Assignment # 2: due Sep 24th
The use of public space for verbal interaction.

This assignment is to make systematic observations of the ways people make themselves available for verbal interaction in public places in the area you have chosen for your field work.

1. The focus is a Philadelphia blocks, a "block" being defined as including the houses on each side of a street that is easily crossed, together with the houses on the near sides of the crossing avenue. The blocks you choose may consist of row houses, set directly onto the street, with only a stoop intervening between the pavement and the front door; or of row houses or semi-detached "twins" set back a little from the street, with a front yard, or porch intervening. Each block should appear to have at least two residences inhabited by members of the ethnic group you are focusing on.

Bear in mind that we're looking for fully-inhabited blocks with nearby institutions that concentrate social life in the area: stores, churches, playgrounds, bars. We are particularly interested in observing schools, and if there is one in the near vicinity, that will be helpful.

2. Make a sketch [or take photographs] of the blocks, showing any stores or other non-residential buildings, and the types of house fronts. Pay particular attention to stoops, steps or porches and the way that private space is separated from public space.

3. For each block, an individual in the group should make a record over a period of one half hour, on Saturday or Sunday afternoon if possible, of the doings on the street. With 4 people per group, you can divide the work so that two of you do the half-hour observation and note-taking on one block and two on the other, but all members of the group should have a chance to do some observation of both blocks. Make notes in particular about:
a. People appearing at windows, who may or may not talk to people in the street.
b. People who come to their doors and stand outside, or just inside.
c. People sitting on stoops or porches.
d. People who pause for conversations on entering or leaving their houses.
e. Activities around cars.
f. Prolonged conversations.

In each case, estimate the length of the conversation or "staying". Report the sex, ethnicity, approximate age and dress style of the people involved. If you see the beginnings of the interaction, note any signals that people give off on their availability, and relate this to the physical layout. Don't report people moving through the neighborhood.

[Past experience shows that it isn't always easy to avoid involvement with people. Don't approach anyone to talk. But if someone approaches you, say that you are a member of a group studying how people get along in Philadelphia neighborhoods, and you wonder if this would be a good place to learn about. You may be able to make significant contrasts between the two blocks by this type of event.]

4. The report should summarize the main ways that public space is used for verbal interaction in the neighborhood, especially with an eye to your entering into verbal interactions yourself later on. Like all group assignments, this should be assembled, reviewed and submitted by the group. You can and should identify individual group members as actors on the scene, but not as authors of the report. Even if you are pressed for time, don't submit anything that has not been reviewed by the group as a whole.

5. Prepare an informal verbal report (with or without pictures you can present in class), and send the report to WL by email by Monday, September 27th.

RELEVANT READING

INTERFACE.