



# Towards a post-foundational geography: Spaces of negativity, contingency, and antagonism

Progress in Human Geography  
2023, Vol. 47(4) 481–499  
© The Author(s) 2023



Article reuse guidelines:  
[sagepub.com/journals-permissions](https://sagepub.com/journals-permissions)  
DOI: 10.1177/03091325231156928  
[journals.sagepub.com/home/phg](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/phg)



**Friederike Landau-Donnelly** 

Radboud Universiteit, Nijmegen, Netherlands

**Lucas Pohl** 

HafenCity University Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany; Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany

## Abstract

The relation between politics, ontology, and space remains one of the most contested concerns in human geography, often leading to a dismissal of ontology in favor of the politicization of space. In contrast, this article mobilizes post-foundationalism to propose a *political* ontology of space. After reviewing geographers' engagements with politics, post-politics and the political, the article demonstrates how a *post-foundational geography* radically uproots geographic understandings of political and socio-spatial realities. Grounded upon parameters of negativity, contingency, and antagonism, the article equips geographers to grapple with the crumbling foundations of an uncertain present, and unknown futures.

## Keywords

political ontology, post-foundationalism, spatial theory, negativity, contingency, antagonism

## I Introduction

Contemporary critical human geography has long discussed the inextricable interrelations between space, politics, and the political. For many contemporary geographers, it might seem difficult to imagine how space would come into being *without* any influence of political agency of various sorts (e.g., legal practices exercised by law, construction buildings, fencing, zoning, prohibition as well as more bottom-up approaches such as spatial occupation and intervention, or performances and protests in public space etc.). Inspired by Marxist, feminist, and post-structuralist social theory, geographers from the 1970s onwards increasingly turned away from understanding space as rigid and immobile, and

started drawing attention to the socio-material production of space (Duncan and Ley, 1982; Harvey, 1996; Gregory, 1994; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 1994; Peet, 1998; Smith, 1984; Soja, 1989). This shift from the “being” of space towards its “becoming” was rooted in an anti-ontological stance, according to which any ontologization of space would lead to a problematic objectification, reification, and naturalization of space.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the question of what space “is,” which undoubtedly hovers at the heart of

---

### Corresponding author:

Lucas Pohl, HafenCity University Hamburg, Henning-Voscherau-Platz 1, Hamburg 22297, Germany.

Email: [lucas.pohl@hcu-hamburg.de](mailto:lucas.pohl@hcu-hamburg.de)

geography, and cognate spatial disciplines (for a summary, see [Kitchin, 2009](#)), was re-positioned towards the processual genesis of space through politics. It was thereby argued that an ontologization of space would come at the cost of losing sight of the political practices that co-constitute space (see [Joronen and Häkli, 2016](#); [Pierce and Martin, 2015](#)). Kirsten Simonsen (2004: 1337) grasps this problem of ontologizing space, or spatial elements, as follows:

By putting spatial elements such as networks, flows, and fluids first and raising them to the status of “ontology” [...] one tends to reimagine spatial form as self-referential and indifferent to social content. The unintended consequence of such a move might be a naturalization of “spatial” process [...] This, of course, is a political as well as a theoretical problem...

We reverse this connection between ontology and indifference, via the trope of *political difference*—based on a distinction between “politics” and “the political” (see [Marchart, 2007, 2010](#))—to sketch a political ontology of space derived from negativity, contingency, and antagonism. We consider space as always-already political in the sense that “the political,” as we shall define it below, takes, claims, or occupies space in ever-changing ways. It thus reveals the constitutive contingency of any spatial form where “politics” is located. We (re)direct analytical attention to the missing link between the political, space, and ontology. While previous engagements with the status of ontology in critical geography have partially foregrounded the problematic naturalization of spatial process and form, a *political* ontology of space underscores the irresolvable restlessness of both space and ontology. The political hence appears as a constant reminder, and disruptive potential of any spatial formation. As Mustafa Dikeç (2005: 172) points out, it is not merely the *presence* of power that makes space political, but rather the “moments of interruption” that point to constantly contested power imbued in space. To approach space ontologically, we follow Dikeç’s (2005: 184) assumption that “the political” has “no proper place,” and trace this lack of location, or absence of foundation, with what we call a *post-foundational geography*.

In this endeavor, we first review existing accounts on engagements with post-foundational thought in critical human geography by emphasizing how the post-foundational difference between politics and the political has manifested in a particular concern with the post-political ([Section II](#)). Subsequently, we sketch a post-foundational geography to be articulated from radical negativity, contingency, and antagonism ([Section III](#)). Negativity, here, underlines the non-essential, produced and relational dimension of any spatial configuration. Contingency, accordingly, is both an ontological and political condition that affects the production, perception and sense of place, space and power. Lastly, antagonism points to the irreducibly conflictual roots of any space or place, regardless of, or beyond scale. Negativity, contingency, and antagonism are per se not new to geographers, but each have long yet differently developed histories in geographical thinking. However, what is rather new is rendering the implicit connection between these three theoretical tropes explicit. Hence, our aim in this paper is to knot together existing geographical knowledge to advance this post-foundational geography. After introducing these three dimensions of a post-foundational geography, we conclude by advocating a conflict-attuned geography attuned to an expansive, antagonistic understanding of “the political” and the ever-present possibility of transformative change ([Section IV](#)).

## II Locating post-foundationalism in human geography

Post-foundationalism has become a prominent analytic in political theory and philosophy to grasp the conceptual differentiation between *la politique* (politics) and *le politique* (the political). Stemming from thinkers such as Alain Badiou ([Badiou, 2018 \[1985\]](#)), Ernesto Laclau (1990), Claude Lefort (1988), Chantal Mouffe (2005), Jacques Rancière (1999), or Slavoj Žižek (1999), post-foundational political theory, on the one hand, engages with the ontic realm of politics, which becomes manifest qua institutions, laws, regulations, prohibitions, and routines. Politics center around notions of order, stability, and hegemony to shape and secure a

society's "existence" (Marchart, 2013). On the other hand, post-foundational political theory projects the political as the ontological potential for transformation and radical change. The political both exceeds and subverts the logic of politics by disrupting, challenging, and dislocating existing hegemonic forms. Arising out of such "political difference" (Marchart, 2007), post-foundationalism revolves around the ever-ongoing dynamics of re- and disarticulation of politics to expose it as a radically contingent constellation that is constantly permeated, and rendered inconsistent, by the political.<sup>2</sup> As synthesized by Mouffe (2005: 9), "politics" is considered "the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created," while "the political" refers to "the dimension of antagonism."<sup>3</sup>

There is a tendency in post-foundational political theory to acknowledge "space as a mode of political thinking" (Dikeç, 2012). Laclau (1990: 18), for instance, argues that every space of discourse, identity, and society refers to such a "radical outside" that is responsible for both providing meaning to what is inside (of a certain social or spatial order), and simultaneously intervening into, or disturbing, that very inside. Every social reality, or inside, is subsequently based on "othering," so to speak, which presupposes a difference to the radical outside. Accordingly, every social relation turns out to be an inherently spatial relation. As put by Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 111): "The irresolvable interiority/exteriority tension is the condition of any social practice." Social reality appears only against the background of an outside that is bound to its inside without being reducible to it. Careful not to lapse into an anti-foundational approach, post-foundationalism, therefore, thinks "the outside in" (Strathausen, 2009), which means to insist that processes of destabilization, decentering, and dissemination are part of every ontological constellation. The differentiation between what belongs to reality (and what does not) is not fixed but evolves from constant tension. It is this tension every (social) reality relies on, regardless of its scale: "it is as if, at every stage, the same opposition, the same undecidable alternative Inside/Outside, repeats itself under a different exponent" (Žižek, 1994: 17). This inside-outside-interrelation also chimes with political difference, as the production of outsides is considerably

political in its effect of producing inclusions and exclusions of people, places, and things. In sum, these insides and outsides, or inclusions and exclusions, respectively, resonate with political difference in that the inside correlates with the logic of politics, while the outside correlates with the political.<sup>4</sup>

