

The Three Dimensions of Ethnography

An interview with Jack Katz

Alexandra BIDET, Carole GAYET-VIAUD, Erwan LE MENER

Looking back on several decades of intellectual activity, American sociologist Jack Katz explains his vision of a three-dimensional ethnography combining human interactions, biographical experiences, and historical processes.

A Professor of sociology at UCLA, Jack Katz was trained in interactionism in the 1970s at Northwestern University, an intellectual environment in which the interactionist tradition was practiced and transmitted as a given, together with the influences of pragmatism and phenomenology. Professors like Howard Becker and John Kitsuse, as well as colleagues like Robert Emerson, had a great influence on him. Revisiting his intellectual trajectory and his most important research experiences, Jack Katz also presents here the integrative three-dimensional ethnography he now claims for.

Throughout his career, J. Katz has addressed miscellaneous topics and issues, developing research in various fields: sociology of work, organizations and law (*Poor people's lawyers in transition*), sociology of deviance and crime (*Seductions of crime*, researches on gangs), sociology of emotions and body (*How emotions work*), and more recently urban sociology (studying daily life in a Los Angeles neighborhood, Hollywood). The unity of his works stems from the ethnographical approach he has adopted on all these fields, with an experimental and on-going reflexivity on the methodology of sociology as a practice.

Jack Katz draws our attention to the way people experience social life by getting as close as possible to the phenomenon he is describing. Revitalizing analytical induction, he tracks the meaning of a phenomenon as it is perceived and felt by the very people who experience it. Thus, he examines the practical and methodological relevance of the ready-made categories of social sciences. We have to go “from what to how to why”. Then, distinctively, ethnography allows him to « follow in detail the lived contours of crime », confronting the reader with the « lived experience of criminality », to share the experience of anger of the pissed-off driver in LA, that of the crying child at school, the shame of the defendant, etc. In every phenomenon he has dealt with, embodied experience and sensual details are used as key entries to the understanding of social normativity.

His re-reading of interactionism allows him to make room for dimensions that transcend the situation, too often narrowly confined in the here-and-now of interactions. His approach makes room for the subject and for an embodied experience – beyond the tyranny of the mutual visibility and the fabric of appearances – but also for a long-time study of processes, from an individual perspective (biographies) as well as from an organizational or macro-historical perspective.

In addition to the following excerpts of the interview, an extensive PDF version of it invites us to follow how intellectual ideas spread continuously from the researcher's everyday life and encounters. Jack Katz's web site and on-line articles can be found [here](#).

Studying Sociology in the 1970s

Books&Ideas: After Law School you shifted to the study of sociology. Who influenced you at that time, back in the 1970 ?

Jack Katz: So I went to post-graduate school, PhD school at Northwestern. I was living in Chicago and for personal reasons I was committed to staying in the Chicago-area. The University of Chicago, which has a very important sociology department, was anathema for me at the time for political reasons. There were student protests against the war and they were throwing students out, and the only work I ever did as a lawyer was to defend students from getting thrown out of the university for protests. And that department was considered as very authoritarian – and I just know that with my personality I wouldn't last. I would get into too much trouble.

Becker was at Northwestern so that was really very attractive. Other people I was reading, other interactionists were also around – basically I just went through Becker's footnotes and went through Goffman's footnotes. You know, through Goffman I would maybe pick up Kenneth Burke – a literary critic that you wouldn't pick up from sociology textbooks. But basically like a lot of students, I just read footnotes and I said, ok, how are these people coming to their perspectives, what are they drawing on, and what worlds are they in.

I don't know when I read what exactly. I can't date it, but by the time I got into graduate school I was reading very broadly, everything interactionist and things somewhat phenomenological. Becker was a very strong influence in graduate school. Actually, Rémi Clignet was also an influence. He has retired near Nanterre, I saw him recently– I don't know if you've ever heard of him, but he's a French guy who taught at Northwestern. I TAed for him and he used novels by Gide, and I thought, "Oh, this is cool"; and it was very existential, pushing a businessman off of a train on the spur of the moment. It was probably something at the back of my mind for *Seductions of Crime*¹, you know, that there is an impulse you want to follow and materialize. But Clignet was a minor influence because he worked quantitatively.

But Kitsuse, John Kitsuse, was a very important influence and a good friend. I mean things were very informal at that department at that time. People would hang around the coffee room and the faculty would come in there. Becker would look like a student. He would wear T-shirts with grungy people depicted in cartoons, with a legend like, "Hey kids, let's fuck the state" or something like that. Because he had written about marijuana he attracted a lot of people who were doing drugs in class.

