Urban communities in early modern Europe (1400-1700): A Research Review

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1. Introduction

This brief literature review, an AHRC Connected Communities scoping study carried out during 2011, set outs to identify current approaches to ideas and practices of 'community' in European urban history between 1400 and 1700, and suggest where there is potential for new lines of enquiry. It selectively assessed the recent Anglophone literature – from roughly 2000 – with a focus on work that pushes the field forward methodologically. This desk-based research was combined with interviews with historians who work on community from various positions of expertise. This made the review a collaborative process, and one that points ahead of the published scholarship. The review's principal findings were to recommend further research on: the relationship between space, memory and everyday movement in the early modern city; how communities were shaped by sound and smell as much as by visual stimuli; the nature of boundaries and negotiation between majorities and faith and immigrant minorities; how digitisation and GIS holds real potential for accessing and modelling the urban/spatial dimensions of source material.

All the review material – the review itself, the eight interviews and the bibliography – are published online through the main project website (www.earlymoderncommunities.com) and a wiki site (http://communities-bib.wikispaces.com/Communities+Bibliography). The purpose of this PDF booklet is to bring everything together in a single, easily accessible document that can be downloaded and printed. This material – in particular the interviews, in which we talked to a number of scholars of early modern Europe, as well to an expert on digitisation – has already become a valuable research and teaching tool, accessed an average of eight times a day, with 2,323 hits between April and November 2011.

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2. Urban Communities in Early Modern Europe (1400-1700): A Research Review

Overview

Recent work on early modern Europe has demystified the idea of "community", while acknowledging that it continues to be an indispensable, if dangerous, term (Burke, 2004). In the first place, community is no longer necessarily defined as an experience of organic unity, a trope that has its analytical roots in late 19th-century sociology and in particular Ferdinand Tönnies' famous opposition between community (gemeinschaft) and society (gesellschaft). It now tends to be understood as a complex set of social processes in which peace-making, conflict, rivalry, unifying rituals and the negotiation of power, resources and boundaries are all integral – so long as the actors involved are in some sense engaged in the same argument (Shepard and Withington, 2000; Halverson and Spierling, 2008; Cohen and Cohen, 2010). In this context, the distinction between "thick" trust (kin, faction, patronage) and "thin" trust (weak loyalties or connections based on values, beliefs, institutions and spaces shared by 'strangers') has been influential, a model injected into the discourse – at least for Italianists – through the debate around political scientist Robert Putnam's theories of social capital and civil society (Putnam, 1994; Muir, 1999, 2002, 2011; Eckstein and Terpstra, 2009). In practice, ties of thick and thin trust overlapped at many points, but thin trust is seen as essential for a wider sense of social connectivity and empowerment, and it is here that the emphasis of recent work on urban community lies.

Within this framework, identity, space and agency have become increasingly significant, and interconnected, terms. Recent scholarship views identity as a constructed category, determined yet fluid. Urban actors often identified with multiple communities – of occupation, neighbourhood, ethnicity, confession, and more widely civic. Meanwhile, the 'spatial turn' in the humanities has been predicated on the idea that space, rather than simply being occupied, is produced in relationship to the built environment (Lefebvere, 1991; Certeau, 1984; Crum and Paoletti, 2006). One of the effects of these two trends is to give as much weight to the agency of human actors as to overdetermining structures, or rather to see the two as interlocked and mutually determining (Williamson, 2010; Kümin, 2009). The attention to space has also begun to intersect productively with digital mapping technology, offering new forms of visualisation of historical process and social interactions in the urban sphere (Gregory, 2007, 2011).

Space, place and the senses

The social analysis of government buildings and churches is a well-established way of thinking about authority, hierarchy and community at both the civic and neighbourhood levels (Najemy, 2006; Burke, 2006; Nevola 2010). More recently, however, attention has turned to other loci, above all taverns. These socially heterogeneous, liminal, and usually contested places could play both an integrative but also disruptive role for any given community – and in fact the tavern has been tied to, and the fresh historiography has been inspired by, debates around space and artisan agency (Kümin, 2007; Brown, 2009; Hailwood, 2010). There remains a case for a more thorough synthesis of cultural-literary and social historical approaches here, and a fuller exploration of the shifting gendered/class/political discourses that turned around taverns during the Reformations. At the same time there is more work to be done in a similar vein, on other public spaces, for example, bath houses, marketplaces, streetcorners and indeed squares as junctions of community.

Two other recent trends are important here. The first is the gradual expansion of historians' apprehension of urban life beyond the visual to embrace the other senses, which feeds into the way experiences of belonging, boundedness and exclusion were constructed. Smell has started to be strongly identified as one way in both places and groups – such as the "poor" – were identified and sometimes stigmatised (Jenner, 2011; Wheeler, 2007). Sound is also beginning to be more rigorously integrated into the analysis of the sensory cues that both connected and differentiated urban dwellers. Bells, for example, created community-shaping temporal regimes, both at parish and city levels, but could also be appropriated to disrupt everyday sonic rhythms and thus subvert normative structures of community (Atkinson, 2011). The other promising approach to community in public space, again privileging agency, focuses on motion. Building on the insights of a rich body of work on processions and the way they ritually and spatially defined sacred and/or political communities (Howe, 2007; Muir, 2005; Trexler, 1980), historians have productively begun to explore how everyday urban movements and a person's associations with the places he or she passed through were productive of both self and community and at the same time kept the definition of spaces fluid and contingent (Milner, 2006; Atkinson 2011).

These two strands interact productively through the emerging medium of GIS visualisation of historic urban environments. Thus, for example, a new project 'Sex and the Sacred: Negotiating Boundaries in Renaissance Florence', aims to map zones of prostitution in relation to convents and palaces, and to become an online resource upon which more data can be layered (Nicholas Terpstra, University of Toronto). With a similar agenda, Locating London's Past was launched in November 2011 (**http://www.locatinglondon.org**). Such integration of social and spatial data offer great potential for future directions in research.

Boundaries and exchange: faith and minority communities

The grand narrative of early modern European history tends to characterise community as an idea that increasingly intersected with purifying, essentialising imperatives, giving rise to harder distinctions and less penetrable boundaries. For example: distinctions between the confessions in the Reformations; between Christians and minority faith groups; between social strata. While this story remains more or less intact, the thrust of recent scholarship has been in the opposite direction. The emphasis has been on how boundaries, and identities, were permeable, how divergent communities remained connected and in negotiation.

The intensive scholarship on Jewish communities, expelled from Spain and Portugal in the late 15th century and ghettoised in some places in the 16th, has been particularly attuned to issues of identity, segregation and interaction. The "lachrymose" idea of Jewish oppression (Bell, 2011) has been leavened by a consideration of the Italian ghetto as a semi-autonomous community under the aegis of the state, which in effect made Jews a part of the greater body politic (Siegmund, 2006; cf. Stow, 2005). Ghettos appear in recent work as "incubators of social-cultural liaisons" with Catholic majorities (Ruderman, 2008) – and those correspondences have been seen in terms of the professionalisation of the rabbinate, marriage customs, educational standardisation, moral policing, social stratification, and bureaucratic structures (Ruderman, 2008, 2010; Bell, 2001, 2008, 2011). The exploration of connectivities, identity and the negotiation of boundaries finds an important arena in towns that fostered the co-existence of multiple religious communities, especially Amsterdam and Livorno (Ceserani, 2004; Sutcliffe, 2004, 2008; Muir, 2011). Moreover, this desire, in regard to Jewish communities, to unpack the nature of exclusion, exchange, and conflict, and the spaces through which that took place, mirrors recent work on the cohabitation of Christian confessional communities in urban spheres (Luria, 2005; Kaplan, 2007; Halverson and Spierling, 2008). One common thread here is a close attention to identity, the idea that early modern actors could experience a sense of belonging to more than one community (confessional, civic). The community-identity question becomes particularly charged around the issue of conversion. The "blurring of religious boundaries" remains at the forefront of research on early modern Jewry, due to the Conversos and other types of converts (Ruderman, 2009; Jewish History, 24, 2010 and 25, 2011). However, the question of how communities accommodated and were changed by internal religious differences, and in turn how individuals leapt between perceived communities, is a productive field with a wider purview. Recent scholarship, for example, has begun to address the neglected topic of female conversion between Christianity and Islam, during the height of Christian conversions in the 16th and 17th centuries (Dursteler, 2011). The other common thread, highly relevant to Jews, is the consideration of mobility – of migrancy, commerce, assimilation and marginalisation in, for example, expanding cities such as London, but also in the relatively neglected towns of central and eastern Europe (Selwood, 2010; Rosenthal, 2010; Dursteler, 2006; Keene; 2009; Miller, 2008).

Boundaries and exchange: Gender and class

A similar set of issues – the nature of space, boundedness, exclusion and exchange – are germane to the analysis of power relations and subordinate groups. Recovering the voices of such groups, assessing the nature of their marginalisation but also of their agency and self-reliance, has been a major trend in recent scholarship.

At the formally political, and more widely public, level, ideals of community were structured in a gendered fashion. Against this historiographically well-established paradigm, the question of women, agency and community has been of major interest (Broomhall, 2008, Cohen, 2007). Convents of nuns represent the clearest example of female 'community', deeply inserted within neighbourhood arenas, and connected through kinship and patronage to broader civic networks. Recent scholarship, notably for Italy, shows that nuns were anxiously contained yet convents could also be institutions of considerable economic and social capital, providing spaces for wider female association through education, work skills, guardianship of girls, and, as is now being revealed, trade in medicine (Strocchia, 2003, 2009, 2011). With the reforms of Trent and stricter enclosure, convents have been seen as a microcosm of the purging and purifying impulses that gripped Europe at large. But, again, ideals of impermeable boundaries were in dialectic with practice; there remained "cracks in the wall" (Strocchia and Terpstra, 2011). While this remains work in progress, there is perhaps more to be discovered outside the convent walls. If the public sphere was masculine, recent work suggest that public space and everyday social transactions as a more nuanced gendered arena (Flather, 2007; Cohen, 2009; Gowing, 2000). We still know far too little about consororities, for example, a formalised vision of lay female community (Terpstra, 2000; Strocchia, 2002). As for the idea of an everyday sense of 'community', of thin trust, experienced by lay women, especially among non-elites, this is more problematic. Microhistorical approaches have uncovered female association, and a street presence for women, particularly at the neighbourhood level, but little in the way of community, which implies some form of boundedness (Cohen and Cohen, 2011; Gowing, 2008; Capp, 2004). Yet the distinction between network and community should not drawn too sharply, since – as consororities suggest – overlapping networks (of communication, occupation, neighbourhood, and of devotion or charity) could bleed into, or were enacted as, community.

This idea of enactment is an important one for the study of community in general. While the tracing of networks delivers insights into mechanisms and webs of connection (MacLean, 2007), it risks privileging structure over agency. Since everyone has multiple networks, "the question is which one is important – and that tends to contextual and changing" (Muir, 2011). Indeed, community, or a thin trust sense of identification, may in some cases only be enacted, and revealed, during a crisis – from an external threat, political emergency, or sudden disaster (Muir, 2002, 2011; Cohen, 2009; Bell, 2011; Atkinson, 2011). This remains a fruitful line of investigation. However, equally important are everyday or cyclical strategies of enacting or representing community, particularly for non-citizens or 'plebeians'. The ubiquitous early modern phenomenon of Carnival, where artisans chose neighbourhood or occupational kings, was one such marking out of

community (Burke, 2009). Recent work has linked such informal solidarities to everyday spaces, places and fraternal organisations, such as confraternities and guilds, to examine one way in which marginalised groups entered into a dialogue with elites and civic authorities (Rosenthal, 2006; Humphrey, 2001). There is more scope to get inside this "reverse discourse" from the margins (Duncan, 2007) – much of it accessible through the understudied medium of petition – by which those who were on the wrong side of increasingly robust social and rhetorical divides represented community as a means of collective bargaining and of resisting their exclusion from the larger civic community.

Communities of discourse

The study of circuits of information, stories and news, both oral and, from the late 15th century, printed – and, with cheap print, increasingly going beyond, or below, humanist or clerical circles – is an expanding field.

One promising strand of scholarship focuses on gossip, or "community talk" (Horodowich, 2005). Preliminary explorations emphasise how the exchange of information may have been a sign of inclusion in a defined group but also blurred boundaries between public and domestic space and spoke to a culture of neighbourhood surveillance (Cowan, 2009). While universally ascribed to women in the negative, gossip was one constituent in the glue that sustained informal female networks and a limited sense of community. Indeed, it was a force in the regulation of normative community behaviour, both when gossip was used by women against each other (eg. witchcraft accusations), or to damage the reputation of men (Capp, 2004; Horodowich, 2005)

The other significant recent strand of research in the arena of urban communication focuses on street singers, storytellers, and news pamphleteers. What is emerging is the enormous diffusion of cheap print from the early 16th century, and the sale and performance of these texts in public spaces, suggesting that it is now problematic to assume that certain social groups would not have read a given text, or heard it performed (Salzberg, 2010, 2011). An amplification of a pre-Gutenberg street poetry traditions (Kent, 2000), cheap print included chivalric romances, edicts, social commentary and criticism, and it addressed, and shaped, both specific constituencies or publics – in particular artisans, with a literature on poverty – and wider audiences, creating shared knowledge linked to associations around particular places, all of which can be seen to feed a 'thin trust' sense of community (Atkinson, 2011). Moreover, the consideration of oral culture and the printed word, political gossip and the dissemination of print on public affairs is leading to a more robust mapping of a pre-Habermasian 'public sphere' a culture of conversation that widens the community of political discourse (De Vivo, 2007; Salzberg and Rospocher, 2012; Pettegree, 2007).

Again, GIS technology offers new tools for visualising the 'community of discourse' by mapping news information circulation and what specific publics were reading, hearing and talking about. (e.g. 'Republic of Letters' mapping project run by Paula Findlen at

Stanford https://republicofletters.stanford.edu/). There is also scope, as the volume of digitised printed sources mushrooms, to exploit 'text mining'. One path-finding example effectively shows what part of the discourse in a community of discourse looks like by visualising the relationship between places and themes (e.g., war) in English news pamphlets from 1653-4, totalling 800,000 words (Dunning, Gregory, Hardie, 2007; Gregory, 2011).

Recommendations for future research

Emerging from the review and from the interviews that have formed part of the review process, we have identified a series of strands that are emerging as key areas for future research:

- The sonic dimensions of urban experience, better integrating sound (bells, drums, etc) into the semiotics of how communities were identified, regulated, enacted, or subverted.
- Combined social and cultural history approaches to unpack how actors occupied and navigated public places such as streets, streetcorners, taverns, squares, and thus produced both space, time and everyday experiences of community in a relationship with the built environment.
- Further research on the (self)-identification of faith or foreign minority groups, and the nature of the boundaries and boundary crossings between them and others.
- A more systematic exploration into the ways community was spatially and representationally defined and enacted by groups of non-citizens as a strategy for claiming agency and bargaining with authorities.
- The ways the street performance of texts and dissemination of print created shared social-cultural spaces which fed local and/or civic 'conversations'.
- The way community was conceptualised in the visual arts, literature and theatre, and political treatises. While the ideology of community is often implicit to the analysis of such sources, it has rarely been tackled directly or systematically.
- Cutting across a number of these strands is the methodological innovation and potential offered by the application to the above recommendations for projects using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and other forms of data visualisation which can locate data in its spatial relation to the urban environment.

3. Interviews

a. Niall Atkinson: 'They rang the bells at the wrong time'

Niall Atkinson (Univ. of Chicago, http://tinyurl.com/bv9mqdx*) is an art historian with a deep interest in the sensory world of the Renaissance city. Here he discusses the importance of bells to community formation, civic concord and rebellion, as well as the relationship between public space, memory and movement. (24-3-2011)*

David Rosenthal: In one of your recent papers you ask, what exactly was the relationship between the construction of community and the fabrication of the self through the circulation of visible signs at the threshold of the Renaissance? You elaborate this in terms of Florentine experience, perhaps most originally in terms of sound rather than visual signs. You've done much of that, as far as I have read, in relation to the Ciompi revolution of 1378. But your wider agenda is clearly not to show the exceptional moment, the crisis, but to see what that tells us about the everyday semiotics of urban communities. Nor is it to show that Florence was exceptional but in some ways typical. Can you elaborate on this work, and the thinking that has informed it?

Niall Atkinson: The kind of dialogue I was trying to establish with Renaissance historiography was to upend it a little. For me as an art historian it's long been about design and production, and I wanted to look at experience. In terms of community versus the individual, my interest there was bringing together the Renaissance tradition of the individual with a lot of the new scholarship on corporatism, communities, and social networks, to see how the two were negotiated at the same time.

   The whole project got started when Lawrin Armstrong pointed me to Alessandro Stella's book [*La Révolte des Ciompi*, Paris 1993] where he mentions that this revolution of 1378, brought about primarily by wool workers in Florence, was initiated by the sounding of bells, and what the workers were doing was sounding the call to insurrection by first ringing a series of bells in various peripheral neighbourhoods in order to coordinate themselves spatially for the insurrection. That got me thinking immediately of the relationship between sound and space. It became clear that they had been communicating already with bells, and that they understood the long tradition, and power of bells to choreograph bodies and bind people together. So they were appropriating an urban semiotic system that was already in place and upended it in a certain way.

They rang the bells at the wrong time, disrupting sonically the rhythm of the day, and I later went back to figure out what exactly was that daily soundscape, the seasonal and liturgical soundscape into which they inserted themselves. I was interested in the fact that here was a group of people who had no official identity, because they weren't allowed to mark themselves visually or sonically in terms of relationships to processions and other forms of ritual life crucial to early modern urban communities. Here was a way, through sound, of getting at the very lowest rungs of society, to people who don't leave textual traces the way others do. They were able to claim a voice for themselves, but it was a voice that already had the authority to speak for communities. When bells rang in Christian communities, they gathered people together, they defined neighbourhoods spatially, they were a constant reinforcement of communal bonds. That was already existent. They took the one voice that could possibly speak for them, and that was the bell. Bell ringing was a way of interpreting the very quickly changing political fortunes of various groups throughout that period of 1378 under that revolutionary regime. That, in turn, led me to look at the way people were constantly interpreting their aural environment. I found what Florentines were doing, down to the lowliest disenfranchised worker, were performing what we as art historians should be doing all the time, that is, interpreting the symbolic dimensions of their visual and aural environment in very sophisticated ways and relating them directly to historical contingencies, political movements, social structures, collective memory, and the built environment. Florentines who were living through what we now call the Renaissance, were listening to and acting upon the very monuments that we are constantly looking at, to reconfigure or recontextualise them, and they were doing that on a daily basis – as a matter of life and death, in a way. They were constantly listening and looking.

With visual signs especially there's a negotiation between personal and communal identity formation. Bells tend to be universalising and global. Visually, for example, the church and state are separate in a city like Florence, and I think a lot of the early architectural legislation of the guild and republican regimes was about disciplining enemies, like reducing the height of private defensive towers, destroying palaces, or legislating new public streets. That was a very antagonist kind of urbanism and strategic manoeuvring that was very powerful. However, what I find is the genius of these regimes is that they eventually developed a sonic regime that did exactly the opposite. So on one hand they're fracturing communal spatial relations, but on the other hand they integrated an acoustic daily rhythm of civic sounds – from the bell towers of the Bargello and the Palazzo Vecchio – in an already sacred landscape of sound: the Cathedral, the Badia [Benedictine Monastery], the various parish and mendicant churches. Because of the way the legislation is written, the bells that sounded to organise space politically and define a community globally was integrated into the moments of silence between the calls to prayer, to mass, and the canonical hours. They understood that antagonising a certain class in urban space was very different from upsetting the aural rhythms with which an entire city marked their lives. This was precisely what the French revolutionary regime misunderstood when they tried to silence the bells of the countryside in an effort to build a republic. Florentines, on the other hand, understood that the republic had to balance political conflict with a more harmonic acoustic dialogue. For example, the statutes talk about the mass at dawn, which should be answered by six rings of the great bell of the people, called the Leone.

There's a transition from the sacred to the secular jurisdiction of the day but it's a choreography that shows a very delicate dance between church and state. They're announcing and answering each other in complex ways, so the republican regime was not disrupting a rhythm of sounds that reminded listeners where they belonged , accompanied them to where they ought to be going, what they should be doing and showing them how to get there. They were allowing that sound to continue and enter into a dialogue with acoustically sanctified spatial jurisdictions, which also provides different bonds through which people understood themselves. You became a Florentine with different Christian and communal bonds, with allegiances to different authorities that linked you across neighbourhoods and so on. That was what was so successful, creating a balance between an antagonistic policy and one that was very inclusive. Architectural historians in particular have maybe missed this double game that they were playing by not listening to architecture.

DR: What you're talking about here is the creation of community at a civic level through a network of sounds coming from civic buildings. So in the case of the Ciompi, they were making disruptive sounds that would seem in the first instance anti-community, in order ultimately to arrive at a new sense of civic community into which they would be integrated.

