

On the Dark Side of Culture

The Encounter of the Swedish Tinker with Justice

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Many ethnologists today use the historical perspective merely as a backdrop against which they stage their cultural compositions. An exaggerated obsession with actors and subjects has led to the neglect of both the rich social context and the significance of a deep historical perspective.

The experiences of groups like the Swedish tinkers (*tattare*) in their encounter with the exercise of power in different periods has given them a cultural identity with a surprising consistency through time. This identity has not only been created by society's segregation but has also been built up by people who refused to subordinate themselves to the prevailing norms.

In my study of the situation of the tinkers, I start from a conflict perspective and question the harmonious descriptions which assume that the exercise of power was successful. Conflicts based on crimes against prevailing morals have left numerous traces in the archives. By looking at the individual tinker's everyday attempts to stretch the limits of society's norm system and comparing this with various levels in the exercise of power, I exemplify how the interplay between actor and structure, between separating and generalizing forces, affects both the disciplinary system and the individual tinker.

My analytical strategy is to apply a long time-depth, so that we can see more distinctly not only what remains consistently the same but also what is transient and different.

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Culture and history

Anthropologists and historians often fail to see the importance of individuals and groups in interaction with culture and society. Anthropology too easily becomes culture without a social context, and history becomes a social context without culture. Ethnology, on the other hand, has the potential to be culture in a historical context.

Yet there are both anthropologists and historians who come close to ethnology (e.g. Sabeen 1984, Sahlins 1985, Hastrup 1985, Ankarloo 1988, Österberg 1991a). Today, however, many ethnologists are asking what history is. Does this mean that we are losing the competence to analyse historical processes? Should historians take over this analysis, leaving eth-

nologists to pursue textual analysis in a present that lacks both past and future?

Many ethnologists today, in my opinion, do not use the historical perspective analytically, but more as a background against which they stage a contemporary cultural composition. Historical process and movement are replaced by a backdrop against which the actors' experiences and actions are free of a context. Perhaps an excessively strong influence from phenomenology has led to this remarkable obsession of ethnologists with the subject as an isolated individual. Are we really more interested in people's narratives than their lives, in text more than context? Is it narrativity which creates actions and events, or is it action itself which creates history and cultural patterns?

Our discussions are increasingly about aes-

thetic aspects and descriptions – and less about everyday life. Even when the object of the description can be found in both the present and the past, the rich social context, which puts the actor and the acting in a historical setting, is neglected.

One way in which the historical perspective is commonly used has been to begin by painting a flimsy historical background on the basis of already known facts, against which one then enacts the analysis, but in a different historical situation. Two different stages of time are thus compared in order to show how different conditions have led to different patterns of life – a simplified past against a complicated present. Something new is contrasted by being held up against something old. The historical background is thin, while the actual study is conducted in the present. History is used as a comparative technique although the researcher has not painted a qualitatively comparable picture. It is, after all, just one of the historical situations that has been studied.

Another and, unfortunately, increasingly common way to use the historical perspective is to enter a historical situation without even painting the comparative backdrop, and sometimes even without describing the social context in which we find ourselves. Cultural analysis becomes scenic analysis, where the cultural performance is enacted free of a historical context. The culture that is described acts alone and without opposition.

Early constructors of tradition often used a long and interesting historical perspective, but they described only one belief or custom. Although they cited a wealth of evidence and compared different points in history, they did not seek links with other beliefs and customs, and they failed to consider that the world is not culturally homogeneous.

How did the discussion of historical anthropology in the 1980s (e.g. Löfgren 1987, Christiansen 1988) influence our historical perspective? It led us to divide historiography up into either an actor's perspective or a structural perspective. Culturalists against structuralists – at the expense of the interaction. Experience is thus divorced from structure. Either the role of the actor in history is over-emphasized, or

else a homogeneous mentality becomes a structure without movement and without oppositions. There cannot be just a single culture at a particular time, just as little as people themselves can create their history independent of the prevailing order.

Are we on the way to abandoning the broad lines and the long-term outlooks? Are we no longer to combine social analysis with cultural analysis? Shall we no longer use the historical perspective analytically, but merely as décor? Do we really want to have culture without context, or subject without analytical object?

