

## Part I

### Encountering the stranger

#### 1 Recognising strangers

I turn around as you pass me. You are a stranger. I have not seen you before. No, perhaps I have. You are very familiar. You shuffle along the foot path, head down, a grey mac shimmering around your feet. You look dirty. There are scars and marks on your hands. You don't return my stare. I think I can smell you as you pass. I think I can hear you muttering. I know you already. And I hold myself together and breathe a sigh of relief as you turn the corner. I want you not to be in my face. I cast you aside with a triumph of one who knows this street. It is not the street where you live.

How do you recognise a stranger? To ask such a question, is to challenge the assumption that the stranger is the one we simply fail to recognise, that the stranger is simply *any-body* whom we do not know. It is to suggest that the stranger is *some-body* whom we have *already recognised* in the very moment in which they are 'seen' or 'faced' as a stranger. The figure of the stranger is far from simply being strange; it is a figure that is painfully familiar in that very strange(r)ness.<sup>1</sup> The stranger has already come too close; the stranger is 'in my face'. The stranger then is not simply the one whom we have not yet encountered, but the one whom we have already encountered, or already faced. The stranger comes to be faced as a form of recognition: we recognise somebody *as a stranger*, rather than simply failing to recognise them.

How does this recognition take place? How can we tell the difference between strangers and other others? In this chapter, I will argue that there are techniques that allow us to differentiate between those who are strangers and those who belong in a given space (such as neighbours or fellow inhabitants). Such techniques involve ways of reading the bodies of others we come to face. Strangers are not simply those who are not known in this dwelling, but those who are, in their very proximity, *already recognised as not belonging*, as being out of place. Such a recognition of those who are out of place allows both the demarcation and enforcement of the boundaries of 'this place', as where 'we' dwell. The enforcement of boundaries requires that some-body — here locatable in the dirty figure of the stranger — has already crossed the line, has already come too close: in Alfred Schutz's terms, the stranger is always approaching (1944: 499). The recognition of strangers is a means by which inhabitable or bounded spaces are produced ('this street'), not simply as the place or locality of residence, but as the very living form of a community.

In this chapter, I analyse how the discourse of stranger danger produces the stranger as a figure — a shape that appears to have linguistic and bodily integrity — which comes then to embody that which must be expelled from the purified space of the community, the purified life of the good citizen, and the purified body of 'the child'. Such an approach to 'the stranger' considers how encounters between others involve the production and over-representation of the stranger as a figure of the unknowable. That is, such encounters allow the stranger to appear, to take form, *by recuperating all that is unknowable into a figure that we imagine we might face here, now, in the street.*

#### On recognition

To recognise means: to know again, to acknowledge and to admit. How do we know the stranger *again*? The recognisability of strangers is determinate in the social demarcation of spaces of belonging: the stranger is 'known again' as that which has already contaminated such spaces as a threat to both property and person: 'many residents are concerned about the strangers with whom they must share the public space, including wandering homeless people, aggressive beggars,

muggers, anonymous black youths, and drug addicts' (Anderson 1990: 238). Recognising strangers is here embedded in a discourse of survival: it is a question of how to survive the proximity of strangers who are already figurable, *who have already taken shape*, in the everyday encounters we have with others.

A consideration of the production of the stranger's figure through modes of recognition requires that we begin with an analysis of the function of local encounters in public life. As Erving Goffman suggests, 'public life' refers to the realm of activity generated by face-to-face interactions that are organised by norms of co-mingling (1972: ix). Such an approach does not take for granted the realm of the public as a physical space that is already determined, but considers how 'the public' comes to be lived through local encounters, through the very gestures and habits of meeting up with others. How do such meetings, such face-to-face encounters, involve modes of recognition that produce the stranger as a figure?