NA: It was a way of re-orientating what I was thinking of as an elaborately constructed monologue from centre to periphery, reorienting it as a dialogue from periphery back to centre. And they were disrupting the kinds of bonds that monologue was supposed to create and maintain. At the same time they were constructing cross-bilateral communities as a new alternative, which was why it was so terrifying to some but so liberating to others. But it was already a language that had a legitimacy and that is the point. Stephen Milner argues with the Ringhiera ['Citing the *Ringhiera*: The Politics of Place and Public Address in Trecento Florence', *Italian Studies*, 55, 2000, 53-82] that whoever gains hold of the place from which the government performs its aural authority, is able to legitimise their speech, imbuing it with a certain authority, and I think the bells also allowed a disenfranchised people to claim a voice that demanded to be attended to. Ultimately it had to be backed up with the threat of numbers and violence, but it was important to symbolically disrupt and reorient already existing semiotic systems.

DR: It was parish bells they began by ringing. One wonders to what extent this was an instantaneous language that people from all parts of the city would understand. If I'm at Sant' Ambrogio, for example, I hear the bell on other side of town at Santa Lucia sul Prato. I know it's quite far away, perhaps I recognise the tone. Were Florentines that sensitive to subtle gradations of tone and distance?

NA: It seems from the evidence they were and that they had to be. One source from 1378 is in the centre of the city and he names each bell as it starts ringing. So spatially he knows exactly what is going on. He doesn't get them all right, but he's pretty damn close. He understands this encroaching siege precisely in all of its horrifying spatial character. So Florentines, like any pre-modern urban community, were very sophisticated that way.

Fabrizio Nevola: It's also about ritual. There's a standardised pattern, and the breaking or rearranging of that pattern is what gives it its particular significance. That's how ritual, when you're talking about processions, also operates. To go back to our conversation with Ed Muir, that day in 1378 for you is the same as that day in Buia for Muir, the thing that renders the everyday visible. They discover their voice on that day.

NA: Right, and at the same time, they were understanding themselves as a community in the way the political rhetoric of Florence had taught them to, except they also understood that such rhetoric, which was in theory an idea of global community, was in fact excluding them. So they were really appropriating the entire system through which they were exploited and turned it back upon the government itself. At all levels they understood how the different systems of representation – of political rhetoric, of flags, of coats of arms, and of bells – worked symbolically to exclude them, and they were able to upend this.

DR: It seems to me what you're doing is developing the kind of anthropology that comes out of Richard Trexler's work. And at the heart of your work seems a concern with issues of power and agency. Though Trexler did not focus on sound very much.

NA: Trexler does say Florentines understood bells in an intricate way. He talks about the subtle play of diplomacy in which the ringing of bells was implicated, so that both Florentines and foreign diplomats had to listen to the subtle differences in tone and nuance in order to understand Florentine reactions to momentous events abroad. [R. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, Cornell UP, 1980, 288-9]. He does explicitly say, though, that space is not part of this issue at all. He says the sacred and meaningful are invested in buildings and objects, not in space. He's absolutely and profoundly wrong about that, but it's through him that I got to this place. What he didn't do was follow through on bells to show that bells were creating space in multiple and temporal ways, so that they bound time and space together in a way, and this is very important methodologically. I recently completed a short article about Florentine sonic armatures and David Howes, who has written extensively about sensory experience, remarked upon reading it that what he was interested in is in how time and space were not understood in the Kantian sense of pre-existing general categories, but they were produced. Sound actually produced time, because it opened up spaces of time through which people understand temporal motion. It's not as if things happened within time. Bells also opened up space that so that it was generated through practice and was not simply a container to be filled – it was produced by the very acts of daily ritual. That I think is extremely important.

In terms of ritual, what I'm interested in is the relationship between the individual and community – where you can stake the claim of the individual within the community, so you have both constructed at the same time and through the same forms, through the dialectic relationship that binds them. Some of the merchants that I'm interested in, in terms of their active engagement in writing about their city, establish their self-understanding in relationship to the communities in which they think they belong or ought to belong. There's a freely available system of signs that you can use to mark

territories and so on, but they won't always work the way you want them to because you're always negotiating with everyone else about what they mean. So you're constantly negotiating with others to define yourself as an individual within and against the groups to which you belong and those that you don't. It's the space through which these encounters happen where identity – communal, familial, political, social, individual – is stored. And movement through spaces, I've come to believe at this moment, is the necessary condition for producing identities in urban communities in the past. You have to be moving, you have to be looking and listening, moving being a kind of critical practice performed on your urban environment, which includes bodies, institutions, buildings and spaces, so you're constantly relocating your identity externally and marking it spatially, whether you do that alone or not. It's a little inchoate right now, but something that I think promises to produce new forms of knowledge about the urban past.

With elaborate ritual, you're with the community with which you're negotiating, under certain customary rules, inverted or not, but you also establish community by yourself as you're walking, because of the histories and narratives you are re-evoking, that you are overlaying on to very symbolic spaces that mean everything to you, your family, your past, other people's pasts. When you pass different spaces you know certain things about them, so you are constantly engaged in the spaces which define that community, even when you are alone. So identity doesn't belong to a community, or to an individual, it is produced by the act of walking and moving, linking oneself to the narratives of a collective memory stored in physical space – which is what processions do in a more formal manner. In a way it's a counter-model to the way we learn about the perspectival model that so dominates discussions of the Italian Renaissance and its artistic production, where the individual steps back, stops, fixes vision in order to know, and such knowledge is assumed to come from the primacy of sight, from the privileged position of a subject apprehending an object. In fact, what people are actually doing, I think, is creating narratives through movement, understanding themselves as a continuous series of stories that are told by them walking and others walking against them or with them. I've always carried with me this idea from Maurice Halbwachs about collective memory, an anti-Freudian idea of how you remember who you are: it's not about internally repressing the past or about something inside of you; memory exists outside you in your interaction with other people, which embeds it in the spaces you are interacting with as well [M. Halbwachs, 'The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land', in *On Collective Memory*, ed. L.A. Coser, Chicago UP, 1992]. So that in a very small way every time you move through a premodern city you are on some kind of pilgrimage, it's not about getting anywhere, but the act of moving is crucial, encountering familiar narratives at every street corner in a manner similar to the way that familiar divinities inhabited the spaces of ancient Rome. What you're doing is pinning narratives, sounds and meanings to certain locales, and I think you have to constantly reattach them or reengage with them. The sound element of my work has made me realise how important it is to imagine the productiveness of the fact that sounds dies very quickly, The fixity that architecture tends to have, being of stone, makes us forget that at times. The grafting of meaning onto stones is constantly petering out, and pre-modern communities have to constantly re-engage with them.

DR: You've talked a lot about bells. I'm wondering what we're not hearing properly yet. What else do you think we need to listen to in early modern towns – or smell, or touch – to understand more about the relationship between self and community?

NA: Most of the premodern studies are from the 18th and 19th centuries. But there's some work, such as that of Liz Horodowich, who is working on gossip. Gossip and the movement and the vocalisation of information, the way in which news travels, what kinds of circuits its goes through, the way the physical environment facilitates or hinders that. I'm thinking of anything that's not music – since musicologists are working a great deal on aural landscapes. Cantastorie are a perfect example of where that comes together. In terms of community, in a fractious community like the Renaissance city, cantastorie could be found in the squares of many cities telling similar stories but modulating them to their audiences, as preachers do. They represent moments where a variety of social classes were bound to urban narratives and intellectual culture as an audience which hears stories from Dante and Boccaccio, modulated perhaps, corrupted we might say, but concretely meaningful to the people that heard them, wrote them down and retold them. There's that funny story in Sacchetti, where Dante listens to the blacksmith singing his own Commedia, and he's hacking the poem to pieces in the ears of Dante. This fascinates me. Dante is walking through the city, then he hears this artisan messing up his poem because he had heard it from a cantastoria in the piazza. So Dante's texts, in a very real way, belonged to the entire community, despite what Sacchetti or Dante might have thought about that. Even Petrarch in that famous letter about walking with his friend around the ruins of Rome declares that the textual sources from which we learn history belong to us and only forgetting can take them away from us – so much for copyright and plagiarism – and communities are also formed this way, so even the most erudite texts are part of the urban dialogue as well. There's a creative rewriting and retelling here that would horrify us now, but which they were naturally compelled to do. Part of my dissertation was about how Boccaccio and Sacchetti dealt with issues about whether an author owned his text or not, or did it belong to the community. Did other storytellers have the right to continue to mess it up in the way they'd been doing, and to retell these stories on their own terms in ways that explained and made their own situations meaningful – stories that were oral to begin with anyway? The circulation of oral stories also creates urban communities, so the blacksmith can sing Dante in a way that is meaningful to him. I think storytellers are one of the focal points where several oral discourses collide.

DR: I guess if we're thinking back to ideas of social capital, cantastorie created audiences bonded by something like thin trust, which Robert Putnam, and which Ed Muir had taken up, see as essential for communities to exist.

NA: Yes, it's the deep bonds that don't matter. But the other more casual bonds matter entirely for well-functioning community. And that thin trust is enacted within urban space, in the piazza. It lingers there in a way that it may not elsewhere – and people coming back through those same spaces have attached to themselves again, temporarily, that thin trust. So in a way it's part of your memory that connects you even if, or maybe especially, when you are alone. For example, I have never felt more bonded

to an urban community than when I was fist-bumped during a recent banal and entirely forgettable encounter on the south side of Chicago. That is profoundly what community is about.

b. Dean Bell: 'In a certain sense we got out of the ghetto'

Dean Bell (Spertus, http://tinyurl.com/cbw9tg3) is an authority on early modern Jewry in Germany and Europe more widely, with a special interest in the question of community. Here he talks about approaches to the complex relationship between Jews and Christians in the era of expulsion, migration and confessionalisation. (14-6-2011)

David Rosenthal: In your *Sacred Communities* book of a decade ago now, you were talking about looking at both Jewish and Christian communities together, and in your view until then there had tended to be two kinds of historiography. [*Sacred Communities: Jewish and Christian Identities in Fifteenth-Century Germany*, Brill, 2001]. One was to look at the Christian majority's perceptions of Jews, the other was to look at Jews in and of themselves. What you were trying to do was to see this relationship as a dynamic process. Is that a fair way of describing your project, and to some extent the direction of studies since then?

Dean Bell: There really has been a revolution and a renaissance in urban Jewish history in the early modern period in particular. The number of sources that are being engaged, both Jewish and non-Jewish is really remarkable. When you look at Jewish-Christian relations we always used to talk, at least up to the Fifties and Sixties, about the lachrymose idea of Jewish history. It was about on one hand learning and scholarship, and on the other persecution. Many people sort of got rid of that notion a couple of generations ago already, and yet it still seeps into the vast majority of general writing about Jewish history. I would argue a similar kind of thing was at play when we looked at Jewish communities. We had a sense of a very specific kind of structure within Jewish communities, that all Jewish communities were modelled the same way, operated the same way, utilized the same structures and processes and documents – and that they were in a certain sense shut off from the environment around them. Maybe every once in a while something managed to get through that affected the way Jews thought about their communities, but by and large it was a response to restrictive policies and legislation, and a response to internal Jewish concepts of peoplehood and community. I would say that this lachrymose idea when applied to community has really also been shed, but it took a little longer than with the Jewish-Christian relationship issue. And I think that's because community studies until recently were fairly traditional. It's not until anthropology and history begin to intersect and we begin thinking about communities and social dynamics and relationships that are permeable, that operate at many different levels for different purposes, that you can think about communities in new and more interesting kinds of ways. As historians have begun to do that they've found there really

wasn't a single model for a Jewish community in the early modern period. There were many different kinds of communities. Sometimes they weren't "communities" at all. Sometimes they were settlements, or conglomerations of smaller regional settlements; sometimes they were very large urban communities with multiple sub-communities. The nature of Jewish identity in each of these contexts could be quite different, in terms of interaction with the non-Jewish world but also in terms of interaction with other Jews inside and outside of that community or area. It's in the last 20 years or so that we have begun to understand Jewish community in the broader bigger sense that general early modernists were heading towards already, and in a certain sense we got out of the ghetto.

Of course, on the other hand, there is a challenge here, in that we tend to overcompensate – we begin to assume that things were so permeable, that, for example, the number of councillors in the Jewish community was exactly the same as the number of councillors in the Christian community and so Jews and Christians must have been interacting at a very high level. There's a danger to suggest there was a superabundance of interaction that helped to effect and create communities. Some studies go so far as to suggest that in a certain sense there really are no boundaries Jewish and non-Jewish communities. I think that's a step in the right direction in some cases, but in other ways it creates a history that's equally problematic. The balance is somewhere in between obviously.

For example, a big deal has been made recently about the professionalisation of the rabbinate in the middle ages and early modern period. In some ways that mirrors developments in the Christian community, yet in others it's still fairly *sui generis* to the Jewish community in terms of the position of the rabbi. In some cases it's clear that the rabbinic authorities are receiving contracts, for which the associated salaries are being paid out of the city poor box or communal coffers or by individual community members. At other times we do have a sense, depending on the stature or the social context of the particular rabbi, that the position of the rabbi was more traditional in terms of rabbinic authority being wed to the individual's personality. So, I'm not sure professionalisation of the rabbinate necessarily means the same thing that we're thinking about in the broader culture, in terms of the clergy being professionalised.

Another thing I've thought about recently is that you see some similarities – whether you use the confessionalisation paradigm or not – in how Jewish communities are developing in the 16th and into the 17th century, in terms of creating bureaucratic structures, documents and processes that are more formalised, such as memory books, communal ledgers, protocol books. In many ways this mirrors what is going on in the broader community, yet in some ways it is building on Jewish traditions, taking certain kinds of Jewish texts, or legal (halachic) discussions, and adapting them to contemporary conditions. And yet Jews are not necessarily taking over lock, stock and barrel everything that's going on in communities around them. On the other hand, there have been some instances – as in the work of Rolf Kiessling and his students, who have done a very interesting job of examining this – in southern Germany, for example, and especially rural communities, where Jewish and Christian communal structures become symbiotic. So there are examples where there's a great deal of integration, not just acculturation. But in the majority of early modern cases we're talking about much smaller percentages of Jews in these large communities. I still sense there is a

separateness, that there remains something specifically Jewish there. My caution is that we sometimes go too far in the revision of the history and suggest that everyone was getting along just peachy, that normalcy was the thing that ruled the day most of the time, and that persecutions and restrictive legislation were prescriptive, that is, that it was not always followed and it didn't have long-term implications in many cases.

DR: In that context, I was curious about something Kenneth Stow said recently on the topic of the ghetto in Italy. He says in the 16th century the co-existence of stigma and acceptance, as he puts it, gave way to an era of separation and disciplining. [K. Stow, 'Stigma, Acceptance and the end of Liminality: Jews and Christians in Early Modern Italy', in S. Milner, ed., *At the Margins: Minority Groups in Early Modern Italy*, Univ. Minnesota Press, 2005] At the same time, Stefanie Siegmund, on the founding of the Florentine ghetto in 1571, takes the position that the ghetto in fact creates community. [S. Siegmund, *The Medici state and the ghetto of Florence: the construction of an early modern Jewish community*, Stanford Univ. Press, 2006]. For her the ghetto seems to embody precisely that balance between stigma and acceptance, that the state makes a permanent space for a group previously tolerated on a more ad hoc basis. Which is it?

DB: The good Jewish answer is it's both. But it depends on the context. Stow is right in many cases, but Stephanie's answer resonates in other areas. I recently did some work on Hamburg, and the Jewish community here is accepted fairly late – it's really the early 17th century that we're beginning to see Jews officially recognised as Jews, Hebrews of the Portuguese nation if you will. All of a sudden there are all these requirements for policing within the Jewish community, protocol books about how people are supposed to behave, documents the Jews have to produce and show to the city council. And it's not unlike similar kinds of protocol books for the Mennonite community, or similar faith-based or merchant communities. So there is the element that the Jewish community becomes confessionalised again as part of this larger state or territorial or civic supervision of the peoples living there. In other cases, though, it's much more fluid, particularly where you're dealing with small settlements – I wouldn't even call them communities – that together comprised a larger community. Looking at parts of south Germany, you may have a group of 20 to 25 settlements within a 50 mile radius that see themselves as a community. In the literature we call it a medina, a region, as opposed to a kehilla, a local community. As you get further into Eastern Europe you start to see these large communities begin to blossom in the 17th century; the notion of community is a little bit different – it has more of a self-directedness and self-sustainability than you see in many of these smaller settlements.

The implications of ghettoisation are different in many places. Some ghettoes are a whole lot more permeable – and Venice is the great example – and there are others where you get a sense that the ghetto walls weren't so permeable, in terms of social and cultural interaction or politics. So I think it does vary quite a bit. Probably in more cases rather than less, you have people who are living in a particular area in a city but are not necessarily ghettoised. In Hebrew we have a *get*, a bill of divorce, and I think it was Benjamin Ravid who said that early on the Jews might have been shocked that a ghetto was established, especially in Venice, but in rationalising it later on they might have come back and said, maybe it's better we have a *get*, a bill of divorce, from society

around us and tried to take it in a more positive tone. I'm not sure everyone would have seen it like that. But, again, separation wasn't necessarily a bad thing and I think the extent of separation could vary dramatically.

One of the ways I've been trying to approach this more recently is in responses to natural disaster. Because there you see individuals in both their faith community, but also part of a broader civic or territorial community, responding to larger kinds of issues – floods, earthquakes, pestilence, or whatever it happens to be. Even into the 18th century you see an interesting development. Sometimes the Jewish and Christian accounts are fairly universalistic, in terms of the general devastation that's being wrought, the way people band together, and so forth. At other times they remain quite particularistic, even in terms of being anti-Jewish, or only focused on the Jewish community. And there you do see that tension, of being members of a community that is beyond the boundaries of the specific Jewish community, but also being rooted in their specific faith-based community. When they're responding to a natural disaster you catch them off guard, not thinking about what these boundaries are or should be, but rather in their everyday life. This is one of the more recent kinds of historiography that begins to ask interesting questions about Jewish identity and notions of community in this period. We don't have a lot of sources, but there are more than you think. I've come across flood chronicles, or local community ledgers, even liturgical poetry. There are windows into these mentalities or experiences on a more day-to-day basis that, as opposed to prescriptive or legalistic texts, begin to form a very different notion of community.

What holds us back, more than the limitation of the sources, is the way we've read our traditional sources. To give one example: there are commentaries on customs books that are written in the 15th, 16th and into the 17th centuries. But we tend to look at them in terms of the intellectual and religious or legal origins of some of these customs in different communities. But if you start reading them a little bit differently, they can actually tell us about how people were practising and the tensions between different kinds of practices. It's that kind of alternate, deeper reading of these kinds of texts that begins to add more evidence about how communities were conceived and how people were interacting, positively or negatively, with neighbours, Jewish and non-Jewish. These are complicated sources. Rabbinic *responsa*, to take another example, are often theoretical, neither based on actual events, nor providing much concrete historical detail. But sometimes they do, and then they let us into a discussion that might give us anecdotal evidence about what other people were doing and how the rabbi was responding to it. The revolution is in part that there are new sources, but also new ways of thinking about sources, and there's a new openness to suggest that community is really about these social relationships, not just about how boundaries and borders were policed and patrolled.

DR: At the same time, from below the level of this experiential approach, you have these large structural shifts. In your recent general book you put expulsions and migrations front and centre – and that still seems to represent the baseline against which historians are looking at the drivers of change from the 15th through 17th centuries. [D. Bell, *Jews in the Early Modern World*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2008]. You have two stories kind of working together, as it were.

DB: And sometimes working against each other. When that book came out one of the reviews said, that for all the talk he does about cultural interaction, at the same time there's a lot of anti-Judaism. Well, the two things can be true simultaneously, where structures are affecting everybody, or you have smaller episodes that might be played out on top of those, or adjacent to them.

DR: What are the other structural shifts that you see happening? Part of your own line has been that new forms of community emerge by the end of the 16th century. In this context, what are the major differences you see as you look around the European map?

DB: It strikes me that there are more similarities than you would expect across Europe. There are some common themes. Not only demographic shifts, many of which are forced but some of which are voluntary, and are often times related to political issues. There is significant cultural-intellectual change that is occurring. David Ruderman and others like to point to the revolution of printing. But even beyond printing itself there is a new exchange of ideas that begins to occur at the end of the 15th and into the early 16th century, and clearly Jewish communities are affected by that as well. You look for example at the number of customs books that start to appear – it's this tension between universalising in say legal codes, and creating more a regional or communal identity and trying to save that through the recording of local customs in notes or books, which often times may never have been read. Such collections were written down and thrown into the communal repository and maybe they were published 200 years later. We don't really know if they were guiding principles in day-to-day to life, or were simply written down as an ethnographic study, or, in fact, what the purpose might have been, but clearly there's this tension between the universal and local or particularist. I argued in *Sacred Communities* and would continue to argue today that that parallels very nicely with what's going on in early modern Germany in Christianity – a tension between the universal Catholic Church and a domestic sacrality that's very Protestant. In plainer language I'd say that as this intellectual and social transformation is occurring, more things are available, there's a circulation of ideas at unprecedented levels, and it raises not only opportunities but questions. This is true in the Jewish as well as in Christian communities.