My aim here is to test whether it is possible to take abstract civilization theories concerning coercion and freedom, shame and guilt (Elias and Foucault) and bring them down to a concrete level. The example I use is the Swedish *tattare*, for whom I use the term "tinker". My questions concern how people perceive a disciplinary system, how they use experience, and how they influence and reshape the system. On this concrete level there arises a much more complicated pattern, and I must use a long historical perspective so as not to lose sight of the tinkers.¹ Continuity can only be made visible through abstractions and long-term connections, and continuity must be discovered before we can detect change.

The interplay between subjective and objective

In my view, structure and culture are not mutually exclusive. Let us not contrast but combine cultural analysis and structural analysis. It is not a matter of whether it is actors or structures that direct history, but how they interact. We must consider individual events and lives with the aid of the structure around them. We need both a bird's-eye view and a worm's-eye view of history, to find both similarities and differences. As Kirsten Hastrup puts it, "we cannot separate the real world from its analytical object" (1990: 88).

The tinkers are a clear example of a way of life which arose out of and was shaped by socializing structures in society. Those who built up this way of life were of course highly active in

defining their own tinker culture, in manipulating, mocking, challenging, testing the limits for what was possible. Yet they did not create their history themselves, as freely acting subjects. In this they are like the witches – without the talk of tinkers there would have been no tinkers (cf. Henningsen 1980).

The tinker is both what the context makes him – that is, an object – but he also represents an identity built up by an individual, as a frame within which he acts, as a subject. It is this interplay of object and subject which interests me. How does the individual use the role of tinker against society to change the disciplinary system? And how does society use the concept of tinker to segregate and educate certain individuals? How is a tinker identity built up – by the tinker himself and the people around him? What is the interaction between the subjective role of tinker, as it is lived and fulfilled by a tinker developing his own identity, and the tinker as an object created by the powers that be?

I think that some of Foucault's works help us to understand how to discern the subject and obtain knowledge about his possibilities in different societies.² Foucault's last books are above all about people's right to form their own lives and not just follow other people's norms – about how people create themselves as moral subjects. He had previously studied, for example, insanity on the basis of the way other people regarded the insane. Now he sees that people use their own experience of themselves to form their subjectivity. In the last interview Foucault gave, in June 1984, he explains: "I tried to locate three major problems: the problem of truth, the problem of power, and the problem of individual conduct. These three domains of experience can only be understood in relation to each other, not independently" (Foucault 1988: 243).

The strategic field of power

Power is nothing but its exercise, says Foucault, and it is everywhere. It cannot be sought in any centre or on any particular occasion; it is being created all the time. Power is a network of relations of strength. It concerns the way

some actions and practices structure other actions. And it works through strategies (Foucault 1978).

How then does the tinker react to the network of disciplinary measures which is woven around him, and how does this reaction then influence the measures? The tinker is a "good enemy" in the same way as Nils Christie and Kjetil Bruun (1985) have described drugs. This enemy looks strong and dangerous, but is actually weak. He represents evil and often appears in the form of an entire group, but he does not really threaten any power in society. Those responsible for the struggle against this enemy can feel safe. They can take powerful measures against him, but he himself must also be so cunning and powerful as to constitute a real threat. The strategy for the exercise of power is to define the enemy vaguely. He has to be sufficiently distinct to be able to be combated, but indistinct enough so that one is not sure whether or not there are more in the background.³

I envisage three degrees in the exercise of power – that is, the tinker played with justice on three levels. He encountered (1) the power of the state in the form of public discourse, legislation, and so on; (2) the local power when it was exercised by executives of the state – judges, policemen, and priests; and (3) the picture of the tinker formed by the way ordinary people spoke about him, communicated to us via sources like folklife archives and court records. How do people perceive and talk about tinkers, and how do tinkers use this in their actions? In other words, what power does the tinker himself exercise? How is this channelled back to the three levels in the exercise of power, and how do the levels interact with each other and with the tinker? What interplay is there between the exercise of power and the person affected by it?

Outsiders and moral conformism

My method is to juxtapose tinker biographies with the way tinkers were regarded and treated by other people. I examine how they influenced legislation, the central and local public sphere in the form of debates in press

and parliament, discussions at parish assemblies, descriptions of them in parish registers, court records, literary accounts, and the way ordinary people spoke about them, and I examine how this in turn influenced them. My starting-point is a conflict perspective. I question both the moral conformity and the success of the normative power.