We had a class in deviance and...was Becker the teacher? I don't remember who the teacher was –maybe Kitsuse – when a student came in naked, and he sat down completely naked in the middle of us, and we knew that this is his way of getting the paper so we refused to react. We just totally normalized the whole thing, but it was the early seventies and it was an atmosphere that went well with the times. The faculty atmosphere went well with the times.

There was a lack of distance. Kitsuse was a great teacher but also kind of a friend. And I learned a lot from him just through how he lived his ideas and his life and the kind of continuity in his personality. He died a few years ago unfortunately. But he had worked with

¹ J. Katz, *Seductions of Crime. Moral And Sensual Attractions In Doing Evil*, New York: Basic Books, 1988.

Cicourel. Cicourel had been at Northwestern for a bit. And that was a tie to ethnomethodology, which was also a tie to phenomenology.

I don't know if I've ever written this up, but I was at Kitsuse's house once and it was a time when professors would invite students over and it would just be informal stuff and he was a great cook. He influenced me as a cook. He is Japanese but he did Chinese cooking, fantastic. But he was repotting a plant while we were talking and I remember seeing him go through or seeing as a series of stages of involvement in this little course of activity. And that to me was a phenomenological theme. It's not just what you are doing that merits attention; it's how much you are into it and how much the environment gets into you. So it's a theme about embodying the environment and the environment taking you up.

So through Becker, I got more grounding in the history of interaction. Everett Hughes' sociology work, or rather Hughes was Becker's mentor, he was his direct connection to Robert Park. Hughes had been a student of Park. And Hughes was a wonderful teacher, I mean, I never met him but my colleague Bob Emerson studied with him at Brandeis because Hughes went to – I don't know the order – but he went to Brandeis and then to Montreal after he retired from Chicago. So that was very much the continuity with the Chicago tradition I was picking up. In a way, I feel now a responsibility to try to give to students a sense of that tradition because I acquired it naturally. I felt like, ok, I understand these progressions. I understand context. I am not just reading something out of the blue, and I think as time goes on more history of thought builds up, more history of work, and it's harder and harder to do that. And I had the advantage of being generations after the origins, but in a kind of chain of continuity.

Writing on White-Collar Crime & Concerted Ignorance

Books&Ideas: As a fellow and then a post-doc at Yale, what spurred your interest in white-collar crime ?

Jack Katz: I recommend to my American students – I don't know how it works here – that before they start a dissertation and before they start teaching, to go to another university research environment, in order to realize the blinders you have from the local gods. All of a sudden there are other gods of a very different nature and in a different place and your gods look much smaller.

But that got me to Yale and money came up to do research on white-collar crime – that was Watergate time, this was the mid-seventies, post-Watergate. You know, people in the Yale professors' offices, they had all of Nixon's appointees in a photograph on the wall and they would cross out each one as they got indicted or went to prison or something. I think it was an amazing time.

It wasn't just Watergate. I remember what struck me was the fact that the charisma of all the institutions started to pale, started to fade. All institutions which had been protected by respect, now started to get questioned. Even, I remember the Merchant Marine Academy – this is a training place for people not in the military armed forces but the marine part that deals with bringing commercial things around. They found that the guys in the dorms were smoking marijuana. This becomes a big criminal case in the wake of Watergate. Otherwise nobody had paid attention. A lot of things that Catholic priests were doing, that Orthodox Jews were doing by taking federal money in Brooklyn and misapplying it. All these things

that were like sacred cows, that you couldn't touch before, all of a sudden, now you could. I never developed that as much as I wanted but there is a tremendously interesting sociology going on there, how the charisma of institutions is interconnected. There is something, I don't know, Durkheimian, something very profound about that. I don't know if it works that way in France now with all these investigations going on – all sorts. Down to, this (Balladur) thing in Pakistan that ends up like a murder case, basically. I mean you've got sex, you've got murder, you've got dirty money, you've got personal money, you've got bags of money, I mean, in the US this is fantastic but I don't know if it spills over or if it's more isolated in France. This is a fabulous comparative study possibility. Anyway, that was the white-collar work². Then I had to leave the East so I couldn't really continue that. It's the kind of work that is really hard to do at a distance.

Books&Ideas: At that time you also wrote about concerted ignorance in organizations, could you explain this notion?

Jack Katz: Yes I also did a paper on concerted ignorance, probably by that time³. Arlene Daniels was another important faculty member at Northwestern who was another kind of interactionist type of person. She was editing the journal *Social Problems* and they had a special 25th anniversary issue coming up, so she asked me to write something for it. And this was the kind of stuff that over time comes to shape your work as people start to make requests. So I put together that paper which was about how deviance in organizations is covered up⁴. Merton took some interest in this and he contacted me, because it was about how all organizations, in order to have a collective identity, do in one sense or another cover-up. That's the basic work of an organization, covering up.