Louis Althusser's thesis of subjectivity as determined through acts of misrecognition evokes the function of public life. Althusser writes:

ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'

(1971: 162–163)

All individuals are transformed into subjects through the ideological function of interpellation, which is imagined as a commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing. The recognition of the other as 'you there' is a misrecognition which produces the 'you' as a subject, and as subject to the very law implicated in recognition (the subject is suspect in such encounters). Althusser's thesis is clearly to be understood as a universal theory of how subjects come into being as such. However, we might note the following. First, the constitution of the subject through hailing implies that subjectivity is predicated upon an elided 'inter-subjectivity' (see Ahmed 1998a: 143). Second, the function of the act of hailing an-other, 'hey you', opens out the possibility *that subjects become differentiated at the very same moment that they are constituted as such*. If we think of the constitution of subjects as implicated in the uncertainties of public life, then we could imagine how such differentiation might work: the address of the policeman shifts according to whether individuals are already recognisable as, 'wandering homeless people, aggressive beggars, muggers, anonymous black youths, and drug addicts' (Anderson 1990: 238). Hailing as a form of recognition which constitutes the subject it recognises (= misrecognition) might function to differentiate between subjects, for example, by hailing differently those who seem to belong and those who might already be assigned a place — out of place — as 'suspect'.

Such an over-reading of Althusser's dramatisation of interpellation through commonplace hailing suggests that the subject is not simply constituted in the present as such. Rather, inter-subjective encounters in public life continually reinterpellate subjects into differentiated economies of names and signs, where they are assigned different value in social spaces. Noticeably, the use of the narrative of the police hailing associates the constitution of subjects with their subjection to a discourse of criminality, which defines the one who is hailed as a threat to property ('Hey, you there'). If we consider how hailing constitutes the subject, then we can also think about how hailing constitutes the stranger in a relationship precisely to the Law of the subject (the stranger is constituted as the unlawful entry into the nation space, the stranger hence allows Law to mark out its terrain). To this extent, the act of hailing or recognising some-body as a stranger serves to constitute the lawful subject, the one who has the right to dwell, and the stranger at the very same

time. It is not that the 'you' is or can be simply a stranger, but that to address some-body as a stranger constitutes the 'you' as the stranger in relation to the one who dwells (the friend and neighbour). In this sense, the (mis)recognition of strangers serves to differentiate between the familiar and the strange, a differentiation that allows the figure of the stranger to appear. The failure embedded in such misrecognition — rather than the failure of recognition — determines the impossibility of reducing the other to the figure of the stranger: as I will argue in Chapter 2, the singularity of the figure conceals the different histories of lived embodiment which mark some bodies as stranger than others.

By analysing recognition in this way, I am suggesting that the (lawful) subject is not simply constituted by being recognised by the other, which is the primary post-Hegelian model of recognition (see Taylor 1994). Rather, I am suggesting that it is the recognition of others that is central to the constitution of the subject. The very act through which the subject differentiates between others is the moment that the subject comes to inhabit or dwell in the world. The subject is not, then, argues, 'with the delimitation of any place of dwelling, the constitution of a people, a nation, a state, or a democracy necessarily specifies who is estranged from that identity, place or regime' (1999: 119; emphasis added).

This recognition operates as *a visual economy*: it involves ways of seeing the difference between familiar and strange others as they are (re)presented to the subject. As a mode of subject constitution, recognition involves differentiating between others on the basis of how they 'appear'.<sup>2</sup>

Given the way in which the recognition of strangers operates to produce who 'we' are, we can see that strangers already 'fit' within the 'cognitive, moral or aesthetic map of the world', rather than being, as Zygmunt Bauman argues, 'the people who do not fit' (1997: 46). There are established ways of dealing with 'the strangers' who are already encountered and recognised in public life. The recognisability of strangers involves, not only techniques for differentiating strange from familiar (ways of seeing), but also ways of living: there are, in Alfred Schutz's terms, 'standardized situations' in which we might encounter strangers and which allow us to negotiate our way past them (1944: 499). Goffman's work on bodily stigma, for example, attends to how the bodies of others that are marked as different, such as disabled bodies, are read in ways which allow the subject to keep their distance (1984: 12). Social encounters involve rules and procedures for 'dealing with' the bodies that are read as strange (Morris 1996: 72–74).