I follow the course of history by constructing life-stories of people in the same families generation by generation. These constructions are chiefly based on parish registers and on what tinkers themselves have told of their lives in the court records. Parallel to this I describe the way these tinkers have been viewed in different historical contexts, on the different levels.

In times of change, outsiders stand out with particular clarity. New ideals are manifested in the struggle against marginal ways of life like that of the tinkers. In the 1930s attention was drawn to the tinkers as a special problem, and this led to a dramatic increase in their number. They were depicted as a dark threat to the bright Swedish "home for the people" that was being built up (see Svensson 1985). There were at that time two families in Skåne who were especially singled out as being tinkers, by the central and local authorities, by the legislature and the judiciary, and by the communities in which they lived.⁴ These families accepted the tinker identity that was ascribed to them and elaborated it with unusual vigour. I have compiled biographies for people from these families, going back in time generation by generation.

The tinkers had the chance to show resistance by virtue of being outsiders. The norms of the outsider are unlike those of established society. It is this which makes them a threat. They live outside the general order, and they are not affected by the moral rules that apply to others. The freedom which they manage to retain is due to the fact that they have no honour to lose. They can afford to mock the prevailing morality.

The judge and the priest had a relatively mild attitude to the tinker, but the judgement of the people was hard. The tinker was hated by the people for stealing their horses and raiding their storehouses. Moreover, it was often

the peasants who were punished while the tinkers got off.

The intellectual public sphere had generally more in common with the tinker than the ordinary people had. One expression of this is the fondness of many socially interested writers for tinkers, especially during the period of liberal romanticism at the start of the nineteenth century.

The court: the point of contact between power and resistance

The law expresses the normative will of a society. It is in the encounter with its administration that I have sought my material. The trial proceedings of the hundred courts (*häradsrätter*) do not deal chiefly with how many crimes of what kind were committed, nor about who committed crimes and how they were punished. Instead they describe the way local people viewed the tinker – in the testimony of the witnesses and the way the local power handled him – and they record the tinker's own description of his life. With the aid of the ample body of court records it is possible to reconstruct the points of contact where the conflicts were enacted.⁵

The detailed accounts in the court records enable us to detect the formation, testing, and change of both the exercise of power and the resistance struggle (Svensson 1989). By studying, not the actor or the structure, but the event or process itself, I think that the prevailing norm can be made clear. We have here the opportunity to observe how the different levels are confronted, how society works to preserve its norms, at the same time as the tinker stretches the boundaries and the people in the district learn where the boundaries run.

Classic peasant society and the tinker

My starting-point was Sweden in the inter-war years. When I started to trace the tinkers back through time, however, I gradually found myself in the public discourse that was conducted about social issues at the start of the nineteenth century, and I was amazed at how simi-

lar – and yet different – this was to the debate in the 1930s. This too was a time of change. A transition from one social form to another was in progress. This transformation lasted from the end of the eighteenth century to some time around or just after the middle of the nineteenth century. During this period old norms and new ideas lived side by side. It took a long time for the ideas of the modern society to be transformed into everyday norms. But it was here the path was carved which leads to the norms we follow today. However, it was not until the 1860s onwards that the change of norm was confirmed in new habits and new laws.

My analysis assumes that we are dealing with two different types of society in Sweden in the last few centuries. The first – classic peasant society – persisted until the start of the nineteenth century. After that, conditions and possibilities were different, and the value system changed. From the nineteenth century, modern society emerged, and the foundation was laid for the norms we follow today. From my findings to date, then, I think I can discern two different historical contexts for tinkers: one in the eighteenth century, the other in the nineteenth century.

My oldest tinker was born in 1704. The first historical situation that I enter is thus the eighteenth century, and it is one which had probably existed for a long time. Perhaps the tinkers had lived like this for centuries. At this time they lived a relatively good life, free and mobile.⁶ They were regarded as thriving, colourful personalities, and they no doubt enjoyed a better life than many sorely pressed peasant farmers; above all, they were better off than the servant folk. They took no part in the social life of the community, not because they were marginal deviants; they simply stood aloof from the local social life.