While space is therefore not new to post-foundational theory, post-foundational theory is also not entirely new to geographers. In fact, a number of scholars engaged with this strand of political theory in recent years (Blakey, 2021a; Dikeç, 2005, 2012, 2015; Featherstone and Korf, 2012; Hannah, 2022; Landau et al., 2021; Landau and Pohl, 2021; Meyer, 2012; Sparke, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2007, 2010, 2013, 2018). One of the most prominent ways of fusing post-foundational and spatial thinking in human geography and related spatial disciplines, such as urban planning, can be subsumed in the debate about the "post-political" (Deas, 2014; Doucette, 2020; Hannah, 2016; Rosol, 2014; Swyngedouw, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2018; Swyngedouw and Wilson, 2014; Williams and Booth, 2013). Post-politics can be read as a post-foundational concept due to its built-in sensitivity to the difference between politics and the political. Post-politics stems from theorists such as Rancière (1999) and Žižek (1999) and describes a significant shift of understanding the possibilities and concurrent impossibilities of political action. Historically rooted in the rise of (neo)liberalism, post-politics relates to the dissolution of the state as an independent or closed sphere of political decision-making (i.e., government) towards a more flexible and consensus-oriented notion of politics intertwined with "the market" and other non-state actors (i.e., governance). In the vein of post-politics, processes of privatization and deregulation lead to the outsourcing of state functions and an up- and down-scaling of governance techniques (Swyngedouw, 2018). When the realm of politics is limited to mere questions of management, individual rights, and procedures of participation, there is no "proper," or no longer any space for the political. In such post-political times, more than ever, the question is: "Where is the political?" (Swyngedouw, 2014). This claim implies that the political, and with it, political theory, is not something that simply "is" but, again, something that *takes place* or does *not* take place.

With a concrete urban focus, scholars have drawn attention to the particular ways of how, and if at all, the political takes place in the city. Following Erik Swyngedouw's (2007) account of the "post-political city," urban scholars have criticized how regimes of neoliberal urban power and managerial governance exclude, occlude, suffocate, or colonize the political. A variety of empirical case studies have demonstrated how post-political urban governance has been contested by civic stakeholders and alliances (see Davidson and Iveson, 2014; Holden, 2011; Legacy, 2016; Legacy et al., 2018; McClymont, 2011; Millington, 2016; Oosterlynck and Swyngedouw, 2010). Crystal Legacy (2016) examines a contentious transport planning process in Melbourne, in which citizen initiatives questioned a seemingly "done deal" and thus broad the precarious nature of post-political consensus to the fore. Nate Millington's (2016) account of the London riots 2011, deemed "disappointedly apolitical" (ibid.: 707) by commentators from media and politics, draws attention to hip-hop culture as a space where actors who were not expected to become politicized spontaneously joined to work against the post-political city. Hence, beyond a mere obsession with consensus in urban planning and policy (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012; Gualini and Bianchi, 2015; Hillier, 2003; Kühn, 2021; Metzger et al., 2014; Pløger, 2004, 2018), the post-political city broadens the scope of conflict analysis towards questions of how cities can serve as stages for the political (see Davidson and Iveson, 2021; Enright, 2017). As Dikeç and Swyngedouw (2017: 10) put it, the city unravels moments of the political as "always placed, localized and invariably operative in public space." Accordingly, the city, in a post-foundational sense, "is" nothing but sedimentation of specific hegemonic constellations of physical, material, and symbolic power (Roskamm, 2017). Ontologically speaking, the city becomes possible via attempts at establishing order, ground, or reason (i.e., following the logic of politics) and simultaneously impossible as a continuously dislocated and dislocating realm of ontological lack and antagonism (i.e., actualizing the logic of the political).

Another, yet connected, strand in which "the post-political" has been prominently discussed in human

geography and related disciplines concerns the debates around climate politics. In line with the work of the post-political city, there have been increasing attempts in recent years to critically evaluate the discourses on climate change as profoundly depoliticized (Bettini, 2013; Blakey, 2021b; Celata and Sanna, 2012; Goeminne, 2012; Kenis and Lievens, 2014, 2015; Kenis and Mathijs, 2014a; MacGregor, 2014; Machin, 2013; Maesele, 2015; Pepermans and Maesele, 2016; Pohl and Swyngedouw, 2023; Swyngedouw, 2011, 2013, 2015; Weisser and Müller-Mahn, 2016). Giovanni Bettini (2013) points to the depoliticizing implications of apocalyptic climate narratives, which construct the "climate refugee" as a racialized and potentially threatening figure used to mobilize a politics of fear. Anneleen Kenis and Erik Mathijs (2014b) discuss the politicization strategies of *Climate Justice Action*, a grassroots movement invested in radically imagining ecologically fair climate futures. More generally, geographic works on the (de)politicization of climate change formulate a radical critique of catastrophic climate imaginaries stating that the latter conjure a populist specter of "the people." That signifier frames the climate catastrophe as a crisis that "everyone" is responsible for and has to respond to, thereby masking the considerable antagonistic divisions and inequalities that divide society and space (Swyngedouw, 2010).

While various scholars have shown how the post-foundational concept of the post-political can be used as an analytical lens to engage geographically related matters, including spaces of urban and climate politics, others have criticized the post-political as a diagnosis (Beveridge and Koch, 2016, 2017; Chatterton et al., 2013; da Schio and Van Heur, 2021; Featherstone, 2013; Kenis, 2019; McCarthy, 2013; North, 2010; Urry, 2011). Regarding the post-political city, Ross Beveridge and Philippe Koch (2016: 31) claim that it is this diagnosis itself (and not the socio-geographical condition) that diminishes the possibilities of the urban as a political space of resistance and emancipation, whereby the "binary understanding of the real political/politics as police" would thus negate "the in-betweenness and contingency of actually existing urban politics." With regard to climate

politics, John Urry (2011: 90) criticizes the post-political as a “new orthodoxy” that disregards the manifold manifestation of environmental mobilization and protest, such as *Climate Justice Action* and Transition Towns (see North, 2010; Featherstone, 2013; Chatterton et al., 2013). Overall, what unites the critical accounts of the “post-political thesis” is that they see the latter as leading to an overemphasis of the institutional foreclosure (of the political) by contemporary governance regimes (of politics). This might lead to and encourage post-political thinkers to ignore, or at least underestimate, the multiple forms of contestation and politicization (da Schio and Van Heur, 2021: 3).

Even though it has become fashionable in recent years to criticize the post-political as a self-fulfilling prophecy, this critique risks turning this concept into a straw man (Dikeç, 2017). Instead of considering the post-political as the absolute end, or ultimate death of the political, we insist on the post-foundational legacy of post-politics by emphasizing the radically *ontological* implications of political difference (Marchart, 2007). The “post-political hypothesis,” therefore, does not proclaim that the political vanishes altogether (because that is ontologically speaking impossible), but that it is insufficiently articulated within particular historical-geographical settings. The political cannot take place (i.e., as it is continuously disavowed, repressed, displaced) under post-political conditions. However, due to its ontological scope, the political remains “a permanent possibility” (Dikeç, 2017: 51); it haunts politics even under the most devastating post-political regime. Ultimately, as Swyngedouw (2018: 58) puts it: “the spaces of appearance whereby the political is embryonically manifested, can nevertheless not be foreclosed fully.”

### III Towards a post-foundational geography

After sketching some of human geography’s engagements with post-political thinking, which have undoubtedly shaped recent critical understandings of

political mobilization, politicization, and depoliticization, we note that post-foundational thought has primarily, if not exclusively, been addressed by geographers through looking at the difference between politics and the political. However, this has not yet exhausted the full potential of what post-foundationalism has to offer to geographers (see Landau et al., 2021).<sup>5</sup> We wonder: What are the concrete interconnections and precarious spatial foundations of a post-foundational ontology of space? How do politics and the political become “enmeshed” (Blakey et al., 2022) in the contentious production of space? In forging answers to these questions, we propose the following three dimensions of a post-foundational geography: negativity, contingency, and antagonism. Notably, there is neither a clear hierarchy nor chronological path dependency between these three aspects. Yet, a post-foundational geography, as we see it, can only emerge within spatial theory and empirical research when these three aspects—however, unevenly—coalesce. For example, some productions of space foreground its antagonistic quality, making it painfully clear for its users that conflict rules this space. Other spaces are tangibly contingent—exuding to all of its users that this space could also be otherwise (e.g., if resources for spatial adaptation were supplied). The conceptual valence of these three dimensions is to better equip geographers to grasp conflicts that might already linger in spatial settings, and to advance a more radical, and in that sense political understanding of space.

