

# Prologue

## *Regrounding Grounded Theory*

*[M]y efforts are to work the ruins of a confident social science as the very ground from which new practices of research might take shape.*

—Lather (1999:152)

We are today in the midst of a renaissance of qualitative approaches to research not only in the social sciences, where they have had considerable longevity if not prominence, but also in the humanities, professions, and beyond. Within this renaissance, established methods are also being reinterrogated.<sup>1</sup> Questions are raised not of their validity in quantitative terms that ignore challenges to the truth claims of positivism but rather regarding their capacities to resituate both the inquirer and inquiry itself within new transdisciplinary sites around the postmodern turn.

My project here is to regenerate a very popular and epistemologically sound approach to qualitative analysis called “grounded theory.” With roots in Chicago sociology, symbolic interactionism, and pragmatist philosophy, it was initially developed by Glaser and Strauss in the late 1960s, and later elaborated by them and others.<sup>2</sup> Grounded theory offers an empirical approach to the study of social life through qualitative research and distinctive approaches to data analysis. While many grounded theorists have recently produced more constructivist framings (see esp. Strauss, 1987; also Charmaz 1995a, 2000), problematic positivist recalcitrancies remain.

I seek to push grounded theory more fully around the postmodern turn through a new approach to analysis within the grounded theory framework. Called situational analysis, it can be used in a wide array of research

projects drawing on interview, ethnographic, historical, visual, and/or other discursive materials, including multisite research. Situational analysis allows researchers to draw together studies of discourse and agency, action and structure, image, text and context, history and the present moment—to analyze complex situations of inquiry broadly conceived. Thus it can support researchers from heterogeneous backgrounds pursuing a wide array of projects.

Situational analysis has a radically different conceptual infrastructure or guiding metaphor from the action-centered “basic social process” concept that undergirds traditional grounded theory. In situational analysis, that is replaced with Strauss’s situation-centered “social worlds/arenas/negotiations” framework.<sup>3</sup> Building upon and extending Strauss’s work, situational analysis offers three main cartographic approaches:

1. **Situational maps** that lay out the major human, nonhuman, discursive, and other elements in the research situation of inquiry and provoke analysis of relations among them;
2. **Social worlds/arenas maps** that lay out the collective actors, key nonhuman elements, and the arena(s) of commitment and discourse within which they are engaged in ongoing negotiations—meso-level interpretations of the situation; and
3. **Positional maps** that lay out the major positions taken, and *not* taken, in the data vis-à-vis particular axes of difference, concern, and controversy around issues in the situation of inquiry.

All three kinds of maps are intended as analytic exercises, fresh ways into social science data that are especially well suited to contemporary studies from solely interview-based to multisited research projects. They are intended as supplemental approaches to traditional grounded theory analyses that center on the framing of action—basic social processes. Instead, these maps center on elucidating the key elements, materialities, discourses, structures, and conditions that characterize the situation of inquiry. Through mapping the data, the analyst constructs the situation of inquiry empirically. *The situation per se becomes the ultimate unit of analysis*, and understanding its elements and their relations is the primary goal. Thus situational analysis can deeply situate research projects individually, collectively, organizationally, institutionally, temporally, geographically, materially, discursively, culturally, symbolically, visually, and historically.

Situational analysis supplements traditional or basic grounded theory with alternative approaches to *both* data gathering and analysis/interpretation.

In addition to producing and analyzing interview and ethnographic data, situational analysis promotes the analysis of extant narrative, visual, and historical discourse materials. It enhances our capacities to do incisive studies of differences of perspective, of highly complex situations of action and positionality, of the heterogeneous discourses in which we are all constantly awash, and of the situated knowledges of life itself thereby produced. What I am ultimately grappling toward are approaches that can simultaneously address voice and discourse, texts and the consequential materialities and symbolisms of the nonhuman, the dynamics of historical change, and, last but far from least, power in both its more solid and fluid forms. The outcomes of situational mappings should be “thick analyses” (Fosket 2002:40), paralleling Geertz’s (1973) “thick descriptions.” Thick analyses take explicitly into account the full array of elements in the situation and explicate their interrelations.

With deep roots in pragmatist philosophy and symbolic interactionist sociology, the grounded theory method can be viewed as a theory/methods package.<sup>4</sup> While scholars utilizing grounded theory have ranged from positivist to social constructivist, recent work is shifting toward more constructivist assumptions/epistemologies (Baszanger & Dodier 2004; Charmaz 1995a, 2000). Situational analysis is part of these shifts. I seek with Charmaz (2000:510) to “reclaim these tools from their positivist underpinnings to form a revised, more open-ended practice of grounded theory that stresses its emergent, constructivist elements” and to “use grounded theory methods as flexible, heuristic strategies.” Charmaz emphasizes that a focus on meaning making furthers interpretive, constructivist, and, I would add, relativist/perspectival understandings. My goal is to further enable, sustain, and enhance such shifts.

In the remainder of this chapter, I first briefly frame what I mean by “the postmodern turn” (discussed more extensively in Chapter 1). I then offer the grounds for a new method based around the postmodern turn. Next is a sketch of the main parameters of basic grounded theory as it has been done over the past 30-plus years, followed by an outline of doing the new situational maps and analysis. Last, I provide an overview of the book.

## The Postmodern Turn

*Postmodernism is “the as yet unnamable which begins to proclaim itself.”*

—Derrida (quoted in Lather 1991:160)

This book is part of a long-term project of regenerating and expanding grounded theory after the postmodern turn that has been taking place over the past several decades. I frame this expansion by situating grounded theory methods within current transdisciplinary conversations on doing qualitative research after the postmodern turn, traversing and hopefully erasing some of the boundaries amongst social sciences, humanities, and professional practices of inquiry.

