

Things and Patterns – from Pyramiden to Patagonia

Festschrift in honor of Professor
Hein Bjartmann Bjerck

Birgitte Skar, Heidi Breivik og Martin Callanan (red.)



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Going Himmelblå

Sideways-Thinking Archaeology Within the Multiple

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ABSTRACT

What happens when archaeology becomes public? What happens when cultural heritage management and material studies of our past become an actual interest of contemporary society, or even start to serve a purpose outside archaeology itself? These questions have in recent years been brought to the surface of theoretical discourse on public archaeology as a practice of critical soul-searching. However, what if the public and wider usability of the material past has always been present? And how may we turn our theoretical outlook around to grasp the actual nature of participation and the production of archaeology in this regard?

This article will examine whether the current epistemological mindset characterizing public archaeology has a built-in mechanism that both creates and maintains the problem it sets out to solve. For instance, the principle of public involvement implies a pre-implied exclusion: as if inviting the public to enter something it was not initially a part of. In the current state of affairs public archaeology is a process in reverse, in analytical terms making and sustaining archaeology as un-public. As such, it favours perspectivism and position rather than practice and multiplicity. This needs our scrutiny for public archaeology to move forward.

Introduction

Public archaeology has come to be considered a subdiscipline within the academic discipline of archaeology. It concerns how archaeology can and should relate to society in general. Since the 1990s it has addressed uncomfortable asymmetries between the hegemony of archaeologists as experts and the subaltern other, with the aim of analysing and remedying the mismatch. However, this endeavour appears to create and uphold *a notion* of asymmetry rather than abolishing any *actual* asymmetry. In recent iterations of such efforts, arguments for applied *critical theory* have been added into the mix (Westmont 2025:7–10). This highlights the question of the very meaning of the term *public archaeology*, as well as to what extent this can indeed be labelled as, and analytically confined *within*, an archaeological subdiscipline. Does this inevitably and always place archaeology at the centre of cultural heritage discourse whenever archaeology is involved? Our answer is twofold: yes and no. Yes, because the optics of public archaeology presuppose fixed positions

that leave the public outside the very core of heritage discourse, which remains a stronghold occupied by archaeology. No, because this presumption is based on an ontological topography more apparent than real.

Public archaeology as a pathway towards symmetry and egalitarianism is both exclusionary and deceptive at the same time. It is too narrowly conceptualised as being centred around archaeology. Instead, public archaeology can be analysed as the performance of heritage discourse in terms of *styles of practice*. Based on Annemarie Mol's *praxiology* (1999, 2002), we consider reality as done or enacted, rather than observed and constructed. We aim to demonstrate that this makes the role and locus of archaeology in heritage discourse flexible and, perhaps even more importantly, sideways *movable*. We suggest archaeology should be appreciated as decentralized in multiple practices, holding ever shifting positions and interference in differently constituted cultural heritage processes. The public is not always and inevitably a subset of archaeology, in

so far as archaeology in itself may sometimes be a sub-set (Brattli and Brendalsmo 2016, Guttormsen 2025: 196, Vennatrø 2012:122). The nature of heritage discourse as a process of materialization is diverse, shifting, unruly and unpredictable, and therefore cannot be subsumed by the ontological topography prescribed by public archaeology (Brattli and Brendalsmo 2016:67).

Bjerck and Brattli go Himmelblå

On April 25th 2010, the final and 24th episode (series 3, episode 8) of the Norwegian TV series *Himmelblå* aired on NRK1. In the (thus far) concluding moments of the soap opera, set on Ylvingen, an idyllic island in the archipelago of Helgeland, Northern Norway, a team of archaeologists, led by amateur actors Hein Bjerck and Terje Brattli, unexpectedly appears to save the day by examining some not further uncovered, spectacular and fictitious archaeological find at a fictitious archaeological site in a bog. Alas, although they were watched by approximately 1,3 million viewers on that evening, their 40 seconds of fame did not prove to be the start of new careers as soap opera actors, and Hein Bjerck and Terje Brattli quickly found their way back to their old jobs as real-life archaeologists at the archaeological department at NTNU Vitenskapsmuseet in Trondheim, Norway. Whether thinking in terms of symmetrical archaeology (Damsholt et al. 2009, Olsen 2003, 2006, 2010, Olsen and Witmore 2015), or of post-humanist attempts at non-human phenomenology (Bogost 2012, Bryant 2011), or of assemblage theory (DeLanda 2016, Jervis 2018, Law 2004), or of approaches to landscapes as *taskscares* (Ingold 2000, 190) or *praxiotopes* (Grønnesby 2019:226), the same thing happened to the various material agents involved: a selection of archaeological digging equipment from NTNU Vitenskapsmuseet, after being recruited as soap opera props, found their way back to the museum and may still be in use at ongoing archaeological excavations. The landscape of Ylvingen, against the beautiful backdrop of the larger landscape of Helgeland, returned from its brief career as a film set and TV series location to its former self as a genuine archaeological landscape with known and still-hidden archaeological sites and finds. More interestingly, some of the specially made props related to the “fictitious” archaeology – the on-screen plans and finds made on set – found their way back to NTNU Vitenskapsmuseet, but now as genuine artefacts and materialisations from the film set (Fig. 1). In terms of expert versus non-expert, genuine versus staged, over-

