



Reflecting on Practices

New Directions for Spatial Theories

Edited by Friederike Landau-Donnelly,
Hanna Carlsson and Arnoud Lagendijk

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agenda
publishing

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First published in 2024 by Agenda Publishing

Agenda Publishing Limited
PO Box 185
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE20 2DH
www.agendapub.com

ISBN 978-1-78821-574-9

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Typeset by Newgen Publishing UK
Printed and bound in the UK by 4edge

CHAPTER 12

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

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and Arnoud Lagendijk*

Dear reader, dear practitioner, dear practice.

You might have read this whole volume. You might have selected to read individual chapters because you were intrigued (or put off) by titles, keywords, themes. You might have skimmed, smiled, frowned, yawned, googled something while reading this book. You might have felt inspired, curious, enlightened, bored, uncomfortable, tired while reading. In drawing this experience to a close (even though you are always invited to return to this book, reread, repeat, reuse, reinterpret, criticize and/or forget about it), in this concluding chapter, we aim to position the conceptual contributions of the book vis-à-vis future directions for spatial research, theory and practice.

So, what has this collection offered? How will future reflections and analyses of practices change when we consider renewed notions of the multiple agencies, properties, conflicts and materialities that co-constitute practice and place? In light of the utterly diverse chapters in this volume, the question “What now?” cannot have an unequivocal answer but is necessarily multidirectional. In line with some of the utopian thinking undergirding this book (see Ernste, [Chapter 11](#) and Ache, [Chapter 10](#)), we want to highlight possibilities and alternatives for future-oriented practice theories and thus unleash new, hybrid, assembled, unorthodox and/or unruly pathways practice theories could go forward with.

Along the lines of the book’s three parts, we review further avenues of reflection on practices, and practice ontologies. Through empirically grounded research on practices, the present volume might have provided insight into how practice theories can better account for power struggles and inequalities in sites and nexuses of practices. For example, through research on women’s boxing, deportation activism, international development and struggles for new career evaluation criteria in Dutch universities, Carlsson ([Chapter 2](#)), Schapendonk ([Chapter 6](#)), Munas and Smith ([Chapter 4](#)) and Lagendijk and Wiering ([Chapter 3](#)) have demonstrated how

practices emerge and manifest temporarily in socio-spatial reality, but also how they are constantly precarious and prone to change. For researchers with transformative research agendas, these invigorating outlooks of practice theory might provide an analytical tool to examine how social change can occur, even in institutions with long histories of perpetuating exclusion and inequality.

For a more poetic, ethnographic reflection on practices, the volume has drawn attention to nuanced engagements with the different modes of “the political” that permeate everyday life (Landau-Donnelly and Pohl, [Chapter 5](#)). Unpacking auto-ethnographic practices of everyday life, the book has grappled with the complexities of routine, helping us cope and remember but also move forward and change (Kramsch, [Chapter 7](#)). Taking an essayistic approach, Ache ([Chapter 10](#)) reflects on debates in planning and on what a practice perspective can offer researchers seeking to investigate how utopia can materialize in planning practices. From accounts such as these, further theory-building exercises of practice might be more situated within intersecting logics of conflict and complexity, showing how practices always emerge in already contested spatial contexts.

Last, in terms of reflecting on the shortcoming of canonized practice theories, and terms connected with it, the book has proposed new vocabularies of understanding practice. Examples include [Chapter 9](#) by Geiselhart, Runkel, Schäfer and Schmid, which offers methodological tools to study large phenomena inspired by the work of Latour. Ernste ([Chapter 11](#)) draws on Plessner to critically reflect on the role for the human subject in practice theory. The contribution by de Haan ([Chapter 8](#)) pulls together insights from Deleuze, Latour, Luhmann and Badiou to set out a practice theory of counter-actualization, applied to the case of privacy and surveillance. Rather than offering one direction for practice theory going forward, these chapters provide different roadmaps towards multiple discoveries.

The twofold ambition set out in the introductory chapter was to contribute to the spatialization of practice theory on the one hand, and to enhance the use of practice theory within geography and spatial theory on the other. Have we met this aim? Regarding the former, spatializing practice theory, various chapters have made engaged efforts to apply practice theory using rich geographical notions such as “site”, “space” and “connection”. In our view, this is how far our ambition could go. Studying and storying what happens within and across sites historically and geographically assists us in underlining the pragmatic and engaged focus of practice studies. Regarding the latter, enhancing practice perspectives in geography and spatial theory, many chapters have used practice vocabulary to shed light on practical questions and quarrels about power, politics, conflict, discourse and transformation. What is important here is the immersion into practice. Our call was, and is,

not that geographers should apply “more” practice theory. Rather, what we sought to emphasize is that a practice-attuned lens can be instructive when applying and elaborating geographical (and other) theoretical concepts in our empirical work. This certainly warrants more thinking and elaboration, and we invite scholars to practice this forward.