#### 1. Negativity and space

Negativity inevitably lingers in a post-foundational geography. Richard G. Smith (2003: 563) points out that “space is folded into everything”; this all-encompassing notion of space is not able to grasp what constitutes space (and what does not, for that matter). In contrast, a post-foundational geography departs from the assumption that space is also, maybe even more importantly, folded into and out of *nothingness*.

To better grasp this relationship between space and negativity, we turn to a prominent critique of

this relationship proposed by Doreen Massey. In her book *For Space*, Massey (2005) offers a powerful critique of the post-structuralist engagement with space *qua* negativity. Besides further engaging with Laclau, whom Massey criticized earlier for his supposed depoliticization of space (Massey, 1992),<sup>6</sup> she extends her critique to other thinkers, such as Michel de Certeau. These thinkers are, in Massey's view, unpromising companions for geographers since they regard "time" as the only true category of "the political" and assign to "space" only a subordinate, apolitical role. In doing so, Massey reads thinkers like de Certeau as eventually ending up in contradictions, since time is also the essential driving force of a capitalist mode of society. While Massey's critique of space as apolitical is widely known, she (Massey, 2005: 11) also has been a crucial advocate for a difference-attuned and radically open conception of space. De Certeau (De Certeau, 1988: 95) himself states: "Finally, the functionalist organization, by privileging progress (i.e., time), causes the condition of its own possibility – space itself – to be forgotten; space thus becomes the blind spot in a scientific and political technology." Massey (Massey, 2005: 46) considers this passage as "ironic" because de Certeau, by binarizing space and time, allows space to become a residual category, which is neglected in favor of time and treated as politically futile. While time is considered a subversive and political element, space comes to stand for representation, stasis, closure, and domination (Massey 2005: 29).

A significant element of de Certeau's spatial theory, indeed the element that makes him a post-foundational spatial thinker in the first place (see Dikeç, 2005; Groth, 2021), is neglected in Massey's critique. He distinguishes not only between time and space but also between "place" (*lieu*) and "space" (*espace*). While place refers to an ordering structure of distribution that assigns elements a "proper" and unique location, which defines and fixates them, thus providing stability, space, in contrast, "occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities ...

In contradistinction to the place, it [space] has thus none of the univocity or stability of a 'proper'" (De Certeau, 1988: 117). For de Certeau, it is not space that provides stability and order, but *place*—and this *difference* between place and space needs to be emphasized from a geographic standpoint. Space has a mobilizing, temporalizing, challenging, and thus *conflictual* quality that cannot be recognized and contained by the order of place, or the place of order, if you will. It is only from this standpoint that we can understand the meaning of Massey's statement according to which space is considered "the blind spot in a scientific and political technology."

Such a notion of space not only helps us to grasp the relationship between space and the political, which Massey (2005: 38) considers as getting lost in the works of thinkers like Laclau or de Certeau (we further elaborate on this point below). Rather, it also allows us to reconsider the relationship between space and negativity more broadly, and with implications for geographic theory-building and empirical research. If we do not acknowledge space as blind spot, spatial analysis runs the risk of morphing into a self-fulfilling analysis and diagnosis of space as it has been conceived prior to empirical investigation.

Space as "blind spot"—thus as absence, lack, negativity—from the standpoint of place is one of the cornerstones of a post-foundational ontology of space. A post-foundational approach advocates for a concept of "space as the product of negative spacing, through the abjection of the other" (Massey, 2005: 55)—more precisely, through the abjection of place *qua* reality and order. As Oliver Marchart (2007: 139-140) emphasizes:

The constitutive outside of space is what is radically different with respect to the system—something which cannot be explained from the inner logic of the system itself, or which has never had any prescribed place in the topography. Yet, it occurs within such topography as its dislocation, disturbance, or interruption: as event.

This understanding of space points to the premise that not everything can be placed within a system, order, or logic of politics. Something always remains out of sight, out of place, constitutively outside. But

instead of leaving this outside unnoticed, a post-foundational geography insists that this outside makes itself present *inside* through dislocation, disturbance, interruption, an event. Such “negative spacings” do not have to be large in scale, or physically visible. Various works in geography engaged the figure of the ghost to highlight the powerful presence of negativity, or absence, in space. As a metaphor for the unpredictable, erosive, and sometimes traumatic connotations of human memory, the ghost has been adopted as a cipher of haunting that blends the direct, material presence of discrete places with implicit, immaterial absences that linger in those places (Edensor, 2005; Frers, 2013; Hook, 2005; Landau and Pohl, 2021; Maddern and Adey, 2008; Pile, 2005; Pohl, 2020; Roberts, 2013; Searle, 2020; Wylie, 2007). Post-foundational political theory made use of Jacques Derrida’s (1994) conceptualization of the ghost or specter in order to engage with the haunting qualities of the political within the realm of politics (Marchart, 2007). The ghostly, thus, illustrates both the symbolical and (im) material manifestations of the political. Post-foundational geography, in a way, allows us to ontologize the notion of haunting in and of (political) space. Hence, a negative ontology of space embraces the ghost as an ever-present yet flickering by-product of every production of space. Spaces are never merely what they “are”, but always also what they are *not*. While “place”, in de Certeau’s terms, is considered as the positive realm of fixity, surface, and territory, “space” stands for a negative realm constituted by more fluid and relational boundaries. Space, therefore, traverses the fantasies of spatial order(ing) by pointing to the multiple and incommensurable spatial components situated in one and the same place (Blum and Secor, 2011). Space dismisses the allegedly solid grounds of tropes such as “city”, “state”, or “world” and instead opens the door for the spectral present-absences that unsettle topographical figurations (Secor, 2013). The post-foundational credo is thus: “At the heart of every situation [or place], as the foundation of its being, there is a ‘situated’ void [or space], around which is organized the plenitude (or the stable multiples) of the situation in question” (Badiou, 2001: 68; see Pohl, 2021).

Post-foundationalism, therefore, departs from a reversal of Leibniz’ famous formula: its most pertinent question is not “why is there something rather than nothing,” but “why is there (also) nothing and not (just) something?” (Žižek, 2017: 17). In this sense, a post-foundational geography relates to the more recent “turn” towards the implications of negativity in human geography (Bissell et al., 2021; Dekeyser and Jellis, 2020; Dekeyser et al., 2022; Kingsbury and Secor, 2021). However, post-foundationalism grapples with the situatedness of negativity differently than negative geographies. While the latter proposed by David Bissell et al. (2021) treat negativity in “nonrelational” terms, for post-foundational geographies, relationality is rather radicalized and can never fully be erased. Negativity “is not simply ‘out there’ as a cosmic principle or an objective feature of the world” (Marchart, 2018: 187), but functions as an immanent void lingering as a by-product of particular socio-symbolic orders, places, or politics. For post-foundationalists, any socio-spatial formation irrevocably exists in relation to that which it is *not* (i.e., its own negation or outside). This foregrounds these formations as neither stable nor complete, but as always partial and open for change. To spatialize this difference between negative and post-foundational geographies, one could mobilize the distinction between *Schranke* (border) and *Grenze* (limit), which Hegel brings up in *Wissenschaft der Logik* (Hegel, 1986: 144-145, own translation). While a limit relates to an utterly external other, “borders are internal, they border on an outside which lurks within the inside” (Dolar, 2016: 68; see Pohl, 2019). While negative geographies are concerned with the “question of limits” (Rose et al., 2021: 1), a post-foundational geography engages the question of borders, which serve as demarcations or sedimentations of foundations that are radically constructed and contingent. In sum, the radical negativity of a post-foundational geography grasps the negative as an ever-present outside which lurks within the inside, thus constantly disturbing the full, finite, or enclosed emergence of a place, leaving any spatial construction crucially unfinished, ungrounded, and to a degree ungroundable.

