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## discussion article

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### **Performing towns. Steps towards an understanding of medieval urban communities as social practice** *Axel Christophersen\**

#### **Abstract**

Urban archaeology in Scandinavia has long been dominated by a processual understanding of medieval urban development. The author proposes that the concept of urbanity in the sense of ‘urban living’ should replace the processual and functionalist-oriented concept of ‘urbanization’, and that instead focus should be directed towards social processes, practices and materiality. He perceives the emergence of urbanity in the Middle Ages in the light of the formation of specific urban patterns of practice that can be analysed with the aid of theoretical tools from recent social-practice theory. Against this background, the potential of recent social-practice theory is examined as a possible analytical tool in an urban archaeological approach to medieval urban communities. Through concepts such as interaction, event, leakage and creativity, the medieval urban landscape can be reformulated as a dynamic social space in which diverse everyday routines were intertwined in patterns, bundles and complexes.

#### **Keywords**

urbanization; medieval towns; social-practice theory; everyday life; household; urbanity

#### **Introducing a challenge**

Over the last two decades urban archaeology in Scandinavia has significantly changed direction and perspective: the urbanization of Europe’s northernmost region has been seen within a wider regional and international time–space perspective, and everyday life, the individual, identity and gender are occupying an increasingly large share of urban archaeology’s overall repertoire of thematic research. In this context, the term ‘urbanity’ is used broadly synonymously with ‘urban lifestyle’ and appears to supersede the otherwise frequently used notion ‘urbanization’, perceived as growth of urban (i.e. non-agrarian) buildings, functions and activities. This can be perceived as an intention to push back processual archaeology’s steadfast

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reconstruction of the medieval town as a structure lacking individuals and held together by political, economic and productive structures. This challenge has been the subject of discussion in Scandinavian and international urban archaeological research since the start of the new millennium (e.g. Andersson 1997; Andrén 1995; Carelli 2001; Christophersen 1997; 2000a; 2000b; Griffith 2013; Hadley and ten Harkel 2013; Hansen 2000; 2004; Larsson 2006; Thomasson 2011). Mathias Bäck (2009) has summarized the trends and tendencies in Swedish urban archaeology from the 1970s to date, and he presents a far more nuanced and complicated discursive structure than the one I have presented above. Nevertheless, he concludes, ‘Many questions about people living in towns are still not fully answered. Were people conscious of living in an ongoing urbanization process? What did they know about towns as an organizational framework for living their lives?’ (Bäck 2009, 63, my translation); these questions are my focal point in this article.

Thus the fundamental challenge still seems to remain, namely the marginalization of the formation, existence and disintegration of everyday practices that take place in all contexts in which individuals and groups interact with each other and with their material surroundings. Thus if interactions between individuals and their material surroundings are ascribed a crucial historical driving force, a central challenge appears to be how to draw attention to the significance of processes of social practice.

This article contributes to the development of the urban archaeology of practice as an alternative to the processual research tradition which dominated urban archaeology in Scandinavia from the early 1970s to the middle of 1990 as a branch of history that perceived the past as a dynamic system of complex, interrelated cultural factors (Krieger 2012). The particular focus was on identification, documentation and analysis of material remains in urban culture layers and written sources, in order to understand its archaeological contexts and to assess the long-term consequences of the formation of social practices in urban communities. The current challenge for the urban archaeology of practice is to establish a theoretically consistent and sustainable methodological basis for conducting empirical studies of urban material remains. In the following, I aim to (1) identify and describe the theoretical tools that social-practice theory can offer to the urban archaeology of practice, and (2) examine their relevance and methodological implications with reference to some concrete archaeological examples from the early medieval town of Trondheim, Norway.

### Do we need an urban archaeology of social practice?

If one could go back in time to a medieval, Scandinavian urban landscape and spend a winter’s day passing through the wooden-paved, snow-covered, unlit, narrow streets on the way to a cold, fetid, noisy local workshop, wearing leather shoes of type B2, aware of the icy surface underfoot (having forgotten to wear crampons), with the damp seeping into one’s shoes and the cold creeping up one’s legs, would it have been then that what has since been referred to as asymmetrical power relations and reciprocal exchange mechanisms preoccupied the mind in the darkness? Was it *then* that future visions of quick monetization governed the choices and shaped future hopes?

The everyday challenges of the poor light levels, the icy streets and the severe cold weather, or the conversations with people one met on one's way, the food one ate, the game one lost, the curiosity about the new boat moored at the neighbour's jetty, and so forth, were situations that seem insignificant and of little interest for the understanding of how history progresses. However, collectively they are significant for all the individual and collective choices that are taken (or not taken), the solutions agreed upon or rejected, and expectations that are created or that fade into nothingness. In reality, archaeologists explore the material remains of such routinized social practices from the past.

All formations of practice include past experiences, insights, and competence, as well as meanings, intentions, goals, and expectations about the future. Research into past social practices aims to provide insights into processes involving the past and future in the present. The focus of such analyses is 'the acting person' or a person as an 'actor', and the result of his or her actions is visible in routinized social practice in which the experiences and knowledge of the past are directed towards future goals, whereas his or her desires form the dynamic and easily influenced focal point of all choices and decisions made at all levels. This thinking challenges the notion of 'linear' development in history. As Tim Ingold has recently claimed, 'What is life, indeed, if not a proliferation of loose ends! It can only be carried out in a world that is... not fully articulated' (Ingold 2013, 132). Moreover, it opens up a discussion of history's infinite possibilities for development and its loose threads, dead ends and half-run courses that never became history, but that nonetheless are part of the historical tapestry that binds together time and space, the individual, and materiality. In the wake of the 'development' described above there remains a tangled mass with an infinite number of lost patterns of practice or 'loose ends' that were never continued, but that have played as much of a role in the past as steps on the way towards an unknown, open future.

During excavations, archaeologists have searched for information contained within the material remains that would provide new insights for the main lines of development already established through generations of research into the past. The loose ends are not a visible part of the 'empirical hierarchy' that is captured and integrated in the descriptions and analyses of the development of practices in the past. Hence an archaeology that focuses attention on what happens at the intersection of materiality, human experiences and intentions is necessary in order to capture the diversity and variation in the development of patterns of urban practice, which I refer to as urbanity. How are practices formed? How are they developed, connected and included in other practices? And how do they eventually fall apart? How do the created durability and flexibility start to decline and ultimately cease to exist? To develop my discussion of these issues, I introduce a distinction between 'being a town' (to understand the town as a structure) and 'performing a town' (to understand the town as a field of dynamic practice). 'Town' and 'urban'/'urbanism' are terms subjected to a comprehensive discussion of definition (a general overview is given by, e.g., Smith 2013, 1–3), which I will not go into at the moment, but limit myself to

stating that by ‘town’ I understand a population centre that is larger than a village and smaller than a city. In the following three sections, this distinction respectively forms the basis of (1) a reformulation of the town as research object in historical archaeology, (2) a description of the medieval town as social practice, and (3) an analysis of the town as a place and space.

### Reframing definitions of towns in historical archaeology

It is customary to discuss towns as things that *are* – as places that have a recognizable demographic structure, physical form and functions – since many people live in close proximity in a dense urban landscape, the residents practise trades, distribute goods and safeguard some central functions for the surrounding rural areas. In sum, the town’s material environment and its social and productive life represent practical solutions to the challenges encountered by the residents in everyday life at home, at their workplace and so forth. In this regard, the town can be understood as a historical phenomenon that is *performed*: the town is created and re-created through the exercise of social practice in a material environment as a particular *social space*, where countless practices are intertwined in patterns, bundles and complexes that combine to form a particular recognizable urban lifestyle. This way of applying the term is taken from Damsholt and Simonsen (2009, 26–34), using the term ‘performativity’, synonymous with ‘doing’, or materiality deposited in practice and thus equally participatory in individual, bodily and somatic experiences. This way of using the term differs, however, from the term ‘performance’ and the way it is widely discussed by Takeshi Inomata and Lawrence S. Coben (2006, 11–46), namely in the sense of spectacles and performances as integral elements of political processes and ‘theatrical performances’ in a wide range of social and cultural settings.

To live in an urban community is very much about understanding, and conforming and adapting to, the routines of the social space and making them one’s own. In turn, this process of adaptation and readjustment affects mental and social norms and conceptions. Georg Simmel (1995) introduced the idea that the town had such an impact on the individual in terms of their personality development, behaviour, values and relations, as emphasized particularly by Takooshian (2005). Louis Wirth developed this thinking further and proposed the concept of ‘urbanism as a way of life’ in his renowned article (Wirth 1938). Wirth’s main point is that as long as the town is identified as ‘a physical entity’ it cannot be understood as a particular form of social interaction. He discusses population size, density and perpetual social heterogeneous building development as the main criteria for sociological identification, delimitation, description and documentation of urban communities. Wirth’s work fundamentally concerns facilitating a modern empirical–inductive sociological study of urban development during industrialization with a functionalist approach.

One of the methodological challenges Wirth discusses is how one can delimit the town without simultaneously excluding urban character traits such as social heterogeneity and variation. In this regard, he draws attention to the fact that places located outside urban communities that have no resemblance to towns ‘in the physical and demographical sense’ can nevertheless sustain

a full or partial urban way of living (Wirth 1938, 7). However, Wirth does not see any problems with elements of an urban lifestyle taking root in rural communities, since to varying degrees these communities have contact with urban communities and will therefore be affected in various ways by life in towns. This approach has received archaeological attention: through a general critique of processual urban archaeology's rigid requirements for clear and consistently applied criteria, clear distinctions have emerged between, for example, town and country and between urban communities of varying sizes, settlement types and functions. Paradoxically, this attempt at defining what constitutes a town, which in its origins has much in common with Wirth's attempts, has not contributed to any clarification but has instead initiated a discussion of where the boundary between town and country existed in the Middle Ages and how this might have affected urban–rural relationships (e.g. Anglert 2006; 2009; Anglert and Larsson 2008; Brendalsmo 2009; Eliassen 2009; Gansum 2009; Grundberg 2006; Helle 2009; Thomasson 2011).

In sum, the critical light on the question of definition and delimitation has made it all the more clear that the historical town comprised a multitude of physical, social and cultural forms that clearly defy classification and typologizing; that over time the boundary between town and country was the subject of negotiation and change; and that the relationships between urban and rural cannot be ascribed any general shared characteristics. Mads Anglert (2006; 2009; Anglert and Larsson 2008) has examined how the town as a way of living and an ideology spread in the post-Reformation southern Swedish landscape. In an attempt to explain this phenomenon he distinguishes between *urbanization* as the process whereby towns are established and/or expand both in area and demographically, and *urbanism* as indicative of the way of life developed in dense urban communities. In this respect he follows Wirth's use of the latter concept.

In addition, Anglert (2006) has introduced the term 'urbanity' as a dynamic force that is able to restructure the landscape and expose it to local urban influences. It is unclear what Anglert understands by urbanity, but he seems to perceive it as a type of *urban ideology* rooted in urban lifestyle, but without being place-bound to towns. This urban ideology is helped on its way in the landscape through the increasingly strong network that gradually developed between urban centres and the 'production landscape' during the Reformation (Anglert 2009, 42). This representation does not, however, differ significantly from Wirth's explanation as to why an urban lifestyle (which he described as 'urbanism') could be found in places that *do not* have the defining criteria in place to be called towns, yet that nevertheless have elements of 'urban living'. Anglert's representation of urbanity is difficult to grasp and is thus poorly suited as an analytical concept. Instead, in the following discussion, I use the concept of urbanity to refer to the urban communities' *shared horizon of understanding as a basis for the development of practice*. This understanding is created and developed through the town dwellers' shared experiences, competences, intentions, and conceptions about many people living together in a dense and diverse community in interaction with the urban landscape. Thus "urbanity" is attached to the town and its urbanscape, and stands in contrast to the externally recognizable forms of urban lifestyle that

can spread naturally and be imitated independently of any particular urban mental presence in the area in question. The external spread of an urban lifestyle is thus associated with other processes and relations than those in focus in this article.

Thus far, I have attempted to shed light on the power of definition over the phenomenon of ‘town’: a defining approach that a priori delimits what a town *is* contributes to the difficulty in capturing the historical breadth and diversity of the ‘town’ as a phenomenon. The alternative approach suggested here is to approach the town as a social space for practices that developed through the *performing* (performativity) that bound practices together through countless actions and events. A performance perspective has the potential to redefine the starting points for urban archaeology and will help to initiate a broader repertoire of theoretical and methodological approaches. Thus new questions can be generated, new sources activated and the collected data used in new contexts. These possibilities are discussed further in the next section.

### Medieval towns as performative social practice

I have indicated how an analysis of the medieval town’s urbanity can be based on the formation of social practices, and that performativity in the sense of ‘practise’ or ‘perform’ is central to such processes. For a long time, social practice in premodern urban communities and its impact on urban materiality and spatial organization have been discussed from various geographical regions, theoretical angles and empery: while Roderic J. McIntosh (2005) discusses the *variety* of urban communities and its social organization seen from a non-nucleated, state-focused urban development in the Middle Niger, Jesse Casana and Jason T. Herrmann (2010, 55–80) discuss *hierarchical planning* in the city of Zincirli Höyük in southern Turkey and its social implication of being organized around patrimonial households. Of significant interest to the question of the formation of urban social practice is Stephanie Wynne-Jones’s discussion of *mechanisms of creating identity* by use of material resources in a multicultural context: she argues that past identity has a complex nature that ‘requires a more analytical approach to material culture, focusing on the social role of artefacts, rather than viewing distributions as archaeological facts’ (Wynne-Jones 2007, 326). She introduces the useful concept of ‘nested identities’, which characterizes the phenomenon of shifting between identities depending on a context associated with social and cultural stress (*ibid.*, 340–41). How social use of architecture is deeply entangled in our visual and auditory senses is convincingly demonstrated in Augusta McMahon’s (2013, 163–79) analysis of ancient monumental architecture in Khorsabad (717–706 B.C.). Daily routines involving light, shadows, temperature, sounds and movement are decisive for how we experience the built environment, she argues, thus pointing out the fact that the tangible and intangible environments, our bodies and the materiality surrounding them, are inextricably bound together forming the preconditions for our comprehension of ‘being in the world’. In the following, I elaborate on a set of theoretical tools that can be used to identify, describe and analyse the formation of social practices from the point

of view that body, mind and materiality are entangled and encapsulated in our daily routines.

Shove, Pantzar and Watson's book *The dynamics of social practice. Everyday life and how it changes* (2012) is an important reference in this respect. Although Wittgenstein and Heidegger took fundamental elements of the episteme of theoretical practice from philosophical works, there is still no coherent practice theory but rather a group of philosophers and sociologists who are interested in the social construction of everyday life and have adopted a loosely defined 'practice approach' (Ward 2008). Their approach to everyday social practices is inspired by the works of Charles Taylor and Pierre Bourdieu, as well as by Giddens's classic structuration theory (Giddens 1984), but particularly they lean on the works of American sociologist and philosopher Ted Schatzki and German cultural theoretician Andreas Reckwitz. Schatzki, Knorr Cetina and von Savigny (2001) describe this practice approach as 'the practice turn in contemporary theory', stating that the point of departure for all theories of practice is the question of what human action *is*, how action occurs, the impact of actions on social organization, and how actions contribute to individuality and social order. This is also my point of departure in the theoretical approach presented below.

Reckwitz (2002, 249) describes practice as 'a routinized type of behavior', and in common with Schatzki he emphasizes the material as a symmetrical component in the development of all social practice. Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012) build further on this theoretical point of departure and present a set of analytical tools that (1) describe a model of how practice is formed, develops and disintegrates; (2) describe and explain the relationships between the basic elements of social-practice formation and the processes that bind them together; and (3) explain how social practice shifts from individual experiences to being shared by a community.

