

### Commentary III

Reviewed by: Nicola Guy, Goldsmiths,  
University of London, UK

*We depart from the assumption that grounds are not merely absent or gone, but constantly inscribed in already-constructed spaces, which carry traces of continent decisions of the past, having led to social sediments of power and meaning as results of processes of hegemonic articulation. (p.11)*

With post-foundational thinking any idea that there is absolute reason is left, so ungrounding resists and disrupts those social practices that are taught as principle. For urban studies, this opens up the possibility for re-examination both of the sites of research and the discourse we use. Through accepting the notion that space is constantly made while retaining its past an understanding of how the status quo can be disrupted can be formed.

*[Un]Grounding* carefully situates post- foundational thought within spatial studies, arguing that these links are already there but necessitate closer study. The overarching question of *[Un]Grounding* is around how this post-foundational approach can be used to revisit spatial thinking for a radical reproach of urban studies. The above quote from the collectively written introduction indicates to the usefulness of revisiting spatial studies with a post-foundational lens, and the potential this gives to look beyond these studies themselves. Through the introduction, the editors review the lack of writing around post-foundational thinking and its origins using Oliver Marchart as the key reference throughout. Clearly set out are the terms and ideas that follow through the book as well as the writers that will be considered within a post-foundational discourse, which comprises the first section of the book.

Revisited are Laclau, Badiou and Rancière, whose work is situated easily within post-foundational thinking but takes a little more to understand within the spatial. In these chapters, their work is outlined within post-foundationalism, again often referring to Marchart to do this, as well as the potential for spatial consideration. Out of the writers discussed Lefebvre operates as a more understandable bridge between the two, at least upon initial reading, between the two, which Nikolai Roskamm details in ‘‘On Shaky Ground Thinking Lefebvre’’ offering a look at Lefebvre’s very early spatial studies.

*[Un]Grounding* early on recognises the problem of representation in post-foundationalism; that it is dominated by white, cis male writers, a problem that is echoed within the spatial studies being discussed as well. Efforts have been made for this to not be replicated within the publication, though it is undeniable that most of the referenced writers still fall into this category. Throughout the publication however, this dominant narrative is consciously challenged with contributions that examples from outside of the west that expand on those earlier writers.

In ‘How Does The *[Un]Grounded* Interface Generate Possibilities for Spatial Alternative’, Mohamed Saleh looks to fieldwork undertaken in Cairo and Alexandria, Egypt, in order to look more hopefully to the radical potential of protest and urban power. As the penultimate chapter of the book, this contribution offers a different approach that opens up what has been written so far. The notion of learning hope as a revolutionary idea that can unground shows a way in which urban transformation could occur. Saleh refers to embracing the ‘uncertainty, ambiguity and multiplicity at the core of understanding our dynamic world of urban change’

(p. 320). This continues to highlight the sense in using a post-foundational understanding to study urban space, as a way of thinking that seeks to understand abundance.

Across the whole final section is acknowledgement of the potential for post-foundational thinking to inform and be informed by political action leading to the possibility to dismantle hegemony, something that has of course been a longstanding interest within urban studies. In this final section of the publication, these possibilities are explored through chapters that take examples of resistance in the city and apply spatial theories to disseminate them. Sören Groth discusses how de Certeau's pairings 'strategies/tactics' and 'space/place', introduced in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1998), can be looked at as comparable terms for the much discussed post-foundational 'political difference'. Groth recognises de Certeau's strategies and tactics as practices of grounding and ungrounding respectively and outlines several examples where a tactical ungrounding has taken place in the urban environment. These examples, that include a changed walking pattern in Frankfurt/Main and the wider practice of fare dodging on public transport across Europe, demonstrate 'subtle counterforce' actioned by the societal other (p. 296). These actions push against strategies, those foundations and principals we are taught to live by, demonstrating grounding in (in)action. As well as serving as examples in understanding politics and the political, Groth also shows the impact small acts of ungrounding can have in urban space, encouraging the reader to rethink these kinds of quiet moments that may already be undertaken.

In the final chapter, Daniel Mullis uses Lefebvre and Rancière to look at recent resistance in Athens. While Lefebvre has been frequently called upon in discussion of the resurgence of unrest in cities that was seen in the late aughts this study looks beyond *The Rights to the City* instead to *The Production of Space*. This three-dimensional Lefebvrian understanding of space – spatial practice, representational and representations of – is easily understood in post-foundational terms. As Mullis writes, '[Lefebvre's definition of] Space is a historical product of political production' and so 'grounding order is apolitical practice of producing space' (p. 331). Through this the production of space become continually produced through existing power relations, which Mullis establishes with an examination of the behaviour of the police in Athens in the uprisings against governance in 2010. For Mullis, the police are a spatial product of political production, but this is not predestined, as demonstrated by the city containing both this order, or grounding, and the practice able to contest it.

*[Un]Grounding* is both a thorough contribution to post-foundational thought and to spatial studies by themselves. Both of these sides of the research support a new understanding and further development of each discipline. When applied more directly to urban studies, it gives a clearer language to what is being frequently and currently studied, particularly when looking at recent instances of unrest in the city. With a post-foundational lens, we are able to view urban space as complex, myriad and in constant production. Through this understanding that which is considered to be fundamental, those societal principals that nurture hegemony, can be broken down. *[Un]Grounding* as a publication, and ungrounding as a political act, are both critical and hopeful, praising of small actions and the potential there is to enact change. As is stated in the introduction of *[Un]Grounding*, this describes something that is not new but longstanding. Now carefully recorded and together in one place, we can be reminded of this and continue to chip away at what attempts to ground us.