Encounters between embodied others hence involve *spatial negotiations* with those who are already recognised as either familiar or strange. For Schutz, the stranger is always approaching — coming closer to those who are at home (1944: 499). In the sociological analysis of strangers offered by Simmel, the stranger is understood, paradoxically, as both near and far (1991: 146). In the next section, I consider how the determination of social space and imagined forms of belonging takes place through the differentiation between strangers and neighbours in relationships of proximity and distance.

### **Neighbourhoods and dwelling**

How do you recognise who is a stranger in your neighbourhood? To rephrase my original question in this way is to point to the relation between the recognition of strangers and one's habitat or dwelling: others are recognised as strangers by those who inhabit a given space, who 'make it' their own. As Michael Dillon argues, 'with the delimitation of any place of dwelling, the constitution of a people, a nation, a state, or a democracy necessarily specifies who is estranged from that identity, place or regime' (1999: 119; emphasis added). At one level, this seems to suggest the relativisability of the condition of strangers: any-one can be a stranger if they leave home (the house, the neighbourhood, the region, the nation). However, in this section I want to argue that forms of

dwelling cannot be equated in order to allow such a relativisation. Some homes and neighbourhoods are privileged such that they define the terrain of the inhabitable world. The recognition of strangers brings into play relations of social and political antagonism that *mark some others as stranger than other others*.

How do neighbourhoods become imagined? In the work of Howard Hallman, neighbourhoods are understood as arising from the 'natural human trait' of being neighbourly, which combines a concern with others and a concern for self (1984: 11). According to Hallman, the neighbourhood is an organic community that grows, 'naturally wherever people live close to one another' (1984: 11). It is both a limited territory — a physical space with clear boundaries — and a social community where 'residents do things together' (1984: 13). The simple fact of living nearby gives neighbours a common social bond. However, according to Hallman, some neighbourhoods are closer and hence better than others. He argues that neighbourhoods are more likely to be successful as communities when people live near 'like people': 'people with similarities tend to achieve closer neighbour relationships' (1984: 24). Hallman defines a close neighbourhood through an analogy with a healthy body, 'with wounds healed, illness cured, and wellness maintained' (1984: 256).

The analogy between the ideal neighbourhood and a healthy body serves to define the ideal neighbourhood as fully integrated, homogeneous, and sealed: it is like a body that is fully contained by the skin (see Chapter 2). This implies that a good or healthy neighbourhood does not leak outside itself, and hence does not let outsiders (or foreign agents/viruses) in. The model of the neighbourhood as an organic community — where a sense of community arises from the simple fact of shared residence — defines social health in terms of the production of purified spaces and the expulsion of difference through ways of living together. Matthew Crenson's consideration of neighbourhood politics hence concludes, 'social homogeneity and solidarity ... may contribute to the defensive capabilities of neighbourhoods, and in fact it may take an external attack upon some of these homogenous neighbourhoods to activate the latent sense of fellow feeling along local residents' (1983: 257). Likewise, David Morris and Karl Hess describe neighbourhoods as protective and defensive, like 'tiny underdeveloped nations' (1975: 16).

Neighbourhoods become imagined as organic and pure spaces through the social perception of the danger posed by outsiders to moral and social health or well-being. So although neighbourhoods have been represented as organic and pure communities, there is also an assumption that those communities will fail (to be). A failed community is hence one which has weak or negative connections: where neighbours appear as if they are strangers to each other. The neighbour who is also a stranger — who only passes as a neighbour — is hence the danger that may always threaten the community from within. As David Sibley argues, 'the resistance to a different sort of person moving into a neighbourhood stems from feelings of anxiety, nervousness or fear. Who is felt to belong and not to belong contributes to an important way of shaping social space' (1995: 3). However, the failure of the community should not just be understood in terms of failed communities. *It is the very potential of the community to fail which is required for the constitution of the community*. It is the enforcement of the boundaries between those who are already recognised as out of place (even other fellow residents) that allows those boundaries to be established. The 'ideal' community has to be worked towards and that labour *requires* failure as its moment of constitution (to this extent, then, the organic community is a fantasy that requires its own negation).

