

Activating History through Praxis: The Role of Practitioner-Historians in Mediating Past and Present Concerns within Design

Dr David Preston

The Design of History and the History of Design Symposium

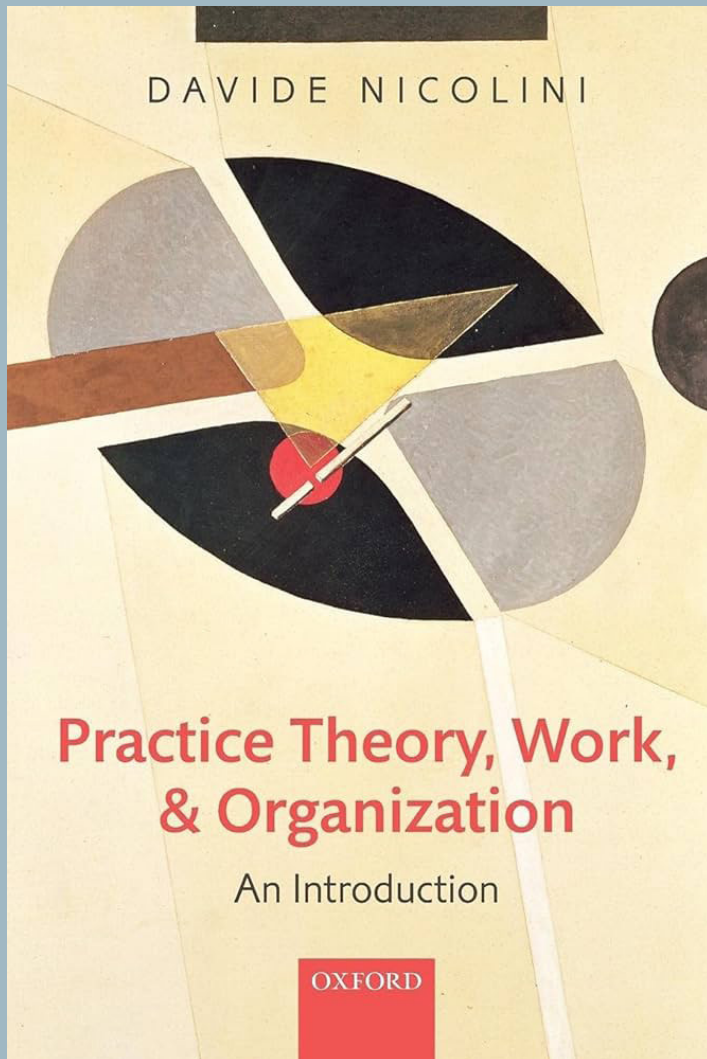
15 September 2025 • London College of Communication • UAL

A trivial modality

‘the project before us is to move design out of what in the critical scheme of things is a trivial modality of history, into a position wherein its actual historical importance, and thus its futural significance, is understood and engaged.’

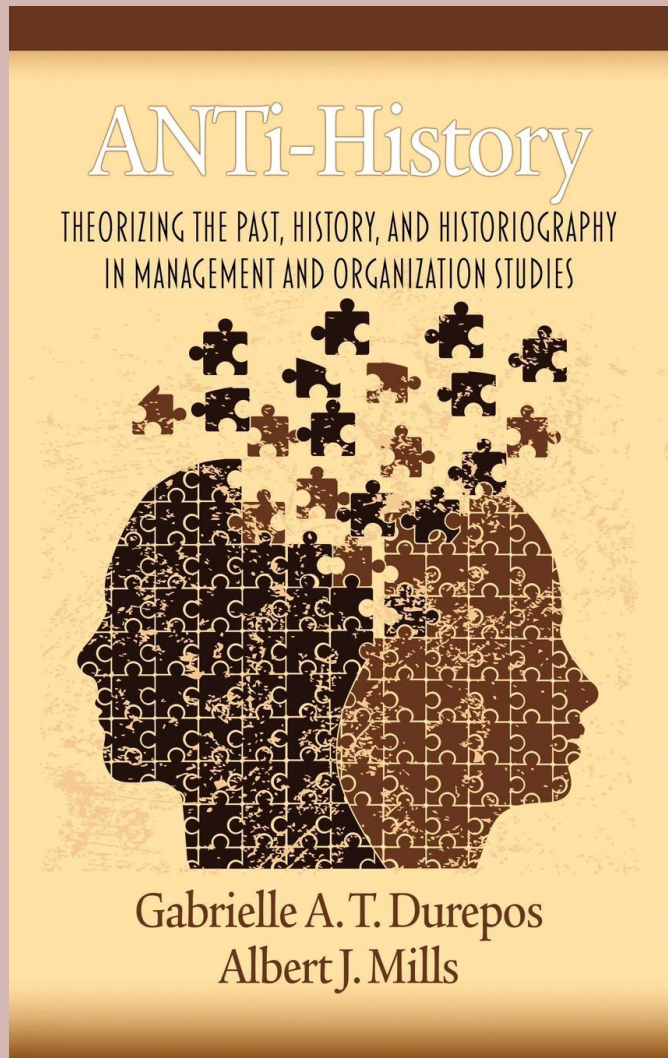
Fry, Dilnot and Stewart (2015: viii)

STRATEGY 1 : THE STRONG APPROACH TO PRACTICE



- Management & Organisation Studies.
- Historical dimension, but not framed as a historical method.
- Practices are the unit of analysis.
- The 'strong approach' is about moving beyond decontextualised thick description of practices.

STRATEGY 2 : ANTI-HISTORY



- Management & Organisation Studies (linked to business history and critical management studies).
- Derived from Actor-Network Theory (ANT).
- Histories emerge from relations between humans, non-humans, texts, and artefacts.
- Past, present, and future are entangled, not neatly separated.

STRATEGY 3 : PRESENT-ING HISTORIES



Transitional Design Histories

**Maria
Göransdotter**

- Framed around design historical enquiry.
- Focused on design practices rather than design outcomes.
- Histories as processes, not endpoints.
- Provisional, open-ended, and responsive to the present and future.