

# RETURNING TO THE ARCHIVE IN SEARCH OF EVERYDAY PRACTICES IN FIELDWORK

*Karin Gustavsson*

This article concerns itself with the early twentieth-century documentation of different phenomena in the Swedish countryside considered crucial to an understanding of rural lifestyle in the past. This research was motivated out of a concern for a vanishing peasant culture. Vast quantities of photographs, drawings and descriptions of houses and settlements were compiled into archives and later on, this material was used as the base for the Atlas of Swedish folk culture published in 1957. Inspired by Fleck's notion of "thought collective" and Latour's ideas of "craftsmanship", the article returns to the archives in order to examine the everyday practices of the fieldworkers and the different tools and techniques used to document the vanishing peasant material culture.

*Keywords:* fieldwork, history of discipline, technology, building documentation, archives

A young man is standing in front of a farmhouse, deeply concentrated, presumably making a drawing of it or taking notes. The suit and student's cap indicate that he is not part of the setting but is an outsider carefully observing the surroundings. The photograph with the young man working with a documentation of the farmhouse is dated 1921 and was taken at a small farmstead in the province of Scania (Skåne). In the archival text accompanying the picture, the farmhouse is described in terms of building techniques, materials and age.

## **What the Archives Contain**

I have examined a large number of photographs of this kind as well as descriptions and drawings of old buildings and settlements, dating from about a hundred years ago, that are kept in Swedish archives.

This initial picture is one of many that caught my attention. It is pasted on a piece of cardboard. Topographical information can be found beneath the picture, together with the accompanying text about the building. The picture opens up a story on the practices of ethnographic documentation in the past and how documentary research was carried out.

The different buildings at the farmstead are described in words, accompanied by a plan of the setting that gives information about the size of the different buildings, their function and location. There are other things in this photograph, however, not described in the text. What was the name of the man at work? What kind of carriage is seen behind him? Is it an agricultural tool, or was it used for transportations? Who were the people living in the house, and how did they greet him when he arrived?



Ill. 1: A fieldworker at a small farmstead in the village Lya in Östra Karup parish in the province of Scania. (Photo: City museum of Helsingborg)

Or was the house abandoned – windows seem to be broken! And who was standing behind the camera, and how had this person composed this motif? No answers to these questions could be found in the file where this almost hundred-year-old photograph is kept. When this picture is viewed in the twenty-first century, it can be assumed that the viewer sees other things than the photographer in 1921 had in mind, and that quite different questions are considered. Questions like those listed here might of course have been asked by an early twentieth-century visitor to the setting, but the overriding set of questions at that time were related to the buildings as constructions, rather than what life was like at that place.

In the folklife archives in Sweden (as well as in many other countries in Europe) one can find a substantial number of files containing the results of documentation of what was looked upon as a vanishing peasant society. Such documentation was conducted during the first decades of the twentieth century. At that time, there was a strong belief that an old rural lifestyle was not only undergoing change

but was doomed to vanish. Considerable efforts were therefore made to collect traditions and old customs, songs and dialects. Rural villages, buildings and settings were documented in descriptions, drawings and photographs. The underlying idea was that when the rural lifestyle eventually was abandoned, it would be possible to study it through this material. Time and changes in research ideals have, however, made this presupposition obsolete. When viewing the content of the records from the archives today it is easy to focus on what are now seen as deficiencies. We want to know other things than the explorers of 1921. This can direct our attention to the gaps rather than the content that nevertheless exist in the pictures. In spite of all these information gaps, these pictures are brimming with knowledge.

George W. Stocking, one of the pioneers in the writing of the history of anthropology, claims that anthropological fieldworks in the early years of the twentieth century were conducted with no questioning or analysis (1983: 8). The belief that neutral knowledge was gathered was strong. The same be-

lief can be seen in the documentation conducted by the folklife archives in Scandinavia, where gathering was the primary task because of its perceived urgency. Evaluation and research were regarded as tasks that could be conducted later once the material was gathered in the archives. Thus, when the fieldworkers of the 1920s had completed their work, the archives were filled with material assembled with a set of empirical questions as a base. The aim at that time was to enable research of the presumed neutral material in the future. Research questions were based upon temporal and spatial connections between different types of buildings and settlements.

I have examined records from the archives in order to investigate if this voluminous material can be used in research today with other questions in mind. With texts from Ludwik Fleck and Bruno Latour underlying my reading I intended to subject the material to a reading of the importance of collective work in science. I also wanted to analyse the practical fieldwork of the early twentieth century in terms of materiality and technology. Both Fleck and Latour emphasise the importance of seeing research as a collective endeavour. From today's perspective, Sigurd Erixon (1888–1968), the ethnologist who initiated the documentation of vernacular architecture in Sweden, can appear as a solitary scholar, but he was surrounded by people like the fieldworker in illustration 1 (whose names are not always known to today's scholars) all working hard for the same aim.

