

The Extended Case Method

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This book treats methodology neither narrowly as the science of technique nor broadly as a branch of theory. Indeed, for us methodology provides the link between technique and theory. It explores ways of utilizing technique to advance theory. If technique is concerned with the instruments and strategies of data collection, then methodology is concerned with the reciprocal relationship between data and theory.

The studies of this book utilize a single methodology, that of the extended case method, for (re)constructing theory out of data collected through participant observation.¹ However, the extended case method is only one methodological response to the two traditional criticisms of participant observation: first, that it is incapable of generalization and therefore not a true science and, second, that it is inherently "micro" and ahistorical and therefore not true sociology. In this chapter I want to clarify the distinctiveness of the extended case method by comparing its response to these criticisms with the responses of other methods, in particular ethnomethodology, the interpretive case method, and grounded theory. Thus, in the first part of this chapter I move from technique to method. In the second part I move from method to theory. There I argue that by focusing on the "macro" determinations of everyday life, the extended case method is also the most appropriate way of using participant observation to (re)construct theories of advanced capitalism.

FROM TECHNIQUE TO METHOD

According to convention, the technique of participant observation suffers from two fundamental problems. The first is the problem of sig-

nificance. Single case studies may provide very interesting results, but they provide no measure of their generalizability. Moreover, singularity is compounded by the observer's potential disruption of the situation under examination. The case study is, therefore, so it is said, inherently particular until its results are tested in a sample of cases carefully selected from a population. The second criticism refers to the *level of analysis*. The study of face-to-face interaction, of the social situation, is said to be inherently micro and ahistorical. By its very definition the technique of participant observation is confined to the short term and to limited geographical space. In what follows I try to explicate the extended case method's response to these criticisms by comparing it with three other responses—ethnomethodology, the interpretive case method, and grounded theory.

Ethnomethodologists deny the relevance of the two charges. They argue that social situations of face-to-face interaction must be understood first as a unique product of the competencies, reflexivities, and assumptions of reciprocity among participants. In this perspective the abstractions necessary to make comparisons and thus generalizations across social situations have no "objective" standing. They are themselves constructed from the social situation of the inside participant or the outside observer. Jack Douglas, for example, shows how the official suicide rates that Durkheim used to establish the existence of a "macro" order of external constraining forces cannot be compared, because they take on very different meanings according to the circumstances of their collection.² Aaron Cicourel shows how the concept of delinquent is socially constructed by the juvenile justice system: by police officers and probation officers working under organizational and client pressures and with particular theories of delinquency. If the use of general concepts to apply across social situations is sociologically suspect, so too is the postulation of an external level of reality.³ In the view of ethnomethodology the macro world is not a real world but a construction of participants enabling them to negotiate and uphold face-to-face interaction. There is, therefore, only one sociology and that is the microsociology of the unique social situation, what Knorr-Cetina calls "methodological situationism."⁴ The task of ethnomethodology, therefore, is to elaborate the cognitive accomplishments that make social interaction possible. These accomplishments include the social construction of abstractions that constitute both general and macro phenomena.

Like ethnomethodology, the interpretive case method denies the premises of conventional criticisms. Here too macro and micro, general and particular, are collapsed, but in the other direction. The micro is viewed as an expression of the macro, the particular an expression of the general. It is as if the whole lodges itself in each part in the form

of a genetic code, which has to be uncovered through a process of hermeneutic interpretation. Clifford Geertz is one of the supreme artists of this interpretive case method. In his celebrated study of the Balinese cockfight, for example, Geertz presents the ritual cockfight as a "paradigmatic event" that displays the social organization of Balinese society and the Balinese sense of self.⁵ Through an elaborate system of betting and gaming rules, the warring of cocks brings together and orders villages, kin-groups, lineages, and castes into a status hierarchy. Cocks are the symbolic expression of their owners' masculinity, standing, and prestige, while the cockfight itself simulates the social matrix of Balinese society. The Balinese cockfight holds a key to the wider society in which it is embedded: "Its function, if you want to call it that, is interpretive: it is a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves."⁶ Geertz describes his method as follows: "Hopping back and forth between the whole conceived through the parts that actualize it and the parts conceived through the whole that motivates them, we seek to turn them, by a sort of intellectual perpetual motion, into explications of one another."⁷ The interpretive case method denies the premises of the conventional criticisms by claiming that, properly understood, the micro and particular are simultaneously macro and general.

