

Archival Ethnography, or: Reflections on a Lost Note

by Rebecka Lennartsson

Ma chere seur

Ma chere seur, please be so good as to come to me this evening at 11 o'clock, which I believe to be the most suitable time for you, and bring along sister Maja, who is in the service of Fru Schantz, for this evening I shall receive some honest gentlemen who, as they are not afraid to spend money, will certainly ensure our satisfaction. If you happen to see Dirty Greta, bring her too, the tomrig looks good, je me recommande
Ma chere seur

L. von Plat

The above lines were written in Stockholm in 1747. The man behind the elegant handwriting is Petter Levijn, a clerk at Södermalm *kämnärsrätt* (a subsidiary court). His text is the official transcript of an on-going trial. The original consists of a note given to the court in evidence. The message is addressed to Catharina Thun, the housekeeper of Commissioner Robsulun, and was discovered in the rear courtyard of Robsulun's house.

It is the month of June. Summer Stockholm is verdant and in bloom, refuse heaps are fermenting in the heat, gulls screech and sails flutter. At Södermalm *kämnärsrätt* a trial is underway against Helena Catharina Bohman, the 17-year-old daughter of Master Joiner Anders Bohman and his wife Maria from Hornsgatan on Södermalm. Bohman wants the public prosecutor to teach his unruly daughter a lesson she will not forget. Lately she has been out at all hours of the night. When he has tried to stop her she has 'snapped her fingers at him'. Sometimes the parents feel quite simply threatened by their daughter. Master Bohman has lost control. But the trial, which originally seemed straightforward, almost a family affair, soon reveals itself to be far more complex. Anders Bohman's case against his daughter is only a prelude to a whole series of legal examinations, which will shine the spotlight on many names, places, and events, and reveal various aspects of Stockholm's organized sex trade.

The case of Helena Bohman is part of my current research project that looks at the trade in sexual services in 18th-century Stockholm, where it forms one of three key scenes.¹ The case is interesting, not least because it confuses me, just as it appears to have confused the *kämnärsrätt* too. Helena Bohman falls outside the conventional frame of reference; her behaviour is hard to understand, from either an 18th-century or a modern perspective. However, in this article, using the discovered note as a starting point, I shall limit myself to discussing the role of the written word when an ethnologist looks at historical material in order to conduct ethnography in the past.² Because I am currently in the middle of my project, this article reflects rather than summarizes methodological possibilities and limitations.

Archival Ethnography

Ethnologists are schooled in ethnographic thinking and ethnographic methods. A subject is subdivided into fields, which are mastered and analysed using interactive observations, field notes, conversations and interviews. Culture, in its anthropological sense, comprises interpretational frameworks and knowledge-related goals: „Ethnography is the interpretation of cultures“³, as the anthropologist James Clifford has pointed out. The term ethnography has the strange tendency to denote both what ethnographers do – the wide spectrum of methods and practices within fieldwork, such as conversation and interview, field-note taking, photography, audio and video recording, and geo-

¹The other two key scenes are the 'whore ball', which was held in secret at the offices of the Royal Military College at the Royal Palace, and a series of workhouse escapes.

²In two previous articles I have attempted to explain my method by using a model that combines Paul Ricoeur's variations of scale with Roland Barthes' analysis of three levels of meaning, cf. Rebecka Lennartsson, *Etnografiska utfärder i 1700-talets Stockholm*. Etnologi, historia och metod, in: *Kulturella perspektiv*, 3 (2010), pp. 1-13; Rebecka Lennartsson, Notes on 'Not Being There'. *Ethnographic Excursions in Eighteenth-Century Stockholm*, in: *Ethnologia Europea. Irregular Ethnographies*, 41:1 (2011), pp. 105-116.

