

Neopragmatic Horizontal Geographies 1

Olaf Kühne

Redescribing Horizontal Geographies

A Neopragmatist Approach
to Spatial Contingency, Complexity,
and Relationships



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Neopragmatic Horizontal Geographies

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Central aspects of philosophical neopragmatism have been made available for integrative spatial research in recent years. Following classical pragmatism, which measures the quality of cognition by its suitability for problem solving, rather than by philosophical or moral principles, neopragmatism also integrates considerations of language theory. The central element of this meta-theoretical approach is the plurality of perspectives appropriate to the subject matter. This plurality gains particular relevance in the study of complex objects. Especially in the case of spatial syntheses, as they are carried out in 'horizontal geographies' (e.g. in the form of region, city or landscape), a multitheoretical, also multimethodical and inter- and transdisciplinary approach is required – following the neopragmatic approach. Due to the inter- and transdisciplinarity of the approach, there is a special focus on innovative forms of presenting the results of research, following the neopragmatic approach of horizontal geographies.

The aim of the series is first of all to elaborate the meta-theoretical fundamentals of 'neopragmatic horizontal geographies', which form the justifying basis for the triangulation of theories, research methods derived from them, and last but not least methods of representation. Studies that operationalize the meta-theoretical framework with different spatial as well as theoretical and methodological shear points illustrate the potentials of the approach for theory-driven horizontal geographic research.

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Foreword

This book represents a (preliminary) synthesis of my efforts to make the philosophy of neopragmatism available for ‘horizontal geographic’ research, a process that I have carried out together with my working group, but which has also been taken up and continued by colleagues outside it (more on this later). The path to neopragmatism was neither straightforward nor continuous. The starting point ultimately lies in my dissertation in sociology (published in 2006), in which I dealt with the social construction of landscape and subsequently developed a social science landscape theory based in particular on Berger, Schütz, and Luckmann. This theory reached the limits of its interpretative power when, at the beginning of the 2010s, I began to focus increasingly on ‘region’, and the tangible references of ‘landscape’ became more relevant in my research. For me, these could not be satisfactorily integrated with social constructivism. In this respect, after attempts to stretch a social constructivist theoretical framework, which I found unsuccessful, I began to search for a more suitable theoretical concept. Initial thoughts on neopragmatism followed in the mid-2010s. It was not until the end of the second decade of the 21st century that I had advanced my reflections to the point where I was able to publish my first conceptual essays on the subject. This was followed by a first empirical operationalization with Corinna Jenal on Baton Rouge. The results suggested that I had found a useful approach to dealing with the complexity of spatiotemporal relationships, in this case ‘horizontal geographies’. Further investigations followed. After the first explorative studies, the development of the approach was intensified with the approval of the project ‘Geographies of Unsustainability—A Neopragmatic Regional Geography of Louisiana’ by the German Research Foundation. This funding enabled not only the empirical testing of the approach, but also—linked back to it—further (meta-) theoretical reflection, which is documented in this book.

I would first like to thank all the members of my working group who were actively involved in the development of a neopragmatist approach for ‘horizontal geographies’, firstly Lara Koegst, with whom I carried out the investigations in Louisiana in the DFG project, then Karsten Berr, who is always available to me as a friendly critic and partner for the development and testing of theoretical approaches, as well as Corinna Jenal, with whom I undertook the first empirical trials of the approach.

My thanks also go to Timo Sedelmeier, who took on the concept in order to test its suitability outside of ‘horizontal geographies’, here in the context of foodscapes. I would also like to thank Julia-Deborah Fischer, with whom I explored the ironic possibilities of the approach in the development of ‘Pillepallescapes’. Marie-Luise Zimmer and Sven Endreß also contributed to the development of the approach, which is why I would also like to thank them. I would also like to thank all the research assistants in my working group who took care of Citavi entries, the creation and revision of maps and graphics, as well as the proofreading of the text (on behalf of myself: Anna-Maria Weber, Hannes Brüggemann, Nina Spröbler, Juliane Paul, Lisa Holderied, Naomi Anton, and Kira Blepp).