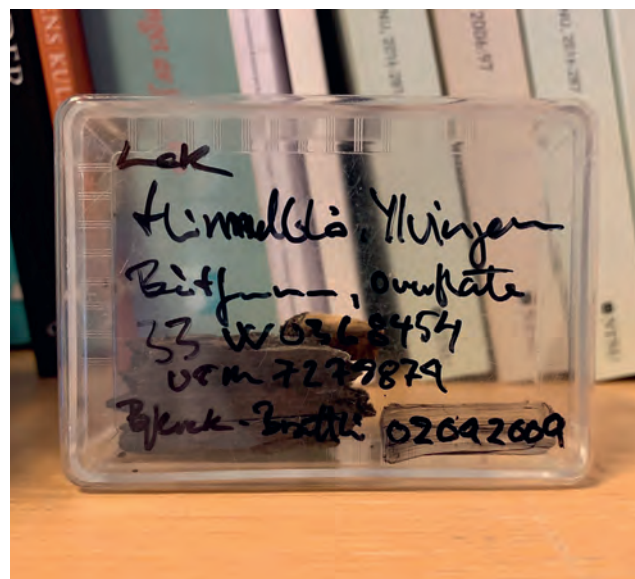


Figure 1. Find or prop? The materiality or “theatricality” of the Ylvingen boat. Photo: Ragnar Vennatrø, 2024.

lapping versus parallel, and material versus non-material relational perspectives on public archaeology, this context gets complicated, fast. But why? And could such contexts be approached in other ways?

The viewing platform

Arguing for a practice-oriented, audience-focused analysis of public archaeology with the archaeological site as an “experimental performance space” (2009: 39), Gabriel Moshenska provides a striking metaphor of what goes on, and simultaneously goes wrong, in terms of public interaction across on-site archaeological viewing platforms. As a public-oriented construct for enabling an audience a good view of archaeological excavations, the viewing platform immediately creates a new form of separation, reinforcing:

... the sense of a ‘fourth wall’ in public archaeology: an imaginary barrier through which an audience, ignored by the performers, passively views the action on the stage. From a public archaeological perspective this is patronising, culturally impoverishing and generally unsatisfactory. In looking beyond this dichotomous performer/audience model we are opening up the possibility of more democratic relations of production of archaeological knowledge. (Moshenska 2009:40–41).

Endeavouring to “bridge the gap” between an archaeological audience and the practice of archaeology

lies at the heart of public archaeology (Grima 2002, 2016, Merriman 2004, Matsuda and Okamura 2011, Gould 2016, Moshenska 2017, Oldham 2018). Seemingly, this gap exists both between archaeologists and non-archaeologists and in everything public-facing archaeologists might do. Mark Oldham notes that an analytical problem for public archaeology is “the ‘blurred areas of overlap’ [...] where practice, management, and research meet” (2018:3). The claim of this article is that on the contrary these “blurred areas of overlap” might be the opposite: valuable starting points for our analysis.

Moshenska’s glass-paned metaphor of the *viewing platform* (2009) sheds light on recurrent practical challenges within Merriman’s (2004) and Grima’s (2016) models of public engagement. It might also be a metaphor for a larger underlying theoretical issue within public archaeology: much like a viewing platform establishes and reinforces boundaries and gaps between an archaeological practice and its audience, public archaeology seems to establish, define and maintain elusive boundaries and absolute gaps between *practices as archaeology* and *practices as spectators*. The problem is implicit in various definitions of public archaeology such as:

What distinguishes public archaeology [...] is the very starting point—that is, the relationship of the archaeologist and the archaeological discipline to a wider world—and the binary opposite, or how “they”/“the others” interact with the domain of archaeologists. (Guttormsen 2025:196)

The bridgework is constructing the gaps, so to speak. In a word, the problem at hand centres on a hidden absolutism present in the concept and analytical trope of *inclusion*. What is called for is an approach that goes beyond the persistent dichotomies in our construction of public archaeology (Moshenska 2009:41). This requires a wider analytical framework, which frames archaeological practices within multiple ongoing bodies of practices (Mol 1999, 2002), and where the practical socio-material ontological and epistemological *production* of archaeology takes place anywhere there is a “fourth wall”. An essential aspect of a multiple, assemblage-oriented approach is seeing the “blurring” of different practices not so much as a problem, but rather as the affective rhizomatic interference which brings public archaeology to life. Taking archaeologists and actors at work as actors and archaeologists in an episode of a Norwegian soap opera as our example,

public archaeology could be established and analysed in terms of a bit of sideways thinking: never mind the gaps.

Public archaeology

Mark Oldham (2018:2), among others, traces the term *public archaeology* at least back to Sir Mortimer Wheeler, who in 1954 wrote about the need for archaeologists to disseminate their findings to the public. Matsuda and Okamura (2011:2) traces a more discursive concept becoming widespread with the publication of Charles R. McGimsey’s *Public Archeology* in 1972. From its beginnings it was primarily associated with the cultural heritage management of archaeology, and the initial focus was on the practices of professionals and management apparatuses regarded as leading to *exclusion*, rather than inclusion, of the general public.

By the late 1990s new discourses had developed, enabling numerous ways to redefine public archaeology. Setting the stage for what would become a shift toward *inclusion*-focused approaches, the English archaeologist Tim Schadla-Hall called for a very wide definition of public archaeology as: *archaeological activities that interact or have the potential to interact with the public* (1999:147). This allowed public archaeology discourse to be expanded to include several societal issues, in close kinship to epistemological and ethical aspects of *post-processual archaeology*, *critical heritage studies* and *new museology*. The establishment of the journal *Public Archaeology* in 2000 marked the culmination of the process which saw public archaeology become an independent field of research covering a wide range of societal concerns.

Subsequent work on public archaeology can be seen as a closely related twofold discursive movement taking an analytical approach to mending and expanding aspects of public *inclusion*, while also safeguarding the archaeological perspectives and outcomes of those processes. There are, however, no watertight bulkheads between the definitions from the 1970s and the late 1990s. Nevertheless, from this point onwards the analytical development of public archaeology has broadly been centred on expanding inclusion and participation into and across the social membrane of expert archaeological perspectives. All the same, riding the twin horses of public inclusion and archaeological expert authority frames every act of inclusion as a pluralistic appendage to our multivocal yet fundamentally archaeological *perspectives*, and everyone who is included as our invited *guests*.