³James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, London 1988, p. 15. Given that the anthropological concept of culture is itself so ambiguous, questionable and sensitive, I have chosen not to explore the subject any further in the present context.

graphical movement – as well as the products of these exercises. We often regard completed ethnography as a text; it can certainly also be a film, exhibition or lecture. Mixing process and representation can lead to a certain confusion of ideas. Yet there is good reason for allowing the concept to denote the entire process of events, from the first tentative steps into a new field to its representation, from the collection of material to analysis. Quite simply there is no clear distinction between ethnography as collection and ethnography as analysis, or between fieldworker and author. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz summarizes the entire intellectual process of ethnography with the concept of *thick description*.⁴ In an essay of the same name he carves out four characteristics that define ethnography as a discipline. First, ethnography is interpretative. Second, it dedicates itself to defining and depicting flows of social discourse as well as, third, aiming to interpret them. A fourth characteristic of ethnography is that it operates on a micro level.⁵ These characteristics are no different for an ethnologist working with historical material. In my experience working methods are often similar too, not least because the method, regardless of field, is based from beginning to end on text in its widest sense, which requires writing in all its various forms.⁶

Trying to get to know 18th-century people and become familiar with the cultural pixels of the period has proved challenging. In many

⁴Thick description has become a highly popular working method in disciplines where historical perspectives and ethnographic methods combine, such as microhistory, historical anthropology and new cultural history. Not least in German-speaking parts of Europe, historical studies characterized by ethnography have proved successful. Cf. Michaela Fenske, *Micro, Macro, Agency: Historical Ethnography as Cultural Anthropology Practice*, in: *Journal of folklore research*, 44,1 (2007), pp. 67-99, here p. 74; Alf Lüdtke (Ed.), *The History of Everyday Life. Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, Princeton 1995. Geertz has undeniably contributed to developing and disseminating the concept – yet originally he adopted the idea from the British philosopher Gilbert Ryle.

⁵Cf. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, New York 1973.

⁶Cf. Clifford, *The predicament of culture*, p. 120; Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 10; Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography. Ethnographic Practices for the 21st century*, Thousand Oaks 1997.

ways I was initially disorientated, needing to regain my balance and „find my feet“⁷, as Geertz describes the sensation of finding himself in an unfamiliar field. The language is different – the alphabet itself is not the same as mine. Moreover, the basis of communication, which builds on the understanding of morals and social norms, humour, honour and the rules of life in general, is difficult to comprehend. To train myself to decipher manuscripts and find material, but also to get to know my ‘field’ and gain a deeper understanding of the period and the people that are the subject of my project, I have spent a great deal of time reading criminal court records. The sensation on opening a leather-bound volume and breathing in the dust of centuries puts the reader in a curious frame of mind. Frustration is great when reading takes time and the letters dance before one’s eyes. The desire is to crack the code, to break in, to understand. Satisfaction is all the greater when the letters suddenly fall into place and sentences become intelligible. Eighteenth-century society hits you with its odours and tastes; people take shape in all their decrepitude, suffering, love, sorrow and hate. Reading the records becomes a journey into the everyday life and hardships of the time. They deal with both the great and the small. Half-metre tall volumes of densely written text, full of items struck through and margin notes, are inhabited by runaway maids, slandered wives and defamed market-stall assistants, who co-exist with the corpses of infants found in attics and outhouses, gangs of thieves, violent criminals and murderers. The detail in the material vividly transports the reader down onto the street, into houses and taverns, bringing to life conversations and arguments, family relations, and disagreements between master and servant, between neighbours and with strangers, recounting tales of how people loved, hated and killed. Eighteenth-century *kämnärsrätt* courts are very much social arenas, where deliberations and struggles over the right to interpret actions and events are played out and judged.

