

PART I

Encountering the stranger

2 Embodying strangers

The AA subway train to Harlem. I clutch my mother's sleeve, her arms full of shopping bags, christmas-heavy. The wet smell of winter clothes, the train's lurching. My mother spots an almost seat, pushes my little snowsuited body down. On one side of me a man reading a paper. On the other, a woman in a fur hat staring at me. Her mouth twitches as she stares and then her gaze drops down, pulling mine with it. Her leather-gloved hand plucks at the line where my new blue snowpants and her sleek fur coat meet. She jerks her coat close to her. I look. I do not see whatever terrible thing she is seeing on the seat between us — probably a roach. But she has communicated her horror to me. It must be something very bad from the way she's looking, so I pull my snowsuit closer to me away from it, too. When I look up the woman is still staring at me, her nose holes and eyes huge. And suddenly I realise there is nothing crawling up the seat between us; it is me she doesn't want her coat to touch. The fur brushes my face as she stands with a shudder and holds on to a strap in the speeding train. Born and bred a New York City child, I quickly slide over to make room for my mother to sit down. No word has been spoken. I'm afraid to say anything to my mother because I don't know what I have done. I look at the side of my snow pants secretly. Is there something on them? Something's going on here I do not understand, but I will never forget it. Her eyes. The flared nostrils. The hate.

(Lorde 1984: 147–148)

How do strange encounters, encounters in which some-thing that cannot be named is passed between subjects, serve to embody the subject? How do encounters with the one whom we already recognise as a stranger take place at the level of the body? To what extent do strange encounters involve, not just reading the stranger's body, but defining the contours or boundaries of the body-at-home, through the very gestures that enable a withdrawal from the stranger's co-presence in a given social space?

In the above encounter, recalled as memory, Audre Lorde ends with 'the hate'. It is an encounter in which some-thing has passed, but something she fails to understand. What passes is hence not spoken; it is not a transparent form of communication. The sense that some-thing is wrong is communicated, not through words, or even sounds that are voiced, but through the body of another, 'her nose holes and eyes huge'. What is the woman's body saying? How do we read her body? The woman's bodily gestures express her hate, her fear, her disgust. The strange encounter is played out on the body, and is played out *with* the emotions.

This bodily encounter, while ending with 'the hate', also ends with the reconstitution of bodily space. The bodies that come together, that almost touch and co-mingle, slide away from each other, becoming relived in their apartness. The particular bodies that move apart allow the redefinition of social as well as bodily integrity: black bodies are expelled from the white social body despite the threat of further discomfort (the woman now must stand in order that she can keep her place, that is, in order to keep Audre at a distance). The emotion of 'hate' aligns the particular white body with the bodily form of the community — such an emotion functions to substantiate the threat of invasion and contamination in the dirty bodies of strangers. The gestures that allow the white body to withdraw from the stranger's body hence reduce that body to dirt, to 'matter out of place' (Douglas 1996: 36), such that the stranger becomes recognised *as the body out of place*. Through such strange encounters, bodies are both de-formed and re-formed, they take form through and against other bodily forms.

Does Audre's narrative of the encounter involve her self-designation as the body out of place? Certainly, her perception of the cause of the woman's bodily gestures is a misperception that creates

an object. The object — the roach — comes to stand for, or stand in for, the cause of 'the hate'. The roach crawls up between them; the roach, as the carrier of dirt, divides the two bodies, forcing them to move apart. Audre pulls her snowsuit, 'away from it too'. But the 'it' that divides them is not the roach. Audre comes to realise that, 'it is me she doesn't want her coat to touch'. What the woman's clothes must not touch is not a roach that crawls between them, but Audre herself. Audre becomes the 'it' that stands between the possibility of their clothes touching. She becomes the roach — the impossible and phobic object — that threatens to crawl from one to the other: 'I don't know what I have done. I look at the side of my snow pants secretly. Is there something on them?' The stranger's lived embodiment hesitates on the question, 'am I the roach?' or, 'am I the dirt that forces me away?'

In this chapter, I will address the role of such 'eye-to-eye' (Lorde 1984) or 'skin-to-skin' encounters in the formation of bodily and social space. As I argued in the introduction to this book, the word 'encounter' suggests a meeting, but a meeting which involves surprise. How does embodiment take shape through encounters with others that surprise, that both establish and shift the boundaries of the familiar, of what is already recognisable or known? By opening with a scene from Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider*, I have already pointed to how 'the encounter' is mediated through a range of different kinds of texts or, more precisely, different forms of writing. In *Sister Outsider*, Lorde uses the poetics of remembering to dramatise the operation of racism on her body, in the violence of its particularity. At the same time, we must remind ourselves as readers, that the recalled encounter between herself and another is written, and that it functions as an aspect of an argument within a text that shifts between academic, personal and political modes of address. The encounter is lived and written, but it fails to be an event, or even a text, that is simply in the present. The encounter is already recalled and relived in the metonymic slide between different encounters: not only do we have the (re)narrativised encounter between Audre and the white woman, but also we have encounters between Audre's past and present self, between an apparently intimate self and a public life, between the writer and her subject, and between the reader (myself as reader) and the text.

A concern with strange encounters involves a concern with the dialogical production of different bodies and texts. While Audre Lorde's text allows me to address what is at stake in such strange encounters — to dramatise that there is always *some-body* at stake — it does not provide the only means by which I ask the impossible question, 'what about the stranger's body?' The ethics of my own encounter with *Sister Outsider* demands a more responsible reading, a reading which admits to its limits, its partiality and its fragility. I hence do not use the text as an example that simply holds my argument together, as the object of my writing. I move towards and away from her text, *only ever sliding across it*: my encounter with this text allows me to re-encounter different kinds of bodies and texts. Quite clearly, I am touched by Audre Lorde's story — 'being touched' is a way of understanding how encounters always involve, not only a meeting of bodies, but between bodies and texts (the face to face of intimate readings), in which the subject is moved from her place (see Chapter 7).

My concern with the embodied nature of strange encounters requires that we first ask the question, 'what is the body?' I will argue that there is no body as such that is given in the world: bodies materialise in a complex set of temporal and spatial relations to other bodies, including bodies that are recognised as familiar, familial and friendly, and those that are considered strange. My argument will challenge some psychoanalytical and feminist approaches to embodiment by thinking through the function of cultural difference and social antagonism in marking out the boundaries of bodies.

Bodys

Within feminist theory, 'bodies' certainly have become a privileged focus of attention. Partly, this attention can be explained by the feminist recognition that women's marginalisation from philosophical discourses and the public sphere has been produced through the association between

masculinity and reason and femininity and the body. The feminist concern with revaluing the body, and undermining such mind/body dualism, has led to an acknowledgment that bodies are not simply given (as 'nature'), that bodies are differentiated, and that subjectivity and identity cannot be separated from specific forms of embodiment (Bordo 1993). A philosophy that refuses to privilege mind over body, and that assumes that the body cannot be transcended as such, is a philosophy which emphasises contingency, locatedness, the irreducibility of difference, and the worldliness of being. However, despite many appeals to the differentiated body within feminist philosophy, I think there has been less substantive analysis of how 'bodies' come to be lived through being differentiated from other bodies, whereby differences in 'other bodies' already mark 'the body' as such.

Indeed, Kathryn Bond Stockton has argued that 'the body' has achieved an onto-theological status in feminist theory (1994). She suggests that the assumption that 'the body' is already determined, partly in the sense that it is already gendered, reflects an epistemic reliance on the body as in some way prior to, or at least irreducible to, the contingency of linguistic and social relations [...]

The appeal to the body as already determined and as differentiated in terms of gender and sexuality, and also race and class, does not always involve in practice an analysis of the particularity of bodies or of subjectivity in general. I admit that it is easy simply to point out that *appeals* to difference do not always involve an *analysis* of difference (those moments where, often in brackets, a theorist will add — and also, race, class, disability etc.). But the appeal to the differentiated body as a rhetorical ploy that does not operate beyond that level has structural implications for the bodies that are discussed and reinscribed in feminist discourse. For example, in Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies*, there is little mention of the racialised nature of the multiple and differentiated bodies she dedicates her text to, except in the following quote:

The more or less permanent etching of even the civilised body by discursive systems is perhaps easier to read if the civilized body is decontextualised, stripped of clothing and adornment, behaviourally displayed in its nakedness. The naked European/American/African/Asian/Australian body (and clearly even within these categories there is enormous cultural variation) is still marked by its disciplinary history, by its habitual practices of movement, by the corporeal commitments it has undertaken in day-to-day life. It is in no sense a natural body, for it is as culturally, racially, sexually, possibly even as class distinctive, as it would be clothed.