As a discursive trope, we can follow an analytical expansion of us/them interaction in public archaeology from Nick Merriman's (2004) two models for public archaeological involvement: the *deficit* model and the *multi-perspective* model. The deficit model assumes a public in need of information on the correct way of understanding and practicing archaeology, and that this is the main concern of public archaeology. It encourages public participation, but only in line with approved expert practice. One weakness it fails to address is to consider the embedded dissonance of the cultural heritage discourse: that there are many different, often contradictory, ways of thinking about, understanding and practicing heritage. The *multi-perspective* model acknowledges the importance of diversity in public involvement. In other words, the multi-perspective model sees archaeology as embedded in society, not as located in an ivory tower, a recognition which is also present in post-processual archaeology, critical heritage studies and new museology. The objective of the multi-perspective model is to promote self-actualization, reflection, and creativity in the general public. Nevertheless, Merriman considers it important to ensure that the pendulum does not swing too far in the other direction, as recognition of plural perspectives must not lead to uncritical acceptance of all non-professionals' understanding and use of archaeological heritage. Ensuring that the multi-perspective model is not a step towards an extreme relativism, he therefore recommends a combination of the deficit model and the multi-perspective model.

Merriman's approach provided a basis for both Holtorf's (2016) and Grima's (2016) tripartite models, as well as Matsuda and Okamura's (2011:6–7) four approaches to public archaeology. Holtorf (2016) identifies three models: the *education* model, the *public relation* model and the *democratic* model. The *education* and *public relation* models correspond to Merriman's deficit model, as they regard the public as being in need of education, information and guidance. Holtorf's democratic model entails that archaeology should allow the public to freely develop their interest in archaeology, similarly to Merriman's multi-perspective model. Matsuda and Okamura (2011:6–7) operate with four approaches: *enlightenment/education*, *public relations*, *critical approach* and *multivocal*. The first two coincide with Merriman's deficit model, and the last two with his multi-perspective model and Holtorf's democratic model. Their *critical approach* focuses on which interests benefit from which definitions of heritage and the past. The authorized heritage discourse model simi-

larly addresses these issues (Smith 2006). Laurajane Smith's dichotomy between authorized and subaltern heritage discourses has had significant influence on the analysis of cultural heritage discourses. Matsuda and Okamura's multivocal (or polyphonic) approach is not only concerned with defining the dominant and/or dominated actor, and analysing relations of power and powerlessness, but also with examining how the overall diversity of definitions of heritage and past work within a context.

How can it be that the longstanding effort of public archaeology bridgebuilding has still not fulfilled its endeavour? One explanation is that an emphasis on dichotomies, positions and power structures inadvertently provides a rigid approach that creates and cements a given way of understanding heritage discourses. This means dynamic *processes* are largely under-emphasised and seen as subordinate to static *positions*, leaving public archaeology as a theoretical no man's land in a perpetual state of trench warfare. The "public" does not simply represent a multivocal subset or the subaltern perspectives of archaeology, however complex, dynamic, empowered and emancipated we conceptualise it as being, with every good intention. Archaeologies form part of a public multiple.

Critical resources and constraints

Public archaeology has brought about increased critical reflection on knowledge, the role of expertise and how heritage functions in society. During the last decades, there has been a considerable amount of literature on the field (for instance Grima 2016, McGuire 2012, Pyburn 2009, Moshenska 2009, Richardson and Almanse-Sánchez 2015). It has encouraged diversity and debate rather than the one-dimensional communication of a monolithic past and heritage set in stone. Key issues have included who defines the past, what is relevant cultural heritage, and the use of cultural heritage. The critical opportunities offered by this expanded definition of public archaeology aim to make archaeology more democratic and thus more ethically sustainable. This has had an effect on how we reflect on dissemination of cultural heritage and the past. Ethnic groups previously marginalized or at worst suppressed by archaeology may now find archaeology is a resource or opportunity to promote themselves and their interests. Groups and aspects of heritage that for whatever reason represent views, interests or understandings of the past that differ from those of the authorities and the archaeologists supposedly have better opportunities

to enter into dialogue with professionals (Westmont 2025:6–8). Allegedly, this has contributed to reducing the danger of democratic deficit.

Despite purported positive effects, there are still reasons to question whether public archaeology is doing what it has set out to accomplish. One issue in need of scrutiny is whether inclusion is about differences of degree or in quality. Merriman (2004) argues that the multi-perspective model used alone carries with it the risk of a destructive relativism. To ensure balance, principles from the deficit model must also be included. He advocates what he calls “informed imagination”:

By this I mean an approach to interpretation which is based on the knowledge of the archaeological and historical context of the material provided by the expertise of the curators, but which acknowledges diversity of views, the contingency of archaeological interpretations, and encourages imagination and enjoyment in the visitor’s own constructions of the past. (Merriman 2004:102)

Roger Thomas (2004) advocates for archaeologists accepting the many ways in which people may want to explore the past on their own. By means of a more “open” approach, archaeologists can “help people to discover for themselves (among other things) a sense of place and locality, and of history and historical process” (Thomas 2004:199). Along these same lines Matsuda and Okamura (2011:12–13) stress the importance of clarifying the roles of archaeologists in interpreting the past in public discourse: as educators, instructors, consultants, facilitators, and partners, sometimes playing both double and triple roles. While the knowledge archaeologists possess does not entitle them to control/dominate public discussions on the interpretation of the past, Matsuda and Okamura (2011:14, see also McGuire 2012:79–80) emphasize that this knowledge still gives them a certain authority in heritage discourses. Furthermore, an appreciation of different pasts does not reduce the importance of educating the public about archaeology. Similar distinctions are drawn in the book *Key Concepts in Public Archaeology* (Moshenska 2017:5–11), but now as the working repertoire of the subdiscipline. Since Schadla-Hall (1999), efforts to focus public archaeology on inclusion have been ongoing, whilst growing in complexity. A recent *critical public archaeology* approach designed to safeguard multivocality and *diversity of perspectives on the past* (Westmont 2025:9) stresses a need for precautions “required to prevent archaeological interpreta-

tions from being misappropriated in service of the very forces critical archaeology aims to critique and dismantle” (2025:10). It is long overdue to consider Bruno Latour’s (2004) diagnosis of critique, where he states that “Critical theory died away long ago” (2004:248) and urges the adoption of a renewed concept of critical thinking of facts forming as *gatherings* (2004:235) while pinpointing the symptoms of critique as a prevailing double-standard subtractive process.