Very few cases deal directly with commercial sexuality, the theme

⁷Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973.

of my project. In the 18th century prostitution had yet to assume its modern meaning of the payment of money in return for sexual services. No legal distinction is made between an unmarried woman – or man – who produces a child by a lover, and a woman or man who regularly receives money for fornication with different partners.⁸ Numerous cases deal with the subject indirectly, such as the many examples of *lägersmål* where single mothers are fined or sentenced to the pillory, instances involving maids prosecuted for ‘idleness’, and the countless cases of slander involving men or women accused of being whores, whoremongers or procuresses. Many of these cases are completely unconnected with my project, yet I cannot help becoming engrossed by them, rather like a fieldworker studying a particular quarter of town who sees something interesting going on in an adjoining lane. I am almost tempted to say that this counts as part of the ethnographic method, this openness for tangential trails and unexpected turns. Sometimes it reinforces my sense of estrangement and wonder in relation to 18th-century society, as in the case of the 9-year-old boy who, after being so amused by seeing the jerking legs of a criminal being executed at Nytorget square, hangs himself in the entrance hall of his home. The boy’s parents are prosecuted for burying him in consecrated ground rather than at a gallows hill or in the forest with other suicide victims. Other cases relate alternative histories and give a voice to individuals who otherwise remain silent in the written sources, such as the workhouse inmate who dares to take her inspector to court for beating her with a birch-rod so badly that her unborn baby died in her womb. And in rare cases, a trial turns up in the sources that proves to be a veritable keyhole, allowing a view

⁸According to the Criminal Code of 1734, fornication was illegal. Offences were punishable on a sliding scale from *hor* (if both parties were married to someone else), via *lägersmål* (if neither was married) to *otidigt sängaläge* (if the couple were engaged). Another clause forbade procuring or allowing oneself to be used for fornication at a procurer’s house. Many of the women (I have found no references to men) who would be called prostitutes today were prosecuted for being unable to support themselves legitimately, and were sentenced to the workhouse for ‘idleness’.

right to the heart of the project.

Going Astray

One such case is that of Helena Bohman, her father and the suspected procuress L. von Plat.⁹ Even on its own, the note, the short extract from the court records that begins this article, provides a great deal of information – and prompts numerous questions. It shows, for example, how communication across town was made using written messages, which, by extension, needed someone to deliver them. It is also evident that the note’s author connected men and women who were unknown to one another, made her home available for their meetings, and that money changed hands. The women who were contacted worked as household maids, whereas the men were ‘honest gentlemen’ of means, willing to pay their way. The note suggests that servant women were free to move alone in the city late at night, and that it was presumed they could read. But who was L. von Plat and the other named women? Who delivered the message? And how commonly were similar notes delivered across town?

Similarly, the whole series of records of Helena Bohman’s trial – or, as it turned out, trials – may be broken down into numerous details, which then give rise to questions. The case of Helena Bohman provides hard evidence of how the trade in sexual services worked. We are given the names and addresses of other participating women and procuresses in Stockholm, information on their male customers, and a mass of detail on where, how and under what circumstances transactions took place. Indirectly we learn a great deal about the freedom of movement for a young woman in Stockholm, the mechanisms by which rumours spread, forms of social interaction, notions of honour, neighbour relations and the function of the family. The case provides unique insight into a societal sphere that would hardly be visible other

⁹Lovisa von Plat turns up, for example, in a number of trials. She appears in songs by Carl Michael Bellman as well as in anonymous ‘whore poems’, and is referred to in letters and diaries of the period. Plat’s home is described in the erotic memoirs of Gustaf Hallenstierna, and her silhouette is preserved for posterity in the National Library of Sweden in Stockholm.

than via obscene or romantic fiction. Of no less interest, of course, is that fact that these situations and environments are described by a young woman who took an active role herself. During the trial it is Helena Bohman's version of reality that is quoted and referred to. But many others get to speak too: several witnesses, court officials, the public prosecutor, Helena's father – and soon Lovisa von Plat herself, who has the misfortune to be passing the courtroom window just as Helena Bohman is giving evidence about Lovisa's procuring. Lovisa von Plat is brought in. She denies emphatically, despite admitting that she does know Helena Bohman. Plat, or Helena Fahlberg as she sometimes calls herself, is however, one of the most renowned procuresses in Stockholm. She appears in many other written sources.¹⁰ Bohman and Plat met for the first time at a tavern ball in the city. According to Plat, Bohman asked her help to find a job. Helena Bohman, on the other hand, describes in detail how Plat, over a period of months, has arranged for her to see one man after another, from market-stall assistants to barons. Plat has taken care of the men's money, for which Bohman says she cares little.