It is symptomatic then of the very nature of neighbourhood that it enters public discourse as a site of *crisis*: it is only by attending to the trauma of neighbourhoods which fail that the ideal of the healthy neighbourhood can be maintained as a possibility (which is then, endlessly deferred as 'the real', as well as endlessly kept in place as 'the ideal', by that very language of crisis).

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The enforcement of the boundaries which allow neighbourhoods to be imagined as pure and organic spaces can be understood as central to neighbourhood watch schemes. Such schemes began in the United States in the 1970s, and in the United Kingdom in 1982. The National Neighbourhood Watch Association in the United Kingdom (NNWA) describes it as, 'the best known and most effective example of the police and community working together in partnership to prevent crime, build safer communities and improve quality of life'. In the United Kingdom, there are currently over 161,000 schemes and over 10 million people involved. Neighbourhood Watch brings together the creation of an ideal community as one 'which cares' and the production of safer spaces through the discourse of 'crime prevention'. Its main motto is, 'Crime cannot survive in a community that cares — Neighbourhood Watch works'. In other words, crime only exists when communities fail, when communities do not care. Marginalised or under-valued spaces where there is a high rate of crime against property are hence immediately understood in terms of a *failure to care*.

In other words, crime only exists when communities fail, when communities do not care. Marginalised or under-valued spaces where there is a high rate of crime against property are hence immediately understood in terms of a failure to care. Neighbourhood Watch schemes are more common in middle-class areas, where residents are more likely to want to co-operate with the police, and where there is more 'property' with value to protect (Hill 1994: 150). The value attached to certain spaces of belonging is enforced or 'watched' through schemes that allow middle-class spaces to become valued: the subject who watches out for crime, is also *maintaining the value of her or his neighbourhood*. The link here between value of spaces, the protection of property, and the maintenance of social privilege helps us to theorise how the defence of social boundaries against unwelcome intrusions and intruders produces certain categories of strangers — those who don't belong in the leafy suburbs — that are socially legitimated and enforced. In Elijah Anderson's work, there is a discussion of how the concern with safety amongst residents means that, 'they join their diverse counterparts in local struggles to fight crime and otherwise preserve the ideal character for the neighbourhood, forming town watches and shoring up municipal codes that might discourage undesirables and encourage others more to their liking' (1990: 4). The production of safe spaces that have value or 'ideal character' involves the expulsion of unlike and undesirable 'characters'. In Anderson's work, these characters have already materialised or taken the form of, 'wandering homeless people, aggressive beggars, muggers, anonymous black youths, and drug addicts' (1990: 238).

[...]

the 'suspicious person' and 'the stranger' are intimately linked: they are both emptied of any content, or any direct relationship to a referent, precisely as they are tied to a (missing) history of seeing and hearing others: *they are both already seen and heard as 'the uncommon' which allows 'the common' to take its shape*. The failure to name those who inhabit the signifier 'suspicious' hence produces the figure of the unspecified stranger, a figure that is required by the making or sensing of 'the common', of what 'we' are, as a form of distinction or value (property).

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### **Stranger danger**

If the construction and enforcement of purified spaces of belonging takes place through the production of the figures of the good citizen, the vulnerable body and the loitering stranger, then how is this linked to the social perception of danger? In this section, I examine the discourse of stranger danger as a way of analysing how strangers are already recognised as posing danger to

property and person, not just in particular valued dwellings and neighbourhoods, but also in public life as such. I want to consider, not only how the construction of stranger danger is tied to valued and devalued spaces, but also how strangers are read as posing danger *wherever* they are: the projection of danger onto the figure of the stranger allows the definition of the subject-at-home, and home as inhabitable space, as inherently safe and valuable. One *knows again* those whom one does not know by assuming they are the *origin* of danger.

Partly, this concern with public life involves a consideration of urban space and cities as 'a world of strangers' (Lofland 1973).