Several scholars of European ethnology and other cultural sciences have returned to the history of their own disciplines over the last twenty or thirty years in order to understand their contemporary predicaments (Stocking 1983: 4). According to Regina Bendix it is possible to analyse how authoritative knowledge is produced by focusing on the inquiries within one's own discipline (Bendix 1997: 4). This is the main reason for my returning to these old investigations.

The archival material that constituted the results of the search for the "old peasant society", is the subject of this paper, which emphasises the documentation of vernacular architecture in particular. Erixon later became a main figure in Swedish ethnology

and greatly influenced the development of European ethnology (see the introduction to this volume). Erixon was employed by *Nordiska museet* in Stockholm (Sweden's largest museum of cultural history), which was responsible for the fieldwork that was energetically carried out, especially during the 1920s. Public as well as private founders supported the efforts to "save" the lifestyle of the past by collecting and saving knowledge about it.

Erixon worked within a context where corresponding works were going on in several European countries. Magnificent books with many illustrations of old rural buildings, many in German, had been published since the late nineteenth century. The references in Erixon's works are not only to Scandinavian literature but also to contemporary European scholars, which shows that he was well-orientated internationally in this specific field of research. The documentation of vernacular architecture and rural lifestyle in Scandinavia carried out during the first half of the twentieth century was conducted with the same ideal as parallel work in the rest of Europe and within the anthropological discipline.

The documentation of buildings and sites yielded an immense volume of material as a consequence, easily accessible in different public archives and museums today.<sup>1</sup> The files with photographs, texts and drawings represent an impressive amount of empirical knowledge. They contain information about what kind of houses that were to be found in different regions, about different building techniques, as well as building materials, from full scale to small details; all the facts that the people responsible for the compilation of the material had in mind. In the archives a consistent order exists, based primarily upon topographical units. What was once considered as valuable knowledge about elderly buildings in the countryside can now be found compiled in files and cabinets, conveniently arranged and easily accessible.

## Method

I have done a close reading of the material. This means that both texts and pictures (photographs and drawings) have been thoroughly examined for

content. Information about what kinds of tools and equipment that were used by the fieldworkers is rare, but much can be detected from the pictures themselves. The size of the glass plates used is the most evident, but also other technical issues can be traced from the pictures. Some have dark shades in the upper corners, “corner shading” (e.g. illustration 4). It is a result of the use of an inferior quality lens, or a lens that did not match the camera very well. A lens of higher quality or better match would not leave these kinds of shades. Thus, this specific phenomenon in some pictures implies that the museum responsible for the fieldwork where these pictures were taken did not have photographic equipment that was optimal for the task.<sup>2</sup> One result of the close reading is that it is possible to learn from the photographs what kind of cameras that were used, and how skilled a specific fieldworker was in using it, a part of the knowledge about the interaction between man and technology. In this case, the close reading provides clues regarding the prerequisites for the knowledge production.

A close reading obviously focuses on the motifs of the pictures as well. Many traces of everyday life in the countryside in the early twentieth century can be seen in the pictures, features not described in words in any other sources. This is one of the reasons for returning to old material. The camera can only register what is contemporary, not the past, which was the original aim of the documentation. The photographer of 1921, who took the picture in illustration 1 at the little farmstead in Scania, was surrounded by features that were of less interest at that time, but which today can reveal a lot about everyday life in the countryside, about the conditions for farming, and livestock, etc. At the farmstead there was probably a diversity of sensory impressions – sounds, smells and sights – that were new and exotic for the man we see taking notes. But only the sights were possible to capture on paper (and in photographs). The other impressions that have not been depicted are not described in words. Behind the fieldworker some kind of carriage or farming tool on wheels can be seen. This is quite common in these pictures, but such features are never commented on in the descriptions of the different houses and settings. They

represented, together with the sensory impressions, the contemporary everyday life, that was not in focus for these explorers of the peasant society.

I have examined both published and unpublished texts and manuscripts. In the archive of *Nordiska museet* there is a large number of small notebooks that originate from different fieldwork investigations. The notes were written while working in the field and contain immediate observations, not processed texts written at the office some weeks later or subjected to influence by later experiences. The material represents the work of many, not only those who later became scholars like Erixon. Many notes and manuscripts from fieldworking students that never made a career within folklife research or museum work have been neglected by succeeding ethnologists. For example, in 1920, there were 35 fieldworkers sent out by *Nordiska museet* (B. Nilsson 2000: 197). Some of them later became specialists, but it was not possible to know in advance who was to become a specialist, and who would give up the work and remain a non-professional in this kind of work. In addition to the printed texts, notebooks and archival manuscripts, my close reading also comprises studies of the relation between picture and text. All the photographs in the files are accompanied by an explanatory text. However, there is much more information in the pictures – facts that are not described in texts – which can be extracted and analysed.