I would also like to thank those colleagues outside my working group with whom I have tested neopragmatic approaches to spaces, such as Florian Weber (Saarbrücken), Tobias Chilla (Erlangen), Laura Leonardi (Florence), Petra Lohmann (Siegen), Kai Schuster (Darmstadt), and Dennis Edler (Bochum). Special thanks go to my colleagues at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge for their hospitality and valuable input, especially Craig Colten, Kent Mathewson, and Michael Leitner. I would also like to thank all my colleagues who have contributed to the development process as discussion partners and with impulses to think ahead in certain areas: Ansgar Thiel (Tübingen), Liliana Dumitrache (Bucharest), Cesare Manetti and Barbara Staniscia (both Rome), Mirella Loda and Matteo Puttilli (both Florence), Angel Menendez Rexach (Madrid), Andreas Dix (Bamberg) as well as many colleagues who have expressed their thoughts on what has been developed. This specifically applies to colleagues from the Academy for Regional Geographical Research (formerly the German Academy for Regional Studies).

My greatest thanks, however, go to my wife, Sibylle Berger, who has always supported my research, accompanied me as a competent and unreservedly constructive discussion partner, and looked on my numerous absences with great indulgence.

The scientific basis for this book was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG—Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) under the project title ‘Geographies of Unsustainability—A Neopragmatic Regional Geography of Louisiana’. I would like to thank the DFG for this support.

Tübingen, Germany

Olaf Kühne

About This Book

Spatial syntheses (e.g., regional geographies) have taken a very ambivalent development in the preceding decades: On the one hand, the demand in the public, but also in science, is high; on the other hand, it has been criticized—in comparison with specialized geographical disciplines—as having theoretical voids. This current book now provides a concept of a theoretical redefinition of ‘horizontal geographies’. These denote the spatial syntheses as undertaken in various disciplines, whether as regional studies, area studies, new regional geography, and many others. The basis of the redescription is philosophical neopragmatism, which has occasionally been taken up in the spatial sciences but has never been differentiated into a theory-driven empirical research program. This development of a research program guides the present book. Philosophical neopragmatism, especially as conceptualized by Richard Rorty, particularly focuses on contingency of society, self, and language, which also allows spatial syntheses to be understood not as ‘images of reality’ but as contingent proposals for redescribing spaces. As a result of the complexity of spatial processes, their horizontal geographic study requires a triangulation of theories, methods, researcher perspectives, data, and the involvement of people without expert special knowledge as well as the presentation of results. To highlight the contingency of the spatial syntheses, the presentation of the results—especially ‘graphic and cartographic’ (abbreviated henceforth to ‘(carto)graphic’)—resorts to the mindset of irony. Regarding the six levels of triangulation, neopragmatism acts as a meta-theoretical orientation framework. Against the background of the complexity of spatial developments as well as to operationalize Rorty’s principle of private self-creation and public solidarity, Ralf Dahrendorf’s concept of life chances is drawn upon. Especially in the differentiation of the concept made in this book, it can serve simultaneously as an understanding accessing the (also spatial) expression of options and ligatures, while also offering a normative framework for the evaluation of socio-spatial developments. The reference to neopragmatic studies on spatial syntheses conducted to date and evaluated in this book shows the potential of the approach elaborated here in conceptual detail for the first time.

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Chapter 1

Introduction



The classical aspect of geography has been in crisis for decades. What I describe as ‘horizontal geographies’ (i.e., the collective term for concepts that deal synthetically with spaces and landscapes (such as regional geographies, area studies, ‘regional studies’, etc.) needs to be redescribed. This redescription becomes clear notably from a comparatively low connectivity to theoretical discussions of recent years within the spatial-oriented sciences, which have liberated and developed spatially focused research from the reporting of little-directed empiricism as well as the processing of essentialist ‘residuals’ (Pareto 1916). Attempts to frame ‘horizontal geographies’ in theoretical constructivist terms resulted in the loss of the research field of ‘materialities’. At the same time, there is a social need for spatial syntheses, which is markedly demonstrated by the large number of series and publications dealing with the synthetic treatment of tangible spaces at different scales (as demonstrated not least by the ‘World Regional Geography Book Series’ published by Springer).

