Gabriel N. Gee

# On Transindustriality

ical alternates that emerged to replace the former order, and by what appeared to be vivid connections to the industrial foundations of the modern age, including the complex array of global entanglements associated with the dark side of modernity.[2] I proposed a transindustrial lens to assess the afterlife and spectres of industrial pasts into the present.[3] In this vein, the movement from industrial to post-industrial is not understood as being linear and synchronised, but rather, as multidirectional, ambiguous, leaning sideways and even backwards, in a constant metabolising process.

Concretely, in the past decade, TETI has been active through a range of activities, including workshops, conferences, publications, interviews and exhibitions. Following a workshop at Franklin University in 2014, the edited volume *Nature/City: the 1960s-1970s and their legacies* brought together interdisciplinary reflections on an epistemic shift in our perceptions of nature and culture in the age of the Urban Revolution.[4] The exhibition *Hinterland, the eyes of the lighthouse; blood as a rover*, organised at Corner College, Zurich,[5] in 2018, led to *Maritime Poetics*, a volume combining academic contributions, and essays by artists on maritime narratives, agents, and imaginaries.[6] These two bodies of collaboration stand as the pilars of the group's ongoing research agenda: Curated Nature, and Maritime Poetics.

In recent years, while interdisciplinary dialogues have remained a cornerstone of TETI's modus operandi, represented in the diverse fields of operations of its members — from architecture to design, history, art history and aesthetics, literature and cultural studies — artistic research and the conversation between art and science have become a growing aspect in its activities. In this context, the series of encounters around the theme of Baustelle & Botanik at the Zurich School of the Arts with the collaboration of School of Commons, and at the School of Applied Science in Wädenswil (ZHAW) paved the way for the collective volume *Mobile Soils* (2021), featuring eighteen texts from a variety of perspectives to explore the changing ground beneath our feet.[7] This endeavour also marked the first steps of TETI into independent publication, which this journal, in printed and online form, strives to further. Discus-

## TETI and the idea of transindustriality

Welcome to this first issue of TETI Journal, dedicated to the idea of *transindustriality* that is at the foundation of the activities of TETI Group. TETI, for Textures and Experiences of Trans-Industriality, was created in 2011 as an interdisciplinary research platform to investigate the changing materialities and imaginaries of our global societies. The group was launched at the time as an independent research entity, aiming to foster synergies around joint interests in urban transformations, forms of tangible and intangible heritage, and global circulations ranging from technology to aesthetics in the 21st century. To this day, it promotes collaborations between artists, curators, and researchers in various disciplines in science and the humanities.[1]

The term itself — transindustriality — I had first used as part of a doctoral research finalised in 2008, which focused on the art scenes of the North of England in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield, and Newcastle, had been at the cradle of an industrial revolution that rapidly spread over oceans and continents. By the 1980s, however, these sites of industrial incubation had been submitted to acute processes of deindustrialisation, a phenomenon linked to multilayered historical and economic evolutions on a global scale. Nonetheless, I was intrigued by the social, but also cultural and polit-

1    TETI is currently animated by Jose Caceres Mardones, Philippe Desarzens, Anne-Laure Franchette, Gabriel N. Gee, Lori M. Gibbs, Stéphanie Gygax, Monica Ursina Jäger, Petra Koehle, Maria João Matos, Cora Piantoni, Bérénice Serra, Jan Van Oort, Caroline Wiedmer.

2    *Trophies of empire* (Liverpool: Bluecoat, 1994)
Walter Mignolo, *The darker side of Western modernity: global futures, decolonial options* (London: Duke University Press, 2011).

3    Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante. Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: les Éditions de Minuit, 2002).

4    Gabriel N. Gee & Alison Vogelaar, eds., *Changing representations of nature and the city: the 1960s-1970s and their legacies* (New York: Routledge, 2018).
Henri Lefebvre, *La révolution urbaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970).