This indicates that within its own logic public archaeology is in two places at once (e.g. Westmont 2025:10–11), while it would rather occupy a third position. On the one hand, it is about the importance of recognizing and corroborating the diversity of pasts and interpretations. On the other, archaeologists should still have some kind of authority or precedence in “helping” the public to make discoveries, engaging in training and instructing or providing the foundations for the public’s “informed imagination”. As a result, public archaeology seems unable to acknowledge knowledge formation in genuinely expert-external contexts. This establishes an undesirable dichotomy, as well as barring analytical symmetry. One question is whether the current ontological topography, which forms the basis for post-processual archaeology, critical heritage studies and new museology, is suited for public archaeology, or whether such a match is more apparent than real. From this follows a need for reflection on whether heritage discourses are as dichotomous as current public archaeology and critical heritage studies presuppose (Brattli and Brendalmo 2016), and also what implications and consequences such an assumption may have.

Public archaeology as a matter of concern

One telling aspect that something is afoot is the particular significance public archaeology discourse ascribes to the concept of *involvement* with respect to “public involvement”. The very idea of involvement presupposes dual positions within an inside/outside dichotomy. The consequence is that public involvement in heritage discourses presupposes the public as something external and in constant need of being brought inside by responsible archaeologists. As such, the very concept of involvement presupposes *exclusion*.

On the one hand – granted that this is a fundamental distinction – the general public is essentially seen as something *different* from relatively well defined and demarcated academic disciplines such as archaeology.

This is much appreciated as a bulwark against destructive relativism. On the other – the belief remains this distinction can and should be dissolved, by analytically constituting and reinforcing its operation. This is both contradictory and an ever-present potentially self-fulfilling prophecy. It is contradictory, because it involves trying to untie a knot while at the same time recognizing it to be Gordian. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because it assumes predefined positions as analytical pivot points: either as expert or non-expert or, in principle, as any ascribed qualified/non-qualified position within a pre-defined grid. The issue of public archaeology essentially has been about *adjusting* boundaries, not about *dissolving* them – or rather – appreciating them as *non-existent*. As such, the analysis will inevitably end up where it started. Public archaeology – even within its own epistemological framework – tends to “take the long way home”. Admittedly the journey will be somewhat different, which in many respects has paid off in terms of attention to increased diversity of opinions and democracy, but the destination still is the same; i.e. the point of departure. On a basic level; therefore remaining equidistant.

Why and how has public archaeology ended up in such a quandary? Bruno Latour (2004) stated that *critique* had run out of steam; an analytical endeavour no longer bringing us any further in recognizing how knowledge comes into being. Latour claims that this is leading nowhere, as:

... a certain form of critical spirit has sent us down the wrong path, encouraging us to fight the wrong enemies and, worst of all, to be considered as friends by the wrong sort of allies because of a little mistake in the definition of its main target. The question was never to get away from facts but closer to them, not fighting empiricism but, on the contrary, renewing empiricism. (Latour 2004:231)

Latour argues that a renewal of the critical mind is to be found in the cultivation of a *stubbornly realist attitude*, dealing with what he calls *matters of concern*, not *matters of fact*.

The mistake [...] was to believe that there was no efficient way to criticize matters of fact except by moving away from them and directing one's attention toward the conditions that made them possible. But this meant accepting much too uncritically what matters of facts were. (Latour 2004:231)

The error has been critically debunking a kind of objectivism, in effect placing the critical expert at the analytical centre, and as a result displacing everything for critique to be shot down in a discursive shooting match of changing positions. Explaining the existence of the fact as merely being projected and rooted in a sort of futile delusion of autonomy only recognized by critique, we lose sight of the fact. This is problematic because facts do exist; all the time and everywhere, they surround us. However, analysing the phenomenon in the way that critique does, one has moved away from the fact instead of doing what is necessary because of its intrusive and persisting existence: coming closer to it. To possibly remedy this, Latour asks the question:

Can we devise another powerful descriptive tool that deals this time with matters of concern and whose import then will no longer be to debunk but to protect and care, as Donna Haraway would put it? Is it really possible to transform the critical urge in the ethos of someone who adds reality to matters of fact and not subtract reality? (Latour 2004:232).

Is this dispiriting description of critique also recognizable within public archaeology? Unfortunately, the answer is yes. No doubt, critique has been effective on its own terms. Filled with excitement one has successfully swung the whip over naïve and self-deceiving empiricists. Critique left archaeology in an impossible state in relation to the physical object, which is material culture from the past. It became either everything or nothing at all. Two positions impossible to defend when more closely examined. Sure enough, recent decades of theoretical debates in archaeology have shown the effectiveness of critique in debunking processual archaeology and other empirical positions, but also its own inability to offer anything instead. For a long time, the fact apparently disappeared but was constantly present, nevertheless. This has been the Gordian knot facing critical approaches such as post-processual archaeology, critical heritage studies and new museology. The epistemological quandary associated with these traditions is inevitably also a problem for their close relative; public archaeology. A concealed absolutism of the kind sustaining critique is very much present. Applying Latour's military metaphor (2004:225–226), public archaeology is mobilizing against an enemy who does not exist, and perhaps never did. In short, an analytical pivot point for further analyses of public archaeology lies in moving from matters of fact to matters of concern.