(Grosz 1994: 142)

Here, Grosz introduces race as a signifier of difference ('European/American/African/Asian/Australian') in order to illustrate her point that there is no natural or indeed real body, that the body is always clothed, that is, always inscribed within particular cultural formations. Race becomes a means by which Grosz illustrates a philosophical shift in thinking about bodies. It appears then (and also disappears) as a *figure* for the differentiated body. In this sense, race is made present only through an act of negation: it is included as a vehicle for the re-presentation of a philosophy of difference rather than as a constitutive and positive term of analysis. This metaphoric reliance on race to signify the differentiated body has quite clear theoretical and political implications. It means that a philosophy of the differentiated body — a philosophy of difference — does not necessarily involve, in practice, a recognition of the violent collision between regimes of difference. A philosophy of difference can involve a universalism; a speaking from the place of (for example) the white subject, who reincorporates difference as a sign of its own fractured and multiple coming-into-being.

In order to avoid reading the differentiated body through the figure of race, we need to think through the questions: How do 'bodies' become marked by differences? How do bodies come to be lived precisely through being differentiated from other bodies, whereby the differences in other bodies

make a difference to such lived embodiment? Such questions require that we consider how the very materialisation of bodies in time and space involves techniques and practices of differentiation. To differentiate between the familiar and the strange is to mark out the inside and outside of bodily space (to establish the skin as a boundary line). What is required is, not only an analysis of body images or representations of bodily difference, but also an analysis of how bodily habits and gestures serve to constitute bodily matter and form. Judith Butler's consideration of 'bodies that matter' defines 'materialisation', as the production of an 'effect of boundary, fixity and surface' (1993: 9). To examine the function of cultural difference and social antagonism in the constitution of bodily matters is not to read differences on the surface of the body (the body as text), but to account for the very effect of the surface, and to account for how bodies come to take certain shapes over others, and in relation to others.

At one level, psychoanalysis seems to provide us with such a model of embodiment. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, for example, the child's accession into the realm of subjectivity takes place through the process of assuming a body image. In 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I', the child sees itself in the mirror, and misrecognises the image as itself. This act, 'rebounds in the case of the child in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment — the child's own body, and the persons and things' (Lacan 1977: 1). This play with an image structures the relation of the child to its body and to others, in the form of an identification, that is, in 'the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image' (Lacan 1977: 2). These processes of identification provide the child with an 'imaginary anatomy'. Lacan's approach allows us to consider how the form of bodies is not given or pre-determined, but involves a temporal and spatial process of misrecognition and projection, whereby the body becomes distinguished from others (the marking out of an inside and outside). The body materialises — takes shape and form — through phantasy (flesh and image are here mutually implicated).

Frantz Fanon takes up the Lacanian model of the mirror stage in an interesting footnote in *Black Skin, White Masks*. He suggests that there is a racialised dynamic to the assumption of the body image: 'When one has grasped the mechanism described by Lacan, one can have no further doubt that the real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the black man. And conversely. Only for the white man The Other is perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as not-self—that is, the unidentifiable, the unassimilable' (Fanon 1975: 114). Fanon is clearly using the Lacanian theory as a general theory of the psychic mechanisms which institute subjectivity, which he then redefines as already racialised. That is, the encounter through which the subject assumes a body image and comes to be distinguishable from the Other is a racial encounter. The theory of identification which is articulated by Lacan as a *general* theory of the subject (he writes that the 'drama' of the mirror stage will 'mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development' (1977: 4)) is immediately differentiated and divided. The relation of the 'I' to the 'not-I' is determined, not simply by the psychic processes of misrecognition and projection, but by the racialising of the ego (white) in relation to the materiality of other bodies (black).

Lacan's theory defines both the subject and its other in terms of the relation between the play of the assumed image and 'the reflected environment' which includes the child's own body, 'persons and things' (1977: 1). The dialectic of self-othering defined here is abstract: the other is simply that which the mirror presents as beyond the spatial form of the child's body image, which is to say, *any-beyond*, to *any-body*. Where Fanon's theory is implicitly challenging the Lacanian model of identification as constituting the subject (and its impossibility) in general, is through the implication that both the embodied subject and the persons and things that are excluded from it are *already* particular and *already* framed and constituted in a broader sociality. The *primary* identification does

not then simply take place as such (that act which, according to Lacan, 'rebounds ... in a series of gestures' (1977: 1)). *When assuming a body image, subjects 'take on' the burden of particular bodily others which both precede them and are reinvented by them.* The imaginary relation of the child's body, persons and things hence already carries traces of social antagonism and conflict which differentiate bodies from each other. Fanon's reworking of Lacan implies that the self—other dynamic cannot be abstracted, as it is contingent on bodily differences that are themselves inflected by histories of particular bodily others.

An analysis of strange encounters as bodily encounters suggests that the marking out of the boundary lines between bodies, through the assumption of a bodily image, involves practices and techniques of differentiation. That is, bodies become differentiated not only *from each other or the other*, but also through differentiating *between others*, who have a different function in establishing the permeability of bodily space. Here, there is no generalisable other that serves to establish the illusion of bodily integrity; rather the body becomes imagined through being related to, and separated from, particular bodily others. Difference is not simply found in the body, but is established as a relation between bodies: *this suggests that the particular body carries traces of the differences that are registered in the bodies of others.*

In the next section of this chapter, I consider how different bodies come to be lived through the establishment of boundaries and contours between the inside and the outside, in which the very habits and gestures of marking out bodily space involve differentiating 'others' into familiar (assimilable, touchable) and strange (unassimilable, untouchable). As I will suggest, such a consideration requires that we begin to think through the skin, rather than taking 'the body' as our point of entry.

Bodies with skins

Why is it necessary to think through the skin in a consideration of how strange encounters take place at the level of the body? If we address the role of skin in marking out bodily spaces, then we can refuse to accept that the contours or boundaries of bodies are given. A consideration of the subject as 'skinned' is not then a question of thinking about bodies as having inherent ends or limits (bodies do not necessarily end at their skins). The skin is not simply invested with meaning as a visual signifier of difference (the skin as coloured, the skin as wrinkled, and so on). It is not simply implicated in the (scopophilic) logic of fetishism where the visual object, the object which can be seen, becomes the scene of the play of differences. The skin is also a border or boundary, supposedly holding or containing the subject within a certain contour, keeping the subject inside, and the other outside; or in Frantz Fanon's terms, the skin becomes *a seal* (1975: 9). But, as a border or a frame, the skin performs that peculiar destabilising logic, calling into question the exclusion of the other from the subject and risking the subject's becoming (or falling into) the other. Hence, Jean-Luc Nancy discusses the skin as an *exposure* to the other, as always passing from one to the other (1994: 30).

The skin may open out a moment of undecidability which is at once a rupture or breakage, where the subject risks its interiority, where it meets and leaks into the world at large. The skin is not simply matter in place, but rather involves a process of materialisation; it is the effect of surface, boundary and fixity (Butler 1993: 9). The skin allows us to consider how boundary-formation, the marking out of the lines of a body, involves an affectivity which already crosses the line. For if the skin is a border, then it is *a border that feels*. In the work of Jennifer Biddle, for example, the skin, 'as the outer covering of the material body', is where the intensity of emotions such as shame are registered (1997: 228). So while the skin appears to be the matter which separates the body, it rather allows us to think of how the materialisation of bodies involves, not containment, but an affective opening out of bodies to other bodies, in the sense that the skin registers how bodies are touched by others. Sue

Cataldi's concern with skin as an 'ambiguous, shifting border' centres on the question of how our skin 'paradoxically protects us from others and exposes us to them. How we touch and how we are touched affects us' (1993: 145). The skin provides a way of thinking about how the boundary between bodies is formed only through being traversed, or called into question, by the affecting of one by an other.

But is there danger that we might fetishise the skin as having a peculiar form and logic of its own, just as 'the body' can become fetishised as the lost object of philosophical discourse? I do not want to suggest here that the skin contains a logic which provides us with the means of rearticulating the relation of self and other *in general*. Rather, I want to think of how the skin, as the border that feels, functions as a mechanism for social differentiation. Take Anthony Smith's description of the skin in *The Body*:

The only unprotected tissue which has the living body on one side and the outside world on the other is the skin. Taken as a whole it is the body's largest organ; it is enormously versatile; it keeps out foreign agents; it keeps in body fluids.

(1974: 482)

Here, 'the skin' marks and polices the difference between inside and outside. It is a boundary that guarantees a separation. Its task is to ward off the danger of the foreigner, to keep out the other, to protect the self from the unruliness of others. Its task is not simply one of policing the outside. Its task is also, at one and the same time, to keep in, that is, to prevent the inside from becoming outside and to prevent the self from becoming other.

This construction of the skin as a mechanism for keeping out foreign agents might suggest a relationship between the individual body and the body-politic. The individual body is *like* the body politic; a mechanism for ensuring the integrity of the body by warding off foreigners. However, we need to question the status of this analogy. What is the relationship between the individual body and the body politic? In Moira Gatens's work, the construction of the body politic is modelled on a particular construction of the human body. The human body appears unmarked, but it is marked by privilege; it is, for example, a white, male, middle-class, heterosexual body. The unmarked body is the body that appears contained, enclosed and separate. We can consider such an unmarked body as a body which is *at-home* or *in-place*. Bodies that are marked as different from the human body, bodies that are (although in different ways) out of place, are hence excluded from the body politic: 'Slaves, foreigners, women, the conquered, children, and the working class, have all been excluded from political participation, at one time or another, by their bodily specificity' (Gatens 1991: 82).