### **Norms in Common, Working Together**

The way the vanishing peasant culture was talked about was strongly established within society as a whole. In the Swedish parliament, the disappearance of folk culture was discussed in 1919 under the headline “Everything old is about to disappear”. This discussion led the government to form the Official Committee of Folklife Research (“Folkminneskommittén”) the following year, to work within the frame of the Swedish Government Official Reports with the aim of finding out how the work of documenting the vanishing remains of the peasant society should be organised (Gustavsson 2014: 53). While there was a widespread preconception that

everything old was about to vanish, it coexisted with notions of what “old” represented in terms of value. What was old, was implicitly attributed a high value. It would be a great loss to society if the old disappeared. The importance of exploring and documenting what was considered as “old”, and the efforts to collect folklore, can be traced to the nineteenth century (Bendix 1997). This assumption about the importance of “old” was strongly present during the following century, together with a prediction of the “vanishing primitive” (Stocking 1983: 4). The idea that different phenomena in rural lifestyle really were vanishing, not just undergoing change and development, was characteristic of folklife researchers as a group.

The fieldworkers who undertook the documentation of buildings and settings in the countryside within the commission from *Nordiska museet* were all young men who had studied folklife research, linguistics, art history or architecture, shared the same view of the past, and had the same sense of what was important to note and work with during the fieldwork. They shared the same norms, and were part of what can be defined as a “thought collective” as coined by Polish scientist Ludwik Fleck ([1935]1979). Sigurd Erixon gave both oral and written instructions to the fieldworkers. In the 1920s there were some books and leaflets that could serve as instructions, but they were quite schematic and did not give hands-on instructions for the daily work. This was instead achieved through letters over time as questions arose (Gustavsson 2014: 156). However, all the fieldworkers shared the same presumptions regarding the urgent need for a fast exploration of peasant culture. How were these presumptions formed and maintained?

Not only mutual norms within a group but also concrete “acting together” can create a sense of commonness (cf. F. Nilsson 2000). Travelling together, participating in the same meetings and so on creates a sense of togetherness among the different members of the group. Working together with various tools requires collaboration. Measuring, for example, could mean working in very inconvenient positions that required both physical strength and

ability to cooperate. When working together after bicycle rides that might have been spectacular, a specific fellowship based upon corporal activities, arose. This fellowship was of another degree than that between young men sitting at desks in the same office. Technical innovations affected the fieldwork, and the scientific process, when knowledge about the past was formed by the investigations of the vanishing peasant society.

The idea of the common way of thinking, “thought styles”, and collective thinking in “thought collectives” as crucial in the forming of scientific facts, was presented by Ludwik Fleck in the mid-1930s (Fleck [1935]1979). The belonging to such a thought collective was formed not only by sharing ideological thoughts and norms, after reading the same books, for example, or undergoing the same theoretical education. A situation of fieldwork, when people really are doing things together, can also be crucial. French sociologist Bruno Latour has also emphasised the importance of the collective. According to him, the members of a group doing research together discipline each other (Latour 1999: 95). An even stronger sense of togetherness might appear when people not only participate together in the same events, but also really *do* things together, like handling tools for measuring buildings and cameras. Fieldwork entailed physical strains, with long bicycle rides with heavy equipment. The fieldwork situation also meant that the young participants lived together far away from home, mostly in a quite simple accommodation. After strenuous bicycle rides they were supposed to work with measuring and description-making. Although the measuring tools that were used were quite simple (yardstick, measuring tape), handling them was critical given the need for cooperation to produce reliable results. A camera consisted of several different parts (tripod, lenses, glass plates and cassettes containing the plates, tools for measuring light etc.). Cooperation between the fieldworkers was a prerequisite, given the weight of the equipment, and the number of complicated parts it sometimes consisted of, in addition to the tricky modes of operating it. Bruno Latour emphasises the importance of what he calls “craftsmanship” among



Ill. 2: Fieldworkers having dinner together when a period of work was about to end. Neither their names nor the place have been registered. (Photo: Sigurd Erixon collection at the Library of Linköping)

the employees at a laboratory where he conducted fieldwork with the aim of making a survey of a scientific process. Science derives not only from logical considerations but also from a set of devices that has to be skilfully handled (Latour 1990: 22).

In illustration 2 we see a group of fieldworkers having dinner together at a guesthouse, when their period at work was about to be finished. Only men conducted the fieldwork. No women participated, although there were many women working at *Nordiska museet* during its pioneer years (Klein 2013). One of the men in the illustration is wearing a wristwatch. Measuring time was important; the fieldworks were conducted with a sense of urgency. It was important to work fast, as there was a strong sense that the destruction of old buildings in the countryside was proceeding apace. As in the introductory illustration, their clothing can also be noted. It might look like they have dressed up for dinner, but they

actually wore suits while working. The suits indicate the togetherness within the group, and signal that the young men belonged to another social class than the people they met in the countryside.

