The Cosmopolitan Canopy

By
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The public spaces of the city are more racially, ethnically, and socially diverse than ever. Social distance and tension as expressed by wariness of strangers appear to be the order of the day. But the "cosmopolitan canopy" offers a respite and an opportunity for diverse peoples to come together to do their business and also to engage in "folk ethnography" that serves as a cognitive and cultural base on which people construct behavior in public.

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In 1938, Louis Wirth published "Urbanism as a Way of Life," based on his observations of city life and drawing on Georg Simmel's (1950) earlier work in Europe, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (Spykman 1925). What mainly concerned Wirth were the qualities that for him defined the city, particularly the variables of size, density, and heterogeneity. Especially striking to him was people's "blasé" orientation as they traversed the urban spaces with an impersonal bearing that suggested an attitude of indifference.[1] In the sixty-five years since Wirth's groundbreaking formulations on urbanism, much has happened to big-city life. Of course, some conditions have remained constant, but many have changed profoundly. Strongly affected by the forces of industrialism, immigration, and globalism, the city of today is more racially, ethnically, and socially diverse than

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ever, with profound cleavages dividing one element from another and one social group from another (see Drake and Cayton 1945; Goffman 1963; Gans 1962; Suttles 1968; Jacobs 1961; Hall 1966; Sassen 2001; Duneier 1999; Wilson 1987, 1996; and Anderson 1990, 1999).

As the urban public spaces of big cities have become more riven by issues of race, poverty, and crime, much of what Wirth described as urbanites' blasé indifference seems to have given way to a pervasive wariness toward strangers, particularly anonymous black males (see Anderson 1990). In places such as bus stations, parking garages, and public streets and sidewalks, many pedestrians move about guardedly, dealing with strangers by employing elaborate facial and eye work, replete with smiles, nods, and gestures geared to carve out an impersonal but private zone for themselves. Increasingly, pedestrians are required to contend publicly with the casualties of modern urban society, not just the persistently poor who at times beg aggressively but also homeless people, street criminals, and the mentally disturbed. Fearful of crime, if threatened, many are prepared to defend themselves or to quickly summon help, if not from fellow pedestrians, then from the police. In navigating such spaces, people often divert their gazes, looking up, looking down, or looking away, and feign ignorance of the diverse mix of strangers they encounter. Defensively, they "look past" or "look through" the next person, distancing themselves from strangers and effectively consigning their counterparts to a form of social oblivion.

As anonymous pedestrians actively "see but don't see" one another, skin color often becomes a social border that deeply complicates public interactions; stereotypically, white skin color is associated with civility and trust, and black skin color is associated with danger and distrust—especially with regard to anonymous young males. Many ordinary pedestrians feel at ease with others they deem to be most like themselves; the more threatening the "other" is judged to be, the greater the distance displayed. Black strangers more often greet and otherwise acknowledge other strangers, particularly other blacks. But most other pedestrians seem simply to follow their noses, at times barely avoiding collisions with others. If they speak at all, they may utter a polite "excuse me" or "I'm sorry," and, if deemed appropriate, they scowl. In effect, people work to shape and guard their own public space.

Yet there remain numerous heterogeneous and densely populated bounded public spaces within cities that offer a respite from this wariness, settings where a diversity of people[2] can feel comfortable enough to relax their guard and go about their business more casually. A prime such location is Philadelphia's Reading Terminal Market. In this relatively busy, quasi-public setting, under a virtual *cosmopolitan canopy*,[3] people are encouraged to treat others with a certain level of civility or at least simply to behave themselves. Within this canopy are smaller ones or even spontaneous canopies, where instantaneous communities of diverse strangers emerge and materialize—the opportunities or openings provided by fascinating tidbits of eavesdropped (or overheard) conversation. Here, along the crowded aisle and eating places, visitors can relax and feel relatively safe and secure. Although they may still avoid prolonged eye contact or avert their glances to refrain

from sending the "wrong" messages, people tend to positively acknowledge one another's existence in some measure. At times, strangers may approach one another to talk, to laugh, to joke, or to share a story here and there. Their trusting attitudes can be infectious, even spreading feelings of community across racial and ethnic lines.

Occupying a full city block in Center City Philadelphia, the Reading Terminal Market is composed of numerous shops, restaurants, and kiosks that offer an array of goods and services. It is a highly diverse setting wherein all kinds of people shop, eat, and stroll. Adjacent to the new convention center, it is centrally located among downtown office buildings and upscale condominiums but not far from white, working-class Kensington and black, North Philadelphia. The Terminal building itself, an enormous former train shed, has been part of Philadelphia for more than a century, since the days when trains arrived and departed through the space that became the market. In the 1990s, when the convention center complex was designed and built, the space for the market was kept more or less intact. Many long-time customers feared that it would become simply an upscale tourist attraction, a food court more than a market, but so far, the look of the place has more or less stayed the same, and it continues to draw residents from local neighborhoods, including professionals from Center City as well as Irish, Italian, Asian, and African Americans from Philadelphia's ethnic enclaves. Virtually all racial groups are well represented at Reading Terminal but not in even proportions. On average, about 35 percent of the people there are black, about 10 to 15 percent are Asian and other people of color, and the rest—somewhat more than half—are white, whether WASP or ethnic. The visual, impressionistic makeup of the place is that it is mostly white and middle-class with a healthy mixture of people of color.