TABLE 1 Responses to the Criticisms of Participant Observation

	Significance of Social Situation		
		Particular	General
Orienting Level of Analysis	Micro	Ethnomethodology	Grounded theory
	Macro	Extended case method	Interpretive case method

In table 1 I have summarized the four different responses to the criticisms that participant observation is inherently micro, ahistorical, and particular. By their reductionism, ethnomethodology and the interpretive case method both reject the *terms* of the twin criticisms. Ethnomethodology makes a virtue of necessity and reduces sociology to the micro and particular, whereas the interpretive case method fuses the micro and the macro, the particular and the general, into a single expressive totality. I use them here to shed light on the distinctiveness of grounded theory and the extended case method, both of which accept that micro and macro are discrete and causally related levels of reality

and that generalizations can be derived from the comparison of particular social situations.

As we shall see, each of these two preferred methods addresses one of the criticisms at the expense of the other. On the one hand, the extended case method, by explicating the link between micro and macro, constitutes the social situation in terms of the *particular* external forces that shape it. It faces the problem of generalization. On the other hand, grounded theory, by pursuing generalizations across social situations, obscures the specific contextual determinations of the social situation. It faces the problem of the link between micro and macro. Nevertheless, I propose to show that each method can in principle deal with both criticisms: grounded theory can build up the macro from its micro generalizations, and the extended case method can give rise to generalizations through reconstructing theory.

The Rise of Microsociology

Grounded theory works with a particular image of science in which theories are induced from data. Its principles were already laid out in Park and Burgess's classic *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1921): "As soon as historians seek to take events out of their historical setting, that is to say, out of their time and space relations, in order to compare them and classify them; as soon as historians begin to emphasize the typical and representative rather than the unique character of events, history ceases to be history and becomes sociology."⁸ But Park imposed his naturalistic sociology and the laws of human ecology on the field work of his students. He slotted their studies of the "natural areas" of Chicago into a preordained framework. Only later would field workers be encouraged to construct their own theories from the ground up.

Florian Znaniecki would be the first to theorize the importance of using field work to generate abstract principles or even laws. He called this process analytical induction: "[C]ertain particular objects are determined by intensive study, and the problem is to define the logical classes which they represent. No definition of the class precedes . . . the selection of data to be studied as representatives of this class. The analysis of the data is all done before any general formulations; and if well done, there is nothing more of importance to be learned about the class which these data represent by any subsequent investigation of more data of the same class."⁹

Everett Hughes, one of the most influential teachers of participant observation at Chicago, also advocated this approach. He, for example, compared dissimilar occupations: the physician and the janitor, the real estate agent and the jazz musician, in order to draw conclusions of general validity about the nature of occupations:

The comparative student of man's work learns about doctors by studying plumbers; and about prostitutes by studying psychiatrists. . . . [W]e seek for common themes in human work. . . . I believe that in the study of work, as in that of other human activities and institutions, progress is apt to be commensurate with our ability to draw a wide range of pertinent cases into view. The wider the range, the more we need a fundamental frame of reference.¹⁰

Later, Glaser and Strauss codified these methods in their pathbreaking book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, which has become one of the definitive texts for field workers in sociology.¹¹ They sought to demonstrate that qualitative analysis was neither an anachronism nor doomed as foreplay to the real sociological act. Field work need be no less theoretical than the "grand theory" of structural functionalism and no less scientific than the "abstracted empiricism" of verification.

Glaser and Strauss were at pains to show that theory development was not the prerogative of a few leaders at elite establishments who construct deductive systems of thought based on a priori assumptions and concepts removed from reality. Nor should sociologists be condemned to the slavish task of verifying the theories of the anointed. "[The grand theorists] played 'theoretical capitalist' to the mass of 'proletariat' testers, by training young sociologists to test their teachers' work but *not* to imitate it."¹² Grounded theory is a populist sociology, a way in which all of us can turn our data into the very best scientific theory. By accumulating judicious comparisons constructed from qualitative data, even the participant observer can begin to develop concepts of general applicability to diverse settings.