In 2002 Andreas Reckwitz promoted the idea that the fundamental characteristic of all practices is routinized action – simple, unique actions that are repeated in the same form and sequence over time and thereby form what he calls a *pattern* or *block* of practices. Reckwitz assumes that a pattern contains interdependent elements such as bodily and mental activity, as well as motivation (*motivational knowledge*), know-how, and states of emotion (Shove, Pantzar and Watson 2012).

Shove, Pantzar and Watson (*ibid.*) have systematized Reckwitz's suggestions in a number of *elements of practice*: (1) *material* elements, which include physical categories such as things, infrastructure, specialized tools, and the body; (2) *meaning* elements, which denote various active and mental states such as intention and mood; and (3) *knowledge* elements, which involve conscious or intuitive insights into abstract or concrete, systematic or chance, acquisitions of knowledge. Patterns of practice emerge when the elements become linked together in a mutually bound community and are performed as a stabilized or reproducible practice. Before that happens, the patterns will occur as intentional opportunities – a 'proto-practice' (*ibid.*, 25). When, for various reasons, the links between elements of practice are no longer renewed, the pattern of practice becomes destabilized, disintegrates and enters a stage of 'ex-practice'.

Social-practice theory is engaged in explaining how new patterns of practice become established and shared by a community. Shove, Pantzar and Watson (ibid.) have therefore introduced the concept of *practice as performance*: it is through a specific action or 'event' that practice is *performed*, and it is through the performance that practice is either stabilized or disintegrates. The performance of practices as routine patterns is referred to as *practice as entity*; the patterns are immediately recognizable from the way the practices are carried out and through the elements involved. This distinction is important in terms of explaining social change through the development of practices. In *practice as performance* the role of the individual actor can be described as 'hosting' the pattern rather than being the source and dynamic force of the practice (ibid., 7). Riding a horse involves established relationships between the horse and riding gear, knowledge of how to ride, and the intention to ride (i.e. practice as entity). When the horse is ridden, all these elements are combined through the actual event that is 'to ride' (i.e. practice as performance). These relationships become stabilized through riders' repeated performances. It is the material resources (horse and equipment), competence (equestrian skills), and meaning (intention to ride the horse) that determine how the practice is 'performed'. In other words, man's role in the formation of practice is about realizing the actions behind intention and meaning interacting with the material resources involved. By extension, change will be determined by how the elements of practices gradually break down the mutual connections and how this happens through the changed performance.

A typical situation in which a pattern of practice starts the process of disintegration is when a new material resource, a new idea, new expertise, or another mode of action is introduced into an established practice. This will affect the performativity of the pattern of practice, which in turn will affect the strength and stability of the links between the elements of practices. In the processual urban archaeology research tradition the diachronic or vertical analyses of the course of events and the historical and socially given (meta)structures will be important. By contrast, in a practice approach the event and the synchronous or horizontal interaction between individuals, intent, material resources, space and time will be in focus.

How can this dynamic interaction be described and understood? In the discussion that follows, I take as my starting point American sociologist and philosopher Ted Schatzki's concept of 'activity timespace', which offers a way to understand social practice in cases where the contrasts between time and space, history, and materiality are broken down (Schatzki 1996; 2009). According to Schatzki, where, how and why actions are carried out, and with what result, are contingent upon a number of coinciding circumstances: (1) the course of action is initiated by a goal-oriented intention or purpose formed on the basis of experience and expertise acquired *in the past*; (2) the physical implementation of the action itself transforms intentions, competence and experience into an event *in the present*; and (3) the goal of the action is what the implementation is directed towards and lies somewhere *in the future*. In this way, the past, present and future are understood as different temporal dimensions that merge in the course of action itself – as expressed by Schatzki



(2009, 38), ‘the future dimension of activity is acting for an end, whereas its past’s dimension is acting because of something’.

Since all events take place in an objective space and in an objective ‘timespace’, the physical space, the objective time and the place’s material resources become integrated through the performance. Time, space and materiality thus enter into connections that are bound together in an action’s event moment or ‘event horizon’. Ian Hodder (2012) refers to this type of reciprocal dependence between people and things as ‘entanglement’, and examines how this happens. In contrast to Schatzki, Hodder argues that it is not the physical experience, the bodily emotions or intentions behind the events per se that bind people and things into a community; rather the essential question is how the connections are stuck together and how strong they are. He maintains that relations between people and things should not be understood as materialistic, eco-deterministic or biologically reductionist, but as ‘bundles’ of material and immaterial interactions and dependency (Hodder 2012).

Thus, to some extent, Ian Hodder furthers Schatzki’s idea of the importance of ‘teleoaffective’ elements (i.e. intentions, aims, religion/philosophy of life, emotions, mood) to the physical action (Shove, Pantzar and Watson 2012). He claims that ‘the change of transformation of entanglements depends not on the materials (or intentions) themselves, but on the form of tautness of the entanglement’ (Hodder 2012, 97). The ‘form of tautness’ can be understood in light of what he referred to earlier as the ‘symbolic, meaningful, spiritual, religious and conceptual’ degree of interdependence between the material-, meaning- and competence-related elements of patterns of practice (ibid., 97). Relationships per se are not decisive for the formation and stabilization of practices, but rather the *nature and quality* of those relationships are. This distinction is very important with regard to how individual patterns of practice merge into large complex structures, called *bundles* and *complexes*, and how these occur with different degrees of dependence and stability. Identifying and describing such complexes is of particular analytical importance within the urban archaeology of practice, since urbanity is fundamentally nothing other than a large complex of practices. I return to this discussion in the section ‘Place and space, bundles and complexes’ below.

The concept of ‘activity timespace’ offers archaeology the possibility to link time, space and objects to all courses of events in everyday life. With such a non-anthropocentric approach to urban community, a partially new approach is formulated for understanding interactions and relationships between objects, structures, places, plots, nature and individuals in urban spaces, one that provides content in the concept ‘event’ and sheds light on what it means to be an ‘acting person’. An important methodological consequence of the urban archaeology of practice is that the synchronous analysis of the relationship between the individual and the place’s material repertoire needs to be in greater focus in relation to diachronic analyses that focus on understanding processes of change along an objective timescale.

When Larsson (2006) argues that the central challenge in urban archaeology today is to formulate the human actor he may be referring to understanding the person as a producer of social practice within the

framework of Schatzki's understanding of activity timespace. A similar challenge is to clarify the methodological implications that such an understanding will have for archaeological research practice, both in the field and in the office. In an archaeological context, the development of practice can initially be described and interpreted through observations of connections between spaces, objects and structures that make up the performative phase of patterns of practice (i.e. Schatzki's events in the present). Hence observations of synchronous connections are important in the urban archaeology of practice, and there are further requirements for observations and descriptions of stratigraphic sequences, not merely as an aid to establishing a relative chronology between structures and cultural layers, but as 'materialized events' (i.e. as a representation of the performative phase of courses of events). This may have further implications for how to document and analyse stratigraphical sequences (Larsson 2000; 2006).

In what way can 'event' in a practice perspective be further accessible in archaeological research practice? To answer this question explicitly, I start by examining how the material resources in spaces and places become part of the formation of practices through performance. Under differing circumstances, such performances will lead to different physical influences on, changes in, or disintegration of the material resources entangled in the event in the course of the action. In the following discussion I suggest how patterns of practice in different phases can be traced in empirical archaeological data, based on the following premises: (1) the stabilization process of patterns of practice involves physical resources that through their nature, scope, and composition enable the identification of the intent and purpose; (2) the process of routinization leaves traces in the form of identifiable wear patterns and/or the rearrangement of spaces and/or areas; and (3) the stabilized patterns of practice are linked to spaces or areas that are constructed and adapted according to their intentional meaning. The patterns of practice in different phases are:

*Proto-practices*: characterized by non-stabilized links between elements of practice that have not yet triggered routinized, repetitive actions. 'Meaning' can be identified by the presence of objects and structures with fuzzy functional connections and spaces and/or areas that are still physically poorly adapted or unadapted to practices. Observable traces of wear caused by repetitive actions cannot be detected in objects or other material resources. Objects and spatial arrangements appear as newly introduced elements in the physical surroundings.

*Stabilized practices*: characterized by stabilized links between the elements of practices. 'Meaning' can be identified through the presence of objects and structures with clear functional relationships with each other and adapted practices. 'Competence' can be identified, for example, through material resources, including the complex composition and specialized functions of spaces and areas. The degree of routinization of the actions can be identified and analysed from traces of wear on the objects and structures in question.

*Ex-practices*: characterized by destabilized links between the elements of practice. New physical objects are introduced into spaces and/or areas

or collections of objects that belong to an already stabilized pattern of practice. Spaces and areas linked to previously identified patterns of practice are partially or wholly dominated by new objects and physical structures. New performance routines cause incipient physical traces of wear on new collections of objects, spaces and areas.

Thus the development of practice will always be linked to a *place* and will activate that place's material resources through performance and/or turn it into a meeting place where people share experiences, insights and meanings that are subsequently incorporated in the formation and stabilization of new patterns of practice. The 'place' is thus a vital empirical resource for observations of patterns of practice mapped from the material representations of events. The significance of urban practice formation is discussed in more detail in the following section.

### Place and space, bundles and complexes

Processual urban archaeology has traditionally been mainly concerned with the instrumental functions of urban landscapes (Thomasson 2011) and postprocessual archaeology has focused on actions and ambiguity, identity, and symbolic functions as a basis for interpretation (cf. Andr en 1995; 1998; Carelli 2001; Thomasson 2011). In a social-practice-oriented analysis, both space and area are of minor functional interest and do not have any significant symbolic functions. As material resources interacting in the development of social-practice patterns, space and area are actively involved in the formation of social practice as actants in the shaping of medieval urbanity, discussed in depth by Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012). While in a processual discourse the port is interesting as a topographic place in terms of its capacity to facilitate a town's function as centre of commerce and trade, an analytical approach to social practice will alternatively focus on the port as a place where trade relations, traded goods and maritime transport technology bring together people with different backgrounds and experience, and where experience and expertise are shared in, for example, working partnerships. To examine such encounters can lead to new understanding of the establishment and development of collective cooperation and the professionalization of loading and unloading procedures. The port is a place where material resources in the form of physical arrangements and objects related to maritime transport form a unique physical and social environment that is little-known and little-explored in archaeological contexts (e.g. Deggim 1999).

Similarly, Scandinavian town houses and plots of land on which they were built attracted considerable interest in processual urban archaeology's attempts to understand demographic, topographic and property-ownership relations (e.g. Christophersen 1990; 2001). In an analytical approach to social practice, town houses are primarily treated as a central space of practice and experience with regard to living on small plots of land and in close proximity with someone other than extended family members, animals and the natural surroundings. With its specialized buildings, the ground it stands upon and the physical markings of its associated boundaries, the town house has long been the subject of research and has provided detailed and important knowledge about landownership arrangements and residential environments in medieval

towns in Scandinavia. Against this background, the town house is prominent as the main type of dwelling unit in the lives of town dwellers. Its many rooms and the area it occupies function as both formal and informal meeting places and render indistinct the boundaries of public and private spaces between houses, streets and plots of land (Christophersen 1999a; Thomasson 1997). As a place resource for the formation of urban practice, the town house would thus have been central in the formation of private and public patterns of practice, in which social, mental and somatic experiences of living in a town bound the physical townscape and its residents together in inextricable relationships. In other words, the townscape was not a physical objective space, but a socially defined place that was constantly *performed* by the everyday lives of the town dwellers, who gradually seemed to appreciate their crowded living environment (Rossiaud 1990). The archaeologist might gain insight into this performative town space as ‘materialized urban practices’ through material remains.

Thus far, the elements of patterns of practice have been described as simple, characteristically routine activities held together by a given combination of materials, competence, and intent or meaning. However, on closer inspection, can these seemingly banal everyday patterns of practice really be described as simple? For example, to light a fire in either an open hearth or a corner hearth involves a variety of actions and elements, such as the hearth itself, a suitable place in which to locate it, knowledge about lighting and maintaining a fire, and intent (heating, lighting or food preparation). It also involves several other areas of practice, such as providing the appropriate amount and quality of heat, daily meal routines, and work and leisure activities. In this way, different patterns of practice, places, people and land became connected and formed complex, interdependent relationships between differing elements in terms of materials, competence and meaning. How did such connections occur in practice? I will address this question with reference to Shove, Pantzar and Watson’s analytical terminology, as well as examples drawn from empirical archaeological data.

Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012) point to the *cooperation*, *competition*, *selection* and *integration* relating to different performative mechanisms included in such connection processes. Behind these concepts lie a number of opportunities for physical and mental action and interaction that open up to link physical structures, competence and meaning in different ways. In the following, and in line with Shove, Pantzar and Watson (*ibid.*), I explain some of the most important mechanisms of interaction of particular relevance for the urban archaeology of practice.

*Bundle* and *complex* are different types of complex patterns of practice that may prove to have significant analytical potential in urban archaeological research relating to practice. Shove, Pantzar and Watson (*ibid.*) use the terms *bundle* and *complex* to describe how, for different reasons, mutually independent patterns of practice come to share common resources such as *place*, *time* and *competence*, and they show how such a division could have consequences for the further formation of practice. A *practice bundle* occurs when different patterns of practice come into contact with each other more or less by chance and share a common place as an important material resource.

Through the performance, the patterns of practice intertwine and initiate interaction between other elements in the patterns of practice. In this way, old patterns of practice may enter a phase of decline and new patterns of practice might arise.

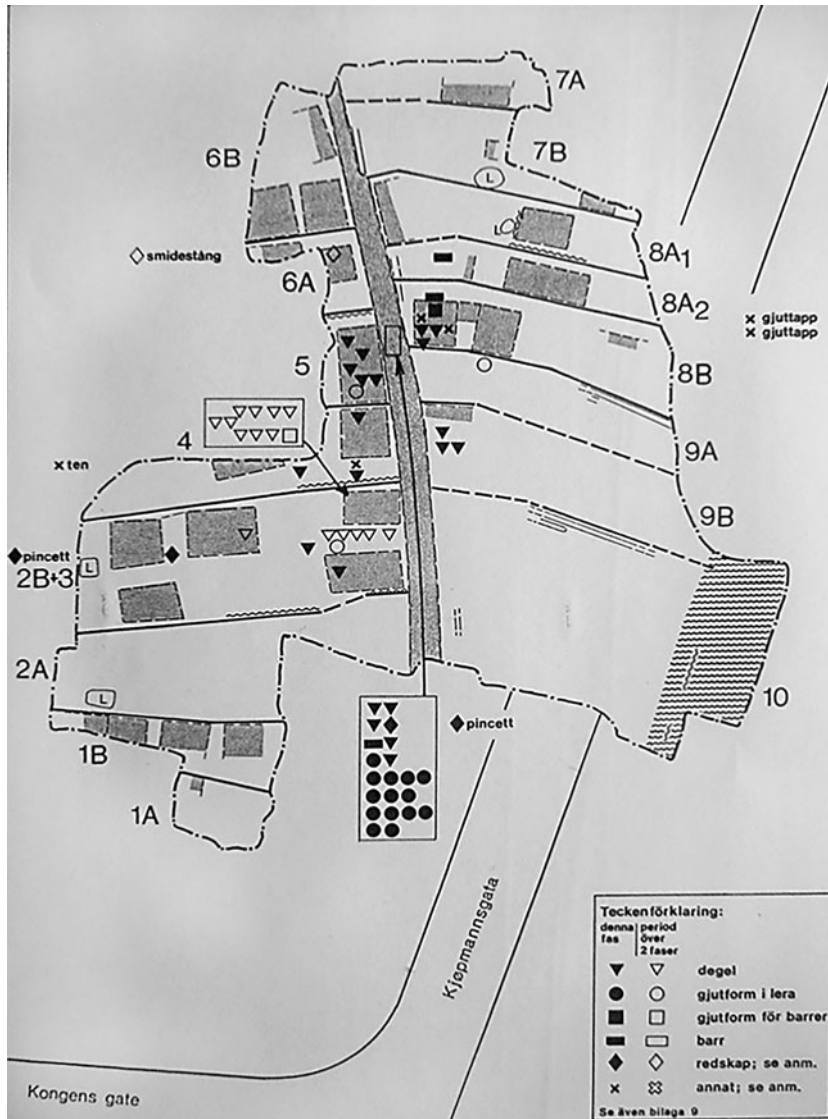
In a medieval townscape characterized by small spaces and fragmentary plots of land, people and their activities would have existed in many small concentrated units, typically with widely different practical tasks, but located in close physical proximity. In a physical setting where the place constitutes a necessary material resource for several independently functioning patterns of practice, a division of the place as a resource will cause the patterns of practice to become entangled and form a bundle. The ‘tautness’ of this entanglement will be conditional upon how and with what consequences other elements (e.g. competence and material resources) are involved in the performance of the practices. A few examples of such bundle formations are presented in next section.