The aim of this book is to provide a redescription that, on the one hand, is able to give direction to the study of ‘horizontal geographies’ by linking it to theoretical discussions and, on the other hand, opens up the possibility of also considering materialities within a conceptual framework. Neopragmatism is used as a meta-theoretical basis. Neopragmatism joins a phalanx of anti-essentialist and anti-metaphysical theoretical traditions, such as post-structuralism, existentialism, hermeneutics, post-modern holism, Wittgensteinianism, and others (Rorty 2018[1994]). According to Rorty (2018[1994]), the central tenets of these perspectives on the world, and the self, include ‘everything is a social construction’ and ‘all consciousness is a linguistic matter’, with the former being a ‘typically European catchphrase’ and the latter going back to an American thinker—Wilfrid Sellars. From this perspective, the question is not (in the essentialist tradition) what the essence of things is, but how they can be useful to people, which therefore also applies to material objects. Science in particular and society in general is formed through vocabularies, i.e., common platforms of social justification behaviors (Rorty 1997), which in turn are changeable and—as will be explained in more detail—can also change into new vocabularies. In this respect,

this book of redescription can be understood as a proposal for a new vocabulary for dealing with ‘horizontal geographies’, which in turn draws on vocabularies in use up to this point in time (how vocabularies will develop in the future remains to be seen). The redescription of the handling of ‘horizontal geographies’ undertaken here follows the hermeneutic approach as it is conceptually anchored in neopragmatism: Only a few things (such as essentialism) are definitively discarded; instead, they are repeatedly tested for usefulness and, if necessary, updated in a redescription. The fact that such an approach cannot provide any certainties and is not geared towards the ‘discovery of the one and exclusive truth’ is already clear at this point (anyone expecting this should check whether he or she is prepared to deal with a completely different view of things; if not, he or she should put the book aside now, it will only cause annoyance). Dealing with ‘horizontal geographies’ from a neopragmatist perspective clarifies the contingency of the world and, with its redescriptions, adds another one to the contingent descriptions of the world; the awareness of contingency is expressed in an ironic attitude (Rorty 1997). In this respect, this work can be classified as ‘ironistic theorizing’, i.e., a theoretical practice “that emphasizes its own contingency” (Rorty 2001, p. 27).

Contingency is also found in relation to spaces: ‘spaces’, which the spatial sciences deal with, whether understood as containers filled with material objects or as a product of the relationships of material objects or as social and individual constructions, are characterized by complexity and intricacy, as well as contingency. While ‘complexity’ refers to the variable relations of different elements of a system, ‘intricacy’ (or complicatedness; German: ‘Kompliziertheit’) is a term for capturing the diversity of the elements of a system. So, while intricacy is primarily related to the structure of a system, complexity is oriented towards the functions. With an understanding of the complexity of a system, one is able to behave with relative certainty according to the (complicated) rules of the system. There is no such certainty when dealing with complexity; after all, the functions (and even states of the system) can change, and ‘predictions’ in this regard are always contingent. ‘Contingency’ refers to “something that is neither necessary nor impossible; something that can be as it is (was, will be), but which is also possible in a different way. The term thus designates what is given (what is to be experienced, expected, thought, imagined) with regard to possible otherness; it designates objects within the horizon of possible variations” (Luhmann 1984, p. 152).¹ Accordingly, contingent statements refer to facts that are *possible* or *accidental* in the way they are stated and could therefore also be otherwise (Kühne and Berr 2021; Papadimitriou 2010, 2020, 2021; Rorty 1997; Simon 1978).