The relationship between the integrity of the 'human body' and the body politic is not best expressed through analogy. Rather, there is a metonymic relation between the apparently unmarked body and the body politic; a relation of proximity or closeness. This suggests that the forming of the boundaries of 'unmarked' bodies — bodies-at-home or bodies-in-place — has an intimate connection to the forming of social space — homeland. The containment of certain bodies in their skin (bodily space) is a mechanism for the containment of social space. We can recall here how the white woman's refusal to touch the black child does not simply *stand for* the expulsion of blackness from white social space, but actually re-forms that social space through re-forming the apartness of the white body. The reforming of bodily and social space involves a process of *making the skin crawl*; the threat posed by strange bodies to bodily and social integrity is registered on the skin.

The metonymic relation between the individual body-at-home — the body that appears not to be marked by difference — and the body politic, suggests an intimate connection between the particular body and sociality, or the imaginary social body. The particular body is often discussed in terms of the body one inhabits, that is, the personal body, or *my* body: 'Perhaps we need a moratorium

on saying “the body”. For it's also possible to abstract the “body”. I see nothing in particular. To write “my body” plunges me into lived experience, particularity. ... To say “the body” lifts me away from what has given me primary perspective’ (Rich 1986: 215). Here, the particular body is the body that I experience as lived, and is defined against any abstract or general notion of ‘the body’. There is an equation here between lived experience, the privatised realm of ‘the my’, and particularity. I would suggest that ‘my body’ is possible in its particularity only through encountering other bodies, ‘your body’, ‘her body’ and so on. In other words, we need an understanding of embodiment as lived experience which moves beyond the privatised realm of ‘my body’. Such an understanding of embodiment can be theorised in terms of *inter-embodiment*, whereby the lived experience of embodiment is always already *the social experience of dwelling with other bodies*. Or, as Gail Weiss puts it, ‘To be embodied is to be capable of being affected by other bodies’ (1999: 162).

Such an approach would appear to borrow heavily from the phenomenological tradition in which ‘this body’ no longer belongs to me, but opens out into a fleshy world of other bodies (Merleau-Ponty 1968; Vasseleu 1998). Merleau-Ponty theorises the fleshiness of such intercorporeality through considering the reversibility of touch:

While each monocular vision, each touching with one sole hand has its own visible, its tactile, each is bound to every other vision, to every other touch; it is bound in such a way as to make up with them the experience of one sole body before one sole world, through a possibility for reversion, reconversion of its language into theirs, transfer and reversal. Now why would this generality, which constitutes the unity of my body, not open it to other bodies? The handshake too is reversible; I can feel myself touched as well and at the same time as touching.

(1968: 142)

Merleau-Ponty suggests that the very experiences that make the body ‘my body’, as if it were a ‘sole body before a sole world’ are the very same experiences that open my body to other bodies, in the simultaneous mutuality of touch and being touched, and seen and being seen. In this sense, ‘my body’ does not belong to me: embodiment is what opens out the intimacy of ‘myself’ with others. The relationship between bodies is characterised by a ‘with’ that precedes, or is the condition of possibility for, the apartness of ‘my body’. This ‘with’ is the fleshiness of the world that inhabits us and is inhabited by us — flesh, not understood simply as matter, but as the very sensibility of the seen, and the very sight of the sensible.

While I find these arguments powerful and suggestive, they remain limited insofar as they remain tied to a general theory of inter-embodiment which transforms ‘my body’ into ‘our body’: ‘*my body* is at once phenomenal body and objective body. ... It is thus, and not as the bearer of a knowing subject, that *our body* commands the visible for us’ (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 136; emphasis added).¹ This curious conjoining of signifiers, ‘our body’, with its plural pronoun and singular noun is suggestive: it suggests that many inhabit, and are inhabited by, the body, as that which exceeds the singularity of ‘me’ yet also includes that me in the sense that it is lived through or as it. Rather than simply pluralising the body (there are many bodies), this approach emphasises *the singular form of the plural*: that is, sociality becomes the fleshy form (body) of many bodily forms (our). However, I want to consider the sociality of such inter-embodiment as the impossibility of any such ‘our’. What I am interested in, then, is not simply how touch opens bodies to other bodies (touchability as exposure, sociality as body) but how, in that very opening, touch differentiates between bodies, a differentiation, which complicates the corporeal generosity that allows us to move easily from ‘my body’ to ‘our body’.

Rosalind Diprose takes from the phenomenological approach, the basis for a theory of corporeal generosity in which bodies ‘borrow’ from other bodies ways of inhabiting the world: ‘the self is produced, maintained and transformed through the socially mediated inter-body transfer of

movements and gestures and body bits and pieces. Just as through the look and the touch of *the other's body*, I feel *my difference*, it is from the same body that I borrow my habits and hence my identity without either body being reducible to the other or to itself' (1996: 258; emphasis added). The relationship that is posited here, as the basis of a generous corporeality, is between 'my difference' and 'the other's body', which *together* form an 'inter-body' that is not reducible to one body or the other. Although this inter-body is not simply the coming together of my difference, that is *my body as difference* with the other's body (my difference is not mine; it is taken from the other's body), it nevertheless positions both bodies *together*. They are together precisely insofar as they are not one. Corporeal generosity, the giving between bodies, does not lead to two bodies which are positioned in the same way, but it does lead to a new form of inclusivity, in which what is shared is the very failure to be self-identical or proper ('our bodies' is hence possible given the very impossibility of having a body that belongs to me or to you — 'me' and 'you' are aligned here as impossible gifts to the other). My body is *with* the other's body, insofar as each other's body makes the other's body.

In contrast, I want to consider inter-embodiment as a site of differentiation rather than inclusion: in such an approach 'my body' and 'the other's body' would not be structurally equivalent (even as impossible bodies), but in a relation of asymmetry and potential violence. Beyond this, inter-embodiment would not just involve the inter-bodily transfer between my body and the other's body: rather, it would involve different modes of transfer between 'this body' and other bodily others. We need to complicate what it means to be 'with', such that 'with-ness' is a site, not of shared co-habitation, but of differentiation (= sociality as differentiation). In other words, in the inter-bodily movements that allow bodies to be formed (as well as de-formed), *bodies are touched by some bodies differently from other bodies*. Not only could we ask the question, 'which bodies are touched by which bodies?', but we could also ask about the different ways in which bodies 'touch' other bodies, and how those differences are ways of forming the bodies of others. We could differentiate, for example, between the caress, the shake, the beating, and so on (see also Chapter 7), in terms of the affect they have on the living out of one's bodily relation to others. We could consider how some forms of touch have been means of subjugating others, or of forming the other as a place of vulnerability and fear (colonial and sexual histories of touch as appropriation, violation and possession). We could also begin to deal with the relationship of touch implicit in the very fear of touching some others: such a refusal of touch is also a means of forming and de-forming some bodies in relationship to other bodies. I am calling here for a phenomenological analysis of corporeal generosity to be supplemented by an understanding of the *economies of touch*.

We can return to my notion of the metonymic relation between particular bodies and sociality, as well as between the body-at-home and the body-politic. We can theorise that relation in terms of touch — touch operates precisely as a *fleshy metonymy*. There is a relation of closeness and proximity between particular bodies and the 'body' of the social in that each comes into a precarious being only through being touched by the other. However, the particular body is touched by the social body in a much stronger sense. For what is meant by the social body is *precisely the effect of being with some others over other others*. The social body is also an imaginary body that is created through the relations of touch between bodies recognisable as friendly and strange; who one allows near, who is further away, and so on. Bodies with skins, while they are already touched in the sense of being exposed to others, are touched differently by near and far others, and it is *this differentiation between others that constitutes the permeability of bodily boundaries*. The differentiated relation between 'this body' and 'other bodies', or between 'this' or 'that' other body, can be understood as the metonymic slide of touch; through touch, bodies slide into each other, in such a way that aligns some bodies with other bodies, engendering the perpetual re-forming and deforming of both bodily and social space.

Strange encounters are hence tactile as well as visual: just as some others are 'seen' and recognised as stranger than other others (as I suggested in Chapter 1, recognition involves a visual economy), so too some skins are touched as stranger than other skins. It is in this specific sense that touch is economic. Rather than thinking of skin as always exposed and touchable, we can think about how different ways of touching allow for different configurations of bodily and social space. Friendship and familial relation involve the ritualisation of certain forms of touch, while the recognition of another as a stranger might involve a refusal to get too close through touch.² But the stranger's body cannot be reified as the untouchable. For example, although the white woman refuses to touch Audre's clothes which have been touched by Audre's skin, she is still touched by Audre; her bodily gestures express precisely the horror of being touched. In other words, to withdraw from a relation of physical proximity to bodies recognised as strange is precisely to be touched by those bodies, in such a way that the subject is moved from its place. In this sense, the stranger is always in proximity: a body that is out of place because it has come too close. The contours of bodies — the skin — are de-formed and re-formed precisely through being touched by bodies that are recognisable as strange and untouchable.

