through creative metaphors, as outlined at the beginning of this article? Can we simply expand planetary urbanisation to account for all things urban that transcend sites, scales, or boundaries? Shall we speak of the *haunting urban industrial* (like a ghost that never dies); *zombie-urban-industrial*; the *forever industrial*?

While we generally see value in conceptual metaphors, following Rogers' (2023) argument outlined above, it is perhaps better to pause for a moment and allow for space to open up a continued discussion over the usefulness of yet another metaphor to decipher urban reality and, crucially, for an in-depth theoretical and critical dialogue on the post-industrial which is grounded in conceptual clarity as well as rigorous empirical research. This would allow for listening to the textures of specific processes, specific places and contexts, and specific outcomes, rather than to fall into the trap of potentially more totalising language. In remaining open, we can better hear and more clearly see the multitudinous emergences of urban worlds and industrial livelihoods, and these examples might then tell their own stories, even in languages not yet translated.

We, therefore, suggest that it is time to leave the post-industrial as a denominator and classificatory concept behind and instead ask researchers to scrutinise their own use of this term whenever they are

confronted with an urban reality they wish to describe and analyse in their research. Is it a really a *post*-industrial reality they are confronted with and have encountered, or is this reality perhaps more complex, multi-faceted, and the result of a specific spatio-temporal process which cannot simply be characterised by one concept? Would using the notion post-industrial simply be a matter of convenience to capture this urban reality for a lack of a better term? If yes, how can this urban reality be depicted in such a way that its complexity is not lost in conceptual ambiguity? We do not mean these questions to somehow suggest that the post-industrial needs to necessarily disappear entirely from our vocabulary, declared a concept *non grata*, thereby censoring its future use. Instead, we urge researchers to simply consider whether this concept helps others to understand the specificities of urban reality, or whether it rather results in more uncertainty over what constitutes urban everyday life. Stanton (2017: 166) argues in this respect that such a critical perspective on the use of the notion of post-industrial:

> helps us see more clearly both the workings and the implications of our own positioning and projects. The basic role of the critical scholar or artist in this setting probably remains the same as it has been all along: to question oversimple narratives and draw attention to the (usually unequal) operations of power throughout economic and social systems.

We agree with Stanton's (2017) assertion and demand to remain critical as urban scholars and to scrutinise our mobilisation of this concept (and other, similarly vague ones) to arrive at a better level of *verstehen* in our inquiries into the complexities of urban life and transformation under globalised capitalism.

Industrial processes are unfinished, unstable and destabilising. What often unites industrial production sites across the world is the experience of precarity and precarious work conditions, from the textile sweatshops in Cambodia and Bangladesh, to call centres in India, Amazon delivery drivers in North American and European cities, to market hawkers in Nairobi. Thus, we believe, urban scholars also need to arrive at an alternative language and discourse which makes visible the similarities of exploitation and expropriation of globalised capitalism across spaces and over time and which might have the potential to unite working classes rather than divide these through problematic binaries of industrialism versus post-industrialism. As recently argued by Nancy Fraser (2019: np) in her essay on the connection between capitalism and racism, "[w]hat is needed, in fact, is to overcome capitalism's stubborn nexus of expropriation and exploitation, […] to eradicate both of capitalism's exes by abolishing the larger system that generates their symbiosis."

We agree with this examination, as well as her call for cross-racial (and we would add, cross-class and pan-geographical) alliances which seek to achieve this transformation. We would further add that urban scholars, too, need to contribute to these efforts by developing alternative languages in speaking of economic transformation, to make sense of these processes and to formulate radical possibilities and alternatives. This is important, for the narrative of post-industrialism, we have argued in this piece, is all-too-often mobilised by far-right movements to rally people from allegedly 'post-industrial' and 'left-behind' spaces behind extremist ideologies and anti-democratic tendencies. There is a direct connection between the post-industrial narrative and the politics of far-right movements and developments which can only be challenged through new and radically alternative discourses and languages. Urban scholars have the crucial task to formulate these alternative conceptualisations to represent the complexities of globalised capitalism; conceptualisations which ultimately also need to find their way into political and policy discourses in order to translate into tangible societal change.

Therefore, a first step in this process of finding an alternative, more inclusive language must be to problematise hegemonic framings such as post-industrialism, as we have done in this dialogue; and, secondly, to initiate broader conversations among urban researchers, working within different geographical places, in how radical counternarratives can be envisioned. To achieve this, it will be

critical to open space for alternative terms, languages, urban cases, and comparative thinking which allow theory to emerge from the realities of daily life in different places; theories and concepts which are not predetermined by 'post-industrial' characteristics and categorisations. Otherwise, the language of 'post-industrialism' will continue to trap scholars geographically (into the same case studies, into the same conference sessions or journal issues), but also limit our ongoing efforts to decolonise urban research and push its theoretical and conceptual boundaries. We hope that this forum piece will be able to contribute and initiate such broader conversations.

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