They developed their resistance strategies skilfully. Mobility was their main principle in the eighteenth century. There was a social space for them beyond the reach of discipline and norm enforcement. It was not possible to register and control the “classic” tinker. Not one of the resolutions of the central government affected the lives of the tinkers in the

eighteenth century. They were seldom afflicted by the shameful punishments meted out for breaches of norms. It was rare for a tinker to sit in the sinner’s pew in church or to stand in the pillory outside the courthouse. Normally they escaped punishment for the crimes of which they were accused. It was often some poor peasant who was fined for having given houseroom to tinkers, while the tinkers were acquitted of the arson or theft which had afflicted the peasant. The tinkers had easy access to society, but it was harder for society to get at the tinkers.

The tinkers were thus successful in their encounter with the power of the central government, but it was more difficult for them to manoeuvre in their interaction with the local popular level. The authorities were compliant and understanding, even fascinated by the tinkers’ way of life, whereas the people who were constantly at the mercy of the tinkers were uncomprehending and intransigent in their attitude to them.

Modern society and the tinker

The eighteenth century as I have depicted it was thus a mobile and relatively free society for the tinkers. By contrast, the nineteenth century was a period of permanence and coercion. As the ideas of modern society were transformed into a normative order, confirmed both in laws and in everyday habits, attitudes, and conceptions, what did this mean for the tinkers?

The normalization strategies now sought to turn the tinker into an individual case to be treated and corrected. The modern tinker was formed in the resolute socialization which sought to incorporate him in the community and to make him internalize a sense of guilt and remorse – as modern society demands.

Perhaps it was out of a desire to warn others of the dire consequences of an immoral life that the authorities were so zealous in their struggle against the tinkers. They were used as deterrent examples in the disciplining that was necessary during the construction of modern society. It was thus possible to strengthen the identity of the normal conformist.

Since society now sought to treat tinkers as individual cases, the tinkers responded by developing their resistance strategies from collective to more individual action. They were now acting in a society which had become static, stratified, and coercive in a completely different way from before, with a more subtle exercise of power and more varied strategies for adaptation.⁷

Whereas the classic tinker was rarely or never condemned, his sons and daughters suffered at the hands of modern society.

The prison chaplain at Malmö prison paints a clear picture of how tinker life had changed. He wrote in 1888 about the father of a tinker who had spent most of his life in prison: "his father was fairly well known in Skåne in his day". At some time in his youth he had been employed by a regiment, but had then led a roving life and "was provided with a large number of horses and did not appear to have any shortage of money". The chaplain went on to report about how often this man "had often been accused of theft, but was seldom, if ever, convicted, which is said to have been because one or other of his children always admitted responsibility for the crime". During the last years of his life, however, when all his children were in prison, this tinker was sent to the poorhouse, where he died at a great age.

Power is now exercised in a more diffuse way, at the same time as social education becomes more effective. Now tinkers were taught how to read and write, they were confirmed, and sometimes they even got married. This was unknown in the eighteenth century. Society now intervened much more in their lives in general. For example, the tinkers were often confirmed in prison – they no longer escaped punishment for their crimes.

From having been free and mobile outsiders, the tinkers now settled down and took more part in local social life. They had less room to manoeuvre. Lacking the opportunities they once had, they found themselves more on the same level as the ordinary people. People were no longer afraid of them, so they did not give them what they asked for; the tinkers therefore stole instead. They developed new strategies, not infrequently outright deceit and theft,

and more and more tinkers became criminalized. Yet they could also increasingly derive an income from clowning, playing the fiddle, and other entertainment.

The tinker developed a new behaviour on the basis of the changed possibilities available to him. He confronted the normalizing power with an altered counter-strategy. Judicial hearings were turned into farces, and the reforming efforts of the prisons were made to backfire. The tinker learned the norms, but he did not internalize them. Instead he violated and mocked them. In this way the tinker built up his own, partly new identity.

Yet there was less freedom of movement, and intense resistance was needed – a vigorous cultural formation – so that the culture built by the tinkers would not be demolished. This resistance was shaped and communicated in intimate kinship relations and ramified networks. This collective gave the strength to act in the individual roles into which they were forced by the normalizing power.

The art of opposing and mocking authority

The tinker's ability to exploit and make fun of the exercise of power is an effective counter-play both in the shaping of his own identity and in society's depiction of a deterrent example. When the more efficient surveillance system of modern society made open opposition dangerous or impossible, then more tactical forms of resistance had to be adopted: deceit, disobedience, evasion, sabotage, and pilfering. Important weapons in such a struggle were quick wit and cunning. In addition, the tinker reinforced his self-confidence through fabulous tales about his heroic exploits.