### Technology, Research Questions and Gaze

At the beginning of the twentieth century, photographic technology had existed for several decades and portable cameras were now at hand. The photograph was an ideal medium that could mediate motifs to a beholder situated in a different place and different time. The technology was also compatible with the contemporary positivistic ideals in science (Petersen 2007: 24). In 1923, the fieldworker Mårten Sjöbeck wrote to the head of the Folklife archive in Lund, senior lecturer Carl Wilhelm von Sydow:

Great demands ought to be placed on the quality of the photographic material, which in future

will be used to authenticate the validity of texts, drawings and plans. The photograph is the only impartial evidence that we have at hand.<sup>3</sup>

However, the photograph can hardly be “impartial evidence”, as Sjöbeck claims. A photograph is the result of the photographer’s active choosing – and thereby also ignorance – of what the motif should be (Garnert 1995: 169). The camera has a significant effect on the gaze (Urry & Larsen 2011: 155ff.). British sociologist John Urry points out photography to be “the most important technology for developing and extending the tourist gaze” (Urry & Larsen 2011: 155). He claims looking to be a learned ability. There is, according to Urry, no “pure and innocent eye” (Urry & Larsen 2011: 1). Looking is constructed upon already formed visual and linguistic experiences. The *gaze* is a way of looking at the surroundings that is based upon experience and knowledge. What is being *gazed* at and considered important to include in the documentation is the result of previously acquired experiences, norms and presuppositions. The fieldworkers’ gaze at the time and the different modes in choosing objects for documentation were essential for what can be found in the archives today.

The content of the archives and the character of the photographs kept there are also dependent on different technical processes that had an impact on the final result. The focal length of the camera lenses influences the result; different filters could affect how colours and contrasts were converted in the black and white pictures, and dramatic skies could be emphasised and become even more dramatic. After taking pictures in the field, the plates would be developed in a laboratory and then copies made on paper – processes wherein the content in the picture could also be affected. To sum up, the camera technology was an innovation with vital effect on research questions.

There is little written evidence about how the photographing took place, or of the theoretical thinking influencing the selection of motives and the way that each photograph was composed. The common pre-conceptions of the fieldworkers resulted in a rather

unreflected way of choosing motives. Consequently, as Swedish ethnologist Jan Garnert has pointed out, the photographs must be the basis for an analysis and evaluation of the work and the thinking in the past (Garnert 1995: 174). The pictures are, in a manner of speaking, sources to their own becoming.

For obvious reasons, the camera is seldom seen in photographs. In a drawing made by Gösta Selling in 1920 we see the fieldworker Harry Henschen handling the notebook and the camera, devices of different character but both crucial in the investigations of vernacular architecture. Selling mentions some materials that were essential: “Camera and notebook were the foremost devices during these research trips, that for the most part were made by bicycle” (Selling 1952: 58). Swedish-American professor in mass communication Karin Becker has called the camera “a companion in exploration and tourism” (Becker 1992: 4). This companionship is evident in a camera like this, mounted on a tripod that renders it as tall as a human.

Gösta Selling, a former head of the Swedish National Heritage Board, and himself a fieldworker in the 1920s, recounted some thirty years later that the “photograph was the primary medium in the documentation of vernacular architecture, with drawings and descriptions as important complements” (Selling 1952: 59), thus confirming the earlier claim by Mårten Sjöbeck. The camera appears as a crucial technique for the documentation of old buildings in the countryside. Without portable cameras, the documentation would hardly have reached the intensity and the focus that it did. The camera as a tool and the photographic technique made it possible to take photographs in the field. Hand in hand with the advances in camera technology, it is possible to observe an increasing need for taking photographs.

I shall return to the notebook later, but first I want to draw attention to another technology crucial during fieldwork, namely that of transport. The bicycle, that Selling mentions, was in combination with travel by train, essential in the investigations of the vanishing peasant society. The pioneers of folklife studies, working in the field in the nineteenth century, travelled in horse carriages or simply walked



Ill. 3: A fieldworker handling the camera and the notebook. (Drawing by Gösta Selling. Original in the Sigurd Erixon collection at the Library of Linköping)

while collecting artefacts and memories in the countryside. The bicycle, invented in the late nineteenth century, became an ideal vehicle for transportation in contexts that are central in this text, and made it possible to take the large cameras along, even though the weight of the equipment was considerable.

But however ideal, cars were soon in use. Selling describes how cars replaced the bicycles in the 1920s.

A revolution in fieldwork occurred in the mid-20s, when the bicycle was definitively replaced by the car as a means of transport. It was ironic that this should happen at the same time as cameras became smaller and the equipment lighter. This modern vehicle that seemed so convenient

nevertheless had some disadvantages. Bad roads, and stiff springs sometimes made the glass plates come loose from their frames and fall forward inside the bellows when the magazine was opened: If the cassettes were loose in the case sometimes the glass plates would even crack. (...) The driver of the Ford was obliged to bed the camera down softly in the back seat. (Selling 1952: 64)

In this case, technology was both friend and enemy. It was easy to travel by car, and bad weather did not pose the same problems as when biking, and people who did not have the physical strength to ride a bike for days and weeks, could also participate. There were some unexpected disadvantages, however. Above, Selling describes one of many paradoxes that can be seen in the documentation; at the same time as lightweight cameras that would have facilitated the travels by bike were made available, the use of cars was introduced.