Grounded theory's claim to science lies in its ardent pursuit of *generalizations*, induced from comparisons across social situations. But in making those comparisons grounded theory represses the specificity of each situation. Thus Glaser and Strauss examine how physicians, families, nurses, and patients deal with terminal illness in different "awareness contexts," related to who knows what and with what certainty.¹³ They develop general laws about the way in which the social loss of a dying patient (loss to family and to occupation) affects the behavior and attitudes of nurses and doctors. In moving from this substantive theory to a more formal theory, Glaser and Strauss propose the more general law: the higher the status of a client, the better the care he or she will receive from experts.¹⁴

Ethnomethodologists, by contrast, prefer to plumb the depths of the single "awareness context" for processes that underlie stable interaction. Typical is Garfinkel's celebrated study of Agnes, whose attempt to pass from boy to girl highlights all the "seen but unnoticed" labors involved in managing sexual identity.¹⁵ More explicitly hostile to the comparative approach of grounded theory is Gilbert and Mulky's anal-

ysis of scientific discourse.¹⁶ Rather than extracting from their interview material some underlying reality, some truth of how science “really” works, they highlight the discrepant discourses of scientists as products of specific social contexts. They show how scientists create two discourses to cope with disagreement: an empiricist discourse in which facts reflect a real world and a contingent discourse in which noncognitive factors account for error. Whereas sociologists have tended to reduce science to the contingent repertoire and philosophers have reduced it to the empiricist repertoire, neither give serious attention to the world of the scientist as a patterning of a *multiplicity* of discourses. In the words of Zimmerman and Pollner, grounded theory uses discourse as a “resource” from which to derive generalization whereas ethnomethodology regards discourse as a “topic” in its own right, something that is produced in specific contexts.¹⁷

Methodological situationism leads ethnomethodologists in two directions. One tendency is toward extreme relativism, in which there is no real world but only a multiplicity of situationally specific perspectives. The other tendency seeks invariant properties that make social interaction possible, whether these be linguistic communication, procedures for accomplishing understanding, or the cognitive basis of all meaning production.¹⁸ In contrast to grounded theory, which seeks generalizations across social situations, ethnomethodology, if it makes any claims beyond the particular, seeks *universals* that underlie all social situations. As we shall see, the extended case method also adopts a situational analysis but avoids the pitfalls of relativism and universalism by seeing the situation as shaped from above rather than constructed from below.

The Anthropological Turn to the Macro

Grounded theory defended the scientificity and theoretical relevance of microsociology against the rising hegemony of structural functionalism. Symbolic interaction criticized the ideas of system and structure for missing the creativeness of actors in social situations. “Instead of accounting for the activity of the organization and its parts in terms of organizational principles or system principles, [symbolic interactionism] seeks explanation in the way in which participants define, interpret, and meet the situations at their respective points.”¹⁹ Ethnomethodology, on the other hand, turned the problem of order from Parsons’s institutionalization and internalization of norms to the prior cognitive accomplishments of everyday life that make normative consensus at all possible.²⁰ This movement from macrosociology to microsociology was also reflected in actual research. Through their field work, urban and industrial sociologists were busy discovering small-scale communities—the urban village and the informal work group—that were holding back the forces of commodification, atomization, anomie, and alienation

trumpeted by classical sociology as defining the modern condition. Within institutions such as prisons, asylums, the military, hospitals, and so on, microsociology was uncovering an unsuspected world of the inmate.

At the same time that participant observation was being increasingly identified with microsociology in the United States, the opposite move was occurring within anthropology. With the expansion of anticolonial struggles and with industrialization disrupting and connecting the furthest corners of the globe, anthropologists could no longer pretend that their villages were isolated and timeless. The problem became even more acute when they left their villages and ventured into urban areas, where it was impossible to impose boundaries on face-to-face interaction.²¹