### Crafts quarters as practice bundles

One example of bundle formation is found in medieval towns where initially the same type of craftsman, but gradually also different types of craftsman, moved into specific areas to form craftsmen’s quarters. There, the place was shared as a necessary condition for the productive activities of the entire group of collocated craftsmen. In other words, the place was *made* meaningful through a development of practices that started somewhere else entirely. The presence of such productive enclaves in the medieval townscape is explained *either* as the result of a desire or need to localize activities close to markets so that potential buyers would pass the craftsman’s stalls and workshops (Jacobsen 1982), *or* due to formal regulatory measures. One example of such measures is found in Magnus Lagabøte’s Bylov (“Town Law”) of 1276, under which craftsmen in Bergen were designated particular places along Øvrestretet according to the type of craft they practised (Helle 2006).

The collocation of many types of craft within a small area facilitated the entanglement of patterns of practice developed in various traditions, in which the potential sharing of competence, space, technology and notions of specialist ideals and organization by, for example, local craftsmen with a foreign background and/or experience may have served to develop a sense of belonging and identity linked to particular crafts and their practitioners. Interestingly, Helle (2006) suggests that collocation of crafts was already under way before the 1276 Magnus Lagabøte’s Bylov came into force. If that was the case, there is reason to question the intentions and purposes behind such non-legally initiated collocation, as well as the implications for the development of professional craftsmen’s social life in particular and urban lifestyle in general, which the craftsmen influenced to a considerable extent.

The archaeologist’s opportunities to develop a closer understanding of the dynamics and development of practice bundles can be illustrated with an example from the medieval town of Trondheim, Norway’s first capital. After the formation of the town in the second half of the 10th century,



**Figure 1** Tools, moulds, bars, slag etc. from metalworking on the plots along the main street in Trondheim, A.D. 1050–1100 (phase 4). After Bergquist (1989, figure 26g).

the production of metal objects from moulds took place in open spaces on each plot of land (figure 1). Extensive archaeological investigations have revealed that around the mid-12th century a radical change occurred whereby most of these activities were moved from the centre of the town along Kaupmannstretet to an open uninhabited place outside the town close to the mouth of the river (figure 2). This resulted in an entirely new physical, social and material work situation for the smiths' performance of their craft,



**Figure 2** The metal workshops are located on a sandbank, Ørene, close to the seashore, Trondheim c. A.D. 1300. Photo: Axel Christophersen, NTNU University museum.

where the division of a common place simultaneously opened up possible closer cooperation between several craftsmakers and the same potential for development opportunities as mentioned for Bergen's craftsmakers roughly 150 years earlier.

In addition, Trondheim's established townscape acquired a completely new and dominant physical element, which residents and visitors alike could not avoid noticing due to the activities located on a small sandbank between the fjord and the river. There, a number of workshops, smithies, and other physical structures related to various types of metalworking had become established and were rendered prominent not only visually but also through the sounds and smells resulting from the intense activity. To date, the archaeological explanations have mainly related to local economic, organizational and political circumstances (Bergquist 1989; Blom 1997; McLees 1989; Nordeide 1994). However, interestingly, McLees (1989) suggests the possibility that the creation of a separate crafts quarter for metalworkers outside the town reflects 'some impulse of self-organization among the metalworkers themselves', but he subsequently abandons the idea since there is no documentary evidence for corporate organization of crafts before the end of the 13th century, when this occurred in Bergen (McLees 1989, 245) (figure 3).

Another line of debate has focused on whether the establishment of a specialized crafts quarter outside Trondheim c.1150 can be explained as a performative expression of a local practice development that already involved the craftsmakers in one or another form of social and/or professional



**Figure 3** The Ørene workshop area, A.D. 1250–1300. Reconstruction based on McLees (1989, figure 45, general site plan). Drawing: Kari Støren Binns, NIKU.

interaction, or whether, in common with the situation in Bergen some generations later, the establishment facilitated the formation of practices with corresponding consequences for the development of social patterns of practice that went far beyond the specialized activities, as well as the social practices and rhythm, of urban life.

An archaeological analysis of practice might contribute new empirical data through an examination of, for example, the overall allocation and organization of the physical elements of the spaces, the variation in the physical traces of workshop buildings, the physical proximity between production units, possible traces of routinized connections between them (e.g. paths or tacks), the variations in manufacturing processes and use of raw materials, and traces of sharing material and expertise resources. Key questions would then be whether the possible sharing of places and expertise led to, for example, the use of common production resources, collaboration in the supply and distribution of raw materials, and hence the formation and development of new patterns of practice as an early step towards the formation of corporations known from more recent times. On the basis of written sources revealing the royal court fines in Bergen during 1293–94, Helle (2006) estimates that the first signs of guild organization in Bergen occurred at the end of the 13th century as a result of foreign influence. However, the development of social practice among craftsmakers may have occurred on a number of different levels and informal organizational forms may have occurred over a long period, which written sources, however, have not necessarily captured.



### The port as practice complex

Just as patterns of practice sometimes share a *place* they also share *time*. What Shove, Pantzar and Watson call *complexes* of practices occur when the performance of a number of practices is developed in ‘sequence, synchronization, proximity or necessary co-existence’ (Shove, Pantzar and Watson 2012, 87). In medieval urban communities, such complexes would have been found in many places, but primarily and most significantly in advanced communities of workers and production that shared production sites and that had to synchronize their common presence because they also shared other material elements, such as technical installations, tools or expertise. The work carried out at ports may serve as an example of such a practice complex in medieval townscapes. A port can range from an entirely natural place where the natural conditions are favourable for landing, to sites with complex physical adaptations. The choice of location and investment in improvements will in turn depend on intent and purposes in combination with natural conditions.

In the following discussion, I focus on ports intended to facilitate seaborne transport and storage of a wide range of goods and commodities. Topographical conditions, ships, wharf construction, mechanical lifting devices, transport organization, warehouses and storage facilities, weights, ropes and hawsers – all would have been involved in determining the patterns of practice, together with the workforce, quantity of goods, packaging, weather conditions and further distribution from the dockside to the town dwellers. The synchronization of place and time would have been critical in order to load and unload cargoes of varying weights, shape and value, and the medieval ships’ time of arrival, the rise and fall of the tides, the availability of labour, light levels, and so forth all would have depended upon coordinated interaction between nature, technology, manpower and expertise that also affected the local formation of practice. Hence the close relations between sea, ships, cargo, land and labour would have depended upon a carefully practised sequential synchronization of time, materials and energy to move the seaborne goods onto dry land, store them and/or distribute them further to the town’s merchants, craftsmen and households.

The necessary competence in the performative practice of loading and unloading would primarily have been the bodily strength and experiences related to lifting, carrying, throwing, receiving, moving and storing goods of varying shape, weight, packaging, textures, smell and value. Bodily qualities and experience would thus have been important elements of the physical competence needed to load and unload cargo and to handle goods of all types in a safe and energy-efficient manner, which in turn would have constituted an important element of meaning in the development of local practices of handling cargo.

Hence there are a number of assumptions and implementations of the performative ‘dance’ related to the combined materials, competence and meaning in coordinated load–unload sequences. Any access to mechanical lifting mechanisms such as hoists, winches and cranes would not have made this ‘dance’ easier, although they would have saved time and energy in terms of work capacity. However, new material elements would have depended upon

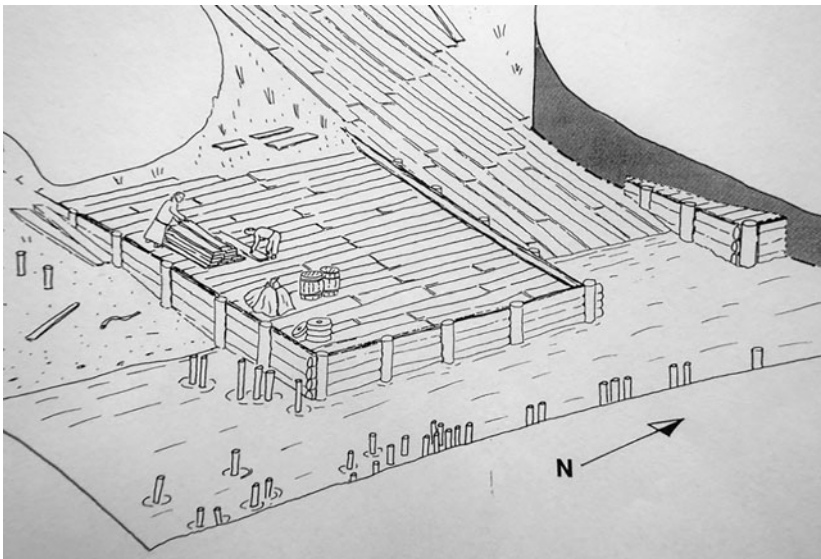
learning by experience and the routinization of new movements and rhythms adapted to a situation in which increasingly heavy and large volumes of goods could be loaded and unloaded faster. Coordination and establishment of new sequential routinization work operations, along with changing requirements for skills and access to labour, would have given rise to new patterns of practice.

The harbour facilities in Scandinavian medieval towns (e.g. Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, Tønsberg, Stockholm) have been the subject of extensive analyses related to technological, functional and logistical matters (e.g. Bill 1999; Hobberstad 2012; Molaug 1998; 2002; Nymoene 2009; Paasche and Rytter 1998; Varenius 1992; Westerdahl 1995), but far fewer questions have been raised about the need for collaboration, synchronization and bodily experience, or about the ports as spaces and places for the establishment of complexes of social practices. One example can be taken from Trondheim, where the earliest port was localized in a small shallow inlet on the western side of Nidelven, which flows through the settlement. During the second half of the 11th century the port was relocated to the river because larger boats with deeper keels could no longer sail into the inlet, which eventually silted up (Christophersen and Nordeide 1994; Gundersen 2001). Following the move, a wooden wharf was constructed adjacent to plots of land located along the river and subsequently became the medieval town's dockside.

In Trondheim's earliest port, loading and unloading would have been carried out from man-made terraces that extended from the end of narrow plots to navigable water levels (figure 4). The physical organization of the new, relocated port was in principle the same, as all loading and unloading activities took place from wharves at the end of owned plots of land facing the river (figure 5). However, the wharves were now constructed as solid structures and covered a larger area, which may indicate that larger boats called at the town and more goods were shipped in. As vessels' tonnage and carrying capacity gradually increased, also a need for more manpower, better routines for safe and efficient loading and unloading, and increased competence and experience in loading and unloading work would have become apparent. How might this have affected the established patterns of practice when there was a pressing need for access to labour, professionalization and organization of loading and unloading workers? We do not know the answer to this question, since neither written sources nor archaeological sources are available for the period c.1300–1670. However, we can presume that a decisive development in Trondheim's loading–unloading practices must have occurred in this period, since an engraving from c.1670 shows an established coordinated wharf extending continuously for hundreds of metres along the river front (figure 6). In addition, footbridges and porticos would have helped to facilitate communication between the individual wharves, which had been developed with large warehouses equipped with winch systems for carrying heavy goods over the shortest distance from the vessels' holds to the onshore storage spaces. The row of wharves dating from late 17th century along Nidelven represents a complex material resource in a complex of practices that over time had become intertwined with a number of other patterns of practice related to property



**Figure 4** Reconstruction drawing of Trondheim's first port, A.D. 1000–25 (phase 2), located in a little inlet of the river Nid. After Christophersen and Nordeide (1994, figure 222). Drawing: Kari Støren Binns, NIKU.



**Figure 5** Reconstruction drawing of the waterfront structures along the west bank of the river Nid, A.D. 1150–75 (phase 6). After Christophersen and Nordeide (1994, figure 62). Drawing: Snorre Bjeck.



**Figure 6** The Maschius engraving of Trondheim displays the wharves along the river Nid, A.D. 1674. Photo: Axel Christophersen, NTNU University Museum.

ownership, shared use, investment, shipping, distribution of goods and trade relations.

The need for professional handling of large and varied amounts of goods that represented substantial investments must have increased significantly during the 17th century, yet despite extensive source material little is known about this need, as pointed out by Christina Deggim in her article about work in north European harbours in the Middle Ages. She states that there has been ‘a surprising lack of appetite’ (Deggim 1999, 34, my translation) with regard to the real historical questions that arise when studying the port area as a space of urban practice. Who were the workers who loaded and unloaded vessels in medieval Trondheim? Did they belong to the wharf owners’ households or were they linked to the consigners or those who owned the consignments? Alternatively, were they casual labourers? Who was responsible for development and maintenance of port facilities? How did the development of practices affect the organization of the workers who loaded and unloaded goods? As archaeologists we can ask these questions, inspired and supported by the physical remains, even though we cannot fully answer them. Still, they need to be asked and thus challenge the traditional use and interpretation of dockside-related archaeological material, as well as remains of other types, such as texts, prints, paintings or photos from past times.

### Interface, leakage and creativity

In the preceding section, I attempted to concretize the concepts of bundles of practices and complexes of practices, and explored their analytical potential by drawing on examples from Scandinavia in the Middle Ages. Specifically, I examined how *place* is a vital material resource and how it can be used as the starting point for an analysis of practice. Concrete examples were drawn

from crafts quarters, street space and harbour area in Trondheim to show how connections in complexes of practices are evident in the medieval townscape's most intensive areas of activity. This does not necessarily mean that bundles and complexes of practices act solely in such areas; on the contrary, different functions and activities would have been so dense and fragmentary in the condensed medieval townscape that in many cases clear spatial boundaries did not exist. For example, in Trondheim craft activities were located both in the town houses and in separate crafts quarters, and activities related to trade and commodity exchange were localized to both private and public spaces (Christoffersen and Nordeide 1994). But how open or closed was the medieval urban space really? And how can we comprehend the importance of non-built-up areas?

Medieval townscapes are condensed areas of dwellings and activities. Urban archaeologists have traditionally focused on the built areas and the activity zones, but the fact is that a substantial part of an urban area consists of open space between the structures. Monica Smith (2008, 217) has pointed out that rather than considering the space between the buildings as 'accidental artefacts' depending on the placement of buildings, we should think about how they were *deliberately created*. Consequently, it is essential to consider (1) how the open space, conscious and unconscious, affects urban life, and (2) how open space might have functioned as a resource for the creation and development of specific urban practice patterns. 'Empty space is flexible and offers the potential for innovation and creativity on a variety of timescales. Open spaces may be used frequently or rarely, and the activities undertaken may be spontaneous, routine or planned', Monica Smith (2008, 228) points out, and thus ascribes open spaces the role of mediator of unforeseen and unplanned events, incidents, calls, meetings and interactions – all these events carriers of creative power and potential, a fundamental assertion in the following.