The Terminal is a colorful place, full of hustle and bustle. Food is a major theme, and the smell of food is pervasive. The shops are bright and clean, and some are adorned with neon lights. Some of the craft shops have been carrying more expensive pieces aimed at tourists. But the grocery stalls still offer fresh produce and meat direct from Lancaster County farms, fish, seafood, and a wide array of fruits and vegetables; these stalls are interspersed with others selling flowers, health supplements, tea, coffee, spices, books, and crafts. A number of businesses are family owned. And Amish farm families are a strong historical presence in the market—their traditional dress adds an exotic element to the life of the marketplace. Their fresh produce, high-quality meats, and poultry are very inviting. Asian families are also well represented, selling all kinds of fresh fish and produce. Blacks own only a few businesses here, including an African crafts shop that sells masks, beads, and other adornments. Delilah's provides delicious African American cuisine, or "soul food." Other eateries, serving a great variety of tasty foods and drink, include a Thai place, an oyster bar, a French bakery, a Jewish bakery, a juice bar, a beer garden, and a cookie company, making the Terminal a particularly busy place at lunch time. Equally striking is the diversity of workers and the general comity with which they interact. For example, black stockmen work for the German butcher with apparent easygoing demeanor and attitude. Some of the white-owned businesses even have black cashiers, which would have been rare or nonexistent not too many years ago.

The customers, too, seem to be on their best behavior. People seem to be relaxed and are often seen interacting across the color line. Seeing a black woman with a walker wrestling with the heavy doors, two Irish men jump up from their meal at nearby Pearl's Oyster Bar to help her. The clientele at the many food counters represent various classes, races, and ethnicities. A black businessman can be seen talking on his cell phone. Hispanic construction workers are relaxing on their lunch break. This is a calm environment of equivalent, symmetrical relationships—a respite from the streets outside.

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And it has been this way for years. The Terminal is an institution in Philadelphia and has always been known as a place where anyone could expect civility. In the days when blacks never knew what treatment they would be given in public, they could come to the Terminal and know they would not be hassled.[4] The ambience has always been comfortable and inviting. Perhaps the focus on food is a reason for this, suggesting a kind of festival of ethnic foods. On any given day, one might see a Chinese woman eating pizza or a white businessman enjoying collard greens and fried chicken or an Italian family lunching on sushi. When diverse people are eating one another's food, strangers in the abstract can become somewhat more human and a social good is performed for those observing. As people become intimate through such shared experiences, certain barriers are prone to be broken. The many lunch counters also help encourage strangers to interact, as they rub elbows while eating. At certain counters in particular, there seems to be a norm of talking with strangers. One woman told me you cannot get people to shut up. The Terminal is a neutral space in which people who behave civilly, whatever their ethnicity, usually will not be scrutinized, as would likely happen in the ethnic neighborhoods of the city if an unknown person were to pass through. In those neighborhoods, such keen notice of strangers is the first line of defense,[5] but the Terminal is not defended in this manner.

Multiple sets of doors on three sides of the market are used from morning to late afternoon, six days a week. Upon entering from any side, one is met by shoppers,

diners, and others here to stroll and take in the ambience. One encounters a varied assemblage under the Terminal's canopy: unobtrusive security guards, both black and white; retired people; teenagers who gather with their friends to hang out; twenty-somethings who come to meet members of the opposite sex; homeless people who gravitate to the market for shelter, food, and the unhindered use of public bathrooms; and business executives and workers from nearby office buildings who make up the lunch crowd. Wholesome sandwiches or healthful, full-plate lunches can be purchased at a reasonable price and consumed quickly on the premises or taken out. At one buffet, you can get a hot meal of collard greens, chicken, sausage, roast, and salad for around $8. Working people and retirees on fixed incomes take advantage of this bargain, at times meeting their friends for sociability.

By the back wall, near the restrooms, black shoeshine men work and socialize, keeping up with one another. They share personal stories and seem always ready for a good laugh. Italians, Jews, Asians, and blacks sit nearby, snacking on baked goods and coffee while enjoying melodious piano sounds played for tips. The municipal courthouse is within a short walk, and occasionally, people appear for lunch with "juror" stickers affixed to their clothing. There is always a scene to be part of and to observe here.

As indicated above, immediately under the canopy, people relax their guard—not completely, but they do look more directly at others as they observe the goings on and move about with a greater sense of security. As they stroll up and down the aisles, stopping at the various shops and kiosks within the Terminal, they experience other people, and they generally seem to trust what they see. There is usually little cause for alarm. As people stop and purchase items or just walk around, sometimes they greet one another, verbally or nonverbally; there is a feeling of being involved with the others present.