One of the first anthropological attempts to come to terms with “macro” forces was Max Gluckman’s exploration of the social structure of South Africa in his analysis of a bridge-opening ceremony in Zululand in 1940.²² In attendance were representatives from both sides of the color bar: on the one side the Chief Native Commissioner, the magistrates, the chief surgeon, missionaries, traders, and recruiting agents for the mines, and on the other side the Zulu king, local chiefs, the men who had built the bridge, clerks, African police, and armed warriors. Analyzing who said and did what, when, where, and to whom, Gluckman was able to represent the ceremony as South African society in microcosm. Based on interrogation of the social situation and on his prior knowledge, he showed how the opening of the bridge contained the key factors with which to construct an understanding of South African society. Presumably had he looked at a bridge opening in the Transkei, or a mine dance in Johannesburg, he would have come to similar conclusions about the nature of South African pluralism. Society was, so to speak, composed of cells each encoded with the same structure, reflecting the essential character of the totality in which they existed. It did not matter which cell one looked at; the purpose was to arrive at features that were generalizable to society as a whole.

This was in effect an application of the interpretive case method. Gluckman was interested in the way the macro was present in the micro situation and less concerned with their mutual determination as two different levels of reality. Subsequently Gluckman and, more particularly, his students developed the extended case method, opening up villages and urban situations to wider political and economic forces associated with colonialism.²³ Whereas in the original study of the bridge opening, Gluckman had regarded the social situation as an *expression* of the wider society, many of his followers viewed the village, the strike, the tribal association as *shaped by* external forces.

Jaap van Velsen elaborated the extended case method in his reflections on his own studies of kinship relations among the Lakeside Tonga of Malawi (then Nyasaland).²⁴ When he asked the Tonga to describe their kinship system, they told him that they were a matrilineal and matrilocal tribe. A traditional anthropologist would have then diagrammed the beautifully symmetrical kinship patterns and called it a day. Van Velsen, however, was not satisfied with just studying norms and began collecting data on actual marriage patterns of the Tonga. He discovered that 40 percent failed to conform to the normative ideal. Whereas a structural anthropologist might have dismissed these as unimportant exceptions, Van Velsen regarded them as the key to understanding the changes taking place in Tonga society. Many of the able-bodied men in the villages were absent for long periods while they worked on the South African mines, and this led to new sources of wealth, changes in the sexual division of labor, and alternative marriage patterns that competed with the ideal. Accordingly, he did not view kinship norms as internalized and then executed, but as an arena of struggle for the realization of competing interests.²⁵

In making problematic the exceptional or deviant cases, Van Velsen is driven outside the field situation to the broader economic and political forces impinging on the Tonga. Looked at through the lens of colonialism and industrialization, the social situation becomes a completely different object, one threaded by patterns of power in which kinship norms become the terrain of struggle. The movement outward compels a reconceptualization inward—from self-equilibration and cohesion to domination and resistance.

The differences between the interpretive and extended case methods become clearer on reexamination of Geertz's Balinese cockfight. Whereas Geertz regards it as a "paradigmatic event" that displays the social organization of Balinese society, the extended case method would examine the specificity of the cockfight—how it varies from place to place, how it has changed over time—as a vehicle for comprehending the forces shaping Balinese society. Geertz gives us a few clues. For example, he tells us that most of the fights are organized by petty merchants near to and on the occasion of markets; "trade has followed the cock for centuries in rural Bali, and the sport has been one of the main agencies of the island's monetization."²⁶ Second, the Javanese government and the Dutch colonial government before it made the cockfight illegal, which Geertz attributes to their modernizing ideology.²⁷ But from a different point of view the cockfight can be seen as a ritual of resistance to colonial and then Javanese domination. The economic and political forces come together when Geertz explains that the cockfight is the way in which the Balinese raise money for public purposes, in this particular case for a new school that the government had denied them.

We see how the extended case method leads directly to an analysis of domination and resistance, obscured in Geertz's interpretation. We can come to similar conclusions by contrasting the way Van Velsen problematizes exceptions to norms and the way Geertz sweeps them aside. Thus, on the one hand, Geertz says that the cockfight is a *paradigmatic* event that simulates the Balinese status hierarchy, but on the other hand he says it is *exceptional* in excluding women since Bali is a "rather unisex society."²⁸ Problematizing rather than dismissing this anomaly, one might conclude that the centrality of the cockfight testifies to the importance of male domination despite and indeed perhaps because of appearances to the contrary. It is a fraternal organization that constructs male solidarity and through its association with the cash nexus cements the material, political, and cultural subordination of women. It is a text written by men for men.