The material largely far exceeds my expectations in terms of its detail and closeness to individuals. I feel I have to some degree come to know the people who drift in and out of the material. I can follow them between the sources as they weave a geographic and social pattern across town. To structure my work I list the names of individuals and places I come across in the sources, noting what I know about them. These can be used to search further in other volumes of archived experiences. Every new collection of dusty, straggling, difficult-to-interpret records challenges me with its hidden secrets. What will I miss if I only use the index, or if I skip a year?

During 'fieldwork' I keep a 'field diary'. Here I record the fragments of vanished lives I come face to face with in the archive: references from court cases, quotations from confessions and witness

¹⁰I first came across Helena Bohman in Mila Hallman's book *Målare och urmakare, flickor och lösdrivare* (1916). I have subsequently encountered her many times in the court records.

statements, sometimes the whole trial itself. It becomes a way of both collecting and processing material, grasping and recording it. I lose people and find them again, imagine I see a pattern only for the solution to disappear from view. More often than not follow-ups and conclusions are absent; the material includes frustrating hiatuses, interruptions and tantalizing fragments. Sometimes records are no more than illegible scribble. At other times interpretation founders on my ignorance of a concept, word, sentence or association. This is strongly reminiscent of how Geertz compares ethnography to reading complex manuscripts: „foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries“.¹¹

Nevertheless, I visualize this stage as trying to cultivate what I have called the *narrative level* of the analysis: what does the material say? I try to present myself with an account of the information the sources provide, what I can claim to know thus far. Looking at my notes, I realize I am of course interpreting even at this stage: I am analysing, mixing in theories and thoughts about the state of things – although as yet at only a very basic level. My field notes are thus a mess, filled with meta-commentaries, disconnected thoughts and incomplete theoretical associations. And despite possessing a fantastic, detailed material that in many ways approaches the individuals themselves, including life stories, events and phenomena that would sufficiently fill the book I wish to write, during the course of my work I have sometimes felt the frustration of never really managing to rise above street level. I continually risk losing myself in the material, going astray in the lanes. Was does it all really mean? How am I to understand it?

Archive Fever

Experience has always been an effective guarantee of ethnographic authority.¹² To have been on site in person witnessing, hearing and seeing provides an obvious interpretational advantage. This can, in turn, lead to the ethnographic ballast that the French philosopher Jacques

¹¹Geertz, 1973, p. 10.

¹²Cf. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, p. 120.

Derrida calls 'archive fever': a desire to find the origin, the point at which experience and its impression remain intact and where the question of representation is unproblematic.¹³ Immanent in the discipline of ethnography is the aim to produce a body of archive material, to reproduce a true version of the reality being studied. Ethnography thus connects with modern power as described by Michel Foucault, manifested in the aim of an archive to collect, categorize, preserve, classify and thereby control the world.

In this respect archival ethnography differs from the ethnographic study of the modern world. Scholars of history do not create their own material. At the same time as a consciousness of the relationship between power, politics, epistemology and representation has become established in the cultural sciences following the cultural turn, the possibility to freeze a piece of reality in textual form has, however, lost its legitimacy. Being present is no longer any guarantee of a less distorted or truer image of reality.¹⁴ What an ethnographer notes down is a never social discourse in its 'raw form', but instead only small parts of what the informants can communicate.¹⁵ Ethnography is always interpretation, regardless of field.