5    *Hinterland: Part 1 the eyes of the lighthouse; part 2 blood as a rover,* curated by Anne-Laure Franchette and Gabriel N. Gee, Corner College, May–June 2018.

6    Gabriel N. Gee & Caroline Wiedmer, *Maritime poetics* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2021).

7    Anne-Laure Franchette, Gabriel N. Gee, Jose Caceres Mardones, eds., *Mobile Soils* (Zurich: TETI Press, 2021).

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Anne-Laure Franchette, *Grands Travaux Urbains*,
La Becque | Résidence d'artistes, La Tour-de-Peilz, 2020

sions as part of the newly set up Art & Industry group at the Swiss Artistic Research Network, prepared the terrain for this collective reflection on transindustriality.

## Time, Space, Virtualities

In transindustriality, the prefix "trans" denotes that which crosses through space or time, that goes beyond the limit contained in the name to which it applies.[8] In this case, the transindustrial aims to supersede — or connect — different historical forms of industriality.

The rapid transformations in economic and social fabric that have taken place since the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries has led observers to identify different sequences unfolding towards the present global yet fragmenting age. Fordism underlined the increased means of production delivered by an efficient division of labour within factories.[9] In the second half of the 20th century, Postfordism signalled the turn to even more flexible production modes, in parallel to the shift to global post-industrial societies, in which invisible economic ties, planning, management, information and knowledge industries, have become the central axis governing the shape of our social fabric.[10] This historical development is often seen to be accompanied by the advent of postmodernity, and its corollary, postmodernism, characterised by a rejection of modern certainties, and the commodification of cultural forms.[11]

A focus on transindustrial patterns, however, aims to emphasise the ongoing circulations between different industrial, technological, and cultural mutations, across interconnected historical periods. As such, it seeks to reflect on the ongoing role played by materi-

al infrastructure in the age of new media and climate change, on the physical roots that still inform digital expansions and virtual networks, and on the survivals, revivals, and haunting ghosts of past industriousness.

In the call for contributions to this issue, we underlined in particular three dimensions taking technology as a springboard:

• The survival of technologies from one historical period to another (for example from telegraph to contemporary coded digital communications)
• The cohabitation of technologies associated with different historical moments within a same period (for example the sail and steam ships in the 19th century, now revived with fair maritime trade initiatives)
• The transfer of technologies from one industry to another (for example in the use of combustion engines, electric batteries, wind turbines, etc.)

Industrial implementation can be described as a perfecting of technical objects. Their internal essence is materialised in industrial production.[12] In this process, the filiations of technical objects survive in their later evolution, in a manner that is not so dissimilar to the way gestures in human species are carried unconsciously through time and generations.[13] Additionally, a spectrum of virtualities dwells around the form and function of technical objects; imagination and innovation animate this spectrum in relation to different geographical milieu and geopolitical situations, at the intersection of their terrestrial environments, technicality, and symbolic realms.[14] The development of peculiar technologies, leading to the construction of singular infrastructures, might be seen in this perspective as stemming from a pool of virtualities, which are negotiated by communities in constant interaction, and friction, rather than teleologically guided towards

12   Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1958).

13   Marcel Jousse, *L'anthropologie du geste* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).

14   Augustin Berque, *Écoumène. Introduction à l'étude des milieux humains* (Paris: Belin, 1987).

Cora Piantoni, Drawings for *Ghost Ship*, Kulturfolger, Zurich, 2021

8   Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales (CNRTL), "trans-".

9   David Macey, "Fordism/Postfordism", in *Dictionary of critical theory* (London: Penguin, 2000), 132–133.

10   Daniel Bell, *The coming of post-industrial society* (New-York: Basic Books, 1973).

11   David Harvey, *The condition of postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

their inevitable predestination.[15] In this light, the relation between the material transformations of the world, and the discursive, or imaginative level, the activities of which feed back into tangible forms, is of paramount importance.[16] Hence the insistence in paying attention to the *experiences* of transindustrial *textures*, in which embodied perceptions, representations and iterations take the limelight. It is in the awareness of the interplay between condition, and reaction, that a potential measure for a discerning engagement may be drawn.