And so whenever any investigation starts, there is all kinds of stuff that's hidden. All sorts of hidden things will start to fall out; whenever there is an economic downturn somebody will go bankrupt, you know, you're going to find tons of stuff. And then people will take the sort of moral attitude, "Oh it went bankrupt because they were deviant or because they were cheaters". But that's a bias in the way you find out about the events that makes it appear that way. As long as everybody is making money, nobody knows that Madoff was doing a pyramid scheme, a Ponzi scheme. It's only when it collapses that you see that this has been going on for years.

And the concerted ignorance, if somebody would do a study of that it would be sociologically revealing in all kinds of ways. The interesting sociological point is not about Madoff himself but about all the other people, who didn't ask questions, about all the ways in which they had signs but did not ask questions. That is the interesting sociology in it. So this is concerted ignorance: how we collectively, in concert and together through direct and indirect interaction often, don't ask questions.

I remember one of these things, I was in Yale at the time and I was using a typewriter where, in those years if you made mistakes there was a little liquid thing that you would whiteout over and then type over the thing. And I remember looking at this thing and on the back of it, if you take the label off and send it in, you get a nice pair of nylon stockings. And I thought: of course, these are usually female secretaries who are using these things and so they are

² J. Katz, « Legality and Equality: Plea Bargaining in the Prosecution of White-Collar and Common Crimes », *Law and Society*, n°13, 1979, p. 431-459.

³ J. Katz, « Concerted Ignorance. The Social Construction of Cover-Up », *Urban Life*, n°3, p. 295-316.

⁴ J. Katz, « Cover-Up dans Collective Integrity: On the Natural Antagonisms of Authority Internal and External to Organizations », *Social Problems*, n° 25, p. 3-17.

pitching to them. And basically they are trying to corrupt them. They are trying to give them a little bit of a bribe to order this product. So this stuff is all over the place.

Exploring the criminal mind

Books&Ideas: Your investigation on crime questions the personal experience of the criminal, why choosing such an angle?

Jack Katz: But to me it was astonishing that sociology had always been studying theft or murder or robbery or crime in general, as if this were all the same thing, to all these people doing it. And it didn't make any sense to me that it would be a good way of finding an explanation. From Durkheim on, everybody was doing that. And they are still doing it.

Everybody was always looking at the independent variables, at different theories of crime and everybody was always teaching, you know, that it is differential association or that it is something Freudian or stratification or inequalities or racism or the ecology of the city. All of the independent variables. But nobody ever looked at what it was you're trying to explain, which did not seem to me like a good way to do science. You go to look at the thing, and then you see from there what possible explanations there are, and you test out different explanations. So I just thought I would pick up everything I could that was the closest descriptions of people doing criminal activity.

Books&Ideas: In *Seduction of Crime* you used all sorts of data, including biographical references, fiction, etc. Isn't this a strange way to explore the criminal mind?

Jack Katz: Yeah and for that reason I think I used my own observations, the scenes I have been in, although I sometimes represented them in other materials. And I had – in “Sneaky Thrills”⁵ – I used reports that I had students write up that were autobiographical. But yeah, I tried to use multiple and different kinds of biographical references because just to use fiction, for example, or journalism, wouldn't be satisfactory. So it was kind of using some forms of evidence to cure the weaknesses in other forms of evidence, which have their own problems. Instead of using just one form.

But really to me the key was to start with the thing you're trying to explain. And the great thing about crime was that the phenomenon is short-lived each time. Except for white-collar crime, which is an ongoing crime because once you do a white-collar crime you have to keep covering it up so it's part of you. Whatever Ballardur might have done 15 years ago, he's been doing for 15 years since. I mean, this stuff goes on and on and on.

But what you do when you rob or you murder somebody, there is a before when it doesn't happen, the time it does happen and then there is an after when it's not happening anymore, and that's a great structure for testing explanations, causal explanations, and in qualitative work, finding phenomena with that temporal structure is very important.

And when I talk to my quantitative colleagues who are very concerned about causal methods and causal inference, that is the most effective thing I have ever thought to say. That when you can take the phenomena before and after you get, quote, “control” on it in a way. I mean the various things that sociology considers important in the person's biography don't change

⁵ J. Katz, « Sneaky Thrills », Chapter 2 in *Seductions of Crime. Moral And Sensual Attractions In Doing Evil*, New York: Basic Books, 1988.

in that time – where they were born, their race, or their ethnicity, the occupational status of their parents holds constant, something else changes right there. When you do qualitative work, you can't answer the usual sampling bias questions the way the quantitative people do. You don't have a consistently structured sample, you aren't using methods in a controlled way that can answer to reliability on interpretations; but you do have this variation and that's why it's extremely – that's why looking at the dependent variables, seeing it rising and declining in a short period of time is interesting... both crime and emotions – the way I studied them anyway – have that.