When taking a seat at a coffee bar or lunch counter, people feel they have something of a license to speak with others, and others have license to speak with them.[6] Strikingly, strangers engage in spontaneous conversation, getting to know one another as they do. Testing others, trying things out on them, people are maybe seeing whether those different from themselves are for real. They find that they are. People leave such encounters with a good feeling about the other, as though recognizing that they have experienced something profound, as they have—they have made human contact across the putative barriers of race, ethnicity, and other differences. Here, race and ethnicity appear salient but understated. The following field notes are germane:

> It was around 11 a.m. on a warm but overcast Sunday morning in March when an African American buddy and I walked into the Down Home Diner, just inside the Reading Terminal Market. The place always seems to be crowded on Sunday mornings with a remarkable diversity of people, locals and out-of-towners, because the Terminal caters to both the convention center crowd and the people from Philadelphia neighborhoods. The crowd that morning buzzed with small talk, resulting in a low-level conversational din, a dull roar. The overall tone was friendly. We walked in, took our seats at the counter, perused the menu, and ordered. He requested ham and eggs, and I ordered pancakes, ham, and milk. We caught up with each other over coffee while waiting for our food, occasionally looking

> up and checking out the scene. After a few bites of my pancakes and a drink of my milk, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I looked up to see a red-faced Irishman about forty-five years old. "Who won the game last night?" he asked expectantly. Without missing a beat, I replied, "The Sixers, 98-79." I shot him a smile, and he said, "Thanks," and moved on.

I was struck by the way this man assumed he could approach me about the score of a ball game, in part because of the race issue but also because of his assumption that I am a sports fan. I felt that he probably would not have approached me out on the street. But here, because of the apparently friendly atmosphere prevailing, he felt he could make such a request and was likely to get an answer. Does he presume that because I am a black male, I might be especially interested in basketball, that I would have followed the Sixers game the previous evening, and that I would not mind sharing the score with him? He was somehow colluding with me as an individual but also as a Philadelphia sports fan. At least he expected that I would be agreeable, and in fact, I did not disappoint him. And again,

> On Saturday, I was to meet Rae at the Down Home Diner at 10 a.m. for breakfast. I arrived at the Terminal at about ten to the hour and walked around the area. The Terminal was busy as usual, full of a diversity of people. Some seemed to be from the nearby convention center, where a trade show was in progress. Others looked more like residents of upscale areas of Center City and the suburbs, and from the local ethnic Irish, Italian, and black neighborhoods—there were also Asians from nearby Chinatown and other parts of the city. This was the typical mix, but Saturday morning at the Terminal is special.
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> On Saturdays, people seem especially relaxed, lazing about or doing their shopping in an unhurried way. The Down Home Diner was quite busy and crowded. There was a line of people waiting to be seated for the homemade pancakes, grits, eggs, sausages, and ham the place is known for—the smells wafting through the air, making people all the more hungry. The seating consists of four- and six-top tables, booths, and a counter for ten to twelve people.
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> I stood and waited for a bit, and when a seat at the counter became available, I took it. The stools are spaced quite close together, making for a certain coziness in which it is impossible not to literally rub shoulders with those seated on either side. As a result, upon sitting down, one is almost obliged to say "good morning" to his or her neighbor. The waitstaff is exclusively female and racially mixed, reflecting the diversity of the city. The kitchen is visible through the pass-through, and the cooks, who too are black as well as white, are busy. Now and then, a black dishwasher emerges to replenish the silverware or dish racks under the counter. The place hums, giving off the general impression of people busily going about their work, with few other concerns. Food is presented, dirty plates are cleared, money changes hands, and diners come and go.
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> While waiting for Rae, I ordered my coffee; it came quickly. In about five minutes, the stool next to mine became empty. I quickly covered it with my leather jacket and cap to reserve it. A white man of about forty was seated next to the empty chair. A few minutes passed, and then another white man emerged and asked, of no one in particular, if he could get breakfast here, revealing that he was new to the place. I answered, "Sure." He was really asking for the seat I was saving, which was the only available one. He stood there behind the seat and soon he asked me more directly, "Is this seat taken?" I said that I was saving it for someone and that she should be here soon. Feeling some pressure to order my food, when the waitress appeared, I asked for pancakes, bacon, and milk.
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> After taking my order, she looked over at the man standing up and asked if she could help him. "I'd like to order some breakfast, but he's saving the seat," he tattled, nodding at me, as if the waitress would make me remove my coat and give him the place. But the

> woman, a young Italian woman, simply looked at me, looked at the man, and moved on to another task, implicitly approving of my right to save the seat. After a few minutes, though, noting his frustration, I offered, “If she’s not here in five minutes, you can have the seat.” He nodded his acceptance. Then the man on the other side of the seat asked, “First date?” “No, no,” I said. “It’s not like that. I’m her professor.” “Yeah, right,” he replied, smiling.
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> Minutes passed and still no sign of Rae. So I removed my coat and offered the man the seat. “Thanks. If she comes, I’ll move,” he said. The waitress came over and he ordered eggs and oatmeal, and as my food arrived, he commented, “Those look good.” “Yeah, the food is pretty good here,” I replied as I ate. Soon, his food arrived, and he too began to eat. We sat there elbow to elbow, shoulder to shoulder. I gathered that he was not from Philadelphia, and I asked him outright where he was from. “I’m from Sacramento. I’ve got a booth over at the convention center and nobody’s there to watch it.” He was in town for an exhibition on farm implements and equipment, and he ran a manufacturing business. He noted how good his food was and how efficient the service was. He also mentioned the diversity of people here at the Terminal and that this situation was unusual for him, as he had little opportunity for this kind of interaction in Sacramento. Clearly, he was impressed. He revealed that he was from a pretty homogeneous background and that his water-skiing club was even more so. He told me that the club was white and male, including a couple of white supremacists, though he didn’t share their views.
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> The man continued to tell me about his background, as I prompted him to talk about his work. It turned out that he employs a significant number of Mexicans in his business and that he is firmly in favor of allowing driver’s licenses to illegal immigrants (“they get licenses and Social Security cards anyway on the black market, so we may as well regulate them ourselves”). Also, he says, his business would fold without them. “I would not hire a man of my own race—they ain’t worth a shit!” he stated. As the conversation continued, he indicated that he assumed that I was not for Bush in the upcoming election, while betraying his own conservatism and support of Bush. He was concerned about terrorism. He worried about “a rise in UPS uniforms being sold on the Internet” and, looking around the Terminal, observed that the place was not protected and quite vulnerable to terrorist attack. Soon, he finished his breakfast, we said our goodbyes, and he left for his exhibition at the convention center.

