



# NOTES ON ‘NOT BEING THERE’

## Ethnographic Excursions in Eighteenth-Century Stockholm

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Although using the past to explain or question the present remains part of ethnology’s self-image, ethnology has become a contemporary-oriented discipline. While we tend to emphasise the complexity of our own time, we risk representing the past as a series of single events with immutable meaning, reduced to a backdrop. This article attempts to discuss the practical implications of using ethnographic methods to describe and understand a lost world. Is it at all possible? Inspired by Barthes’s method for analysing three levels of meaning in the advertising image, and by Ricoeur’s metaphor of history as a map, I shall attempt to outline a method for performing ethnography in eighteenth-century Stockholm, using a notorious ball at the Royal Palace in April 1768 as an example.

*Keywords:* ethnography, method, eighteenth-century Stockholm, prostitution, clues

Spring is in the air with scents of salt and fresh water, a chill wind from the river, and a dark blue dusk that thickens in the alleys and streets of the city. The buildings lie dark and compact, illuminated only by a few ‘wolf-eye’ street lights, faint oil lamps that barely manage to scatter the darkness. Dusk is falling around the debris that tarnishes the surroundings of the palace: tins, broken wooden boxes, horse dung, rotting hay. On heavy chains, pitiful rags of laundry are swaying slowly, like ghosts at twilight. The birds have stopped singing, but all is not quiet. A seagull screeches from the water. Hooves against the street, hired carriages rattle towards the Royal Palace. Pale light shines from a few windows on its west façade. There is movement in the darkness of the palace’s outer courtyard at the end of the curved north wing. If we listen we can hear voices: whispers, suppressed cries, nervous laughter. Small parties on

foot, some arriving from the dark interior of the old town, others coming from the narrow steps at Myntorget Square, are making their way northwards to a dark corner of the palace courtyard. Hair set high, powdered wigs, voluminous skirts. Some of the women are wearing trains. Half hidden by a square protrusion where the north wing joins the main palace building, a nondescript entrance is set in the stone wall, lit only by a doorman’s lantern. Men and women are swallowed up by the darkness inside. Everything happens quickly and in curious silence. A couple of men in military uniform whisper comments about the ladies arriving, including ‘Lammungen’ (‘Little Lamb’), ‘Flaggan på Berget’ (‘Flag on the Mountain’), ‘Korfeva’ (‘Sausage Eve’), Mesdemoiselles Richardsson, Spaas and Attendé. Mlle. Winblad creates a faint hum. Black bouclé bounces at her cleavage as she passes in a rustle of dress, her

head held high. We follow her through the door and become aware of the sound of music: faint tones of double bass, oboe, lively strings. We find ourselves in a stairwell in the office wing of the palace. Two flights up, the tones ring brighter and the voices are louder. Beside the fireplace are musicians. The conversation is moderate but cheerful, servile yet garnished with ambiguous jokes. Loose fragments of French can be overheard: *ma cousine* and *mon frère*, *mesdemoiselles* and *ma chère sœur*. Punch, wine and pastries are being served in the hall. The ballroom is not very big; it is already crowded. The air is soon saturated with pipe smoke, perfume, sweat and nerves. The gathering does not seem very festive.

The room, which has something strict and serious about it, is only sparsely furnished. The caretaker, Löfberg, has ensured the removal of all the writing desks belonging to the Royal Military College, and the oak floor of the office-come-ballroom easily lends itself to contra dances, minuets and reels. Candlelight barely illuminates the square room, which has chairs along the walls and a few gaming tables. Through two deeply recessed small windows, the deep blue spring sky is visible over Norrbro Bridge. Two very young girls, silent and wide-eyed, watch from a corner of the room as the crowd gathers. There are civil servants and high ranking soldiers, wigs, plaits, white painted faces and red heels. Constricted waists and half-exposed breasts. Some guests already seem worryingly unstable. We are visiting a closed society and a secret ceremony. Are we here to be entertained or to show off, to sell or to buy, to be excited or to work off tension? Are we moving comfortably in a respectable environment, or have we entered a foreign and unfamiliar space?