The medieval townscape's overall spatial structure enabled independent patterns, bundles and complexes of practices to establish informal interfaces through which information, knowledge, ideas and opinions could have leaked. Little is known about what actually may have occurred in such leakage zones, but it is reasonable to assume that they may have functioned as an unauthorized and non-obligatory transfer mechanism between isolated, practice-related arsenals of significance (meanings, ideas), competence, and material resources. In this way, they may have played an important role in the informal dissemination of knowledge and information between different areas of competence.

Leaking zones of contact would also have functioned as an important mechanism for establishing new patterns of practice. The formation and development of practice would thus have been able to permeate and bind together the urban space through its own creative dynamics, which initiated the social, cultural and material development of medieval urban communities. A study by Amin and Thrift (2007) highlights this dynamic, as they show that spatial proximity and variation between different and independent patterns of practice forced creative and dynamic, but entirely unpredictable, encounters between meanings, competence and material resources that otherwise would

not have occurred. Such meetings proved to be the decisive driving force behind a unique form of urban development in terms of innovation, spontaneity and creativity (*ibid.*).

Although Amin and Thrift's findings relate to modern cities, there are good reasons to assume that the same dynamic conditions that they describe for today's cities are also relevant for preindustrial urban communities characterized by dense, heterogeneous physical and social environments (e.g. Salmaan 1968; Singman 2013). Amin and Thrift's (2007) findings thus make it likely that preindustrial urban communities with correspondingly close social and material relations developed creative and innovative environments that generated significant driving force in contemporary intellectual and technological developments. An illuminating, though geographically distant, example from a thousand-year-old Middle Sican multicraft workshop at Huaca Sialupe on the north coast of Peru provides a detailed and convincing insight into how mutually independent production processes (metalworking and pottery) have initiated collaboration of mutual benefit that eventually not only affected the production processes and exchange of technological knowledge and experiences, but also had a significant impact on product design, which furthermore reflected the high social status of the metal objects (Shimada and Wagner 2007, 174–83).

A central research task for the urban archaeology of social practice is to localize such possible 'leaking contact zones' in medieval urban landscapes, where – through the entanglement of different patterns of practice – the transfer of knowledge, competence, meaning and materials provided a fertile ground for the formation of meaning and development of new ideas. In this regard, too, the above-mentioned example of metalworkers sharing a production area in a place outside the centre of Trondheim serves to highlight how the formation of new patterns of practice may have contributed to the development of corporate mergers among the town's craftsmen earlier than has been assumed hitherto. The local craftsmen would not have been familiar with the idea of meeting through formalized social gatherings across ancestry and kinship affiliations; for example, Miklagildet ('the Grand Guild') in medieval Trondheim was founded upon one such association of local nobles at the end of the 11th century (Haugland 2012).

In Sweden, guilds are mentioned on two rune stones from Sigtuna and on two from Östergötland, the latter in a context that suggests a sense of community between Scandinavian nobles (Roslund 2009). There was also a long tradition of merchants' guilds as a widespread institution in north-west Europe at the time (Roslund 2009; Verhulst 1999), and there is no reason to assume that Scandinavian merchants and craftsmen were not well acquainted with these institutions. However, there is no documentary evidence for the existent of guilds in Norway before the late 13th century (Haugland 2012), and Helle (2006) explains their presence in Norwegian medieval towns as having been imported from abroad with the arrival of German craftsmen.

Further, informal arrangements based on the idea of social gatherings for the protection and safety of the community might have existed long before then but without having left traces in written sources. However, during the High Middle Ages the external framework for the craftsmen's

practices changed and then such informal gatherings became increasingly important for craftsmen wanting to safeguard their operations (Roslund 2009). The outcome may have been formal organizations and hence greater visibility to the public. The guilds made the craftsmen's position in urban communities both visible and influential through organizational, legal and material performativity in the townscape, and they were central to the development of an urban way of living in medieval towns under their economic, social and cultural influence.

In addition to taverns and public rooms, saunas, guest houses and other informal social 'hot spots' in the medieval town, some less prominent activity-intense contact zones, such as streets, squares, port areas and courtyard dwellings, contributed to the early development of urban life. People of different age, gender, social rank, and cultural and linguistic background could have met informally in such places. However, the meetings would have called for the existence and mobilization of social, mental and cultural resources in contrast to when people met in a professional role. In cases where people met informally and in socially non-committal relationships, a network of irregular interconnecting knots and loose ends would have arisen that could have extended beyond the rational and controllable intentions of the meeting, but which for that very reason could have unleashed new creative processes and thus delivered important but unanticipated contributions to the formation of urban life in the Middle Ages.

### Concluding remarks

Mathias Bäck (2009) has asked whether people were conscious of living in an ongoing urbanization process and whether they knew about towns as organizational frameworks for living their lives. My emphatic answer is: *of course they would have known!* They would have known because that was exactly what everyday life experience was about. Everyday life did not come from outside; it was created by the urban inhabitants themselves, made up of countless entangled practice patterns, and thus little by little it created what Wirth refers to as an 'urban way of life' or 'urbanity'. However, *how* this happened in medieval urban communities is still rather obscure and not comprehended. Hence addressing this question will be a great challenge for urban archaeologists in the future.

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### **On critical approaches, unintended consequences and the data of everyday life in ‘performing towns’** *Jeffrey Fleisher\**

I welcome Axel Christophersen’s effort to offer a new approach to the study of Scandinavian medieval urban communities, and his outline of an ‘urban archaeology of social practice’. His presentation of a theoretical framework and language offers many insights as to how archaeologists can analyse the way people constructed their social lives through practice. It is exciting to see studies that grapple with the complexities of everyday life in urban settings. This article makes a significant contribution in its explicit approach to a theory of practice that archaeologists can use to explore and describe social change. Christophersen draws heavily on the work of Shove, Pantzar and Watson as detailed in their 2012 book *The dynamics of social practice. Everyday life and how it changes*; I was unfamiliar with this work until reading this essay and I am impressed with the way this framework offers a language and a concrete approach to understanding how practices emerge, evolve and disappear. My goal here is not to revisit the details of this argument, but rather to push on some select issues raised in the paper. I first discuss the way that Christophersen frames his arguments against a processual archaeological approach, suggesting that his effort to provide an alternative might be unintentionally minimizing a more critical approach to everyday life. Next, I discuss the role and place of unintended consequences in Christophersen’s argument. And finally I examine the way that Christophersen’s approach might be more fully operationalized with data, providing some examples from my own work in eastern Africa.

#### **Practice beyond processual archaeology**

Christophersen’s essay is structured around a critique of processual approaches to towns in Scandinavian archaeology. He argues that processual archaeology offers a ‘steadfast reconstruction of the medieval town as a structure lacking individuals and held together by political, economic and productive structures’ (pp. 109–10). Elsewhere (p. 119), he argues that ‘processual urban archaeology has traditionally been mainly concerned with the instrumental functions of urban landscapes’. The critique here is that processual approaches lose sight of the actions and performances of people

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which were crucial to the way towns formed, as he describes (p. 129): ‘the formation and development of practice would thus have been able to permeate and bind together the urban space through its own creative dynamics, which initiated the social, cultural and material development of medieval urban communities’. Although this critique is generally well placed, I take issue with how Christophersen argues that his new approach to urban practice *replaces* processual concerns (‘an alternative to the processual research tradition’ (p. 110)), when in fact it might be better to see a practice approach as building out from, and at times complementing, processual concerns. Although I agree wholeheartedly on the importance and centrality of practice in the constitution and transformation of urban societies, the structures and functions that places and relationships acquire through practice cannot be simply ignored but are rather part of ongoing social practices and performances. Robin (2013, 19), in her theoretical introduction to the study of everyday life in Belize, describes this more critical approach well: ‘critical perspectives on everyday life demonstrate how people construct their social world through daily practices and expose the structural constraints and power relations that exist for and among individuals in society and how these practices affect and are affected by day-to-day interactions’. Her description (ibid., 33) of de Certeau’s (1984) distinction between ‘voyeurs’ and ‘walkers’ in *The practice of everyday life* offers a useful example: a voyeur looks down upon the city from on high, seeing the whole of it as ‘a city planner, institution, government, or leader might see’, but this perspective misses the actual activity on the ground, that of the walkers, those who ‘form the chorus of footsteps that give life and meaning to the concept of the city’. She argues further that ‘while the spatial order constructed by planners, leaders, or institutions organizes what is possible, the walker actualizes some of these and also invents others’.

In this example we can see the implicit distinction that Christophersen draws between the top-down approaches of processualists and the bottom-up approaches of practice theory. In doing so, and in focusing exclusively on the bottom-up practices, his approach may be less attuned to the mechanics of power in towns. Christophersen’s approach does offer the possibility of understanding how power works in Scandinavian towns – how it is created, constituted and practised through interactions of everyday life (Robin 2013, 28) – yet we hear little about this in his examples. This may be because of his efforts to exorcise processual concerns and its attendant “political, economic, and productive structures.” For example, in discussion of ports, he draws a distinction between a processual and a social-practice approach:

While in a processual discourse the port is interesting as a topographic place in terms of its capacity to facilitate a town’s function as a centre of commerce and trade, an analytical approach to social practice will alternatively focus on the port as a place where trade relations, traded goods and maritime transport technology bring together people with different backgrounds and experience, and where experience and expertise are shared in, for example, working partnerships (p. 119).

There is, however, no need to make these discourses mutually exclusive; the ‘working partnerships’ recovered through the study of social practice might

be transformative of the way a town functions. The relationship between these approaches thus should not be seen as one replacing another, but rather as the relationship between practice and structure.

A number of archaeological approaches to urban places have explored this dynamic. One recent example is a set of studies in Creekmore and Fisher (2013, 1), where they argue that ‘there is a mutually constituting relationship between urban form and the actions and interactions of a plurality of individuals, groups and institutions’. These studies explore the multiple levels that ‘operated simultaneously’: ‘top-down actions by political authorities . . . mid-level actions of particular socioeconomic groups or neighborhoods and districts, and grassroots actions seen in the daily practice of households and individuals’. Rather than enforcing a strict distinction between processual and practice approaches, such studies work productively between them, exploring relationships between different levels within urban settings (see also Smith 2007; Rapoport 1988; 1990). Similarly, a rich literature on cities and everyday life not referenced in Christophersen’s essay may provide a more critical approach to a social-practice approach to urban communities. As already mentioned, the work of Michel de Certeau (1984) could provide important theoretical inputs, bringing to the study of urban contexts a practice orientation of everyday life as well as a clear notion of space and place. Although more focused on contemporary cities and periods, Gardiner (2000) and Highmore (2002; 2011) offer up further theoretical interventions that would help bolster the theoretical framing of everyday life alongside the more robust work that is offered for social-practice theory. Finally, I return to Robin’s (2013) indispensable study of Mayan communities in Belize, in which she articulates an extremely clear vision of an archaeology of everyday life. She argues (*ibid.*, 5) that the study of daily life is not only a counter to more structural approaches, but in fact a nexus: ‘It is at the daily level of people’s lived experiences that the micro (self, interaction, experience) and the macro (institutions, power relations, societies) levels of social life intersect.’

### Practice, contingency and unintended consequences

It is clear that one of Christophersen’s concerns about processual approaches to Scandinavian towns is their tendency to offer functionalist or mechanistic interpretations. The approach that he sketches offers the possibility for interpretations to capture some of the sense of contingency that occurred as people lived and acted in towns. I want to follow one thread that hints at contingency culminating in one of the final examples of the essay. In this example, he offers a brief discussion of contact zones which include open spaces such as streets, squares, and port areas. In these locations, he argues, people ‘met informally and in socially non-committal relationships’ (p. 131). Such locations, he believes, would be conducive to the creation of

a network of irregular interconnecting knots and loose ends . . . that could have extended beyond the rational and controllable intentions of the meeting, but which for that very reason could have unleashed new creative processes and thus delivered important but unanticipated contributions to the formation of urban life in the Middle Ages (p. 131).

Here we see the way in which a ‘practice complex’ can emerge in quite unintended ways. And it is through the attention to social practice that archaeologists can begin to see how unintentional and unanticipated activities, materials, and performances can serve to shape the histories of towns themselves. As this argument is positioned at the very end of the essay it is hard not to see it as a culminating one. This can be read as one of the crucial contributions of the model presented: the ability to describe and understand unintended consequences as they emerge in the ‘phases’ of practice (proto-practices, stabilized practices and ex-practices), or in particular bundles or complexes of practices.

More than a decade ago, Joyce (2004) offered a similar argument for monumental constructions in Mesoamerica. In her example (*ibid.*, 6), the early monumental constructions were platforms built in well-known styles and materials ‘that probably did not reflect a radically altered use of space or the invention of a new category of building’. In time, however, ‘these more durable buildings permanently changed the spatial arena within which agents lived and worked, and these arguably unintended consequences of the first building projects furnished new sites for innovative practices that, through repetition, became standardized parts of Mesoamerican practices’. This argument provides a useful comparison to Christophersen’s study: we can see how Joyce’s study *begins* with the contingency of social practices and the possibility of unintended consequences, even while acknowledging that ‘actors are always knowledgeable . . . [and] act with intention’ (*ibid.*, 5). And yet, as Joyce (and Christophersen) make clear, ‘their knowledge is not always (or ever) perfect’. The result, then, is often unintended consequences: ‘what we see is as likely to be a result of unforeseen effects of decisions made with other goals in mind’. Although Christophersen gets to this point at the end of his essay, I believe that there is much in his model to develop this idea more robustly, beyond ‘leakage zones’ and his less developed sense of ‘creativity’.

### Applying the theory

Christophersen’s paper offers some intriguing examples in which his theoretical approach might be applied, focusing on quarters, ports and public spaces. And while it is important to see what types of questions might emerge when this practice theory is applied to these contexts, I was unsure as to how archaeological data would ultimately be deployed to address the theoretical model presented. It is one thing to offer a description of the phases of practice patterns (proto-, stabilized and ex-practices) but it is another to connect that framework to archaeological data that can offer the level of granularity needed to distinguish one from the other. Many of the examples lead to questions that would seem to be very difficult to address archaeologically (‘Who were the workers who loaded and unloaded vessels in medieval Trondheim?’ Were they “casual labourers”? How did the development of [port] practices affect the organization of the workers who loaded and unloaded goods?’ (p. 128)). Christophersen acknowledges that some of these questions are not answerable, but suggests that we need to ask them ‘inspired and supported by the physical remains’. The physical remains that can address such questions are, of course, produced

by traditional archaeological approaches but must also expand significantly to include advances in archaeological techniques such as geophysical survey, geochemical testing, soil micromorphology and attention to micro-remains such as micro-artefacts and phytoliths.

To provide a very brief sense of how certain techniques might be useful to Christophersen's practice approach, I discuss my collaborative research project with Stephanie Wynne-Jones at Songo Mnara, a medieval Swahili town on the southern Tanzanian coast. This project has applied a suite of techniques to explore the use of space in houses and public zones (Fleisher and Wynne-Jones 2010; 2012; 2013); through these efforts, research at Songo Mnara has begun to reveal the interplay between planning and practice. We take seriously the power of elite members of society to plan town spaces and build elaborate houses, while at the same time investigating and revealing the myriad ways that peoples' lived experiences shaped how towns developed and changed. This work approximates Christophersen's concept of the towns as "performative social practice" while explicitly examining the way social practice is related to relations of power within the town (Fleisher and Wynne-Jones 2012, 202).