## 2 Contingency and space

Another pillar of a post-foundational geography is the irreducible contingency of any socio-spatial or -political formation. Contingency indicates, very roughly, that things, spaces, and places could always be *otherwise*, but also *elsewhere* or *elsewhen*. In terms of Reecia Orzeck and Laam Hae's (2020) recent review of contingency in (legal) geography, a post-foundational notion of contingency might qualify as "strong" rather than "weak." While we agree with their claim that "all of social life may not be contingent but there are aspects of the social world that are the result of accident and agency" (Orzeck and Hae, 2020: 834), we do consider contingency as a primarily ontological category which is being constricted by ontic (i.e., concrete, every day, tangible) forms and practices of hegemonic power, exploitation, and inequality. Accordingly, social-spatial formations and processes are always a product of historically specific political, economic, and cultural norms, yet also provide radical openings of transforming these very hegemonic settings. In that sense, contingency points to the unpredictability and ongoing reversibility of socio-historical hegemony. Contingency has historically implied different meanings of political virtue, risk, and necessity (Dillon, 2007). What David Delaney (2015) calls "governing through contingency" points both to the concrete limits provided by sedimented rules, laws, policies, obstacles on the one hand, and the ever-present possibility of challenging, reversing, reforming, abandoning these regulatory frameworks of power on the other.

As a trope in post-modern and post-structuralist geographies, contingency appears as a crucial epistemological starting point that accounts for anti-deterministic and anti-essentialist notions of space (see Soja, 1989; Doel, 2000; Massey, 2005). While Marxist geographers have criticized notions of contingency, arguing that they potentially obscure the influences of power, capital, and exploitation in shaping spatial relations (see Sayer, 1984, 1991), various strands of contemporary geographical thinking make use of more permissive, relational, and in that sense "weak" notions of contingency (Orzeck and Hae, 2020). For example, contingency has become a well-established

term in new materialist geographies on urban assemblages (McFarlane, 2011) and on formations of politics and governance (Wilson, 2004). According to feminist political theorist Lois McNay (2014: 170), contemporary more-than-human strands such as new materialism, actor-network, and assemblage theories

All express the core idea that a vitalist energy infuses the material world, giving rise to a manifold dynamism, richness of being and limitless alterity. The world is radically contingent in the sense that there are no necessary social forms, but this contingency proceeds not from a constitutive lack ... but from a constitutive plenitude.

The use of contingency in new materialist thinking thus demonstrates that the instituted forms of conventional (anthropocentric) social orders constrain the multiple energies and agencies involved in the complex assemblages of socio-political life. Vitalist approaches aim to expand the space of life by including all kinds of entities, using contingency to acknowledge the richness of the socio-material world or "reality" beyond the human. In geography, actor-network theory is, therefore, considered an "approach which emphasizes the high degree of contingency of the world" (Bingham and Thrift, 2000: 282), while the Deleuzian assemblage is conceptualized as a "contingent variation of immanent consistency" (Doel, 2000: 119).

The engagement with irreversible indeterminacy of socio-political life also plays a significant role in post-foundational thought. However, in contrast to the positive, or affirmative, understanding of contingency in new materialisms, post-foundationalism rests on the radical negativity, and ontological scope of contingency, its "constitutive" lack or outside. When contingency enters the field of socio-political life, it does not unconditionally reveal the richness and abundance (of possibilities, actors, etc.) but rather a realm of ambiguity or an "undecidable" terrain. From this undecidable terrain, no necessary course or direction of political action follows (see Norval, 2007). Put differently, decisions that are being made remain barred with a degree of undecidability, impossibility, or simply, negativity,



which again points to the origins of contingency—its constitutive, ontological non-necessity. Through this, contingency allows to “furnish an always expansive space of possibility, not in the sense that ‘everything goes’, but by eliminating the possibility of a final suture” (Fisker, 2021: 68). In sum, and nevertheless, contingency is not a political dead end; rather, it articulates itself from ontological negativity as an open space of possibility.

Marchart (2007: 29) shows how such a negative conception of contingency emerges from challenging or displacing the foundations upon which any meaning, position, or place of power are founded “as an operational term indicating the necessary impossibility, in scientific terms, of systemic closure or, in ontological terms, of the full beingness of beings or ground.” Following such a negative understanding, contingency is not situated in the realm of multiple agencies and plentitude that constitute a particular socio-spatial condition. Rather, it is situated in the space of negativity “that reveals the ultimate contingency, fragility (and thus changeability) of every symbolic constellation” (Žižek, 2000: 221). In the constitution of particular places, a rem(a)inder of negative contingency irritates, and thus inhibits, this process. A place like a mall, or a territorial unit such as a nation state, cannot be fully authorized, formalized, materialized, etc. because it is constantly infiltrated by the ongoing presence of its own “contingent foundations” (Butler, 1992). In other words, from a post-foundational geographic perspective, there is no place that is *not* threatened by the absence of an ontological instance (e.g., God, Nature, Reason, Technology, the Market) that could ever serve as a ground for its definitive constitution. In the face of the ever-possible collapse of socio-spatial settings, the pertinence of conflict comes to the fore. As Marchart (2018: 81–82) argues:

Contingency and conflict, emerging from the same source, became what one would call the reflective determination of the social in its totality: where every social fact [or place, in our case] can be experienced as contingent, conflicts are bound to arise over its redesign; in turn, where every social fact [or place] can be

changed by way of conflict, it is possible to experience its essential contingency.

In any attempt at making “place” for something, there is always the displacement of some contingency. At the same time, however, any of these places are inherently bound to their contingent foundations. Nothing(ness) ultimately determines the role and function of a place: Without the hegemonic power of the Church, a cathedral might lose its authoritative aura; once globalized capitalism loses its supremacy, financial centers and global cities may lose their role as international hotspots of innovation; whenever a nation state is called into question, whether by the slow dissolution of borderlines or the forceful imposition of new borders through military intervention, its contingent foundations come to light. Conflict or antagonism, as we unpack below, is the experience of contingency in place, which is sensed as a rupture. Ultimately, contingency cannot *take* place without that place falling apart. Such an interconnected, relational understanding of conflict and contingency contrasts with the more-than-human understanding of contingency that locates the latter in a multitude of actors (see Simandan, 2018). While new materialist approaches, and assemblage thinking in particular, engage with “a symbiosis defined less by conflict and contradiction and more by the lines of flight that run through them” (McFarlane, 2011: 211), a post-foundational understanding of contingency is necessarily conflict-oriented. Ultimately, negative contingency contaminates every symbiosis. It is in the face of this impossibility of affirming or mastering contingency once and for all that the political takes stage.

### 3 Antagonism and space

Lastly, a post-foundational geography, or post-foundational *political* geography, is articulated in the ever-ongoing, conflictual oscillations between politics and the political. As briefly introduced in Section II, political difference continuously permeates material and discursive spaces pregnant with negativity. Revolving around each other in unstoppable and inconclusive tensions, political difference catapults the underlying antagonism of socio-political life

into concrete conditions of political struggle and change. In the context of thinking about space, the concept of antagonism suggests that different spatial practices and systems often stand in conflict with each other. For example, there may be tensions between different uses of a particular space (e.g., residential versus commercial) or between different groups claiming ownership or control of a space (e.g., Indigenous versus settler communities). Antagonism also highlights the importance of power dynamics in shaping and reshaping spatial configurations. Different groups may have varying degrees of influence or control over how space is used and experienced, which can lead to struggles over access, representation, and the distribution of resources. Overall, the concept of antagonism suggests that space is not neutral or static, but rather a site of constant contestation and negotiation (Heindl and Drehli, 2021).

Antagonism in critical geography is nothing new, but has accompanied it since its outset. References to antagonism lingers in much of geographical thinking and writing (Castree, 2002; Davidson and Wyly, 2015; Featherstone, 2005; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Korf, 2010; McAuliffe and Roger, 2018). Notably, two of the intellectual forerunners of post-foundationalism, Laclau and Mouffe (2001), initially framed their radical democratic trajectory as *post-Marxism*<sup>7</sup>—“liberating” the Marxist antagonism of class struggle from its over-determining and all-explanatory position towards a more performative understanding of identity-related antagonisms cutting across society and space (see Schurr, 2013). For Laclau and Mouffe, antagonism is not limited to a specific arena of socio-political life, or to be reduced to concretely discernible controversies. Of course, conflicts *take* place, and thus influence spatial arrangements around borders, nation states, resources, property. Yet, beyond these *ontic* conflicts, that might be temporarily resolved, and transformed into agonistic constellations of power (Mouffe 2005, 2013; Landau, 2019, 2021), antagonism persists as an *ontological* condition. It is in this conceptualization of antagonism that Žižek (1989: 184) identifies “an impossible kernel, a certain limit which is in itself nothing ... [but] prevents a closure of the social field.”