In Paul Schilder's *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body*, there is a recognition that bodily contours — or the postural model of the body — are always shrinking and expanding in the bodily encounter with other bodies (1970: 210). The permeability of bodily space is produced through the connectedness between bodies: 'A body is necessarily a body amongst other bodies' (Schilder 1970: 281). However, different forms of connection have different effects on that permeability: 'There is no doubt that the far distant body will offer less possibility of interplay' (Schilder 1970: 235). Bodies that are close by may be taken in by, or incorporated into, the body image, hence expanding the contours of the body, while bodies that are further away, are less likely to offer this expanded sense of the body. We could perhaps even suggest that further away bodies — and this sense of distance is irreducible to physical distance — may serve to contract or shrink bodily space, producing discomfort and resistance.

We can build on Schilder's work by considering how familiar bodies can be incorporated through a sense of community — being together as like bodies — while strange bodies are expelled from bodily space — moving apart as unlike bodies. Both incorporation and expulsion serve to re-form the contours of the body, suggesting that the skin, not only registers familiarity and strangeness, but is touched by both differently, *in such a way that the skin becomes the locus for social differentiation*. As such, 'like bodies' and 'unlike bodies' do not precede the tactile encounters of incorporation or expulsion: rather, likeness and unlikeness as 'characteristics' of bodies are produced through these encounters. As bodies move towards and away from each other, in relationships of proximity and distance, both bodily space (the shape of the skin) and social space (the skin of the community) expand and contract. Rosalind Diprose suggests that 'the ease of an encounter with another is limited by the extent to which you already have gestures in common. Faced with a stranger, with a different cultural history and hence a different corporeal schema, one's own lived body may exhibit intolerance or resistance to the encounter' (1994: 122). Although I would question the assumption that the stranger is the one who 'has' difference *on* her body, Diprose does draw our attention to how encounters with others who are already recognised as strange(rs), as out of place in this place, involve forms of discomfort and resistance, that are felt on the skin.

Strange bodies

How do the processes of incorporation and expulsion produce assimilable and unassimilable bodies? In this section, I want to consider how 'strange bodies' or bodies that cannot be assimilated into a given social space are, in some sense, already read and recognisable through the histories of determination in which such bodies are associated with dirt and danger. Such histories of

determination that define the parameters of the bodies that are marked as different from the familiar body — the body which is mere home for the white masculine thinker and viewer — inform the strange bodily encounters that take place between subjects, though in such a way that the encounters are not fully determined.

How does the reconfiguration of bodily space through strange encounters evoke such histories of the stranger's body, the body which is already recognisable as strange? In order to deal with such a difficult question, I will firstly examine Kristeva's theories of abjection, as a model which gives primacy to the bodily encounter with dirt and filth. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva argues that, 'There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside; ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable' (1982: 1). The abject relates to what is revolting, to what threatens the boundaries of both thought and identity: 'The abject has only one quality of the object — that of being opposed to I' (Kristeva 1982: 1). At one level, the abject is a jettisoned object that is excluded, or cast out, from the domain of the thinking subject. The abject is expelled — like vomit — and the process of expulsion serves to establish the boundary line of the subject. At the same time, the abject holds an uncanny fascination for the subject, demanding its attention and desire: 'from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master' (Kristeva 1982: 2). The abject both establishes and undermines the border between inside and outside: 'It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of "one's own and clean self"' (Kristeva 1982: 53).

Kristeva's approach to abjection emphasises the physicality of emotions that threaten to pulverise the subject and cross the boundary line. Such physicality is directed towards filth, defilement and pollution, though these are not themselves abject. Rather, they define the crisis posed by abjection insofar as they threaten to undermine the integrity of the subject by passing between the inside and outside. The abject is not reducible to a particular object or body: the abject relates precisely to the border which becomes the object (Kristeva 1982: 4). In the encounter between the white woman and Audre, when the white woman withdraws with horror and disgust at the black body, the border that is threatened by their skin and clothes touching is itself turned into an object of abjection: the roach. It is through a complex sliding of signifiers and bodies, that the roach becomes the black body, and the black body becomes the border which is hence transformed into an object of abjection (rather than an abject object). To this extent, black lived embodiment is, as Frantz Fanon has argued, 'sealed into that crushing objecthood' (1975: 77).

The relation between the physical emotions of horror and disgust, the function and effect of dirt and pollution, and the production of strange bodies as objects, is determined through the 'border': strange bodies threaten to traverse the border that establishes the 'clean body' of the white subject. It is the function and effect of the border — which we can again theorise in terms of the skin — that allows us to think about how the bodily exchange between subjects reopen the histories of encounter that both substantiate and subjugate strange bodies, here constructed as black bodies. However, the association of strange bodies with the border that establishes the inside and outside — and here we can think of both bodily and social space — requires a more proper historicisation than Kristeva's psychoanalytics of abjection will allow. We need to ask: how is it that some bodies are recognised as stranger than others and come to be liveable as unliveable, as the impossible object that both establishes and confounds the border (to return to the stranger's question, 'am I the dirt that forces me to move away?'). What is required is not simply a psychoanalytical approach to how identity *as such* gets established and contested, *but how bodies are differentiated through the metonymic association of some bodies (and not others) with the border that confounds identity.*

In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler considers how abjection functions to produce a domain of unthinkable and unliveable bodies. She writes, 'This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed

thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet “subjects”, but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject’ (Butler 1993: 3). Such a domain of abject beings inhabit the ‘unliveable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life. The unliveable and uninhabitable zones of social life are, at the same time, ‘densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject’ (Butler 1993: 3). How can bodies populate zones which are uninhabitable? The marking out of the border which defines the subject — the constitutive outside — is the condition of possibility for the subject, the process through which it can come into being. *This* subject is precisely the subject who determines the formation of home — the space one inhabits as liveable — and whose access to subjectivity is determined through being at home — the centre from which other beings are expelled. The subject who can act and move in the world with ease — the white, masculine, heterosexual, subject — does so through expelling those other beings from this zone of the living (although the expulsion always leaves its trace). One does not then live in abjection: abject bodies are precisely the bodies that are not inhabited, are not liveable as such, or indeed, are not at home. To account for strange bodies is to account for the historical determination of his white body as the body which becomes home: *the body that comes to matter through the reduction of other bodies to matter out of place* (= strange bodies). However, we need a model of how his body is determined as (at) home, without assuming a structural equivalence between those others who are expelled from the domain of the liveable. There are different forms of expulsion, all of which also involve prior acts of incorporation. We need to examine how the processes of ‘taking in’ and ‘expelling’ (which involve the transformation of the border into an object) allow some bodies to be lived as (at) home.

Strange bodies do not exist as such, as they can only be assimilated as the unassimilable within the home of the white masculine subject: his being is here and there, secured as a dwelling that allows him to occupy and move within space. And yet, strange bodies are also over-represented and perpetually encountered as the impossible border that both establishes and threatens his identity and home: ‘A fear of difference is projected onto the objects and spaces comprising the home or locality which can be polluted by the presence of non-conforming people, activities or artefacts’ (Sibley 1995: 38). The different value given to homes or localities discussed in Chapter 1, slides into the different value given to bodies: the most privileged white masculine body is at home in the spaces which themselves are privileged (his body = his home = the world). In some sense, the domain of the white masculine subject is established by the equation of his body with home as such: his body transcends itself to become simply where he lives (= the knowable, inhabitable world).

The histories of determination of ‘strange bodies’ as an impossible object that establishes the domain of the privileged subject (his bodily world), also produce such bodies as dangerous, uncontrollable, dirty, engulfing and *overreaching space itself*. In Stallybrass and White's *The Poetics and Politics of Transgression*, for example, there is an examination of how marginalised bodies are associated with the grotesque, and are seen as being multiple and bulging (1986: 9). Strange bodies are also represented as bodies that are incomplete, that threaten to leak and contaminate, and that have open orifices (Stallybrass and White 1986: 9). The over-representation of strange bodies as grotesque already positions the bodies of those that are not yet subjects, as out of place precisely in their refusal to be contained by place. The threat of contamination posed by strange bodies is precisely that those bodies already exceed the place in which they come to be encountered as such.