What is so striking about this episode is that in this setting, a white man with white-supremacist friends is able to have a frank conversation with me, a black man, in which he reveals his own feelings about race and diversity. It is the ambience of Reading Terminal that one can go there and take leave of one’s particularism, while showing a certain tolerance for others. The Down Home Diner can be viewed as a version of the cosmopolitan canopy under which opportunities are provided, at least situationally, to connect across ethnic and racial lines. Outside, in a more impersonal public space, there is little chance for such interaction; the man would not have approached me, and there would have been no opportunity for the exchange described above. Of course, at least an occasional tension crops up in any human group, and the Terminal is no exception. Rarely, racial and ethnic tension does indeed occur, perhaps in relation to people’s ethnic origins and their working out of their sense of group position. More often, due to the apparent large store of comity and goodwill manifested here, tension remains on the individual level. People come to this neutral and cosmopolitan setting expecting diverse people to get along.

This cosmopolitan canopy that seems to spread over and affect relations within the general space called Reading Terminal Market can be divided into subzones

that might be seen as the quasi-public impersonal and the more intimate zones, the former being off-putting and the latter socially more encouraging. In the more intimate settings within the canopy, such as at one of the numerous lunch counters, people often feel welcome and secure enough to relax, even to the point of engaging complete strangers in conversation. In these circumstances, people carry on their business but also engage in *folk ethnography* and formulate or find evidence for their *folk theories* about others with whom they share the public space.[7]

In Philadelphia, the Reading Terminal Market is but one of many such locations that may be viewed, conceptually at least, as existing under this kind of "cosmopolitan canopy"; other examples with a similar ambiance are Rittenhouse Square park, 30th Street Train Station, the Whole Foods Markets, the Italian Market, various fitness centers, hospital waiting rooms, the multiplex theater, indoor malls, and sporting venues, among other places.[7] Typically, under the canopy, within the exterior walls or within the prescribed street boundaries in the case of Rittenhouse Square—Philadelphia's premier public park—the atmosphere is usually calm and relatively pleasant, as a diverse mix of people go about their business, at times self-consciously on good or "downtown" behavior, working to "be nice" or civil to the next person they encounter. Here, they sit, eat, and walk, moving through the square, sometimes meeting new acquaintances or bumping into people they know.

The denizens return from time to time to conduct their business, while becoming more familiar with one another as well as with the social ambience of the place. In time, they come to "know" the "regular" people without ever having met them. A major theme is civility, and people are encouraged to behave civilly to one another; at times, they can be solicitous and extraordinarily helpful to complete strangers.

Such neutral social settings, which no one group expressly owns but all are encouraged to share, situated under this kind of protective umbrella, represent a special type of urban space, a peculiar zone that every visitor seems to recognize, appreciate, and enjoy.[9] Many visit not only for instrumental reasons—to have a meal or just to be "out and about"—but also for the experience of being among the social types they believe they are likely to find here. The ambience is decidedly "laid-back," and in navigating the quasi-public spaces here, there is little sense of obligation to the next person other than common civility. Visitors leave with the memory of a good experience and are likely to return another day, perhaps to relive an otherwise uneventful and pleasant experience.

As people engage others in these public settings, they can do what I call both practical and expressive folk ethnography. Simply put, cosmopolitan canopies are interesting places to engage in the fine art of "people watching," for "all kinds" of folk are represented. The curious will sometimes gawk at strangers, but most often, people are polite and, from a safe distance, watch others unobtrusively, if indirectly. Others may be reluctant at first, only to find themselves unavoidably overhearing conversations that pique their interest; then they eavesdrop and collect stories, which they may either repeat to friends or keep to themselves.

In the more quasi-public areas, it is common for people to publicly interact with complete strangers, exquisitely expressing themselves through face and eye work;

smiles and frowns are occasionally punctuated by a critical commentary of grunts and groans and outright talk. Through these various transactions, they legitimate a look here, discourage an advance there, and put "who they are" on public display. In time, their accumulating observations feed both prejudices and truths—affected by their own identities—about the others they encounter here.

With such frames in mind, they build on what they know, effectively "understanding" strangers they encounter and coming to "know" the public life of the canopy. They do all this with an eye to sorting out and making sense of one another, either for practical reasons or to satisfy a natural human curiosity. Later, among their friends, social peers, associates, people of their own ethnic communities, and others with whom they feel close enough, they share their observations, telling their stories and shaping them as they go.