Selling also describes how the two technical systems, the car and the camera, do not match. Here, it was necessary for those who handled the different technologies to use their curiosity and ability to think creatively to find out how to solve this specific problem. In this case, bedding down the camera in the back seat of the car probably did not prove a major obstacle. There are other examples of different problems caused by technology, and how they required both skill and a great deal of creativity to make the tools work in a way that made the work efficient. The glass plates that were used were mounted in cassettes. After taking a photograph, the glass plate would be removed and replaced with an unexposed plate. This meticulous work had to be done inside a sack made of dark textile. Selling describes how he preferred to do this at night, in bed, with the cassettes and plates under the blankets to prevent light from reaching the glass plates (Selling 1952). This is not only an example of how technology has an impact on the people handling the device, but also an example of how man's ingenuity is capable of refining the technology with quite simple means.

As Gösta Selling points out, the notebook was one of two fundamental devices in the investigation of

vernacular architecture. At the same time, he characterises the notebook as materiality, in addition to its knowledge content. The parallels to Bruno Latour's description of how the notebook was used by scientists in the forest of Boa Vista in Brazil in the late twentieth century are obvious. Latour conducted a study of natural science fieldworkers in the forest, with the aim of examining the relation between research results and technical devices. Here too, the notebook was of major importance for the fieldworkers. It created the sense of being in a laboratory, even though the research group was far out in a forest (Latour 1999: 58).

In Boa Vista Latour followed a fieldwork of natural science. The participants made conclusions of their observations by making a map where all the fluctuations in the qualities of the soil they had examined were highlighted with different signs. The result of several weeks of hard work of gathering soil was concentrated onto a large sheet of paper. They had created what Latour calls an inscription, that is, a materialisation of knowledge. It is possible for a beholder to point with the finger on the map – the inscription – and follow the inscription with a finger. The map contains concentrated knowledge, and is at the same time an artefact, a piece of materiality that shows the results of many years of fieldwork. When knowledge is transformed in this way into an object – here a map – it is possible to view the findings with a gaze (Latour 1999: 29).

The notes taken during fieldwork in the Scandinavian countryside were somewhat rough and ready material both for the files in the archives, and also for publishing. The notes were the first draft for manuscripts, that later became articles and books. In many of the notebooks there are traces of excerpts made later. Lines were drawn over the pages; small notes were made in the corners etc. As the notebooks contained knowledge from several weeks of fieldwork, they were very valuable and it was crucial that they should not be lost. In many of them, the name and address of the owner is written, sometimes including the information that a good finder's fee would be paid, in the event that the book was lost and found by someone else (Gustavsson 2014: 177).

The word photograph means "writing with light". A photograph can be seen as an inscription, though it is a picture and not a text. It is written not by words, but by light, and contains information that can be interpreted in a similar way to that of a text. At the moment of exposure, the photographer captures a glimpse of reality into a picture onto a highly light-sensitive material. The photograph becomes an inscription in the Latourian sense. It is both an artefact and a medium. Long after a fieldwork was finished, people other than those who were present at the moment of exposure, can put their fingers on the photograph, and in that way mark both the content of knowledge in the photograph, and its materiality.

Only stationary objects were the motives of the documentation, mainly houses, both from the exterior and the interior. There was little or no attention given to working processes, such as roofing with straw, for example, which was a recurrent work, and other building construction, or traditional farm work and so on. As the cameras were loaded with glass plates, the equipment was very heavy. The weight caused a limit for how many photographs that could be taken of each object, which meant that working processes consisting of many steps, that would require a lot of photographs if the process should be fully depicted, were neglected (Gustavsson 2014: 136). Illustration 4 is a photo of a straw-roofed house from the province of Halland in the south of Sweden, taken in 1921. The different shades of the roof make me curious – why does it look this way, how had that roof been made? Unfortunately, the pictures and the descriptions in the files made by the fieldworkers give no further clues. The description of the picture says that this is the farmstead viewed from the south side. A glimpse of the dwelling house is seen to the left, the building that dominates the picture is the stable. It is the stationary object that is pictured, and also described. Neither the daily work nor the processes when the house was being maintained and repaired are documented.

Some researchers in the late 1920s started to document on film the different working processes in the countryside. Danish museum inspector Kai Ulldal was a pioneer in making films with the purpose of

mediating folklife. He began filming for the Danish National Museum in 1927 and was of the opinion that the films showed “living pictures of old manners and old times work”. If there was a technology available, then there was also a need for using it (Gustavsson 2014: 195). In this specific case, it is possible to see that the interest among the fieldworkers to follow a working process arose when a suitable technology for documenting such processes became available.