This exceeding of the out-of-place-ness of strange bodies opens out the temporality of the bodily encounter: rather than simply understanding strange bodies as produced in the present encounter with an-other we recognise as strange, we can now theorise that such encounters slide not only through space (bodily space leaks into social space), but also through time (the present encounter reopens past encounters). The over-determination of the local encounter by the historical and social production of ideal, contained and closed bodies suggests that strange bodies remain threatening:

they not only make possible the designation of the body-at-home, but also, at the same time, confirm the impossibility of such a body being at home, in the present, as such. The strange body can only become a material 'thing' that touches the body-at-home, or a figure that can be faced in the street, through a radical forgetting of the histories of labour and production that allow such a body to appear in the present. The strange body becomes a fetish which both conceals and reveals the body-at-home's reliance on strangers to secure his being — his place — his presence — in the world.

This production of unliveable or unassimilable strange bodies involves contingent and over-determined regimes of difference that are concealed in the very forms of stranger fetishism (the production of the stranger as a figure with bodily integrity). In the encounter discussed in this chapter, the strange body becomes the black body, a strange body in relation to the liveable domain of the white female subject. The antagonism between white and black femininities is here determined through a bodily encounter: an encounter which involves the refusal to share social space, to touch each other, a refusal of co-habitation that contains the black body *as body*, and allows the white body to move away, even away from itself. Other forms of power differentiation intersect in the recognition of bodily strangeness: while the white female body can become lived as the body-at-home by the withdrawal from proximity to the strange black body, the white female body becomes uninhabitable and unliveable in relation to the formation of the masculine body. What is required is precisely an analysis of how abjection — the unstable constitution of the domain of the liveable — brings into play multiple forms of social antagonism. The relationship between the processes of incorporation and expulsion which produce the abject and the marking of, and withdrawal from, particular bodily others as strange bodies, is hence *contingent* rather than necessary: there is a metonymic sliding across different borders, objects and bodies within such strange encounters.

Strange bodies are precisely those bodies that are temporarily assimilated as the unassimilable within the encounter: they function as the border that defines both the space into which the familiar body — the body which is unmarked by strangeness as its mark of privilege — cannot cross, and the space in which such a body constitutes itself as (at) home. The strange body is constructed through a process of incorporation and expulsion — a movement between inside and outside, which renders that the stranger's body has already touched the surface of the skin that appears to contain the body-at-home. The economy of xenophobia — the production of the stranger's body as an impossible and phobic object — involves, not just reading the stranger's body as dirt and filth, but the re-forming of the contours of the body-at-home, through the very affective gestures which enable the withdrawal from co-habitation with strangers in a given social space. The withdrawal remains registered on the skin, on the border that feels.

3 Knowing strangers

[H]ave you not observed that it is characteristic of a well-bred dog to behave with the utmost gentleness to those it is used to and knows, but to be savage to strangers ... it is a trait that shows real discrimination and a truly philosophical nature ... for the dog distinguishes the sight of a friend and foe simply by knowing one and not knowing the other.

(Plato 1970: 111)

How do you know the difference between a friend and a stranger? How do you know a stranger? Such questions challenge the assumption that the stranger is the one who is precisely *not* the object of knowledge. For in such a question, knowledge is staged as constitutive, not only of what is familiar, what is already known or indeed knowable, but also of what is strange, and who is the stranger. As I argued in the previous two chapters, the stranger is not *any-body* that we have failed to recognise, but *some-body* that we have already recognised *as* a stranger, as 'a body out of place'. Hence, the stranger is some-body we know as not knowing, rather than some-body we simply do not know. The stranger

is produced as a category within knowledge, rather than coming into being in an absence of knowledge. The implications of such a rethinking of the relationship between knowledge and strangers are far reaching: it suggests that knowledge is bound up with the formation of a community, that is, with the formation of a 'we' that knows through (rather than against) 'the stranger'.

In the above quotation, knowing the difference between friend and enemy, or between friend and stranger, reflects 'a truly philosophical nature'. So we might guess that philosophers have good noses. And we might guess that having a good nose means being able to smell the difference.

Smelling the difference is here a way of knowing that establishes the border between the familiar and the strange: do you smell like a friend or stranger? Should the philosopher let you in? I can just see it: philosophers and guard dogs at the door, busy, smelling, smelling you as you all come in. You might get a gentle lick from the philosopher's tongue if you smell familiar, and you might get bitten if you don't: the philosopher's teeth may bite deeply into your already scarred not-quite-human flesh. You may of course want to refuse the choice of being licked or bitten (at least by a philosopher), but you may have resigned any right of refusal by simply being-Here. Smelling the difference involves a practice of differentiation: those we know we treat with kindness, we let you in, we allow a relation of proximity or closeness. Those we don't know turn us into the savages. The knowing of one from the other is here determinate in the constitution of Law as savagery: as the cutting off of the stranger, as the determination of the standard of 'letting in' or 'keeping out'. And so Plato narcissistically admires the guard dog's nose (in the end, it must be a question of him, in front of a mirror, admiring his own nose): 'it is a trait that shows real discrimination and a truly philosophical nature ... for the dog distinguishes the sight of a friend and foe simply by knowing one and not knowing the other. And the creature that distinguishes between the familiar and the unfamiliar on the grounds of knowledge or ignorance must be gifted with a real love of knowledge' (1970: 11). And then, 'is not philosophy *the same thing* as the love of knowledge' (Plato 1970: 111).

The same thing. Philosophy is a thing that is the same as loving knowledge: a love of knowledge which is the same thing as telling the difference between what you know and don't know, which is the same thing as smelling the difference between the friend and the foe. These slips from one 'same thing' to another are the gift of a philosophical community: a community of those whose epistemic privilege is a form of loving, a loving of the 'same thing', and an expulsion of strangeness from the thing itself (the thing which is, in the end, the philosopher's most elegant nose). But the difference which is cast as strange, the smell then of strangeness itself, is only smellable from within that nose. The stranger is here the condition of possibility for the philosopher's narcissism, for the love which lets him caress his nose through which he always smells himself as the one he knows or who knows. He loves himself, and the 'same-thing-ness' of himself, only by first smelling the stranger, which makes him, if you like, sneeze the stranger out of the philosophical body. The stranger is both within and without the same thing: as the border that determines the necessity and impossibility of the difference between one and another.

In other words, the stranger is produced as a figure that is distinct from the (philosophical) body, only through a process of expulsion: the stranger 'comes to be' as an entity precisely by a prior inhabiting of that philosophical body, or the body of the community 'that knows'. So while it is the love of knowledge that creates the spatial distinction between friend and stranger (perhaps another way of talking about Orientalism), that love also causes the philosopher to sneeze 'the stranger' out of the philosophical body; it threatens the integrity of the philosophical body. The sneeze which allows the figure of the stranger to take shape, as if it were 'outside' of the knowledge, can be understood, not as a form of purification (where there is no *trace* of the stranger left in the body), but as a form of contamination. Knowing strangers, in this sense, is about telling the difference between what one knows and does not know, in such a way that this difference is already called into question.

In the quotation above, the stranger is already known precisely insofar as it is known as an enemy (see Chapter 1). What I will examine in this chapter, through exploring the relationship between ethnography and translation, is how knowledge is *accumulated* about 'the stranger' that both confirms and threatens the difference between the one 'who knows' and the one who is known. The stranger is not necessarily known as an enemy, but may come to be known as a stranger, once she or he has become a friend. The stranger is hence both familiar and strange, both within and without 'our field of knowledge'. This consideration of the relation between knowledge and the stranger (in which I will suggest that knowledge allows the stranger to enter the epistemic community *as a figure*) will shift the debate in post-colonial theory, feminist theory and postmodern ethnography from the question of 'the other' as such. As I will discuss in more detail later, the fascination with otherness has allowed us to hesitate on questions such as 'who speaks', where the question of speaking has taken on 'a life of [its] own' (Marx 1976: 164), becoming abstracted from the conditions of knowing and labour which allow for the very possibility of speaking or listening. In other words, if we consider the production of 'the stranger' through relationships of knowledge (rather than simply speech), we can draw attention to the processes of inclusion and exclusion, or incorporation and expulsion, that are concealed in stranger fetishism.

Ethnography and strangers

In order to examine the production of 'strangers' in knowledge, I will examine the role of ethnography which has, in relationship to the emergence of the discipline of anthropology, been predicated on a model of translating 'strange cultures'. To talk about ethnography as the translation of a strange culture might appear to equate ethnography and anthropology. So why is this chapter not framed as a critique of anthropology? There are a number of reasons for this decision. First, I want to consider *techniques* of knowing implicit in the notion of 'fieldwork' that cannot be reduced to the discipline of anthropology. Second, I do not want to reify the link between anthropology and 'strange cultures', not only because anthropology can return home (see Jackson 1987), but also because the notion of strange cultures as radically exterior to the culture of the ethnographer must be criticised (hence sociological ethnography is also an encounter with strangeness). Third, the discipline of anthropology has self-reflexively considered its relation to 'the Other' and how it constructs rather than describes the Other (for examples, see Asad 1973; McGrane 1989; Fabian 1992; Trouillot 1991; Clifford 1986). While my work involves a critique of some of that recent literature (for example, the postmodern model of ethnography as collaboration), I am also aware that I cannot exhaust the complex and multi-fold ways anthropology has articulated its relation to its Other.