The postmodern turn has occurred across the academy in the social sciences, humanities, and professional schools (e.g., nursing, education, business, social work) and throughout other sites of knowledge production such as the media, and sites of creativity in the arts, film, architecture, and so on. Postmodernism consists of many things and interpretations, today essentially ubiquitous if also contested (e.g., Best & Kellner 1991; Lather 2001a). If modernism emphasized universality, generalization, simplification, permanence, stability, wholeness, rationality, regularity, homogeneity, and sufficiency, then postmodernism has shifted emphases to partialities, positionalities, complications, tenuousness, instabilities, irregularities, contradictions, heterogeneities, situatedness, and fragmentation—complexities. Postmodernism itself is not a unified system of beliefs or assumptions but rather an ongoing array of possibilities, “a series of fragments in continuous flux . . . abandoning overarching paradigms and theoretical and methodological metasystems” (Fontana 2002:162). Postmodern scholarship seeks to address “almost unthinkably complex, interrelated and interactive global” situations while simultaneously acknowledging the “ungraspable of this world” (Usher 1997:30). It involves us in “the ontological politics of staying true to complexity” (Landstrom 2000:475), however partially and contradictorily.

One fundamental issue taken up throughout postmodernist literatures and projects and particularly pertinent to research concerns the nature of knowledge. “‘Postmodernism’ is the continuation of modernism except that confidence in the extension of reason has been abandoned” (Latour 1999:308). As part of the theoretical turn of the mid/late 20th century, postmodernism thus offers a way of describing the broadening and now relentless challenges to the Western Enlightenment, humanism, and positivist sciences as the assumed pinnacles of human achievement globally. Instead, postmodern perspectives view *all* knowledges (including the natural and social sciences and humanities, “lay” knowledges of all sorts, and knowledges from all sites globally) as socially and culturally produced (e.g., Berger & Luckman 1966; McCarthy 1996). Key interlocutory questions of the postmodern turn thus feature those of the sociology of knowledge concerning the relations of knowledges to the sites of their production and

consumption practices—aspects of “ecologies of knowledge” (Rosenberg 1979; Star 1995).

Since the postmodern turn, then, all knowledges are understood by major segments of scholarly worlds and beyond as *situated* knowledges (e.g., Haraway, 1991b)—produced and consumed by particular groups of people, historically and geographically locatable. Claims of universality are considered naive at best and much more commonly as hegemonic strategies seeking to silence/erase other perspectives (Gramsci 1971). Genealogies of knowledges, their discourses and practices—histories of the present—are routinely undertaken (e.g., Foucault 1972, 1973, 1980). In fact, taking on social analysis of “the hard cases” of knowledge production is what studies of science, technology, and medicine (my own research area) do.

Others in other studies have also been busy with parallel yet distinctive projects in the sociology of knowledge, often focusing on the involvement of particular racial, gendered, and related social formations in projects of knowledge production (e.g., Omi & Winant 1994; Poovey 1998). Over the past several decades, many explicit ruptures of “difference” have been asserted through postcolonial, feminist, diasporic, ethnic, queer, multicultural, and “other” theories and studies. Each of these innovative approaches to examining knowledge production has challenged the kinds of knowledges and discourses circulating about differently situated people, things, and issues, often produced by and circulating especially among those situated in positions of greater power, legitimacy, and/or authority. These projects ask: Who is authorized and not authorized to make what kinds of knowledges about whom/what, and under what conditions? Together they have initiated a disruptive and truly stunning appreciation of the complexities and heterogeneities of our individual and collective situations, discourses, and the complexities and heterogeneities of our knowledge production—our interpretations of those situations.<sup>5</sup>

But postmodernisms have not been unopposed, and there are several strands of pertinent critique. The main critique is, of course, the positivist denial of the sociology of knowledge, of the socially constructed nature of all categories, and of the theory of linguistic indeterminacy that undergirds postmodern theory (e.g., Ashman & Barringer 2001; Gross & Levitt 1994). There are softer versions of such realisms as well that are more common among qualitative researchers and remain problematic. Another strand of critique objects to slick, quick, and trendy pomo framings and statements that lack depth and attention to history and context. A third critical edge concerns the “collapse of optimism of the modernist project” (Jenkins 1997:5), and belief in human progress. To some critics, an ultimate nihilism must (logically to them) flow from the abandonment of realism, the

acceptance of the partiality of all knowledge, and the moves to integrate constructionism. While I have some sympathy with the latter two critiques, I can only make sense of the world with the tools of the sociology of knowledge and constructionism, and I seek here to add to those tools. Further, as Latour (1999:23) points out, nihilism is not required:

In opening the black box of scientific facts, we knew we would be opening Pandora's box. There was no way to avoid it. . . . Now that it has been opened, with plagues and curses, sins and ills whirling around, there is only one thing to do, and that is to go even deeper, all the way down into the almost empty box, in order to retrieve what, according to the venerable legend, has been left at the bottom—yes, hope. It is much too deep for me on my own; are you willing to help me reach it? May I give you a hand?

This is not to say that very dark readings indeed of the human condition today are “wrong.” It is to say that when, with Foucault (1991:84), we ask, “What is to be done?” we need to address that darkness and proceed in the face of it.