In *Seductions of Crime*, I am not studying the kinds of crimes that go on forever like white-collar crime. That is important to study but not part of that book. And when I am studying emotions I am not studying schizophrenia that starts in a double bind during childhood, like with a schizophrenogenic mother. The kinds of things that (Gregory) Bateson and others would have gotten into, RD Laing or Freud. I am not studying these lifelong emotions. Instead I study emotions that emerge and decline repeatedly, rapidly. And so basically the data is structured to give lots of resources for testing hypotheses and causal hypotheses.

Here you are in a situation where you are humiliated, you're ashamed. You found out that your wife is cheating on you and everybody knows about it. You're called a little punk or you're eating your BBQ and the guy next to you just takes these from you without asking. You're nothing; you're just treated as a non-being, as a non-person as Goffman might say.

Well, what is that? You're thrown out of the community. You're treated as a non-person; you're treated as not part of the human community. So the logical response to that is to say "I am" and to show that you are, you defend the whole community so you say "OK I am defending the importance of loyalty in marriage", "I am defending property rights". "Somebody is taking my BBQ" or "parking in my driveway without permission". It's not just because it just bothers me, it's like the whole system of our society would fall down if people didn't respect property rights, so I get my shotgun and I shoot the guy.

But without that meaning of defending the community, without that moral meaning, you don't do the attack. Invoking the communally recognized morality of your action, honoring your action in that way, is necessary to unleash and sustain it. You aren't really responding to logic in the sense of anticipating how others will see and evaluate your action. You're seduced by the moral imagery. And because you give that special meaning to your aggression... that's why people usually just wait around for the police, because they are not anti-morality. They are being super moral in a sense, in this kind of violence.

There are many different types of violence and murder that are not like this, but Righteous Slaughter⁶ is maybe the most common historically and across time and space. So the moral aspect of the explanation, of the process of launching an enraged attacked, refers to how the person identifies with the community, upholds what he takes as generally accepted values. That is how the aggression makes sense to him, because he has sensed he was thrown out of the community as kind of amoral being, some being not worthy of respect, and so he attaches himself to respectability in an extreme way.

This guy is not telling the rest of the story, he's not saying the words to himself. This is being lived through the rage itself; through the rising up of self-righteousness as a righting of your body. I mean, when you think of somebody being self-righteous, they are looking down and,

⁶ J. Katz, « Righteous Slaughter », Chapter 1 in *Seductions of Crime. Moral And Sensual Attractions In Doing Evil*, New York: Basic Books, 1988.

you know, trumpeting their condemnations to others and to a whole community so you're in a world of historically transcendent values. All fathers should be respected, so I hit this kid until the kid dies. And yes, it's experienced and done in and through the body, not through discursive reason, not through a conversation with the self, much less with others.

And that answers one of the questions that often comes up: where does the phenomenology come in, why do you (the analyst) need the phenomenology? Well, because culture won't get to this, the way things are framed by others won't get to this. You have to get to the embodiment of these understandings and to study the embodiment. And understanding that really led me to the emotions studies, and to the use of videotape in some of them, and other ways of trying to get access to patterns that people were creating and responding to in and through their bodies.

There are three parts of any moment of social life: there is an interaction aspect, there is a praxis or practical aspect and there is an understanding of the transcendent meaning of the moment that's being done in a hidden way. In these three elements – and the interaction theme, that I do take from Blumer – I believe that all social life is done through interaction; that there is no social act that is not an interaction. But I also believe in the ubiquity of praxis. There's stuff in Marx that also inspires or maybe is consistent with this. That the world is obdurate, it must be worked with, it's not just that you want to have something and you have it. You have to work through stages of it. And I guess I take the transcendence theme – I am very inspired by Merleau-Ponty and by the constant flow in the way we are intertwined with the world. We are all a part of the world and the world is part of us.

So I look for data on each of those three dimensions. I think it is useful to separate them analytically; I don't know that in reality, if there are clear seams in our experience between these things. It makes a difference because what social science usually does is: it studies either what is situationally specific, what is visible within the situation, what you can observe, what you can record within the situation; or it studies matters that transcend the situation, which are background variables, which are through interviews. Things that happened earlier; where you were born. The kind of statistic demographical stuff. It is very rare to combine the two.

People talk about macro and micro and qualitative and quantitative as being a division we should overcome. To me, the big practical challenge is to overcome the split between studying situation specific phenomena and transcendent phenomena. And embodiment is the way that the transcendent is lived constantly, because the body is what transcends all the situations we are in.

Books&Ideas: How do you use video as a tool?

Jack Katz: Our research techniques have become very sophisticated about studying the actions of a situation, both the interaction and the praxis aspects of it. We have recordings, whether it is a conversation or people working together in a work situation. A lot of great studies are based on data like that. There is nothing wrong with these studies but because they get so committed to the interaction analysis and the praxis analysis, they don't look at the transcendent issues.