Such a proclamation does not seem to sit well within the emerging scholarship of critical geographies of peace (see Bregazzi and Jackson, 2018; Williams and McConnell, 2011). In particular, critical geographers have criticized the over-reliance and fetishization of conflict and violence (see Barnett and Bridge, 2013; Bregazzi and Jackson, 2018; Tyner and Inwood, 2014). While we do not subscribe to forging conflicts for the sake of conflict, a post-foundational approach insists on the constitutive and ever-present possibility, of conflicts to break out or become de- or re-antagonized (Schad-Spindler et al., 2023). We acknowledge how different modes of antagonization or violence vary hugely in their degree of aggression or physical harm within smoldering conflicts. Exclusion, then, is a necessary dimension of any socio-spatial constellation, and with it, the potential for conflict and change. Bregazzi and Jackson’s (2018: 76) plea for a “political ontology of positive peaceful relations” therefore rubs up against the post-foundational negative ontology of conflict. In the spirit of antagonism, Michel Foucault argues (2004 [1976]: 50–51):

[W]ar continues to rage in all the mechanisms of power, even in the most regular. War is the motor behind institutions and order. ... to put it another way, we have to interpret the war that is going on beneath peace; peace itself is a coded war ... a battleground runs through the whole of society, continuously and permanently, and it is this battleground that puts us all on one side or the other.

In that sense, an ontology of peace runs the risk of overshadowing the nevertheless conflictual relations that are always-already nested in society and space. From the standpoint of post-foundational thinking, the absence of war does not equal the presence of peace, but rather the ever-looming possibility of conflict to erupt. In line with this primacy of conflict, a post-foundational approach does not limit antagonism to a particular scale, or place, of politics, but rather treats antagonism as a horizon without scale that stretches across the (w)hole of society. In a distinctly post-foundational reading of antagonism, Marchart (2018: 101) claims that “the question of scale is not important.” Yet, as he (*ibid.*) goes on:

Antagonism, as an ontological concept, is beyond the scalable. Its modulations reach from revolution to the fight over housework, from the general strike to skiving off. Antagonism—as opposed to ontic politics—cannot be grasped by a sociological differentiation into micro and macro. It is not quantifiable; it is merely possible to experience its intensity—or more precisely: experience it *as* intensity.

In light of this unscalable scope, the point of post-foundationalism is to acknowledge the myriad of *potential* and/or existing conflicts—from the most mundane bickering about whether or not to put the butter in the fridge to trans-national diplomatic efforts against dictators—to be grounded in the *same* space of antagonism. This space of antagonism unfolds from an ontological terrain, which is nevertheless grounded, and viscerally felt in ontic places (see Habermehl, 2021; Hussey, 2022; Schurr, 2013). Briefly, antagonism emerges from the radical negativity outlined above. In this sense, a post-foundational geography awkwardly squints vis-à-vis the proposition for a “human geography without scale” (Marston et al., 2005). Rather than focusing on the absence of scale as an ontological category, a post-foundational geography, however, is committed to a concept of antagonism *without* scale, or beyond it.<sup>8</sup>

## IV Conclusion

With this exploratory article, we have outlined a political ontology of space which is specifically post-foundational in that it pushes geographic scholarship to look beyond assumedly stable foundations that affect the scope of the knowledge, or knowability and production of space. While ontology is often considered as leading to an ultimately passive, positivist and apolitical conception of space, a post-foundational geography that rests on parameters of negativity, contingency, and antagonism, avoids this depoliticizing pitfall. Just as post-foundationalism, as a theoretical intervention, rejects the idea that there is *one* single foundational structure or set of principles that underlies “reality,” and instead proposes that reality is composed of a complex constellation of

interconnected practices and processes, and practices of conflictual negotiations, the post-foundational geography we have laid out allows to grasp the often-visceral experience of contingencies and contestations in and about space in both everyday life and trans-national geopolitical turmoil. The integrated, three-pronged paradigmatic shift towards negativity, contingency, and antagonism as driving forces of future-oriented geographic research practice and theory touches on the choice of methods, logics of causality, validity, conceptual innovation, and analytical rigor in the face of socio-spatial realities having become utterly uncertain. Negativity, contingency, and antagonism interrelate and mutually inform, contaminate, and cross-pollinate each other; they jointly contribute to a politicized notion of space. Schematically, we have injected a sensitivity to negativity that contours the constitutive exclusions between insides and outsides in processes of spatial production. In addition, we have conceptualized contingency as the necessary fragility of any socio-spatial order, and antagonism as the ever-ongoing potential of conflict to erupt (or implode). With these three facets of a post-foundational understanding of space, we forge for an understanding of geography as open and attuned to radical possibilities for change.

Such a conflict-attuned geography appeals to geographers who take the threat of post-politics seriously, and seek to contest depoliticization via a constant reference, reflection, and theorization of the *difference* between the confining logics of politics and the more excessive and uncontrollable potentials of the political. Post-foundationalism can serve as a framework for geographers who insist on the ever-occurring possibility to encounter and research socio-political and -spatial transformation. Post-foundationalism, Post-foundationalism offers negativity, contingency, and antagonism not only as historical but also as ontological dimensions of space. Thus, with this ontological openness, the radical implications of the political point to the prospect of radical alternatives: “sensitised by such an ontology, social [and geographical] analysis will be prompted to search for modes of the political in the most unexpected places” (Marchart, 2018: 12). Due to this broad notion of the political, actors, places, practices, and things that are usually not

considered as “political” gain traction for post-foundational geographers, both methodologically and conceptually speaking (e.g., as carriers, mediators, inhibitors and gatekeepers of negativity, contingency, and antagonism in empirical field research and grounded theorization). Post-foundationalism equips geographers to deal with unforeseen events, to cope with crumbling social, political, and spatial conditions, to operationalize and care for them during empirical investigation, and ultimately, to plunge into empirical realities, in which conflicts dominate politics and space. As a political framework, post-foundationalism demonstrates its potential especially in times characterized by aspects of political uncertainty, dissolution, and upheaval. When “the time is out of joint” (Derrida, 1996), it becomes clear on which type of insecure, contingent foundations assumedly self-evident truths have been formerly established. These are the times we live in today. As Bruno Latour (Latour, 2018: 8) states with regard to contemporary politics: “the sense of vertigo, almost of panic, that traverses all contemporary politics arises owing to the fact that the ground is giving way beneath everyone’s feet at once, as if we all felt attacked everywhere, in our habits and in our possessions.” Of course, we still witness attempts to inscribe foundations or absolute rules into society, politics, and space. This is why there is “nothing more contemporary than to negotiate landing on some ground” (ibid.: 53). Yet, we are currently witnessing an increasing awareness that these grounds are not permanent, but fragile, shaky and contingent. Wherever we land, it will not be forever. Against this background, we conclude that geographies of the future will be post-foundational geographies: subject to constant destabilization, decentering, and disruption. Until then, we remain committed to holding space for such future-oriented endeavors that will unground the discipline of geography itself.

### Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge the input of many post-foundational allies who helped to advance and develop the ideas unfolded in this paper, in particular, Joe Blakey, Mark Davidson, and Arnoud Lagendijk for their

valuable feedback on early ideas and previous drafts. The authors also thank the three anonymous reviewers for providing very helpful critiques and comments as well as Don Mitchell for his excellent critical remarks and marvelous editorial guidance.


### Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### ORCID iDs

Friederike Landau-Donnelly  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5728-6527>

Lucas Pohl  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7944-301X>

### Notes

1. Henri Lefebvre, as one of the crucial figures of critical geographies, has prominently pursued an “anti-ontological marxism” (Kipfer et al., 2008: 11). However, his assertion that “space *is* political” (Lefebvre 2009: 169, emphasis in original) bears an ontological mark. Space, for Lefebvre, is political in the sense that *every* space is produced as a social and historical product.
2. While the dominant strand of post-foundational theory is based on a “left-Heideggerian” reading of the difference between politics and the political (see Marchart 2007), Pohl and Swyngedouw (2021a) have recently suggested a “left Lacanian” (Stavrakakis, 2007) grounding of post-foundationalism based on Jacques Lacan’s notion of “the Real” as indicating what doesn’t work in the world (as opposed to “reality” being indicative of what works). The Real as negative category of un-representable lack and excess has an implicit political connotation that manifests spatially (see also Pohl and Swyngedouw (2021b)). The Real, in short, reinforces the possibility of post-foundational conceptualizations of ontological negativity beyond Heidegger.
3. While antagonism can be mediated into agonistic solutions, or modalities of conflictual consensus in multi-stakeholder settings (see Hillier, 2003; Kenis and

Lievens, 2021; Landau, 2021; Pløger, 2004), agonism cannot prevail permanently but needs to be constantly re-instated. Notably, Nikolai Roskamm (2015) has cautioned that Mouffe's agonism only insufficiently points to both empirical and conceptual impossibility of taming antagonism.