Neopragmatism can be understood as a less unified philosophical tradition that primarily developed around American philosophers, especially Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam (for example: Hildebrand 2019; Pihlström 2013). Other philosophers, such as Richard Shusterman or Robert Brandom, and in Europe Jürgen Habermas, can also be categorized as neopragmatists. In this respect, there is not

¹ To improve the readability of the text, all foreign-language quotations have been translated and all obvious errors (spelling) and outdated spellings in the quotations that do not affect the meaning have been corrected.

one (neo)pragmatism, but rather a family of (neo)pragmatisms (Bernstein 2010). Two basic currents of neopragmatist thought can presently be identified—which are united by the rejection of Cartesian representationalism: Those who, moderately, advance a reconstruction of epistemology (such as Hilary Putnam, Karl-Otto Apel, Jürgen Habermas, and Robert Brandom) and those who wish to abandon it altogether (most notably Richard Rorty; Levine 2023; Müller 2023). The proposal to be developed here for a neopragmatic approach to ‘horizontal geographies’ refers in particular to Richard Rorty, not only because neopragmatist thinking is strongly associated with his name (Pihlström 2013) but also for reasons that make it easier to connect with spatial research:

1. Rorty offers a direct link to social constructivism, which is also the starting point for anti-essentialist and post-positivist reflections on region and landscape.
2. In essential respects, Rorty ties his philosophy not only to the philosophy of language of the late Wittgenstein and the pragmatism of John Dewey, but also to the phenomenology of Heidegger (Kremer 2023). This phenomenological approach makes him compatible with the tradition of phenomenological landscape research.
3. He emphasizes the central importance of language, whereby the understanding of language in this work is broadly defined (cartographic signatures are also understood as language).
4. Rorty’s philosophy offers a link to the European post-structuralism discourse and combines this with the American tradition of pragmatism.
5. Rorty’s philosophy is not geared towards exclusion, but towards inclusion (of theories and perspectives, for example).
6. In his “ironically relaxed attitude, he is an *integrative philosopher* who appreciates the insights of very different directions in a pluralistic manner” (Hacke 2021, p. 94 emphasis in the original), which can also be followed by other fundamental tenets.
7. With his concept of pragmatism, Rorty offers a meta-theoretical framework from which a research program for a synthetic engagement with spaces can be derived.
8. He thus provides a fairly comprehensive outline of a meta-theory that can be operationalized by using further theoretical building blocks from other philosophers and social scientists (in the concept presented here, in particular Karl Popper and Ralf Dahrendorf).

Among the works of Richard Rorty referred to in this paper, ‘Pragmatism as Antiauthoritarianism’ (Rorty 2023) has a prominent significance, as it presents “the final, mature form and perspective of his seminal pragmatism” (Brandom 2023, p. 7). Many of Rorty’s approaches, which until then had hardly been related to each other, are linked together here and become a ‘research program’ (Lakatos 1974),² even though Rorty does not present a ‘unified outline’ of neopragmatism here either, but

² With regard to this final synthesis of the work, I am deliberately referring to the German-language version, not the English version published two years earlier, as parts of the German-language version that are central to the present work, for example on pan-relationism, were first published in the German edition.

remains true to his approach of developing his understanding of neopragmatism in an evolutionary way by engaging with other philosophers and testing it in different contexts, such as political philosophy (Müller 2014). Rorty has also designed his neopragmatism in such a way that it contains little definitional unambiguity, which makes it difficult for those who are trained in unambiguity to understand Rorty's thoughts (Reese-Schäfer 2016) but, on the other hand, also increases its connectivity for different positions. His political philosophy in particular can be read as conservative, liberal, evolutionary-left—and also criticized (Held et al. 2021; Jörke and Schwuchow 2021). This openness of his own explanations, and also Rorty's practice of recognizing the “authority of other thinkers” (Müller 2014, p. 167) by means of “reformulating their thoughts” (Müller 2014, p. 167) for its own purposes, in turn invites the reformulation of Rorty's thoughts for its own purposes—in this case the formulation of a neopragmatic horizontal geography. But it also invites us to combine Rorty's thoughts (in a hitherto unusual way) with those of other thinkers who have at least an affinity with Rorty's understanding of the world (here in particular Ralf Dahrendorf and Karl Popper). The neopragmatist approach in Rorty's interpretation is supplemented chiefly by aspects that can be found in Putnam's work. This primarily concerns the aspect of tracing the vocabularies of experts back to everyday language, as well as the idea of the plurality of individual worlds (Putnam 1990, 1997).