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This complex process affects how they view and define this place and other interesting aspects of the city for their local social networks, while inspiring folk notions about "how people are" and "how things work." At Reading Terminal, for instance, they casually observe and perhaps ponder the "Jewish butcher," the "Amish farmer's stall," the "Asian fish counter," "the Italian bakery," or the "black shoeshine stand." The denizens learn to get along and deal effectively with life in this setting, all the while expressing their own identities with respect to others present.

While civility may rule and be taken for granted here, when people leave such zones, they may well be challenged in other ways that require different responses. The local neighborhoods from which they come and through which they must travel are publicly known for their racial and ethnic tensions. Because of this, the denizens of the most public spaces, spaces defined by civility as being within the cosmopolitan canopy, put an active, if unacknowledged, premium on up-close observations of others, including inadvertent eavesdropping and what are in effect informal studies of the local people. This kind of observation is never systematic or

planned. And the collection of evidence as to what others are like is highly selective and might be seen as giving rise to or reinforcing persistent stereotypes, as well as uncovering unexpected truths about others they encounter.

In such urban social settings, passersby are often able and willing to sample sizable portions of other people's conversations. Such fragmentary data are like so many pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of social ambience or the ethnography of a given public place. People are inclined to fit these pieces together somehow, generally in a conscious manner with a grand design but also rather intuitively and inductively, creating a mental picture of the nature of the setting and of certain kinds of others. They may do this for no other reason than "to be in the know" or "not to make a fool of myself" in a given setting. They engage in folk ethnography to navigate uncertain terrain but also as naturally curious human beings inclined to make sense of their social habitat.

Naturally, a certain physical and social distance between people is common in the larger, more public settings such as Reading Terminal Market and Rittenhouse Square. And although the amount and quality of interaction are always a matter of person-to-person negotiation, numerous smaller quasi-public venues can be found all over the city where strangers coexist for a brief time with a kind of closeness bordering on intimacy. The more intimate the space, the more chance there is for up close "fieldwork," including direct and indirect observation and eavesdropping. Such places are important settings for diverse strangers to "learn" how to get along with one another, albeit at times superficially. The jazz bar Zanzibar Blue is an example of a setting that is both intimate and public.

> After descending the steps off Broad Street down into Zanzibar Blue, one feels as though one has entered a dark inner sanctum, an underground world of live music, food, liquor, and a cosmopolitan mix of people who have in common a certain appreciation of jazz. On the left is a bar with a few people sitting around it, sipping their drinks, and nodding to the smooth beat wafting about and through space. As one's eyes slowly adjust to the gloom, little candlelit lamps suddenly become visible atop neat rows of four-top tables with blood-red tablecloths. One then encounters two hefty black bouncers in dark suits. They engage the visitor with small talk while checking him out to see what his business is, perhaps especially if he is a stranger dressed in dark clothes, though here everything has a dark hue.
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> Over in the corner sits a dark-skinned black man engaging his brown-skinned honey; his gold-rimmed glasses sparkle, capturing and reflecting the scarce light here. Nearer the bandstand, nine black women gather to honor a friend on her birthday—as becomes apparent later on when the waiter delivers a small cake with two candles on top. On the other side, facing the bandstand, another black couple enjoys their meal while waiting for tonight's sets to begin. The maitre d' shows another black man and me to a table, first a two-top but then a four-top that we accept more happily. We both order Delta catfish, Cokes, and bread to keep us until the meal arrives. We talk. More people slowly appear. A young, white, professional-looking couple sits behind us. In a while, to our right, another; and in fifteen minutes, still another. The place seems to be filling up, though it has a long way to go. This is Sunday night in downtown Philly. Our Cokes and bread arrive, and we sip and nibble and talk, taking in more of the scene, observing what is happening around us.
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> The band is now set up—a cool-looking white man on guitar, a black Muslim with a coofee [cap] on sax, a small brown-skinned man on drums, and the leader, a muscular, baldheaded black man, on bass. The leader opens with the usual introductions. To start

the first set, he makes fun of straying black men and their family responsibilities while pleading for the audience not to be too judgmental—"give a brother some slack because he always comes home." Chuckles come from the audience, the blacks perhaps "getting it" more than the whites. The combo plays. Naturally, the sounds are smooth, melodious, stark, and loud. People go into conscious listening and watching mode, as they are here to see the show, and a show it is.

But a show is being put on not just by the combo but by the clientele themselves. The people observe one another, watching how this or that person reacts to the sounds. When a player works especially hard to bring out an unusual or seemingly difficult but appealing sound, the audience collectively agrees to give the player some recognition—applause, that is. And when the guitar player makes a sound not commonly associated with the guitar, members of the audience clap spontaneously—almost on cue. It is especially interesting when the blacks clap enthusiastically for the white player. Everyone notices. People here are aware of each other but at the same time anonymous. They feel a sense of community while they are here, and then they move on.

One might say that places like Zanzibar Blue are a salve for the hustle and bustle of more fraught urban experience. While the jazz club is a special experience,[10] with complete strangers participating in a collective entertainment and artistic production, intimate spaces of a different sort proliferate with the boom of the franchise business. More generally, they include the Starbuckses and McDonaldses of the world, places where complete strangers congregate and observe one another but may not feel as connected as people do at a jazz club. Through people watching and eavesdropping in a tight space, they may leave with strong impressions and stories of other people's lives, truncated and fleeting as they may be, which serve to shape their gossip, not simply about individuals but about the groups these strangers seem to represent.