Since 2009, we have applied a set of methods to public spaces and houses that have offered evidence at the level of daily practice. In the public spaces at Songo Mnara (akin to what Christophersen calls 'leakage zones'), we have conducted extensive geochemical and geophysical sampling as well as more traditional test excavations and shovel test pits. By correlating these multiple techniques we have been able to populate outdoor, public spaces with recursive human activities: the ongoing protection of public areas through waste-avoidance practices, long-term commemorative deposition practices, the small-scale production of materials like shell beads, the possible use of public space for drying nets or fish, and the creation of sightlines and differential visibility across town spaces (Fleisher 2013; 2014; Fleisher and Sulas 2015; Fleisher and Wynne-Jones 2012). Within houses, research has included soil micromorphology, geochemistry and phytolith analysis: this suite of techniques has helped reveal locations where plants were processed and burned, what types of plant were used in the houses, and how floors were plastered and replastered (Sulas and Madella 2012; Wynne-Jones 2013). The addition of these techniques to the traditional excavation of houses has transformed our understanding of them: where once excavations would have allowed for an assessment of the size, shape and features of the rooms, we can now begin reconstructing the ephemeral and recursive practices of the people who inhabited them. There are many projects which now deploy these techniques, and they are increasingly applied to the study of houses and urban settings (Shahack-Gross *et al.* 2005; Shillito and Ryan 2013; Milek and Roberts 2013). The point in describing this work is to suggest that the work of reconstructing the recursive and often ephemeral practices of past people requires a shift in the analytic units with which archaeologists work – the reconstruction of 'practice complexes' will not be accomplished only through traditional archaeological excavations and stratigraphic analyses. The fine-grained perspective that such techniques offer is the scale at which the routinization of practices can be investigated, but it requires an expanded approach to archaeological fieldwork.

**Urbanity by its 'smallest units'. Comments on 'performing towns'**

Sven Kalmring\*

Any reader expecting yet another contribution on the urbanization of Scandinavia will be misguided reading Axel Christophersen's contribution on 'performing towns'. As the author makes very clear, he focuses on *urbanity* in the sense of *urban social practice* rather than on *urbanization* itself. The latter concept is straightforwardly dismissed as belonging to processual archaeology, and was trying to understand the town as a *being* structure and neglecting the dynamic role of its individual inhabitants as a 'crucial historical driving force' (p. 110). Christophersen also omits the classic discussion – actually besides Christianization one of the two most prominent topics in early medieval archaeology – on the designation and character of the earliest towns in the north, where early towns are merely defined as population centres 'larger than a village and smaller than a city' (p. 112). Instead, with the adoption of *practice theory*, Christophersen picks one heuristic approach from modern social theory (mentalism (subjectivistic/objectivistic), intersubjectivism, textualism and practice theory itself) for the analysis of social phenomena as routinized body/knowledge/things complexes (Reckwitz 2002, 257–58).

Christophersen emphasizes that urban environments are not static, but dynamically created and re-created through the everyday *performance* of social practice. In practice theory, the carrier performing a certain practice as a routinized type of behaviour is the single individual as bodily and mental agent (ibid., 250). However, Christophersen strangely avoids naming or characterizing actual agents. Since even artefacts and structures can obtain a certain social role, everyday social practice/performance thus would, next to meaning (intention/mood) and knowledge, to some extent also be reflected in the respective material culture. With this entry Christophersen joins a current general trend in the archaeological discussion tending to focus on both *social approaches of everyday life* (Hadley and ten Harkel 2013) and personal and communal *identities* (e.g. Hem Eriksen *et al.* 2014, viii) – in prolongation one might even add isotope analysis of particular individuals here (cf. Price *et al.* 2011; Linderholm *et al.* 2008; Grupe, von Carnap-Bornheim and Söllner 2011) – rather than on early towns as entities. In focusing on social interaction, the author aspires to capture 'the historical breadth and diversity of the "town" as a phenomenon' (p. 114), which up to now would have been obstructed by earlier approaches. For him, 'in the *processual urban archaeology* research tradition the diachronic or vertical analyses of the course of events and the historical and socially given (meta)structures will be important. By contrast, in a *practice approach* the

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event and the synchronous or horizontal interaction between individuals, intent, material resources, space and time will be in focus' (p. 116, my emphasis).

After a minute exposition of the theoretical apparatus consuming half the contribution he turns to the more practical benefit in archaeology: the adaption of this preferred social theory as an 'urban archaeology of practice' in its own right is intended to shed light on the identification and analysis of the formation, development and disintegration of social practices. Or, to put it in the author's words, to consider 'how the material resources in spaces and places become part of the formation of practices through performance' (p. 118). In contrast to customary archaeological approaches, harbours are rather looked upon as places where people with different backgrounds and experiences meet and interact, town houses are perceived as central spaces for the formation of private and public patterns of practice. Of course, the performative mechanisms that Christophersen is after are not always that trivial and independent only: in a densely populated townscape different practices tend to *bundle* and intertwine by their mere physical proximity of performance and so create new patterns of practice, as in the case of the relocation of craft quarters in Trondheim in the mid-12th century, which may have led to sharing of competences and cooperation. *Complexes* of practices appear in places where agents share material elements and have to synchronize their performances, such as in harbour environments, as illustrated by the example of Trondheim's river harbour at the Nidelven and the changing requirements for loading and unloading commodities. Finally, *leaking zones of contact*, informal encounters due to spatial proximity, are regarded as 'the decisive driving force behind a unique form of urban development in terms of innovation, spontaneity and creativity' (p. 130) and thus it would be a central task to identify them archaeologically in medieval urban landscapes.

Whether the general application of the expression 'urban lifestyle' – later equalized with Christophersen's own ideas of 'urbanity' – really supersedes the perception of 'urbanization' as a conscious process, with the 'intention to push back processual archaeology's steadfast reconstruction of the medieval town' (pp. 109–10), can actually be questioned. This claim might be motivated by the author's specific line of argument and his attempt to constitute an 'urban archaeology of practice' in its own right. Building his argument, Christophersen exposes the school of processual archaeology to a particularly hard critique, even if the author actually tries to distinguish his approach from postprocessual archaeology, too. At this point, maybe we should briefly recall what is rebutted here: in contrast to the normative and descriptive cultural-historical archaeology, processual archaeology shared the general insight that a mere collection of empirical data, building typologies and drawing distribution maps, is not enough. Data should henceforth be tested by more scientific and anthropologically underpinned hypotheses in order to be able to focus on processes, trends and generalization in a positivistic approach. In contrast, a non-positivistic approach is specific to postprocessualism: due to the dilemma of *equifinality*, the problem of testing or proving anything conclusively, the school of postprocessual or 'interpretive'

archaeology turned to theoretical approaches from structuralism, Marxist and neo-Marxist theory, and phenomenology. With his focus on the subjective human experience, the social performance/practice of bodily and mental agents, Christophersen's approach indeed is closely related to phenomenology and thus could be addressed as postprocessual. Also, the universally criticized processualism in fact is commonly assessed as having remained 'absolutely central to contemporary archaeological theory and practice' (Johnson 2010, 11), and it also has not remained in its 1960s state.

Thus, instead of the grave assessment that the previous ('processual') archaeology's definitions would a priori delimit what a medieval town is, it would have been helpful to venture a circuit and present an accordant *state of the art* – which in fact is quite considerable and versatile – before coming up with his utterly minimalistic approach of 'population centres ... larger than a village and smaller than a city'. Of course the author is perfectly right in underlining the historical breadth and diversity of towns as well as the fact that they were by no means static, but perpetually created and re-created. Very true, early towns for too long have been perceived as monolithic entities despite their considerable preponderant chronological depth. Yet there are in fact important contributions trying to tackle that problem: for the phase of early urbanization, already Hodges (1982, 50–52) discerned between type A (seasonal fairs), type B (classic emporia) and type C (emporium, regional administration centres). And in the widely noted article 'Urbanisation in Scandinavia and the Baltic region', Callmer (1994) suggests a phasing with time slices of 50 years: non-permanent trading places (A.D. 700–50), permanent or semi-permanent sites (750–800), the heyday of early urbanization with a developed hierarchy (800–50), the collapse of 'second-level trading places' (850–900), the reorganization of trade (900–50), a breakdown in specialized production (950–1000), new towns as royal foundations after western European models (1000–50), and finally denser populations and brick buildings (1050–1100). Even if one tended to disagree with these proposals, there is certainly much room for discussion. Admittedly in this the town as a social phenomenon plays only a minor role. While in social-practice analysis space and area might be of minor functional interest, this is by no means the case in archaeology, where any find or feature gains significance chiefly by its spatial context. And even if a townscape beyond doubt was also socially shaped, the town itself, of course, was quite a 'physical objective space'. The purpose of Christophersen's contribution surely is more than just to recapitulate once more the archaeology of Trondheim or else to present the state of knowledge on early urban development in Norway. Yet even here some more background on the physical 'spaces and areas' might have been beneficial in order to understand the addressed dynamics of this neither linear nor evolutionary process: why Norway's first town, Kaupang, ceased to exist c. A.D. 930/960 (Pilø 2007, 178); Trondheim's roots in the 950s as a trading place (Christophersen 1994b); its royal foundation as Nidaros by Olav Tryggvason in 997 (Christophersen 1989); the coincidence with the founding of Oslo and Bergen (Christophersen 1999b; Molaug 2010) in the 'second wave of urbanization' (cf. Skre 2007,

46); or even the underlying role of Christianity and state formation (Bagge 2005).

The socio-scientific theoretical instrument Christophersen likes to implement in archaeology, as he himself admits, is eligible to help to enunciate more questions rather than to grasp new evidence and provide us with digestible hard facts. Having said this, of course, we have to recall that this contribution is humbly titled 'Steps towards an understanding ...'. But indeed the actual outcome of the presented case studies is characterized by a clearly increased use of subjunctives – 'an archaeological analysis of practice *might* contribute ...', 'Key questions *would* then be ...' (p. 124, my emphasis), 'How *might* this have affected ...?' and '*would* have helped to facilitate ...' (p. 126, my emphasis) are just a few examples. The case of the longshoremen and the question about 'the performative practice of loading and unloading ... the bodily strength and experiences related to lifting, carrying, throwing, receiving, moving and storing goods of varying shape, weight, packaging, texture, smell and value' (p. 125) is illustrative indeed: this way of thinking would bring us as close as it gets to the respective urban dwellers who, in their performances, all contributed to the everyday social and innovative environment of a town. And of course the study of the daily agitating of individual agents would add another facet to our prevailing knowledge on early medieval towns. However, the question is whether such an approach, focusing on the social in its 'smallest units' and its localization in practices (Reckwitz 2002, 245), will be fully feasible by means of archaeology and the study of the residues of material culture – or is condemned to remain an intellectual pastime? And have we not already identified our spaces and areas of *leaking zones of contact* in the quite physical medieval towns themselves? Are changing practices, innovations and their diffusion not a large part of what medieval towns were about? Particularly in otherwise strongly agrarian and traditional societies as in medieval Scandinavia (Bäck 1997, 130, 135)?

One of the major challenges of our time is to master the steadily increasing amount of exceedingly rich empirical archaeological data from rescue excavations and research surveys in towns and to confront them with decades of earlier efforts on the respective sites. Ultimately, together with the source-critical inclusion of the available historical sources and a respective analytical framework, they must be incorporated into a comprehensive overall picture which should then be mirrored with the rural hinterland and compared to other urban sites if we want to understand the emergence of towns, and even everyday life in them. Projects like this are time-consuming, a little swanky and extremely hard to fund. In the light of this, an orientation towards selected dwellers might often seem to be a convenient small-scale solution. (Which, of course, does not apply to the author, who is a profound connoisseur of the archaeology of Trondheim!) Certainly the increasing debate surrounding the individual, identity and even gender, with either social theories or natural-scientific methods, has its justification and matches the current zeitgeist. Yet at the same time it seems important not to lose sight of the discourse along its main lines.



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**Steps towards understanding medieval urban communities as social practice** *Ulrich Müller\**

The contribution by Axel Christophersen aims to present new perspectives for the archaeology of medieval and post-medieval towns. In enlisting ‘social-practice theory’, the author would like to view the town as a dynamic, ever-changing network of social and cultural practices which is registered in the archaeological data. This perspective on the town lies, therefore, somewhere between structure-centred and agent-centred approaches. As such, Axel Christophersen’s contribution can be seen as more comprehensive. I assess the piece also as a programmatic contribution to the development of theory in the apparently long-term conflict between ‘processual and postprocessual archaeology’. It should be said in advance that he was successful in this. At the same time, however, his contribution makes it clear that it is not easy to transfer or apply current cultural-studies concepts to historical periods and the materiality of archaeological data.

The starting point for the author is the assumption of a strongly processual bent within (Scandinavian) town archaeology. Here, urbanization is still understood as functional, and the political, economic or other parts of the system are researched. A postprocessual approach, with its emphasis on the symbolic dimensions of human interactions, also offers only limited possibilities. At this point, a comment from the Continental point of view should be added: the acrimonious positions highlighted by the author may apply to Anglo-American and anglophone areas, or to ‘prehistoric archaeology’. The never-ending discourses about processual versus postprocessual do not, in my opinion, play a role in the ‘medieval and post-medieval archaeology’ of central Europe, due to its strong culture-historical character.

Axel Christophersen steers the view away from the individual and towards the agency of collectives and the interaction of human and non-human agents. One approach to identifying and evaluating these relationships is offered by ‘social-practice theory’ (SPT). Praxeological theories and perspectives have enjoyed great popularity in cultural studies over the last ten years, and they represent a certain break with agency-based approaches. Since they engage more strongly with the execution of motives, social norms and rules in concrete action, and therefore foreground their material and spatial orientation, they are very interesting for archaeologists. The praxeological approach conforms to concepts of grounded theories, which place neither structural deterministic explanations nor the individuality of agency in the foreground, which shuts out most archaeologists. The ‘practice turn’ was fine-tuned and made more comprehensive through the work of Theodore Schatzki,

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Karin Knorr-Cetina and Eike von Savigny. Andreas Reckwitz systematized the concept, especially in the German-speaking world, and made it a formidable social-theoretical concept for future research. Beyond these researchers, Axel Christophersen deals also with the ideas of Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar and Matt Watson. Above all, in 'The dynamics of social practice. Everyday life and how it changes' (2012) they decisively expanded Reckwitz's concept and defined the 'elements of practice': 'material', 'meaning' and 'knowledge'. They further distinguished between 'practice as performance' and 'practice and entity'. They therefore offer a model in which different theoretical approaches are merged. Other central terms and concepts of SPT, such as 'practices, rules and norms', 'bodily skills and disciplines' or 'language and tacit knowledge', as well as the tension-laden relationship between 'presuppositions and discursive practices' and 'social structure or culture with individual agency', are placed somewhat in the background.

It is indisputable that the theory of social practice has its strengths. It highlights the ambivalence of agency logic in the area of conflict between cultural context and subjective execution. It also illustrates the routine nature and reproduction of agency knowledge as 'unpredictability'. Societal practices are imprinted on subjects and internalized by them. They can, however, at the same time be changed by individual or collective execution. Routine practices and subjective perspective mean that the subjective forms of agency at any one time creep into the area of concrete actions. They imprint themselves, in the framework of the cultural context, in practical understanding, and have an enduring influence on practices. The other side, the logic of practice, emphasizes the subjective meaning of practices in applied understanding, in which the subject is created in the framework of their individual context through practices and their practical implementation. It is clear that presenting the discourses surrounding SPT is not the primary task for Christophersen. However, references to critiques of SPT, as well as the relationship between SPT and agency theories, would have made the theoretical foundation more transparent. It should also be pointed out that SPT meanwhile refers to a collection of very different approaches and, therefore, has to accept accusations of eclecticism.