Moving closer to the fact

It is necessary to look at the fact once more, rather than continuing to reject it all together. If it is neither transcendent nor immanent, what then are we dealing with? How and where does reality come into being? Answering these questions, we will present an analytical approach to public archaeology that moves away from *position* as the analytical pivot point towards *practice*. A turn based on Annemarie Mol's and John Law's *ontological politics* and *praxiology* (Law and Benschop 1997, Mol 1999). It is important to emphasize that this does not imply a denial of the existence of positions but rather involves critically scrutinizing the heavy emphasis on positions in analysis of heritage discourses. We will use elements of Annemarie Mol's *enactment-in-practice theory* of *praxiography*, as for example demonstrated in her book *The body multiple: ontology in medical practice* (2002). Like Mol, we believe that objects should not be understood as central focus points for the benefit of different perspectives. Rather, they should be perceived as things manipulated in practices. Perspectivism causes singularity, making the object predefined and homogenous (Mol 1999:75–76). This is because it only multiplies the observers but leaves the object itself untouched. It becomes surrounded by viewers unable to do anything but watch, making the object very solid – intangibly strong (Mol 2002:12). Foregrounding practices implies that objects both come into being and disappear with the practices in which they are manipulated. Objects of manipulation differ from practice to practice making reality *multiple* (2002:4–5). As intertwined multiple versions, practices also appear in constant interference with each other (Mol 1999:82, 2002:142–9). This makes specific instances of cultural heritage more than one, continuously engaging in sideways interference with other versions. Mol defines knowledge as a matter of manipulation, not one of reference, and states that the driving question is not how to find the truth, but how objects are handled in practice. How objects are done in practice differs from site to site, so reality does not precede practices (2002:5–6). Mol also includes non-humans as doers in practices. She states that events are made to happen by several people and lots of things (2002:25). Versions of cultural heritages consist of both people and physical matter of various kinds. It is about *socio-material* practices (Damholt and Simonsen 2009:28).

Ontological politics stresses reality as *multiple* rather than plural, and as performed rather than observed or constructed (Mol 1999, 2002). During the last dec-

ades, perspectivism and constructivism, as opposed to earlier appreciations of knowledge as finite and monolithic, have influenced the human sciences. This is also the case in both archaeology and museology. It has provided many important new insights regarding multivocal *pluralistic* approaches to knowledge and the past (e.g. Guttormsen 2025). Questions related to knowledge, democracy and ethics have to a greater extent been put on the agenda. However, we recognize – in accordance with Mol's philosophical point of departure – that this pluralism has failed to recognise *multiplicity* as simultaneous and coexisting realities, which is something apparent in everyday life. Perspectivism does not define multiple realities; it only multiplies the eyes of the beholders looking at reality as a pre-defined centre point viewed from different angles. Constructivism is about always and inevitably competing constructions of reality, where the winner – the most compelling construct – takes it all. Outcompeted constructs end up on the scrap heap of history in a state of inefficiency (Mol 1999:76–77). Put another way: perspectivism can be understood as *synchronous* pluralism [as a panopticon] and constructivism as *diachronic* pluralism [as a museum]. As such, the basis for multiplicity cannot be observation. Neither can it be constructed realities whose purpose is to prevail. Multiplicity (archaeology included) is an ongoing multiple public.

Where and how, then, is this multiple reality to be located? It is to be found in *practices*. Performance becomes the fulcrum, the constitutive factor for the production of knowledge. Mol's (1999) point is that reality is *done*: it can only come into existence through practice, by engaging with matter. Since different practices can coexist, different realities – or ontologies, as she denotes them – also coexist. An important premise for this way of thinking of practice as engaging with physical matter is the recognition of a symmetrical relation between material and human mentality. The mental has no hegemony over matter when it comes to constituting realities or ontologies. Material is not passive and acted *upon* but possesses agency and is acted *together with*. The social extends to include the material (Latour 2005:71). As such, there is a significant difference between *material* (as matter) and *materiality*. When material and humans engage in practices, materialization happens, and the outcome is materiality. Hence, different performances involving a given material (such as archaeological objects) produce different materialities. Materialization is the process by which something is stabilized as form over

time (Damsholt and Simonsen 2009:27–28). Hence, materiality becomes the fact possible for us to *get closer to*. This is what has been described as the material turn in archaeology (Olsen 2010, Webmoor 2007, Solli 2011).

The absolutism described by Latour (2004) is present in both perspectivism and constructivism. Paradoxically, there is an unavoidable in-built pre-defined reality as a function of absolutism, exclusion and restriction, which sustains the heterogeneity characterizing pluralism. Admittedly, pluralism acknowledges, welcomes, and even cherishes heterogeneity in cultural heritage discourses, but only to a certain degree and in a certain manner. Pluralistic approaches, such as public archaeology, appreciate and are very concerned with the *production* of knowledge, and as such are somewhat (probably involuntarily) deceitful, making promises their very nature prevents them from keeping. By avoiding relating to *performance* as the grammar and foundation for the production of knowledge – as what *constitutes* knowledge – the inherent absolutism described above also becomes invisible.

How we perceive the constitution of knowledge – as observed/constructed or performed – is crucial to how we understand both the production of knowledge and the nature of its heterogeneity. Moreover, the obscured absoluteness in critique dwells precisely here, in its basis for constituting knowledge. Heterogeneity is constrained to plural interests and different cultural backgrounds (perspectives and constructs). As a result, critique and as such; public archaeology, leave us with different perspectives on predefined fixed points where archaeologists are helplessly trapped within their own cultural context – as the at any time prevailing and limiting construct. Consequently matter inevitably becomes forever inert.