To sustain the challenging endeavors of “opening Pandora's box[es],” our research processes and assumptions need enhanced capacities to grasp and interpret the complexities and heterogeneities of social life empirically (e.g., Haraway 1999; Lather 2001a, n.d.). We need methods for research and analysis to support our yearnings (hooks 1990), our desires to know (*savoir*), and our will to know (Burchell, Gordon, & Miller 1991; Foucault 1972, 1973), both for the knowledge itself and for the potential such knowledges may offer for making life on the planet better. We need methods that can support research on social suffering and anguish that also allow the hope that dwells at the bottom of Pandora's box to emerge, nourish, and be nourished. But that hope cannot be naive. In Richardson's (2000:928; emphasis added) terms:

The core of postmodernism is the *doubt* that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal claim as the “right” or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism *suspects* all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural and political struggles. But it does not automatically reject conventional methods of knowing and telling as false or archaic. *Rather it opens those standard methods to inquiry and introduces new methods, which are also, then, subject to critique.*

Thus not only are more scientific quantitative approaches challenged through postmodernism and the sociology of knowledge, but so too are interpretive qualitative approaches to knowledge production. Clough's (1992) provocative

call for the “end of ethnography” and of the use of other research methods, including grounded theory, has not been widely heeded. Research per se is much too important as both commodity and pacificatory strategy to disappear. But for many in the field, there has been an end to their acceptability in the absence of the kinds of reflexivities and acknowledgments of partialities and linguistic and other complexities that have drawn our serious attention through the postmodern turn (Olesen 1994, 2000).

Research, then, is not impossible after the postmodern turn, but quite different. And there has been a renaissance, a rebirth of new and older approaches attempting in a multitude of ways to take into account the still profound and haunting if heterogeneous and challenging theoretical insights of those contributions to the human sciences called postmodern.

## Grounds for a New Method

*My interest is in a less comfortable social science, one appropriate to a postfoundationalist era characterized by the loss of certainties and absolute frames of reference.*

Lather (2001a:221)

To address the needs and desires for empirical understandings of the complex and heterogeneous worlds emerging through new world orderings, new methods are requisite (Haraway 1999; Lather n.d.). I believe some such methods should be epistemologically/ontologically based in the pragmatist soil that has historically nurtured symbolic interactionism and grounded theory. Through Mead, an interactionist grounded theory has always had the capacity to be distinctly perspectival in ways fully compatible with what are now understood as situated knowledges. It is this fundamental and always already postmodern edge of a grounded theory grounded in symbolic interactionism that makes it worth renovating.<sup>6</sup> I discuss this at length in Chapter 1.

Many problematics of methodology per se have been elaborated through the postmodern turn. These include an ever deepening recognition of the always already political nature of the practices of research and interpretation; enhanced reflexivity on the part of researchers—and increasingly on the part of those researched—about research processes and products; such a profound recognition of the problematics of representation that there is an ongoing “crisis of representation”; questions of the legitimacy and authority of both research and researchers; and de/repositioning the researcher from

“all-knowing analyst” to “acknowledged participant” in the production of always partial knowledges (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln 1994, 2000; Gubrium & Holstein 2002). All of these postmodern problematics are addressed by situational analysis.

Yet to me, the methodological implications of the postmodern primarily require taking situatedness, variations, differences of all kinds, and positionality/relationality very seriously in all their complexities, multiplicities, instabilities, and contradictions. The postmodern has been too often greeted with disdain by some/many sociologists and other social scientists precisely because of the deep, and at least century-long, commitments of the discipline to the erasure of context/situatedness, variation, and complexity through the vast bulk of empirical research (both quantitative *and* qualitative). Most research has relentlessly sought commonalities of various kinds in social life while evading and avoiding representations of the complications, messiness, and denseness of actual situations and differences. Variance or difference is even called “noise” in some approaches to research. Simplifying and universalizing strategies abound (e.g., Hornstein & Star 1990; Star 1983, 1986). Furthermore, positions have been “correlated” with persons and groups in rigid and monolithizing ways that also erase ambivalences, contradictions, multiplicities, and the shifting relationalities through which we negotiate social life individually and collectively.

But what do I mean by the complexities of “situatedness” after the postmodern turn? In fact, I am quite specific (see also Chapters 1 and 2). Many if not most of the methodological moves in qualitative research since the postmodern turn have centered on research wherein individual “voice” and its representation lie at the heart of the matter. These include autoethnography, interpretive ethnography, new biographies/life stories, interpretive phenomenologies, many forms of narrative analysis, and many forms of feminist inquiry (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln 2000). I heartily applaud these efforts and fully engage analysis of individual-centered materials here. But the most innovative part of my project is to *also* bring the social—the *full situation of inquiry*—further around the postmodern turn and ground it in new analytic approaches that do justice to the insights of postmodern theory. With Denzin (1989:66-82, 2001c), I am deeply committed to “situating interpretation.” With Hall and McGinty (2002:304), I am asserting that “interactionists [and others] can and should expand their theoretical environment, broaden their perspective to be sensitive to and analyze more general, larger domains of social action.” Yet *action is not enough*. Our analytic focus needs to go beyond “the knowing subject” and be fully on the situation of inquiry broadly conceived, including the turn to discourse.

Some years ago, Katovich and Reese (1993:400-405) interestingly argued that Strauss's negotiated order and related work recuperatively pulled *the social* around the postmodern turn through its methodological (grounded theoretical) recognition of the partial, tenuous, shifting, and unstable nature of the empirical world and its constructedness. I strongly agree and would argue that Strauss also particularly furthered this "postmodernization of the social" through his conceptualizations of social worlds and arenas as modes of understanding the deeply situated yet always also fluid organizational elements of negotiations and discourses.<sup>7</sup> He foreshadowed what later came to be known as postmodern assumptions: the instability of situations; the characteristic changing, porous boundaries of both social worlds and arenas; social worlds seen as mutually constitutive/coproduced in the negotiations taking place in arenas; negotiations as central social processes hailing that "things can always be otherwise"; and so on. Negotiations also signal micropolitics of power and the powers of discourses—decentering the subject and power in its more fluid and discursive forms (e.g., Foucault 1979, 1980)—as well as "the usual" meso/macro structural elements.