### This issue: openings

These considerations were proposed as an invitation, for contributors to enter into dialogue with, and to appropriate. The editors of the issue, Anne-Laure Franchette, Stéphanie Gygax, Caroline Wiedmer, and myself, are extremely grateful to all the contributors for their insights and inspiring works, and their willingness to exchange and creatively reflect on transindustrial passages.

Geographically, the volume opens in Taipei, where Cyrus Khalatbari looks at the dynamics behind a major computer fair. What he finds connects two seemingly very different technological worlds of computational cultures: the Taiwanese optimisation of computers, and the large-scale recycling of discarded PCs in Ghana. In reflecting on their joint relation to global computing companies, Khalatbari underlines the material foundations of our digital environments.

The superposition of times in technological uses is also at the heart of the work of Loïc Rogard and Cédric Carles, which aims to revive forgotten innovations to construct a more sustainable future. The ideas of "lowtech" and "retrotech" are explored through energy usages, as alternative paths to linear conceptions of progress.

Similarly, the Antique meets a high-tech present, in Rafaël Newman's proposal for a poetry journal to be built on blockchain technology. Reviving ancestral elegiac performative practices, while ensuring economic sustenance to poets, Common Speech is to use NFTs in a decentralised revisiting of the ancient Greek topos of artistic authenticity.

From words and voice, we turn to gestures in Juliane Ahn's research on robotic-assisted surgery. After retracing the history of robotic uses in operation rooms, Ahn reflects on an exteriorisation of gestures, which connects prehistorical times to the most advanced surgical technologies, leading to a discussion of trans-materiality, trans-spatiality, and trans-consciousness.

Lenses are also a recurring consideration in Mara Züst's essay on how to talk to a mountain, a meditation on the photography of Andreas Züst, whose analogue techniques are described as creatively oscillating between the duplication of the real, inscribed in the medium's genesis, and poetic wonder.

From the mountains we go to the sea, or rather to the Indian Ocean, through the artistic research of the collective Time's up, which explores modes of *futuring*, of thinking possible futures. These are discussed through scythes and the revival of sailing in maritime trade, explored as an alternate permacircular route towards more sustainable navigation in the planetary age.

Maritime industries also serve as a springboard to the artistic practice of The New Liquidity, who take us to Hamburg, where their *De-territorialized Listenings* probes industrial bridges and infrastructure. In revealing the multi-layered textures of the German harbor, and its conflicting stories of industrial development, the term transindustriality is discussed as an open platform to engage with the forces and cracks of the past and present.

Finally, Paul Dolan ends our journey in the native grounds of the Industrial Revolution, in the North-East of England, where disused coal mines are being repurposed for geothermal energy. In his research and infrared photographic work, Dolan explores the reconfiguration of industrial landscapes, stressing the importance of relational attention to better negotiate our earthly environments.

In the issue you will also find a number of singular visual and sound pieces: Ana Bisbicus' spiral mapping of data infrastructure and colonial traces; the interspacing of Eduardo Cruces poetic and interrogating textual piece "Prefix-Transindustriality"; and the closing prayer of Alan Dunn, *Hear us O Lord*, whose sonic work on the Isle of Man reiterates questions of ecological pressure in present times.

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15 Bruno Latour & Steve Woolgar, *La vie de laboratoire. La production des faits scientifiques* (Paris: La Découverte, 1979).
   David Graeber & David Wengrow, *The dawn of everything. A new history of humanity* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2021).

16 Nik Heynen, Maria Kafka, & Erik Swyngedouw, *In the nature of cities. Urban political ecology and the politics of urban metabolism* (New York: Routledge, 2006).