However, the danger remains of what Derrida calls the seduction of the archive, in simple terms the enticing assumption that an archive's contents reflect lost realities.¹⁶ The allure is powerful. I could make life easy for myself by presenting an objective, fully referenced account of the trials of Helena Bohman. For many this would probably qualify as a more genuine form of scholarship: a survey, a thorough account of the state of things. But the court records comprise no simple, objective reflection of reality, in the same way that no other form of archive does. According to Derrida, archives are in effect just like institutions, largely

¹³Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*, Chicago 1996. Axel, Brian Keith, *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures*, Duke 2002.

¹⁴Cf. N. K. Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography. Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century*. Thousand Oaks, CA 1997.

¹⁵Cf. Clifford Geertz, 1973, p. 20.

¹⁶Cf. Derrida, *Archive Fever*.

mixed up with surveillance and power, their contents permeated by the panoptic principals of modern power.¹⁷ But using archive material does not necessarily mean working with its categorical constructs or reinforcing any of its inherent political functions and power. Quite the opposite, I would claim that the work of an ethnologist of the past involves questioning and destabilizing truths that have been established in archive material. Thus, my interest in Helena Bohman's testimony is, of course, different to that of the court. Whereas the public prosecutor leading the hearing aims to determine the crimes of Helena Bohman and Lovisa von Plat, to ascertain the truth, I am more interested in the conditions and perspectives of the various voices.

This leads me to the second level of my analysis, which I have called the *communicational level*. The trial records, multifaceted by nature, are interesting both in terms of the events they portray and examine, and the event of which they themselves form a part. Thus, the trial records are interesting with regard to the situation that produced them, in other words the trial itself and the interplay of voices and wills that the records reproduce. For the records to fulfil their potential as a keyhole on history, I must know more about the situational context. What relationships and discourses do the dialogues reflect? What does the interaction between court officials and defendants tell us about the societal conditions for commercial sexuality in the 18th century? What conclusions can we draw? To briefly return to the note that begins the article, it is used in evidence against Lovisa von Plat who is accused of procuring. The court finds Helena Bohman's thorough account of Plat's trade, with Bohman herself and other girls, credible. But when Lovisa von Plat, having looked at the note herself, supplies a handwriting sample for comparison, the court finds that she cannot be its author. Why is this? Does the court have some reason to protect Plat? What is the nature of her relationship to the public prosecutor, or to Helena Bohman? And who handed the note to the court?

Witnesses are questioned in turn, and Lovisa von Plat personally

¹⁷Cf. *ibid.*

delivers her defence speech. Evidence in the form of letters and others forms of written communication are sometimes read out, and thereby enter the court record. Some of the originals survive in a special folder for appendices. Witness testimonies and the presentation of reports are directed by the public prosecutor and transcribed by the recording clerk. This clerk decides the nature and content of the records, which reproduce his language and his interpretation of what was said. Antipathies and loyalties sometimes shine through. Occasionally one suspects the clerk to be tired or irritated. Nevertheless, the court records are very much dialogical in the sense that they accommodate conflicting perspectives and several voices.¹⁸ In fact some sections comprise a dialogue. Throughout long passages the clerk transcribes the ebb and flow of conversation, as defendants and plaintiffs, witnesses and court officials appear to engage in relatively free discussion. All parties interject at one time or another in order to have their say.

My 'field notes', gradually expanding with reflections on how the sources were created, begin to take the form of a thick description. But they are still a jumble, an unstructured collection of thoughts, observations, quotations and testimonies. The need to rise above street level, away from the myopic, detailed studies of the micro perspective, is starting to feel acute. How can I obtain a general view and observe from a distance? Is it possible, or even desirable?