Through integrating the social worlds/arenas/negotiations/discourse framework with grounded theory as a new conceptual infrastructure, I hope to sustain and extend these methodological contributions of grounded theory. This situational analysis is especially useful for understanding and elaborating what has been meant by "the social" in social life. This is valuable precisely because the social has too often been analytically elusive and ungrounded in research.

There are several key methodological issues here. First, methods are needed that can address and elucidate the complexities of situations as the grounds of social life. That is, methods are needed that intentionally aim at capturing complexities rather than aiming at simplifications; that elucidate processes of change in situations as well as they elucidate patterns and stabilities; that detangle agents and positions sufficiently to make contradictions, ambivalences, and irrelevances clear. Second, methods are needed that can allow and encourage the analyst to elucidate heretofore illegitimate and/or marginalized perspectives and subjugated knowledges of social life—to lucidly communicate what it means to be dwelling heterogeneously all over this planet in the new millennium in complicated and unstable situations (e.g., Ferguson, Gever, Minh-Ha, & West 1990). Here, some threads of symbolic interactionism have been moving toward postmodern cultural studies in ways that I seek to extend through this project (Becker & McCall 1990; Denzin 1992, 1997, 2000). Cultural symbolologies have always been of concern in symbolic interactionisms, if not routinely featured.

Third, methods are needed that go beyond "the knowing subject" as centered knower and decision maker to also address and analyze

salient discourses within the situation of inquiry. We are all, like it or not, constantly awash in seas of discourses that are constitutive of life itself. Situational analysis therefore integrates aspects of Foucault's poststructural approaches, enrolling him in pushing grounded theory around the postmodern turn. Specifically, situational analysis follows "Foucault's footsteps" (Prior 1997) into sites of his serious theorizing—historical, narrative/textual, and visual discourses. The decentering of "the knowing subject" common in poststructuralism needs to be integrated more deeply into empirical research. Grounded theory aided and abetted by situational analysis can facilitate such moves.

Having begun down this path, it quickly becomes obvious that if the subject is decentered, "the object is also and always decentered" (Dugdale 1999:16). This means that fresh methodological attention needs to be paid to objects in situations. This includes cultural objects, technologies, media—all the nonhuman, animate and inanimate things that also constitute the situations in which we live (e.g., Foucault 1972; Latour 1987; McCarthy 1984). Some are products of human action (and we can study the production processes); others are construed as "natural" (and we can study how they have been constructed as such). In the postmodern moment, studying action is far from enough.

Further, I would argue that we need at least a century's worth of attempting to take differences seriously empirically through a variety of innovative methodologies. Individual and collective difference(s) in our situatedness and practices need to be capable of being taken into account in social life and in social policies of all kinds from education to welfare reform to health coverage and caregiving to social security in old age. If we lack both an adequate vocabulary and research methods to specify at least genres of difference, we will continue to be paralyzed in terms of constructing ways of sharing the planet that work effectively toward greater social justice and more democratic participation.

Such visionary Deweyian aspects of pragmatism are alive and well after the postmodern turn for good reason—because they are sorely needed (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln 2005; Nicholson 1999; Rorty 1982). But they also need to be recast in ways that allow the *explicit acknowledgment and incorporation of the complexities of situatedness, variation, and difference(s)* rather than promoting their erasure through various assimilations or hopes for transcendence through shared education or shared beliefs. At the same time, we cannot assume (it would be naive and/or more than arrogant to do so) that our research will lead directly or indirectly to the changes we may envision and desire. Herein lies the skeptical and dubious postmodern "rub," the challenge with which we must come to terms.

## Basic Grounded Theory

*Social phenomena are complex. Thus they require complex grounded theory.*

—Strauss (1987:1)

This is not a book for beginners in grounded theory or qualitative inquiry. It assumes some familiarity with basic or traditional grounded theory methods, and the greater the familiarity, the easier the read. This section is for those unfamiliar. A modest framing is offered by Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont (2003:150): “[G]rounded theory is not a description of a kind of theory. Rather it represents a general way of generating theory (or, even more generically, a way of having ideas on the basis of empirical research).” Very briefly, grounded theory is an empirical approach to the study of social life through qualitative research and analysis. In this method, the analyst initially codes the data (open coding)—word by word, segment by segment—and gives temporary labels (codes) to particular phenomena. The analyst determines whether codes generated through one data source also appear elsewhere, and elaborates their properties. Related codes that have endured are then densified into more enduring and analytically ambitious “categories,” and these are ultimately integrated into a theoretical analysis of the substantive area. Thus a “grounded theory” of a particular phenomenon of concern is composed of the analytic codes and categories generated inductively in the analysis and explicitly integrated to form a theory of the substantive area that is the focus of the research project—an empirically based “substantive theory.” In traditional grounded theory, over time, after multiple substantive theories of a particular area of interest have been generated through an array of empirical research projects, so the argument went, more “formal theory” could be developed (see esp. Strauss 1995).