In the outpatient waiting room of the local university hospital, among computer screens, alcoves, plastic chairs, coffee wagon, and reception desk, people have slowed down as they kill time waiting for the bureaucracy to go through its motions. This is an ideal setting in which to observe more relaxed, quasi-public race relations. What one observes is that while some people might like to group themselves with others who are of a similar race, here, people sit where they can and tend not to go to the extra trouble of such racial sorting. Still, people like to be comfortable.

On this particular day, there are about forty people intermittently seated in rows of cushioned chairs facing each other. The length of one side of the building is walled by a high and broad light-filled window looking out on a manicured courtyard. It is a somewhat busy setting, with diverse people moving to and fro doing their business. Staff people, who seem disproportionately African American, transport patients, equipment, and other materials. Every staff person is assumed to be engaged in critical work, a fact that garners certain respect, regardless of the worker's station, color, or perceived background.

Four no-nonsense, middle-aged black women handle paperwork at the various business windows, triaging outpatients. The patients are predominantly African American (about 70 percent), but whites (about 25 percent) and Asians and Latinos (about 5 percent) are being served as well. The black people, some of whom work for the university, are mostly poor to working class and from the nearby ghetto community, intermixed with a few middle-class people; the whites tend to be working to middle class as well. A younger black man and an older woman, who appears to be his mother, enter the setting and move slowly toward a couple of empty seats. Others present here, black as well as white, follow

the couple with their eyes, momentarily, if inadvertently, making eye contact. They all take in the scene. A minor drama unfolds as the young man faces a seemingly difficult task of seating the heavy old woman. First, he relieves her of her bags and then helps her to remove her coat to make her comfortable, the object being to get her settled.

As this situation unfolds, a young, Irish, working-class man with stringy brown hair sitting in the next seat rises and offers assistance, which is soon shown to be unnecessary. But after seating his mother, the black man audibly thanks the young man anyway. The working-class white man nods. And things return to normal as people refocus their attention on their magazines, their children, or their partners. In this setting, actually quite a few older people are being helped by younger people who are more physically able and more capable of negotiating the hospital bureaucracy.

In a few minutes another scene develops. A rotund black man of about sixty-five in a motorized wheelchair, who has a hook for one hand, is clearly enjoying his conversation on his cell phone. He speaks at a voice level that allows many of those present to follow parts of his conversation. A few people are clearly annoyed by this, while others are perfectly tolerant in what is certainly a public place. It becomes clear that the man is speaking with a friend, apparently excited about the prospect of obtaining an artificial limb. Eyes follow the man as he moves across the room to be nearer the large window, perhaps for better reception on his cell phone. By the window, he continues his conversation, which is rather expansive, reflecting his cheerful mood.

When he finishes his phone call, he expertly moves back across the room, his *Daily News* jammed into the side of the wheelchair. People watch, and when he moves on, a few of the others there make knowing eye contact, whites and blacks alike. Over on the other side, the man strikes up a conversation with another heavyset black man of similar age, a person whom it is clear he does not know, and yet they talk rather intimately and loudly.

In this setting, the black people tend to be somewhat relaxed and at times even animated in their presentation of self (Goffman 1959). Most are of working-class status, but they outnumber the whites present. A perfunctory look might suggest that whites' attention is riveted on the blacks here, since this is a seemingly unique situation, but on close inspection, it is clear that people of both groups are curious and take this opportunity to observe each other closely. This is a relatively safe place, and people can look at others without feeling threatened, though some of the whites might feel somewhat awkward about being in the company of so many black people at one time.

Essentially, cosmopolitan canopies allow people of different backgrounds the chance to slow down and indulge themselves, observing, pondering, and in effect, doing their own folk ethnography, testing or substantiating stereotypes and prejudices or, rarely, acknowledging something fundamentally new about the other. Those observed may well become representatives of social types in the observers' minds and can be described afterward outside the setting as "this black guy," "this Jewish man," "this WASPy white guy," "this white dude"; a white person might say, "this black lady," or a black person might say to other black people, "this sister." An accretion of such shared observations made under the cosmopolitan canopies of the city becomes part of what people "know" about each other, a way they "make sense" of the more public world.[11]

The cosmopolitan canopy can also be mobile, as in the case of public transportation, which in Philadelphia is always a racial experience. Typically, black riders outnumber whites on buses and trolleys in downtown Philadelphia; there may be

some racial tension, but most often, people are civil and polite, respecting one another's presumed social spaces. Such spaces can, of course, vary in level of neutrality—by time of day or night, by the specific individuals making use of them, or by subspaces within larger ones, such as the back of a big-city bus.