The new technology of film made it possible to document processes such as timbering, and a need to make films was now expressed and justified with arguments that referred to the necessity of science. The costs for film-making were extremely high, which can be seen in the Swedish Government Official Report about the exploration of the peasant society presented in 1924, but that did not make it impossible to make films (Gustavsson 2014: 135). The high cost seemed to be just another obstacle to overcome.

There is an obvious paradox here – industrialisa-

tion was seen as the cause of the vanishing of the rural lifestyle, but it was the products of that industrialisation – railways, bicycles, cars, cameras etc. – that made it possible to document and in that way “save” peasant society for the future. The prerequisites for the investigation of rural lifestyle and vernacular architecture were the fruit of industrialisation, fruit of the same processes that caused the peasant society to vanish.

### Mapping Folklife

The great national atlas projects that were going on in several European countries, and the striving to produce a European atlas of folk culture, are topics too extensive to be dealt with in this article (see Munk and Elgaard Jensen, and Sandberg in this volume).<sup>4</sup> There exist links, however, between the investigations of vernacular architecture conducted in the 1920s and the making of a Swedish Atlas of Folk Culture several decades later. It was Sigurd Erixon and Åke Campbell, taking part in the documentation in the beginning of their careers, who took ini-



Ill. 4: Farmstead in the village of Björkeröd, Hasslöv parish, in the province of Halland in southern Sweden. (Photo: City museum of Helsingborg)

tatives to such an atlas in the early 1930s. The first part of the work was completed in 1957, the second was published in 1976 (Campbell 1957).

As mentioned above, a map is a picture that is a comprehension of reality. The results of the investigations of vernacular architecture could be concentrated in flat pictures, easy to overview. Erixon used maps in several of his articles from the 1910s and 1920s to show the distribution of different types of buildings, and in the 1930s he began the work with the earlier mentioned Atlas of Swedish folk culture, together with Åke Campbell, among others. He had presented the first ethnological doctoral thesis in Sweden in 1928. The thesis contains about 300 pages of text, but there are four maps in which he summarises the results of several years of work with the investigations of farmsteads and methods of fencing in the province of Scania (Campbell 1928). It is a parallel to what Latour describes in his studies of a laboratory – a long period of work that has engaged a whole group of people yields diagrams and plots on paper as a result (Latour & Woolgar 1986, 1990: 22). The use of maps to show results of the documentation of old rural buildings can be seen as a way of constructing a visual language for ethnology, an important factor in making it a powerful discipline (cf. Latour 1990: 36). Folklife research became a discipline where it was crucial to *show* things, not just to talk (and write) about them (cf. Latour 1990: 34). And the photographic and transportation technologies were essential in this.

### **Disagreements on the Task?**

Thus far, this text has dealt with people working together and who shared the same norms and preconceptions. From the material examined I make the interpretation that the situation during fieldwork where young men from a similar background shared both hardship during work and commitment for the task formed a common thought style in the Fleckian sense. However, this interpretation also raises the question: did everyone really agree on the desirable outcomes and the methods at work? Were there not any individuals who participated in the fieldwork that had another way of working, with other tech-

nology and perhaps also other goals? In a study of the practices of archaeology, Swedish scholar Ola W. Jensen, who has studied the history of the archaeological discipline, claims, “new methods and new technology can be developed as a result of a conflict, to be used as an argument about the ‘right practice’” (Jensen 2012: 26). According to Jensen, there is much to learn about scientific practice by studying the rejected practices. This can provide a perspective on the practices that became accepted and dominant in use (cf. Jensen 2012: 27). But are such conflicts and rejected practices also to be found in folklife research and in the documentation of peasant society? Perhaps there are – at a micro level – when it comes to how to measure a building, what kind of paper that was most convenient to use, or whether glass plates or film sheets would give the best results when taking photographs. But at another level, no. There was a consensus about the overall targets and about the methods – measuring, writing down the descriptions and taking the photographs that were to be compiled into records.

My interpretation, therefore, is that there may well have existed different opinions regarding camera techniques; for example, some preferred to work with the heavy cameras as in the sketch by Selling, while others found the lightweight cameras where film sheets were used more convenient and appropriate to the task. And the principals and the fieldworkers will no doubt have had different opinions concerning the appropriate amount of pictures of each object (Gustavsson 2014: 135). But the belief in technology, and the convictions about the importance of making the documentation were shared. The larger disagreements are to be found within the matters of organisation and how the responsibility was divided among the different actors, not in the fieldwork situation. Which organisation was best suited to take care of the important questions? Who should own the compiled archive files, who should have the rights of access to the contents of the files for further scientific processing? The Committee of Folklife Research mentioned earlier (“Folkminneskommittén”) ended their work in 1924 in disagreement about matters of responsi-



Ill. 5: Picture found in a miscellaneous file. Having fun together and making light of the serious work is also a component in the “thought collectives”. This fieldworker (name unknown) dared to indulge in pranks like this because of the existence of common norms and what Fleck calls a common “thought style”. (Photo: Sigurd Erixon collection at the Library of Linköping)

bilities and organisation (Gustavsson 2014: 54). As said, there was a consensus, however, concerning the practical fieldwork. There was a shared conviction both among scholars and in Swedish society as a whole about the importance of documenting peasant society. The extent of the project and the great economic efforts that were made both from

authorities and private founders are clear signs of consensus.