One of the central models for the production of ethnographic knowledge has been cultural translation: the translation of a strange culture into the language of ethnography, the language of the one who knows. A classical formulation is offered by Lienhardt: 'The problem of describing to others how members of a remote tribe think then begins to appear largely as one of translation, of making the coherence primitive thought has in the languages it really uses, as clear as possible in our own' (1956: 97). Here, translation is a question of making the strange appear *within* the familiar as clearly as possible. The process is one of exchange, of moving strangeness from one system of meaning to another without altering its coherence. Strangeness could only be thought in terms of the primitive: translation is a translation of the primitive which is itself a residual trace of that which was prior to 'our own'. The exchange hence is spatial and temporal: from one culture to another, and from (our) past to the present.

Vincent Crapanzano reconsiders the metaphor of translation in an article that appears in the collection, *Writing Cultures*, one of the (if you can forgive the irony) classical articulations of a postmodern ethnography (see also Asad 1986). First, Crapanzano cites Benjamin's consideration of all translation as a provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages (Crapanzano

1986: 51). The phrase, 'coming to terms' demands our close attention. Coming to terms can suggest 'dealing with', coping with. However, the phrase could also work to suggest, 'coming (into) the terms of': in other words, translating as re-termining. The double meaning of the term, 'coming to terms', is suggestive: the event of dealing with foreignness could be rearticulated as a re-termining of the foreign such that the foreign becomes the familiar. In other words, ethnographic translation produces knowledge of the foreign through a radical *de-termining* of the foreign. Ethnographic knowledge would not be knowledge of the stranger, but knowledge of the familiar: knowledge which creates the stranger in the familiar in order then to destroy it. If the 'coming to terms with' is provisional, then creating strangeness involves acts of violence that can be endlessly repeated.

How does Crapanzano translate Benjamin on translation into ethnography? Of course, we begin with the assumption of analogy. He writes, 'Like translation, ethnography is also a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of language — of cultures and societies. The ethnographer does not translate texts the way the translator does. He must first produce them' (Crapanzano 1986: 51; emphasis added). Here, the analogy has its limits. The limits of the analogy between translation and ethnography resides in the different status of the text: in ethnography the text has to be produced before any 'coming to terms with' can take place. We can relate this to Todorov's model of the ethnographic as the accumulation of documents (1984: 240). The ethnographer creates the writing (about the strange culture) in order then to translate or re-term: the act of violence is here an act that not only presupposes creation (the strange is created in order to be destroyed), but is an act of creation in and of itself. The ethnographer creates and destroys at the same time in the very accumulation of documents (the authorisation of knowledge as writing). The stranger comes to appear as a figure of speech at the same time as it is rendered impossible. The Stranger hence becomes a figure for that which has been made impossible by the necessity of translation. Crapanzano concludes that the ethnographer, 'Like Benjamin's translator aims at a solution to the very problem of foreignness, and like the translator (a point missed by Benjamin) he must also communicate the very foreignness that his interpretations (the translator's translations) deny, at least in their claim to universality. He must render the foreign familiar and preserve its very foreignness at the same time' (1986: 52). The task of the ethnographer is hence not only to write about the strange, but to write about strange cultures for other ethnographers (it is their ear which must be the text's proper destination). The writing has an *institutional home*, so to speak, and hence the writing of strangeness must *return home*. But the need to resolve foreignness is set against a need to preserve it: we must translate the foreign into terms we understand, but in such a way that it can still live in the writing as the foreign. The doubling of the assertion and disavowal of foreignness and strangeness is symptomatic: knowledge both creates and destroys the stranger (the document) and yet re-creates the strange as a spectre of itself: as that which is then known in terms of (coming to the terms of) the not-quite-strange or not-quite-familiar. The knowing of strangers is, in this way, linked to the production of hybridity.

We can compare the model of ethnography as translation with the model of the ethnographer as the professional stranger offered by Michael Agar. On the surface, this model appears very different. It is the ethnographer who is the stranger coming into a space where others are familiar with each other. Does this suggest the relativisability of the very condition of strangeness? Agar writes, 'Ethnography is really quite an arrogant enterprise. In a short period of time, an ethnographer moves in among a group of strangers to study and describe their beliefs, document their social life, write about their subsistence strategies, and generally explore their territory right down to their recipes for the evening meal' (1980: 41). Quite clearly from this statement of the ethnographic project there is no renunciation of authority (however much the ethnographer admits to the arrogance of the enterprise). The ethnographer moves among, studies, describes, documents, writes and, importantly, explores

their territory. Ethnography is maintained as an exploratory and accumulative discourse: we get closer to the object, in order to gain more knowledge.

Agar's representation of the ethnographer as the professional stranger does not lead to a relativisation of strangeness. On the contrary, the objects of the ethnographic exploration remain the strangers. What we have instead is the creation of another epistemic distinction: the ethnographer turns strangeness into a profession, into a technique for the accumulation of knowledge. Those Agar writes about writing about are named simply as 'a group of strangers' (1980: 41). The distinction is now between strangers (objects of knowledge) and the professional stranger (the subject of knowledge). Such a distinction suggests that ethnography can occupy the position of the strangers in order to accumulate documents, without simply becoming the stranger. The desire to tell the difference is here a desire to know the strangers, to get closer to them through exercising various techniques of observation and writing (so that we can even cook and eat their food). Professional strangers constitute the stranger as an unknowing other (the one who simply is a stranger rather than takes on strangeness through knowledge). Knowing strangers is here knowing strangers as unknowing. Ethnography defines itself as the professionalisation of strangeness: *the transformation of the stranger from an ontological lack to an epistemic privilege*.

Feminist knowledge and strangers

So if the ethnographic techniques for the accumulation of documents about groups of strangers involve the designating of strangeness as an ontological lack which can be transformed only through those documents into knowledge, then what are the implications for feminist ethnography? Does the feminist challenge to such ethnographic techniques produce a structurally different kind of knowledge? What I want to do here is bring the concern with research methodologies that is clear in feminist ethnography into contact with some of the questions concerning representation raised by feminist post-colonial theory. I will suggest that such a contact can only be productive: it will shift the terms of reference for both sets of approaches.

The central question for post-colonial feminism has been, 'who is speaking here?' Indeed, the question, 'who is speaking here?' has become familiar. The question does not demand to know the particularity of the 'who' that is speaking. The question, as it has gained our critical attention, calls for us to refuse any such particularism and to grant the 'who' a tenuous existence as marking only a position from which a speech *can be* made. This question has become a reminder of the relations of force and authorisation that institute the very possibility of speech: some speak precisely because they are in the position to be heard, to command our attention. Gayatri Spivak has asked the question powerfully, 'does the subaltern woman speak?' Her reply has been as powerful: 'she does not' (1988). Some, such as Benita Parry (1987), have responded negatively to such an assertion, suggesting that it forecloses the possibility of subaltern agency. However, Spivak's assertion is a challenge to the condition of subalternity itself: what constitutes the position of the subaltern is precisely the impossibility of being heard (1996: 289). In other words, the question becomes not so much, 'who speaks?', but 'who hears?'

The question, 'who is speaking here?', has also been addressed to feminism itself. There has been a suggestion that certain privileged white women have themselves spoken for the subaltern woman and have hence been implicated in this politics of not-hearing (Mohanty 1991). The question, 'who is speaking here?' reminds us that feminism is implicated in the relations of force and authorisation that structure the very possibility of the one speaking and the other being spoken for. While the question of 'who speaks?' remains an important and necessary one, it is also in need of supplementation. This chapter has already posed an alternative question, 'who knows?' It is this question that brings the ethnographic desire to know more about strangers into contact with the post-

colonial concern with the politics of representing others. The question, reformulated as an epistemological one is, 'who is knowing, here?' Such a shift opens out the contexts in which speaking and hearing take place: we need to ask, what knowledges are *already* in place which allow one to speak for, about or to a 'group of strangers'? (Agar 1980: 41). In other words, we need to move our attention from the production of otherness to the (re)production of strangeness.

The shift implicit in the question, 'who knows?', echoes the shift in Gayatri Spivak's work. In an interview, Spivak suggests that to always return to the question of speaking is to conceal the structuration of speech by labour. She asks instead, 'who works *for* whom?' (1996: 296). It is my argument that considering the epistemic dimensions of speaking will demonstrate the links between representation and broader relationships of production: in other words, labouring formations are at work in the assumption that the subaltern woman can be known. An epistemological dimension is implicit in both questions, 'who speaks?' and 'who works?', suggesting a mutually constitutive and over-determined relation between speaking, knowledge and work. We can ask the provocative question: *how does the act of speaking already know 'the stranger' as within or without a given community?*

In order to address the implications of such a shift for both feminist post-colonial theory and feminist ethnography I want to consider what has become known in Australia as 'the Bell debate'. The Bell debate is a debate about a white Australian feminist, Diane Bell, and an article in which she, alongside her 'co-author' Topsy Napurrula Nelson, an Indigenous woman, speaks out about the rape of Indigenous women by Indigenous men. Her/their first article, published by *Women's Studies International Forum*, was entitled, 'Speaking About Rape is Everyone's Business' (Bell and Nelson 1989). The title itself confirms the position: everyone must speak out about rape: everyone has the right to speak out about rape, as rape is a fundamental violation of the rights of women. While I am not able to address here the issue of rights and universalism (see Ahmed 1998a), we might consider how the 'everyone' might operate as a general term to conceal who might come to speak about rape. It is the concealed relation between the 'everyone' and the 'I' claimed elsewhere by Bell (in a later article, Bell writes, 'Speaking out, speaking of, speaking with, speaking about, speaking for *What did I say*' (1996: 107; emphasis added)) that may partly explain the controversy.

