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Look at figure 1 of Martín Sánchez-Jankowski's *Cracks in the Pavement: Social Change and Resilience in Poor Neighborhoods*. For each of two kinds of stores a line relates increases in "average prices" to numbers of robberies (between 2 and 10) that occurred "within an average twelve-month period." We are not told the meanings of "average," who recorded what, nor how counting and guessing were married. Look at tables 6–8, quantifying, for each of nine years, eight features of nine gangs sorted into five types of neighborhoods. Numbers are given on gang membership, age range, the injured, the killed, and so on. Who knew such specifics? How? The author states that as a senior professor he could not hang out with gang members. No research assistant is acknowledged. The reader is unable to assess how these empirical descriptions were created.

To trek across *Cracks in the Pavement* readers must step over dim lines between fact and fiction and push beyond sharp contradictions in nearly adjacent paragraphs (e.g., public housing neglects maintenance, public housing employees dutifully repair damage). There are many cul-de-sacs into 1950s functionalism. When a chain store enters the "social system" of "the poor neighborhood" and puts a local market out of business, damage from the "alien organism" is sealed off and functions shift to another store. It's like "kidney failure, when the remaining functioning kidney assumes the work of both" (p. 351). Gangs, cast as bands of Robin(g) Hoods, have overwhelmingly positive functions, like generating income and mediating consumer complaints with merchants. Near the journey's end the reader stares into the precipitous argument that, but for student disruption of school authority that "affirms" local norms, success in education might undermine the social life of poor neighborhoods.

Sánchez-Jankowski chose neighborhoods with public housing, three in New York and two in Los Angeles, in which, for at least 25 years before 1990, at least 50% of residents were below poverty level. He "randomly" picked four sites from an unstated number of neighborhoods with "preferred attributes" and one other "with only some of the preferred criteria," the last to serve as a "quasi-control." He does not grasp that the uncontrolled acquisition of field data in five sites vitiates the creative sampling and experimental logics he has invoked. More important, the selection of public housing areas—which contain a small fraction of the poor, especially in Los Angeles—has implications that the book's model of self-sustaining poverty never appreciates. Government policy has structured persistent poverty into these neighborhoods, whatever the mobility experience of the individuals who move through them.

From 1991 through 1999, Sánchez-Jankowski observed within “mom and pop” stores, around public housing, in high school lunchrooms and classrooms, and in barber and beauty shops. He eavesdropped while sweeping in barbershops, hiding behind curtains in beauty salons, walking behind pedestrians, and dallying in markets. Interview data are scanty. For two chapters on gangs, in which, I should acknowledge, he criticizes what he miscasts as my work, no observational site is described. How often he observed in each neighborhood we do not know.

The author recalls that, since William Foote Whyte, urban ethnographers have endlessly rebutted the view that social life in the slum lacks order. Having recognized “no order” as a straw man, he then vanquishes the friendless null hypothesis with a model of a poverty neighborhood maintained in equilibrium through internal social processes.

Sánchez-Jankowski describes residents’ normative order as a fabric woven by neighborly hostility across genders and against racial and ethnic others, immigrants and lower-status coethnics; criminal enterprise; defilement of public housing (memorably, urinating in elevators); the defiance of school authority. Informally, some resident and store “caretakers” reduce tensions. This normative culture sustains bonding among tenants; segregation within sex, ethnic, status, and gang lines; and student cooperation in disrupting classes. Having drawn himself into league with Edward Banfield and Oscar Lewis, the author devotes many pages to an alternative self-portrait.

Three distinctions also structure the narrative. The first compares contested (interethnic conflictual) and fragmented (multiethnic, with conflict among social strata within ethnicity) neighborhoods. A table classifies the study’s five areas by year. Four neighborhoods changed type during the decade. But as fieldnote passages are not dated, the reader cannot test whether the data are inconsistent with the typology nor discern why the author thinks they are.

Second, “neighborhood” institutions struggle against solely money-seeking “enterprises” and ominously labeled “state” institutions. Intrusive land developers, self-serving public housing managers, naïvely idealistic teachers, and parasitic franchises threaten to undermine the neighborhood’s vibrant social life. Analysis of this struggle is based on a presumed ontology of “the” neighborhood as a transcending whole and on an equation of neighborhood life with what an ethnographer can learn primarily without talking to people or negotiating access to private spaces.

There is no substantial description of social life in “enterprise” stores, nonpublic housing, and church circles, nor of families whose children may resist “the social norms” of the neighborhood. The vast segment of people in any poor neighborhood who do not hang out in corner markets and hair salons or organize their social lives through gangs remain invisible. We must presume that there is no social life in places where sexism must be tempered, such as in unisex salons; that no normative order develops in chain restaurants and professional service facilities; that no networks

rooted in kinship, residential proximity, religious commitment, or legitimate occupational experience contribute to neighborhood life.

A third organizing principle produces 10 chapters in five pairings. The first shows social life in a type of setting (e.g., hair salons, markets, public housing), the second, how disintegrating forces are countered. Had the book focused on stability and change in the selected local institutions, the analysis could have fit what was observed. But even this potential is hidden under multiple veils.

Invoking the ethics ethos, Sánchez-Jankowski will not identify the neighborhoods, despite the fact that what he represents is 10 to 20 years old and that in each neighborhood there are thousands of people and dozens of sites similar to those described. Pseudonyms are used; places are characterized, not described physically; and the book is based on fleeting talk by people typically glimpsed in the text only once. This is not a study with recurrent characters, visible landscapes, or biographical description. It is not clear why there is an ethical need to mask place; indeed, Sánchez-Jankowski writes that he offered residents the opportunity to identify themselves in the text (p. 362), an offer that, if taken up, would risk identifying place and others. A lack of transparency matters. City neighborhoods, poor and nonpoor, have been rapidly changing over the plausible historical reach of this book, which is the last 20–45 years. We cannot investigate whether poverty in these places has remained constant in structure and size, much less the extent to which these neighborhoods have trapped generations or been temporary staging grounds for changing lives. The presumption of pathos depends critically on the answer.

Sánchez-Jankowski systematically documents where he was when he overheard each bit of quoted talk but does not analyze the social character of what he has heard. Eavesdropping can be a firm base for analyzing the situational presentation of self, but Sánchez-Jankowski treats overheard talk as a transparent window onto the cause of the most profound biographical transformations. For example, while walking behind two people, he overhears a 16-year-old explaining that she is expecting because, she and her boyfriend having no money to go to a movie, they just hung out. Now he knows why she got pregnant (pp. 63–64).

The saving grace of ethnographies that fail to substantiate the author's intended analysis is their ability to archive firsthand descriptions of social life. Sánchez-Jankowski presents dialogue without marks that distinguish quotations from paraphrase. Assuring us that his renditions are "98% verbatim" (p. 17), he makes no separation between contemporaneous notes and subsequent reconstructions. In others' hands these data risk toxicity.

Ethnographers should reflect carefully on the costs of invoking supposed ethical gains from concealing place. If we want to engage public audiences, we should anticipate that the source and quality of our evidence must be subject to audit. On this count, no real problem: the concluding "policy" section is vacuous.