To claim that everyone agreed might be construed as making a heroic portrait of the group, instead of focusing on matters in which there were conflicts. On the other hand, this consensus in the group may have resulted in a situation in which

new ideas had no impact. The stability of the group, formed both by a common education and during meticulous practices, had a preservative effect. “To convince someone, a scientist needs data (...) but also someone to convince!” (Latour 1999: 102). When everyone agrees, there is no one to convince, and therefore no sharp arguments are formulated. Scientific progress slows down and becomes less incisive in such a context, and a condition arises which Fleck identifies as a conservatism of thought (Fleck [1935]1979).

Let me return now to the thought style and how it can occur and be expressed in the material that I have investigated. In the files in the archives we find the “official” photographs – pictures of houses, villages and settlements. These were the tangible result of the documentation, and were the media that would redistribute knowledge about rural houses and settlements to scholars in other contexts – and in the future. It is possible to discern the “unofficial” side of the work, particularly in personal letters between fieldwork participants, in which the troubles of everyday life in the field are expressed, and also in the exchange of jokes about situations in the field, about flat tyres and lack of food and so on. There are unofficial pictures, too, sometimes found in “miscellaneous” files in which another side of the fieldwork can be seen – revealing a less respectful view of the serious mission, where fieldworkers go beyond the workplace boundaries of acceptable behaviour. These pictures show an obvious sense of fun (see illustration 5), which I want to suggest, in keeping with Fleck, was an important ingredient in the forming of a collective of knowledge. Both the “official” illustrations (such as illustration 4 above) and illustration 5 represent vital knowledge about how the investigations were conducted.

## Conclusion

German cultural anthropologists Michaela Fenske and Antonia Davidovic-Walther use the expression “knowledge venue” to illustrate a discussion about ethnological knowledge practices (Fenske & Davidovic-Walther 2010: 1). The archive appears as such a knowledge venue in several respects as materials

in archives can be used as sources for studies today with different aims.

One aim in returning to the archives is the possibility of exploring the content of photographs of the kind that has been used in this paper. There is a lot to see in them that is not explained in words in other sources. The empirical content can be used to tell stories about different phenomena from the past and be useful in a practical application, such as in studies of housing addressed to building history and building restoration. In a doctoral thesis in the discipline of heritage studies, Swedish Gunnar Almevik uses archival records like the ones described in this text in order to trace both the history and living conditions of an ancient farmstead in the province of Scania (Almevik 2012).

When examining the photo in illustration 1, we see many phenomena in the picture that are not mentioned in the accompanying text. The carriage and the curtains in the window that can be seen represented, together with the sensory impressions that surrounded the fieldworker in the picture, the contemporary everyday life, that was not in focus for the explorers of the peasant society. There is a constant lack of information about the everyday life in the countryside in the archive files. What is not written in words in the files can, however, be detected in the pictures. The way the roof of the building in illustration 4 looks is a result of continuous repair work – a small section of the roof was thatched every year. In other pictures, other traces of daily life in the countryside can be detected, that bequeath us valuable fragments of knowledge.

By detecting the preconceptions in texts and also in other sources like pictures, as well as studying the use of artefacts like cameras and bicycles, knowledge processes can be traced and new knowledge produced. When looking at the materials in the archives from different angles, different kinds of knowledge can be produced. Research processes in the past can be examined, as well as detailed empirical knowledge about building techniques, for example.

There are misconceptions among many ethnologists of today regarding these pictures. It has been claimed that the photographs taken during the in-

vestigations of the peasant society only show houses and settings, not people (Becker 1992; Garnert 1995). In my examination of a great many records in the archives, it is obvious that the presence of the inhabitants of the countryside in the pictures varies according to who was standing behind the camera. Different fieldworkers apparently had different ideals in this respect: some were eager to depict the buildings without disturbing features in front of the actual motif; for others this was not an obstacle (Gustavsson 2014: 117). The camera technique that was used cannot be overlooked when examining the pictures – sometimes the shutter speed was so long that it would have been impossible for a person to stand still.<sup>5</sup> The lack of people in the pictures is simply a result of the available technology.

The files that are filled with facts about buildings constitute sources of knowledge about the time and the context in which they were created, and the scientific processes in which they were produced. By studying the content of the files we can learn about the context and the contemporary research questions. Both the research questions and the practices of science are contextually specific as well as consequences of the surrounding society (Jensen 2012: 22). According to Regina Bendix, the archived collections of folklife and folklore have contributed to form the bulk of the discipline (Bendix 1997: 156).