Unique to this approach has been, first, its requiring that analysis begin as soon as there are data. Coding begins immediately, and theorizing based on that coding does as well, however provisionally (Glaser 1978). Second, “sampling” is driven not necessarily (or not only) by attempts to be “representative” of some social body or population or its heterogeneities but especially and explicitly by *theoretical* concerns that have emerged in the provisional analysis to date. Such “theoretical sampling” focuses on finding *new data sources* (persons or things—and not theories) that can best explicitly address specific theoretically interesting facets of the emergent analysis. Theoretical sampling has been integral to grounded theory from the outset, remains a fundamental strength of this analytic approach, and is crucial for

situational analysis.<sup>8</sup> In fact, “The true legacy of Glaser and Strauss is a collective awareness of the heuristic value of developmental research designs [through theoretical sampling] and exploratory data analytic strategies, not a ‘system’ for conducting and analyzing research” (Atkinson, Coffey, & Delamont 2003:162-163).

Since its inception in the late 1960s (Glaser 1978; Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987), the focus of most research using grounded theory has relied on fieldwork to generate interview and/or ethnographic data through which to analyze human action (e.g., Glaser 1993; Strauss & Corbin 1997). Conventional grounded theory has focused on generating the “basic social process” occurring in the data concerning the phenomenon of concern—the basic form of human action. Studies have been done, for example, on *living with* chronic illness (Charmaz 1991; Orona 1990), *crafting* scientific work (Fujimura 1992), *disciplining* the scientific study of reproduction (Clarke 1998), *classifying* and its consequences (Bowker & Star 1999; Star 1989), *organizing* the specialty of pain medicine (Baszanger 1998a), *making* hospitals appear accountable for their practices (Wiener 2000b), *making* CPR the main emergency response to sudden death (Timmermans 1999), and *creating* a new social actor—the unborn patient—via fetal surgery (Casper 1998a, 1998b).

In a traditional grounded theory study, the key or basic social process is typically articulated in gerund form connoting ongoing action, and at an abstract level. Around this basic process, the analyst then constellates the particular and distinctive conditions, strategies, actions, and practices engaged in by human and nonhuman actors involved with/in the process and their consequences. For example, subprocesses of disciplining the scientific study of reproduction include *formalizing* a scientific discipline, *establishing* stable access to research materials, *gleaning* fiscal support for research, *producing* contraceptives and other technoscientific products, and *handling* the social controversies the science provokes (e.g., regarding use of contraceptives).

Many superb projects have been done using basic grounded theory, and this action-centered approach will continue to be fundamentally important analytically. What I propose is to supplement basic grounded theory with a situation-centered approach that in addition to studying action also explicitly includes the analysis of the full situation, including discourses—narrative, visual, and historical. Such work can enrich research by addressing and engaging the important complexities of postmodern theoretical and methodological concerns. In many ways, as I argue more elaborately in Chapter 1, grounded theory was always already around the postmodern turn while in other ways it was not particularly so, and/or not clearly so. Situational maps and analyses make it so.

## Situational Maps and Analysis

*[A]ll aspects of human being and knowing are situated.*

—McCarthy (1996:107; emphasis in original)

My goal is to revise and regenerate the grounded theory method toward new approaches to grounded theorizing that take postmodern turns in social theory and qualitative research more fully into account. I seek to do so by

- Disarticulating grounded theory from its remaining positivist roots in 1950s and 1960s social science and enhancing its always already present but heretofore often muted postmodern capacities;
- Supplementing the traditional grounded theory root metaphor of social process/action with an ecological root metaphor of social worlds/arenas/negotiations/discourses as an alternative conceptual infrastructure that provokes situational analysis at the meso-level, new social organizational/institutional/discursive/practice sitings;
- Supplementing the traditional grounded theory analysis of a basic or key social process (action) with alternatives centered on cartographic situational analysis—maps of key elements; maps of social worlds, arenas and their discourses in meso-level negotiations; and maps of issues and axes focused around difference(s) of positionality—the dense complexities of the situation of inquiry broadly construed;
- Generating sensitizing concepts and theoretical integration toward provocative yet provisional analytics and grounded *theorizing* as an ongoing process rather than the development of substantive and formal theories as the ultimate goals; and
- Framing systematic and flexible means of research design that facilitate multisite research, including discursive textual, visual, and archival historical materials and documents, as well as ethnographic (interview and observational) transcripts and field notes to more fully take into account the complexities of postmodern life.

Because epistemology and ontology are joined at the hip, methods need to be understood as “theory/methods packages” (e.g., Star 1989). I therefore make the theoretical groundings of grounded theory in early-20th-century Chicago School sociology, in pragmatist philosophy, and in post-World War II symbolic interactionism explicit. I do so precisely because over the past 20 or so years, grounded theorists have been widening their theoretical gazes and moving around the postmodern turn, shifting to more fully developed constructionist framings, which I seek to further (e.g., Charmaz 1995b, 2000). This book therefore not only offers situational analysis as a new

approach to constructionist/postmodern grounded theorizing but also elaborates some key theoretical shifts that undergird it.

Situational analysis arose in and through my own work since I entered the University of California, San Francisco as a graduate student in sociology in 1980, especially through my teaching of grounded theory and other qualitative research methods at UCSF since 1989. It also emerged from my reading and teaching feminist theory, interactionist theory, Foucault, cultural studies and science, technology, and medicine studies. As a student, I learned grounded theory from Anselm Strauss long before he began on the *Basics of Qualitative Research* books, so the method I learned was much less codified and closer to that discussed in his *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (1987). Strauss was also then deeply engaged in elaborating his social worlds/arenas/discourse/negotiations framework, and I was thus raised in what Miller (1997:2) calls the “institutional studies tradition” in qualitative research.<sup>9</sup> Some aspects of the *Basics* books (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998) work very well for me, while others do not, and I engage those here. The basic coding procedures of grounded theory as they appear in the earlier works remain invaluable,<sup>10</sup> and are used in developing situational analysis as well as in analyzing basic social processes.