A door stands open at the far left of the ballroom. It leads to a long, dimly lit corridor. We find both sides of the passage lined with offices: thirteen strict, sober rooms for secretaries and registrars, together with a staircase and cloakrooms. Some of the rooms might be specially furnished with gaming tables or wooden bunks this evening. In any case, some of them will certainly be used. The night is young, and the event will continue until four in the morning.

## In Pursuit of the Past

Surrounded by a romantic shimmer, faintly masculine in character, slightly adventurous and compelling for the ethnological eye in pursuit of overlooked detail and cultural mysteries to solve, fieldwork and ethnography lie at the heart of ethnology. They are used both as a method – or rather, a set of methods – and as a certain genre, allowing an author to evoke a sense of actually taking part in the event described. Ethnography, even in Norman Denzin's 'sixth hour' where the modernist, positivist ideal has long since been thrown overboard, is thus still connected to the sense of actually 'being there', to be on the spot, to witness, interact, see, hear, smell, sense and describe. It is still based largely on the modernist commitment to study lived experience in the real world (Denzin 1997).

Perhaps this is one reason why ethnology in Sweden has become a contemporary-oriented discipline. Although using the past to explain or question the present certainly remains part of ethnology's self-image, contemporary society is often the focus of present day ethnological cultural analyses.<sup>1</sup> At a previous Nordic ethnology conference in Helsinki in 2009, only around ten percent of the papers included any kind of historical perspective. Very few studies go back any further than the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> As a result, methods for collecting contemporary data and memories have become well developed, whereas techniques for resurrecting a past that no longer survives in living memory have been discussed far less (Bergquist & Svensson 1999). The linguistic or cultural turn, which in part criticised the concept of history as objective and immutable, had a profound impact on ethnology (Lindqvist 1992). While new disciplines such as historical anthropology, micro-history and the history of everyday life have discovered the advantage of combining an anthropological concept of culture with an historical viewpoint, Scandinavian ethnologists appear largely to have abandoned historical perspectives. In field studies of contemporary society, the past for obvious reasons is easily reduced to a backdrop or setting. While we tend to emphasise, or perhaps even exaggerate, the complexity of our own time, we risk representing

the past as a series of single events with immutable meaning.

In view of this, contemplating the task of the Pariah project – to study the sex trade in eighteenth-century Stockholm – makes me feel rather lost as I possess neither a map nor compass.<sup>3</sup> Eighteenth-century Stockholm is a foreign and exotic environment. If ethnography is both the method and a form of expression of our discipline, how can I apply these in a city that no longer exists? Can ethnography ever be used to describe and understand a lost world?

This article attempts to discuss the practical implications of conducting fieldwork in the past. Its conclusions, being part of an ongoing project, are preliminary and subject to revision.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, inspired both by Roland Barthes's method for analysing three levels of meaning in the advertising image, and by Paul Ricoeur's metaphor of history as a map, I shall attempt to outline a method for performing ethnography in eighteenth-century Stockholm, using the ball at the palace as an example.<sup>5</sup>

### **A Ball at the Royal Palace, 1768**

The story that begins this article describes a real event, a ball held at the Royal Military College at the Royal Palace in Stockholm on April 10th, 1768. The ball was, in itself, nothing remarkable. Dances, balls and masquerades were extremely popular forms of entertainment in eighteenth-century Stockholm. Music was played and dances were held at the smallest taverns and grandest restaurants, and at the royal court itself. However, this ball was different from others in that no official consent had been given and because of its scandalous mix of high and low society, male and female, virtue and sin. The premises of the military college – which represented manliness, noble honour and service to king and country – were imbued with solemn, high-minded virtues such as honesty and patriotism. Balls, and particularly masquerades, were associated with vulgarity, feminine vanity, sloth and carnal lust, not least because the female guests frequently included 'women of the town'. At this ball we are visiting, women had been procured by the infamous Madame Torstensson. They included some of the most notorious prostitutes in Stockholm.