The contribution by Axel Christophersen comprises three main sections. The author next explores the terms 'urbanization', 'urbanism' and 'urbanity' for the reader. The most substantial part of the study is represented by the presentation of the concepts from the text under discussion. In the concluding part, the author applies some of these concepts to archaeological data, drawing upon case studies from Trondheim.

'Urbanization', 'urbanism' and 'urbanity' are conceptualized very heterogeneously in the research traditions of different disciplines, as well as generally in the history of science. With reference to the greats, such as Georg Simmel and Louis Wirth, Christophersen understands 'urbanization' more as a spatial and/or temporal process of aggregation, whereas 'urbanism' indicates a way of life or lifestyle which develops in urban societies. This is not so new, at least from a central European perspective. The primarily historical discussion of 'town landscapes' or 'town foundation' exhaustively broached this topic and was also adopted by urban archaeology. 'Urbanization' and

'urbanism' describe processes of reciprocal structuration. 'Urbanity' forms the connective element, for the author. 'Urbanity' is not taken just to mean an ideological or political concept, as is the case for Blomkvist (2001) or Anglert. Christophersen uses the term more comprehensively; it is a 'shared horizon of understanding . . . for the development of practice' (p. 113). Precisely because this term is central for urban archaeology, I would have liked to see a more detailed analysis. There exist very different attribution practices, for example in sociology and urban geography. Therefore 'urbanity' in the praxeological sense can also be further expanded, since an urban culture can purport both an 'objective' context and the subjective meaning of the agents.

With regard to a structure-oriented consideration ('being a town'), Christophersen refers to 'dynamic practices'. 'Performing a town' places the agents in a central position, and their agency is expressed through routine social practices. The agents are thereby not slaves to the structure, but rather their experience and knowledge have a structuring effect. With this the author returns to the topic of agency, which he nonetheless does not wish to justify with agency theory. 'Performativity' is the keyword. Christophersen understands it in the sense of praxeological discourse as 'doing'. This agency knowledge generates practice. I can accept this view, although a clear delimitation to action-theory (agency-based) approaches would have been desirable (Schulz-Schaeffer 2010). Furthermore, how 'performance' is different does not seem clear to me. This concept also views performative processes as transformation processes. Performance theory (Judith Butler, Erika Fischer-Lichte, Jörg Volbers; see Volbers 2014) highlights that performative acts are, as a matter of principle, not completely subject to being planned, controlled and available. They provide leeway and freedom and in this space the unplanned and unforeseeable appears again and again, which is essentially codetermined by the process of transformation. Concepts of 'corporeality', 'perception', 'orchestration' and 'performance' are therefore central categories, which can also be found in similar forms in praxeological approaches.

For many social-practice theorists, the materiality of the social and the cultural is a central category. The important material entities are therefore the body and 'artefacts'. Practices are, above all, 'embodied'. Bodies are 'competent' – subjects equipped with knowledge relating to rules and norms, setting intentions and know-how. At the same time, practices are temporally and spatially bound. Conversely, time, space and material are furnished with meaning through practices and in turn provide order, settings and tools to carry out practices. This is balsam for the soul; especially for the souls of historical archaeologists, who often have to justify themselves in the face of the power of written sources. Against this background it is understandable that the author deals with materiality with particular reference to Schatzki (1996; 2009), as well as to Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012). In any case, Christophersen is working here with a series of standards and presuppositions which are not always in accordance with SPT. Above all, it should be noted that materiality within SPT is always viewed in connection with acts of agency, acts of speech and human behaviour, and the prefigurative role of artefacts is judged quite controversial. Therefore it must be questioned, with reference

to Schatzki and others, how far the concept of ‘teleoaffective structures’ can be condensed materially or inferred from materiality. Teleoaffective means that with the collection of activities, or the combination of activities with a practice, particular motives and also affective conditions can be connected. These can in turn have quite different culturally specific ‘loading’. Particularly in view of the harbour case study, these concepts can be profitably investigated. Culture as practice connects the social with the cultural and thereby delivers analyses not only within one and the same group, but also, for example, alongside or between groups. More concretely put, the ‘foreigners’ in the town, cultural contact etc.

According to the opinions of many social-practice theorists, social practices are composed of an organized bundle of activities, both ‘implicit’ and ‘explicit’. They form a connection with the activities in the sense of ‘betwixt and between’. Contents-based expressions are thereby always also mediated through the body, so that bodily practices play a substantial role. Here, through the connection to the term ‘performance’, reference to materiality discourse would have surely been fruitful. With the differentiation between ‘proto-practices’, ‘stabilized practices’ and ‘ex-practices’, Christophersen introduces terms which originate from the concepts of philosopher Theodore Schatzki. He appears particularly through his work on the relationship between behaviour and knowledge. Given how important the works of Schatzki are, and how they have fertilized STP in particular, I have to wonder whether these extensive social-philosophical constructions are not too powerful for archaeological data. The ‘proto’, ‘stabilized’ and ‘ex’ triad, as imparted in a somewhat simplified manner by Christophersen, is not without merit in connection to materiality discourse. It not only leads to the considerations of one Bruno Latour (see Schäfer 2013, 251–303), but also requires dealing with concepts from Clifford Geertz (Geertz 2014; Springs 2008) or Michel Foucault (see Wolf 2003; Schäfer 2013, 121–86). Both have occupied themselves in different ways with the reconstruction of behavioural norms (‘mental collective phenomena’). They attribute supra-subjective knowledge systems (behavioural norms) to discursive practices (Foucault) and to public symbols and social practices in general (Geertz). Applied in a reductionist way to stratigraphic units, the danger arises that functionalist explanations can sneak in through the back door.

To the specific context of an interaction belongs a concrete space, with its temporally determined material arrangement, which is enabled by a cultural and historical localization. In his concluding considerations, Axel Christophersen cites certain ‘case studies’. Their selection is convenient for the discussion. ‘Craft quarters’ and ‘ports’ are areas of highly agglomerated social interaction, upon which the theses formulated at the outset can surely be tested. The concepts ‘cooperation, competition, selection and integration’, introduced from Shove, Pantzar and Watson, allow Christophersen to go on to explain agency options. Agency situations and agency spaces are defined by ‘bundle and complex’, terms likewise adopted from the three authors. We are dealing here, therefore, with a complex model which can be represented by a dynamic network. Using the example of Trondheim, Christophersen draws on a town that has been comprehensively researched. This also makes it possible

for him to test the presented considerations in practice. The ‘craft quarters’, with their temporal and spatial distribution, enable the author to discuss ‘practice bundles’, such as the ‘port’ as an example of a ‘practice complex’. The author does not pale before this, however. Christophersen regards the open areas in the town almost as an opposing model to the highly agglomerated interaction networks. Spaces between, in both a literal and a metaphorical sense, offer space and place for innovation and creativity, perhaps even for non-compliant behaviour. The model of a town with concentrated building development may be valid for modern towns, but is not suitable for the Middle Ages. Whether waste plots in medieval towns such as in Bern, Switzerland, or large unbuilt areas in early Lübeck, Germany: these spaces have hardly entered the focus of research until now. Christophersen’s view here is fruitful and it remains worthwhile to question the archaeological and written sources.

Christophersen subtitled his essay ‘steps towards an understanding of medieval urban communities as social practice’. With his consideration of the application of SPT, he provides a concept which I would like to follow in several points. At the same time, we should not forget that we cannot talk of ‘the SPT’ in the singular. Theories about social practice are thought about praxeologically, and as such connect many concepts and perspectives through their pragmatism, which occasionally bestows a certain arbitrariness upon the critique. Christophersen can, with the approach which he has chosen, form completely coherent new interpretations. He does not, however, provide any answers regarding which ‘tools’ were applied in order to reach this new approach. Does SPT only form an umbrella term which encompasses the many diverse processes of archaeological knowledge production? This would not be fair to the subject or to SPT. The explanations of Christophersen highlight social practice as a field-specific dynamic network. Does (social) network analysis therefore offer a powerful and suitable tool for this purpose?

Purists may accuse Christophersen of a certain amount of eclecticism. At first glance, certain propositions appear not to have been dealt with. To these belong the coupling of practices, different temporalities of actors, the meaning of social order or the vagueness of actions for the construction of social events. The discourse about ‘power and social chance/transformation’, which is surely of central importance for medieval societies, is also hardly touched upon. However, I consider this kind of objection rather unhelpful. The essay raises neither the requirement to justify a comprehensive archaeological theory of social practice, nor that of verifying theories of social practice based on historical reality. It is a known problem that cultural-studies theories are only partly applicable to historical, especially premodern, societies if we choose not to argue using cultural anthropology. A reconstruction of social practices always means that the complexity of actions and activities, and their multiple entanglement with other activities, motives, supply systems, social and societal structures and processes, and so on, must also be considered. Practice-theory approaches have, therefore, a great advantage, especially compared to pure agency-theory approaches: they can incorporate individual activities, both agent-specific and social-structural. However, not all actions or activities are

necessarily part of some social practice, even when they are carried out within the scope of one. The challenge, therefore, is to determine and weigh the multidimensionality of practices.

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## **Towns and cities. A commentary on ‘performing towns’**

*Monica L. Smith\**

In this paper, Axel Christophersen does three important things. First, he addresses the way in which the inhabitants of premodern cities created an urban ethos through their cumulative daily actions. Second, he provides the opportunity to address a long-standing definitional challenge in the study of cities by examining what it means to undergo a process of ‘urbanization’. Finally, he focuses our attention on medieval Scandinavia as a region that has had a considerable amount of archaeological research but with which many readers may not be familiar compared to other historical periods in Europe.

The recognition of an urban ethos is an essential component of the understanding of the meaning of city life for its inhabitants. This process has been well studied by ethnographers of contemporary cities who capture city-dwellers’ philosophical musings, with some of the most poignant expressions of the relative advantages and disadvantages of urban life expressed by those engaged in menial labor and others at the margins of economic viability. Although ancient urban migrants must have engaged in similar sentiments, they are more difficult to access directly.

There are distinct advantages that accrue when we have texts describing the life of ancient urban inhabitants. Just as modern people of all social classes can clearly identify the relative merits and disadvantages of city life, so too did ancient urbanites express a simultaneous capacity for exhilaration and dismay. The Roman poet Juvenal wrote about noisy cart traffic, filthy streets and criminals in a way that provides an aura of dangerous inconvenience that we might never have imagined if we only looked at the soaring columns and triumphal architecture of the Forum and the Colosseum. In southern India, mute architecture of the first centuries A.D. is similarly enlivened by the Sangam texts that populate the urban realms with a cacophony of sound:

In Kanchi’s city there are groves in which  
The pregnant monkeys seize, when keepers armed  
With sticks are negligent, the ghee-mixed rice  
Intended for the elephant whose trunk  
Hangs down, and whose bad temper is subdued  
By being tied to wooden pillars strong.

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Strong chariots run and make ruts in the streets.  
 There is an army strong, invincible,  
 And famous; markets where the city folk that densely live do  
 always buy and sell . . . (Chelliah 1985, 129)

Often, even just a little nomenclature can provide some knowing insights into ancient peoples' perceptions of the urban world around them. Snippets of graffiti give us the quotidian details of urban spatial realms: the map from Nippur that identifies one passageway as 'the gate of the unclean women' in the second millennium B.C. (Ur 2012, 51), or the approximately 11,000 instances of graffiti at first-century A.D. Pompeii that included taunts, prayers, lovers' entreaties and advertisements for gladiatorial games (Benefiel 2010).

When we do not have specific texts, or when texts are limited, archaeology enables us to imagine other ways of being. Using the example of Trondheim in Norway, Christophersen's account of the daily trudging through dim, frozen streets reminds us of the power of narrative in the process of seeing the ancient individual, a mode of scholarly presentation that is relatively rare in the study of ancient cities, despite its inclusion in analysis of prehistory for the past 20 years or more (e.g. Boutin 2012; Tringham 1991). Interestingly, archaeologists have most often given themselves permission to impersonate the agents of small-scale societies; after the Neolithic, we expect people to be able to speak for themselves.

But even in literate eras, there are 'people without history'. While the experiences of the rural might well have continued the tropes of prehistory, the advent of urbanism brought new ways of interacting with others. The analysis of material culture, even in a simple object such as a worn-down tool or a well-used hearth, indicates the extent to which work, culinary practices and the routines of daily life in cities are different from the quotidian configuration of rural places. People are made urbanites not only en masse, but also through individual actions. Through a first-person narrative, Christophersen invites us to consider the way in which urban life is strung together in vignettes of experience. The author's exhortation to 'assess the long-term consequences of the formation of social practices in urban communities' through this narrative approach thus adds to the literature of social agency in ancient urban centers that has been handily addressed by numerous other contemporary scholars, such as R. McIntosh, Jesse Casana, Stephanie Wynne-Jones, Jeffrey Fleisher and Augusta McMahon.

The second important aspect illuminated by Christophersen relates to the issue of definitions. The author's discussion of population centers in Scandinavia illustrates the conundrum of definitions in the study of urbanism as one of the most compelling but complex subjects of archaeological and social analysis. Sometimes researchers have tried to parse this dynamism by augmenting the term 'urban' with prefixes and suffixes that attempt to identify the intent and outcome of different agencies within concentrated populations, referring to proto-urban, urban, urbanizing, and urbanized environments (cf. Smith 2003). The author starts out making a similar distinction in this paper but almost immediately falls into the unavoidable position of having to use

another word in order to break up the repetitive use of the words ‘city’ and ‘urban’ by using them interchangeably again with the word ‘town’. It is indeed ironic that a concept so central to the modern world, the concept of the city, should have no plausible synonym, but the use of the word ‘town’ obscures an important distinction among the sizes of population centres.

‘Towns’ deserve to be more closely analysed as definitionally separate and functionally distinct entities. Their roles as settlements of intermediate size enabled residents to participate in the economic, social and political activities of urbanizing environments in specific ways. Researchers working on social complexity are beginning to address the way in which towns have their own dynamic processes that are in some ways independent of proximate urban centres (e.g. Tol *et al.* 2014). In fact, the study of towns is likely to yield a more tractable way of understanding the first truly urban realms, because any city’s origins are otherwise very difficult to ascertain, buried as they are beneath metres and metres of occupation. In addition to studying towns in the interstices of urban networks, as Tol and colleagues are doing, one can also evaluate them as offshoots of urban centres that then engage in their own trajectories of growth (e.g. Mohanty, Smith and Matney 2014) and as the apex of settlement hierarchies when true urbanism does not seem to form (e.g. papers in Neitzel 1999). In sum, the threshold events that seem essential to city life might be most efficiently identified in towns as both precursors and contemporaries of truly ‘urban’ spaces.

Scandinavia is an ideal place from which to address the transition from rural to town to city life. Located in an area of distinct environmental challenges and opportunities, Scandinavia represents a concentrated seasonality for domestic plants and animals and associated outdoor productivity. Christophersen’s imagined street scene would have characterized much of the year, in which harsh exteriors were matched with warm, noisy interiors that became increasingly concentrated in urban spaces. At the same time, the region had excellent maritime connectivity in a manner that can compare well with other regions of the world, such as the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, where connectivity across the ocean was often easier than connectivity overland. Urban centers in Scandinavia were the nodal points of this connectivity, linking together the most challenging of outside worlds with the great intimacy of closed spaces once ashore.