I'm in a department that... I was probably influenced by the people in conversation analysis, and one of the big historical events was Harvey Sacks saying "Record the data, work off of recorded data, because otherwise you are just making it up, it's just cultural lies, glosses; what you think is going on in the conversation, you have no access to it". Its right in front of you,

but you can't get any control and have any access to it, descriptively, accurately. That is still a pretty challenging kind of position for people doing discourse analysis, paralinguistic analysis.

Ok that's terrific, but the folks who want to record, and work off of recordings get so committed to that, that they won't look that there is life before and after that moment they're recording. And if you rely on recordings only, well, you'll have to record somebody's whole life and spend your whole life looking at their whole life to get the first sense of it, and then, you'll have to have another lifetime to revise it and make your transcription, and you're not going to get there. That's not going to happen.

You need other methods to get to the fact that the actors themselves are aware that this situation is part of a trajectory that goes beyond what is physically observable to others right now, or to yourself right now. You're driving on the highway, and you may wonder: well where are these people going? I can see what they are doing right now; I can see how they are steering and interacting with other drivers. But I can't see where they are going.

Now there are people who study where they are going. There are people who interview drivers to find out – ok, they say, let's take a sample to understand where the drivers are going, in order to control traffic. So we will interview them, you know, when did you get on this highway, at what entrance? When will you get off? Is it part of a business trip, picking up kids from school, shopping or going out to a park, or what? What, what is it? But they won't look at the action of driving, the interaction of driving, the praxis of driving. Because they get trained in the methods that are good for interviewing and sampling to get those interviews and so forth.

And that is a big challenge in our time in research history, I think. To put those two together, the study of situated action and of transcending projects known to the actor, because you don't get to the fullness of the experience and you're going to miss something. You can get the praxis analysis right; you can find interesting things out about interaction. There is nothing wrong with anything that comes up out of any of these different ways of working. But you'll miss something by not seeing the whole, that there is the interrelationship going on of all these things.

The self-reports are not going to give you perhaps what you need. First of all, you know, what I did on that part of the book, the chapter on anger in driving⁷, is I had students interview other people and also report their own experiences, not just as drivers but as passengers.

And as passengers, they see what the driver is doing without the emotions. The emotions of the driver are very powerful and they affect the driver's ability to recall what has happened, and to report it. But the observer can see the driver doing all these things without the emotions, which is very significant because they aren't embodied by the car or being embodied by it. Even though they are in the circumstance and in the same interrelation. They are not having the same experience because they don't have their hands on the wheel and their feet on the pedals.

So I realized at some point, looking at these interviews, that the passenger, the observer is a wonderful resource for seeing things that you don't see if you rely on a lot of cases of the drivers' self-reports.

⁷ J. Katz, « Pissed Off in L.A. », *How Emotions Work*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 18-86.

And what I at some point would like to write about is the visible unconscious. It's what is invisible to the actor at the time, but is visible to a third-party or on videotape. Or if you go through the experience again yourself with the intent of describing how you've embodied an action... Of if you do interviews, if you make another effort, you create another situation with the person and you interview them on it. And then they can bring to mind things that at the time they live emotionally and in their bodies but can't talk about.

So, yes, you have to look for another device and that's why in that series of studies I tried many different forms of data. I tried interviews done by people co-present during the behavior under study, by passengers. I tried self-reports of shame experiences. And I had two or three chapters that were based on data examined on videotape. I didn't do everything on videotape, because I didn't want to – what's the Marxist phrase – make a fetish of videotape.

But videotape is an important resource because it can give a third-party perspective that both parties interacting are not aware of. Or at least, if they are aware of it, they are aware in an unconscious way and could not speak to it, then or later. I wouldn't say they aren't aware of it.

Just on the videotape, from the whining chapter⁸, another way to make some of these points: the girl Rachel whining in preschool. The video clip shows that the teacher is illustrating how to do the puzzle. Ok the girl is working at a little puzzle at a desk and she is whining, whining, whining. So the teacher, who first of all says, this is annoying, but if adults are observing her, this is embarrassing, the school shouldn't have whining kids, so there are problems there. The teacher comes over and she shows Rachel how to do the puzzle.

Now in fact, Rachel, who is a smart little girl, knows how to do the puzzle. But she is sitting there whining, she is not engaging, so the teacher takes the puzzle pieces to demonstrate to her how to do it. So the teacher goes like this (raising puzzle pieces and putting them in place) and this is done very histrionically, very slowly, and in silence so as to draw the child's attention, so that there are no distractions. This is the only thing happening. And all of a sudden the whine goes "ehhh" (upward and downward in scale). Rachel's whine follows the hand motions. And it starts and stops, and its trajectory follows the hand motion. You can see that on the videotape. I may have the clips on the website, but you can see that quite clearly. Before the teacher comes, the whining is irregular. And the teacher comes and basically in whining, the way she whines, she is joining the teacher.