Hearing about the ball was my key to the world I shall examine in the Pariah project. The event is exceptionally well documented, and the ball became the talk of the town for a few months in the spring of 1768. The main reason the ball became a scandal was, obviously, the fact that the news leaked out. The primary source of information was the author and publisher Jacob Gabriel Rothman who briefly published a magazine deriding the unsatisfactory state of affairs in Stockholm. The first issue of *Philolalus Parrheristes* (the garrulous free-speaker) includes a description of the ball in verse; the second is devoted to a sulphurous sermon denouncing its guests. When even despicable taverns closed their doors to lewd harlots, could it be right to place them in the palace, and transform the rooms of war into a German brothel? The ball was also described as a scandal in Stockholm's leading newspaper, as well as in several private letters and documents. According to a collection of historical and political notes from 1765–68, owned by the author and journalist Birger Schöldström (1840–1910), the ball was organised by Chief Judge Hasemkampff who, intending to hold a dance for his daughters and their friends, asked the caretaker Petter Löfberg to seek the necessary permission (Lundberg 1924: 75f.). Instead, the room was emptied of its furniture, and the most notorious harlots in Stockholm were invited along with a variety of secretarial staff, officers and other senior gentlemen. When the news broke, the Royal Military College summoned Löfberg to an inquiry, where he claimed he had been allowed to use the rooms by Carl Carlsköld, the Secretary of State. Carlsköld, in turn, claimed Löfberg was given permission to use the rooms for a quiet family party. Löfberg replied that such a gathering had been his intention, but that he had been unable to prevent uninvited guests from turning up. The Royal Military College refused to believe his story, and Petter Löfberg was dismissed and evicted from the guard room (Lundberg 1924: 75f.).

A few months later, one Jakob Ennes wrote to various Stockholm newspapers in an attempt to publish an essay written by a guest at the now infamous ball. Ennes probably wrote the essay himself – it is signed by the same hand as the letter – but wished to remain

anonymous. The essay was never published in any newspaper but appeared elsewhere under the title 'A Confession of Sin by someone who Attended the Well-Known Ball'. The confession is a stirring polemic against the debauchery and depravity of the time, written by a young man whose conduct that night led to fatal consequences. He had contracted an illness of the worst kind – probably syphilis – through his 'shameful pleasure with the doomsday ghosts at the ball.' The doomsday ghosts included some of contemporary Stockholm's most disreputable women. All are identified by name, and/or their *nom de guerre*, in another document that describes the ball and its guests and is preserved in the De la Gardie archive at the university library in Lund.

The notorious ball of 1768 is documented by trial records, eyewitness accounts, guest lists and indignant reactions. Other sources provide additional information about similar balls. Several of the female guests were apparently well known among their contemporaries and their names are found in other sources. Some appear in the work of Carl Michael Bellman, the renowned eighteenth-century composer and entertainer who portrayed part-real, part-romanticised figures and events in Stockholm. His primary muse, Maja Christina Kiehlström – better known at the time and later as Ulla Winblad, the name Bellman gave her – was a guest at the ball, appearing in the De la Gardie archive document under the two names Mlle. Peter and 'Winflaskan' ('Wine Bottle'). Art of the period also depicts parties and balls, where guests are shown eating, drinking, dancing, fighting and flirting – all portrayed with striking intensity. The memoirs of the thief Jacob Guntlack, who was executed for his crimes, include detailed descriptions of goings on at similar dances and balls (Guntlack 1772). Guntlack lived occasionally in the brothels of Stockholm, from where he ran errands and assisted at dances. The balls he describes were usually held at a well known tavern on Kungsholmen, a part of Stockholm that was still mainly rural, in 'adequate and fit' rooms where the proprietors would not disturb the party. Wine and pastries were served. Conversations between the men and women, when they happened at all, would concern

'matters of love'. These events appear to have been a spectacle, a masquerade where women, dressed as ladies in borrowed clothing, would pretend to be aloof while men courted their attention. Yet the deal had already been done beforehand.

Quite what Guntlack meant by 'adequate and fit' rooms became clear when I visited the former premises of the Royal Military College at the Royal Palace in Stockholm one grey sleety day in January 2011. The rooms are situated in the north wing. Today they accommodate offices. The room that must have been used as the ballroom is now a library, with dark green bookcases from floor to ceiling. It contains a fireplace and two fairly small, deeply recessed windows. The space could probably accommodate around sixty people dancing and revelling. Leading off from this room, a long corridor runs through the wing, lined with smaller rooms. A 1762 floor plan shows no doorway through the party wall between the wing and the main building. Instead an entrance is situated in a corner next to a protruding part of the main building. A black, nondescript door is still there but is no longer used. Alternatively, guests may have entered the wing via the cellar below the stairs, passing along an office lined corridor before ascending to the ballroom. Either way, guests could have reached the ballroom relatively unnoticed and its adjacent long corridor provided access to no fewer than thirteen small, lockable rooms where guests could retire.