Lofland suggests that cities, in particular public spaces within cities (such as streets and leisure spaces), involve perpetual encounters between people who are not personally known to each other, although they may be known through forms of visual identification and recognition (1973: 15–16). As a result, he argues that cities involve particular kinds of social and spatial encounters. I would not want to refute the premise that there are different kinds of spaces that involve different kinds of encounters between others (such as urban and rural spaces, or such as different forms of the public within urban spaces). However, Lofland's account does involve a form of spatial determinism — these spaces determine these encounters between others — which shifts quickly into a form of cultural determinism — cultures have different spaces and therefore involve different encounters between others. What I am interested in is how the very encounters that take place between others involve the forming of both cultural and spatial boundaries: that is, how the (mis)recognition of others as strangers is what allows the demarcation of given spaces within 'the public domain', but also the legitimation of certain forms of mobility or movement within the public, and the delegitimation of others.

I am positing here a relationship between dwelling and movement: spaces are claimed, or 'owned' not so much by inhabiting what is already there, but by moving within, or passing through, different spaces which are only given value as places (with boundaries) through the movement or 'passing through' itself. The relationship between movement, occupation and ownership is well documented in feminist work: for example, women's restricted movement within public spaces is a result, not only of the fear of crime, but of the regulation of femininity, in which 'being seen' in certain spaces becomes a sign of irresponsibility (Stanko 1997: 489). Women's movements are regulated by a desire for 'safe-keeping': respectability becomes measured by the visible signs of a desire to 'stay safe'. In this sense, movement becomes a form of subject constitution: *where* 'one' goes or does not go determines *what* one 'is', or where one is seen to be, determines what one is seen to be.

Elijah Anderson's work on how communities are established through the concern with safety examines how the fear of crime becomes a fear of strangers. Such a fear produces a way of inhabiting the world, as well as moving through it. He writes, 'Many worry about a figure lurking in the shadows, hiding in a doorway or behind a clump of bushes, ready to pounce on the unsuspecting victim' (Anderson 1990: 5). The danger posed by the stranger is imagined as partly concealed: the stranger always lurks in dark spaces. While the victim is unsuspecting, the safe subject must be suspecting: the safe subject suspects that the suspect is around the corner, always hidden to the gaze, to the watchful eye. The danger of the stranger is hence always there in the imagined future of the subject who is safely at home, the stranger is always lurking as the threat of that-which-might-yet-be. Safety hence requires that the subject must become familiar with the terrain: the safe subject must become 'street wise' and 'alive to dangerous situations' (Anderson 1990: 6). Certain lives become liveable as both safe and valuable insofar as they are *alive* to the danger of strangers.

The discourse of personal safety is not about the production of safe and purified spaces from which strangers are expelled (such as 'the home'), but also defines ways of moving through spaces that are already dangerous given the possibility that strangers are close by, waiting in the shadows of the streets (where good citizens walk only with purpose, living their legitimated lives). The possibility of personal safety for mobile subjects hence requires 'collective definitions' of that which is 'safe, harmless, trustworthy' and that which is 'bad, dangerous and hostile' (Anderson 1990: 216). Such collective definitions provide the subject with the knowledge required to move within the world, allowing the subject to differentiate between familiar and strange, safe and dangerous, as well as to differentiate between different kinds of strangers ('characters').

Clearly, discourses of personal safety involve forms of self-governance that differentiate between subjects. As much feminist research has suggested, safety for women is often constructed in terms of not entering public spaces, or staying within the home (see Stanko 1990). Safety for men also involves forms of self-governance, not in terms of refusing to enter the public space, but in terms of *how* one enters that space. So at one level, the discourse of personal safety presumes a vulnerable citizen who is gendered as feminine, at another level, it legislates for a form of mobile and masculine subjectivity that is not only a safe form of subjectivity, but also one that is heroic. Such a mobile subject, who can 'avoid' the danger of strangers in public spaces is constructed as 'street wise'. This subject's mobility is legitimated as a form of dwelling: first, in relation to the vulnerable bodies that stay within the home; and second, in relation to the strangers whose passing through public spaces is delegitimated as the 'origin' of danger (the movement of strangers is hence not a form of dwelling; it does not lead to the legitimated occupation of space).