While an emphasis on variation and/or difference(s) was clearly not part of either Strauss’s or Glaser’s agendas (see Glaser 1992, 2002; Strauss 1993:210-212), nor those of other current elaborators of grounded theory (see note 2), it is central to mine. In fact, the long-established grounded theory strategy of theoretical sampling can be explicitly directed toward seeking the broadest range of variation within salient data sources. That is, thoughtful theoretical sampling strategies can be used to pursue particular aspects of situatedness, difference(s), and variations. Heterogeneous positions and relations can be explicitly sought out, pursued, analyzed, and discussed. This is in direct and vivid contrast with their explicit erasure through various data homogenization and simplification strategies common in traditional positivist social science, but also too frequent in qualitative pursuits. To be able to do such purposive theoretical sampling involves elaborated attention to research design previously underdeveloped in the grounded theory tradition (aside from theoretical sampling), discussed at length in Chapter 2 and elsewhere.

A key feature of the postmodern turn has been an enhanced theoretical grasp of the analytic importance of the nonhuman in our complex situatedness, and I emphasize this here (also discussed in Chapter 2). Distinctively, grounded theory analysis does not center on properties of persons or “variables” as is common in most social science. Therefore it has never been limited to the study of humans, but it can in principle easily accommodate

nonhuman objects (technologies, animals, discourses, historical documents, visual representations, etc.). Such material entities in our situations of concern deserve more explicit and intentional inclusion in our research and analyses. Just as “nature” and “society” are not separate but “make each other up”—are coconstitutive—so too do humans and nonhuman objects (e.g., Haraway 1989, 2003; Latour 1987; McCarthy 1984; Mead 1934/1962). The semiotics of materiality matter and materiality is relational (Law 1999:4). Any method that ignores the materialities of human existence is inadequate, especially today as humans and various technosciences are together transforming the planet from the inside out (e.g., Clarke, Shim, Mamo, Fosket, & Fishman 2003).

It was, in fact, the very openness of grounded theory in its Straussian incarnations to allow analysis of a wide range of nonhuman objects that initially attracted me. This openness allowed me while a student to begin doing grounded theory studies of discourses—historical materials and later visual cultures—and ultimately prompted this attempt to regenerate grounded theory methodology within a postmodern framework. It also provoked me to draw explicitly and deeply on the work of Michel Foucault in pushing grounded theory around the postmodern turn (discussed in Chapter 2).

Although Glaser and Strauss did not initially emphasize context/situatedness, Strauss (e.g., 1987:77-81) later did so. With Corbin, he also engaged situatedness through their conditional matrices (e.g., Strauss & Corbin 1990:163, 1998:184). These are analytic devices intended to push grounded theorists to consider seriously the various contexts of their research focus and to portray how contextual elements “condition” the action that is the central analytic focus. But, while pointing in some “right directions,” I find the conditional matrix approach inadequate to the task (see also P. M. Hall 1997). I offer instead the considerably more elaborated modes of situational analysis. Here, *the situation of inquiry itself broadly conceived is the key unit of analysis*.<sup>11</sup>

The situation of inquiry is empirically constructed through the making of three kinds of maps and following through with analytic work and memos of various kinds. The first maps are the **situational maps** that lay out the major human, nonhuman, discursive, historical, symbolic, cultural, political, and other elements in the research situation of concern and provoke analysis of relations among them. These maps are intended to capture and discuss the messy complexities of the situation in their dense relations and permutations. They intentionally work *against* the usual simplifications so characteristic of scientific work (Star 1983, 1986) in particularly postmodern ways.

Second, the **social worlds/arenas maps** lay out all of the *collective* actors, key nonhuman elements, and the arena(s) of commitment within which they

are engaged in ongoing discourse and negotiations. Such maps offer meso-level interpretations of the situation, explicitly taking up its social organizational, institutional, and discursive dimensions. They are distinctively postmodern in their assumptions: We cannot assume directionalities of influence; boundaries are open and porous; negotiations are fluid; discourses are multiple and potentially contradictory. Negotiations of many kinds from coercion to bargaining are the “basic social processes” that construct and constantly destabilize the social worlds/arenas maps (Strauss, 1993). Things could always be otherwise—not only individually but also collectively/organizationally/institutionally/discursively—and these maps portray such postmodern possibilities.

Third, **positional maps** lay out the major positions taken, and *not* taken, in the data vis-à-vis particular axes of variation and difference, focus, and controversy found in the situation of concern. Perhaps most significantly, positional maps are not articulated with persons or groups but rather seek to represent the full range of *discursive* positions on particular issues—fully allowing multiple positions and even contradictions within both individuals and collectivities to be articulated. Complexities are themselves heterogeneous, and we need improved means of representing them.

All three kinds of maps are keyed to taking the nonhuman—including discourses—in the situation of inquiry seriously. In doing initial situational maps, the analyst is asked to specify the nonhuman elements in the situation, thus making pertinent materialities and discourses visible from the outset. The flip side of the second kind of map, the social worlds/arenas map, is a discourse/arenas map. Social worlds are “universes of discourse” routinely producing discourses about elements of concern in the situation. Such discourses can be mapped and analyzed. Last, positional maps seek to open up the discourses per se by analyzing positions taken on key analytic axes. Discourses can thereby be disarticulated from their sites of production, decentering them and allowing further analytic bite.