Another area is changes in religion itself. One of the things I like to do as a historian, particularly a historian of German history, is to look at new historiographical developments, and then come back and say, was it good for the Jews? What does it mean for Jewish community and Jewish history? Sometimes these are not terribly relevant kinds of developments, but sometimes they really are. Everybody has been abuzz with confessionalisation for the last ten years. Not much has been written about it from a Jewish perspective, at least until you get to the end of the 18th century. And I can't say I've done an exhaustive study of it, but if you begin to look at some of the main themes, in terms of the centralisation of state power, the ideas of moral policing, creating standard curricula in education, you certainly see a lot of the same developments going on in Germany – and I would argue the same in Italy and eastern Europe as well – for Jews as well as Christians. So the sort of broader confessional religious changes that you see throughout Europe are affecting Jewish communities as well, both directly and indirectly. Jews learn what's going on by seeing communities

around them; in a certain sense they absorb some of these notions by simply living in these cities and reading non-Jewish literature. There are plenty of examples of Jews not just reading biblical or rabbinic literature but reading contemporary chronicles and a whole host of scientific or medical treatises. Here's where you get permeableness, this idea of interaction at an intellectual level; but it's also at a religious and social level. The old argument has always been that everybody in the Jewish world was "orthodox" until the 19th century, then reformers came along and shattered it. The truth seems to be somewhat more complicated. We don't really completely know what orthodoxy meant back in this period, in terms of praxis or belief. And we begin to get a sense these days as we see more documents that there was a pretty broad range of opinions and practices within Jewish communities. Jacob Katz, who was the father of Jewish social history back in the late 60s and 70s, argued there was a concept of halachic (legal) flexibility, in which the Jewish community was able to absorb a variety of practices and still have everyone contained within the community in a way that was not possible after the 19th or even the 18th century. The boundaries had to be much more flexible because they had to include every sort of Jew and Jewish practices. There was no place for Jews to go if they weren't in the Jewish community, whereas in modernity you could leave the Jewish community if you wanted to – without having to convert to Christianity. So, throughout the early modern period there was the sense of "tolerated dissent".

There's a nice book by Ivan Marcus from a few years ago on the history of Jewish practice and he goes through a whole bunch of these discussions about how many traditional rituals that we think about today, including Bar mitzvah, really evolved in a medieval early modern context, in exchange with ideas of broader society. [I. Marcus, *The Jewish Life Cycle: Rites of Passage from Biblical to Modern Times*. University of Washington Press, 2004] There's a great example which I use in one of my books that I borrow from *Elisheva Baumgarten at Bar Ilan University*, She's got a wonderful book on mothers and children in medieval Germany [E. Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe*, Princeton Univ. Press, 2004]. She gives the example of a remarkable custom in south Germany of giving a secular name to the child in the cradle. She tries to figure out where it comes from, because its not inherently a Jewish ritual. She finds out that it's a local south German ritual called Hollekreisch. She suggests it's borrowed lock, stock and barrel from the local Christian population and it's to protect children from Frau Holle, who's a demon-ness who likes to steal babies. But the more interesting thing is that as this part of south Germany becomes more heavily Protestant the whole ritual is abandoned as being Popish and the Jews are the only ones who continue it into the 19th century. So a ritual that's not Jewish at all becomes defining, and the Jews try to take it over and suggest it's related to Lilith and other kinds of biblical lore.

DR: Is that kind of process also happening *within* urban ghettos, which sometimes contain different Jewish communities with different customs living cheek by jowl?

DB: Yes, but interestingly in many ways the boundaries between let's call them geographic or ethnic Jewish groups are sometimes stronger than between the Jewish and non-Jewish world. Particularly in Venice, or even in the larger cities of the Ottoman empire, you have very distinct communities that revolve around where individuals have

come from, what customs they have; often times the members of these communities don't want to interact with each other. In Germany the classic example is the difference between the Portuguese Jews on one hand and the German Jews on the other. In a few places, like Hamburg, they actually constitute separate communities – quite distinct, not just ethnically, but in terms of social standing and professional life. They see themselves as completely different communities, even if they recognise that they're both Jewish.

At times this diversity does lead to a kind of richer interaction – so one of the main legal codes in the 16th century, the *Shulchan Aruch*, is particularly Sephardic in orientation and there is a lot of opposition to it in Germany in the mid-16th century. But within 10-15 years that opposition is overcome and it sort of becomes the standard text. But it's interesting in the early modern period to see tensions between German and Sephardic legal reasoning or between German and Polish customs. There are a lot of walls around customs, practice, and authority. Eventually there are opportunities for rich and robust interaction between different Jewish groups, but not always and not always very quickly. As we see Jewish communities as more complicated than we once thought them to be, there are social and economic differences as well as religious and ethnic ones that are also important. And that might be one of the things you see in this early modern period in terms of broad changes in Europe, namely social stratification. In terms of larger social changes, you see this being played out in exactly the same way as in Christian communities.

DR: Speaking of Portuguese Jews, there seems to be a lot of attention lately to the commercial aspects of Jewish communities. That strand seems to be quite prominent, so-called Port Jews for instance.

DB: It used to be Mediterranean, now it's Atlantic history. I think these are important studies. What happens in Amsterdam, and to some extent Livorno now with Trivellato's book, is that there are some interesting and numerous documents all of a sudden and they can be placed in a burgeoning context of more general history. [F. Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period*, Yale Univ. Press, 2009]. So on the one hand I think there are some remarkable studies, such as the book *Reluctant Cosmopolitans*, that have unearthed some nice material, that's not only about commercial issues, by the way. [D. Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth Century Amsterdam*, Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, 2000]. What's much more difficult to get at – unless you're using trial records or property deeds, which we don't often have much record of – are small town or rural Jewish communities. Sometimes you can get at that through rabbinic *responsa*, and they're not often direct. Part of the explanation for the foci in historiography is, I think, the nature of the sources available; there are also certain topics that are more popular for a variety of reasons. Some recent studies let us into a world of commerce and intrigue as being played out across the Atlantic Diaspora, addressing issues that are becoming more fruitful and intriguing because of globalisation. Globalisation, networks of communications, these are the kinds of buzzwords that perhaps have replaced confessionalisation and religion. Not surprisingly, now we're looking at a different sense of community.

DR: The other question, related to that, is about the direction of the historiography on the conversos. I guess I'm thinking about the relationship between identity and community, something that in this context historians of Jewish culture are perhaps particularly attuned to.

DB: In a certain sense it's a hot topic in Jewish history, not just because it's inherently interesting, but also because it deals specifically with this identity question. Here we have individuals who are going back and forth between faith communities or between civic communities and often we have personal reflections from them. Having said that, I'm not sure that in the early modern period things are always quite so clear. If you go back to the notion of halachic flexibility that I mentioned before and tolerated dissent, there's a fairly broad range of at least expressed Jewish ideas that you see in many different texts, and it's hard to say this is an orthodox Jewish position and this is not. There's a famous dictum, discussed in the middle ages as well, which is that an Israelite who sins is still an Israelite. So it doesn't matter if you do something, say convert, or leave the community, you're still Jewish from a Jewish legal standpoint. You have early in the 15th century, because of the Spanish pogroms and forced conversion in 1391, discussions among Spanish and North African rabbis about what happens if these people have the chance to revert back to Judaism and they don't. Are they still Jews? You get both opinions: I don't think it's really resolved. I recently came across a rabbinic *responsum* from the mid-15th century from Austria. A fellow writes in to the rabbinic authorities and says, I took an oath that I wouldn't gamble with anybody who's Jewish. There's this guy in town who converted from Judaism to Christianity and the question I have is whether I'm allowed to gamble with him. The response is that while it's true we have this notion that an Israelite who sins is still an Israelite, clearly he's no longer Jewish in terms of social action. What it points to is certainly in the 15th and early 16th century there's still not a lot of clarity about that question. Identity is still more complicated, and I think that's probably true well into the 20th century, in terms of Jewish law and community. As long as there are restrictions on how converts are going to function outside the Jewish community, they tend to still hover around the Jewish community. Some of the rabbinic *responsa* suggest that you basically work with these people. And it comes up in social, practical ways. For example, what happens if somebody converts from Judaism and won't give a bill of divorce to their wife? They're no longer Jewish per se so how do we coerce them to do that? Another would say, they are still Jewish so you need to get the bill of divorce. Others might say, that they're not Jewish, so the rabbinic decree no longer applies, we don't need the bill of divorce. That might be one of these big, underlying issues, the whole question of identity that is not only Jewish, but that's percolating in the early modern period: it certainly plays itself out in the Jewish communities of central Europe.

DR: What areas in your view need more investigation? What kinds of new questions about Jewish community do you think historians need to be asking? Where do you think the field should be moving?

DB: The history of everyday life and the experiences of people and communities beyond periods of turmoil and outside of prescriptive legislation are fascinating areas and need

more attention. Although there are severe limitations on what we can know, there are many sources that can inform our understanding, especially when the sources are read more deeply, or indirectly. As we have moved from the lachrymose notion of Jewish history, we have been struck by questions of how Jews engaged in power relations, how they lived within and beyond their communities on a daily basis, especially during more "normal" periods, and what social structures meant within the Jewish community – the role of women most significantly, but also the role and position of the poor, criminals, and other marginal groups. Social history has a great deal to teach us about the questions we could be asking and the types of sources we could be examining – both Jewish and non-Jewish sources – in order to create a more nuanced picture of the Jewish past. Finally, as in history more generally, early modern Jewish history has become more global and comparative. We have found both similarities and differences in Jewish communities in Europe, the Ottoman Empire and the New World. This also stimulates new and important questions that will shape the way we approach Jewish history in the future.

c. Peter Burke: 'If socio-linguistic concepts could be used to analyse behaviour that would be exciting'

Peter Burke (Emmanuel College, Cambridge, http://tinyurl.com/jdyrl*) is an authority on the social and cultural history of early modern Europe, and on the use of anthropological and sociological models in the analysis of past societies. Here he talks, among other things, about the mythology of community, the nature of space, and 'code-switching'. (13-10-2011)*

David Rosenthal: In your *Languages and Communities* book several years ago, you define community as being a dangerous yet indispensable term. Could you expand on that? [P. Burke. *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, CUP, 2004]

Peter Burke: It's easier to try to explain why I think the term community is dangerous than why it's indispensable, so I'll start at the easy end. There are two big problems with using the term community. One is the danger of idealising community, and that's an obvious problem, so one can allow for it. Secondly there's the problem – and this is trickier, because not everybody's aware of it, historians, sociologists, whatever – of operating with too simple a dichotomy between community and society, Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft, and not attending to everything that's in between, and there's such a lot in between. So, in the first place, community, a small face-to-face group, people who interact all the time – when you don't have it, you idealise it, it's warm, it's human, it's personal, and then you forget how people can hate one another, can't get away from one another, and, how the neighbours are always looking through the window and peering into your private life.

I think that this is the case for the early modern period, as well. I was very much struck by a couple of sentences in the history of Italy, published in the middle of the 16th century by a Welshman called William Thomas when he praises Venice. Why? Because Venice is the home of liberty, "no-one shall ask why thee cometh not to church, to live married or unmarried, no man shall ask thee why". It immediately made me think, this man has to have come from a Welsh village – there are no big towns in Wales in 1540. What was life like in Wales so that he so much idealises Venice? So, there is that side to it, immortally described by Robert Browning in the poem 'Soliloquy in a Spanish Cloister'? It begins, "Grr, there you go my heart's abhorrence! Water your damned flower-pots, do! If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence, God's blood, would not mine kill you!" So, here are, say, 20 monks, living on top of one another for 20 or 30 years, hates develop. In St John's College, when I was an undergraduate in the Fifties, the undergraduate folk lore, probably true, was that the dean and the senior tutor had, in their youth, been in love with the same woman, whom the senior tutor had married. The dean never married and the two men disliked one another, but, in those days, you

had to sit at high table, in the order that you'd taken your MA, so these two had to be side by side every night! And, this lasts for 20 or 30 years. Imagine what it does.

All this is more intense in the early modern period, because there are more communities. I tried to make a list, to myself, and there were families, obviously, villages, colleges, neighbourhoods, fraternities, guilds, and at the end of the period military groups – they didn't have barracks but people would serve with one another so, again, the company, or something that size, would be a community. And on the other side only a few cities as big as Venice, where you've got the benefit of anonymity. There's no problem for historians simply deciding they'll use the term community, but without saying that it's good or bad or, maybe better, saying it is, both good and bad in different ways.

The other point, which is more important, is that you can't simply divide Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, because of all those in betweens. What happens when migrants go to the city, and they're doing this all the time in early modern Europe? Well, they're attempting to set up community and, very often, it's chain migration, so that people from the same village, people from the same family, they'll go to the same place and work in the same job and try to live with them. And to the outsider it may look as if there's a kind of ethnic ghetto, whether it's literal, in the sense of the Jewish community in Venice, or metaphorical, let's say Sicilians are thicker on the ground in one part of Milan than another. But, in fact, even though the outsider will go in and think, "Oh, this whole place is foreigners", actually it's only one house in three, or something like that, it's much more of a mixture. And the people who live in that area may leave it for many hours a day, so they're in and out of the community. In one place everybody knows their face, but you only have to walk a few hundred yards in an early modern city and you become much more anonymous. So people are living with these two social realities at once, but I've not seen any books that talk about the in between, and I think people tend to focus either on community or they look at cities as great anonymous areas and quote Georg Simmel on life in the metropolis, and all that.

DR: What you are implying is that there are multiple urban communities, and people feel greater or lesser senses of belonging, at different times, to one or another of them. At the same time they might also have a sense of belonging to a greater civic community.

PB: Yes. Florence is a community, at least, on one day in the year, the feast of St John the Baptist. We can't interview the dead but it would be interesting to know whether people thought that they came from this parish or neighbourhood, first of all, and, only afterwards, from Florence. I like to test something similar on Italians when I meet them. I just give them an open ended question, where do you come from? And they never say Italy. They normally mention a particular city. My guess would be, in the early modern period, that people would give an even more localised response to that question: I'm from the Santa Croce part of Florence, rather than the whole thing. Besides festivals, when the community is threatened there's a greater solidarity than usual, at least temporarily. Social history is the history both of social conflict and social solidarity, and you can't imagine one without the other. Conflict with one group promotes solidarity in another, and solidarity goes with the sense of community, which was very well analysed, after all, by Ibn Khaldun in the 14th century, with his concept of Asabiyya, which no

Arabists seem to agree how to translate but it must be more like solidarity than anything.

DR: The terms that I keep coming across in relation to community are agency, identity and, perhaps above all, space. I wonder what you think of this toolkit of terms. Old wine in new bottles, or is the field going somewhere new?

PB: In the case of space, I think we are getting something new, because it's historians talking to geographers, or reading their books more than before, and also, with luck, talking to architects and architectural historians. What interests me is the way in which the built environment, including the spaces that are left when you build – which are, in a sense, constructions, because, they're in between the buildings – shape the social lives of people who live in them. Working in a Cambridge college is an ideal place for thinking about this, because, you've got these buildings that were constructed so many centuries ago, for particular purposes. We're trying to live differently, but sometimes you feel a bit of a pressure from the space on you, to behave in one way rather than another, as in the case of Italian piazzas. This encourages a certain kind of sociability. The buildings are giving you cues what to do. You can resist but it's an effort, and there is a line of least resistance. And if you don't have these spaces people don't meet.

   The term 'identity' has been overused so much in the last ten, even twenty years, that it makes one suspicious. I think it's once again an indispensable concept, but a dangerous one and people don't think enough, maybe, that it's got an inside and an outside. Not enough attention is given, perhaps, to the way which we identify other people, as opposed to how we identify ourselves. Maybe that's an excuse for, what I think is a horrible neologism, self-identity, because identity is surely about the self. I can see the point of saying, collective identity or individual identity, because it's contrasting it with something, but self-identity seems to be just pleonastic. Anyway, it's definitely valuable to have a spatial turn. In the case of identity, it is partly old wine in new bottles, but not entirely.

DR: The other concept is agency, a master trope of recent social history, as one historian has put it.

PB: Do you think we should be talking, especially, about collective agency and the extent to which that depends on the shared sense of identity, as when a crowd starts to behave almost like a person? Or, to take a more permanent case, the identity of people living inside an institution, sometimes making collective decisions, holding a meeting, voting, and so on.

DR: Yes, but one of my concerns is to what extent one needs to be careful about attributing agency to early modern actors, the vast majority of whom have very few resources and are economically and politically marginal – and also to what extent deploying a notion of community helps them grasp agency.

PB: But where you have action, you must have agency. Ritual seems important here, not only as an expression of community, but as a way of constructing it. So when I was

trying to interpret the first days of the Masaniello revolt in Naples, I thought it was interesting that the whole thing started with a ritual, because that's something that everybody knows, which means you know what the next move is and that coordinates things. Soldiers knew that and that was why they started to train people to drill, so that in the stress of battle, they would still be coordinated and all the musketeers could step back one pace and let the pike man come forward or the next people who have loaded their muskets, and so on. It's not an accident that, in the army, esprit de corps was taken so seriously in early modern times, and still is.

DR: Do you think this allows people to have some influence over the conditions under which they live?

PB: But that's only one kind of agency, because it's already agency if you're firing guns and killing people and winning or losing battles, but in the case of rebellion, well, some rebellions have been successful, others not, so where they were successful at least for a time conditions changed. If we're talking about the English civil war, at least in the late 1640s and 1650s things had changed very dramatically.

DR: In your work on popular culture, the arc between, say, 1500 and 1700 is that agency, in that broader sense, diminishes. Does that still stand up for you?

PB: Depends on how late in time one continues with this, because, in the 18th century, there's plenty of subversive movements and of course there were the revolutions of the late 1640s in so many parts of Europe. The comment I most want to make is that this is all about more or less, rather than presence or absence. So it's not that the lower orders or the subaltern classes have no agency, but that there are times when they can do more, and, times when they can do less, and I'm not sure that the whole of Europe is step in the 17th century. Of course, writing a general book about Europe, I was desperately looking out for something to say about change, in a general way. I still believe in the withdrawal from popular culture. There's a whole literature now where people have taken up the term, sometimes to bash it, and sometimes to use it. I don't believe it's exactly the same chronology all over Europe. Even in the book I said that in eastern Europe things happened later than they happened in western Europe, but, yes, it is a big change. For me it went back to that passage in Castiglione's *Cortigiano* where a Milanese nobleman admits to wrestling with the local peasants. That surprised me, so it made me start to think about this, and there is quite a lot of evidence that there would have been a social and cultural mixing – of course, not on equal terms, except when you're wrestling it has to more or less on equal terms, unless they always let the noble man win! But you can be hierarchical and close at the same time, which, I think, is very common in the early part of the period. It takes us back to space. You have all those cities where the richest and poorest people live only a few yards from one another, in front of the grand canal and at the back, whereas in the 19th century you've got these bourgeois suburbs where people are spatially cut off. Social relations can't be the same in the two cases.

DR: If someone asked you to write a book about community in early modern Europe today, how would you frame that?

PB: I'd simply start with solidarities and conflicts, and then move on to some of the other points you mentioned. And I would be interested in the myth of communities, the effect on behaviour of people thinking they have something in common whether they do or not.

DR: I wonder to what extent one could find that mythology through literary and dramatic texts. That seems to be an area that's under researched.

PB: You could do that, and maybe it would be most clear at the negative level, that is, who thinks who is not part of the community. One of the texts I decided to look at, I can't quite say analyse, I didn't give it enough space in *Languages and Communities*, was that Dutch play, Gerbrand Bredero's *The Spanish Brabanter*. So it's migrants from the South speaking the same language as Amsterdamers, but with this southern accent and being disliked by the locals, thought of as totally foreign and not knowing how to behave because they're not as reticent as Amsterdamers. Maybe they're really papists. Maybe they've been influenced too much by Spain. So one side of it is Bredero thinking of himself as part of a community of real Amsterdamers, and he's writing for people who think of themselves like this, but the evidence comes out most clearly about whom he's excluding. The exclusion implies an inclusion which doesn't have to be discussed, because that's the sort of thing you should take for granted. There was a famous article about the myth of community by someone who made a study of Banbury in a anthropological, sociological way. [M. Stacey, 'The Myth of Community Studies', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 20, 2, 1969, 134-47]. This shows that people will over-stress solidarity and they won't even want to tell the outsider that there are all sorts of cracks and splits inside what they want to present as a unified community. Sometimes people use the language of community and maybe not even consciously leave lots of people out. So, you say there's nobody here, when you mean nobody of your social class that you could visit.