Geertz denigrates as reductive and relegates to footnotes what is constitutive of the extended case method, namely the specific historical context that shaped both the cockfight and the domination it produced. In Geertz's own favored metaphor of text he fails to examine who wrote the text and for whom, and how it was received.²⁹ The metaphor of text is not innocent. One can read and interpret a text without knowing its author or audience. Texts may appear to be autonomous, but nevertheless they have to be created, and they do produce effects.

The extended case method looks for specific macro determination in the micro world, but how does it measure up to the criticism of generalizability? It seeks generalization through reconstructing existing generalizations, that is, the reconstruction of existing theory. In focusing on the deviant marriage patterns among the Tonga, Van Velsen developed a "post-structuralist" theory of kinship that emphasized strategic action in the pursuit of interests rather than the execution of norms.³⁰ In examining the source of the deviations, Van Velsen rejected the idea that return migration from the towns was due to the strength of primordial ties to a traditional way of life. Instead he showed how oscillating migration was shaped by the policies and institutions of the colonial administration and the South African mining industry. The colonial administration in Nyasaland needed a tax base and the mines needed cheap labor—both objectives were assured by reproducing a system of return migration. For their part the Tonga worked within these political and economic constraints, using entry into wage labor to further their own material interests.³¹ By reconstructing existing theories of migration in this way, Van Velsen was able to generalize from his single case study.³²

The Extended Case Method and Grounded Theory

We have seen how both ethnomethodology and the interpretive case method deny the terms of our two criticisms, by reducing all sociology either to the micro and the particular or to the macro and the general. We are now in a position to directly compare the two methods that *do* problematize the relationship between the particular and the general. Table 2 summarizes the differences between the two strategies, which are discussed below.

TABLE 2 Comparison of the Extended Case Method and Grounded Theory

	Extended Case Method	Grounded Theory
Mode of generalization	Reconstructing existing theory	Discovering new theory
Explanation	Genetic	Generic
Comparison	Similar phenomena with a view to explaining differences	Unlike phenomena with a view to discovering similarities
The meaning of significance	Societal	Statistical
Nature of totality	Uniqueness is located in a context external to itself, which elucidates society	Abstraction from space and time in a setting, which facilitates generalization to population of cases
Object of analysis	Situation	Variables
Causality	Indivisible connectedness of elements	Linear relationship between variables
Micro-macro	Macro foundations of a microsociology	Micro foundations of a macrosociology
Social change	Social movements	Social engineering

As I described in some detail in chapter 2 and above, the extended case method derives generalizations by constituting the social situation as anomalous with regard to some preexisting theory (that is, an existing body of generalizations), which is then reconstructed. Grounded theory, on the other hand, discovers generalizations by abstracting from time and place.

Grounded theory's inductive strategy leads to *generic* explanations, which take the form of invariant laws, such as "all organization tends toward oligarchy." The extended case method constructs *genetic* explanations, that is, explanations of particular outcomes. An example would

be Weber's analysis of the historically specific constellation of forces, including the motivational component provided by the Protestant ethic, which gave rise to Western bourgeois capitalism. A generic strategy looks for similarities among disparate cases, whereas the genetic strategy focuses on differences between similar cases. The goal of the first is to seek abstract laws or formal theory, whereas the goal of the second is historically specific causality.³³

Our two types of explanation work with very different understandings of what we might mean by "significance." In the generic mode we seek out what different social situations have in common, and generalization is based on the likelihood that all similar situations have similar attributes. Here significance refers to *statistical significance*, generalization from a sample to a population. In the genetic mode the significance of a case relates to what it tells us about the world in which it is embedded. What must be true about the social context or historical past for our case to have assumed the character we have observed? Here significance refers to *societal significance*. The importance of the single case lies in what it tells us about society as a whole rather than about the population of similar cases.

In grounded theory society provides "natural" settings for the discovery of recurrent patterns of social behavior. Thus, Robert Park referred to the city as a "laboratory" where, because of rapid change and social diversity, the laws of human nature become readily visible.³⁴ These laws are not specific to the city but reveal themselves most clearly there. On the other hand, in the extended case method, the city is not an arena where laws are played out but a constellation of institutions located in time and space that shape domination and resistance.