Bowker and Star (1999:10) discuss “infrastructural inversion” wherein the infrastructure of something is (unusually) revealed and even featured. An example of this would be the Pompidou Center in Paris, where all the pipes, stanchions, conduits, and other building innards are instead “outards”—exposed and attached to the exterior walls rather than hidden *in between* the interior and exterior walls. Situational maps and analyses do a kind of “social inversion” in making the usually invisible and inchoate social features of a situation more visible: all the key elements in the situation and their interrelations; the social worlds and arenas in which the phenomena of interest are embedded; the discursive positions taken and not taken by actors (human and nonhuman) on key issues; and the discourses themselves as

constitutive of the situation. This is the postmodernization of a grounded theory grounded in symbolic interactionism and Foucaultian analytics.

Situational maps and analyses are postmodern approaches in a wide variety of ways elaborated above and throughout this book. Let me end this introductory moment by emphasizing that an “analysis” of any kind is no more than one or a few “readings” of a situation—understandings, interpretations. An analysis or reading thus does not claim adequacy or validity in the modern methodological usages of those terms. Rather, an analysis is what it is understood to be, in all its partialities. Obviously, I believe the analytic strategies I have developed and laid out here are worthy of attention and useful in terms of doing the kinds of work in research worlds that I think need doing. But other approaches are always already available and may also be provocative and interesting, perhaps in combination with situational analyses.

My project, then, is to regenerate grounded theory in ways that can support researchers from the social sciences, humanities, professions, and beyond in a wide array of projects drawing on historical, visual, textual, ethnographic, and interview materials. Here the researcher becomes not only analyst and bricoleur but also a cartographer of sorts. Because the codes and categories of a particular analysis can be both generated and applied across the full range of possible data sources, the new mapping approaches are especially useful for what is being called multisite research. They are equally useful with small or large interview-based research projects as well as ethnographic field projects and analysis of extant discourses of many kinds. Everything is situated, and situational analysis maps and elucidates this facet of postmodern understanding.

## Overview of the Book

There is always a question of how and where to enter any book. In fact, some readers may want to peruse Chapter 3 first, before reading Chapters 1 and 2, to get a deeper grasp on where I am going with situational analysis.

Chapter 1 focuses on why grounded theory needs to be updated and aptly takes up “pushing and being pulled by grounded theory/symbolic interactionism around the postmodern turn.” It first lays out how grounded theory is “always already” around the postmodern turn through its symbolic interactionist roots, including the Meadian notion of perspective, its materialist social constructionism, its relational ecological frameworks, and its postmodern capacities to handle the complexities of situatedness, variation and difference(s), positionality and relationality. Yet grounded theory also needs

to be pushed around that turn, actively pulled away from its positivist roots in 1950s and 1960s sociology. These problematic recalcitrancies include a lack of reflexivity about research processes and products, oversimplifications, interpretations of “negative” cases, and searching for grounded purity. I then begin to push grounded theory around the postmodern turn by regrounding grounded theory in the broader symbolic interactionist concept of the situation of action, assuming the situatedness of all knowledges and their producers. Knowledges always bear the inscriptions of their production processes. I also emphasize elucidation of variations/difference(s)/heterogeneities of position, and assert the sufficiency of sensitizing concepts and analytics for a fresh approach to grounded theorizing rather than the development of high modernist formal theory.

Chapter 2, “From Chicago Ecologies to Situational Analysis,” frames the new approach of situational analysis historically and theoretically. It traces Chicago School tradition/symbolic interactionist mapping strategies from the relational ecological maps of the early ethnographies (1920s-1940s) to Strauss’s social worlds/arenas maps and my own (1980s-present). It is important to grasp the ecological roots of this conceptual infrastructure as the guiding metaphor for doing situational analysis. Next, three “new roots” for theoretically grounding situational analysis are laid out. First, the major push of grounded theory around the postmodern turn through situational analysis is, through Foucault, the turn to discourse. I briefly situate Foucault among the interactionists by placing him in conversation with Strauss about three sites of their conceptual articulation: discourse/discipline and social worlds/arenas; the field of practice(s) and negotiated/processual ordering; and the gaze and perspective.

Second, a featured aspect of situational analysis is taking the nonhuman elements in that research situation explicitly and seriously into account. Understanding how such materialities matter and how they are *constitutive* of the situation of action are next discussed at length. Third, I turn to an extended critique of Strauss and Corbin’s conditional matrices of action, their major effort to ground grounded theory in the situation being researched, and offer my alternative framing of this problem—making the situation the unit of analysis. This is the third new root. Situational analysis also requires some innovative strategies for project design and data gathering, topics generally unaddressed in traditional grounded theory, and I discuss these. The need for enhanced reflexivity and new forms of researcher accountability as fundamental to grounded theorizing after the postmodern turn are also taken up.

Chapter 3 on “Doing Situational Maps and Analysis” is very much an introductory “how-to” explication of each of the three modes: situational

maps, social worlds and arenas maps, and positional maps. It offers a thorough description of each, followed by extended examples from two different research projects that are carried through the chapter. One example is a small interview study, while the other is a multisited project. My examples throughout the book are taken largely from studies of health and medical scientific domains where I dwell as a scholar. Obviously, many other kinds of exemplars are possible. Readers, especially faculty considering teaching with this book, might well want to locate substantively appropriate (and hence much more familiar) studies to assign in article form along with this book. These works can then be mapped in class as locally relevant working exemplars in action.