Whining is saying negative, I'm not in what is going on here. But by shaping the whine to the hands, she is saying "I am here; I am with you. I am social; I am socially competent". But that sort of thing you can't see with the naked eye. You can't be sure that that's going on. You can suspect it, but you can see that kind of thing on videotape.

Ethnography & Political Relevance

Books&Ideas: What is the link between ethnography and political consciousness ?

Jack Katz: Since I teach ethnography and in the US context, there's been a lot of controversy I guess since Wacquant wrote his essay criticizing Duneier, Anderson and Newman... I found

⁸ J. Katz, « An épisode of whining », chapter 5, *How Emotions Work*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 229-273.

myself in the middle of the arguments that developed because I had good relations with everybody before this thing started. And I still have ok relations with everybody; I haven't broken with anybody. But I was trying to figure out what was going on here and the students kept asking me "So what's going on? Do we have to take a choice?" and I wrote one paper that was published in the *Annals* that was on politics and rhetoric and ethnography⁹.

But since then in my teaching, I've worked up another paper that I will put in a book on methods after my Hollywood project. That's called *Three Genres*, and it's less polemical than the *Annals* paper. Actually it's not polemical at all, because it sees virtue in each of the three genres of ethnography. One genre is iconic and a great example is – the street corner studies are iconic. They take a few people, like Elijah Anderson's *On the Corner*, which was his dissertation: it might have had three or five people – that's it. But it's an icon as in religious imagery of a precious little representation, worked elaborately, but in it there's some larger meaning – it's precious. Mitch Duneier's *Sidewalk* study, which, I don't know how well known it is here [in France], but it was a very successful sociology book and also a popular book in the States. Duneier goes along, with these guys who are selling books on a sidewalk in Greenwich village that they picked up at one place or another and so you get to know these people, very vividly. So that's one kind.

Then there is modeling work. There are several different examples of modeling work. There's Radcliffe-Brown's way of working. He would go into some island society that no one had seen before, and he would model the whole society, but there wouldn't be one person named, there wouldn't be one particular person described. It would be all the structures and functions of how the kinship structure works with the economic system, with the political power system, with the ecology. But nobody is visible. There are no people visible in that work. Another example of modeling is what I think Burawoy is recommending. In his well-known book¹⁰ there are some people visible, but a lot of that work is... basically you do theoretical commentary to fill in a lot of the model. The point is to create a model of micro, macro and meso. I think of Howard Becker's work on art. The genre there is modeling. All the different people coming together. Now there he has lots of people visible but the effort is to show these are all interweaving; so it's a macro portrait, showing a whole that is composed of many different parts. In some of the parts you can see people and in some of them you can't. But it's a different effort than the iconic. I don't think Becker ever did an iconic, but a lot of his students have.

Then there is the comparative analytic genre, which is the kind of stuff I've done, Stefan Timmermans does, Bob Emerson does. This comes out of the Everett Hughes training, and Becker and Glaser and Strauss developed studies in this style. You get lots of incidents, variations on a certain kind of thing happening. A lot of studies in this tradition were studies of people at work. An example is Donald Roy's factory study. He had many incidents describing how guys were, quote unquote, "making out". How much they are producing to reach the required limits and their strategies to do so. And then, you create an analysis that makes sense of all of that, basically through analytic induction.

So these are the three styles and each has a way of being politically progressive, if you want to do that. Each has a way of being conservative, if you want to do that. There is nothing in

⁹ J. Katz, « On the Rhetoric and Politics of Ethnographic Methodology », *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 595, n°1, 2004, p. 280-308.

¹⁰ M. Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979.

the style itself that dictates what the political slant is. But each has a different place in the history of investigation in an area of work.

Like when Radcliffe-Brown was doing his work, an anthropologist might be the first person from Europe from the West to go to a society in the Indian Ocean or the South Pacific, to try to chart out the social life. There is a different language and many many things are different from what Europeans knew, so you don't necessarily want a comparative analytical study and you don't want an iconography. You want to understand the whole and the way it fits together – that makes sense to get your orientations. It's also what you need as a colonialist, I suppose, to get control.

You need a lot of information, not just a narrow, comparative analytic study of a given practice.... An example of such a study, from much later on in the history of anthropology, is Charles Frake, doing a study on how to enter into a Yakan which is located on a Muslim island in the Philippines. And the stages they go through before people actually enter a house and the stages they go through as they come inside. There are lots of cases of entering a house that he examines to show the variations. But that wouldn't be the right thing to do in the first study of that society. He draws on a lot of things already known by others created through modeling work.