The two approaches also adopt different conceptions of causality. Generalizing across disparate social situations involves not only abstraction from time and space but also the simplification of the social situation itself. Where causal patterns are observed across situations, they tend to be of a simple, linear form such as x causes y , what Herbert Blumer and more recently Charles Ragin call "variable analysis."³⁵ In constituting a social situation as unique, the extended case method pays attention to its complexity, its depth, its thickness. Causality then becomes multiplex, involving an "individual" (i.e., undividable) connectedness of elements, tying the social situation to its context of determination.

Glaser and Strauss move from substantive to formal theory, making their generalizations among micro situations ever more abstract. They always remain at the same level of society. Others use microsociology as building blocks for a macrosociology. The simplest way is to argue, as Randall Collins has, that with the exception of space, time, and num-

bers there are no true "macro-variables."³⁶ The macro is then the aggregation and repetition of many micro interactions. The purpose of sociology is to arrive at "generalized explanatory principles, organized into models of the underlying processes that generate the social world."³⁷ Collins thus reduces "macro-phenomena" to the only real experiential reality, the micro situation with its rules of interaction.

Can one derive the properties of the macro world from the micro level laws? Such attempts to establish the micro foundations of a macrosociology ride on both the intended and unintended consequences of the social interaction order. Logically this realm should be the province of symbolic interactionism, which regards social structure as an emergent process. In practice symbolic interactionism, like grounded theory, either ignores or takes social structure as given. Instead the project has been taken over by game theory and economic models, which claim to link the macro to the micro on the basis on methodological individualism. Sensitivity to the social situation, to the symbolically constructed lifeworld, is abandoned in favor of normative assumptions about the rationality of actors.³⁸ The extended case method takes the opposite approach and seeks to uncover the macro foundations of a microsociology. It takes the social situation as the point of empirical examination and works with given general concepts and laws about states, economies, legal orders, and the like to understand how those micro situations are shaped by wider structures.

Finally, we turn to the vision of social change that emerges from the two methods. Glaser and Strauss self-consciously aim to develop theories that will enhance the control participants exercise over their situations.³⁹ They distinguish "access variables," which give participants access to "controllable variables," whose manipulation would affect the situation. Grounded theory, for example, should allow nurses to better cope with different levels of awareness of terminal illness just as it gives doctors an idea of the consequences of disclosure.

In advocating social engineering, grounded theory suppresses two related factors. First, it does not consider the dimension of power within the micro context; how, for example, doctors exercise power over nurses and how both exercise power over patients. Second, in focusing on variables that can be manipulated within the immediate situation, it represses the broader macro forces that both limit change and create domination in the micro sphere. Whereas grounded theory might examine the way AIDS patients can be more "effectively" handled in hospitals, the extended case method would examine the way the state has failed to take AIDS seriously, has held back the development of public policy, and has restricted experimentation with new drugs.

Once one highlights systemic forces and the way they create and sustain patterns of domination in the micro situation, the application of social theory turns to building social movements. As Alain Touraine has argued, it is not a matter of applying the knowledge of the expert but of the observer joining the participants in a joint movement of analysis and action.⁴⁰

FROM METHOD TO THEORY

In order to distinguish the extended case method from other methods of using participant observation to advance theory, we had to adopt the general categories of "micro" and "macro." The considerable divergence between the methods requires categories that are so abstract and ahistorical that they are of little use in examining the appropriateness of a given method for studying particular phenomena. We have to respecify the meaning of micro and macro to appreciate the relevance of the extended case method for the study of power and resistance in the modern metropolis.

We may take as our point of departure Alain Touraine's idea of a postindustrial society in which not only the *means* but also the *ends* of production are transformed. Postindustrial society acts on itself and determines its own goals. It is a "programmed" society that rejects the old teleological models of history as evolution and progress in order to embrace "historicity," that is, our ability to create social relations through participation in social movements. "Society used to be in history; now history is within societies, and they have the capacity to choose their organization, their values, and their processes of change without having to legitimate these choices by making them conform to natural or historical laws."⁴¹