The knowledges embedded in street wisdom are linked by Anderson to a kind of 'field research' (Anderson 1990: 216). The wise subject, the one who knows where and where not to walk, how and how not to move, who and who not to talk to, has an expertise that can be understood as both *bodily and cultural capital*. It is such wise subjects who will prevail in a world of strangers and dangers: 'To prevail means simply to get safely to one's destination, and the ones who are most successful are those who are "streetwise"' (Anderson 1990: 231). In this sense, the discourse of stranger danger involves techniques of knowledge that allow wise subjects to prevail: to arrive at their destination, to leave and return home and still maintain a safe distance between themselves and dangerous strangers. Community is not just established through the designation of pure and safe spaces, but becomes established *as a way of moving through space*. Becoming street wise defines the subject in terms of the collective: the wise subject has collective knowledge about what is, 'safe, harmless, trustworthy' and what is 'bad, dangerous and hostile' that gives that subject the ability to move safely in a world of strangers and dangers. The stranger is here produced as a figure of danger that grants the wise subject and community, those who already claim both knowledge and capital, the ability to prevail.

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The projection of danger onto the figure of the stranger allows violence to be figured as exceptional and extraordinary — as coming from outside the protective walls of the home, family, community or nation. As a result, the discourse of stranger danger involves *a refusal to recognise how violence is structured by, and legitimated through, the formation of home and community as such*.

The stranger is here figured as the violent monster whose elimination would mean safety for women and children. Such a figuration allows the home to be imagined as a safe haven: an imagining that cannot deal with the violence that is instituted through the social relations within the home. As Merry argues, 'Violence at the hand of the stranger is usually perceived as dangerous, but an assault in the context of a fight with a known enemy or neighbour is rarely viewed in this way' (Merry 1981:

14). The notion of violence as domestic, while now recognised through Law as a result of years of feminist campaigning, remains a difficult one for the social imaginary: the violent husband is then read as a monster underneath, as a stranger passing as husband, rather than as a husband exercising the power that is already legitimated through hegemonic forms of masculinity. According to stranger danger discourse, the stranger husband has intruded into the ideal home: he is not understood as an element *in the ordinary production of domestic space*, and in the formation of relations of power and exchange within that space.

The ultimate violent strangers are hence figured as immigrants: they are the outsiders in the nation space whose 'behaviour seems unpredictable and beyond control' (Merry 1981: 125). Cultural difference becomes the text upon which the fear of crime is written: 'cultural difference exacerbates feelings of danger. Encounters with culturally alien people are defined by anxiety and uncertainty, which inhibits social interaction and reinforces social boundaries' (Merry 1981: 125). The projection of danger onto that which is already recognisable as different — as different from the familiar space of home and homeland — hence allows violence to take place: it becomes a mechanism for the enforcement of boundary lines that almost secure the home-nation as safe haven. On the one hand, the fear of crime embedded in the discourse of stranger danger allows the protection of domestic, social and national space from the outsider inside, the stranger neighbour, by projecting danger onto the outsider. On the other hand, the stranger only appears as a figure of danger by coming too close to home: the boundary line is always crossed, both 'justifying' the fear and legitimating the enforcement. In doing so, the discourse of stranger danger, not only allows the abdication of any social and political responsibility for the violence that takes place within legitimated spaces, and which is sanctioned through Law, but also becomes a mechanism for the justification of acts of violence against those who are already recognised as strangers.

In this chapter, I have examined how 'the stranger' is produced as a figure precisely by being associated with a danger to the purified space of the community, the purified life of the good citizen, and the purified body of 'the child'. Rather than assuming that the stranger is any-body we don't recognise, I have argued that strangers are those that are already recognised through techniques for differentiating between the familiar and strange in discourses such as Neighbourhood Watch and crime prevention. The 'knowing again' of strangers defines the stranger as a danger to both moral health and well-being. The knowing again of strangers as the danger of the unknown is a means by which the 'we' of the community is established, enforced and legitimated.

Ahmed, Sara, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. New York, Routledge, 2000, pp. 21-37.