DR: If we are thinking about taking the study of community forward, one element, or at least tool, that seems to offer something fresh in the humanities is the increasing digitisation of materials – the ability to mine large amount of digitised text, for example.

PB: But even digitisations only make it possible for us to do faster work that some people were trying to do slowly before. In the 1970s, there was this lexical laboratory in Paris were people were counting the number of times Rousseau used one word in the *Contrat Social* rather than another one and one can parody this, because there was one text from the French Revolution where the most common word was *bougre* and this was obvious enough when you were reading the text, even though you didn't know exactly how many times the word had been used! From the community point of view, if one can be searching Pepys's diary, or something like that, it would be much faster than before. One could work out how many interactions he had with people of the same social status, higher, lower, and whether he writes about those in different ways, but again it's

something that you could have done all the time, only it would have taken you years more. So, digitisation encourages that style of research, because it's become easier, so the balance changes, rather than something totally new.

Fabrizio Nevola: Thinking of the example you gave of the Dutch play, in a sense a computer would entirely miss that, because it would find only the incidences of occurrence. Unless you were looking for the absence, the computer wouldn't notice it. So it takes a real reader to notice absence and see that absence has a point to make.

PB: Yeah, and I don't even know whether the computer picks up very easily when a reference is hostile, rather than a neutral or friendly, though it might via association of words. [On experiments in this direction, see interview with Ian Gregory]

FN: I suppose to the question about text mining I would have added the geospatial work, the GIS type computing, so that you add the specific points where things are said or done. It's the interaction that seems like an interesting innovation. What some research seems to be doing – and it's quantity but it's also managing quantity and complexity of data that I wouldn't even think about trying to do as an individual – is show the clustering of emotion or banking or action words in relation to place, and that can throw up meaning which is spatially located to do with how people behave in space. So, as you say, when I'm in the quad, in any college, there's engrained in that space an understanding about how people used it when it was built, 400 years ago. But all we have is the walls that tell us that, and if we can feed into those walls the words from that time about how people would talk about that space, we actually get an extra layer. So that's where I wonder about the novelty. I suppose I'm asking you whether you think that might be the case or is it just more of the same?

PB: Well, it's a case of analysing, carefully, what contemporaries thought about something, which, again, is what historians have been doing for a long time. It's doing it in a more fine tuned way, and fine tuning is always welcome. I suppose I don't think of it as a great revolution for its historical consequences, however great a revolution it is technologically. And, there's been this quantitative history, which goes back even before the big computers, because there was all this price and population history done in the early 20th century. So long before the personal computer and long before digitisation, there were these ambitions. Historians always need to ask themselves, when they're talking about some trend, well, roughly how many people are involved in this? Is it a big percentage of the population, or a small one? A hundred years ago, they didn't think quantitatively, so I think quantification was a breakthrough, but it's a breakthrough which has got a longer history.

DR: In our interview with Ed Muir, he was sceptical of quantitative history. He was talking about network analysis. His position was that it simply tells you, here's a quantity of connections. It doesn't tell you how much importance one person would place on a particular connection, at a particular time.

PB: I thought that networks, and microhistory, would come up. Network is an alternative to community, as an interesting concept, because networks are more open and everybody has got a different one, rather than, everybody that's inside the community has the same experience. It's as if each of us lives in a different virtual community but they overlap to a degree.

DR: I wonder when a network becomes a community.

PB: Well, once again, this is not going to be a clear conclusion, but I think it is a valuable addition to the arsenal of concepts, because it is a more open concept than community. Microhistory, meanwhile, reveals all sorts of cracks where, from outside the village, it seems more or less the same.

DR: When we talked about micro history with Tom and Elizabeth Cohen, one of the problems, as Elizabeth saw it, is that microhistory has had a quite limited success in linking up the micro study to the bigger picture.
PB: Some historians are more concerned with the problem of microhistory than others, and, usually the ones in Paris have raised it to a greater theoretical level, like the volume that Jacques Revel edited, where people are talking about the problems at a theoretical level unparalleled in the North American or English microhistorical literature [J. Revel, ed., *Jeux d'Échelles: La Micro-Analyse à l'Expérience*, Gallimard, 1996]. How do you move between scales? I think it's a bit like the wave/particle problem. There's a kind of cynicism which is built into microhistory without people necessarily wanting it, because when you scrutinise individuals they all seem to do things for personal and local reasons, rather than because they really believe in some great movement. There's a marvellous case of somebody that nobody ever quotes as a microhistorian, Jack Plumb, who, on one occasion, was asked to write a chapter in the Victoria County History for Leicestershire, because he was a Leicester boy. He couldn't refuse, and he wrote a study unlike everything else he did. It's like a piece of Annales history – it's a political history of Leicestershire over the *longue durée*, it goes from the 15th century to the 19th. And what does he argue? That all the political conflicts in the county were the rivalry of two families, Gray and Hastings: one was white rose, the other was red rose, one was cavalier, one was roundhead, Whig and Tory, Labour and Conservative. So he's reducing everything to family rivalry. But when you look at things at a much more general level, it appears that ideals like liberalism and conservatism matter to people. So this is a problem. It's not just that historians haven't bothered to try to connect, it's a more serious problem than that.

DR: And taking these ideals seriously is then to insert these people into larger communities of discourse.

PB: Yes. Maybe code switching would help solve the problem, that is the same people at times think locally and think family rivalry, but that doesn't stop them, at other times, thinking with idealism, against absolute monarchy, or whatever.

FN: Code switching is something that you've used in terms of language.

PB: Yes, but I'm thinking you could extend it to behavioural goals. And language is a wonderful litmus paper for revealing these things more clearly. Once you start to think about it, you can investigate other kinds of behaviour, but the language thing is more obvious. Somebody is speaking in dialect one minute, or more spectacularly is switching between French and German, just because somebody else has joined the group. It happens all the time. In the Netherlands and Scandinavia, if I go to a party, I know I don't have to worry as I do in England whether people notice that I've joined the group, because I hear the language switch into English, and that means they know I'm approaching.

FN: Is linguistics an area that is doing new things that historians can helpfully borrow from, and do new work with? Is that something that I detect from the *Languages and Communities* book?

PB: It's the second time around, in the sense that, in the Forties and Fifties, when Levi-Strauss was living in the United States and talking to linguists, they inspired the structuralist revolution. He keeps saying, I learned this from Trubetzkoy, or whoever. But that was the universalising linguistics. Now it's the particularising socio-linguistics. I have to say that I think the socio-linguists are making a historical turn more obviously than the historians are making the linguistic one. Of course, they talk about the linguistic turn, but what they mean is doing intellectual history and focusing on concepts, which isn't the same linguistic turn at all. There's also a geography of this. In England, very few people seem to be interested in the social history of language and I've virtually never been invited to speak about it, except once in Sheffield at a conference organised by linguists, not by historians. But take a small country, it can be Finland, it can be Hungary, and people are aware of the language question and they think it's perfectly interesting for historians to be talking about it.

FN: Because it's a kind of community thing there isn't it? Because it's community under attack, in a way, a small language community. Whereas, in Britain, there's this sense, if you're reading popular stuff by David Crystal, for example, that English has become a hybrid language and therefore the study of dialect, or of things that talk about locality, isn't something that is done so much.

PB: I'd have expected the English to be more interested because of the tie up between language and class, historians being interested in class. I think the most exciting thing would be if some of the socio-linguistic concepts turn out to be adaptable in situations outside language. Actually, it's not the first time it's come up: Ranajit Guha, in a book of 1983, *The Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, talks about code switching between violence and non-violence – the crowd can go either way.

d. Elizabeth and Thomas Cohen: 'Community is linked by sacrifice'
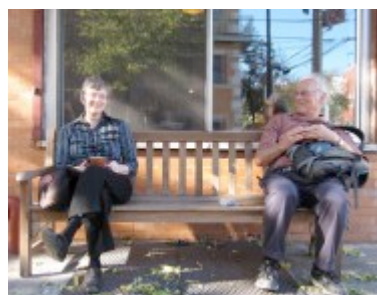
Elizabeth Cohen and Thomas Cohen (York University, Toronto; http://tinyurl.com/cwy6g76, http://tinyurl.com/cjcl394) are experts on early modern Rome and its hinterland, cultural anthropologists of everyday life with particular interests in lower-class women, gender and the micropolitics of family, neighbourhood and village. Here they talk, primarily, about the aims, rewards and pitfalls of microhistorical methodologies. (27-3-2011)

David Rosenthal: You both are committed in some sense to a form of history that has been described as microhistory, now four decades old though according to many historians still packing a punch. Tom, if I can quote you back at yourself from Love and *Death in Renaissance Italy* [Chicago UP, 2004], you said "microhistory charms and discontents, magnifies and baffles". So I wonder if we can explore that a little. How have microhistorical methods changed, where are they going, what are they still telling us about community?

Tom Cohen: What I like about microhistory, as a strategy for representing the past, is how we try to bring the reader as close as possible to the complexity of a world. In doing this we ask the reader to experience the world as it was experienced and to see the structure of the world as it was structured – which are two very different things. It takes a kind of double vision, from both inside and outside. And this process of seeing what was complicated and had many different textures, facets and rhythms requires a kind of knowledge that is close to total – it's sensory, kinetic, auditory, physical **–** every sense should be engaged to understand the real world as it was. That kind of double inquiry raises many questions, and also leads to a variety of knowledges, which you might think of as analytic and exterior and structural **–** this is the "outside" understanding **–** or, for the "inside", as experiential or "embodied", as they say these days.

Both kinds of knowledge pose terrible problems. The problem of experiential knowledge is that our instincts belong to us, here and now **–** they are hardly universal, and we are feeling our way towards a world that is both very different and only half visible. One of the things I like to do with microhistory is evoke a world, but at the same time caution the reader that we actually know so little. That sense of being there, on the street among people, of dealing and reacting, that we reach for when writing in a novelistic mode, is very seductive. Microhistory seduces us into thinking we can go there easily, but a really good microhistory tries to warn us that we are up against the problem of otherness. I like to evoke that strange conflict between being there and not being there.

Elizabeth (Libby) Cohen: What distinguishes between what you think you're doing verbally and on the page, and what a history filmmaker is doing? You are very critical of film that has to represent visually all of those kinds of sensory data that it has no basis for.

TC: In my mind film in some way disempowers the viewer, because it tells you exactly what the filmmaker has to show you, the colours, shapes, movement, rhythms. They are given by the film and not open to interpretation. Film, by giving too much, robs the imagination. With microhistory, prose's incapacity to fill the screen entirely frees and seduces readers to think around corners or fill in gaps, to find and ponder the unknowns.

EC: But perhaps also to make it up, just as the filmmaker did? What about the documentary problem, that filmmakers have no basis for deciding if the dress was blue or red or people were walking with small or large steps, all these things that they don't even think of as historical data. But Tom does, when he tries to tease an experience out of a document. One thing about microhistory is that we are working with documents, like trial transcripts, that are very dense and allow a kind of microscopic enquiry but are in another way fairly confined. In order to get the density, you're looking at a document that only shows you a couple of people in a particular moment.

Microhistory does mean different things to different sorts of historians. A colleague who does Latin American history says they call microhistory something that I would say is closer to an ethnography or community study. In the Latin Americanist practice, looking at a single village, instead of a region or nation, becomes a microhistory, though it often draws on many different kinds of documents. There the document itself doesn't collect the information you are looking at, as it does in, say, the judicial records that are the basis for the kind of classic microhistorical studies in the European tradition. If we're thinking as early modern Europeanists, like [Carlo] Ginzburg and [Natalie] Davis, and so forth, for them a single complex record is often the core.

DR: With your own methods, you've brought out an idea of how communities operate at a very small scale, but with implications for a larger scale, in terms of power, or of identity.

TC: When scholars inquire into community, there's a kind of push towards the idea of collective identity. One image of community that will come up asks what processes, what ceremonies, what exchanges, what images, allow a people, be it an entire city, a parish or a neighbourhood, to say, **"**this is us"? Microhistory is interesting in that zone, because it often studies interpersonal relations and small-scale events, where community is just background and hard to see. Other sources, like chronicles or images of festivals, will stand back a bit, and say, this is the procession, the festival, the riot – and there we see community acting as one, collectively**,** with its boundaries, its centre, its rhythms. When you do microhistory you're not looking at community as a community, but at persons in dense networks of exchange, and these networks converge on ganglia. As people act, they're not acting as members of a community very much, but as somebody's brother-in-law, somebody's customer, enemy, friend, lover. What microhistory shows is what's in

the exchange, what is immediate, what is long term, implicit, explicit. You see people acting in these very dense social meshes that are characteristic of the early modern world. And one thing everybody knows about the early modern world is that the weaker the formal institutions – the weaker the state, church, banks – the more people are turning to one another to be banked, to be insured, cured, educated, defended. So early modern community in many ways is mostly seen not by its edges, not by its centre, but by that very dense interchange between its members.

EC: Implicit in what you just said is a meaning of "community" that I would distinguish from networking. I think there are, in some ways, two competing models for discussing the social. Community draws lines between us and them. It includes the notion that we are all inside something and share it, that all will say, at some moments, this is a "we" experience. Networks instead knit individuals into chains, often pragmatically, and don't have boundaries. Certainly the stuff I've been talking about is probably better described as creating networks than as enacting and marking identities. Early modern Rome, for example, is probably more fluid in terms of community than some other early modern places. That doesn't mean there were no communal bodies, or identities that people used, but they're probably less consistent, at least compared with the picture we have in other Italian cities, where people are invoking more collective, communitarian identities more of the time than seem to be in play in Rome. Maybe it's a special case, or at one end of a spectrum.

   Historians imagine the categories that work for the kinds of documents we have, different ones for different projects. Many very useful conversations about early modern communities reflect the kinds of corporate structures that generate the documents, and those in turn shape what we see and talk about. But a microhistorical approach sees past worlds from a different, more fragmented angle.

TC: To think some more about both what was on the social and institutional ground and about how to catch it, let's look at what we do with trials. A trial is a very interesting, complex, almost-backwards telescope into a little piece of the world. It shows us the complicated transmission, onto paper, of real activities, exchanges, words said, out there in the real world. But we can't go back there. The actual words and deeds are all brought to us in a very mediated way. So microhistory is not only about what people did, but about how people then took what they did and transformed it in a dialogue between what we could call the "state" and what we could call "society", to use abstractions. Microhistory then looks both at institutions, and at the social world that institutions are not controlling but are in various tense dialogues with. In our work, for instance, the courts and the populace are using, shaping, and playing one another. I'm not sure we can say that we see "community" or "society". In our trials, the Romans themselves seldom talked about such things.

EC: Romans did talk about neighbourhood, *vicinato*. So one thing to think about is what indeed is the language they used to talk about the groups that we're interested in.

DR: In the course of these initial interviews, we have talked a little about the idea of social capital, of thick and thin trust, and community set out by the political scientist

Robert Putnam, its advantages and flaws. Tom, you have been part of the most recent engagement with Putnam's thinking by early modernists, with your piece about Rocca Sinibalda north of Rome, a village you've studied in depth ['Communal Thought, Communal Words and Communal Rites in a Sixteenth Century Village Rebellion', in N. Eckstein and N. Terpstra, eds., *Sociability and its Discontents: Civil Society, Social Capital and their Alternatives in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Brepols, 2009, 23-50]. So I wonder how that debate is or isn't meaningful to the approaches you have used.

TC: I read Putnam and I get annoyed, because he oversimplifies. He says they had community that was good, in the North, in the communes, and it was a shared activity that other people liked. I'm annoyed because I'm south of him – in Rome and the countryside around Rome in a world not much different from the North. But what I'm seeing is not that people "had" community, but that they made community, enacted community for some reason or other. It's a bit like faith, like religion. One enacts confraternity, penitence, marvel, the whole Easter cycle, for instance. And we might say, "Well, that world is Christian!" But they also enact other things that are at variance with that, like family, like party. These enactments of community take great effort, they involve emotional mobilisation, the transformation of behaviour. One enters the communal sphere, just as one enters the sacred sphere. So one of my irritations is that Putnam is reifying community. He takes it as a fixed thing, rather than as a fluid, intermittent practice.

EC: He has his own agenda, constructing the Italian commune retrospectively to serve present-day purposes. He's not meaning to be a historian of the commune. He simply takes a model that some people have offered him and used that. Also, there were multiple communities and people enacted different ones in different contexts, so a person was not simply part of a community that governed everything she or he did. That seems an overly social conformist model of how most people are operating. I prefer a picture of people, whether female or male, who have some agency, where ideas and experiences of community are real to them. But at a given moment they may mobilise one or another of the communities or identities to which they belong**.** And the people who respond to a claim on collective obligations or alliances, they also are agents. So it's not like there is a set of rules – I say you have to do this for me because we're in a community, and then people do what they're told to. There's much more negotiation around ideas of community. Sometimes it gets people where they want to get to, and sometimes they don't choose to enact community in conventional ways.

TC: If I can go to the present British government's notion of the community's going to help pick up the dog poop. One of my problems with Putnam is that there's a rosy glow around community. And in fact modern studies do say that where community is strong, life goes better, where community webs are strong, cities function better. But one of the things that is not strongly emphasised in Putnam is the cost of community, the emotional and social labour that goes into sustaining any communal enterprise, be it a family for which we make great sacrifices, be it a neighbourhood or a sacred society, a city. One sacrifices one's safety, one's life**,** one's money. Community is linked by a great

deal of sacrifice and self-abnegation. And people sacrifice things in expectation of reciprocity – and this can be very formal or clear, or very vague; the exchanges can be narrowband or wideband. So community carries with it the positive, and it also has considerable negatives, and there are real costs to belonging.

So when I study my village of Rocca Sinibalda**,** the place is burning dissenters' houses and then making them fall on their knees in church and say, "Please take me back, you've burned my house". So one of the things I have seen with a village when it forms a *popolo* or commune is that to belong requires a certain amount of suffering, imposes suffering. That pushes me in the direction of Daniel Smail, and all his talk about hatred as a social institution, as well as towards the piece that Libby and I wrote for Locating Communities ["Postscript: Charismatic Things and Social Transaction in Renaissance Italy," *Urban History*, 37, 3, 2010, 474-82]. There communities are not held together just by positive feeling but also by envy and hatred. An interesting example is the city of Rome today, which is held together by the hostility of the fans of Lazio and Roma, and it's richer for that hostility. **"**We are people who hate each other**",** so to speak.

EC: If we imagine our own world, there are people who have entered particular ways of practising religion – Orthodox Jews or Christian monks, for example **–** in part because it brings community. When they do so, they voluntarily agree to behave in certain ways that distinguish them and to give up things that may have been desirable in another context. So the sacrifice itself becomes part of the sense of belonging and of what makes you feel good about what you're doing. In the early modern context overall, the option of not being in a community was probably less available. Yet in some places, like Rome, social identities may sometimes have been less clearly defined. There were more choices, including illicit ones, and people with more communities than, say, in Tom's village. I don't want to push the notion of agency too far, but I suspect people in these urban settings generally had more choices, and less clarity, and some may have felt a lack of community.

DR: Agency in fact has been an important idea for you, to move sideways now. A lot of your work has been about making women visible, and you have used the kinds of methods we have been discussing to do that. How has that work on women and gender changed our sense of how urban communities operate?

EC: The women I'm looking at are lower-class women and that makes a lot of difference. Upper-class women have become more visible, partly because they appear in more sources, and a lot of the historiography has gone to making them visible. That's great. But there is also a long-standing discourse, particularly about Mediterranean societies, that women are invisible because they're not allowed in the street. That's only semi-true. But the presence on the street of upper-class women is very different from that of lower-class women, who are exposed to various risks associated with being female and unprotected, but it's also a necessity for them. So I see them and try to portray them as trying to make the best they can with the modest resources they have. They are certainly visible. But they are also not doing the things that matter to many historians – so I find that it isn't always easy to make scholars integrate the people I'm talking about. At one level or another they are inconsequential by the terms in which these

discussions are usually conducted. Lower-class men suffer similar kinds of invisibility in some ways. In other words it's not only about gender, but there's a kind of double bind for the women I'm looking at. On the other hand, I do think that looking at the nitty-gritty processes of daily life tells you something about the way people lived and experienced their social environments, and in that sense I am doing microscopic history, looking at very small kinds of transactions. That's absolutely essential, but it's not going to tell us about politics or art. Women are out in public and their behaviour has public consequences – I find a dichotomy of public and private not terribly helpful for the early modern world – but most of my women are not making petitions or engaging with the public sphere in the governmental sense. In turn, women's relatively weak participation in corporate relationships outside the family shapes my understanding of community. Acting locally, early modern women built and nourished alliances — and sometimes hostilities. Yet, with the exception of some religious and charitable bodies, we have little evidence of their identification with formal communities.

DR: But this work has changed our understanding of what was possible in public space, what women were actually doing, and about the operation of agency in early modern culture.