### Filling Mute Spaces with Lived Life

A field worker of the past must reconstruct the world he or she intends to examine. It does not exist, ready for the researcher to inhabit. Unlike anthropologists or ethnologists who devote themselves to contemporary society, a fieldworker of the past cannot access the real life context and is thus denied the means of collecting first hand data (Magnusson 1988: 73; Fenske 2007: 89). Eighteenth-century Stockholm can still be found throughout the city today. I can stroll through the Old Town, visit restaurants where Bellman sang and walk on the same cobbles as Ulla Winblad. I can visit the Royal Palace and the very rooms where the notorious ball of 1768 was held.

The places may exist but the sense of the spaces is lost: the social and cultural environments, sounds, smells, fears, lusts and voices are all dead and gone. I cannot interview the ball's guests or observe their actions, interact or use my senses in the field. When investigating these mute spaces, my writing will always be based on what others have experienced and witnessed (Bergquist & Svensson 1999). Yet I would argue that the similarities outnumber the differences when comparing fieldwork in contemporary society with trying to grasp a lost world.

Firstly, 'being there' does not guarantee closeness to informants, or necessarily provide a true reflection of the reality of the Other, for that matter. As the German ethnologist Michaela Fenske notes:

'Lived life' is only to some extent accessible to cultural analysis, whether it is the life of the past or of the present, and as it is made manifest in complex relations between researcher and researched. It is also always only partially reflected in historical documents or excerpts from them, only partially captured through interviews and their transcripts, and inadequately captured by either written or visual evidence. (Fenske 2007: 90)

Secondly, I like to think of ethnography not only as a method for collecting data in contemporary society, nor as a genre for describing or representing these experiences. Ethnography comprises many different methods, all based in some way on texts of various kind. As Norman Denzin observes, we do not study lived experience, we examine lived textuality (Denzin 1997). As far as I am concerned, ethnography is above all a particular approach to the field, where methods of collecting and analysing data on the one hand, and reporting and representing it on the other are so intertwined that they cannot really be separated. Ethnography includes an awareness of detail and the heterogeneity and plurality of the field. It allows room for contradiction and for alternative stories, voices, narratives and experiences, and acknowledges that the author and interpreter is not a neutral spectator. 'Fieldwork' thus comprises numerous elements for the ethnographer of the past. Work in

the archive can be regarded as fieldwork in that an archive is a physical place and a field research site. Michaela Fenske has written intriguingly about the smell of old paper and the ink blots of the past, the relationships and regulations of the archive, and the addictiveness of the unknown worlds that lie hidden among piles of dusty documents (Fenske 2007). Archives are enchanting because they function as gateways to history. For the uninitiated, archives might seem more akin to sepulchres or mausoleums than repositories for remnants of life, memories and lived experiences. But occasionally – and more often than expected – one can experience an almost overwhelming sense of closeness. Here, the archive is merely a means to an end, supplying documents that hold previously unknown information, allowing the researcher of the past to 'walk' through a lost world by reading newspapers and pamphlets, trial records, overseer's reports and prison documents, as well as diaries, private texts, dreadful 'whore stories', and musical parodies once sung in taverns and public houses.