Variations in Scale

The philosopher of history Paul Ricoeur in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2005)¹⁹ describes the importance for scholars of history to operate at various levels in their material and analysis. He likens history to a map, where separate scales allow the researcher to discover different things. The ethnographic micro perspective must be placed in a broader context than the situational perspective. Only when the dialogical court records are set alongside the cultural and societal context of

which they are a part, can they divulge the relationship between the individual and the cluster of ideas, ideals, and truths that we call culture. One characteristic of ethnography's way of thinking is that contextualization springs from lived life, from interpreted and transcribed experience. For me this corresponds with my attempts to structure and thematize the material in the current phase of my research project. This does not mean that I have not previously searched for clues in the manner of Carlo Ginzburg: the apparently small and insignificant details which can, in fact, point to fundamental and significant features of a given culture.²⁰ The research process, as many have pointed out, is not some crystal clear course of events from inception to representation. Only after spending some time in the intended context of study do repetitions and concentrations in the material become apparent. Returning to the found note as an example, how should we interpret the odd combination of the dignified, albeit misspelled French and the quite crude form of address in the communication? What should we make of the other, similar meetings that have been arranged in people's homes? Has the brothel in its 19th-century form yet to be 'invented'? What does the involvement of money mean? How did this influence the court's judgement, or that of friends and neighbours? How did the women concerned look upon their actions? What did they risk? What did they stand to gain? Further questions arise from the situational context: why does Master Bohman come to court to resolve a family problem? What does Helena Bohman mean when she says money holds no interest for her? What is the significance of her background as a daughter of a relatively respectable family? Why do both Plat and Bohman appear to avoid conviction? Do the moral concepts of the court coincide with those of the general public? And how do we explain that a craftsman's daughter, accused of and admitting to carnal relations with a number of unknown men, marries a nobleman only a couple of years later?

¹⁸Cf. Inger Lövkrona, Annika Larsdotter, barnamörderska. Kön, makt och sexualitet i 1700-talets Sverige, Lund 1999.

¹⁹Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Chicago 2004.

²⁰Cf. Carlo Ginzburg, *Ledtrådar. Essäer om konst, förbjuden kunskap och dolda historia* Häften för kritiska studier 1989.

Questions of this kind would not arise where a body of information, or the perspective on it, began and remained at the large end of the scale, again with reference to Ricoeur.²¹ If we view the period in terms of its prevailing laws and Christian morals passed down to the people of Stockholm via the catechism and religious teaching, parish catechetical meetings and sermons, the spirit of the age appears immensely rigid. If we instead take case law and the available statistics into account, the situation becomes rather different. It is quite obvious how variables such as gender and social background influence judicial decisions. Lower-class women are clearly overrepresented in *lägersmål* cases, where the man identified as the father is surprisingly often a seaman, usually one who has sailed away to an unknown port. Starting instead at an ethnographic, individual level, and closely reading specific cases, an even more complex situation emerges. Here we find the women, men and events that have come to the interest of the authorities, but which nevertheless seem to slip through the net of regulatory discourse and practice. Here we discover the women neighbours have never seen the departed seaman, but have seen the man of the house dragging his foster daughter to taverns and balls across town, and who in front of his maid has quite openly knocked the girl sprawling against the bench in the hall.

The ability of the small-scale perspective to identify flaws, contradictions and cultural diversities is, in my opinion, one of the main advantages of the ethnographic method of attack. Yet to find explanations to questions that arise, a wider context is needed. According to Geertz, one fundamental methodological problem for ethnography is, working from the collection of miniatures that the method produces, to formulate interpretations and theories that encompass nations, epochs or continents.²² The thick descriptions produced are not 'the world in a teacup', and one cannot claim that 'the small' is a simple reflection of 'the large'. Nevertheless, the goal is to draw comprehensive conclu-

sions from the fragments that make up thick descriptions. Using tools provided by existing theories, together with contextualization from individual-level detail, which is then followed to different variations of scale, I hope to shed new light on the relationship between legislation, societal norms and the order of power on the one hand, and the role of the individual on the other. Helena Bohman's choices, opportunities and limitations must be seen in relation to concepts of femininity and sexuality, Church teaching, how the law was applied in practice, and the reactions of neighbours, friends, relations and strangers. The aim of the project stretches beyond narrating a number of events and fates from a lost reality. It extends to trying to formulate theories to explain how marginalization processes act and endure over time. How do social status, money and gender inter-react with 18th-century notions of the 'whore'? How and why has the specifically female stigma 'whore' survived the centuries, despite massive social, economic and cultural upheaval?