4. Laclau, Mouffe, and Žižek, just like other post-foundational political theorists, have thereby been inspired by Jacques Derrida's (1988) notion of the "constitutive outside" (see also Marchart, 2007; see Derickson, 2016; Roskamm, 2015, 2019; Vanolo, 2019).
5. Another attempt to address the potential of post-foundational political theory in relation to issues of spatial theory and human geography comes from Mustafa Dikeç's work (Dikeç, 2005, 2012, 2015). Critically engaging with the spatial underpinnings of political theorists such as Hannah Arendt, Jean-Luc Nancy, or Jacques Rancière—who, if we follow Marchart (2007), can be subsumed as members of post-foundational family—Dikeç emphasizes, albeit implicitly, the spatial aspects of a post-foundational conceptualization of politics and the political.
6. Massey's (1992) critical discussion of Laclau's (1990) differential notion of space and the political was an early and significant push in geography towards an engagement with post-foundational theory. However, Massey's critique initially led to a dismissal of Laclau's strong notion of the political. Eventually, Massey accused Laclau of depoliticizing space. Later, post-foundational theorists such as Howarth, Marchart, and Stavrakakis attempted to restore Laclau's discussion of politics and space thereby enabling a renewed opening of geography to post-foundational political thinking.
7. The terminological development from "post-Marxism" to "post-foundationalism" remains difficult to discern and depends on scholars' self-identifications and their respective assessments of whether a reference to these terms is analytically helpful.
8. Recent attempts to draw on scale from a post-foundational perspective have emphasized that the ontic power of scale should not be underestimated. Depending on the theoretical perspective, scale can be considered, for instance, as part of a social fantasy structure in the Žižekian sense (Pohl and Kingsbury,

2021) or as part of what Rancière calls the police order (Blakey, 2021a). In both cases, scale is considered a social construct that projects itself onto antagonism to cover its own lack of foundation.

## References

- Allmendinger P and Haughton G (2012) Post-political spatial planning in England: A crisis of consensus? *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37(1): 89–103.
- Badiou A (2001) *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. London, New York: Verso.
- Badiou A (2018 [1985]) *Can Politics Be Thought? Followed by of an Obscure Disaster: On the End of the Truth of the State*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Barnett C and Bridge G (2013) Geographies of radical democracy: Agonistic pragmatism and the formation of affected interests. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103(4): 1022–1040.
- Bettini G (2013) Climate Barbarians at the gate? A critique of apocalyptic narratives on 'climate refugees. *Geoforum* 45: 63–72.
- Beveridge R and Koch P (2016) The post-political trap? Reflections on politics, agency and the city. *Urban Studies* 54(1): 31–43.
- Beveridge R and Koch P (2017) What is (still) political about the city? *Urban Studies* 54(1): 62–66.
- Bingham N and Thrift N (2000) Some new instructions for travelers: The geography of Bruno Latour and Michel Serres. In: Crang M and Thrift N (eds). *Thinking Space*. London, New York: Routledge, 281–301.
- Bissell D, Rose M and Harrison P (2021) *Negative Geographies: Exploring the Politics of Limits*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Blakey J (2021a) The politics of scale through Rancière. *Progress in Human Geography* 45(4): 623–640.
- Blakey J (2021b) Accounting for elephants: The (post) politics of carbon omissions. *Geoforum* 121: 1–11.
- Blakey J, Machen R, Ruez D and Medina García P (2022) Intervention: Engaging post-foundational political theory requires an 'enmeshed' approach. *Political Geography* 99: 1–9.
- Blum V and Secor A J (2011) Psychotopologies: Closing the circuit between psychic and material space. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29(6): 1030–1047.

- Bregazzi H and Jackson M (2018) Agonism, critical political geography, and the new geographies of peace. *Progress in Human Geography* 42(1): 72–91.
- Butler J (1992) Contingent foundations: Feminism and the question of 'postmodernism'. In: Butler J and Scott J W (eds). *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York, London: Routledge, 3–21.
- Castree N (2002) From spaces of antagonism to spaces of engagement. In: Brown A, Fleetwood S and Roberts J M (eds). *Critical Realism and Marxism*. London: Routledge, 187–214.
- Celata F and Sanna VS (2012) The post-political ecology of protected areas: Nature, social justice and political conflicts in the Galápagos Islands. *Local Environment* 17(9): 977–990.
- Chatterton P, Featherstone D and Routledge P (2013) Articulating climate justice in Copenhagen: Antagonism, the commons, and solidarity. *Antipode* 45(3): 602–620.
- Da Schio N and Van Heur B (2021) Resistance is in the air: From post-politics to the politics of expertise. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 40(3): 592–610.
- Davidson M and Iveson K (2014) Recovering the politics of the city: From the 'post-political city' to a 'method of equality' for critical urban geography. *Progress in Human Geography* 39(5): 543–559.
- Davidson M and Iveson K (2021) Spacing Rancière's politics. In: Landau F, Pohl L and Roskamm N (eds). *[Un]Grounding: Post-Foundational Geographies*. Bielefeld: transcript, 133–150.
- Davidson M and Wyly E (2015) Same, but different: Within London's 'static' class structure and the missing antagonism. *City* 19(2–3): 247–257.
- De Certau M (1988) *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Minneapolis: University of California Press.
- Deas I (2014) The search for territorial fixes in subnational governance: City-regions and the disputed emergence of post-political consensus in Manchester, England. *Urban Studies* 51(11): 2285–2314.
- Dekeyser T and Jellis T (2020) Besides affirmationism? On geography and negativity. *Area* 53(2): 318–325.
- Dekeyser T, Secor A, Rose M, et al. (2022) Negativity: Space, politics and affects. *Cultural Geographies* 29(1): 5–21.
- Delaney D (2015) Legal geography I. *Progress in Human Geography* 39(1): 96–102.
- Derickson KD (2016) Taking account of the 'part of those that have no part'. *Urban Studies* 54(1): 44–48.
- Derrida J (1988) *Limited Inc.* Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Derrida J (1994) *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Derrida J (1996) The time is out of joint. In: Haverkamp A (ed). *Deconstruction Is/In America: A New Sense of the Political*. New York, NY: NYU Press, 14–38.
- Dikeç M (2005) Space, politics, and the political. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23(2): 171–188.
- Dikeç M (2012) Space as a mode of political thinking. *Geoforum* 43(4): 669–676.
- Dikeç M (2015) *Space, Politics, and Aesthetics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Dikeç M (2017) Disruptive politics. *Urban Studies* 54(1): 49–54.
- Dikeç M and Swyngedouw E (2017) Theorizing the politicizing city. *International Journal of Urban And Regional Research* 41(1): 1–18.
- Dillon M (2007) Governing through contingency: The security of biopolitical governance. *Political Geography* 26(1): 41–47.
- Doel M (2000) *Poststructuralist Geographies: The Diabolical Art of Spatial Science*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press.
- Dolar M (2016) Voice and topology: The tiny lag. In: Friedman F and Tomšič S (eds). *Psychoanalysis: Topological Perspectives. New Conceptions of Geometry and Space in Freud and Lacan*. Bielefeld: transcript, 63–93.
- Doucette J (2020) Political will and human geography: Non-representational, post-political, and Gramscian geographies. *Progress in Human Geography* 44(2): 315–332.
- Duncan J and Ley D (1982) Structural Marxism and human geography: A critical assessment. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 72(1): 30–59.
- Edensor T (2005) The ghosts of industrial ruins: Ordering and disordering memory in excessive space. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23(6): 829–849.
- Enright T (2017) *The Urban Political: Ambivalent Spaces of Late Neoliberalism*. Cham: Springer.