Chapter 4 is predicated on the increasing complexities of genres of data that can be pertinent to particular research projects. As we dwell, in postmodern times, in the society of the spectacle, analyzing individual and collective human and nonhuman actors and actants will not suffice. Chapter 4 therefore pivots situational analysis into the domains of discourse. It lays out why the turn to discourse is crucial and maps the major genres and foci of discourse analysis to date. It then provides short and long examples of multisite research that include discourse analysis as parts of larger projects as well as projects unto themselves. Last, it frames how to do situational analysis of extant discourses, including issues of research design, how analysis of extant discourse is different, and possibilities for integrative and/or comparative mapping of different genres of data.

Chapter 5 is the first of three “how to analyze discourse” chapters and focuses on working with extant narrative discourses. Issues of choosing a discourse, locating, situating, documenting, and tracking materials are addressed. The chapter then turns to actually doing each of the three kinds of situational maps using discursive data with an exemplar from my own work. It ends with a section on doing project-specific maps based on narrative materials.

Because so few grounded theorists have studied visual discourse, Chapter 6 offers a theoretical and conceptual overview of this domain. I then lay out the distinctive methods for doing situational analysis of visual materials. These include the complexities of deciding upon and gathering the materials, doing initial locating, big picture, and specification memos, and then doing the three kinds of situational maps. The exemplar is from my ongoing work on anatomies with Lisa Jean Moore.

Chapter 7 takes up mapping historical discourse—using historical materials to either historicize a research project focused on a contemporary situation or to pursue a “full-on” history project. Again using my own work as an exemplar (of the latter version), doing the three kinds of situational maps

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is explicated. Doing the same maps for different historical moments and their comparative provocations is the focus. A project map is also offered.

Last, “Epilogue: FAQs and Conversations,” takes up questions and comments about situational analysis raised to me by students and colleagues to date. I respond to theoretical/philosophical questions, technical methods questions, miscellaneous questions, and critiques of situational analysis. I end with unanswered questions. As McCarthy (1996:111) has argued, “Situated knowledges are, by their nature, unfinished. But that is the character of all things human and alive.”

## Notes

1. See, e.g., Rosaldo (1989), Marcus and Fischer (1986), Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000), Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, and Lofland (2001), and Lather (1993, 2001a, 2001b). Bryant (2002) also uses the phrase “regrounding grounded theory.”

2. See Glaser and Strauss (1967), Glaser (1978, 1992, 2002), Glaser and Holton (2004), Strauss (1987, 1991b, 1991d, 1993, 1995), and Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1994, 1997, 1998, 2005). It has been further elucidated especially by Charmaz (1983, 1995a, 1995b, 2000, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2003a, 2003b, 2005, in press), Charmaz and Mitchell (2001), Clarke (1991), Clarke and Montini (1993), Dey (1999, 2004), Locke (2001), and others: Annells (1996), Bartlett and Payne (1997), Baszanger and Dodier (2004), Corbin (1997, 1998), Ezzy (2002), Flick (1998), Konecki (2000), Melia (1996, 1997), Schreiber and Stern (2001), Soulliere, Britt, and Maines (2001), Starrin, Dahlgren, Larsson, and Styrborn (1997), van den Hoonaard (1997), and Wuest (1995).

3. Strauss’s work on social worlds/arenas/negotiations was undertaken over many years at the same time as he developed grounded theory. See Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, Ehrlich, and Sabshin (1964), Baszanger (1998b), and Strauss (1978, 1979, 1982a, 1982b, 1984, 1988, 1991a, 1991b, 1993). For Clarke’s work in this area, see Clarke (1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1998). For Clarke’s earliest articulation of the analytic importance of the situation, see Clarke and Fujimura (1992/1996).

4. On theory/methods packages, see Star (1989), Star and Griesemer (1989), and Fujimura (1992). Symbolic interactionism provides the ontological grounding. See Charmaz (2000) for an excellent discussion of the range of epistemologies associated with grounded theory, past and present. I discuss the Glaser/Strauss debate and Glaser and Holton’s (2004) refutation of interactionist roots in Chapter 1.

5. Each of these is a huge literature in itself. For entrée to postcolonial studies, see Gandhi (1998); on feminist studies, see Olesen (1994, 2000); on diasporic studies, see Appadurai (1996); on race/ethnic/multicultural studies, see Twine and Warren (2000) and Ladson-Billings (2000); and on queer studies, see Plummer (1995) and Gamson (2000). See also Denzin and Lincoln (2005).

6. The phrase “always already” is used from Derrida (1978). It infers that the roots of present phenomena can always already be discerned in the past. We often enter always already ongoing flows later constructed as histories.

7. See note 3 for full citations to Strauss’s work in these areas.

8. See, on theoretical sampling, Glaser and Strauss (1967:45-77), Glaser (1978:36-54), Strauss (1987:38-39), and Strauss and Corbin (1998:201-215).

9. By and large, I do not see Strauss as having theoretically elaborated upon his social psychology after 1959, although he routinely applied it in his research. See [www.ucsf.edu/anselmstrauss/](http://www.ucsf.edu/anselmstrauss/) for topic bibliographies that demonstrate this point.

10. On classic grounded theory coding, see especially Glaser and Strauss (1967:21-43), Glaser (1978:55-82), Strauss (1987:22-109), and Strauss and Corbin (1998:55-181). For more recent formulations, see Charmaz (2000, 2001, 2002b, 2002c, 2003b, in press). On diagramming, see especially Strauss (1987:130-230) and Strauss and Corbin (1990:195-224, 1998:217-242).

11. There is an extended discussion of the concept of situation in Chapter 1 and a critique of the conditional matrices in Chapter 2.