The studies in the volume exemplify the production rather than the consumption of social relations. ACT UP and the antinuclear movement challenge the goals of society: they challenge how society uses its resources, how it legitimates inequality, and how it imposes alien needs. The state fragments and bureaucratizes the administration of social benefits to prevent alliances between worker and client for a more just and rational welfare order. Workers at Wholly Grains oppose the degradation of work with the ideal of self-management in which producers decide how and what they produce. New immigrants show astonishing imagination in articulating alternative visions, as Central American domestic workers create new meaning in their jobs and Cambodian women define the needs of their community. In African-American communities parents band together to counter the denial of public ed-

ucation to their children. Even junior high school students take the classroom into their own hands and challenge the teacher's authority to teach. Social research itself becomes self-conscious about its purposes. An outreach program for drug users employs a sociologist to monitor its activities, and a sociologist uncovers the hidden agendas of his fellow students.

But where does this self-consciousness come from? Where are the new meanings produced and where are they lodged? Jürgen Habermas, drawing on Schutz's concept of the lifeworld, considers their source to be social arenas integrated through mutual understanding and collective will formation such as the workplace, family, community, and school.⁴² New meaning arises from communicative labors whose comprehension requires actual or virtual participation. To gain access to the lifeworld, scientists have to enter into dialogue with participants. They have to become real or imaginary participant observers. Like Touraine, Habermas must privilege participant observation as a technique of social research.

But participant observers differ from participants precisely in their status as observers, which gives them insights into the limits of communicative action and the sources of its distortion, that is, how the system world denies freedom and autonomy in the lifeworld. As observers who also stand outside the lifeworlds they study, scientists can gain insight into the properties of the system world, which integrates the intended and unintended consequences of instrumental action into relatively autonomous institutions. Indeed, these can be understood only from the standpoint of the observer.

From this perspective the scientific and hermeneutic dimensions of social research assume an ontological foundation. They correspond to the different types of social action that integrate the system and lifeworld respectively. Thus those who would stress science over hermeneutics—the objective over the subjective—risk stressing the supremacy of system over lifeworld. Such analyses, whether critical or complacent, have a tendency to degenerate into pessimistic overestimations of the power of the welfare state, the capitalist economy, or “the system.” Too often, the system is seen as all-determining, so that forms of resistance such as innovation, negotiation, and rebellion are not taken seriously. Max Weber, for instance, waxed pessimistic about the limits of rationality and the bureaucratization of the modern world. His vision of the “iron cage” that imprisoned capitalist society would seem to deny the possibility of autonomous spaces for resistance. In stressing reification, instrumental reason, one-dimensionality, the critical theory of Lukács and the Frankfurt School relegates resistance to an ever-diminishing “rebellion of the marginal.”⁴³

Habermas is just as critical of those who give primacy to the hermeneutic moment, to intersubjective understanding, such as symbolic interactionists and ethnomethodologists. In reducing society to the lifeworld, they erroneously assume the autonomy of actors, the independence of culture, and the transparency of communication.⁴⁴ They ignore distortions brought about by the economic and political systems, particularly through the incursion of the universal media of exchange—money and power.

In Habermas's view the distinctiveness of contemporary society is the “uncoupling” of the lifeworld from the system world. Whereas the old Marxian models of society bound class struggle to the unfolding contradictions of capitalism viewed as an economic system, Habermas, like Touraine, sees a double differentiation, on the one hand between the economic and political systems and on the other between the lifeworld and the system world.⁴⁵ Once separated, the relationship between system world and lifeworld is one of invasion and resistance.

Although Habermas establishes the theoretical basis for the domination of the lifeworld by the system, he fails to elaborate the sociological basis of their actual interaction.⁴⁶ Instead he substitutes a generalized fear that the “system” will overextend itself and “colonize the lifeworld.” Colonization, he argues, not only undermines communicative action but also saps the lifeworld of the motivational and critical energies necessary for the survival of the system itself. While Habermas does see new social movements as the reaction of the lifeworld against the system, his analysis of resistance is no more concrete than the process of colonization itself.

As the studies in this volume show, the interplay between system and lifeworld, between domination and response, is dynamic and varied. However, it is difficult to systematize the various forms of interplay. Forms of resistance are more easily disentangled than are corresponding forms of domination, principally because the system is diffuse in its operation and less visible in a world that spotlights the subject of domination and hides the deployment of power. Five distinct modalities of resistance, however, are revealed by the studies in this volume.