The long-distance, trade-based connectivity of northern Europe started in the Roman period in the early first millennium A.D., and continued through the Anglo-Saxon and Viking periods that set the stage for continued interactions between Scandinavia, Britain, Iceland and beyond. Towns played a central role in the Viking Age of the first millennium A.D. (see e.g. Clarke and Ambrosiani 1995), as did the concept of ‘things’ or gatherings that brought populations together in ostensibly neutral areas as a way of creating community and imposing law across dispersed populations (Iversen 2015).

The multiple ways in which people entered into collective social realms in the challenging environments of Scandinavia provide critical comparative insights for the study of urbanism elsewhere. Initial archaeological assessments of urbanism focused on the temperate zones of the Near East and classical Mediterranean worlds, in which the provisioning of settlements



was tied to a seasonality of rainfall and storage of plant foods. More recently, studies of tropical urbanism (in regions such as the Maya region and South East Asia) have shown the ways in which the challenges of provisioning and social organization in those environments were distinct from those developed in temperate locales. The distinct physical landscapes, harsh environments and maritime focus of Scandinavian cities of the first and second millennia A.D. provide yet another important comparative region for understanding the development and continuity of urban life, in which the storage of animal foods and a greater dependence on fish provided distinct conditions for the support of durable-goods production and consumer economies.

In sum, Christophersen's paper brings to light the ways in which archaeology and history (when we have it) can be utilized to humanize the past as endured by those who lived and thrived in challenging conditions while creating distinct and enduring forms of community. One hopes that he will continue this trajectory into more comprehensive works that bring the past alive for scholars and for the general public alike, as a way of illustrating the shared humanity of the urban experience even when lived under circumstances very different from today. James Deetz (1977) provided for us an excellent model in his book *In small things forgotten*, for which Christophersen could handily provide a counterpoint through large places remembered.

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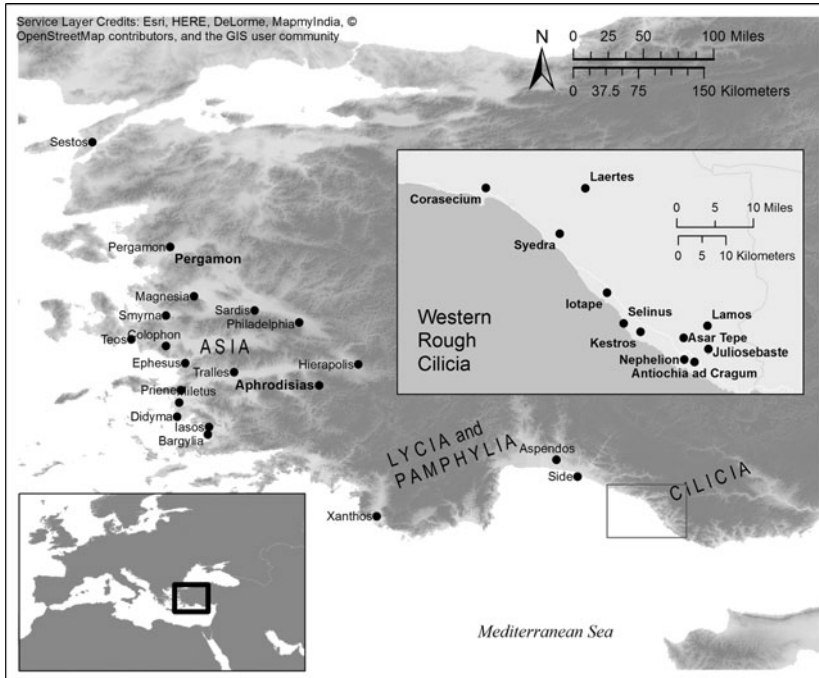
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**On complementarity of practice, scale and structure. Scalar aspects of social/material space in Anatolian peri-urban contexts in antiquity** LuAnn Wandsnider\*

In his illuminating article, Christophersen rethinks concepts in and approaches to the archaeological study of urban living, focusing especially on medieval urban towns in Scandinavia. He recruits various concepts – interaction, event, leakage and creativity – from a materially imbued social-practice theory to explore the urban landscapes as a complex of dynamic social spaces. Christophersen draws from scholars (Hodder 2012; Reckwitz 2002; Schatzki 1996; Shove, Pantzar and Watson 2012) who emphasize that practice is routinized behaviour through which actions and events are performed, that practices are tied to a place and timescape, that social actors live with and interact with materials, and that materials may be the media of interaction with others. Following Hodder (2012), he emphasizes that the nature and quality of social and material relationships lead to the formation and stabilization of practices. In turn, this practice constitutes the town or city.

Christophersen offers this approach as an antidote to earlier 1980s–mid-1990s processual approaches, with their emphasis on urbanization and

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**Figure 1** Map of Anatolia and Roman Asia Minor. Created by the author with assistance from Corbin Bogle using three data sources. The base map comes from data compiled by the European Environment Agency and is derived from the GTOPO30 dataset (<http://edcdaac.usgs.gov/gtopo30/gtopo30.html>) created by the US Geological Survey, EROS Data Center, Sioux Falls, South Dakota. GTOPO30 is a global digital elevation model (DEM) with a horizontal grid spacing of 30 arc seconds (approximately 1 kilometre). The inset reference map comes from the ESRI ArcMap online gallery. City locations come from a variety of historical sources.

urbanism and on function and structure. His approach also refracts the more recent postprocessual approaches that emphasize gender and agency.

Christophersen's approach – a materially saturated form of social-practice theory – is a welcome extension in anthropological approaches to urbanity for several reasons for it offers avenues, elusive in other approaches, by which change in social practice, social behaviors and the cultural repertoire can occur. Following his approach, importantly, we can also be puzzled when we detect no evidence for such change, even while social spaces are available and occupied.

Because I remain interested in trying to understand both sources of variation – why we see urban contexts with certain characteristics – and temporal changes in urbanity – why cities trace sometimes very different organizational histories – I find it useful to consider the scalar dimensions of the space/timescape in order to understand how practice is constrained and directed, with differential potential for rupture and disintegration. After reviewing these scalar qualities, I illustrate their utility by comparing and contrasting the urban situations of southwest Anatolia/Asia Minor and southern Anatolia/Rough Cilicia (southern Turkey) (figure 1).

### Scalar qualities of the space/timescape

A social/material space may be sized in several important ways. Spaces populated with only a few actors have the potential for few interpersonal relations. If a population consists of five people, then  $(5-1)!$  (i.e. the triangular number and computed as the sum of  $4 + 3 + 2 + 1$ ) or 10 possible relations exist. In contrast, a population composed of 100 people may host  $(100-1)!$  or  $\sum_{k=1}^n (k-1)$ , i.e. 4,950 interpersonal relations. Even this simple difference in number of actors must affect how social relations unfold in each of these two different fields. The flow of goods and services within a small social/material space may proceed one way (e.g. via the institution of general reciprocity) while the same flow may expand to include various market institutions in the case of a social/material space with 100 or more actors.

Another scalar dimension of the social/material space is that of density, both spatial and temporal. Christophersen notes the potential for innovation once craftsmen become confined to productive enclaves in Scandinavian medieval towns; that is, a higher-density social/material space. Seasonality in access to ports must also play a role. A congested timespace, with access to a port limited by sea ice, sets constraints for different levels of competence than does an uncongested timespace.

In addition to simple size measures, two other measures consider the number of co-residing kin groups and the number of languages being spoken within the community. If all members of a group belong to the same family, then group order is family order and family order is group order. On the other hand, other institutions appear with the occurrence of multiple co-residing kin groups, especially critical when resources are owned by kin groups. This may be a critical role assumed by the craft guilds referred to by Christophersen.

The number of different languages used in social transactions within a group of people may also influence the nature of those interactions. In any social space, communication occurs via a suite of media – language, material, space use etc. Where multiple languages are in use, communication via materials may play a larger role, compared with a monolingual situation. Trigger (1990) argues for the power and reach of material symbols, such as monumental architecture, in the case of polyglot populations, perhaps seen for the port at Trondheim examined by Christophersen.

Finally, the degree to which a social/material space is tethered to place is also important. In this latter case, the built environment has the potential to become an active participant in the social/material space. In contrast, when the social/material space is untethered, as documented by Night Pipe (2012) for large aggregations of multilingual Lakota in the historic period, then the built environment matters little; the effective field of practice resides with the individual, for whom we see magnificent attires for males and their horses as they jockey for social position in a dynamic field.

I illustrate further the importance of each of these dimensions of the space/timescape of urban and proto-urban social/material spaces through an examination of urban histories of Hellenistic Anatolia and provincial Rome during antiquity.

### Urban centres in Anatolia and Roman Asia

Urban centres in Anatolia and Roman Asia have long histories, with some city states autonomously appearing in the Neolithic and others established by a succession of states to either control or develop population, territory or resources (Gates 2011). While city states with structures of many kinds appeared, here I focus on those with Greek civic structures – council, assembly and judiciary – which allowed Greek cities (found throughout the Mediterranean and beyond) to behave themselves as agents. The assembly and council made decisions and charged magistrates with carrying out those decisions (Hansen 2000).

Importantly, over the Hellenistic (323–31 B.C.) and early Roman imperial (31 B.C.–A.D. 270) periods, Greek civic institutions had a material expression in increasingly monumental public buildings: an agora with nearby *prytaneion* (house of the chief magistrate, where visiting dignitaries were also housed), *bouleuterion* (where the council met) and stoas that provided offices for magistrates, temples and sanctuaries (some now dedicated to cults originating from Alexander's east), gymnasia, a theatre, a stadium and sometimes another auditorium or library; a commercial agora with rooms for shops; and city walls (Billows 2003).

I am especially interested in the urban world that developed in Anatolia after the 323 B.C. death of Alexander the Great, who 'founded' Greek cities throughout Anatolia, Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia (Cohen 1995). These were extant cities that now included a Greek population, a new Greek name, and, importantly, Greek civic institutions (Billows 2003, 198). Simultaneously, some non-Greek cities in Anatolia, e.g. Alabanda (Antiocheia) (Ma 2003, 25–26), came to adopt Greek political language and civic apparatus at this time (*ibid.*, 138). Thus throughout Anatolia, multiple languages – native, Greek, 'foreign' (by merchants) and later Latin – were spoken in city agoras, with Greek the language of civic discourse and Greek and Latin beginning to replace local native languages (Gleason 2006; Mitchell 1993, 172–75).

Following the death of Alexander the Great, we see several interrelated trends in peri-urban Anatolia (Walbank 1993). For one, the security environment of cities changed substantially, with autonomous city states transitioning to cities embedded in larger security structures. Early in the post-Alexander era, vying successor states and local dynasts waged large wars with each other in an attempt to control territory, resources and trade; smaller wars were waged by individual city states over territory (Ma 2000). Simultaneously, the civil wars of the Roman Republic spilled into this area, with cities variously called upon to garrison Roman troops. As the Antigonid (based in Macedonia), Ptolemaic (based in Egypt) and Seleucid (based in the Levant and further east) successor states waxed and waned, power vacuums developed, into which pirates and brigands expanded, taxing cities in other ways, for example by kidnapping citizens and demanding ransom. When pirates (but see de Souza 1999) operating from these areas interrupted the grain trade to the heartland of the Roman Republic, the Roman Senate took action. The pirates were eventually defeated and areas harbouring antisocial elements were brought under the control of client kings, responsible for

maintaining order and collecting tribute (Sherwin-White 1977). The Pax Romana that the new Roman emperor Augustus Caesar imposed meant that cities no longer had to maintain fortification walls and inter-city competition shifted to other arenas. Cities launched extensive building programmes in order, I argue, to impress agents of Rome, seeking relief from taxation, or the siting of an imperial temple (resourced by the emperor), or to be named first city in the province (Wandsnider 2015). In the later imperial period, cities sent champions to agonistic competitions in sports and poetry (Mitchell 1993).

Second, what constitutes an effective agent of the city shows change. Where only native-born adult males were recognized as citizens in the early Hellenistic period, women and freed slaves, while not citizens, began to play larger roles in the late Hellenistic city, as documented by Pomeroy (1997) for Ptolemaic Egypt. As well, we see an increase in the proportion of foreigners – non-Greek, transient and resident, later including Romans – in Greek cities (Chamoux 2003, 197–200; Mitchell 2000).

Third, an oligarchic political system, populated by ‘the notables’ (Veyne 1976), emerges. Inscriptions from the cities of western Asia document several patterns for the early 3rd century B.C. to the end of the Hellenistic period (Dmitriev 2005). Offices were increasingly held ‘for life’ and ‘by descent’. What had been designated sacral offices (often held by wealthy citizens) in the early Hellenistic period gradually became incorporated as part of city functions in the later portion. The terms of offices increased over time from one to six months (for treasurers) to life. Women and children, supported by their wealthy families, began to hold religious offices. Office-holders announced their intent to absorb all finances of the office; this is confined to religious offices early on and later found at both higher and lower levels of secular city government. Individuals increasingly held multiple offices simultaneously. Focusing especially on inscriptions about civic benefactions, Marest-Caffey (2008) identifies benefactors as sons and daughters from a family with a tradition of civic benefactions. Decrees at this late Hellenistic time become much more detailed, profiling the education and careers of the benefactors.

All of these changes represent incremental adjustments in the behaviours of everyday (and elite) people, some of them encouraged by outside forces, such as the Roman practice of cultivating the landed elite, in an effort to stabilize their administrative base (Gleason 2006, 234; Ratté 2002, 19). Another force may also have operated: extending Zuiderheek’s (2009, 53–60) neo-Ricardian (and almost Pikettian (Piketty 2014)) analysis offered for the later imperial period to this earlier stretch of time, simple population growth means that land becomes scarcer relative to labour. Rents thus should increase with more surplus accruing to those owning the land, with a subsequent concentration of wealth. Thus it may be not so much that women and foreigners take on better-acknowledged roles in city life, but rather that *elite* (or at least wealthy) women and foreigners assume these roles.

The social and material practices of city inhabitants over time, of course, are the grist of these broad trends and this is Christophersen’s important

point. City inhabitants build fortification walls, don their armor and shed their blood to defend their city. They attend the assembly and vote on proposals about whether to support Rome or not. They name their children with ‘native’, Greek or Latin names. They donate a subscription to help build the temple or not. They come to bathe with their peer citizens each afternoon. Through their routine but charged actions, they sustain and remake the city.

The central point of my contribution complements that of Christophersen: the field within which social practice unfolds is a social and material space with scalar constraints that are analytically useful. I illustrate this by contrasting the social/material spaces with different scalar properties, as for urban south-west Anatolia/Roman Asia Minor compared with urban southern Anatolia/Roman Rough Cilicia. In the latter area, population centres were smaller, with a more modest and dispersed resource base and a population with a strong indigenous presence, and late in incorporating Graeco-Roman civic structures.

Isaurian tribes, organized in lineages and speaking Luwian, a language derived from Hittite, composed the indigenous element of Rough Cilicia. Rauh and colleagues (2009) argue for Isaurians holding territory whence were harvested cedar trees, a critical strategic resource used in building the naval ships of interest to Cleopatra and others. In addition to these resources, Rough Cilicia has pockets of productive agricultural land, but nothing like the vast stretches seen in valleys further east or west.

During the Hellenistic period, Rough Cilicia served as a place of refuge for organized communities of pirates until their defeat by the Roman statesman and military leader Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus in 67–66 B.C. It was administered by the client kings Archelaus I and II of Cappadocia and Antiochus IV of Commagene for Rome, eventually becoming a Roman province during the reign of the Roman emperor Vespasian (A.D. 69–79) (Rauh *et al.* 2009).