EC: Yes, that's maybe one place the historiography has gone. My question is whether it's turning back at this point. Early on**,** everything was very top down, and one looked at the institutional records to see what authorities were telling others what they ought to do **–** for example, to shape Counter-reformation souls. Later, social history and various other methods of history from below had a larger presence. I'm not sure at the moment where that's going. I think in some ways cultural history, looking at representations of people rather than real people, may be participating in something of a shift that's privileging people with the access to the resources to make and circulate representations. I don't want to push that too far, but I have some sense that we're in a slightly different mood than we may have been 15 years ago.

TC: The old political history was very top down. And the old social history, which was often bottom up**,** was given very much to structures and to the distribution of persons and resources in large numbers. And then there was the cultural turn in scholarship, which was representational, in which the people disappeared **–** we just had ideas and images talking. Some of us historians now are seeing very clearly a shift out of that way of talking. Although we haven't let go of representation, we want people back in. So we see in gender studies a great deal of interest in agency, and one form of agency is social or political action, but another form is self-representation. And then recently, talk of embodiment and the revived discussion of the French Marxist Henri Lefebvre's ideas of space, is all very interesting, because what it's doing, it seems to me, is moving some of us to thinking about how persons as agents were both representing themselves and constructing their environments. And, at the same time, we want to know how people in the past were perceiving those environments. Spatial talk still tends to think of space in a metric way. But the embodiment movement says, wait, space is more than what's the shape of the urban space, the shape of the square or house. It's also what does it smell like, do your feet get stuck in the mud, what do you bump into, what's its texture, its

quality of sound or light. So we have materiality. We can also mix into this general stewpot of where history is going the immense and growing impact of neuroscience, which none of us understand, but many agree must matter. So the move to neuroscience, which is very much under the impact of these potent new imaging techniques, gives us a sense that there must be something palpable in the human body, where it shapes our thoughts, some way of connecting the way the human mind works in itself with forms of action.

EC: To take that back to the early modern, I think that is actually disempowering agency. You're more optimistic about people being present in the historiography that's going in those directions. I'm less sure about that, I think it's getting disconnected again. I'm impressed by my graduate students who are in "cultural history" space, and I say to them, we're going to do a course in social history, and they say, What's that? I think there's level at which looking at social action, looking at making something happen, is not as central to the way some portion of history is being done at the moment. Tom's optimistic notion is that you can do it all at once, but I'm not sure I would describe that as a wider pattern.

TC: Can I give you an anecdote. I gave a micro micro paper about three people naked in bed together. And Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, the historian of the entire world, was in the room – he'd given the plenary about thinking globally. The next day I'm in the elevator and we're changing floors in the hotel. He's in there, too, and he's says to me, I loved your paper. But, I said, it was micro micro, and you are macro macro. I stepped out of the elevator and, as the doors were closing on this famous historian, he said to me, "Everything is macro."

DR: Of course that was one of the aims of microhistory when it started, how you discovered something large from something small.

EC: Microhistory has been only variously successful at making that jump.

e. Ian Gregory: 'GIS can completely reframe your questions'

Ian Gregory (Lancaster Univ., http://tinyurl.com/c42rl68*) is an expert in digital humanities, which has significant potential for historians interested in mapping urban communities. Here he talks about the direction of this fast-moving field – including Geographical Information Systems (GIS), data mining and internet applications.*
(5-10-2011)

David Rosenthal: "There's a potential in Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and in digital humanities more generally to re-invigorate almost all aspects of historical geography, and actually bring historians who never thought of themselves as geographers into this kind of discourse as well." That's a quote from your book of a few years ago where you also said that the full implications of this kind of technology are yet to be established [I.N. Gregory and P.S. Ell, *Historical GIS: Technologies, methodologies and scholarship,* CUP, 2007]. So my first question is, what is GIS, as it stands today, and to what extent has it been taken up by historians?

Ian Gregory: Although GIS tends to be seen as a mapping system, it's much more than that. It's really a database system that allows you to query your data in a spatial way, so asks questions that have answers which say, "Over here this is happening, but over here this is happening, and over there something else is happening." Traditionally, certainly at the time when I wrote that book, the fact that it was a database technology tended to mean it was best suited to the more quantitative ends of the discipline, but I think that's starting to go as computing generally becomes much better at handling information in textual form. To what extent it's being taken up by historians at this point? On the one hand I'd say very, very rapidly, but on the other hand it hasn't spread nearly far enough yet. I think it's fair to say a problem at the moment is still, how do you start? The two big barriers at the moment are, first of all – if you're a PhD student or beyond that – is simply understanding what GIS is and what it has to offer to you, because at the moment most of the people with expertise in GIS are still more likely to be found in geography rather than history departments. So there's that, "Is this really the thing for me?" barrier. The second barrier is probably the, "Okay I am interested, so how do I go about doing it?" The software is not that difficult, but it's not that easy either, and it probably requires a certain amount of training. And getting that training is still relatively hard to get focused at historians. I've run a few courses, but I'm not sure that any history department is including GIS skills as part of PhD programmes as yet. ArcGIS is the standard software, and most universities have got that on a site licence. As for expenses, if you're then going to digitise a large amount of material or try and match them to locations manually, that takes quite a lot of time. It's either the expense of your time or the expense of employing someone to do it for you.

DR: To some degree it seems GIS seems to favour collaborative projects, perhaps because of the kinds of barriers you've just outlined. So, for example, you have a couple of historians who are interested in asking questions that have a geographical element. And then they would probably get some kind of funding for that, and would also draw in somebody like you.

IG: It encourages collaboration, yes. And I think one reason why Britain and Europe have done well in this field, is that we are more sympathetic to collaborative scholarship, even the humanities, than the US is, where the tenure system is basically hostile to it. But that said, a lot of people have set off on their own and made a lot of progress on both side of the Atlantic. So it doesn't have to be collaborative but I think it benefits from it. There are quite a few good examples of projects like that. There's a really good one at the Open University at the moment. Elton Barker is looking at the Greek historian Herodotus [Hestia project, http://tinyurl.com/bl9pj4n]. Barker is in Classics, but he collaborated with some people from Geography, because what they're interested in is this ancient historian's view of the Mediterranean world: where was he talking about, where was he visiting, what was he talking about in various places? And they've had money not just from the AHRC but Google as well to try and follow some of their ideas down. It's very much one of those collaborative projects where Elton had the idea of where he wanted to go, and knew he didn't have the expertise to do it, so he enrolled some people from the geography department to be involved. Now, that's all well and good if you can get the money to do it, but it would be better if, particularly, PhD students were able to actually start working on this themselves. GIS projects don't have to be that labour intensive, or that hard to do, but they do require a certain amount of skills to start with.

DR: Could you give some detail about a couple of successful historical GIS projects that you have been involved in or are aware of – how they were set up, what they produced?

IG: Well, take 19th-century infant mortality in Britain. The Victorians knew they had a problem with infant mortality, or with health more generally because urban areas were growing very rapidly, with very poor sanitation and poor living conditions leading through into high death rates, particularly among babies and children. In the 1870s and 1880s, the government starts to enact public health legislation to try and do something about that, and around that same time infant mortality starts to decline, and it carries on declining all the way through the 20th century. Therefore government intervention in these problem areas, particularly associated with sanitation, was the cause of infant mortality decline – that's been the orthodoxy since the Victorian age. But we were able to use GIS and various techniques to take the whole of England and Wales from the 1850s up to the Edwardian era, to 1911. We found that the biggest declines actually occurred in rural areas, and they started long before the public health legislation came in. That existing orthodoxy, then, at best, can only apply in urban areas that had high rates of infant mortality where the decline started after the public health legislation. At worst, it may be completely wrong. But what the GIS can't do is then advance to an explanation, or at least not as we've implemented it at the moment, so it's very hard to

know what was driving down infant mortality in those rural areas, particularly in the south and east. Nevertheless it completely re-frames the question. That's one example from my own work.

A similar example is Geoff Cunfer's work on the dust storms on the Great Plains in the 1930s – which doesn't sound similar, but it's the same kind of thing, in that when the dust storms were happening it very much fitted the politics of the time that this was down to over-intensive agriculture driven by perhaps over-enthusiastic capitalism, which the New Deal was kind of opposed to. This orthodoxy, that over-ploughing driven by the pressures of capitalism caused the top soil to fall apart, became very much established. Cunfer did, in some ways, the same kind of things I did, he actually mapped out where dust storms had occurred over the Great Plains over quite a long period of time, and found that they actually were occurring in areas that had no ploughing at all going on. The explanation that he started to develop was that the dust bowl was because of unprecedented levels of drought across the Great Plains. Agriculture may have been a contributory factor, but it was more a natural disaster than an environmental disaster driven by capitalism and the likes. So by taking a broader view and by bringing more data in and looking at it across larger areas of time and space, you're able to challenge existing orthodoxies, existing explanations.

DR: I am coming at this from the point of view of thinking about communities in early modern cities. If I said to you, I've got lots of census data and I've got a lot of text and other kinds of data that you can feed into a machine quite easily, what can GIS do for me?

IG: There are a lot of people that have done exactly that sort of work for cities, although not looking at the early modern period, looking at modern North America particularly, focusing on issues like segregation and race. But what can GIS do for you the typical early modern urban historian, or broaden that out slightly, typical urban historian. Basically what you'd be likely to be able to do would be to take whatever records you've got, statistics from the census or taxation or whatever, and I presume link it to individual addresses, if you're very lucky, perhaps slightly more aggregate to streets. So what you're able to do is then reallocate the data to the houses that the people were living in. And I assume you may well have data from a variety of different sources. So you can actually start to link up taxation records with census records and perhaps other records, based on where people lived, and you may have them from different dates, so you can look at how things changed over time. But more than that, you can start then to ask questions about how different parts of the city were different to each other. Where were the immigrants living? Were they also the poor areas? How did this relate to things like, perhaps, transport routes, or, almost anything, the red light districts, the sanitation, the city walls?

DR: One early modern project I do know about that's kicking off, and one that you are involved in, is Nick Terpstra's at Toronto, which aims in the first instance to look at the relationship between zones of prostitution and holy sites such as convents ['Sex and the Sacred: Negotiating Boundaries in Renaissance Florence' aims to produce a digital map of Florence primarily using a census of 1561 in combination with the 'Buonsignori' map

of 1584. The idea is to layer sensory data together with information on patrician homes, religious sites, and where prostitutes lived and worked. The map is intended to become an interactive tool that can be downloaded by others, who will then be able to layer their own data on to it. *Outline provided by Nick Terpstra*. See also http://www.locatinglondon.org]*.* Potentially, it seems, that you can layer just about as much as you like into a GIS.

IG: Yes. The big thing for GIS is, can you fix a location for the data that you've got? As long as you can do that, you can layer it without any problems at all. If you can't do that, you've got problems. But if you can attach a decent location to it, then you're away.

DR: The other thing here, and this seems crucial, is it's active rather than passive, in the sense that you can ask it your own questions once it's online. Is the natural home of GIS the internet?

IG: Its actual home is increasingly becoming the internet with technologies like Google Earth, which are nice and easy to use. And, yes, it is very much about asking it questions, because it offers you a complicated, layered map, where there is usually too much information there to take in all at once, and you either ask it specific questions, like, "What is here? What is here in relation to here?' Or you ask it more general questions, basically, "Show me a map of this kind of thing." It might be locations of convents and the locations of red light districts, because you think that there might be a relationship between the two.

DR: It seems that part of the potential is also to be able to show things in an animated fashion, again perhaps online. And the reason I'm interested in that is because, like many urban historians, part of what interests me is how people move around through urban space. Where, technologically, are we at with that?

IG: Animations are great and they're very easy to do. But there are a number of problems. They're fine if you're publishing them on the internet or doing PowerPoint presentations; not so good if you want to publish them in a conventional journal. Secondly though, they're easy to produce, but they can be quite difficult to understand. If you think about it, what you're trying to do, effectively, is represent space, time and theme simultaneously. If you just produce an ordinary map, you usually simplify theme quite a lot to stress space, and if you're going to add time as well, and still make it understandable, you probably have to simplify the three of them even further. So as long as you've got a relatively simple theme, you can do these things quite well, but where you're trying to represent data which is complex in theme, space and time it's quite hard to do, just simplifying it down enough to make it understandable without throwing out all the information that should be in there. The technical level is not hard, the challenges are more at the cartographic and conceptual level.

DR: Again, the more the technology moves that way the more it seems that conventional publication is becoming degraded as a forum for this kind of spatial computational history or sociology, or whatever it happens to be.

IG: Yes, that's a very fair point. It is a problem. Because it's a problem even with something as basic as colour maps that can't be reproduced, and you certainly can't put interactive maps or animations or anything like that in. And it is a limitation because it means you have to simplify your results, or the way you present your results, because of limitations in publishing, in other words greyscale paper. But it's becoming less of a problem, and it's likely to continue to do so as electronic publishing allows you to put colour in, even in PDFs and the like. A lot of journals now will take colour versions of the map in the PDF version that they produce, and only go to greyscale in the other version. PDFs won't let you put images in, but you can start putting them up on websites and things like that. E-books are likely to move this along even further.

DR: Also, say I want to isolate a particular data set within a census, for example, where are the female heads of households in Florence in the census of 1632, the only way I'm going to be able to ask that is through an interactive online model. Unless the researcher that put up and analysed the census in the first place had decided that that was something that I needed to know.

IG: I mean there's two ends to this aren't there? There's the kind of, "I'm a researcher," end to this where you're actually dealing with the database and framing your own queries, and then there's the, "I'm a reader," I suppose, who is largely following through what another researcher has presented, and following their argument along. It's pretty fundamental to the way that we do scholarship, because if you've authored something, if you've just created a database for instance, and stuck it on the internet for other people to use, you haven't actually generated any argument. You could debate this, but you haven't really done much in the way of scholarship, you've simply said, here's a big lump of, whatever it is, sort it out yourself. Whereas if you've really done the scholarship on it, and produced something like a journal article or a book, the chances are what you're doing is presenting, "Well I've taken this lump of material and this is what I think of it, and this is why I think it." And obviously as a reader, you may be challenging that argument. You may be thinking, "No, I don't agree with that." But nonetheless you are following along someone else's version of what this is telling you.

DR: I take that point, but what I would like to do – and this is where I'm wondering if things are going to go more and more online – is not just have the argument you've made from the data that you've collected, and turned into a GIS of some form, but also put my own questions. At the moment you can't do that?

IG: You can't. There's a couple of examples of people that have tried to do it, and they're quite interesting. One is by a guy called Ben Ray, looking at the Salem witchcraft trials, where on his website he tries to combine having an archive with also having his interpretation of that archive, and linking the two together [Salem Witch Trials project, http://tinyurl.com/2hf9nm]. And there's another paper in the *American Historical*

Review, by Ed Ayres and Will Thomas on slavery, ["An Overview: The Difference Slavery Made: A Close Study of Two American Communities, *AHR*, 108, 5, 2003, 1299-1307]. The journal very interestingly, published a paper version which described the electronic version [http://tinyurl.com/cq68gby]. It did nothing more than say, 'Have a look at the electronic version, this is what we're trying to do on it.' And the electronic version did very much what we're talking about, which was it tried to talk you through their argument, but it put plenty of links back to the original sources, and it also allowed you to read through their argument in a non-linear way, so you could move around the text from all over the place. Unfortunately *AHR* didn't follow up on that kind of thing, because it was a really interesting experiment.

DR: You mentioned before the issue of representing time – and one of the things you say in your book is that the biggest problem at that moment, the biggest critique, of GIS, was that it had trouble dealing with change over time. Is that still true? What kinds of projects have looked at change, and have they been successful, or at least interesting in some way?

IG: I'm not entirely convinced by that statement any more, about GIS not being good at change over time. It depends how you want to represent time. As long as time can be represented as a series of layers, then it works quite well. So time, in terms of census data, it does quite well. Your censuses are every x years or whatever, so each year is a slice through time, and you can bring them together very nicely within the GIS. Where it doesn't handle time so well, although technology has improved a little bit, is where you're trying to deal with continuous time. An example might be work that Richard Healey and Anne Knowles did in the *Journal of Economic History* in 2006 for example, where they were interested in firms in the north-eastern United States in the 19th century, and those firms could open and close, they were near railways which could open and close. Firms could also rename themselves, they could move from one location to another. [R. Healey and A. Knowles, 'Geography, Timing and Technology: A GIS-Based Analysis of Pennsylvania's Iron Industry, 1825-1875, *Journal of Economic History*, 66, 3, 2006, 608-34]. It's not so good at coping with that much more complex sort of information. It can do it, but it does it slightly clumsily.

But there's also a kind of conceptual problem with it, in that GIS very much comes from a perspective of the map, of space, and change over space, how things are different over space, whereas historians tend to think of things more as change over time. Going right back to the early Nineties when GIS first came on the scene, a woman called Gail Langran wrote something where she said that we don't want to be contextualising things either from a spatial point of view or a temporal point of view. We want to do both together. [G. Langran, *Time in Geographical Information Systems*, Taylor & Francis, 1992]. Which seems like a good idea until you actually try and think, well how do you represent things through time and space simultaneously, in a way that you can understand them? One example being, if you have some data, you might either map it, or you can show time series graphs of it, but actually trying to represent those time series and maps simultaneously is very hard. And I think as human beings, almost, we prefer to have things served up in a way that either emphasises space or time, because we just can't cope with the complexity of both simultaneously. You can try

animating things for instance, but if it's complicated data you just stare at it, and either see what you want to see, or what you're expected to see, or just think, 'This is a mess, help!' You need to simplify it down. I think there are still problems. I think there are likely to continue to be problems with that, just because I don't think we conceive of space and time simultaneously very well.

DR: I was also interested in the "data mining" piece on 17th-century English news pamphlets that you did, which matched words or concepts in a large body of text to places. [A. Dunning, I. Gregory, A. Hardie, 'Freeing up digital content with text mining: New research means new licenses', *Serials*, 22, 2009, 166-173]. Could you tell me about that, because that seems to me something that would have been unthinkable a few years ago, simply because it would have
been too labour intensive?

IG: What it does is use what we call "corpus linguistic" techniques to identify what may be place names in your large amount of text. And then pull them all out, and you then compare them to what's called a gazetteer, which is basically just a database file which gives place names and coordinates for those place names. So you're trying to match – and this is the slightly difficult bit, the bit where some human activity is required – your suspected place names against a list of known place names, and where they don't match you're trying to work out whether it's actually a person's name, or is it a different spelling and that sort of thing. But once you've done that, you've then got coordinates, potentially, for every place name in a very large amount of text, because actually all of this can be largely automated. At that point you can start asking questions. The first question you can ask is simply, "Where is this text talking about?" Because you'll get a map of every place it's talking about. And then you can ask questions like, "What is it saying about the different places?" It picks up on the idea that if certain types of word, like words related to war, for example, words related to scenic beauty, are occurring near that place, then they're relevant to that place name, so you can start mapping what place a certain writer is viewing positively, or what places are being mapped in relation to words like war and finance, governance and things like that, which were things we were picking up in that article. I've published something else more recently that goes into more detail on that, with Andrew Hardie, and we just got funding to follow that up. [I.N. Gregory and A. Hardie "Visual GISting: Bringing Together Corpus Linguistics and Geographical Information Systems," *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, 26, 2011]. Another way of going about it would be simply to take the whole text, and ask the question, "Well what are the major themes this text is talking about?" and then try and map what it's talking in relation to those. Or the third way of doing it would be to say, "Well I'm interested in the following places," or, "The following areas, what are the major things that are being talked about in relation to these places?"

DR: And how would a computer identify themes unless you told it to? Unless you gave it the key words to begin with?

IG: One thing that corpus linguistics does is it gives you what's called semantic tagging, whereby it groups words into major themes associated with those words. So, for

instance, a word like "admiral", as in the navy, would be associated with "war". So there'd be kind of hierarchical cataloguing systems for all types of words, which you can use in this kind of way.

DR: This seems to me like a powerful tool for analysing online printed text.

IG: Yes, that's where it's going. I don't think we're 100 per cent there yet. As I say, I've just got more funding to develop this, but if you stand back and think about it, and this only really occurred to me recently, IT is not about numbers any more, it's about text, and we've got far more text now than we know what to do with, so we need to develop tools for handling them, and that's very much where this is coming from. It's one way of approaching what you can do with very large bodies of texts that you can't possibly read all of. How can you go about summarising them quickly? Online resources are a bit problematic, because a lot of the time the people that have put them online only allow you to search them in quite primitive ways. And that's partly deliberate, I think, because they want to protect their copyright. What we're going to be dealing with is where you've actually got access to the raw data, the raw texts themselves, and be working on that. Whether you can then set that kind of technology loose on an internet resource I'm not yet sure. I think the thing to do is to ask them nicely whether they would supply you with the raw data, and take it from there.

DR: Even if they did, that raw data could present a computer with considerable challenges of reading it, simply because an early modern printed pamphlet can actually be quite hard to read until you're used to them, and because the typefaces can be diverse. That must present some obstacles.