Colonization. In some contexts the system so fragments and individualizes the lifeworld that resistance is impossible or ineffective. This is the outlying category that gives Habermas's work its critical edge. It is represented in this volume by Alice Burton's analysis of welfare workers. She shows how the state's reorganization of welfare agencies divides workers from one another and from their clients. Welfare clients are atomized into administrable segments so that they, along with the social workers and eligibility workers, can be more effectively surveilled. Even in this extreme case workers strike or work to rule, but their rebellion

is ineffective. Kathryn Fox's study of outreach work among injection drug users underlines what we might call "neocolonization of the lifeworld." Here direct surveillance is less important a constraint than financial dependence on the state and laws prohibiting needle exchange. By directly or indirectly destroying the autonomy of these lifeworlds, whether of the welfare client or the drug user, the state systematically erodes the basis of its own legitimacy and effectiveness.

Negotiation within limits. In other contexts the system leaves room for maneuver within institutions while strengthening boundaries between institutions. Leslie Hurst's study shows that such a separation of spheres can in fact facilitate what she calls a negotiated order within spheres. Mr. Henry has legitimate control only over his pupils' minds, while their bodies and souls are outside his control. Students take advantage of this to contest his authority; without support from school or family he has no recourse. Shiori Ui also describes the two-edged character of the operation of state and economy, which limits freedom and autonomy while creating opportunities. Cambodian women are able to exploit their status as political refugees to establish themselves in enclaves and prepare passages into the wider society. In keeping itself at a greater distance and permitting limited terrains of maneuver, the state successfully contains resistance and even turns it to its advantage.

Creating alternatives. Within a fragmented lifeworld people can sometimes go beyond a negotiated order and carve out spheres of self-organization. Although powerless to reshape the boundaries of the system, they can at least defend and reconstitute their lives within those boundaries. Self-organization can occur even within the system as, for example, in the case of Ann Arnett Ferguson's producer cooperative. Although continually threatened by pressures of the marketplace, Wholly Grains manages to survive one crisis after another by drawing on a reservoir of workers' commitment to collective organizations as well as on resources supplied by other collectives. In themselves cooperatives do not challenge the limits within which they operate—they have to compete with other enterprises for both labor and consumers. Yet they do plant the idea that alternatives are possible and thereby question the legitimacy of the boundaries set by the system. Similarly, the tutorial program studied by Nadine Gartrell challenges the pessimism about African-American education. The bringing together of spheres that are normally insulated, particularly family and school, gives students a better chance of realizing their aspirations.

Reshaping limits. Leslie Salzinger shows how workers, organizing in defense of their material interests, can actually reshape the limits of the system. Central American women, faced with slender labor market opportunities, opt for domestic work because it gives them autonomy and

flexibility. Individual upward mobility is not feasible, and conditions of employment rule out conventional forms of union organizing. Instead they carve out an occupational community to establish conditions and standards of work and a credentialing system. In so doing they actually construct the demand for their own services, creating a separate tier of domestic workers for richer employers. As they negotiate through the labor market, they also reshape its contours.

Collective protest. For Habermas the "new social movements," with their concerns for issues that transcend class, such as peace, environment, and civil rights, exemplify collective resistance to the encroachment of the lifeworld by the system. Josepha Schiffman's study of dual tendencies in the peace movement and Joshua Gamson's study of gay and AIDS activism can be seen in the same light. Both movements are wary about participation within the system and devote their most original efforts to confronting it or holding it at bay. The peculiarities of their strategies of organization and protest do not derive simply from their antistatist stance but from the difficulties of dealing with a form of domination that is at once ubiquitous and invisible. Before they can begin to think about asserting control over the state and the economy, they have to make what is invisible visible.

The preceding typology of forms of resistance—from capitulation to the creation of alternative organizations, from negotiation within limits to the negotiation of limits, from anarchic outbursts to self-conscious collective protest—demonstrates the varied interplay between system and lifeworld, showing that the lifeworld is not an inert body but a source of continual contestation. But the struggle is an unequal one. We should not overestimate or romanticize the capacity of the lifeworld to fight back. The forms of resistance are constrained and continually challenged by new and more effective forms of domination. Still, resistance there is. We have tried to document its diverse forms, its sources, and its limitations.