Table 1 summarizes the scalar differences seen in urban centres of south-western and southern Anatolia for the Hellenistic period. In both areas, security is a concern and fortifications likely forced city-dwellers, at least periodically, into cheek-by-jowl circumstances, with consequences for the density of social/material fields. Small, medium, and a few very large cities – Pergamon, Smyrna and Ephesus – begin to develop in south-western Anatolia, supported by rich agricultural landscapes; settlements in southern Anatolia appear to remain smallish with a limited agricultural base. The warp and weft of urban life in the Greek cities of south-western Anatolia was provided by city institutions, the temple and ritual cycle, family, and also cultic and social associations, especially in larger cities with multiple co-residing kin groups (Fisher 1988; Kloppenborg 1996; Millar 1993). Our knowledge of this fabric in the case of southern Anatolia is impoverished: we can see that population centres are fortified, that there is limited consumption of contemporary ceramics and that inhabitants are burying individuals with items circulating in the Mediterranean, but evidence for Greek civic institutions in the form of public architecture is lacking (Rauh *et al.* 2009; Rauh, Dillon and Rothaus 2013). Textual sources variously refer to Cilician pirates based along this

**Table 1** Scalar properties of the social/material spaces in urban late Hellenistic south-western and southern Anatolia.

Scalar properties	South-western Anatolia	Southern Anatolia coast	Southern Anatolia interior
Population size	Small, medium, large	Very small?	Very small?
Population density	Fortified cities	Hilltop fortifications	Hilltop fortifications
Number of co-residing kin groups	Depends on city size (associations important)	Perhaps many (diverse pirate communities)	?? Isaurian + pirates ??
Community languages	Greek plus native	Diverse, Luwian plus Greek	Diverse, Luwian plus Greek
Social/material space	Attached to place	Attached to individuals	Attached to individuals

**Table 2** Scalar properties of the social/material spaces in urban provincial Asia Minor and Rough Cilicia.

Scalar properties	Asia Minor	West Rough Cilicia coast	West Rough Cilicia interior
Population size	Small, medium, large	Small	Small
Population density	??	??	??
Number of co-residing kin groups	Depends on city size (associations important)	Perhaps several	Likely few (lineage strong)
Community languages	Greek, Latin, plus native plus foreign	Diverse, Luwian plus Greek, Latin	Diverse plus Greek
Social/material space	Attached to place	Attached to place	Attached to place

coast and moving between small, highly fortified bases where slaves crafted weapons and sails, and built fast ships (Rauh *et al.* 2000).

Into the imperial Roman period (table 2), south-western Anatolian cities (now in the organized Roman province of Asia Minor) and southern Anatolian cities (by A.D. 70 in Roman Rough Cilicia), appear on the face of it to have similar civic infrastructures, with the social and material spaces

attaching to place in each area. Family, civic and religious structures again were the foundation of society and in medium and larger cities, with multiple co-residing kin groups, associations and *collegia* appear important (Van Nijf 1997). In Rough Cilicia, the Isaurian lineage structure intersected with civic and religious structures in interesting ways. In Asia Minor, city centres are composed of *pyreatia*, a *bouleuterion*, temples, gymnasia, stadia and bathing complexes, along with theatres and amphitheatres. All of these, save theatres and amphitheatres, are found in Rough Cilicia. To explain this disparity, I suggested (Wandsnider 2013) a scalar difference in wealth, with communities of more opulent farmers and landholders of western Asia being able to finance expansive structures like theatres. Townsend (2013), however, challenges this and, going beyond scale to structure and institution, argues that indigenous tribal elites who inhabited the seats of power in Rough Cilicia refused to sanction such public fora, where ‘the people’ could exercise their will, as seen in theatres and amphitheatres throughout the Mediterranean (Gleason 2006; Potter 1996; Veyne 1976). Similarly, Townsend argues that the afternoon bath shared by elites and commoners reinforced difference (Yegül 1995), hence bathing complexes abound in Rough Cilicia.

Thus cities in Asia Minor and Rough Cilicia supported many of the same social/material spaces but scalar (and structural) differences in those spaces mean that spatial and temporal density of behaviours – bathing, trading in the market, participating in city functions or religious ceremonies, attending spectacles – all were quite different. In turn, how practice unfolded within these similar, yet different, spaces impacted the formation and re-formation of the city.

### On complementarity in approaching urban living

My point here is that the bundles of practices that allow a collection of individuals and families to become a city may unfold very differently in the social/material fields of Asia Minor versus Rough Cilician contexts simply owing to scalar effects. In sum, I argue that Christophersen’s social-practice approach works best in concert with approaches that also attend to structure and function along with scalar issues. Indeed, both of these elements frame Christophersen’s approach and all together – practice, structure and scale – propel field-based and analytic approaches that enable the researcher to study population centres as they form and re-form cities.

It is important to note that Christophersen’s approach, as articulated here, requires an investigation of the synchronized social and material. Yet our archaeological record rarely affords that degree of contemporaneity (e.g. Holdaway and Wandsnider 2008). At best, we can document snatches of social practice, as in a consideration of the mortuary remains associated with individuals in tombs (speaking here from the experiences of the record that emerges from survey in Rough Cilicia). Second, Christophersen’s approach would have us attend to the everyday things of lived lives. Again, these everyday things become salient especially in the context of the larger artefacts of structure, such as monumental architecture, associated with rhythms of life unfolding monthly, annually, and supra-annually.



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## Urbanity as social practice *Axel Christophersen*

I would like to thank the commenters for spending their time on critical and constructive responses to my paper ‘Performing towns’. The comments add valuable insights, knowledge, viewpoints and ideas, which significantly elucidate the possibilities as well as the limitations of approaching medieval urban communities from a social-practice theoretical perspective (SPT). The commenters have pointed at theoretical questions too superficially treated, the need for a more extensive knowledge base and, most importantly, the need for a broader discussion of the methodological and empirical consequences of an SPT approach in analysing everyday life in a Scandinavian urban community based on archaeological empirical data. Rather than giving individual feedback, I instead centre my reply around four topics that the commenters have raised and which relate closely to the paper’s paramount issue and development potential.

### Town, urbanization and urbanity

The concept of ‘town’ and of its derivations ‘urbanization’ and ‘urbanity’ is essential and, as sharply pointed out by Monica Smith and Sven Kalmring, my superficial treatment obviously requires clarification. My point of departure is Kalmring’s assertion that I also omit ‘the classic discussion . . . on the designation and character of the earliest towns in the north’ (p. 137). That is true, but this discussion is very well known and for that reason I found it more appropriate to put effort into advocating new trajectories that could take us away from the (seemingly) perpetual discussion of ‘what is a town’. That discussion, which I have taken part in from the late 1970s (e.g. Christophersen 1980; 1989; 1994a; 1999b), is, in my opinion, locked in an overall ‘criteria-fixed’ position with an urge to classify, organize, structure and hierarchize history after a priori scheduled and selected criteria and definitions. I am well aware of the importance of clear criteria and definitions. But, as Monica Smith points out, ‘People are made urbanites not only en masse, but also through individual actions’ (p. 147). This obvious, but nevertheless important, observation does not sit well with the mainstream processual discussion about what a town *is* (or should be), where ‘people’ are classified and grouped in categories according to their role and function in production, exchange or the exercise of political or religious power (or both). At this point it is well worth drawing on the statement by Jeffrey Fleisher that ‘Rather than enforcing a strict distinction between processual and practice approaches, such studies

work productively between them, exploring relationships between different levels within urban settings' (p. 134). This Giddens-inspired statement is, of course, very true, and it mediates the difference in opinion about what and how new trajectories in archaeological research in preindustrial Scandinavian urbanization processes should (or could) follow in the future. For that matter, my use of the notion of 'urbanity', conceived as a particular way of life structurally related to urban landscapes and population density, should not be taken, as Kalmring suggests, as an attempt to supersede 'the perception of "urbanization" as a conscious process' (p. 138). I fully agree with Kalmring in this. Rather, the purpose was, helped by this term, to introduce the possibilities of an SPT approach and draw attention to issues and topics seldom discussed in archaeology within the traditional understandings of 'medieval urbanization' in Scandinavia. Ulrich Müller also advertises the need for more focus on what 'urbanity' is about in an SPT framework:

precisely because this term is central for urban archaeology, I would have liked to see a more detailed analysis. There exist very different attribution practices, for example in sociology and urban geography. Therefore 'urbanity' in the praxeological sense can also be further expanded, since an urban culture can purport both an 'objective' context and the subjective meaning of the agents (p. 143).

To me urbanity is still intentions and experiences realized within an urban landscape, performed as human interrelations.

### **How can SPT be a theoretical resource for urban archaeology?**

Ulrich Müller's insightful comments map out a solid ground for applying SPT in archaeological research. SPT, he points out, is not a coherent theory of practice but instead a bundle of theoretical approaches frequently applied in material-culture studies today. Owing to this fact, it is important to further develop some of SPT's essential concepts and coherence according to the needs and possibilities offered by present archaeological research practice and empiricism. One conceptual notion of paramount interest to archaeology is that of 'material resources' in the broadest sense (i.e. time, space, material objects and arrangements). While Schatzki argues that 'understanding specific practices always involves apprehending material configurations' (Schatzki, Knorr Cetina and von Savigny 2001, 3; after Shove, Pantzar and Watson 2012, 9), Shove, Pantzar and Watson emphasize, like Reckwitz, the presence of material resources in social-practice development (*ibid.*, 9). In my opinion, this understanding invites archaeology to explore and refine its theoretical starting point. Müller, though, referring to Schatzki's use of the intriguing concept of 'teleoaffective structures', seems to be undecided whether it is at all possible to successfully apply more complex and sophisticated versions of SPT without at the same time being reductionistic. Müller's restraint is clearly expressed in his comment on my tentative introduction of a set of archaeological criteria (proto-, stabilized and ex-) to identify different stages in the development of practice patterns, which he finds 'somewhat simplified' (p. 144), and which, if applied reductively, may cause pure functionalistic

explanations. In general, I do not disagree with his argumentation. The dangers for a 'reductive understanding' of social-practice formation processes are obvious. Archaeological records alone are not capable of penetrating deep into the interactions between the intentional, the knowledge-related and the teleoaffective elements in practice-pattern processes. But what we definitely *are* capable of doing, and therefore *should* do, is to examine the physical remains that have been involved and look for the physical traces of interaction. The implication of such an aim is demonstrated by LuAnn Wandsnider's interesting comments on the role of architecture in urban settlements in Roman Asia compared with the province of Rough Cilicia. Architecture seems to have been used to facilitate communication and to create mutual understandings in urban societies with different scalar linguistic environments, population densities, political settings and available resources. Monica Smith advocates a similar approach when she argues for analyses which work within an understanding of the importance of the 'intermediate' size of towns as decisive for 'residents to participate in the economic, social and political activities of urbanizing environments in specific ways' (p. 148). Size/scale and population density have, indeed, for long been important matters within Scandinavian urban archaeology. Yet again, the importance of such elements is principally measured against their usefulness as quantitative criteria for urbanization rather than as material resources actively involved in social-practice patterns as actants, which I sense is what Monica Smith is hinting at.

A comment should also be made in order to further reinforce the importance of the issue of 'unintended consequences and unanticipated activities'. This is a profoundly theoretical topic closely related to our comprehension of the uncontrollable dynamic in practice-pattern bundles/practice complexes and the equally important dynamic forces unfolding in leaking zones. I would have expected more focus on this issue because of its interest for the question of how these dynamic and transformative forces influenced the development of social-practice formation in particular, and thus historical development in general. While 'history' was created from a starting point in the past, we utilize its narrative potential from the opposite end, from the present, where the loose ends are no longer loose, but tethered and structured in sequences of logical and consecutive incidents, accidents, events and happenings. History is about an infinite number of loose ends that have influenced the past, but who has cared about the loose ends? Ulrich Müller makes an interesting but cryptic and dense comment when he states that social-practice theory has 'indisputable' strength, because it shed lights on 'the routine nature and reproduction of agency knowledge as "unpredictability"' (p. 142). Jeffrey Fleisher is even more specific when commenting upon the issue of contact zones and unanticipated activities and how they possibly are important for the formation of urban life in the Middle Ages, while Sven Kalmring exposes little interest in this matter, asking, 'have we not already identified our spaces and areas of *leaking zones of contact* in the quite physical medieval towns themselves?' (p. 140). Yes, indeed, but the question is whether or not we fully understand the transformative forces and mechanisms that derive from such meetings. Kalmring's statement illustrates

in a striking way the importance of further refining the matter of leaking zones and loose ends, both theoretically and empirically.

### **SPT and archaeological records: possibility, limitations and challenges**

Theory formulation is important in many ways, not least for the art of asking questions that open unknown landscapes of knowledge and track the ‘six walks in the fictional woods’, as Umberto Eco describes the presence of the reader in the (hi)story (Eco 1998). The archaeologist is the reader and the records are access to the (hi)story. This access goes through the questions we ask and the (hi)story is constructed in our interpretations. Knowledge formation thus is just as much dependent on the creativity and quality of the objectives set – formulated as concrete questions – as on the sources and methods that are available. But this does not at all exclude us from pointing out the methodological and empirical challenges faced by an SPT approach to archaeological records. The commenters have all in different ways questioned the methodological and empirical implications – positive and negative – that derive from an SPT approach: Monica Smith reminds us wisely that when texts are not available or are limited, archaeology offers alternative ways of gaining access to past realities. Kalmring, on the other hand, expresses doubt whether an SPT approach to urban archaeology can contribute with new evidence and ‘digestible hard facts’ (p. 140). Kalmring is even uncertain whether knowledge about the ‘smallest units’ in urban societies is fully feasible from archaeological records, but if so, what can such knowledge contribute to an understanding of the ‘main lines’ in medieval urban development? The ‘main lines’ in science are matters of discursive formation, and so also is the question of what is feasible in archaeology. My simple point is that empirical feasibility in most cases is about discovering new ways of utilizing old records – discovering new sources and developing new methodological tools to penetrate the material remains, and thus we start chasing embedded historical data along new paths and from new heights in the landscape. Müller points correctly to the fact that I have not provided any proposal as to which methodological tools to apply in this regard. Wandsnider and Smith provide us with some concrete examples of that, based on reinterpretations of architecture and the use of size equivalents. Wandsnider urges us to be aware of the need for a better grip on the synchronous interaction between people’s social practice and material, which in research practice means advancing stratigraphic and/or chronological ‘resolving power’, a methodological challenge comprehensively dealt with by e.g. Stefan Larsson (2000; 2006). Also, Jeffrey Fleisher’s comment on the possibilities of improving our knowledge about urban practice complexes based on material remains was positive and constructive, first because he supports his reasoning with the need to include new advances in archaeological technique, besides already known excavation and documentation practices, and second because he provides practical examples and results rich in perspective from his own research at Songo Mnara. Thanks, Jeffrey!

A final, summarizing reflection: Monica Smith urges me to read James Deetz’s book *In small things forgotten*, which for many years has been a great inspiration even in my research. In Lisa Falk’s edited volume *Historical*

*archaeology in global perspective* (1991), James Deetz writes an introduction in which he makes a statement of the utmost relevance to the discussion of SPT's practical feasibility: 'Historical archaeology deals with the unintended, the subconscious, the worldview, and mind-set of an individual. It provides access to the ways all people, not just a small group of literate people, organize their physical lives' (cited in Little 2007, 60). If this is so, then SPT has in the future the possibility to lead open-minded archaeologists by Eco's six, or even more, paths into a landscape of hitherto unknown past social practices, and the traditional discussion of the urbanization process will never be the same.

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