The iconic work has itself a different kind of... when you want to bring together lots of different relevant themes in the lives of a certain population – you can do that by portraying the lives of people and showing how all these different themes make a difference in their lives. So Mitch Duneier in his *Sidewalk* is showing how the constitutional interpretation of the first amendment makes a difference; how the stationary book vendors' work makes a difference; how Penn Station is set up and the alcoves in it make a difference to the homeless book vendors. How pedestrians' routines in Greenwich Village make a difference. And all these things then become a rich portrait, a way of talking to many different themes that are often kept separate in academic and popular discussion.

So the different genres have a different role, but I don't think one is – I think often people say “oh, well one is more moral or politically correct.” They each have a political use and it's not necessarily left or right.

My problem with M. Burawoy is not so much the modeling he does, it's that he, for political reasons, doesn't consider alternative explanations and look for data that's right around. That's a real haunting problem that I see in the work of a lot of students. Actually, it's a kind of academic sociological Marxism that limits the work that we have to do as researchers; it's meaning should be sought in how it shapes our relations to the means of producing sociological knowledge. That's the value.

He uses a theoretical model to justify not looking at the lives of workers outside the workplace he entered. Those people at his research site live in a community, they have relatives, they have sisters and brothers. If there are other firms that have other management practices, why don't we find out about that?

As I understand it, the factory that he argues was so well managed and effectively induced consent, very close to it. There were others that were on strike; that were having labor disputes. That in fact it was not clear that this management practice really was causally significant to, quote, the “peace” at that factory. It might have been other things.

And the way it comes up is really – a fieldworker puts himself or herself into a site and there's a lot of work to get to know the people, to get access, to get comfortable. A lot of us are not that easy in other settings. We're scholars, we like to be in quiet places. Now we have to be very gregarious. OK, you've got yourself situated, now you realize that to really understand whether, for example, management techniques are producing compliance by the workers, – and why the workers stay there instead of leaving – maybe I should go and see the neighborhood of the worker and find somebody – a sister or a brother or somebody very similar to them – who doesn't work in the factory I'm studying and see what they are doing in life. Maybe the workers I'm studying just get more money in their current job than do their brothers elsewhere. Maybe it has nothing to do with the management's practice but is due to the fact that their sisters and brothers can't get a job and when they do get a job it pays half as much. So the management practices really don't matter. That's a reasonable rival hypothesis. It's not necessarily pro-capitalist or more Marxist-critical. That can just be saying that because there is very little employment opportunity elsewhere, management – and for whatever reason management does this, sometimes management does things because they want to appear sophisticated to other management people. There is a lot that management does because – they are not really oriented towards the workers but they are oriented to their own peer group.

So this is the challenge that I face and it comes up because students come up with projects and I want them to go into other settings, to investigate other reasonable hypotheses, and this is the way that people get a political kind of ideology into academia, to justify not doing extra work. And so the result is not serving the larger interest in building knowledge. But it's not a matter of modeling or not modeling. It's a matter of what is reasonable and alternate hypotheses that are not being pursued because a lot of rhetoric is being used.

Books&Ideas: In what sense is ethnography politically relevant? Can it help us understand our urban societies ?

Jack Katz: Well, first of all, as I argue in the *Annals* paper, if you go out and show how things are and how culture misrepresents, that in itself has political value. Showing that people are being misrepresented by the culture. So Becker has contributed to the whole decriminalization of marijuana and other criminalized drugs. To my knowledge, he hasn't been on the street with it, with a picket sign, he hasn't joined political parties, personally he has never accepted a position within a professional organization of any value. He would never be chair of any department he was in. He wouldn't take on that power, he wouldn't play that role. But his marijuana essay, which came out in 1953¹¹ – which is really early if you think about it, with what the state of culture was about marijuana in the United States at the time – I mean millions of college students read that. That informed a whole generation.

Now, has it led to anything? I don't know. Goffman's *Total Institutions* work was cited by the Supreme Court when they were deciding to remove the state's ability to incarcerate people based on mental illness claims when they weren't a danger to anybody else. Some students had read his stuff in college and they were clerking for the Supreme Court Justices, and they got a reference to Goffman into the opinion. So there are signs that these things make a difference.

¹¹ H. S. Becker, « Becoming a Marihuana User », *The American Journal of Sociology*, 59(3), 1953, p. 235-242.

Because if you show how things are on the ground ethnographically, you're probably going to be fighting some part of the culture that is misrepresented for some power reasons and so to me that is one kind of political response.

I can say that the Hollywood study is going to attack a lot of common policy ideas. Whether anybody will listen to it, I don't know. Whether it will have any impact, I don't know. But in terms of political relevance to – at least logically as far as I can see – the research questions.