The tinkers also used the education they received in prison for their own purposes – to challenge power using its own language. Many of them attained a level of education much higher than that of the people. Their way of speaking – eloquently, with no dialect – astonished many people and was frequently mentioned in popular accounts of tinkers. They had to be able to master the language of the au-

thorities to survive. The language of the peasantry they could manage without.⁸

Their response to official control and attempts to incorporate them in society was to give the illusion of a professionalism which only they possessed. In court hearings they often made fun of the officials by making confusing and contradictory statements or by making a mockery of the evidence. Being accustomed to appearing in court, they showed great skill in manoeuvring plaintiffs, witnesses, judges, and jurors.

Ordinary people isolated the tinkers by calling them by pejorative names. The tinkers' effective response to this was to set themselves above the norms for naming children. They chose names of noble or at least bourgeois origin to manifest where they saw their true social standing. Alternatively, they gave their children odd names which nobody else used, to reinforce their identity as deviants. Tinker children often received three, or at least two names, often long, compound names. One girl, for instance, was named Antonia Heredina Vilhelmina. In one of the families we meet, the girls were called Florenzia, Ragnitt, Laurina, Olivia, Nilsina, Helfina, and Dussina. Another family had girls named Vetsera, Axelina, and Hildusine, while the sons were called Agart, Falmer, and Angantyr. We also find Julius, Frans, and Ferdinand, or Alexander and Amandus, names which were otherwise mostly borne by popes. In modern society the tinkers use names like John, Ellen, Mary, Tommy, Johnny, and Jerry. The use of English names, which became generally common towards the end of the nineteenth century, was considered a sign of poor taste and lack of national feeling.

As for surnames, the chief strategy of the tinkers appears to have been to have as many available names as possible. They appear under different names at different trials and in other contacts with the authorities. Their confusing tactics misled the police in their inquiries. Sooner or later, everyone in these tinker families appears to have used the name Karlsson. Yet there was no hereditary tradition when it came to surnames. The tinker Brolin, for instance, had sons who called themselves Karlsson. There was a tendency, however, for

families who had closer contact with ordinary people to use conventional naming practices, whereas the infamous criminal families constantly changed identity. When a tinker mocked the norms of society, he chose a surname like Hederlig "Honest" (see Svensson 1992).

Language was another counter-strategy for use against the authorities in particular. Thieves' cant was used to reinforce their identity both internally and externally (cf. Farge 1986, Okely 1983). Their secret jargon gave a greater sense of solidarity while also frightening other people by being alien, incomprehensible, and hence menacing.

James C. Scott (1985: 289ff.) has described everyday resistance of a kind similar to that of the tinkers. Poor peasants in Malaysia do not show organized, collective opposition but casual, more individual resistance, better adapted to the prevailing system. He calls these forms of opposition Brechtian because they disguise their resistance in the language of conformity. This is a kind of cultural weapon used in everyday actions in a struggle for moral dignity. People do not need to recognize the prevailing social order merely because they are forced to live in accordance with it.

Scott claims that the subordinate classes are more radical in their thoughts than in their behaviour (cf. Ginzburg 1980a). It is easier to envisage a different order than to bring it about. People may also act unconsciously to help to bring it about. Many small forms of resistance can gradually acquire great significance. The fact that they are sometimes individual does not mean that they are not coordinated. If a historical situation brings about a social order that agrees with their values, then their culture of resistance has made them prepared to support it.⁹

In a later work, Scott (1990) criticizes conflict studies for focusing only on the formal relations between the powerful and the weak. There is not just an official version of the world order, he argues. One must therefore study the "hidden transcripts" as well. There is a constant struggle about the right to define what is "the public transcript" and what happens off-stage. "The unrelenting struggle over such

boundaries is perhaps the most vital arena for ordinary conflict, for everyday forms of class struggle" (Scott 1990: 14). Like Foucault,¹⁰ however, Scott thinks that we must start from power, and that resistance has its origin in this.¹¹

Prison and the individual

In 1864 Sweden received a new penal code. It was based on the idea of guilt, with the focus on the criminal rather than the crime. It sought to improve individuals, to shape them into moral beings. The emphasis was not to be on the execution of the punishment but on the effect of the punishment as a deterrent, acting as a psychological coercion on the citizens. This was the normative side of punishment. The new law was to have an internal as well as an external effect. The main aim was to bring the convict to realize his guilt so that he would cease to commit crime. It was the person of the criminal that was now important.