- Featherstone D (2005) Atlantic networks, antagonisms and the formation of subaltern political identities. *Social & Cultural Geography* 6(3): 387–404.
- Featherstone D and Beveridge R (2021) Introduction: Anti-politics, austerity and spaces of politicisation. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 39(3): 437–450.
- Featherstone D and Korf B (2012) Introduction: Space, contestation and the political. *Geoforum* 43(4): 663–668.
- Fisker J (2021) Encountering post-foundationalism in J.K. Gibson-Graham's space of pregnant negativity, Or, ungrounding the ground itself. In: Landau F, Pohl L and Roskamm N (eds). *[Un]Grounding: Post-Foundational Geographies*. Bielefeld: transcript, 63–80.
- Foucault M (2004 [1976]) *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76*. London: Penguin Books.
- Frers L (2013) The matter of absence. *Cultural Geographies* 20(4): 431–445.
- Gibson-Graham JK (2006) *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Goeminne G (2012) Lost in translation: Climate denial and the return of the political. *Global Environmental Politics* 12(2): 1–8.
- Gregory D (1994) *Geographical Imaginations*. Cambridge & Oxford: Blackwell.
- Groth S (2021) Materialization of antidiscipline: Small-scale post-foundationalism using Michel de Certeau's clash of strategies and tactics. In: Landau F, Pohl L and Roskamm N (eds). *[Un]Grounding: Post-Foundational Geographies*. Bielefeld: transcript, 279–300.
- Gualini E and Bianchi I (2015) Space, politics and conflicts: A review of contemporary debates in urban research and planning theory. In: Gualini E (ed), *Planning and Conflict: Critical Perspectives on Contentious Urban Developments*. London: Routledge, pp. 37–55.
- Habermehl V (2021) Everyday antagonisms: Organising economic practices in Mercado Bonpland, Buenos Aires. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 39(3): 536–554.
- Hannah MG (2016) State knowledge and recurring patterns of state phobia: From fascism to post-politics. *Progress in Human Geography* 40(4): 476–494.
- Hannah MG (2022) Powerless to separate from the clouds: Badiou, mathematics and geography. *Scottish Geographical Journal* 138(1–2): 130–158.
- Harvey D (1996) *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Hegel G W F (1986) *Wissenschaft der Logik. Band I*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Heindl G and Drehli R (2021) (Non)building alliances: Approaching urban politics through Siegfried Kra-cauer's concept of nonsolution. In: Landau F, Pohl L and Roskamm N (eds). *[Un]Grounding: Post-Foundational Geographies*. Bielefeld: transcript, 243–260.
- Hillier J (2003) 'Agon'izing over consensus: Why Habermasian ideals cannot be 'real'. *Planning Theory* 2(1): 37–59.
- Holden M (2011) Public participation and local sustainability: Questioning a common agenda in urban governance. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35(2): 312–329.
- Hook D (2005) Monumental space and the uncanny. *Geoforum* 36(6): 688–704.
- Hussey G (2022) Spatialising antagonism: A post-foundational analysis of the spatial dynamics of violence in nineteenth Century Derry. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 40(8): 1677–1692.
- Joronen M and Häkli J (2016) Politicizing ontology. *Progress in Human Geography* 41(5): 561–579.
- Kenis A (2019) Post-politics contested: Why multiple voices on climate change do not equal politicisation. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 37(5): 831–848.
- Kenis A and Lievens M (2014) Searching for 'the political' in environmental politics. *Environmental Politics* 23(4): 531–548.
- Kenis A and Lievens E (2015) *The Limits of the Green Economy: From Re-inventing Capitalism to Re-politicising the Present*. London: Routledge.
- Kenis A and Lievens E (2021) Politicizing air: On the political effects of spatial imagination. In: Landau F, Pohl L and Roskamm N (eds). *[Un]Grounding: Post-Foundational Geographies*. Bielefeld: transcript, 261–278.
- Kenis A and Mathijs E (2014a) (De)politicising the local: The case of the transition towns movement in Flanders (Belgium). *Journal of Rural Studies* 34: 172–183.

- Kenis A and Mathijs E (2014b) Climate change and post-politics: Repoliticizing the present by imagining the future? *Geoforum* 52: 148–156.
- Kingsbury P and Secor AJ (2021) *A Place More Void*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska.
- Kipfer S, Goonewadena K, Milgrom R and Schmid C (2008) *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henry Lefebvre*. New York: Routledge.
- Kitchin R (2009) Space II. In: Kitchin R and Thrift N (eds), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. Amsterdam: Elsevier, pp. 268–275.
- Korf B (2010) The geography of participation. *Third World Quarterly* 31(5): 709–720.
- Kühn M (2021) Agonistic planning theory revisited: The planner's role in dealing with conflict. *Planning Theory* 20(2): 143–156.
- Laclau E (1990) *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. London, New York: Verso.
- Laclau E and Mouffe C (2001) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London, New York: Verso.
- Landau F (2019) *Agonistic Articulations in the 'Creative' City: On New Actors and Activism in Berlin's Cultural Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Landau F (2021) Agonistic failures: Following policy conflicts in Berlin's urban cultural politics. *Urban Studies* 58(12): 2531–2548.
- Landau F and Pohl L (2021) Ruined museums: Exploring post-foundational spatiality. *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization* 21(1): 197–228.
- Landau F, Pohl L and Roskamm N (2021) *[Un]Grounding: Post-Foundational Geographies*. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Latour B (2018) *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lefebvre H (1991) *The Production of Space*. Hoboken: Wiley.
- Lefebvre H (2009) *State, Space, World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Legacy C (2016) Transforming transport planning in the postpolitical era. *Urban Studies* 53(14): 3108–3124.
- Legacy C, Cook N, Rogers D and Ruming K (2018) Planning the post-political city: Exploring public participation in the contemporary Australian city. *Geographical Research* 56(2): 176–180.
- Lefort C (1988) *Democracy and Political Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Machin A (2013) *Negotiating Climate Change: Radical Democracy and the Illusion of Consensus*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- MacGregor S (2014) Only resist: Feminist ecological citizenship and the post-politics of climate change. *Hypatia* 29(3): 617–633.
- Maddern J F and Adey P (2008) Editorial: Spectro-geographies. *Cultural Geographies* 15: 291–295.
- Maesele P (2015) Beyond the post-political zeitgeist. In: Hansen A and Cox R (eds). *A Handbook of Environment and Communication*. New York: Routledge, 429–443.
- Marchart O (2007) *Post-foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Marchart O (2010) *Die politische Differenz. Zum Denken des Politischen bei Nancy, Lefort, Badiou, Laclau und Agamben*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Marchart O (2013) *Das unmögliche Objekt: Eine post-fundamentalistische Theorie der Gesellschaft*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Marchart O (2018) *Thinking Antagonism: Political Ontology after Laclau*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Marston SA, Jones JP and Woodward K (2005) Human geography without scale. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30(4): 416–432.
- Massey D (1992) Politics and space/time. *New Left Review* 1(196): 65–85.
- Massey D (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Massey D (2005) *For Space*. London: Sage.
- McAuliffe C and Rogers D (2018) Tracing resident antagonisms in urban development: Agonistic pluralism and participatory planning. *Geographical Research* 56(2): 219–229.
- McCarthy J (2013) We have never been “post-political”. *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 24(1): 19–25.
- McClymont K (2011) Revitalising the political: Development control and agonism in planning practice. *Planning Theory* 10(3): 239–256.
- McFarlane C (2011) The city as assemblage: Dwelling and urban space. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29(4): 649–671.
- McNay L (2014) *The Misguided Search for the Political: Social Weightlessness in Radical Democratic Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.