IG: That would present obstacles. Hopefully with things like Eebo [Early English Books Online], there is an electronic text behind it, so somebody's already dealt with turning weird typefaces into ASCII text or whatever, that the computer can handle.

DR: One of the more recent things you've done is the Lake District narratives, which was a case study to try and find out how GIS could deal with qualitative information, How successful was that? [This aimed to explore how subjective spatial experiences could be mapped by followed accounts of tours of the English Lake District by two poets, Thomas Gray in 1769 and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1802. D. Cooper and I. N Gregory, 'Mapping the English Lake District: A literary GIS', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 36, 2011, 89-108.]

IG: It was really successful, I was surprised just how far we were able to go, because it enables you to think about text in a completely different way, because it presents a summary of the geographies in that text. Where are they talking about? For the Lake District, things like, what heights are those places that they're talking about? Are they near lakes, are they near towns? Lots of questions like that which were very difficult to answer in the past. And as you move through the text, how do the places talked about change, how were they represented, how does one writer compare with another writer and one source compare with another source? We were only dealing with 20,000 words,

which is pretty short, but potentially you could start applying those techniques to millions of words. Once you start doing that, the potential is absolutely amazing, because all of a sudden you've moved from a position where you can start summarising these large volumes of text without actually having to read them, while in the past you've always been pinned down by simply the fact that your scholarship was limited by your ability to read quickly. That no longer needs to be the case. Not that you want to stop reading entirely, but it points you at where you need to be reading in detail and which parts you can ignore, which in the past we've always done, but we've almost had to do it through guesswork.

DR: I noticed with the Lake Districts that you had the "mood maps". If a writer was to express a complex, even paradoxical, emotion, then that can't be placed in a simple way on a scale. Though you might be led to that passage of text.

IG: I think if this is going to work properly, in a way that historians and others are comfortable with, in the humanities particularly, then what it needs to be able to do is combine these kind of grand, but somewhat crude, summaries with the ability to still add nuance yourself, and I think, to pick up on that mood map example, I think you get the feeling that in general people are responding to this place in a very positive way, however, a number of people seem not to be doing that. Therefore, you then perhaps want to follow up a writer who has not responded in the typical way and ask why. It's a tool that helps your scholarship, it's not something that does your scholarship for you.

DR: What other pitfalls are there?

IG: Sources is probably the biggest one, but then as historians you're used to dealing with sources so you just have to remember that those limitations are still there. Next big problem is probably the time and expense of getting the data into digital form and then GIS form. That can be a big job. It shouldn't be underestimated. Another pitfall that people can and do fall into – it's probably a good pitfall – is to get too excited about the potential for then extending the database or doing new bits of technology, and forgetting that at the end of the day it is about the scholarship and not about the technology. Keeping focus on research questions is, then, important. But also allowing your research questions to adapt as the work progresses, as they inevitably will.

f. Edward Muir: 'Why didn't the dog bark in Buia?'

Edward Muir (Northwestern, http://tinyurl.com/d6kagb4) is an authority on early modern ritual and the nature of community in Italy and Europe. Here he discusses his work, methodology and new directions in the field. (24-3-2011)

David Rosenthal: It might be useful to start by asking about your approach in your 'The Idea of Community' article of several years ago [*Renaissance Quarterly*, 55, 2002, 1-18]. When you found those documents, and in them the cry of Costantino Rizzardi in the town of Buia in the Friuli, "help me my commune", you clearly thought that this was a way to unpack community. At the same time you were engaging, not for the first time, with the debate over the so-called Putnam thesis, which argued that the social democratic success of some northern and central Italian regions was rooted in medieval civic republicanism [R. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, Princeton, 1993]. This debate, which seemed to have flickered out, is in fact still exercising renaissance historians [N. Eckstein and N. Terpstra, eds., *Sociability and its Discontents: Civil Society, Social Capital and their Alternatives in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Brepols, 2009]. How does your thinking about early modern communities fit into that debate?

Edward Muir: That document was a *spia*, a spy, a clue to a bigger set of concerns that preoccupied me all along, the relationship between communities and what me might call anti-communities, that is to say the processes that are corrosive or destructive or maybe even precede the creation of a community. In Italian terms, how do communities get constructed and what is on the other side of communities, what are people afraid of, and what are the sources of violence. So my work on feuding was an attempt to look at anti-community, or the way in which family and private networks were corrosive to community life. I'd already written this big study of feud, which in my own head is in dialectic with my work on communities. When I was writing on that book [*Mad Blood Stirring*, Johns Hopkins, 1993], I ran across this little document in the little town of Buia. Now Buia was in the midst of the enormous conflagration in 1511, the most bloody vendetta-factional outbreak in Renaissance Italy. I mapped out locations of violence in 1511 and a few years after that. This town of Buia was a peaceful island. So, to use a Ginzburgian model of microhistory, this was the piece that didn't fit. Why didn't the dog bark there? I ran across this case, a violent outbreak, but it was the community against the local lord rather than factional conflict that prevails everywhere else. That raised the question, what cultural or political resources did this community have that its neighbours didn't. The answer became, it had statutes, a legal framework that local elites, in this case a notary, defended, and could use against the lord, and negotiate a better position for the community. So the hypothesis was that statues matter, that is to say the political-legal structure mattered. Now someone has to enforce it, believe in it, follow it, but that I think was what's going on in that moment when the community tried to

prevent the arrest of their notary by the henchmen of the local lord. It's a clue to another set of relationships.

I think communities, either latent or unrecognised, come into being in moments of stress – and in moments of stress people have to make choices. So this is a moment where you can see the operation of human agency, and one of big goals in scholarship in the last 25 to 30 years is to bring agency back in as we escape from structuralist kinds of models. In those moments people are forced to makes choices, which have consequences, with gains and losses. In this case I knew the names of most of the people hanging out in that tavern and tried to figure out who they were. I couldn't go very far, but I realised that there were a number of families there on this occasion who were willing to protect the local notary against the lord. This was precisely the sort of thing that had failed to happen in so many other places in the previous seven or eight years, where communities, such as they were, were divided sometimes quite literally with chains in the road, defining turf, dominated by gangs, in a phenomenon that we can still recognise in the modern world. That didn't happen there. It's a Sherlock Holmesian method – to look for the piece that doesn't fit. It always points towards something particular rather than general and it's in the particular that you find agency – and that's what I want to find.

As for Robert Putnam, he is one of these interesting guys who asks the right questions but I don't think has correct answers. Putnam's notion of social capital has several advantages. One, it pushes us away from what has become an arid debate between [renaissance] republicanism and monarchy, between a constitutional approach and looking at the otherwise hidden social fabric of communities. Looking for social capital points us towards acts of association, and the ways association can be a grounding for broader community connections. The really key question he asks is about this leap from thick trust to thin trust, a move from a community based on face-to-face interpersonal connections very often cemented by marriage alliances – a very powerful form of social cement but the opposite of a community – to what he calls thin trust, this acceptance of trusting in what in many ways is an abstraction, so that you're willing to place your loyalty with people you don't know. That seems to me the fundamental question in the creation of community, the nature of trust. Where does trust come from, how it constructed, or represented, how is it renegotiated, rejuvenated and transmitted culturally over time?

Putnam's historical construction of Italian history is pretty faulty, it's based on a crude understanding of medieval Italy. It's a kind of hopeless model, in the sense that if you didn't become a community in the 12th century it's all over. I think Friuli is a prime example of why the model is wrong. Friuli was capable of dramatic social change after 1976. By his measure it has one of the highest levels of community association today, an enormous success as a region making plans for its future, particularly after the earthquake of 1976, and leapfrogging itself from a backward region to one of the richest regions in Europe – and it had no communal tradition at all, Buia is this little weird exception. The model doesn't take account of moments of agency in which communities can transform themselves quite radically. There are also two big disadvantages in the way he presents it. He really does ignore economic models, He doesn't want to see poverty as making a difference. Secondly, he doesn't place enough weight on religion. And if we think about events over the last 10 to 15 years, religion has become

paramount as a symbolic field in which identity is formed and divisions are made – it's both a community builder and corrosive to communities. In the United States, but Europe too. If you think about contemporary France or Holland, for example, what is the place of Muslim communities there? It's always true in America, which is a bizarrely religious place. Plus, our social science colleagues are interested in building models, and though we use models, as a way of clarifying ideas, we have a kind of aversion to them because in the end we're interested in change, and most models have a static component.

DR: The other important theme for you is ritual. I'm thinking of putting these things together now and talking about ritual communities. What is the role of ritual in the approach to community that you have developed? More generally, how would you describe the kind of anthropology that you have imported into renaissance history and where do you think that's heading now?

EM: My first approach to ritual, as I would now look back on it, was a little naïve. I saw ritual as a way of creating communities through representation, but more importantly through the capacity to evoke emotions. It was a kind of enactment of a set of ideas. These were about ideas of community – you were a member of a community by participating in ritual in an essentially non-literate society that has to do with public performances. My initial approach was not open enough or aware enough of counters to that, on a local level, or a gendered level, or a class level. Second is something I really learned from Richard Trexler in the heavy debates we had for many years, as good friends. His approach is much more radical than mine in the sense that it's behaviouralist, almost to the complete exclusion of ideas or formal ideas, or he would want to make it that way. The telling point of his approach is to talk about the ways the affective processes of rites and rituals take place even before any appreciation of language or ideas in a child's life. So he talks about children learning to pray who could not possibly comprehend theology – and this becomes a kind of embodied memory. That was a really powerful idea. He was perhaps a little too radical, because ideas do matter. There's a dialogue going on all the time between formal articulated sets of principles and behaviour that cannot be reduced to these principles. But on the other hand behaviours often calls forth an explanation.

So what was going on that tavern in Buia may have had nothing to do with statutes, but to represent that action outside the community you have to enter into a broader intellectual field. So there's a dialogue always going on between words and actions, ideas and emotive moments. That's what intrigued me all along: that you can't have a community without a passion for it; and at the same time there's something quite fragile about a community based on ritual. One of the really telling ethnographic moments that all historians should see is Nicolae Ceauşescu's last speech [http://tinyurl.com/cfbvakd] . Here is an authoritarian regime based on mass rallies, public presentations. He's up there giving this speech, and the crowd starts chanting, and you literally watch his power dissolve right in front your eyes. You can see it in his face, in the people around him, you can see it in the whole crowd. You literally watch the collapse of a performance. So without some deeper connections, these performances can be incredibly fragile and transitory.

As for anthropology today, ethnography in particular, it's deeply in crisis. My main guide for thinking about this is the work of George Marcus and James Clifford, who have been involved in what they would call repatriating anthropology, bringing methods from the study of what we would no longer call the primitive, to apply them to the global world, and to look at change. They're particularly interested in what happens with globalisation in all kinds of societies, even including NGOs and voluntary organisations. In that sense they have become much closer to being historians, because they are interested in processes of change, than they would have been 30 years ago. So in some ways there has been an intriguing merging of approaches [though] I think there's still a tendency in anthropology to want to construct, maybe unravel, deep meanings through behaviour and representations. There's a very interesting essay by Clifford on Fort Ross in northern California [J. Clifford, 'Fort Ross Meditation', in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Harvard UP, 1997]. It's the point where the Spanish and Russian empires met, It was a Russian trading post. He uses this as a device to understand something broader about empires, about the way empires moved indigenous peoples from Alaska down there – in fact he has a whole series of issues. That's something that historians can still latch on to. It's like my use of Buia, though his much more broadly interpretative because there's a lot bigger issues.

One area in which community studies is going is network theory. I'm thinking of the sociologist Paul McClean and political scientist, John Padgett. The problem with that is it's heavily quantitative and most historians, including myself, are not equipped to do that work. It's incredibly labour intensive. Avner Greif, the economist at Stanford, has a similar approach, looking at 15th-century Florentine loans and contracts, using loans as a marker of social networks and relationships. It's so sophisticated and complicated I'm note sure if in the long run this is going to be a major source of historical knowledge. Paul McClean has been doing this stuff for 20 years and in many ways he has a very powerful demonstration of the obvious. I'm not sure I'd say what I've learned – class mattered in Florence, a few elites were lending money to one another. Well, I think I already knew that.

DR: Networks in general have become interesting, though, if we're interested in community. In early modern terms we're often thinking in terms of two broad categories of community – one closely linked to spaces, and then those that are not necessarily linked to one particular space – and therefore cross-urban networks become quite important. So for example in work I've done on German migrants in Florence in the early 16th century. They're scattered around, a group here, another there, but these people know each other. So other factors, like a common ethnic identity, can transcend particular spaces.

EM: Right, and everybody ends up with multiple networks, so the question is which one is the most important. And that tends to be contextual and changing. Here's the tension: you can map these loans in 15th-century Florence, but it's in specific contexts and moments of choice where you have a loan that matters or doesn't matter, where you figure out whether your ethnic connection is more important than your neighbour or another commercial relationship. I'm often struck by a passing comment by Ronald Weissman in 'The Importance of Being Ambiguous' [in *Urban Life in the Renaissance*,

eds. S. Zimmerman and R.F. Weissman, Univ. Delaware Press, 1989]. It's based on the simple observation that if you look at the portfolios of a lot Florentine merchant families it looks like they are losing their shirts financially because they have all these outstanding loans they never collect. His answer is, well there's something going on here other than the maximisation of profit. It's something to do with a set of social connections. You can't find that in Padgett and McClean's network theory. What you have is the quantitative measure of loans, to whom they are made and how much they are.

I think there's also an economy of energy here. There are only so many of us and we'll only live so long. So how much time do we spend demonstrating to the satisfaction of our colleagues in the business school that we're right. I was at the Stanford centre of Advanced Study in the Behavioural Sciences a few years ago, which was heavily dominated by political scientists, economists, psychologists, sociologists, and there were a few if us who were humanistic types. We became incredibly frustrated with the gap between the methods of the heavy quantifiers and those of us who are more interested in an interpretative framework. The best example was a very good historian who was writing a history of romantic love since the 12th century. We all know as historians that it's an interesting topic. Love changes, it gets connected to marriage at certain points, at other points it's got nothing to do marriage. It's one of the most powerful cultural concepts we have. He gave a talk about chivalric love and how it changed in the Protestant Reformation. The social science types could not get beyond primate sexual behaviour. Their idea was that love was about mating. To some degree it is, but it changes. They had no ability methodologically to look at change. What is interesting to the historians is precisely the stuff that goes beyond primate mating behaviour, and has a cultural resonance. I think that tension is very powerful – even more powerful than it may have been in the Sixties and Seventies because of a lot of scepticism on the historians' side about what can be achieved through these methods.

Two points here. There are great achievements coming out of the intellectual tradition of social science history, one of which is of course Herlihy and Klapisch- Zuber's work, which utterly transformed the way we think about Florentine families. And I think of Scofield and Wrigley's work on population, particularly in Britain, in the same way. So the demographic stuff was really successful. In the United States there was a moment of dramatic cleavage. I can date it quite precisely to 1975. Before that we were told that quantitative methods would answer all historical questions. We would know what caused the French Revolution. In 1975 there was a famous book called *Time on the Cross* [R Fogel and S.L. Engerman, 1974]. It was a macro-economic study of slavery in the US by two economists. It was based on a counterfactual assumption. They asked, would slavery as an economic system have survived if there hadn't been a civil war? And they had massive bodies of data to argue that slavery as an economic system was functioning quite well. Now this looked like science but was politics. The American Historical Association convention of 1975 was devoted to that book – and I think it led to a cleavage when a lot of us gave up on the full-fledged formal application of social science models in history, because it looked to us like the emperor had no clothes. The fundamental fact was that there was a civil war and it was a war about values, about what kind of a country you wanted to have. It wasn't about whether one economic system was better than another.

DR: Your agenda has clearly been democratising in some sense, both in your work on communities and ritual, about as you say discovering agency of people who previously who were not regarded as having much of a role in history. I suspect most historians using ethnographic methods are thinking about what are in some sense marginal groups.

EM: This is where I'd say Ginzburg's methods are particularly helpful, controversial as they are. He's looking for fragments of oral culture, or certainly was in the Seventies and Eighties, the ways in which we recapture these lost words. Trials and inquisition records are the best way to do it, so notaries transcribe those words. I'm deeply attracted to that as a model. He's shown we can find the agency and voices of individual people who were otherwise lost. They tend to be people who get themselves in trouble. That generates records, so we construct a cultural norm by learning all about the circle around it, by defining the abnormal – which is a lot of what we've done over the last 20 to 25 years.

DR: Is that played out? Have we now excavated the margins?

EM: I think there is some sense of, do we need one more study of a heretic, or a lesbian nun or a crazy miller? One book that continues to do this very effectively, though, is Thomas Robisheaux's *The Last Witch of Langenburg* [Norton, 2009]. What he's done is taken the last witchcraft trial in Germany in the late 17th century, and what he does is look at what we might see as various communities of discourse that speak about this case. So there's a medical one, a theological one, a judicial one, there's the actual neighbourhood in which the case takes place with a set of people who knew this woman and had their animosities and friendships, and there's the local civic government. He brings all of this into play. It's not just about finding the marginal voices. He's not so much interested in her or the case, as much as these multiple rhetorics and discourses. There's a lot still to be said about that, it's not just Menocchio the heretic miller, but the range of discourses that appear in a community around a particular question or phenomenon.

We're also more and more interested in the movement of peoples, because massive migration is a contemporary problem, and I think also the relationships among different religious communities. There are institutions that have not been very extensively explored. In Italy there are orders of catechumens who are dealing with conversion. Eric Dursteler has written a book on conversion of Muslims to Christianity, which he uses as a way of tracing mostly women who had a relationship with Christian men, but he is really looking at the whole conversion process [E. Dursteler, *Renegade Women: Gender, Identity, and Boundaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, Johns Hopkins, 2011]. We would see that as very common in early modern Europe but it's not much interrogated. What does it meant to convert, to change from one religion to another, or from one community to another? One way to look at migrants is to look at health records, since you always assume the outsider is bringing disease. Giulia Calvi did this 20 years ago did this with the plague in Florence of 1630, so you learn all about these vagabonds because that's who the health authorities were interested in.

So have we depleted the marginal? I'm not so sure. But I think the next move is to be able to map out the range of interactions in and possible ways of conceiving of a

community. One of my graduate students, Stephanie Nadalo, who's working on Livorno, is trying to do this. Livorno was founded in 1591, as a community open to any religion. It's specifically in the statues, Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews. Protestants even. It doesn't mention Muslims but there was a Muslim community there, and she's even found a mosque in the 17th century. Here you have these multiple religious communities, a city in which the cathedral and Sephardic temple are in the same piazza – all under government protection. What she's interested in is the relationship between these communities. She's plotted this out spatially, the way conflicts are resolved, and networks of relationships that she can reconstruct through loans. This is not one town – what does it meant to be a Venetian or a Florentine – but what does it mean to be an Ashkenazi or Sephardic Jew in relationship with other people? And in so doing, of course what happens is she interrogates and in some ways undermines the very notion of community. So an Ashkenazi will identify him or herself that way and yet there are all kinds of other relationships that take place in a community like that, and so we get back to networks. However, we have to keep this from getting analytically too vague. Historians have several deep failings. One is our taste for the particular can destroy our ability to create generalisations. Secondly we must have a commitment to trace and explore change. So any time we import social science models we have to be careful, because change is what we are about or should be about. That's what our discipline contributes to the larger intellectual discourse.

g. Rosa Salzberg: 'Print saturated the lives of ordinary people'

Rosa Salzberg (Warwick Univ., http://tinyurl.com/cxof56z) is an expert on the dissemination and performance of early printed texts in Italian cities. Here she discusses how recent work on cheap print and street singers is starting to expand our sense of the discourse of the piazza, the places and mediators of community, and the shaping of urban publics in the 16th century. (30-6-2011)

David Rosenthal: I want to start by asking you to situate what you do. It seems to me you're operating within a tradition of talking about print culture and what people who look at humanists would call the republic of letters. But that's just one level of it, and in certain ways the easiest to investigate. You're saying that there is another layer of communication in early modern towns that hasn't been given a great deal of attention, a much wider arena to do with the dissemination, and oral performance, of cheap print.

Rosa Salzberg: I started off studying the famous scholarly printer in Venice, Aldus Manutius, and exactly that idea of the republic of letters, of scholarly workshops and literary circles. Then, coming to London and working in the British Library and starting to dig through the early modern Italian printed stuff there, I started finding all of these fantastic pamphlets that just don't appear in the classic big histories of Venetian or even, to a certain extent, Italian print. In fact, people like Peter Burke and Ottavia Niccoli had pointed to this material, and obviously the likes of Roger Chartier and Natalie Zemon Davies had begun to look at this for other countries. Now there is heaps of work, particularly on England, on this kind of material – but when I started working on it I felt like I didn't really know where this fitted into the picture at all. I thought, probably somewhat naively: by using this material can we actually find out what the expansion of print really meant to a much wider group of people, beyond the scholars and patrician collectors? There is some very good targeted work looking at particular examples of popular printed pamphlets, but, in terms of our view of Italian Renaissance culture – which still tends to be rather top-down and elite, and focused on these big eminent works – this is still just starting to be taken on board.