But we should not limit ourselves to studying written records. Paintings and drawings can also be fruitful sources of history. We can gain an idea of everyday living conditions by visiting the places people inhabited, by listening to their music, learning their language and codes of conduct, and discovering their beliefs and taste in food and clothes. Trying on a corselet or a popular hairpiece may allow insight into the constricted mobility of an eighteenth-century woman dressed for a ball, as well as the sensuality of a rustling skirt or borrowed dress worn to disguise a lower social status. Visiting the palace area and the very rooms where the notorious ball of 1768 took place gave me an insight into the conflict between the strict, masculine setting and the implied carnal lust and feminine vanity of the ball itself. When trying to fill mute spaces with lived life, feelings and thoughts, I certainly feel the urge to visit them, to try and picture the people and the events that once took place there. My notebook is the field diary where I simultaneously write down new questions, fragments of speech, sequences of events and other phenomena, anything in fact from the

strikingly odd to the readily familiar; all those small things that might just mean something. The acts of observing, documenting, analysing and otherwise performing ethnography, both as a method for collecting data and as a genre of representation, thus take place simultaneously in much the same way as when conducting fieldwork in contemporary society. Even so, I wish to shed light on three disparate yet intertwined levels of ethnography of the past, which deal with data collection, analysis and report writing. I have called these the narrative level, the communicational level and the connotational level.

### The Narrative Level

The narrative level deals with the immediate message of the sources, and is the natural starting point in any cultural analysis. Its purpose is to clarify what the most obvious information tells us. Aided by the narrative level's reproduction of details and facts, one can create a spatial perspective and a feel for the period and people one wishes to approach. Taken as a whole, the sources for the notorious ball of 1768 provide a fairly comprehensive picture of a specific event, one apparently charged with meaning. Certain details, such as those concerning the scenario, the space, the music and the guests, allow me the sense of actually 'being there'.

However, this first level is a starting point rather than an end in itself. History that merely collects picturesque or colourful details risks romanticising its subject matter or emphasising the exotic and strange. At this stage, the boundary between narrative and ethnography might be blurred; the main difference being, if any, that the ethnographer strives to annotate 'the probable' and remain faithful to the sources. The narrative level thus gathers the fragments and details of the past that describe *what* happened. For example, the story at the beginning of this article tries to evoke the ball of 1768 using the available sources. Yet here lies, according to my understanding, an important principle of research: answering the question *what* is not an end in itself but a starting point. Ready drafted problems and questions do not lie in archives waiting to be discovered, they must be created by the researcher.

And in order to do so, the questions *how* and *why* need to be asked.

### The Communicational Level

The communicational level asks questions that relate to creating and receiving data, thereby establishing the *situational context*: the time and space relative to the data and the context in which it was received. This requires information additional to that found at the narrative level. Who talked and wrote about the ball? What were their intentions? Whose voices are omitted? Under what circumstances was the body of information created? What, if any, was the intended reaction? What was the relationship between the participants and their actions? Are the narrative level 'facts' based on fresh observations or longer term memories? Are they personal experiences or formed from the accounts of others? Do they reflect how things are, or how they should be? Does the information belong to a specific genre with internal rules and restrictions? Are there signs of intertextuality?

Moreover, reflexivity should also be ascribed to the communicational level (Ehn & Klein 1994). Our sources of information recount stories in their contemporary context at the same time as they are interpreted through the cultural filter of the modern day researcher. The objectives we formulate, sources we choose and issues we focus upon are all influenced by our own personal interests and by the questions and problems facing contemporary society. Why do I see what I see and record what I record in terms of the ball of 1768? I invite the reader to accompany me into the palace, like a silent, unnoticed guest. I focus on the clothes, especially those of the women. I point out the young girls. The women guests are identified by name whereas the men remain anonymous. What do we make of that? Do I express sympathy, feel aversion or make moral judgements? Asking questions of this kind is crucial for ethnography. It reinforces the idea that the narrative level is merely a starting point and that even with limited data and few sources, research is always a dialogue between the choices of the researcher and the extant information (Fenske 2007: 92).



The Pariah project stems from my own personal curiosity about how the sex trade worked in a society very different both from our own and from that of late nineteenth-century Stockholm, which I have studied previously. Yet its ambition extends beyond surveying, reconstructing and describing how the sex trade worked in the Stockholm of the late eighteenth-century. My primary aim is not to use the information to reconstruct history. The overall ambition is to find possible explanations as to how the social and cultural function of the ‘whore’, as well as her position in society, related to her contemporary context. To do this I must deepen my analysis further.