The ethnographic imagination

Ethnography is a narrative discipline. Historical ethnography is no exception. Textualization represents a further degree of distance, another step away from the reality we wish to convey.²³ But if the debate that Writing Culture brought about has taught us anything, it is that the distinction between object and representation can never be erased. Representation, regardless of whether it takes the form of a book, film, exhibition or lecture is never just communication, visualization or translation – it is always interpretation. Thus, ethnography in that sense is additionally always fiction, just as history is always fiction.²⁴ In the same way that a painting of street life is not the actual street, a thick description of the same street scene is not real life either.²⁵ However, to reproduce reality can hardly be the goal of a cultural discipline.

²³Cf. Allison James / Jenny Hockey / Andrew Dawson, *After Writing Culture*, London 2004.

²⁴Cf. Geertz, 1973, p. 15; Fenske, *Micro, Macro*, Agency, p. 92.

²⁵Cf. Geertz, 1973, p. 27.

²¹Cf. Ricoeur, *Memory, history, forgetting*.

²²Cf. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*.

On the contrary, I would claim that analysis and interpretation are the tasks of scholarship, rather than relating as thoroughly and objectively as possible a historical course of events.

During this process, writing is both a tool and a form of representation. Writing continually produces obstacles and poses new questions. How, for example, should I deal with the fact that neither *prostitution* nor *sexuality* are words used in the 18th century? If I use these terms I risk being anachronistic. If I avoid them and use 18th-century expressions instead, the whole text would sound old-fashioned. If I continually point out that the experiences in my writing are not my own, but belong to the 18th century, then the text becomes too cumbersome. The process of writing becomes a balancing act where inclusion and exclusion strongly influence representation.

In the modern classic *Exercises in Style* from 1947, Raymond Queneau shows how a single, everyday event – a man on a bus accuses another passenger of pushing in – can be described in 99 different ways, from 99 different perspectives and in 99 different styles. The event could come straight from the pages of an ethnographer's field diary. These exercises in style are most thought-provoking. Despite giving the impression of following fixed templates, the process of academic writing is no less flexible than that of fiction. Its problems have been discussed at length. Academics have examined the literary devices they use to establish legitimacy: detached language, avoidance of the first person, generalizing claims, referral to unavoidable may seem completely paralyzing. So how can one write archival ethnography? Is there a 'correct way' to present results? Michaela Fenske asks this important question in her essay „Micro, macro, agency“. ²⁶ Her answer, as I understand it, is to accept the creative process inherent in writing, and the fact that subjectivity is unavoidable. The power of insight is needed at each stage of the ethnographic process. The sociologist C. Wright Mills coined the term *sociological imagination* to describe the vivid power of awareness that enables the scholar to

connect biography and history by linking the experience of the individual with universal structures.²⁷ The ethnographer Paul Willis in *The Ethnographic Imagination* has developed Mills's concept further, adding *everyday culture* as a link between the individual and structures.²⁸ Scholars working to understand how people deal with the reality they inhabit, and how they experience that reality, require the power of imagination, insight and an openness for the unexpected: an ethnographic imagination. To identify or empathize with informants may be seen as an aid to understanding, rather than as an obstacle to objectivity and stringency – even in the mystifying, sometimes frustrating and occasionally intoxicating stages of the ethnographic process that now lie before me.

²⁶Cf. Fenske, Micro, Macro, Agency.

²⁷Cf. Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, London 1959.

²⁸Cf. Paul Willis, *The Ethnographic Imagination*. Oxford 2000.