Archaeology as performance

Mol mainly constrains her analysis to practices conducted by experts, demonstrating how different fields within medicine perform disease as differently practiced realities (Mol 2002). It is possible to conduct an equivalent analysis within archaeology by studying the performativity stories of different expert groups with respect to past material culture (Brattli and Steffensen 2014, Vennatrø 2005, 2012). Applying Mol's (2002) concept of the *body multiple* to an analysis of bodily practices in field archaeology, Kevin Pijpers (2017:88–89) questions *how multiple* a single body of a field archaeologist might concurrently be. However,

Mol's concept (2002:177) applies to multiple overlapping and interfering socio-material practices (including bodily practice), an approach tailor-made for exploring multiple bodies of knowledge-performative practice.

Nevertheless, useful as this may be in demonstrating constitutive aspects of knowledge, this alone will not bring us closer to the issue of “public”. The focus will still be on expertise and on making the public archaeological, in other words involvement as pre-exclusion. However, if reality – *materiality as fact* – comes into being through performance within expert contexts as Mol has demonstrated, the same should be the case within *expert-external* contexts. As such, an essential part of what really constitutes public outreach work, among an array of material agencies, is the integral “non-expert” practices of schoolchildren and teachers (Vennatrø and Høgseth 2021:8–9). By appreciating the constitution of knowledge this way, and as a basis for production of knowledge, archaeology by default also is and has always been public. Viewing the fact as performed and as materiality opens a new dimension for understanding the public's dealings with heritage, including archaeological material culture. The public does not need to be involved, because it was never on the outside in the first place. *Expert-external* contexts already exist all around us, although not always welcomed by archaeologists. A plethora of fringe archaeological, ideological and religious practices, financial and large-scale societal movements are from time to time out of step with established academic archaeology. Nevertheless these actors have always and inevitably been present and effective. They possess agency, having decisive impact on processes of materialization and thereby for both how facts come into being and for their very nature. In practice, alliances may equally well form along axes other than the expert–non-expert axis (Brattli and Brendalsmo 2016). The dichotomy assumed, for instance, by critical heritage discourse through the notion of authorized heritage discourse is not a mismatch made in hell, even though it sometimes seems to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The fact that there is sometimes a dichotomy between expert and non-expert cultural heritage discourses does not exclude other social constellations. Every performative context is unique and must be analysed as such. If heritage is understood as *materiality as fact*, current public archaeology appears to be an endeavour aiming to solve a never-existing problem at the same time as upholding the notion of it.

Our approach to heritage differs from the one promoted by Laurajane Smith. In her book *Uses of heritage*

(2006:11) she states “There is, really, no such thing as heritage. [...], it is not so much a ‘thing’ as a set of values and meanings”. She talks about a discursive construction of heritage, but by stating that it is about values and meanings, Smith promotes a kind of perspectivism which not only omits the agency of matter but also makes the object she wants to dissolve both untouchable and solid, and as such intangible and strong. The question is whether this creates a quandary rather than solving any problems. Admittedly, she acknowledges that social relations are material and have material consequences (Smith 2006:13). However, in her discursive construction non-humans seem to have a subordinate role. They are referred to as props (Smith 2006:13). Practice of heritage is defined as the management, protocols and procedures undertaken by heritage managers, archaeologists, architects, museum curators and other experts, and as social and cultural practices of making meaning and identity. These practices as well as the meaning of “things” (Smith’s own quotation marks) of heritage are, as such, constituted by discourse (Smith 2006:13). This must be understood as appreciating discourse as autonomous (Latour 1993). Matter does not enact but is acted upon. In Smith’s definition of heritage discourse, non-humans are present but are assigned a state of passivity. Heritage does not exist beyond values, interests, and perspectives. Similarly, Ashley and Frank (2016:501) claim that “heritage” (their quotation marks) is one social imaginary used by people to define identity in relation to ideas about the past. However, despite this, the notion of heritage as consisting of a lot of stuff stubbornly exists. It is all

around us in its fleshiness – because of its fleshiness. Rather, if heritage is considered as socio-material practices, *things* look different. Then there really *is* such a thing (without quotation marks) as heritage and matter that matters. This significantly changes how we should understand heritage, and in turn heritage discourse, and in turn again the appreciation of the nature and function of experts. The existence of expertise and position presupposes asymmetry along another axis as well: human–non-human. This is because only the sovereign subject – as hegemonic in relation to matter – can constitute heritage discourse as Smith describes it. Put another way: the sovereign subject becomes a prerequisite for the sovereign expert and thus for the very concept of *authorized heritage discourse*.

The multiple heterogeneity of heritage discourse

Our alternative diagnosis requires a different medicine from the one previously prescribed for analysing archaeological heritage discourses. It is not only necessary to acknowledge the *existence* of expert-external performance contexts, but also to recognise and analyse them as relevant arenas for constituting and producing facts. We cannot deny they are there, nor subvert them for our purposes, or categorically dismiss too many of them as irrelevant, distressing, disreputable or harmful. Offering a movement away from the idea of fixed positions and public involvement towards expert-external contexts processed/driven by performance, 40 seconds of the TV series *Himmelblå* might provide an



Figure 2. *Himmelblå* in the making. The actor multiple, the material multiple and the multiple of material worlds. Photo: Kari Renate Nilsen, 2009

example of cultural heritage as heterogeneous processes of materiality or as multiple enacted spaces of interaction (Brattli 2013).