It was in this way that the soul entered penal law. This gradually gave rise to a whole new science, a new understanding of man. The body, which had previously been the goal of the penal system, was now only an instrument for reaching a person's inner being through a system of compulsion and duty. The pillory disappeared, to be replaced by an array of experts on education and therapy. The penalty was no longer aimed at the body, but sought a profound influence on "the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations" (Foucault 1977b: 16).

Detailed biographies of the course of the prisoners' lives and their family background were now compiled in Swedish prisons. The tinkers thus came to be defined as a distinct group. Normative assessments led to them being judged more harshly, since no improvement in their conduct could be observed. The tinker Elias Fredriksson was condemned in 1888 to penal servitude for life for his fifth theft (which he denied), the stealing of a purse valued at 10 öre out of the waistcoat pocket of a person at Clemenstorget in Lund. It was not the crime but the criminal that was judged.

When shame ruled, it had been the practice to condemn a person who had violated the

norms, by punishing the crime and making the culprit atone for it by suffering shame, whether in the sinner's pew or the pillory. When the crime was atoned for, the offender was free. In a modern society ruled by guilt, the focus is on the person who committed the crime. The criminal is to be made to regret his deeds. From guilt, duty, and remorse there is no freedom. It was in this way that trespasses became crimes, and offenders became delinquents.

The ethnology of criminal civilizations

Foucault believes that with the nineteenth century there came a world of delinquents. Criminality was now defined less in relation to the law and more in relation to the norm. There developed different types of condemned people with different dispositions. For example, there were people with an "innate disposition" or just bad morals.

A new view of illegality thus developed. There has of course always been a certain degree of lawlessness in different strata of society – a margin where the rules are not applied. For subordinate groups this often shaded into criminality. This could concern opposition to taxes and dues, or vagrancy with all that it implies. Such lawlessness was for them a constant source of criminality. On the one hand, crimes which were part of the struggle against the authorities were highly esteemed by the people. On the other hand, great hate befell anyone who caused injury to others. It was considered unfair to let one's own people, those worst off, suffer the lawlessness which was part of their living conditions.

When ownership attained a higher status, crime against it had to be punished more severely. The new way of producing, accumulating capital, and handling goods led to a new view of the people's habits. A distinction was made between the lawlessness that affected ownership and the lawlessness that affected one's rights. The lower classes permitted themselves to indulge in the lawlessness which affected ownership, while the bourgeoisie permitted itself to indulge in the lawlessness

which meant infringing rights. Violent crime had previously dominated, but now it was crimes of property that were most frequent. Justice became steadily less liberal and increasingly class-based.

It had formerly been the undernourished poor who had committed crimes, but now it was the outsiders on the margin. These now organized and banded together in their own cultures, with their own norms and habits. The laws against vagrants were renewed and toughened. At the start of the twentieth century the Swedish committee on vagrancy warned of what they called the growth of criminal colonies. In this civilization, tinkers took on a special position. More attention was devoted to them as a distinct group, and there were discussions of special legislation.¹²

It was no longer the crime which made the criminal into an alien in society. He was living in society as an alien.

Foucault's critique of modernity

Foucault's history of penalty, *Discipline and Punish* (1977b), paints the clearest picture hitherto of the disciplining system of modern society. When he describes the development of corrective techniques, punishments, criminology, and institutions, he is criticizing our modern "disciplinary society". The prison system and its network of power is the very foundation of the normalizing power in modern society. A knowledge of the way prisons handled tinkers can thus tell us about the entire norm system of society. We see how normality can now be asserted more forcefully and efficiently than before, but also in a more diffuse, covert way. New experts are consulted, who can ensure the normality of the population. Prison chaplains and teachers play a fairly obvious role, but modern society is also a complex system of little powers – the judges of normality are to be found everywhere.

Foucault is suspicious of modern subjectivity, which he says does not lead to any liberation but is only a new form of subordination. He does not regard the history of the treatment of people as a process of humanization and education. On the contrary, people's possi-

bilities have been circumscribed, and coercion has increased. Society creates individuals to be able to force them into the prevailing norm structure. The tinker is made into an object, against whom the authorities can call for action.