### The Connotational Level

The humanities and political sciences have emphasised the advantages of microhistory in its potential to visualise subjectivity and experience, to identify power relationships on an individual level and to reveal different voices in the material (Ahlbeck-Rhen 2005). This, in my view, is compatible with conducting ethnography in the past. It encompasses the sense of ‘being there’, a desire to come close to historical individuals, the aim often being to explore how social actors understood and explained their world. Inspired by Paul Ricoeur’s visual metaphor of history as a map, we may argue that the ethnographer of the past strives to create a multidimensional map, to walk down the street, open doors and step inside (Ricoeur 2005). To paraphrase Clifford Geertz, ethnographers do not study towns; they study *in* towns (Geertz 1973: 22). To this end, we need the kind of detailed or small scale data that allows us to step into history; to sense the smells and sounds and the limitations of life, to approach the individuals. Yet this is not enough. The situation is comparable to that of an anthropologist trying to understand a foreign culture where he or she is merely a temporary guest (Sewell Jr. 1999). Researching in the distant past means the well known dilemma of being blind to one’s own world becomes redundant. Conversely, one needs to become acquainted with a completely different context. In the case of the Pariah project, a new language needs to be learned, not only to interpret the beautiful handwritten texts, but also to

understand associations, synonyms and codes that have become eroded over time, and to learn about the popular metaphors, the humour and the important issues of the day.

What I call the connotational level concerns the less pronounced cultural information that is not immediately disclosed. Understanding details of this kind requires a more profound knowledge of the relevant social and cultural contexts. In order to reach the connotational level, I suggest using two general but interlinked procedures: contextualisation, and the search for clues.

### Detail and Context

Scholars often stress the need to place interpreted and analysed phenomena in their historical context (Bergquist & Svensson 1999). The ball of 1768 will be difficult to understand and analyse if I am unfamiliar with the society that produced and reacted to it. Focusing on small scale data may jeopardise the crucial task of contextualisation, leading to oversimplified or apparently arbitrary, unimportant results. Specifically, in order to contextualise one must read thoroughly all texts relevant to a project and, in addition, collect related information of potentially marginal value but still useful for the analysis. To become familiar with late eighteenth-century Stockholm, it is not sufficient to go through legal documents, brothel poems, newspaper articles and other documents of immediate relevance. One also needs to become familiar with the contemporary media and popular culture by reading diaries, letters, memoirs and popular novels. One needs to understand contemporary beliefs and truths about the nature of male and female, love, lust, relationships and contraception, honour and disgrace, and to learn about life in the city in general. In short, depth requires breadth. These criteria are interrelated: the deeper one wishes to descend into a subject, uncovering new layers of cultural meaning, the more one needs to know about the society in question (Geertz 1973; Ricoeur 2005).

We must discuss how far we need to extend our analyses in order for ethnography in the past to be valid. Perhaps we need to visualise and define more



closely the scientific processes of contextualisation. How is the concept defined? Where does a context begin and end? What scale is required, referring again to Paul Ricoeur's discussion about variations in scale? Where are the context boundaries? Are they defined by space, time or the place in question?

I wish to distinguish between the situational context and the general context, for the simple reason that they give rise to different yet related questions. The situational context may be easier to grasp and outline. More questions surround the general context. Researchers of the past would probably agree on the difficulty in catching and describing a segment of history in its entirety, even one that is spatially delimited. How can one identify a context that is wide enough to give the analysis validity in the case of a limited source material? I am currently struggling with questions of this kind. So far, my aim has been to work methodically with variations in scale, as introduced by Paul Ricoeur (2005), together with the search for clues inspired by Carlo Ginzburg (1988).

### Clues and Traces

In his essay 'Clues', Carlo Ginzburg argues that the smallest details may prove to be vital clues in understanding significant relationships in a given culture (Ginzburg 1988). Personally, I find the analytical concept of *clues* very useful for several reasons (as do many other ethnologists who study the past).<sup>6</sup> If we call the documents, artefacts and fragments of lived lives that survive from the past *traces*, then *clues* are the phenomena, words or artefacts that appear to carry great significance, their importance extending beyond what they immediately denote. By this definition, broadly speaking, traces reside permanently in the archive (and elsewhere of course) until found by the researcher when they become useful information. Clues, on the other hand, depend on questions set by, and ultimately from the perspective of, the researcher. A trace becomes a clue only when the researcher forms a question about it. A clue is a detail of a trace: a word, an artefact, an idea or a phenomenon that frequently recurs on different scales, again with reference to Ricoeur. A detail that constantly crops up in the data will no doubt be charged with