DR: And part of your argument is that these big eminent works are actually appropriated from below, which among other things makes the question of authorship interesting. In a sense the idea of authorship is exploded at a certain level because texts are taken up by *cantastorie* [street singers] or peddlers and reworked, like a mash-up almost. I wonder what this does to perceptions of so-called popular and elite culture.

RS: There has been a tendency for these kinds of work to be studied in a bit of a bibliographic ghetto, and not, as has happened in England and to a certain degree in

France, connected in with socio-political history, as they should be. People may have looked at how the works of Ariosto, for example, were disseminated, but they haven't come at it from the bottom up. There's also been a tendency to try to "take the cultural temperature" of a text and place it on the scale between elite and popular culture, rather than watching where it moves. I've tried to show that this makes no sense at all. I started off by taking on board ideas from the [Carlo] Ginzburg, Chartier and [Robert] Scribner generation of circularity and interchange, and I guess I can't think of a better way to formulate it than that. Some texts might seem to originate from an elite literary circle but were in fact first inspired by street culture and street literature. Through the publishers and peddlers that I have looked at, you see that print helps texts to move in every direction, not only through different media but through different kinds of social spaces and groups, without the kind of barriers that you would expect. I focus on the first 50 to 100 years of print, where there seems to be a real opening up of opportunity in this way, because it's new and people are experimenting, mainly driven by profit. What this suggests is that we really need to be careful about assuming that a certain social group would not have read a certain kind of text – or if not read, perhaps heard or seen performed.

DR: One of the things that interests me is how this affects the culture of the piazza. Because it's often in the piazza or in particular places in cities where either pamphlets or cheap print are disseminated or sold and also, correct me if I'm wrong, it's the same places in which *cantastorie* are performing some version of the same kinds of text. I'm wondering how this creates experiences of community, as it were, through a sense that familiar texts and familiar tropes are connected to particular places.

RS: That brings up the whole question of continuity versus change and the effect of print. There is an aspect of continuity because there is a well-established culture of performance and circulation of texts in cities like Venice and Florence. And not just via oral performance. I'm thinking of Dale Kent's work on 15th-century Florentine chapbooks [D. Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance*, Yale UP, 2000]. Particular texts are circulated and get written down, people were very familiar with them. The thing that's clear is that those same kinds of performers who worked in the medieval piazza are incredibly quick in getting in on the act after print arrives in Italy in the 1460s and seeing it as a new sort of entrepreneurial opportunity. There is this precious logbook of the Ripoli press in Florence. It shows that from the 1480s peddlers and performers are coming in and commissioning works that were obviously tied to the performances they were giving, so things like an oration to San Rocco commissioned just before the feast day of San Rocco. There's an argument in this article by Susan Noakes from 1981 that these people were in a position to know the interests and taste of the public better than most, and they provided this incredibly useful connection between the piazza and the people and the print shop, because the printers are experimenting and trying to work out what there was a public for – it's all very new [S. Noakes, "The Development of the Book Market in Late Quattrocento Italy: Printers' Failures and the Role of the Middleman", *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 11, 1, 1981]. The work that I did on Venice shows that there is a strong continuity, that these kinds of performers keep being associated with print throughout the 16th century, working to bring these

texts out and presumably also performing them – therefore, being able to communicate to people who couldn't have read or couldn't afford to buy the text.

DR: In this context, does the literacy rate – often put at about 30 per cent overall – matter?

RS: I don't think it does very much. Many "readers" couldn't actually read but they encountered and absorbed texts in other ways Also, historians increasingly argue for higher degrees of some kind of "functional literacy" in this period than was previously thought. Trying to find out how cheap printed works actually made their way to readers is one of the problems that I came up against very quickly, because what I found was that the traditional sources for book history, that you use to try to find out who bought and read these things, aren't very helpful here. There are very few inventories that record the ownership of cheap print. There aren't bookshop registers to show what was sold. There is rarely marginalia on cheap pamphlets saying who bought them or read them. Instead, the way I went about it was to focus on the figures who disseminated cheap print, where they worked and as much as possible how they worked. They are certainly elusive, but not as elusive as the readers and consumers, and they help I think to lead us to the readers and consumers. Being able to establish the fact that these sellers were prevalent in the piazzas and on the bridges and in the streets of cities like Venice is crucial. Say you cannot read or you cannot find anyone to read something for you. But if there's someone on the Rialto who was advertising something verbally and reading it out, or singing the first lines, you are at least aware of the text and something of what was being circulated. Your interest is probably piqued by the fact that the seller might be saying, 'I've got the latest news about the war in Brescia on the mainland', or whatever. So the fact of selling in public spaces and the fact that texts were advertised verbally, if not performed in their entirety, is crucial.

And again, I think those barriers that we tend to erect between the literate and the illiterate meant much less than we tend to think. Somewhere like Venice, even by the end of the 15th century, is saturated with texts. There are books being advertised and laid out all the way down the main shopping thoroughfares, and there are stalls in the piazzas advertising these things. Obviously we can't document the fact that people who were exposed to printed words then bought them or read them, but accessing texts was certainly much easier than in the era of manuscripts. The other important factor from the bits of evidence we have is that pamphlets were really, really cheap. A pamphlet of a couple of pages in the early 16th century cost something like the same as a mackerel, or two eggs or a loaf of bread. So we can't document the moment of buying the text and keeping it, but we can put all of these other contextual elements in play. And then there's the fact that the economy of cheap print does not work unless you print a lot of copies, which means that very large numbers of these texts would have circulated even if only one copy might now survive. Again, the Ripoli press logbook, from the 1480s, is one of the few sources we have for this: the charlatans and performers who go in there order 500 copies of pamphlets or fliers, or 1,000 in some cases. Our attention tends to get distracted by what survives, which grossly misrepresents what was originally printed, and we tend to forget to leave mental space for the things that haven't survived. There are also things that were printed on commission and stuck up or handed out for the

purpose of public information: for example papal bulls, excommunications and laws seem to have been printed in big quantities. Factoring these back in adds to our picture of the way in which print was saturating the life of ordinary people, even if they couldn't read.

DR: Which makes the figures who disseminate these works cultural mediators, as you call them. And I guess agents as well. To what extent do your findings extend our view of the politics of civic life? I've got in mind something like the recent book of Filippo de Vivo, who makes a case for the expansion of what constituted the 'political' sphere in the early modern city [F. de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics*, OUP, 2007]

RS: What De Vivo shows was that by the early 17th century there's this fully fledged genuinely popular print culture in Venice discussing intense political issues. I think what we have from the more fragmentary evidence 100 years earlier is that print is already being used for some of the same purposes. The best examples are things like news poems and songs that were disseminated particularly by *cantastorie*. Transmitting news was part of the traditional role of these figures, but they very quickly become involved in also publishing and selling these kinds of news accounts. For me that's significant. For example, this ballad singer I've studied, Ippolito Ferrarese, publishes a "Lament of Florence" soon after the city had been besieged in 1530, and he definitely worked in Venice in these years so he probably performed it there as well as other places. And you think, OK, we know that the Venetian people never revolted against their patrician government but if they're hearing an account of something like the fall of the Florentine Republic, at least they were aware of and heard about different kind of political arrangements, changes, upheavals. There is a lot of evidence that a lot of people were interested in hearing news of politics and wars and so on, which suggests that there was much more popular knowledge of current events than we often assume, not just in Venice but outside.

DR: The question then becomes, I suppose, to what extent that has an effect or feedback into the official world of politics, which of course is very difficult to show.

RS: Yes, I started to get into this in the article that I've written with Massimo Rospocher about Venice during the League of Cambrai, which essentially tried to show that the government and members of the patriciate were intensely conscious and very concerned that people of all classes in Venice were talking about what was going on in the war, to the point where the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian, who had his armies in the Veneto, tries to disseminate printed letters in Venice appealing to various segments of the population to revolt against the government. [M. Rospocher and R. Salzberg, '"El vulgo zanza": spazi, pubblici, voci a Venezia durante le Guerre d'Italia', *Storica*, 48, 2010]. They don't do it, but print is used in that way. It's disseminated in churches and around the city. We know from some diarists that people were talking about this on the piazzas and in the streets, and there was some fear that it could lead to revolt. It seems that the government was watching and trying to make sure that it was kept from the point of boiling over. The circulation of these kind of texts and ideas, particularly cheap printed

media and by people like *cantastorie*, is important in feeding that discussion. It increases the reverberation of voices and opinions that the government had to take account of if it wanted to keep the population peaceful. In the article, we propose the idea of an "evanescent public sphere". We were trying to find a way not to just say that the public sphere existed 200 years before Habermas's but rather that ephemeral forms of public debate were emerging at times of crisis like the early 16th century in Venice. Not just "bourgeois" and not just in places like coffeehouses and salons, but much more socially diverse publics in places like the piazza. And this is where it comes back to community. If these people are coming together around the bench of the *cantastorie* to listen and then perhaps buy a text, then we know that they would continue to sing the songs, which would get stuck up in various places and recited. In a way they were small publics.

DR: This makes me think of artisan chronicles of the 16th century that historians have been using for decades. When you look at edited editions of these, what's striking, despite the slight corrections of facts or dates, is just how informed people were. What this current generation of scholarship on print culture seems to be showing is the detail of how that's happening.

RS: I think that also comes back to figures such as *cantastorie*. The ones I have studied, who you can trace by their editions that survive, moved around Italy and often reprinted the same text in different cities, slightly adjusted perhaps, and I think helped to move texts between different printers. Just as preachers did, these kind of figures would have had to use a kind of pan-Italian language and adapt their performances to a certain degree. There was just much more trans-local communication and information than is often thought, because they're essentially recycling the same kind of texts, whether it's a news item or a funny poem or a religious oration. It suggests that these urban artisan publics – and we know more of northern Italy but the same was probably true in the south – had certain shared interests, shared concerns, and shared knowledge about particular stories. There are times when performers refer to characters from ancient history, for example, assuming that any person in the piazza would have a certain amount of knowledge about, say, Julius Caesar.

DR: There seems, then, to be more than one public, or community, being created here, and I wonder how easy is it to differentiate them. On one hand street singers as you say could attract very mixed audiences. On the other hand, some of your findings suggest that *cantastorie* also speak particularly to the anxieties and problems of essentially impoverished people, in other words, to artisans or the working poor. It seems as if this specific audience, or if you like community, is being identified, or indeed shaped to some extent, through these kinds of text.

RS: If you look back at the history of *cantastorie* before print, they did speak to different groups and concerns. Some of them were trying to appeal to elite audiences for patronage or whatever, but on the other hand, even in the 14th century, there are examples of songs that talk about poverty, and to a certain extent there are at least hints of social and political critique against the rich and the powerful. You have to be really careful, because it's certainly not that *cantastorie* were always speaking for the

poor to the poor, but there are examples – and I think increasingly as the 16th century goes on – of a literature of poverty that is published and performed by these people that might refer to the performer's own experiences, such as being a blind singer sitting and begging on the Rialto bridge and being ignored, or to the fact that the grain taxes are being raised and the rent's really high. Someone like the Bolognese *cantastorie* Giulio Cesare Croce could genuinely sing songs about living through a difficult time, saying to his audience, 'I understand this, I am experiencing it as well'.

DR: Is that one of the reasons that there's increasing surveillance and suspicion of *cantastorie*?

RS: There's a good article by Giorgio Caravale where he argues that there is increasing surveillance and censorship of these kinds of text because they go against the Counter-Reformation idea of accepting poverty as part of the social order. [G. Caravale, 'Censura e pauperismo tra Cinque e Seicento. Controriforma e cultura dei "senza lettere"', *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa*, 38, 2002]. But sometimes you get *cantastorie* themselves playing it safe. They're not Bob Dylan, singing protest songs. The commercial imperative was always there, and the awareness that they are performing often under the noses of the authorities, in a space like Piazza San Marco in Venice. They were obviously aware that they walked a fine line and aware of testing the limits. On the other hand, there's this case from 1545 – we only have a few lines about it – from the blasphemy magistrates in Venice about a *cantastorie* who has been selling a pamphlet about the god Priapus and presumably performing it with gestures. We don't know what the text was, but the printer and publisher and the peddler-performer get fined. And we don't know exactly where in the city, but it says he was working on his bench, so probably somewhere pretty prominent because otherwise he wouldn't attract an audience. So, they found these moments to get away with this sort of thing, to be subversive – though in that case he didn't get away with it.

DR: Papal bulls, laws, orations, stories, what else was out there?

RS: Chivalric literature was one of the biggest sellers. There's tons of it. This genre seems to be perennially popular, because you find the same texts being printed and performed in Italy in the early 20th century, which is amazing.

DR: If we're thinking about creating textual communities of shared references and tropes, why is that so resonant do you think?

RS: More knowledgeable people than me have spent time thinking about this. But it has something to do with the fantasy and glamour of the chivalric tales. The first line of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* talks about tales of battle and of love. There's magic, exotic lands, great feats of heroism. If you look at the way these stories are advertised on the title page, the printers sometimes pick out in red ink or in bold the words: love, war, new, exiting, delightful. And also they put woodcut images on the title page, generic images of knights at battle, which they reuse in different kinds of texts because it's much cheaper to do that. They tend to focus on the images of the knight, a damsel in

distress, images of a dragon, which suggests that printers thought these were the elements with the most appeal.

DR: In the kinds of carnivalesque or inversional performances that I and many others have written about, chivalric ideas are in fact being played out, and played with, manipulated parodically. Most of us, though, probably haven't given enough thought to the extent to which these words were saturating the piazza. It makes better sense of the roles that artisans seem to be taking on almost as second nature, as knights and so on.

RS: That's what's so interesting about it. There's been a tendency to see the trajectory as, for example, Ariosto being inspired by medieval troubadors and *cantastorie* singing about these things and then turning it into this classic text. And in fact you find straight away that the performers are taking the text back, cutting it up into small bits and performing and selling it in the piazza. So it very quickly ends up back where it began. A lot of other things are printed in cheap formats which had close ties to street performance, for example, all kinds of funny dialogues. One of the things that comes up again and again in *ottava rima*, the rhyme form that so many of these texts appears in, is the story of the battle between a blond and a brunette over the love of one man, which is in some ways a parody of chivalric tropes. These kinds of texts were probably performed as well as printed. They often start off with invocations to the muses or God or the Virgin, or a call to gather round and listen, so there are obvious clues to oral performance. Then there's all sorts of scurrilous tales, such as the one about the priest who cuckolds a peasant and ends up in a pile of shit – Boccaccio-esque stories – again written in verse in a way that would lend itself to performance. There are also prophecies, tales of monstrous births, and I found a lot of anti-courtesan poems, and invective, which were popular in elite circles at this time but also in popular literature and performance. Again there might be an element of social critique in that. The ballad singer Ippolito Ferrarese published an interesting verse text in the 1530s called the *Trionfo della lussuria* [The Triumph of lust] in which he describes a parade of courtesans and clergy and the luxurious and dissolute life in Rome.

DR: That seems to feed into the image of 16th-century Catholic reform that's emerged in recent years, one that is not as top-down as was once assumed – and where moral invective encoded wider political or social points.

RS: Definitely, and that's shown really well in Ottavia Niccoli's *Rinascimento anticlericale* [Laterza, 2005]. Another thing that appears and is related to this is the Pasquino character as a voice of social critique and often critique of the clergy and the Roman Curia. This starts out in Rome in the ambit of the Curia, with slanderous manuscript verses posted on the Pasquino statue, but it transfers to a certain degree into cheap print, though in a slightly watered down way – so using the character of Pasquino to voice subversive criticisms**,** for example against courtesans.

DR: That takes us more generally to the changes occurring towards the end of the 16th century. You suggest that to a certain extent the battle of the piazza is won by 'official culture'. Niall Atkinson, in his interview for this project, argued that ideas and

experiences of community clung to particular places partly because of the texts being read or sung there and because of the audiences that attracted and shaped. If that's right, one wonders to what extent how spaces and communities were changing.

RS: My sense is that the piazza is this space of enormous cultural mixing in the late 15th and early 16th century, but as you go on to a certain degree the elites withdraw from the piazza. We know that in the early 16th century the *cantastorie* were still being invited to perform for the Doge or the court, and it seems by the late 16th century this is happening less, that the elite has moved on to other forms of entertainment. There is the building of secular theaters and then the development of opera. Even if people can pay to get into a theatre, it's not as inclusive a space as a piazza, and more often elites are engaged in entertainments and cultural activities that take place in restricted spaces, like the salons and the academies and courts, and are leaving the piazza to the plebs. In Tommaso Garzoni's description of the piazza, from 1585, he's describing charlatans all over the piazza performing and crowds seeing them – he's not necessarily saying that this is something only for the plebs but I think he marks a change; this kind of entertainment is becoming more clearly designated as 'popular culture' for the unwashed masses [T. Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo***]**. Garzoni is part of a trend that you get increasingly in the 16th century to want to taxonomise everything, the need to categorise things and put them in their place. In the realm of print, I see that as being a reaction to this explosion of print and the uncontrolled movement of texts that had happened earlier in the 16th century. Later in the 1500s there's this need to bring order to the universe of texts, by things like the Index of Prohibited Books but also by catalogues and libraries, a need to clearly designate what is a canonical text, what is popular literature, what is elite literature. The *commedia dell'arte* is a related example, because they come out of the same matrix as the *cantastorie*, out of the piazza performances, but they increasingly try and differentiate themselves from them and even though they do continue to perform in public spaces, they increasingly try to associate themselves with theatres and with the court and more elite spaces.

DR: Anxieties about taxonomy are in effect anxieties about identity, then.

RS: That's exactly how I see it. I think it's very much related to wanting to clarify social status, to make sure that you know who's a *cittadino*, who has never worked with their hands, and who's an artisan. That's why *cantastorie* are quite troubling because they trample over boundaries. They're tolerated and they continue because they are put in their place in the piazza. It's very hard to survey the kind of literature performed and sold in the piazza and say how it changed, but my sense is that they continue to produce a lot of the same texts from the early 16th century, but the safer ones, the chivalric tales, acceptable religious works and not so much works about contemporary politics and society. So the performers are allowed to stay in the piazza and perform as long as they stay in relatively safe territory. That's probably mostly a result of censorship, and I also think they started censoring themselves. One of the things I try to show in my forthcoming book is this increasingly ambivalent or anguished discourse as the 16th century goes on about the way in which many different people are starting to read

because of print, and so a shoemaker can think himself a learned person because he can suddenly get his hands on texts. [R. Salzberg, *Printshop to Piazza: Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Venice, Manchester UP, 2013*] Sixteenth-century writers often talk in these terms, about tradesmen and artisans getting above themselves because of a sudden access to books and standards of scholarship slipping**.** It's very clear to me that print was one of the important factors in raising this sense of anxiety about the divisions of society being eroded, and this despite the fact that there's incredibly high rates of illiteracy in Italy through to the 18th and 19th century. I have a sense that in Italy, more than anywhere else, there was potential for huge social change because of printing, but that the lid to a certain extent was put back on.

DR: Where do you think historians need to be going with this now, with this examination of the links between print culture, identity and community?

RS: Just on a very practical level there are a lot of obstacles to studying this topic: the accessibility of the texts and the fact that they're scattered through numerous libraries. There still isn't a comprehensive catalogue – there's no Eebo [Early English Books Online, http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home] for early Italian print – but then there's also vastly more printed material produced in Italy compared to England in this period. Huge amounts will be able to be done once there is more stuff online and these texts are more easily searchable, because I think that they're an incredible and underused resource for this kind of history. This is already starting to happen with the orality/print/manuscript project taking off at the University of Leeds, which is about moving beyond the history of print culture and thinking about the various communication media – which might be manuscript, oral or print – which people used and which interacted with each other. We cannot ignore how important oral culture was for the majority of people in this period; we can not assume that because we don't have written texts by ordinary people about their role in the state and political processes, for example, that these issues weren't being discussed. The spatial aspect is crucial to all of these questions, in terms of defining communities and thinking about the physical and material conditions under which certain kind of exchanges took place.

g. Sharon Strocchia and Nicholas Terpstra: 'There are always cracks in the wall'

Sharon Strocchia (Emory University, http://tinyurl.com/c8ayk2r) is an authority on female monastic communities, parish life and urban ritual in renaissance Italy. Nick Terpstra (Univ. of Toronto, http://tinyurl.com/cblbjas) also an Italianist, is an expert on early modern civic religion, confraternities and charitable institutions for children. Here they discuss, among other things, the nature of boundaries as urban communities changed between the 15th and 16th centuries. (27-3-2011)

David Rosenthal: It seems to me you're both interested in ideal communities, imagined communities, in specific kinds of ways. The monastic female communities which you, Sharon, have written extensively on, are in the first instance very actively imagined. You. Nick, have been very interested in lay confraternal brotherhoods – and sisterhoods to some extent, though we know a lot less about that. So one of the things I'm interested in is how you think ideals about community bounce off what we understand about how they actually operate. You've also both worked on how both ideals and realities change over time – especially between the 15th and 16th century. So I'm also interested in how you see larger forces changing the shape of urban communities.