At the same time, penal methods are refined. The intention now is not to punish but to correct, to educate, and to cure. Foucault's conclusions about the carceral system become a critique of the modern way of regarding society as a whole (see Grumley 1989).

From freedom to coercion

For the tinkers, nineteenth-century modernity, which was supposed to be synonymous with freedom, instead turned out to be coercion, making eighteenth-century society look like an age of freedom and mobility.

Tinkers appearing before justice in the eighteenth century were like large, alien companies just passing through. When they stood in the dock in the first half of the nineteenth century, they were mostly not permanent residents of the district, but they were recognized by the local population, and there were some points in their networks where they could encounter each other. People were afraid of them, never reporting on them or testifying against them. The crimes of which they were accused could rarely be proved, and since they never confessed to anything, they were mostly set free.

In late nineteenth-century society, it is the individual tinker we meet in court; the law tries to keep them apart. They have fixed abodes, although they move often and travel a great deal. The police thus have the possibility of searching their homes and finding stolen goods, and investigating their movements and company. People in the district now dare to report them and turn them over to the law. It is easier to submit evidence and obtain convictions.¹³

Yet their resistance remained, now becoming instead a mockery of the court. This was a way for tinkers to achieve dignity in the inferior position where they found themselves. Whereas tinkers had formerly escaped convic-

tion, they were now condemned. Their sentences were harsh, in accordance with the normative judgements on which the new penal system was based. And this penal system had been changed by the resistance of the tinkers.

The interplay with the immediate social milieu, in which the tinkers now had a more concrete place, meant that ordinary people no longer needed to fear them in the same way as before. There was no need to dread their revenge, but there *was* a fear of winding up in their immoral life. The normalizing power was really successful in this. It was able to discipline the people by sharpening its weapons against the tinker. Normal people were now controlled by an internal compulsion. The soul of the tinker, however, had not been reached.

Everyday life transgressing the boundaries

The tinker's possibilities and conditions thus differed greatly in the different societies, but there was strong continuity in the outsider's way of challenging and reformulating the norms. And the tinker was able to preserve this way of life through his skill in adapting his "informal economy" to the changes of society's economy. The more material side of their cultural identity was based on their successful and flexible ability to support themselves (cf. Kienitz 1989, Okely 1983). The consistent feature of the everyday tinker life is movement and constantly new solutions. The habit of change can be described as the tenacious structure.

The tinkers have a very sensitive ear for the prevailing norm in society. This norm always guides people's actions, regardless of whether they are conformist or deviant. The tinkers perform a balancing act with this norm as a guide. Sometimes the rope is slack, sometimes tight, depending on how the strategies of freedom interact with society's counter-strategies. Sometimes the rope even breaks, leading to totally new strategies and contexts.

Yet the tinkers always maintain a stubborn everyday resistance. Studies describing power as structural coercion see this coercion as impossible to escape. I think that the tinkers

prove the opposite, since they are able not only to escape the coercion but also to make fun of it. In this way they unmask power and show how it is possible to build up a resistance.¹⁴

To acquire and maintain this ability, however, requires living a rootless and restless everyday life, where change is a habit and permanence a Utopia.¹⁵ In such a life, transgressing boundaries – the capacity to challenge and reformulate the norms – becomes the decisive skill.

Historical cultural analysis

To conclude, it is my belief that ethnological historiography or historical cultural analysis must be recaptured by the ethnologists. The historian has adopted a great deal of our methods and material, but he can never come so close to people that he can see what experiences they have or how they use their knowledge to construct an everyday identity of their own. Moreover, many historians have not seen that there are several different ways to look at the world – not just that of the governing system. It is not only the people who are disciplined by those in power; the reverse is also the case. My tinkers clearly show how both norms and legislation are also created and changed from below. Yet I would not have discovered this if I had not used such a long historical perspective as to make different historical situations visible; or if I had not regarded statements in my archival sources as actions performed by human beings, if I had not acquainted myself with the structure around them and considered the probability that such actions and people can tell us something about culture and history (see also Isaac 1982: 323ff.).

Historians seek to show the social context surrounding cultural practices, whereas we ethnologists aspire to show cultural practices in their social context. The fact that we put people, not the system, in the centre is what distinguishes us from both anthropologists and historians. Yet we too must seek explanations in society, not in the individual.