cultural meaning, and may be a clue as to how a culture was organised. When examining the sources for the notorious ball of 1768, questions will arise and possible clues will hopefully emerge. The concept of a ball seems to be in itself a clue in that it produced excitement, rage and anxiety in contemporary society. What power relationships are at work here? The word "prostitute", which in the eighteenth century had yet to assume its present day meaning, is used in *Philolalus Parrheriastes* to describe both men and women at the ball. What are we to make of the strange names given to, or adopted by, the 'women of the town'? How should we interpret the masquerade theme and the transgression of social status? And why was the caretaker Löfberg treated so harshly when the women accused of selling sexual services at the ball were never punished?

Looking for clues is vital when dealing with a vast body of material, which one can thereby delimit without preconception or fear of overlooking what might be important. Moreover, one advantage of the concept of the clue (the Swedish word for clue, *ledtråd*, means 'leading thread') is that it aims ahead, providing an impetus to follow a trace (of which it is a detail), thereby creating new meanings and understandings and leading the researcher to a new level of scale. A clue calls for scrutiny and might lead to an answer. This method, just as with Michel Foucault's genealogy, requires a history that cuts through various categories of the past, allowing itself to change perspective and scale by searching for clues on different levels: from legislation, regulations, court proceedings, scientific texts, libel charges, witness statements and newspapers to diaries, memoirs and popular satirical verse (Beronius 1991; Foucault 1980). The method corresponds well with the ethnological practice of applying and combining a variety of sources and information in a way that might seem inappropriate to other scholars of the past (Ehn & Löfgren 2002: 150; Bergquist & Svensson 1999). By following a number of clues through different levels of scale, a coherent context will hopefully emerge, one which takes into account the various perspectives of the researcher and allows for contrasting information. This allows the researcher, step by step,

to build a complete picture of the context, find additional links and make new interpretations. The breadth and depth of history are interrelated and by combining them the researcher of a lost world might evoke a sense of actually being there, thus making it possible to conduct an ethnography of the past.

## Notes

- 1 There are, obviously, many exceptions: Inger Lövkrona (1999), Birgitta Svensson (1993), Jan Garnert (1993), Ella Johansson (1994), Karin Salomonsson (1998), Eva Lis Bjurman (1998), Lars-Eric Jönsson (1998), Anja Petersen (1999) and Carina Sjöholm (2003) are just a few of the Swedish ethnologists who have conducted fieldwork in archives in the last ten years. While writing my thesis on prostitution in late nineteenth-century Stockholm (Lennartsson 2001), I became familiar with archives and curious as to the possibility of applying ethnological methods to historical sources.
- 2 This may be true also for European ethnology in general. Michaela Fenske, referring to an ongoing debate in Germany on carrying out fieldwork in archives, claims that 'European ethnology' is increasingly conceptualised as a Europe-oriented study of the present. Historical research is often limited to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, periods considered modern in European terms (Fenske 2007).
- 3 The Pariah project, funded by Vetenskapsrådet (The Swedish Research Council), began in 2009. It is based at the Stockholm City Museum.
- 4 I must stress that this is a work in progress. The aim is to discuss these issues further in a book that will conclude the Pariah project. I have also developed my thoughts on the subject, visualised in the form of a model, in an article in the Swedish journal *Kulturella perspektiv* (Lennartsson 2010).
- 5 In *Memory, History, Oblivion* (2005), Paul Ricoeur refers to variations in scale, i.e. the importance for the researcher to move between different levels in the data being analysed. Ricoeur conceptualises history as a map, where variations in scale allow the researcher to find details that might otherwise be overlooked. This scale, extending from micro to macro, represents to my mind the breadth and width of history. The depth of history is represented by different levels of analysis, inspired by Roland Barthes's method in 'Rhetoric of the Image' (1976) for analysing three levels of meaning in the advertising image. This breadth and depth of history are interrelated.
- 6 See, e.g., Lövkrona (1999), Svensson (1993), Salomonsson (1998), Ekström (2002).

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