Sharon Strocchia: Regarding the ways in which various ideals inform the realities of communities, how they are constructed, who belongs, who's in or out – I think that the model that's held up for female monastic communities in 14th and early 15th century Italy is the apostolic family. There's a leader who's the proxy for Christ, and then a number of followers who are all supposedly equal in spirit. The number of members really is very small – usually ten or twelve women – so that the imagined apostolic families recreated in monastic communities have a very intimate feel. Imitating the apostolic family meant that only a handful of people could genuinely live out their spiritual ideals together.

   I think that the ideal of this holy family within female monastic institutions changes over time in very complex ways. Other kinds of family groupings, particularly the holy family figuring Joseph, Mary and the Christ child, come to be represented visually more often in the 16th century. Recurrent bouts of plague certainly kept convent populations

low for most of the 15th century, but I think that at the same time, the apostolic ideal became less powerful as an informing model for women's monastic houses. Other kinds of ideological forces, primarily civic in nature, begin to either erode or replace the notion that a handful of women gathered in a kind of fictive household constituted the ideal community. These notions of community really begin to change by 1500, whether in terms of face-to-face relationships or strong interpersonal bonds. So the informing ideology changes in tandem with realities.

DR: What is the changing relationship, then, between these religious houses and the city? This has been one of your themes, to insert them as much as possible within a neighbourhood then, as you say, an increasingly civic context. What were the ideological shifts that changed the way these communities thought about themselves? How do you see that process happening?

SS: I think there's a dynamic interplay between forces on the grounds and changing notions of what a religious community is or could be or should be. One of the governing forces that's driving change on the ground is the need to have safe places, so to speak, that are honourable places for women who are not able to find a respectable place in society, or at least their families or various social groups think that they are best suited to one kind of residential situation versus another. Notions of the ideal size and scale for communities can and do change – I'm thinking here of Nick's major orphanages and custodial institutions – depending on the nature of the institution itself [Terpstra, *Abandoned Children of the Italian Renaissance*, Johns Hopkins, 2005; *Lost Girls: Sex and Death in Renaissance Florence*, Johns Hopkins, 2010]. As one kind of constructed community among many, female religious houses had to navigate between the ideal religious life desired by and for female monastics, on one hand, and other urban social needs on the other. What happens in 15th century Florence is really exciting because an older medieval notion of the apostolic family embodied in small, intimate religious groupings gradually gives way to the sense that larger constructed communities carried greater political and spiritual heft. As Italian convents became more instrumental to urban elites during the 15th century, people changed their minds about the possibilities of finding and serving God in a broader range of settings. The monastic ideal for women no longer was confined to just the anchorite, the recluse, the group of 12 with the abbess. It could be a group of 100 or 200 women.

Nicholas Terpstra: One thing that I see is the importance of the model or metaphor of the family. Through the 15th century it operates at the level of individual communal groups, which then collectively create the social and civic whole on something like a republican model, complete with the exchange of offices and circulation of authority. What you see is that internal corporate notion of the family becoming projected on to states as a whole, with different states engaging in different forms of projection. This is one thing that struck me in comparing Florence and Bologna in the 16th century. Bologna tries hard to maintain some kind of republican power sharing to balance out intensely competitive oligarchs. In Florence it's more clear that Duke Cosimo I is going to be the *pater patriae* in a real way – that is, not in the indirect behind-the-scenes manner of his 15th century ancestor Cosimo, but as a true head of the house or father of

the nation. When you examine this transition politically, it's clear that the corporate model to some extent still functions internally in these states, particularly with the guilds, confraternities, and corporate or kinship groups that make up civil society. Yet as the republic refashions itself around the model or metaphor of the family, it gradually loses its real republican elements. There's a certain amount of window dressing to keep up the appearance of continuity, but the family model is the one that goes forward into absolutism. And Duke Cosimo as the head of the family-state then becomes the head of all these other little families, that is, the groups that make up civil society.

While I've looked a lot at confraternities, for me it's never been about those groups in isolation or even fraternalism as such. The focus has always been about civic religion, legitimating discourses, and invented traditions as the language of politics. It's really about how religion, charity, politics and gender intertwine to create communities, to legitimate power structures, and to create new institutions. Usually these mutate over time. In this language of power, sometimes the words stay the same but the ideology flips around. That's what been fascinating to me about studying civic religion, civil society and social capital. A good part of the ethos that you have expressed in the 15th century draws on 14th and 13th century models and is itself transformed in the 16th century. Really, the only way for a legitimating discourse to *maintain* its legitimating function is for the words to the stay the same even if the underlying realities change fundamentally.

That's where I found useful Mary Ann Clawson's notion about fraternalism as a cultural form and social resource – and I think this is what Sharon's pointing out too. The model of the family and particularly the holy family is imprinted so sharply on the individual and collective consciousness, it's so clearly the language of social organisation. But how you frame that family, and what size it becomes, and who acts as the parent at the top, well that's always very flexible and open to manipulation. I think what you have in some of the debates of the time are precisely disagreements about the limits and definitions and roles and responsibilities of the family as a political metaphor. So while in Florence, the duke becomes the head of the family, in Bologna there's a desperate struggle between republicans and oligarchs to claim the family metaphor and use it either horizontally or vertically. Because there is no single head, it's more complicated. The oligarchs are clever enough to pick up on republican ideology even as they are trashing it and trashing the republicans. And they're the ones who succeed of course.

DR: One of the things it seems to me is also changing are boundaries. Are boundaries becoming less porous between various kinds of community in the 16th century, to do with growth of states, to do with religious groups, in terms of class or gender, or in terms of a perception of pollution?

SS: I haven't studied the 16th century as much as the 15th, but for that reason I'm coming to the archival material with fresh eyes. I think one could make an argument for boundaries becoming more calcified, or at least better defined. There's certainly a greater interest in articulating boundaries between social groups in the 16th century. But I still wonder about that notion for a couple of reasons: Italian urban communities are very heavily networked, and we are only beginning to understand how men and women of different classes, ethnicities and religious identities defined community for

themselves. Some communities are more obvious, since they were embodied in formal institutions like convents or guilds, while others are loose, sometimes short-lived informal associations. How did these very different types of communities connect with each other? What kinds of information, goods and practices did they exchange? The impression I get so far from the work I've done in the 16th century regarding communities is that there was a thick undergrowth of personal associations linking clusters of individuals – subterranean networks so to speak – that might offset whatever greater boundedness and greater determinacy was occurring. It may be that there was a compensatory process at work. I'm thinking of the research on ghettos and Jews that shows how different religious groups in Italian society were being marked out more definitively in the 16th century. Or to take another example: Nick has described a process whereby righteous members of religious brotherhoods in Bologna began to ramp up the rhetoric that separated them from their wayward or "impure" brothers, and then translated that rhetoric into disciplinary action against them. He's made a persuasive case that this kind of separation was already going in the 15th century. What we don't know at this point, though, is what else was happening in the political and social relationships of Jews or confraternal brothers that might give the appearance of inclusion/exclusion, and what kind of informal social exchanges began to mitigate that disciplinary process.

NT: That's where I find Benedict Anderson's work on "imagined communities" very helpful. He's looking at the expansion of nationalism in the 19th century. You can't speak about nationalism in the 16th century, but you are looking at ideologies and at the gap between ideology and the implementation. What I've found interesting in the prescriptive literature is that clearly there's a greater emphasis on defining boundaries between insiders and outsiders and a greater will to enforce those boundaries. There's a sense of boundedness and of communities having walls and limits. As an ideological construct it's expanding steadily, but there's always a great gap between the construct and the social reality, not just in an Italian town but anywhere. Thinking again of civic religion, the fascinating thing is that this is becoming a greater preoccupation within cities and states, and it results in the extraordinary series of expulsions of dissidents and outsiders that begin picking up in the 15th century and carry on until the early 18th century. Anderson talks about imagined communities of the nation, and in the Renaissance and Reformation you can talk about imagined communities of faith – each city favoured by the Virgin and given a mission by God. Dissidents and the 'impure' had always been expelled. But part of the difference between these new expulsions and the medieval ones is that you have a more powerful state apparatus behind it. So it becomes a mass phenomenon. At the same time, there are always divergent voices. There's always a dialogue. There are always people who are immune to the 'pure community' ideology, or places where it doesn't bite, or just doesn't get off the ground. But when it does, it has extraordinary effects for sometimes hundreds of thousands of people.

   I'm trying to maintain the sense that it's not a monolithic total change. There is discussion, there are gaps and loopholes and exceptions. But that said, and looking at it in the context of the exile and expulsion project I'm engaged in now, it seems to me that this idea of a pure, imagined community of faith becomes the governing ideology for so many people and so many states. I would say that there are more people around in

1517 who are concerned about purity and contagion in their communities than there are people concerned about their personal salvation. Their personal salvation is something that they don't necessarily have an immediate grip on, but what they do grasp very strongly is what contaminates their community. If we're going to look at the Reformation as a popular phenomenon we have to look beyond theological constructs and into some of these deep fears and hopes about community. We have to see how the 'new' theology first rose out of these depths and then turned around and came back as a language that reshaped them. This is the funny thing, the advantage, about coming as an Italianist into an area like Reformation studies that has been defined by Germanists and northern Europeanists. You see things differently, and you see different things. They barely even know you're there, so it's a subversive kind of action. Sometimes Reformation studies seems extraordinarily inward looking – they are all having intense conversations together about theological ideas that they've discussed for generations. One of the more fascinating opportunities as an outsider to the field is to precisely to explore some of the issues coming out of Italian studies about community and how its defined and protected.

Again, there is the question of how that translated into reality. In one of our sessions at the RSA conference, Andrew Gow looked at the Jews of Augsburg, and what happened with the expulsions that started in 1438 **['**In and Out of the Window: Jews In (and Out of) Tri-confessional Augsburg', Exile, Expulsion and Religious Refugees panel, Renaissance Society of America, 2011]. What nobody's looked at is where they go. They just move outside the city walls, and settle in the suburbs. They're always going in and out. So they're expelled from that pure space that's bound by the city walls, but not really expelled from the broader community. They *are* expelled, though, from a sense of what it is to be part of the pure imagined community. Many of these German cities later develop towering public sculptures in the form of a tree, and on the tree's branches are representations of all the local guilds and crafts. You'll never find on that tree any Jews, or Jewish occupations, or characters. So in a sense the notion of who makes up the community is very bounded and very visual – even in towns where almost half the population is Jewish! How does that shape people's sense of community, of inside and outside, even if they moderate the actual implementation of it – as they often do – and just push the Jews out to the suburbs?

SS: Another example of the growing social concern with establishing boundaries both within communities and between them moves from Nick's meta-narrative of Europe as a whole to what happens in Catholic Europe and women's religious communities in particular. For instance, we don't see an intense social concern with convent walls in the 15th century. Many Italian convents really have very low perimeters; they're not enclosed behind massive, fortess-like walls. That sense of separation is very much a 16th-century phenomenon, in which the sacred space occupied by these young virgins who were given to God had to be clearly delineated and protected. At the same time there are always cracks in the wall, ways to look over the wall both from the inside and the outside. Certainly part of the push by the Council of Trent is to purify the enclosures by saying that only women who have taken vows can reside in the community. Convents can't include older women who really just need a place to live and are willing to cede their goods to the community and so forth – they have to be pushed out. These religious houses are microcosms of the process that Nick is describing for much of Catholic Europe

in terms of purging, purifying, defining and redefining religious communities: only the right members are inside, everyone else is on the outside, and the perimeters are more clearly defined and policed. But the process of purifying and enclosing convents is not as easy as it seems. Even after Trent, elite families want to have it both ways: they want convents to be "pure" religious communities uncorrupted by worldly affairs, but they also want to have full access to their sisters, aunts, and daughters living in these houses. So Catholic reform sets up many instances in which we can look at small-scale communities as microcosms of a much larger process – and those two things inform each other.

NT: Absolutely, and that also true for the charitable institutions I look at. They become enclosures as well: foundling homes, orphanages, and many shelters, but particularly ones for women and girls and for the poor. The wall goes up, but if we look at further records, we find complaints about how porous the wall is and how porous the members both inside and outside end up making that wall. The prescriptive literature for these enclosures – like statutes and rules – can be compelling, and for an earlier generation of historians it was almost blinding, because they assumed all of these regulations, which were often extraordinarily harsh, were followed as put down. But you don't have to go too far in to the records to realise that the people ultimately responsible for these homes are tearing their hair out for decades afterwards, saying, "Why can't we make these rules stick?" They complain that "we've had this *guardiano* who for 30 years hasn't observed the regulations".

We recognise this from what we know of Italian society now, a society where people "find ways around" – the wonderful term *arrangiarsi*. I don't think it's just dealing in stereotypes. It's a culture, certainly in our period, that's as wedded to the notion of people as it is to the notion of boundaries – and people usually trump boundaries. It's not that they tear down the walls, because the walls have a certain convenience of their own. But there's a porousness of Italian society around individuality that we find compelling in our work.

DR: Talking about purity and boundaries puts you I think on some kind of ethnographic playing field, so I wonder if could ask to elaborate a little further on how you would describe your approach to the communities you study. And more generally, in terms of approaches, where do you see the field going at the moment?

SS: I think the approach to early modern communities has to be as rich as the communities themselves. There has to be a very expansive toolkit that works almost seamlessly. One of the things I notice is how effortlessly a gifted historian today blends a variety of different tools. So in contrast to, say, the pioneering social historian Richard Trexler, who foregrounded certain kinds of symbolic anthropology two decades ago, scholars today are able to be more nimble and use those same concepts which have become part of our mental furniture, when the material warrants it, or when those approaches will open up new insights – but not necessarily use symbolic anthropology only. The same is true with various kinds of feminist theory. Nick was talking earlier about views of prescriptive literature that were just stifling, that blinded us to what happening on the ground – and I think we know now that practices have a life of their

own, which in certain cases only encouraged people in authority to reissue rules and regulations using stronger language.

I would say two things about the theoretical constructs guiding Renaissance studies today: first, that it's very hard to put your finger on a single defining element; and second, that that's a very good thing. Many contemporary approaches are intertwined and work together to give us insight into evidence that can be pretty opaque. To take the example of boundedness: one could look at a various ecclesiastical decrees that suggest lay people should not be coming into women's cloisters, and that various transactions between discrete communities should not be occurring. Those decrees get ramped up over the 16th century, and of course the capstone is the Council of Trent, where in theory you have a neatly laid out template of how communities of women should operate. They should be removed from the world, with very little commerce of any kind with others. If we took that pronouncement at face value, we would have a very static view of history and certainly of how female religious communities are embedded in 16th century life. What we need to do is to set that picture in motion. What sets these norms in motion for me is looking at the varieties of exemptions, first of all, issued by these same ecclesiastical authorities, because they know that there are other imperatives, they know that Italian society needs both boundedness and contact between worlds that have been artificially separated. But lay families as well as high church officials want to have it both ways. One of the things I've learned about prescriptions of all sorts is that they can be activated at crucial moments and made very powerful, and we as historians ignore them at our peril. But we get a more rounded view of social realities by looking at the circumstances in which prescriptions and other rules are either left latent or ignored, because doing so might serve other important purposes. The point I'm trying to make is that societies not only need to have a variety of tools and mechanisms, but also ways of getting around those mechanisms, of contravening their own normative pronouncements in order to remain nimble, responsive to contingency, and able to adapt. I think that's in part how historical change occurs. The theoretical tools needed to approach that complex historical reality have to be equally diverse – and so feminist tools, anthropological insights, poststructuralist views can help us crack open what is going on at a particular moment in time.

NT: If we're talking about methodology, one of the things I learned out of my last project is the importance of reading into the silences, and the silences that happen in different documents about the same institutions. As you bring them together you have to balance which you think is the strongest narrative, because you'll have competing narratives. So in the case of *Lost Girls*, where I was looking at the Casa della Pietà orphanage, there is an official, authorised history, which gave a very particular slant on the home, and which looked like it had all sorts of authority – one of the girls of the home was one of the early authors, and some of the early stages of the text were almost contemporary with events. It was something like a convent chronicle that had evolved over time. My doubts about its narrative only grew after I'd started looking at other documents in other archives, and that was when I came across other silences. The key thing about the "official" convent narrative was that it said very little about the fact that so many of the girls were dying and it gave a very coloured view – a very acerbic view – of the women who were running the institution. It tried to suggest they weren't really

running it. In other archival documents you could see that the women were running the home on an intense day-to-day basis, not just distantly engaged as a board, but right there in the daily grind of the place. What seemed to emerge was that the convent narrative was more clerically oriented. It focused on everything the clergy was doing, and was silent on the women. The women's narrative in a sense responded to that as a reciprocation; their records were all about the nuts and bolts of administration, with very little about the clergy. I got a better sense out of the women's administrative documents about why the girls were dying. I had to take these silences together.

This is the kind of project you can only do once you've been in the archives for a while and have got a better sense of what the records do and what they don't do. You also start to see what the records look like physically, and read into that. What was striking to me was the excellent physical condition of the beautiful volumes that were produced from the 1550s, when the places opened, and then the gradual disintegration you could see in the way papers were collected and records kept – or not kept – by the 1580s. It took time, experience, and entering the archives with a hermeneutics of suspicion. At a certain point you find the voice you find most compelling, and that's the voice you then start to expand on. I got that from Natalie Davis, who gave advice on how to write this up. She said one of the key things for her was to give voice to people who had none. That's the priority that was driving my narrative. There are others who have written on the same institutions and who have taken a different approach. I don't think that's such a problem. In terms of where the profession is going, there's more of a postmodern sense now that accepts different narratives. Here's the narrative I've heard and reconstructed, but I don't mean to make that the only possible one. I don't get a sense of the profession now having the same kind of fundamental ideological splits that it had when we were coming into it, with the titanic debates, really *ad hominem* struggles, going on during the Sixties and Seventies. It sometimes made them interesting but these intense debates often were pointless.

SS: One of the big questions that comes up in tandem with postmodern approaches is how to write history responsibly. This is both a practical and ethical question. If we accept that there are several different, often competing narratives contained within the sources themselves, how do we evaluate those claims and produce a judicious narrative of our own? Over the past few years, scholars have been trying to work out a conceptual vocabulary for the practice of history that is responsible to the evidence, to certain traditions, historiographic and otherwise, to respecting but not being bound by disciplinary boundaries. I think one important area of conversation for the profession and certainly for the field of Renaissance studies is how one takes this expanded toolkit and still works in a responsible fashion.

DR: Nick said just before he was interested in recovering lost voices, while you have been interested not in the lost voices so much as the lost activities of female religious communities. Your work speaks to the field of female agency, and it's not just about what women can, but what they can't do, which seems to me one of the interesting features of monasticism.

SS: I think that issues of agency are important to most historians. For me, coming out of a second-wave feminist moment, I saw that doing women's history was possible after having been told in graduate school that there were few sources for writing the history of Renaissance women. Then I discovered that it wasn't a matter of reading between the lines, or reading into silences, but that in fact there were gobs of material out there for helping us to understand the historical experiences of women in relation to other groups. So I've been interested in issues of agency for a long time. In the book you're referring to, *Nuns and Nunneries in Renaissance Florence* [Johns Hopkins, 2009], I do try to talk about the limits of agency, how community enables women in certain ways and constrains them in others. What I've become more interested in the last couple of years is the fact that creating and sustaining community requires a great deal of energy. Community isn't something that just happens, it has to be continually reaffirmed, in some cases revivified, and that's true of these convent communities as well. That realisation leads me to ask about the practices and the people who help to sustain and enliven community on an everyday basis. I'm trying to get down to a nitty gritty, almost pedestrian level mentally in terms of approaching documents so that I can then go back up to these larger questions of how community creates society. I have to go small to ask the bigger questions.

4. References and external links

<u>EXTERNAL LINKS</u>

Project website:

http://earlymoderncommunities.com

As part of the review process we compiled an extensive bibliography, listed below. This is also online as a wiki-bibliography, which can be added to by members.

http://communities-bib.wikispaces.com/Communities+Bibliography

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The Connected Communities

Connected Communities is a cross-Council Programme being led by the AHRC in partnership with the EPSRC, ESRC, MRC and NERC and a range of external partners. The current vision for the Programme is:

> "*to mobilise the potential for increasingly inter-connected, culturally diverse, communities to enhance participation, prosperity, sustainability, health & well-being by better connecting research, stakeholders and communities.*"

Further details about the Programme can be found on the AHRC's Connected Communities web pages at:

www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/connectedcommunities.aspx