> Mei-Ling, a young Chinese graduate student, and her Chinese male friend got on the bus and unwittingly failed to respect the boundaries between blacks and whites—blacks typically congregating in the back of the bus and effectively claiming it as turf. Whites often stand rather than venture beyond a certain imaginary line. Vacant seats in the back remain so, and the whites stand for long periods. This situation is for all to see, white and black alike, and it informs the folk ethnography of everyday public transportation, particularly the city bus. Mei-Ling and her friend, however, walked right to the back of the bus and began to speak Chinese. After a point, their language got to be too much for one black woman, who responded with, "Don't ya'll be talking about me." Mei-Ling, surprised and confused, said, "We're not talking about you." Tension developed. One black man urged against arguing, but Mei-Ling stood her ground and kept speaking Chinese. Other black women smirked at one another, implicitly standing up for their counterpart, or at least enjoying the fracas. Finally, the woman put her fist in Mei-Lings's face and said bluntly, "Do you want a black fist?" At that point, the situation got to be too much for Mei-Ling, and she walked up to the driver and complained. The driver stopped the bus and asked her if the woman had actually hit her. Mei-Ling said no, whereupon the black woman came forward herself and told the driver, "I just told her to keep her voice down." The driver then told both women to apologize or he would call the police. The black woman did immediately apologize, but Mei-Ling's friend insisted that she had done nothing wrong, and Mei-Ling was left shaken by the incident. She says she never realized that the back of the bus belonged to anyone.

Most people, however, are civil and polite to one another, respecting the putative individual aura surrounding every person and defining the public conveyance as an utterly neutral space where people are generally on good behavior and will just leave other people be.

Equally important, public transportation reflects the class and racial compositions of Philadelphia neighborhoods, which, like many other big-city residential areas, remain racially segregated. Black and white urbanites alike may be put off by the anonymous "ghetto-looking" black male, but there has been some feeling that presently, due to terrorism perpetrated by Middle Eastern–looking men, a large black man is a welcome presence to some who were most prejudiced about black males.

The code of civility that defines the cosmopolitan canopy can break down in various ways on public transportation. People occasionally complain about seating or loud music and can be offended by one another. In particular, when race and gender come together in the presence of the anonymous black male, the ideals of civility and cosmopolitanism are severely tested. Observations on regional trains show that the anonymous black male is often the last person others will sit next to. Black men generally agree that they can ride the length of the train line seated alone, unless the train is crowded and seating is scarce. Black men of all social classes understand full well that they are avoided on public transportation. It is common knowledge among black men that they are stigmatized or degraded in public in this

way, not just by whites but sometimes by blacks as well. The black male may "put white people off" just by virtue of being black, and the younger he is and the more "ghetto" he looks, the more distrust he engenders. This leads many to the working conception or folk belief that white people, protestations to the contrary, generally dislike black people, especially black males. White people are often put off by the black male, but there has been some feeling that presently, due to terrorism perpetrated by Middle Eastern–looking men, a large black man is a welcome presence to some who were most prejudiced about black males.

Essentially, cosmopolitan canopies allow people of different backgrounds the chance to slow down and indulge themselves, observing, pondering, and in effect, doing their own folk ethnography, testing or substantiating stereotypes and prejudices or, rarely, acknowledging something fundamentally new about the other.

As young black men talk among themselves, it seems as though each man has a story of police harassment or public discrimination, such as strangers not wanting to sit next to him or working to avoid him altogether. Whether true in an objective sense, it is too often believed true by the black male, leading him to develop his own sense of group position vis-à-vis the wider society, especially whites. In this respect, black men engage in folk ethnography, talking among themselves, comparing notes, and developing strategies for avoiding such arbitrary treatment and salvaging their self-respect.

At times, they may attempt to turn the tables. Deciding they would rather ride with a seat to themselves—which may well be in part a "sour-grapes" rationalization—they will sometimes puff themselves up and adopt an off-putting appearance, displaying looks geared to make others uptight and determined to avoid them. This approach stems from an understanding that the wider society (especially whites) wishes to avoid them, and they simply want to do it to the "other" first. Strikingly, other blacks will also sometimes seek to avoid anonymous young black males they are uncertain about, though blacks are usually more savvy about distinguishing those who pose an authentic threat from those who do not; familiar with

black life, they are more capable of making finer distinctions than are their white counterparts.

In addition, some black men have taken to devising tests they use on whites who might face the prospect of sitting next to them. Typically, the test is employed in the following manner: After spotting an available seating area, including both an aisle and a window, the young man will move deliberately to the aisle seat, leaving the often more desirable window seat empty and requiring anyone wanting the seat to pass by him to get to it. He might sit with his legs sprawled or present a blank or sullen look on his face, making himself into an uninviting seat partner. His bet is that most whites will not want to cross the barrier he has set up, but if a white person is willing to rise to the occasion and request the seat and sit down, this person then passes the test. A white person willing to "run the gamut," as it were, may be judged acceptable. Some young black men report that they are taken by surprise when a white person does request the seat; then they may well engage the person in what conversation, albeit halting.

Conclusion

Under the cosmopolitan canopy, whether quasi-public or intimate, people seem to have some special need to observe the social setting closely; for many, people watching is a common pastime, and for some, it has risen to an art form. They check others out, practicing a form of folk ethnography, making sense of what they observe while reserving the right to be highly selective in their sources of evidence. The resulting understandings may in fact be as much about themselves as about the others they come to know—a factor that helps them to remain "folk" in the sense that Redfield (1947, 1956) defined—not urban or pre-urban, despite the city's ever-growing size, density, and truly mind-boggling diversity. This kind of exposure to a multitude of people engaging in everyday behavior often humanizes abstract strangers in the minds of these observers.