Philosophical pragmatism has found some expression in geography and neopragmatic philosophy has also been received and applied to its own discipline (see for example: Barnes 2000, 2008, 2023; Cutchin 2008; Hepple 2008; Jones 2008; Lake 2023; Peet 1998; Sayer 2010; Steiner 2009a, 2014). However, the approaches remained largely abstract or a general framework for practicing (scientific) geography was developed (an exception is: Steiner 2009b). The abstractness of the explanations of (neo)pragmatism—and also of the book presented here—may be somewhat irritating, as it is a philosophy that did not and does not see its purpose in theory, but in actual implementation (Saarinen 2011). Against this background, the aim of this book is to present a research program, in the sense of a collection of interrelated theories (Lakatos 1974) for a ‘neopragmatist horizontal geography’ that uses basic philosophical considerations in order to develop a program for the practical ‘making of regional geographies’ (here a reference to Werlen 1997), but also to make it connectable to current theoretical discourses. To put it in a nutshell: The aim of this work is to bring horizontal geographical research out of the ‘dirty corner’ of unreflected and thus instrumentalized lack of theory attributed to it, to make theory-led research fruitful for it without it losing its practical relevance, and even more so to give it greater practical relevance out of meta-theoretical reflection. In order to achieve this goal, on the one hand, we draw on numerous preliminary works of our own, some of which were developed with different colleagues, and on the other hand, on the work of colleagues who have taken up elements of the approach developed to date. These different works are characterized, in turn, by a combination of theoretical reflection and practical research—each with a different emphasis and thematic and spatial focus—which my team, other colleagues, and I have dealt with:

1. The development of a ‘neopragmatist’ approach to dealing with ‘horizontal geographies’ (Chilla et al. 2015; Edler et al. 2023; Kühne 2018c, 2023; Kühne and Jenal 2021).
2. The elaboration of an analytical framework for the integration of the material world, individual consciousness, and social constructions of the world (following Karl Popper’s three worlds theory; Koegst 2022; Kühne 2018b, 2020; Kühne et al. 2021; Kühne and Berr 2021; Kühne, Berr, and Jenal 2023a, b, c; Kühne and Jenal 2020d).
3. The study of Ralf Dahrendorf’s ‘life chances’ concept (1979; Dahrendorf 1992) as a normative framework for the evaluation of socio-spatial processes (Jenal et al. 2021; Kühne 2017, 2018a, 2019; Kühne et al. 2019; Kühne and Leonardi 2020; Leonardi 1993, 2014; Weber et al. 2018).
4. The testing of the approaches mentioned under 1 to 3 in a local context with extensive empirical operationalization, here Baton Rouge (Kühne, Jenal, and Koegst 2020a, b; Kühne and Jenal 2020b, c; Weber et al. 2023) and regionally thematically specified context, here in Louisiana, on land loss (Kühne 2021; Kühne and Koegst 2023a, b) and oilscapes (Kühne, Koegst, and Berr 2023a, b, c). These approaches were also tested at a national level, largely limited to literature reviews or the evaluation of data already collected, here in relation to Germany (Kühne and Weber 2022).
5. The development of innovative forms of presentation for presenting the results of regional geographic research (Edler et al. 2019; Kühne 2022; Kühne and Jenal 2020a; Kühne, Jenal, and Sedelmeier 2022a, b; Kühne and Koegst 2022, 2023c).
6. However, it also draws on research by colleagues who are concerned with applying or reflecting on the neopragmatist approach to horizontal geographies (e.g., Gebhardt 2023; Stemmer et al.: Gebhardt 2023; Stemmer et al. 2023; Zepp 2020).