A lot of things thought about urban life are shibboleths – Urban sociologists accept all the ideas that everybody talks about that are just completely at odds with the facts. Gentrification: it's not that some areas haven't gotten bidden up in price, but that's not the fundamental reality in the diversification of the city. Gentrification is like this binary idea of rich people coming in. And yes, some rich people are coming or middle class people. But there are also all kinds of immigrants coming in and all kinds of change to the city. And it's like an abandonment of the project of really understanding what's going on, to use these terms; it's a real problem.

What I think is most fundamentally going on is not so much even class relations; it's really multiple histories, multiple politically relevant histories being lived next to each other, which you can see in class terms but it's not how the people live them. They live that they were in El Salvador during the Civil War and escaped, or, you know, a gay guy in El Salvador where it was impossible, you could get killed if people knew, and they escaped from that. Or they were interned because they were Japanese during the Second World War. I have one woman who was on one of the Channel Islands during in the First World War. And her life was affected when her brother-in-law was killed, and it was all shaped from then on. She is living right next to the Japanese guy, to the El Salvadorian guy, to the young woman from the state of Washington who is in her twenties and making good money and dating and having a lot of fun. It's a set of very different biographical meanings and to collapse all that into poor and middle class is to fundamentally abandon the relevancies of the urban setting the people you are studying, and to fail to appreciate what is new about the city, which is that LA didn't use to have all these different histories.

The US didn't use to have all these different histories. Immigration was closed between about 1920 and 1965, so all of urban sociology was really developed during this period of US history that no longer structures the city. It's since '65 that there has been just a flow of people coming in. And their relevancies are, their focus is most directly on others of their own ethnic group and how they are doing. They are not looking to the neighbor and saying "Oh, am I doing better or worse than the Japanese who was interned and is now a public schoolteacher? I am an El Salvadorian gay guy and I'm working in a hospital facility not far away. Am I doing better or worse than this 25-year-old woman from Washington who is working in a media company?" I mean, that's not where his head is.

There is some reality to that the economic or class differences; you can count those aspects if you want. But you are fundamentally using a class framework and a static framework that is separate from the biographies of the people; so you are not going to be addressing the differences relevant to them¹².

I do think that the challenge, the big challenge is to get away from the culturally established definitions of the topic because that's what gets you support, that's what your friends respond

¹² J. Katz, «Cooks Cooking Up Recipes: The Cash Value of Nouns, Verbs and Grammar», *American Sociologist*, vol. 43, n°1, 2012, p. 125-134.

to: “Oh I am going to study the, quote, “poor people” or disorder in the *banlieue*”. Well when you get there, you might find that that’s not the best terminology for it, that there’s lots of different things going on and you need to come up with other terms that fit what’s going on and the trouble there is a personal and a political one because you start to separate from the groups that supported you because that’s why you get your research funding, that’s why your friends and your family understand enthusiastically what you do. Now “I am studying Sneaky Thrills”, “oh what is that?” “No, I am studying youth delinquency”, “Oh ok let’s study youth delinquency, that’s great”. “Oh no, I am studying the Ways of the Badass”, “oh, what’s that?” You know, so that’s the challenge.

The challenge is to be a naturalist science and the political affiliations that follow from that, but also it’s like distancing yourself. It’s like being an anthropologist locally, which means creating the distance that anthropologists used to have created for them by geography. Now we have to create it for ourselves to get away from the culture that supports us, but by embracing us can suffocate us. I mean, maybe you folks will later talk about what’s going on in, quote, “the suburbs” here but I hear it so much from a perspective grounded in a French central identity rather than from the biographies of the people, which I don’t know much about so I can’t speak to it but if I’m thinking like Hollywood, I’m thinking maybe there’s a lot of people out there that the, quote, “disorder” seen there by the French – burning cars and all that – how is that relevant to what they experienced before or wherever they or their families were? The prior generation? What does this experience here mean relative to that?

I understand that from the perspective of the reader of *Le Monde* who is born here, his parents were born here, it looks like a great change to disorder, but that’s to ground yourself not in the lives – to me that’s not an ethnographic grounding. The ethnographic grounding has to be in the lives of those people, which I really don’t know anything about so I really can’t speak to, but I suspect that it might be much more historical change and anchoring to historical starting points, and places where things were so much more chaotic and corrupt and poor and difficult, and had a certain order of challenges also. That this must be understood – so it’s almost like a blinding to me in a lot of the talk about the youth, it’s just putting up more and more barriers to see who these people are. Although I can’t say that I’ve done enough.

Excerpts from an interview with Jack Katz conducted by Alexandra Bidet, Carole Gayet-Viaud and Erwan le Méner, 26 September 2011 in Paris.

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