Following the publication of the article in 1989, as Bell puts it, all 'hell broke loose' (1996: 108):

In February 1990, a letter bearing no signatures to validate the names typed at the bottom of the second page, and no address, was sent to colleagues and WSIF, but was not sent directly to me (although my address was on the article). It accused me of creating divisions within the 'Aboriginal community', appropriating Topsy Napurrula Nelson's voice by citing her as a co-author rather than 'informant', of exhibiting white imperialism, of exercising middle-class privilege.

(Bell 1996: 108)

The debate at one level can be read as a debate as to who has the right to speak for Indigenous women (see Moreton-Robinson 1998, forthcoming). Does the white woman who speaks out about the rape of Indigenous women necessarily speak *for* those women? Is the event of her speaking inevitably a form of imperialism? What else can we say about the relationship between her speaking and the position of Indigenous women in the debate? How is it that she came to speak in the first place? What alternatives would there be to her speaking, and to what extent does her speaking involve hearing? As Anna Yeatman summarises, 'This debate signals an emergent politics of voice and representation within Australian feminism, where, in this instance, Aboriginal women are contesting the historically established dominance of white settler women in Australian feminism' (1993: 239). To question Bell's discourse of speaking with (Topsy Napurrula Nelson) as a form of speaking for is to pose a challenge to some of the developments in what has been termed the new reflexive ethnography or

postmodern ethnography. For here, there has been a counter-move to define the 'native informant' as a 'co-author' and to admit to the plurality of the ethnographic document. Sally McBeth in 'Myths of Objectivity and the Collaborative Process in Life History Research' argues that, 'Current ethnographic writing is seeking new ways to adequately represent the authority of "informants" and to explore methodologies that more adequately legitimise the expertise of the members of the culture being investigated' (1993: 145). This exploration of new methodologies is described by McBeth as 'dispersed authority' (1993: 161), which moves from the traditional ethnographic objectivity to an 'informed intersubjectivity' predicated on listening and collaboration (1993: 146). The informant is 'an equal partner' (McBeth 1993: 162).

Such a democratisation of ethnography has been constructed as intrinsically postmodern. James Clifford, for example, argues that in postmodernism: 'Anthropology no longer speaks with automatic authority for others defined as unable to speak for themselves' (1986: 10). The postmodern ethnographic text is dialogical rather than monological, partial rather than apparently total: it is a text in which, 'Many voices clamour for expression' and in which informants are 'co-authors' (Clifford 1986: 15, 17). To argue that there has been such a shift in the relation between ethnography and authority *is to presuppose the possibility of overcoming the relations of force and authorisation that are already implicated in the ethnographic desire to document the lives of strangers.*

To return to the Bell debate, we can see that the question of whether Topsy Napurrula Nelson has spoken is a difficult one. One can take Bell's point that to assume Nelson hasn't spoken — or that she cannot speak — would be to deny Nelson agency. Bell even suggests that Huggins *et al.* are being racist insofar as they assume that Nelson was not 'really' involved in the production of the article (1991b: 509). But that rather misses the point. What is at issue is not whether Nelson has a voice, but whether or not her voice can be heard *within* the article itself. The article was published in an international women's studies journal, in English. It fulfils some very specific formal and scholarly requirements in terms of language and argument. Within the original article, the two 'I's' are separated, and have a different function and effect within the text itself. Nelson's writing is italicised, and separated off from the main body of the text, which develops the over-arching framework and argument. What Huggins *et al.* are suggesting is that the white feminist anthropologist cannot simply 'give voice' to those already known as strangers 'in the field', by including the voice of an Indigenous woman within such a text, however much the act of inclusion is signalled by the italicisation.

Bell places much emphasis on the fact that the article is authorised by Nelson as well, given that Nelson made a significant contribution to it in terms of making Bell's own knowledge possible. That is, the co-authorship signals Bell's debt to Nelson, a debt that would not have been made transparent if she had only been named as chief informant. Again, I think this is problematic as it represents debt to the informant as an exception to anthropological practice. One could argue that anthropology is precisely in debt to the strangers through which it has come to know: it knows only through them, and through the transformation of their being into knowledge. But to say that ethnographers should rename their informants as coauthors would be to conceal how this debt also involves forms of appropriation and translation: it would conceal that the ones who are known have not authorised the forms of writing and knowledge produced by ethnographers, but have been authorised by it. To say that Nelson was not a co-author in any 'equal' sense of the term, is to point to the way in which Bell's debt to her informants does not mean an overcoming of the power relations that allow the ethnographer to transform others into strangers, in order to mark out 'a field (of knowledge)'.

The redefinition of the 'informant' as an 'equal partner' hence works to conceal the power relations that still allow the gathering together of a document. In other words, the narrative of overcoming the relations of authorisation in traditional ethnography constitutes another form of

authorisation. This suggests that (rather ironically given that she writes against postmodernism as a radical feminist), Bell is implicated in the postmodern fantasy that it is the 'I' of the ethnographer who can undo the power relations that allowed the 'I' to appear. Such a fantasy allows the ethnographer to be praised for her or his ability to listen well. So it remains the ethnographer who is praised: praised for the giving up of her or his authority. The event of recognition demonstrates that the ethnographic document *still returns home in postmodernism*, but that the returning home is *concealed* in the fantasy of being-together-as-strangers. When Jackie Huggins et al. (1991), followed by Anna Yeatman (1993: 239), rename Topsy Napurrula Nelson as a 'native informant' rather than as a co-author, they are writing against this assumption that a plural text can overcome the relations of force and authorisation embedded in the desire to know (more) about strangers.

In critiquing such a narrativisation of overcoming within reflexive and postmodern ethnography, I support the claims made by feminist critics such as Kamala Visweswaran who argues that, 'dispensing authority represents anthropology's last grasp of the "other"' (1994: 32) and Judith Stacey, who suggests that an emphasis on antagonism, 'undermine(s) these anthropological pretensions to alliance and collaboration with the Other' (1988: 25). However, as Stacey argues, such a challenge is also a challenge to feminist ethnography which has valued empathy and identification between women as researchers and researched (1988: 25). We have the ironic situation whereby the critique of postmodernism parallels the critique of the work of radical feminists such as Diane Bell.⁵ Importantly, the challenge to notions of reciprocity and collaboration in both postmodern and feminist ethnographic research can be made through a post-colonial feminist emphasis on the power differences between women.

So, at one level, to question Diane Bell's shift from the 'everyone' to the 'I' in speaking about the rape of Indigenous women is to provide an important critique of the assumption that the 'I' can itself overcome the power relations that allow it to appear. However, at the same time, I would argue that to define such a debate as simply about a battle over representation and voice — as Anna Yeatman does — is insufficient: the debate is not simply about the question of who is speaking and who is being spoken for.⁶ Rather, the contestability of Bell's claims must be linked to the relations of production that surround the text, 'Speaking about Rape is Everyone's Business'. In other words, we need to ask: how is it that Diane Bell came close enough to Topsy Napurrula Nelson to allow her to speak about/for/with/to her in the context of 'everyone's business'? We need to take on board the implications of Nelson's own contributions to the Bell debate.

Diane Bell cites Nelson's contribution to dramatise how the reactions against the article serve to render Nelson voiceless (as they serve to deflect attention away from the immediate political issue of sexual violence against Indigenous women), and calls for a model of 'actual friendship and personal trust' as the basis for 'cross-cultural collaboration' (1996: 110). In a seemingly analogous manner, Topsy Napurrula Nelson writes:

I had no Aborigine to write this down. Diane is like a sister, a best friend. She wrote all this down for me. That's OK — women to women; it doesn't matter black or white. I want these things written down and read again later. I was telling Diane to write this story for me.