Himmelblå as a multiple case in point

Our claim is that the prevailing analytical theoretical approach to public archaeology constitutes and reinforces the dichotomies it sets out to remedy. Public archaeology is seemingly entrenched in a strange public no-man's land of academic versus non-academic expertise and entitlement. Overlapping practices are ascribed value as being more or less genuine, authentic, listed, scientific, native or even ethnic, with treacherous ambiguous gaps in between. This can be seen as an effect of how archaeological practice is conceptualized and categorized as something other than multiple enacted instances of *performance*. To highlight the problem at hand, let us dive into the particular circumstances surrounding 40 seconds of episode 24 of *Himmelblå* (2010) where the lines are blurred.

What is going on when real life archaeologists enact archaeology as actors – giving a realistic performance of a fictitious archaeologist doing *on site* archaeology *on set* in a TV series, recorded as a theatrical performance in a real-life archaeological cultural landscape used as the backdrop for the soap opera being performed? What about their academic expertise, their performances as first-time actors, along with the viewers' notions of archaeology and acting? What about the field equipment, suddenly appearing as props, used for staged fieldwork, before being taken back to NTNU Vitenskapsmuseet and re-enlisted as genuine archaeological equipment? What about the cultural landscape of Helgeland, at once a fictitious backdrop in a soap opera and a genuine cultural landscape with listed archaeological locations? What about the pieces of material remains or the “fake” plans used on set, which afterwards become the genuine archaeological materiality of *Himmelblå*? Were the viewers, or the archaeologists themselves, or even the actors playing opposite the two hybrid archaeologists/actors, ever in doubt or confused? More fundamentally, were there at any point any identifiable lines between the dichotomies, perspectives, expertise and audiences, other than multiple practices being enacted *there and then*? This took place in the NRK-produced TV series *Himmelblå* in 2010, when archaeologists Hein Bjerck and Terje Brattli from the archaeological department of NTNU University Museum, Trondheim, featured as themselves in a staged archaeological excavation in the TV series. Leaving aside any possibilities of future fame as

up-and-coming TV actors, or even fear of losing academic prestige by portraying “pretend” archaeologists, let us take a closer look at what in this instance might more fruitfully be seen as multiple *enacted* realities rather than clashing perspectives and archaeological dichotomies.

a) The actor multiple: from acting expert to expert actor

Within cultural heritage discourse, as well as within the dissemination theory of public archaeology, there seems to be a set, if somewhat elusive, distinction between actors as academic experts and actors as professional stage performers and social agents of more or less gravitas. As showcased in *Himmelblå*, a real-life academic archaeologist might also act just as convincingly as an actor portraying an archaeologist. In terms of public archaeology, we might even claim that a disseminating archaeologist is just as reliant on being a good performer of archaeology as on performing archaeology as archaeology. Considering archaeology as practice, we might already view the “genuine” archaeologist not as an elevated expert, but rather as a skilled practitioner of enacting the *craft of archaeology*, side by side and in parallel with other practitioners (Olsen et al. 2012, Vennatrø 2005, 2012). As such, the performances of Bjerck and Brattli in *Himmelblå* hint at the fact that *any* established difference between a genuine expert and a convincing actor (or social agent) is perhaps more apparent than real. Two archaeologists *acting* as archaeologists in a TV series do not experience deep ontological doubts about who or what they are. What they are *doing* is simultaneously enacting themselves as archaeologists and actors, doing fieldwork, carrying out choreographed movements that look like fieldwork, acting as archaeological advisors to the production team, being background actors, getting their first taste of taking centre stage in a TV show and doing a bit of archaeological dissemination. They are not either here or there; they *are* archaeologists multiple. If this lack of a distinction between the performative effect of staged fictitious enactments and real-life socio-material enactments seems unfamiliar (Deleuze 1994:211–214), in spite of the archaeological application of assemblage theory (Jervis 2018), performative approaches to museum work (Johnsen 2022) and re-enactment approaches to archaeology (Piccini 2015, 2016:46–47), look no further than to professional stage actors, who are all too familiar with the performative effects of socio-material enactments both on stage and in real life (Vennatrø et al. 2023: 9787–9788).

b) The material multiple: of props and artefacts.

All the archaeological equipment featured in the TV episode was authentic digging equipment, provided by and later returned to NTNU Vitenskapsmuseet's equipment depot. Just as seamlessly as two real life archaeologists can feature as actors portraying archaeologists at work, an array of archaeological equipment may transition from being *bona fide* archaeological tools to becoming an exclusive selection of props for a TV series, before being reenlisted at NTNU Vitenskapsmuseet as equally authentic digging equipment. What is more, the archaeological material samples and artefacts collected in the TV series are in principle indistinguishable from "real" archaeological samples and artefacts. As such, they are in fact themselves the authentic artefacts of the materiality of the TV series *Himmelblå* in 2009, when the series was recorded. Just like the expert/actor, what is the performative difference between an authentic artefact and a functional discursive prop? And does multiple performative interference between an artefact being a prop as well as the "real thing" in any way subtract from this object, or rather the opposite? On reflection, we might even ask whether the props featured on the set of *Himmelblå* have more in common with the carefully arranged archaeological objects on show in a museum exhibition than assumed at first glance. In an *a priori* performative approach, the difference between authentic artefacts and enacted props dissolves. This, however, does not diminish the complex interferences between them as multiple (Mol 1999:82). An apparent paradox between the two might instead be a property of the theoretical perspectives of public archaeology.

c) Multiple material worlds: Here, there and now this.

A third layer to a multiple performative material context relevant to our analysis is the apparent different existences of the landscape of Ylvingen (the real-life location of *Himmelblå*), as either a scenic background to a film set, or a genuine archaeological cultural landscape with a plethora of listed prehistoric sites and monuments, or both. Consisting of the same topography, with the same highly heterogeneous assemblages of things, habitats and vistas, they are conflicting, overlapping, similar but different cultural landscapes, everyday taskscapes, theatrical backdrops or curated stages. If one insists on defining such contexts as either genuine landscapes or staged backdrops, with mutually exclusive intrinsic qualities, such contexts become paradoxical.