- Metzger J, Allmendinger P and Oosterlynck S (2014) *Planning against the Political: Democratic Deficits in European Territorial Governance*. New York: Routledge.
- Meyer M (2012) Placing and tracing absence: A material culture of the immaterial. *Journal of Material Culture* 17(1): 103–110.
- Millington G (2016) “I found the truth in Foot Locker”: London 2011, urban culture, and the post-political city. *Antipode* 48(3): 705–723.
- Mouffe C (2005) *On the Political*. London: Routledge.
- Mouffe C (2013) *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. London, New York: Verso.
- Norval AJ (2004) Hegemony after deconstruction: the consequences of undecidability. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9(2): 139–157.
- North P (2010) Eco-Localisation as a progressive response to peak oil and climate change. A sympathetic critique. *Geoforum* 41(4): 585–594.
- Oosterlynck S and Swyngedouw E (2010) Noise reduction: The postpolitical quandary of night flights at Brussels Airport. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 42(7): 1577–1594.
- Orzeck R and Hae L (2020) Restructuring legal geography. *Progress in Human Geography* 44(5): 832–851.
- Peet R (1998) *Modern Geographical Thought*. Cambridge & Oxford: Blackwell.
- Pepermans Y and Maesele P (2016) The politicization of climate change: Problem or solution? *WIREs Climate Change* 7(4): 478–485.
- Pierce J and Martin DG (2015) Placing Lefebvre. *Antipode* 47(5): 1279–1299.
- Pile S (2005) Spectral cities: Where the repressed returns and other short stories. In: Hillier J and Rooksby E (eds), *Habitus: A Sense of Place*. Sydney: Ashgate.
- Pløger J (2004) Strife: Urban planning and agonism. *Planning Theory* 3(1): 71–92.
- Pløger J (2018) Conflict and agonism. In: Gunder M, Madanipour A and Watson V (eds), *The Handbook of Planning Theory*. London, New York: Routledge, 264–275.
- Pohl L (2019) Hegel and the shadow of materialist geographies. *ACME - An International Journal for Critical Geographers* 18(2): 285–307.
- Pohl L (2020) Object-disoriented geographies: The Ghost Tower of Bangkok and the topology of anxiety. *Cultural Geographies* 27(1): 71–84.
- Pohl L (2021) Localizing the void: From material to immaterial materialism. In: Kingsbury P and Anna Secor (eds), *A Place More Void*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, pp. 285–301.
- Pohl L and Kingsbury P (2021) The most sublime geographer: Žižek with place, distance, and scale. In: Landau F, Pohl L and Roskamm N (eds), *[Un]Grounding: Post-Foundational Geographies*. Bielefeld: transcript, 197–216.
- Pohl L and Swyngedouw E (2021a) ‘What does not work in the world’: The specter of Lacan in critical political thought. *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* online first: 1–19.
- Pohl L and Swyngedouw E (2021b) The world and the Real: Space and the political after Lacan. In: Landau F, Pohl L and Roskamm N (eds), *[Un]Grounding: Post-Foundational Geographies*. Bielefeld: transcript, 43–62.
- Pohl L and Swyngedouw E (2023) Enjoying climate change: Jouissance as a political factor. *Political Geography* 101: 1–10.
- Rancière J (1999) *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Roberts E (2013) Geography and the visual image: A hauntological approach. *Progress in Human Geography* 37(3): 386–402.
- Rose M, Bissell D and Harrison P (2021) Negative geographies. In: Bissell D, Rose M and Harrison P (eds), *Negative Geographies: Exploring the Politics of Limits*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1–38.
- Roskamm N (2015) On the other side of agonism: ‘The enemy’, the ‘outside’ and the role of antagonism. *Planning Theory* 14(4): 384–403.
- Roskamm N (2017) *Die Unbesetzte Stadt. Postfundamentalistisches Denken und das Urbanistische Feld*. Basel: Birkhäuser.
- Roskamm N (2019) *The Constitutive outside of Planetary Urbanization: A Post-foundational Reading*: 1–21. Online self-publication: [https://www.nikolairoskamm.de/pdf/Roskamm\\_ConstitutiveOutside.pdf](https://www.nikolairoskamm.de/pdf/Roskamm_ConstitutiveOutside.pdf) (accessed 20 December 2022).
- Rosol M (2014) On resistance in the post-political city: Conduct and counter-conduct in Vancouver. *Space and Polity* 18(1): 70–84.
- Sayer A (1984) *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach*. London: Hutchinson.

- Sayer A (1991) Behind the locality debate: Deconstructing geography's dualisms. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 23(2): 283–308.
- Schad-Spindler A, Landau-Donnelly F, Fridrik S and Marchart O (2023) *Konfliktuelle Kulturpolitik*. Berlin: Springer.
- Schurr C (2013) Performativity and antagonism as keystones for a political geography of change. In: Glass MR and Rose-Redwood R (eds), *Performativity, Politics, and the Production of Social Space*. New York: Routledge, pp. 95–120.
- Searle A (2020) Absence. *Environmental Humanities* 12(1): 167–172.
- Secor A J (2013) Topological city. *Urban Geography* 34(4): 430–444.
- Simandan D (2010) Beware of contingency. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28(3): 388–396.
- Simonsen K (2004) Networks, flows, and fluids: Reimagining spatial analysis? *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 36(8): 1333–1337.
- Smith N (1984) *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press.
- Smith RG (2003) World city topologies. *Progress in Human Geography* 27(5): 561–582.
- Soja EW (1989) *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London, New York: Verso.
- Sparke M (2005) *In the Space of Theory: Postfoundational Geographies of the Nation-State*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Stavrakakis Y (2007) *The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Strathausen C (2009) Introduction: Thinking outside in. In: Strathausen C (ed), *A Leftist Ontology: Beyond Relativism and Identity Politics*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press. xix–xlvi.
- Swyngedouw E (2007) The post-political city. In: BAVO (ed), *Urban Politics Now*. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 58–76.
- Swyngedouw E (2009) The antinomies of the postpolitical city: In search of a democratic politics of environmental production. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33(3): 601–620.
- Swyngedouw E (2010) The zero-ground of politics: Musings on the post-political city. In: Kaminer T, Robles-Dúran M and Sohn H (eds), *Urban Asymmetries: Studies and Projects on Neoliberal Urbanisation*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, pp. 52–61.
- Swyngedouw E (2011) Interrogating post-democratization: Reclaiming egalitarian political spaces. *Political Geography* 30(7): 370–380.
- Swyngedouw E (2013) The non-political politics of climate change. *ACME - An International Journal for Critical Geographers* 18(2): 1–8.
- Swyngedouw E (2015) Urbanization and environmental futures: Politicizing urban political ecologies. In: Perreault T, Bridge G and McCarthy J (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*. New York: Routledge, 609–619.
- Swyngedouw E (2018) *Promises of the Political: Insurgent Cities in a Post-Political Environment*. MA: MIT Press.
- Swyngedouw E and Wilson J (2014) The Post-political and its discontents. *Spaces of Depoliticisation, Spectres of Radical Politics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Tyner J and Inwood J (2014) Violence as fetish: geography, Marxism, and dialectics. *Progress in Human Geography* 38(6): 771–784.
- Urry J (2011) *Climate Change and Society*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Vanolo A (2019) Scenes from an urban outside: Personal accounts of emotions, absences and planetary urbanism. *City* 23(4): 388–401.
- Weisser F and Müller-Mahn D (2016) No place for the political: Micro-geographies of the Paris climate conference 2015. *Antipode* 49(3): 802–820.
- Williams P and McConnell F (2011) Critical geographies of peace. *Antipode* 43(4): 927–931.
- Williams S and Booth K (2013) Time and the spatial post-politics of climate change: Insights from Australia. *Political Geography* 36: 21–30.
- Wilson D (2004) Toward a contingent urban neoliberalism. *Urban Geography* 25(8): 771–783.
- Wylie J (2007) The spectral geographies of WG Sebald. *Cultural Geographies* 14(2): 171–188.
- Žižek S (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso.
- Žižek S (1994) Introduction: The spectre of ideology. In: Žižek S (ed), *Mapping Ideology*. London: Verso.
- Žižek S (1999) *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. London: Verso.

Žižek S (2000) Da Capo senza Fine. In: Butler J, Laclau E and Žižek S (eds). *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality. Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London, New York: Verso, 213–262.

Žižek S (2017) *Incontinence of the Void: Economico-Philosophical Spandrels*. Cambridge, London: The MIT Press.

### **Author biographies**

Friederike Landau-Donnelly is a political theorist, urban sociologist and cultural geographer, based at Radboud Universiteit in Nijmegen, NL. Friederike

researches intersections between politics, the political and space as well as contested museums, monuments, artistic activism and conflictual public space(s).

Lucas Pohl is a human geographer and currently works as a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Geography at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. He works on the interstices between cultural geography, urban political ecology, and psychoanalytic theory with a focus on social- and spatial theory, built environments, and political action.