The content of this list requires some justification: as a result of academic socialization with sociological and philosophical classics from the European, particularly German-speaking, context (Korf et al. 2022; Kühne et al. 2023a, b, c). In order to operationalize neopragmatism for regional and landscape geography research, we draw on scholars from the German-speaking world, in this case Ralf Dahrendorf and Karl Popper. Both, like the neopragmatists, are staunch defenders of an open society and science, who reject essentialism as well as ideas of a utopian final society. However, they differ in that they have not completed the linguistic and philosophical turn, but their theories are so open that they are compatible with neopragmatist ideas. The proposal of a ‘redescription’ put forward here (Rorty 1980) of horizontal geographies thus draws centrally on the American tradition of pragmatism and neopragmatism in particular, even though the author of this book is socialized in European thought. In other words, a way of thinking that is based more on the fundamental than on the practical, but which, since the late Wittgenstein, has also made language the focus of considerations in philosophy, science studies, and the social sciences (cf: Joas 1993). Largely because Rorty (2002, 2023) attempts to overcome the boundary between American and European perspectives, to link the focus on language with

pragmatist considerations and to create syntheses, his thinking offers a hitherto barely utilized potential for the spatial sciences.

The aim of this volume is to develop a proposal for a neopragmatist research program for the study of spatial complexity. It does not serve as a detailed introduction to the respective underlying theories. For a discussion of the genesis and criticism of these theories, reference is made to both the original literature cited, and equally to the (comparative) secondary literature and relevant textbooks, in particular on the three authors who shape this work: Richard Rorty, with his conception of neopragmatism (for example: Bernstein 2010; Calder 2003; Gascoigne 2013; Gustafsson and Brandom 2001; Horster 1991; Malachowski 2014; Menand 2001; Mounce 2002; Müller 2014, 2021; Reese-Schäfer 2016; Robert and Wills 2020), Karl Popper with his three worlds theory and the concept of the ‘open society’ (for example: Alt 1995; Boyer 2017, 1994; Franco 2019; Niemann 2019; Zimmer and Morgenstern 2015), as well as Ralf Dahrendorf with his sociological operationalization of the open society to understand life chances and their relationship to conflicts (Kühne 2017; Kühne and Leonardi 2020).

It is not only philosophy, political theory, social sciences, religious studies, linguistics, and literary studies that have dealt with neopragmatism in general and Richard Rorty in particular (Held et al. 2021; Robert and Wills 2020; Selk et al. 2021). The human geography studies engaging fundamental (neo-)pragmatist considerations (in particular: Allen 2008; Barnes 2008; Cutchin 2008; Jones 2008; Peet 1998; Sayer 2010; Steiner 2009a, 2014), in addition to the general conclusions already mentioned above, refer especially to economic geography and cartography. However, a systematic development of a ‘horizontal geographic’ research program has only taken place since the late second decade of the twenty-first century (for example in: Chilla et al. 2015; Kühne 2018c; Kühne and Jenal 2020c; Kühne, Parush et al. 2022a, b). In the meantime, the research program of ‘neopragmatist horizontal geographies’ has reached a stage that suggests a systematic synthesis of philosophical foundations, research strategies, criticism of previous applications, as well as potentials and challenges. This synthesis will now be presented in this volume.

The conceptual framework of the research program presented here is supplemented on the one hand by the theory of the three landscapes (Kühne 2018b, 2020; Kühne and Leonardi 2022) which is derived from Karl Popper’s three world theory (Popper 1973, 1996; Popper and Eccles 1977). On the other hand, from the normative basis of the ‘open society’, which was developed by Popper (2011[1947]) and further differentiated in social science terms by Dahrendorf (1979, 1992). The use of the theory of the three landscapes has proven its worth as a quasi-ontological framework in numerous of the above-mentioned studies, as it can be used to work out the differences and similarities between ‘World’, ‘Space’ and ‘Landscape’, as well as to establish a framework that makes it possible to specify the explanatory possibilities of individual theories between the material, individual and cultural worlds (i.e., World 1, World 2, and World 3). This makes it possible to create a prerequisite for the operationalization of neopragmatist philosophy for the spatial sciences, specifically ‘horizontal geographies’.