Watching *Himmelblå* with two archaeologists acting as archaeologists, acting on the premise that they are working at an interesting archaeological site within a significant archaeological cultural landscape, at the same time as watching the background as a listed cultural landscape as well as a striking backdrop in a TV drama, creates no ontological inner conflict at all. Without any difficulty, you might experience all of the above. The curated visual images of the film set and the notion of this being an archaeologically significant landscape might even mutually enhance one another (in the same way a well-curated museum exhibition might enhance the experience of authentic artefacts on display). *Himmelblå* being a TV drama makes the *a priori* performative context conspicuous. Not least, watching two archaeologists enact archaeologists in a TV drama draws attention to the performative quality of everything you see: the human actors, the enactment of material agents and the large silent role of an ever-present physical landscape. Knowing the difference between the academic endeavour of archaeology and TV entertainment, it is time to ask: what is *a priori* wrong with acknowledging the performative nature of both of them?

Symmetry as sideways thinking in multiple versions - beyond perspectives and expertise

Bjerck and Brattli are both experts (archaeologists) and actors (acting as archaeologists). The measuring grid, the material samples and the archaeological plans are both authentic archaeological materiality as well as curated props (much like exhibited museum artefacts). A coastal landscape is both a cultural landscape containing listed archaeological sites and a scenic backdrop in a TV series. Whereas thinking in terms of dichotomies between perspectivism and constructs of an expert-focused analysis (with a constant need for *democratisation* as a corrective measure) *generates* and *solidifies* an apparently paradoxical volume of knowledge (viewing platforms and windows of vistas included). Meanwhile, a performative approach, flattening the ontology into multiple variants of practice, might remove these paradoxes and allow for constantly modifying interaction and interference between multiple overlapping versions of socio-material context. Thinking in terms of multiple ontology might call for sideways thinking into active interference and affective assemblages. This might be an important approach to theoretical analysis within public archaeology.

It is time to think things sideways, beyond public archaeology as expert/archaeologist versus non-expert/audience, no matter how actively they are involved. Or for that matter: beyond perspectives of public archaeology in the media versus public archaeology in fieldwork settings. To do so, we need to discard public archaeology as an *a priori* archaeological-centric approach. To be precise: archaeology will always be at the front and centre of what the practice of *archaeology* is all about, whereas multiple versions of what so far has been denoted *public archaeology* should never be seen as centred to archaeology. Here the term *public archaeology* itself represents an asymmetric concept of perspectives, which inserts strange constructivisms and paradoxical asymmetric gaps into the symmetric contexts it sets out to create. Discarding perspectivism in favour of an approach involving multiple enacted versions of archaeology, always intertwined with, inside and in interference with differently enacted practices, it is time to consider archaeology as being enacted in interfering versions of crossover practices. Thus, what might be publicly *shared* aspects of archaeology across a larger field of multiple practices might not even be the archaeological epistemology we think of as the one and only archaeological currency of exchange. One example is the multiple enacted versions of the 2016 archaeological discovery of *Klemenskirken* in Trondheim, Norway, to a large degree appearing as archaeology, but with archaeology proper as only one version of what was being constituted as the national monument of Klemenskirken (Brattli 2022:37, 48). Taking our cue from Annemari Mol's *style of politics* (1999:85–86), sideways-thinking archaeology in interference with other more or less similar multiple practices makes *style of practice* an important concept for analysing broadly similar, constantly overlapping and interfering multiple versions of practice. Far from archaeology being corrupted by other practices, this means being able to see different practical aspects of archaeology as shared, duplicated or differently enacted by several practices. As such, what archaeology as public outreach really has in common with education might not be an epistemological interest in archaeological research, but rather the highly developed rhizomatic learning practices of archaeology (Vennatrø and Steiro 2024). Another example of interference is the reverse-engineering practices of archaeology, which

are indistinguishable from the practices of cold war aircraft engineers, computer scientists, as well as military and industrial espionage (Moshenska 2016:21). Practical interference might also be found between the differently enacted versions of on-site archaeology and crime-scene forensic investigations (Vennatrø 2005, 2012, Johnsbråten and Ellingsen 2024), or in interdisciplinary versions combining both, such as forensic archaeology (Hunter et al. 2002, Moran and Gold 2019) or modern conflict archaeology (Theune 2015). Another multiply generated version of archaeology comes to the forefront in *Himmelblå*. Refusing to be reduced to a covert enlistment of a soap opera in archaeological dissemination with wheels within wheels dichotomies, *Himmelblå* represents multiple versions of archaeology as acting, with archaeologists acting as actors while acting as archaeologists. In other words: *Himmelblå* is the sideways interference of capable archaeological practitioners enacting an archaeological excavation, who at that moment have just as much in common with their co-actors as with their fellow archaeologists.

In conclusion

A main motivation for a shift in focus from a multi-perspective to a multiple approach, or in Latour's (2004) words, from *matters of facts* to *matters of concern*, is an analytical shift away from asymmetric construction of observational points-of-view.

Talking about reality as multiple depends on another set of metaphors. Not those of perspective and construction, but those of intervention and performance. These suggest a reality that is done and enacted rather than observed. (Mol 1999:77)

In terms of archaeological *styles of practice* within those multiple realities, this means getting rid of the fractures between any expert's or audience's point of view, to the extent of rendering the term *public archaeology* a misleading construct. Appreciating archaeology through multiple versions of interfering practices, including Bjerck and Brattli as acting archaeologists and archaeologist actors, calls for sideways thinking, with no gaps between multiple versions of practice, which are in constant interference and overlapping.

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