The existence of the canopy allows such people, whose reference point often remains their own social class or ethnic group, a chance to encounter others and so work toward a more cosmopolitan appreciation of difference. As canopies, the Reading Terminal, Rittenhouse Square, Thirtieth Street Station, the Whole Foods Market, and sporting events certainly do not provide identical social experience. But they do all provide an opportunity for diverse strangers to come together and be exposed to one another. In these circumstances, they have a chance to mix, observe one another, and become better acquainted with people they otherwise seldom observe up close.

As urbanites, they encounter people who are strangers to them, not just as individuals but also as representatives of groups they "know" only in the abstract. The canopy can thus be a profoundly humanizing experience. People in these places are also inclined to express common civility toward others. For instance, families with children in tow enable adults to model for their children, and their children to model for still others, including both children and grown-ups. Some parents use

such a setting as a teaching tool, at times making a point of having their children respect people who are in some way different from themselves. And when people exposed to all this return to their own neighborhoods, they may do so with a more grounded knowledge of the other than was possible without such experience. In this way, the generations establish new social patterns and norms of tolerance, while encouraging everyday common civility, if not comity and goodwill, among the various groups that make up the city.

To be sure, people may develop new stereotypes or see fit to hold on to the ones they have previously formed. It is likely that they will opt to hold onto attitudes they are deeply invested in. Yet they will have been exposed to members of a heretofore unknown other (see Blumer 1958). If nothing more, through constant exposure, such environments can encourage common, everyday taken-for-granted civility toward others who are different from oneself.

As canopies proliferate, such neutral territories become an established element of the makeup of the city. Moving about through the major canopies such as the Terminal as well as the more intimate ones in restaurants and bars, people can have a sense of being out and about in a cosmopolitan setting. As they are exposed, others are exposed to them. And especially in the smaller settings, they can eavesdrop, look people over, and more closely observe people who are strange to them, whose behavior they previously could only imagine.

As the urban environment becomes increasingly diverse, the cosmopolitan canopy becomes ever more significant as a setting in which people of diverse backgrounds come together, mingle with strangers, and gain from their social experience a critical folk knowledge and social intelligence about others they define as different from themselves. In these circumstances, they may see profoundly what they have in common with other human being, regardless of their particularity. A model of civility is planted in such settings that may well have a chance to sprout elsewhere in the city. People are repeatedly exposed to the unfamiliar and thus have the opportunity to stretch themselves mentally, emotionally, and socially. The resulting folk ethnography serves as a cognitive and cultural base on which denizens are able to construct behavior in public. And often, though certainly not always, the end result is a growing social sophistication that allows diverse urban peoples to get along.

Notes

1. In Wirth's day, many wealthy people were concerned with moral contamination. Such people can be imagined strolling through the public spaces with their heads held high in an expression of disdain for those they considered beneath them. Today, the public issue more commonly is one of wariness and fear of crime.

2. Gans (1962) has described these urban types as "cosmopolites," "urban villagers," "the deprived," and "the trapped."

3. For a much earlier treatment of "cosmopolitans" and "locals" as a social types, see "Patterns of Influence: Local and Cosmopolitan Influentials," in Merton (1957).

4. Traditionally, in certain segregated neighborhoods, outsiders were kept at bay, and this has kept these neighborhoods relatively homogenous. Since the end of de jure segregation, this situation has been slowly changing. See Massey and Denton (1993).

5. See Suttles's discussion of "the defended neighborhood" in Suttles (1972, 21-43).

6. For an in-depth discussion of a similar phenomenon related to bar behavior, see Cavan (1966).

7. A distinction exists between Redfield's (1947) "folk society," which represents a "little tradition" in an enclosed folk setting, and the idea I am proposing of urban folk living in isolated ethnic communities within the context of the city (cf. Gans 1962). Philadelphia is quite an ethnic town, made up of neighborhoods that reflect its many ethnicities and that are rather particularistic. People from these neighborhoods carry along with them localized ideologies that tell them not only about their own situations but also about those of others. Some of these are clearly stereotypes they use in relating to others and in understanding how others relate to them. Yet this particularistic attitude is affected by class, education, and exposure to more cosmopolitan settings. So a tension forms between ethnic particularism and a more sophisticated understanding of diversity. When people leave their ethnic neighborhood or setting, it is imperative that they take on a more general perspective, especially as they move to more neutral territory where they encounter different kinds of people and the theme is one of general civility. It is in these settings that people can and do act civilly toward those who are different from themselves, even though it may be a challenge for them. Folk ideologies and orientation are challenged by the more sophisticated or tolerant signals of the more cosmopolitan situation. That is just the kind of place a cosmopolitan canopy is, and urban folk are challenged by the cosmopolitanism characteristic of these settings (cf. Wirth [1938] on urbanism and Hall [1966] on urban space and diversity).

8. Other places are different from Reading Terminal as well as from one another, but they are similar as settings where people can come together and experience diverse others—they are places where diversity seems to congregate. The Terminal is unusual, however, in the amount of conversation that occurs between strangers, especially strangers of different races and ethnicities.

9. For an example of a consciously constructed social setting of this type in Paris, France, see de la Pradelle and Lallement in this volume.

10. See Grazian (2003).

11. Similarly, see Lofland (1973), who approaches this theme from a different angle: "The cosmopolitan did not lose the capacity for knowing others personally. But he gained the capacity for knowing others only categorically" (p. 177).

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