Rorty's, Popper's, and Dahrendorf's reflections on science are constitutively embedded in a social-theoretical framework. In this respect, this cannot be ignored in a work on the conceptual development of a neopragmatist horizontal geographic research program, if shortcuts and decontextualizations are not to be accepted. A pure focus on the thrust of the science of neopragmatism without addressing open society would not do justice to the constitutive framework of open society for scientific activities (and beyond). Thus, in the understanding of Rorty (2018[1994], p. 26f.) the open society—in contrast to science—is of paramount central importance for society when he states: “Of Peirce's, Dewey's and Popper's praise of science, there remains [...] no specific epistemological strategy, but nothing more than a praise of certain moral virtues, namely those of an open society”.

Karl Popper's 'open society' (which Dahrendorf differentiates sociologically) and Richard Rorty's ideas have a great deal in common and are considered in detail in this work. However, despite the common ground, there are also differences in justification and scope: Popper's analysis of the logics underlying 'closed societies', for example, reaches beyond Rorty's understanding with regard to the emergence of different worldviews, just as Rorty's philosophy of language goes beyond Popper's approach rooted in 'classical' philosophy. In this respect, the combination of these approaches makes sense. The sociological operationalization of Popper's approach by Ralf Dahrendorf also speaks in favor of this combination, as on the one hand, empowering people to act responsibly and reflectively is a core aspect of Rorty's philosophy (Rorty 2023) but he fails to specify the possibilities and limits, as Ralf Dahrendorf does with his theory of life chances as the result of the interaction of options and ligatures (Dahrendorf 1979). Popper (1992) sees the central task of sociology (in the understanding represented here of the social sciences as a whole, to which human geography belongs) as being to investigate the unintended consequences of human action. This in turn leads to a shift in research interest from structures ('traditional' regional geography was strongly focused on material structures, such as buildings and land forms) to processes, whereby structures take on their significance as manifestations of processes (cf: Dix 2023; Duttman et al. 2020; Ellmers 2020; Kühne et al. 2020a, b; Schenk and Steinkrüger 2020).

Before I come to some conceptual questions and the presentation of the structure of the book, I would like to briefly outline how my path to the conception of 'neopragmatist horizontal geographies' elaborated in this book took shape to concurrently make central considerations comprehensible and to reveal certain thematic and theoretical focal points. The reflections presented in this book on a neopragmatic redescription of geographical research that deals with contingent and complex objects represent the (provisional) conclusion of a personal scientific development that has lasted two and a half decades. This began in social constructivist landscape research—with recourse to Berger and Luckmann (1966)—as its starting point. Over the years, this approach to landscape has become more and more differentiated, but other theoretical approaches have also become clearer and appear more useful for investigating it (for example, approaches based on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital and habitus; Bourdieu 1984, 1989, 1998). Since the mid-1910s at the latest, it has become clear to me that a purely social constructivist approach is limited to a more

comprehensive understanding of landscape, especially regarding its material references. The same applies to the thematic focus of ‘landscape’. With its constitution of aesthetic, later also ecological, as well as moral stereotypes, it can be understood as a ‘prime example’ of the social construction of space-related syntheses, but there are also other synthetic references, such as region, city, or space itself, to which theoretical approaches other than social constructivist approaches are widespread. After ‘flirtations’ with actor-network theory, assemblage theory and (a temporary) intensified engagement with post-structuralist approaches, neopragmatism opened up to me as an alternative into which my social constructivist preliminary considerations could be integrated, which, secondly, allows for a strong transdisciplinary reference, which, thirdly, constitutively relies on plurality and tolerance (and is thus anti-authoritarian) and which, fourthly, is future-oriented with its focus on usefulness (these and other aspects of neopragmatism are dealt with throughout this book). Even if a theoretical and thematic broadening is conducted, the theory of social constructivism and the topic of landscape (quasi as a condensation point of ‘horizontal geographies’) remain central reference points of the explanations in this book. (This is, by way of explanation, not an apology; after all, everyone is free to develop an alternative conception of neopragmatist horizontal geographies).