The fieldworkers that collected the material that has been examined in this paper were working within an ideal that said that they were *finding* knowledge that already existed. By returning to this old documentary project it is possible to look upon contemporary projects with an awareness that reveals, in Bendix's words, that "knowledge is made, not found" (Bendix 1997: 220), and one can add that technology is one factor that contributes in the making of ethnographic knowledge, as well as in collective work.

## Notes

- 1 In this case, material from the Folklife archive in Lund, *Nordiska museet* in Stockholm, and the City museum of Helsingborg has been used.
- 2 These corner shadows only appear in the pictures from the City museum of Helsingborg.

- 3 Mårten Sjöbeck in a letter to the Folklife archive in Lund, 1923 (Gustavsson 2014: 117).
- 4 The strive to make a European atlas has been described in *Ethnologia Europaea* 30:1.
- 5 In many photographs from the countryside, hens and cats are almost seen as ghosts – they were moving while the photograph was taken, and this blur reveals the slow shutter-speed.

## References

- Almevik, Gunnar 2012: *Byggnaden som kunskapskälla* (The Building as a Source of Knowledge, with an English summary). Dissertation. Gothenburg Studies in Conservation 27. Gothenburg: Gothenburg University, Institutionen för kulturvård.
- Becker, Karin 1992: Picturing our Past: An Archive Constructs a National Culture. *Journal of American Folklore* 105, pp. 3–18.
- Bendix, Regina 1997: *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Campbell, Åke 1928: Skånska bygder under förra hälften av 1700-talet: Etnografisk studie över den skånska allmogens äldre odlingar, hägnader och byggnader (Rural Districts of Scania in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century). Dissertation. Uppsala: Uppsala University.
- Campbell, Åke & Sigurd Erixon (ed.) 1957: *Atlas över svensk folkkultur* (Atlas of Swedish Folk Culture). Uppsala: Kungl. Gustav Adolfsakademien för Svensk Folkkultur.
- Fenske, Michaela & Antonia Davidovic-Walther 2010: Exploring Ethnological Knowledges. *Journal of Folklore Research* 47:1–2, 1–5, January–August 2010.
- Fleck, Ludwik (1935)1979: *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Garnert, Jan 1995: Rethinking Visual Representation: Notes on the Folklorist and Photographer Nils Keyland. *Nordisk museologi* 2, 165–190.
- Gustavsson, Karin 2014: *Expeditioner i det förflutna: Etnologiska fältarbeten och försvinnande allmogekultur under 1900-talets början* (Expeditions into the Past: Ethnological Fieldwork and the Vanishing Peasant Culture at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with an English summary). Dissertation. Lund: Lund University.
- Jensen, Ola W. 2012: A Thematic and Theoretical Introduction to Histories of Archaeological Practices. In: Ola W. Jensen (ed.), *Histories of Archaeological Practices: Reflections on Methods, Strategies and Social Organisation in Past Fieldwork*. Stockholm: National Historical Museum.
- Klein, Barbro 2013: Women and the Formation of Swedish Folklife Research. *Journal of American Folklore* 127:500, 120–151.
- Latour, Bruno 1990: Drawing Things Together. In: Mike Lynch & Steve Wolger (eds.), *Representations in Scientific Practice*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

- Latour, Bruno 1999: *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Latour, Bruno & Steve Woolgar 1986: *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Nilsson, Bo G. 2000: Folkklivets upptäckare: Sigurd Erixons by- och bebyggelseundersökningar (The Detector of Folk Life: The Surveys of Villages and Buildings by Sigurd Erixon). In: Bengt Erik Eriksson & Roger Qvarsell (eds.), *Samhällets linneaner*. Stockholm: Carlsson.
- Nilsson, Fredrik 2000: *I rörelse: Politisk handling under 1800-talets första hälft* (On the Move: Political Action During the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with an English summary). Dissertation. Lund: Lund University.
- Petersen, Anja 2007: *På visit i verkligheten: Fotografi och kön i slutet av 1800-talet* (Visiting Reality: Photography and Gender at the End of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with an English summary). Stockholm; Stehag: Brutus Östlings bokförlag.
- Selling, Gösta 1952: Museifotografering (Museum Photography). *Fotografisk årsbok* 1952, 55–68.
- Stocking, George W. (ed.) 1983: *Observers Observed: Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Urry, John & Jonas Larsen 2011: *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*. Third ed. Los Angeles: Sage.

Karin Gustavsson, Ph.D., is a teacher and researcher in ethnology and museology at the Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences at Lund University, Sweden. She is also the Museum Inspector at the City museum of Helsingborg. Her research interests are heritage studies, the use of history and science and technology studies.  
(karin.gustavsson@kultur.lu.se)