(1990: 507)

Does the coincidence of these representations suggest that a radical feminist ethnography could take friendship as its epistemic basis: that the ethnographic desire to know the stranger could be rearticulated as the transformation of strangers into friends? While Nelson's description of her friendship with Bell appears to be close to Bell's own call for friendship as the basis for cross-cultural collaboration or dialogue, I think there are important differences. Bell calls for friendship *in general*, as a new agenda for research that can overcome the barriers of strangeness. In contrast, Nelson is

describing a *particular* friendship that exists which led her to want Bell to write 'this story for (her)'. In other words, Bell's call remains a call which is motivated by the demands of feminist research: the call situates her as an ethnographer who poses general questions about what to do and how to work. Bell writes about how Nelson and she, 'had worked together', but does not name the kind of work that enables this 'togetherness'. However, the work is named as prior and constitutive of her theoretical approach: the trust that she achieves through their work becomes the basis for an approach to feminism that emphasises relationality rather than boundary maintenance (Bell 1996: 110). What is the connection between becoming friends, the working relation of ethnography, and the theoretical reflection on how to do feminism across different cultural spaces?

The incommensurate ways in which friendship is constructed in their texts demonstrates that trust and friendship — getting closer or intimacy — does not overcome the distance and the division between the ethnographer and the one who is constructed as a 'past stranger'. Bell's gaining of Nelson's trust is hence complicated: it relies on a prior ethnographic investment in what the trust provides — that is, *access* to the stranger culture. To discuss friendship as strategically framed is not in any way to question Bell's intentions or the political importance of her work. To do so would individuate a complex set of textual as well as material relations. But we do need to rethink how the claim to intimacy may rework the ethnographic construction of 'the stranger'. For example, Sally McBeth also discusses her relationship to her informants as involving intimacy and an 'interpersonal and intracultural friendship', and then moves from that discussion to the discipline of anthropology ('the relation between text, audience and ethnographic field techniques') (1993: 146, 161). The move from one to the other, from friendship to the question of technique, constitutes that friendship *as a technique*, a technique of knowledge. Bell's discussion of friendship — of the need to make friends with strangers — purely in terms of relationality and dialogue works to conceal the operation of an epistemic difference and division. In other words, the discussion of friendship conceals the ethnographic relation, which is based on the (re)production of strangeness, that already exists between Bell and Nelson.

What are the implications of Bell's concealment of the power relations involved in the ethnographic encounter through the use of a narrative of friendship? In her discussion of the letter sent to *WSIF* by the Indigenous women, Bell makes the following statement, 'It was authored by 12 well-educated urban Aboriginal women, none of whom, to the best of my knowledge has any in-depth fieldwork experience in the area in which we have written, but all of whom had claimed to speak *for* Aboriginal women' (1996: 108). Here, the effect of the concealment of the ethnographic investment makes itself evident. Bell implicitly claims a greater *ability* to speak on the rape of Aboriginal women as somebody who has had, 'in-depth fieldwork experience'. This is a claim to knowledge arrived at through the classical techniques of ethnography. The work of ethnography *in the field* provides the material context in which Bell's speaking for Nelson could take place.

We have a symptomatic shift in Bell's article that appears in the collection, *Gendered Fields*. In the first instance, Bell writes in a way which conveys a sense or intimacy as proximity: a closeness to each other, or togetherness in which no estrangement appears: 'It was only a glance, I was crying and so was she' (1993: 28). Although the 'I' and the 'she' work to indicate subjects who are differently positioned in the writing (there is no move from the 'I' and the 'she' to a 'we'), the two subject nevertheless remain bound together by the shared act of mourning, for 'her' father. So why not a 'we'? Bell writes, 'there were moments in the field when we move so finely tuned to the logic of the host culture that it feels as if we belong' (1993: 28). The 'we' that appears here, is not Bell and the Indigenous woman who is present only as a 'she', but the 'we' of those entering the host culture, those professional strangers called ethnographers. The 'she' is kept in place, through a shift from the 'I' who identifies with her, to the 'we' that only almost does. In between these two narratives is lodged yet

another calling: 'how was I, as the anthropologist consultant to the judge on this case, going to give expert evidence on the local system of land tenure' (Bell 1993: 28). What we have then is the shift from the intimacy of mourning together (where the 'I' mourns with the stranger 'she'), to the structures of law that position the 'I' as expert, and then to the ethnographic 'we'. Such a narrative involves becoming closer to the stranger (being-with-her) as a means of representing her to the 'we' of the ethnographic (the production of knowledge of the 'host culture').

In the final article in *Gendered Fields* by Wasir Karim the implications of this shift become clear. Karim writes:

Bell was subject to a double barrage of prejudices from both 'native' Aboriginal men and white Australians, but in the long term, was able to re-position herself against the 'other' — in particular, powerful white administrators of the law — by becoming an informant on 'Aboriginal' culture in courts of Australia. In a sense, her 'self' becomes the 'other', not so much by emulating native conduct *as by translating its meaning to others.*

(1993: 249–250)

Here, Bell's constitution as expert by the Law operates *through* her designation as being close enough to the stranger to *stand in for her*, and stand against the Law's administrators. Her ability to occupy the position of an informant on Indigenous culture (rather than being an Indigenous informant) is not that she emulates strangers, but precisely that she can translate them. Translation here returns as a metaphor — even if it is for a different kind of ethnography. One gets closer to the host culture, one makes friends with strangers, *in order to transform that friendship into an expert technique, in order to represent strangers in Law precisely through translating them into the Law.*

[...]

Does [...] failed knowledge [about the stranger] suggest alternative ways of understanding the relationship between the 'we' and the strangers? If we cannot overcome the barriers by making friends with strangers, and hence making the familiar an ever-expanding category, then do we simply keep in place the stranger as a figure, as a trace of that which must remain unknowable? These of course, are impossible questions insofar as they imply the possibility of some sort of resolution. What I am not arguing is that a different way of knowing or not knowing would lead to a better world. One model might be to make friends with all the strangers, to welcome them all into the room (to return to my opening comments in this chapter). While we might question the possibility of the abolition of strangeness, we could also problematise such a model as the ultimate violence of the 'we' of community living (all strangers become translated into the document). Another model might be to call ourselves strangers, insofar as we come to recognise that the 'we' needs the stranger if it is to appear. Does not such an approach, which we can read in Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), also perform the gesture of killing the strangers it simultaneously creates, by rendering them a universal: a new community of the 'we' is implicitly created. If we are all strangers (to ourselves), then nobody is. In contrast to either models of knowledge production where nobody is a stranger or everyone is, my concern with tracing the relations of knowledge that allow the stranger to enter the community as a figure has been precisely to situate figurable strangers within the relations of force and authorisation bound up with the 'who' that knows.

Do we need to distinguish between friendly or figurable strangers, and the absolute Stranger, the one who is beyond the singularity of such figures? Is the absolute Stranger the one who is destroyed by the figuring of strangers? Certainly, I think we need to consider the relation between knowledge and knowability: the desire, for example, to become friends with all strangers (to know them all) can be rearticulated as the violence of translation. However, to name the unknowable as the absolute Stranger is not appropriate precisely because strangers are forms of recognition embedded

within community living (see Chapter 1). The unknowable is a relation to what is already assumed to be known: it is hence not an absolute. The unknowable is a limit that pushes us to the boundary of the historical and ontological: the ways of being in the world in which being-ness is constituted by the worldliness of the world. The naming of the knowable as the absolute stranger is to conceal the worldliness of being with others: it is to assume, that is, that the unknowable is unknowable *without* the particular and worldly beings who demand to know.

How I want to end is to consider the term, 'knowing strangers', more carefully. The term is more ambiguous than I have allowed it, so far, to appear. Within the ethnographic discourses of cultural translation, knowing strangers is the transforming of those who are recognised as strangers into knowledge. The ethnographer is situated as the professional stranger, the stranger who is all-knowing. But what of the possibility of the stranger, who is the object of his knowledge and recognition, coming to know? Does the knowledge always originate from and return to the one who knows? Bell writes that, 'In the field we meet with actual women who may well not agree with popular anthropological characterizations of their lives as impoverished and male-dominated. The women with whom I worked would not have endorsed Lloyd Warner's statement that women make little sacred progress through life but remain largely profane' (1983: 229). This is a fascinating claim. On the one hand, Bell assumes what 'the Aboriginal women themselves' would have endorsed or not. On the other hand, she names the possibility of the 'group of stranger women' knowing differently from how they are known in traditional ethnography. Bell hence opens out the possibility — though she does not explicitly deal with it — that if the Aboriginal women are knowing strangers, then they may know differently to the 'who' that knows in the ethnographic document, *Daughters of the Dreaming*. If the stranger is admitted as possibly knowing differently, then the document and the 'who' would lose the easy identification that allows the stranger to be figurative as the 'what'.

Our task, in opening out the possibility of strangers knowing differently to how they are known, is to draw attention to the forms of authorisation and labour that are concealed by stranger fetishism. Such stranger fetishism is implicit in the assumption that the stranger is any-body we do not know, or in the assumption that we can transform the 'being' of strangers into knowledge. It is only by contesting the discourses of stranger fetishism, that we can open out the possibility of a knowledge that does not belong to the (ethnographic) community, even in the event of its failure to 'know the stranger'.

Ahmed, Sara, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. New York, Routledge, 2000, pp. 38-55.