As was made clear at the beginning of the introduction to this book, neopragmatist research is associated with a hermeneutic approach. This can also be found in this book: it does not follow a linear argumentation, but rather repeatedly takes up, re-contextualizes, reformulates, and further develops aspects that were presented at earlier points—which is expressed not least in numerous references between the chapters. Contrastingly, certain aspects that are addressed at the beginning are only elaborated on at a later point. Such an approach is predominantly an outcome of the elaborateness of what is to be connected here: dealing with a complex research category (horizontal geographies), a complex meta-theory (neopragmatism), complex triangulations, theories (and also methods, data, researcher perspectives...). The aim is to use a language that strives for accessibility. In this respect, it should be noted here that both adjectival terms of neopragmatism (also found in the central authors of neopragmatism), neopragmatist, and neopragmatic, can be found (which can also be found in Rorty, for example). Also, the terms vocabulary, language game, and discourse (as in Rorty) are largely used synonymously, if not, the deviating use becomes clear from the context (for example, in the use of the term in discourse theory). In this respect, I would like to take this opportunity to distance myself from the use of distinctive words and elitist posturing—the criticism of which will accompany us through parts of the book.

This book is divided into ten chapters, whereby you will have already completed the first chapter by reading this introduction. Subsequently, Chap. 2 presents the topic ‘Horizontal geographies—an object’, in which the historical development of the different ways in which ‘horizontal geographies’ are dealt with is illustrated, which is why they require redescription. Chap. 3 ‘The quasi-ontological framework: from the theory of the three worlds to the theory of the three landscapes’ deals with the development of an analytical category system that not only provides an overview of the multi-layered nature of ‘space’ and ‘landscape’ and the relations between

them, but is also a tool for assigning theories and methods to the different layers (or levels and their relationships) in such a way that their use promises to be useful. In Chap. 4, ‘Current ‘Mode c’ approaches in the context of ‘horizontal geographies’ refers not only in the title to the approaches described in Chap. 3 (Mode c refers to something like ‘the practice of using ‘expert special knowledge’), but rather the currently used concepts and theories of ‘horizontal geographic’ research (especially landscape research) are presented. These are repeatedly taken up with regard to the potentials and limitations of integration into a neopragmatist meta-theoretical framework. In Chap. 5 ‘Neopragmatism as a meta-theory—philosophical foundations’ provides an introduction to neopragmatism—pragmatically focused on its relevance for the conception of neopragmatic spatial research. This is discussed in Chap. 6 ‘Basic features of a neopragmatic research program’ provides further conceptual preparation. As has already been made clear in this introduction, the concept of neopragmatism—formulated positively—remains open to operationalization. One such operationalization is presented in Chap. 7 ‘Life chances in an open society as an operationalization of the normative content of neopragmatism’. In doing so, we first draw on Karl Popper’s understanding of an open society, which in turn is operationalized with the help of his student Ralf Dahrendorf’s concept of life chances. However, even his concept of life chances, which result from options and ligatures, remains ambivalent in this structure. As a result, both options and ligatures are subjected to a conceptual differentiation. Integrating these considerations, Chap. 8 the ‘Conception of a program for neopragmatic spatial research’. This chapter forms the core of the book, as it develops a research program based on the considerations made so far (with the addition of conclusions from ‘horizontal geographic’ studies that have already been performed), which deals with the implementation of the considerations made so far, from the triangulation of theories, methods, researcher perspectives, and more, to the significance of conflicts for the development of spaces and dealing with them, as well as possibilities of clarifying contingency, for example in the form of the conception and presentation of ‘inverse landscapes’. In Chap. 9, ‘The neopragmatist research program on ‘horizontal geographies’ in application—examples from Louisiana (United States)’, studies that have been carried out to date are presented in order to illustrate the practical research process. Similarly, to demonstrate the potential of the neopragmatic approach, i.e., that the study of ‘horizontal geographies’ need not be limited to descriptive overviews alone but should also be innovative in the development of theory and methods. Chap. 10, ‘Conclusion and outlook’, provides a focused synthesis of the remarks made, clarifies for which research personalities the neopragmatic approach is suitable and highlights the desiderata still to be found in the context of neopragmatic spatial research (and beyond).

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