Translated by Alan Crozier

Notes

1. Our choice of study object dictates not only the historical depth but also our theoretical perspective. It is thus natural that outsiders should be studied from a structural perspective over a long period (Svensson 1991).
2. Foucault has been criticized for objectifying the subject and ignoring his potential. Yet he himself responded to this criticism in an afterword to Dreyfus and Rabinow's book about him: "My objective has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. My works have dealt with three modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects". The three ways are the way of asking questions about the speaking subject, dichotomizing practices, which divide the subject either inside himself or from others, and the way in which people transform themselves into subjects. "Thus it is not power, but the subject, which is the general theme of my research" (Foucault 1982: 208f.).
3. See also Ehn & Löfgren 1982: 45. They call the phenomenon a "third culture", the existence of which everyone should combat. All the forces of good could combine to eradicate the immoral life of the tinkers.
4. In 1935 the Malmö police conducted a special investigation of them. In Sweden the campaign against tinkers culminated in the early 1940s with demands for sterilization, vehement attacks in leading articles in the press, censuses of tinkers, calls for registration, racial studies, and so on. No special legislation was ever enacted directly against tinkers, however, nor were there any special educational camps as there were, for instance, in Norway.
5. A large amount of the material in the archives concerns tinkers. Admittedly, this is not their own narratives; they did not have the opportunity to arrange their lives in the sort of accounts made possible by, for instance, life-story interviews, where the dark side of culture does not emerge. Yet the archives present a clear picture of the way the tinkers played with justice on the terms of justice; instead of submitting, they made fun of the norms.
6. Cf. Kienitz (1989), who has shown how women in Württemberg lived a vagabond existence, where the economy of destitution forced them to beg and steal. Mobility is an important constituent of what she calls the "Kultur der Armut". This culture only becomes clear against the background of society's conflicting norms. Her point of departure is the trial of a vagabond woman accused of murder with robbery, and she paints a picture of what the everyday life of this woman may have looked like.
7. This period has been described by Eva Österberg on the basis of her reasoning about private and public: "There is a great distance between private and public and also between informal control and the bureaucratic system of the judiciary. The courts are less concerned with chastising people and thereby communicating reintegrative shame. Instead they are increasingly occupied with confirming economic settlements and ruling on economic matters. When decisions concerning criminal law have to be made they follow more professional procedures. The semiformal control systems are extensive and ramified: schools, child welfare committees, reformatories, and so on. New groups create their own instruments for self-improvement and discipline, through such phenomena as labour movements and educational associations" (1991b).
8. Eva Österberg (1991a: 9–30) has shown what it means to be silent and to speak in different societies, how there are different kinds of speech and silence, and how (quoting Foucault 1978: 27) "they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses".
9. As an example of this, Scott (1985: 344ff.) points out that the French peasants in 1788 could hardly know which chateaux they would be plundering in 1789, but in 1788 they already had an attitude to the aristocracy which was fully concordant with what was to happen in 1789.
10. As Foucault says in his *History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1978:95), "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power".
11. "By definition, we have made the public transcript of domination ontologically prior to the hidden, offstage transcript. The result is... to emphasize the reflexive quality of the hidden transcript as a labor of neutralization and negation" (Scott 1990: 111).
12. Of course, there were gangs, family bands, even criminal cultures before this. See Arlette Farge's examples from Paris in the eighteenth century. Yet then it was crimes and criminality that were in focus, whereas now the interest is in the criminal and the delinquent, the person who breaks the norms.
13. The police system was developed and organized with increasing efficiency, and new investigation methods and registers gave new opportunities for surveillance. Fingerprints were a new way to detect criminals; they were first used as a means of controlling subject people, by a British commissioner in India. Carlo Ginzburg (1980b) uses this metaphorically when he describes detection by clues as an "evidential paradigm" which, he argues, exerted its influence on science and identification methods in the late nineteenth century.
14. In descriptions and analyses of social problems

and deviants, it is common for the outcast to be described as powerless. The Norwegian criminologist Thomas Mathiesen (1982) has shown how he could instead be described as exercising a counter-power. It is wrong to believe that everyone embraces the general morality. He thinks, for example, that prisoners naturally find no reason to follow prison morality. Like Foucault and Scott, he says that resistance can be developed in parallel to one's participation in society on its cultural premisses.

15. Cf. Frykman on the dilemma of upwardly mobile people – a permanent restlessness (1988: 131ff.) – and on the preparedness for change of the middle class (1991).

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