

3

Recognising Strangers

SARA AHMED

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

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

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

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

On Recognition

To recognise means: to know again, to acknowledge and to admit. How do we know the stranger *again*? The recognisability of strangers is determinate in the social demarcation of spaces of belonging: the stranger is 'known again' as that which has already contaminated such spaces as a threat to both property and person: 'many residents are concerned about the strangers with whom they must share the public space, including wandering homeless people, aggressive beggars, muggers, anonymous black youths, and drug addicts' (Anderson 1990: 238). Recognising strangers is here embedded in a discourse of survival: it is a question of how to survive the proximity of strangers who are already figurable, *who have already taken shape*, in the everyday encounters we have with others.

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

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

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

(1971: 162–163)

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

Such an over-reading of Althusser's dramatisation of interpellation through commonplace hailing suggests that the subject is not simply constituted in the present as such. Rather, inter-subjective encounters in public life continually reinterpellate subjects into differentiated economies of names and signs, where they are assigned different value in social spaces. Noticeably, the use of the narrative of the police hailing associates the constitution of subjects with their subjection to a discourse of criminality, which defines the one who is hailed as a threat to property ('Hey, you there'). If we consider how hailing constitutes the subject, then we can also think about how hailing constitutes the stranger in a relationship precisely to the Law of the subject (the stranger is constituted as the unlawful entry into the nation space, the stranger hence allows Law to mark out its terrain). To this extent, the act of hailing or recognising some-body as a stranger serves to constitute the lawful subject, the one who has the right to dwell, and the stranger at the very same time. It is not that the 'you' is or can be simply a stranger, but that to address some-body as a stranger constitutes the 'you' as the stranger in relation to the one who dwells (the friend and neighbour). In this sense, the (mis)recognition of strangers serves to differentiate between the familiar and the strange, a differentiation that allows the figure of the stranger to appear. The failure embedded in such misrecognition—rather than the failure of recognition—determines the impossibility of reducing the other to the figure of the stranger: as I will argue in Chapter 2, the

singularity of the figure conceals the different histories of lived embodiment which mark some bodies as stranger than others.

By analysing recognition in this way, I am suggesting that the (lawful) subject is not simply constituted by being recognised by the other, which is the primary post-Hegelian model of recognition (see Taylor 1994). Rather, I am suggesting that it is the recognition of others that is central to the constitution of the subject. The very act through which the subject differentiates between others is the moment that the subject comes to inhabit or dwell in the world. The subject is not, then, simply differentiated from the (its) other, but comes into being by learning how to differentiate between others. This recognition operates as a *visual economy*: it involves ways of *seeing the difference* between familiar and strange others as they are (re)presented to the subject. As a mode of subject constitution, recognition involves differentiating between others on the basis of how they 'appear'.²

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

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

Neighbourhoods and dwelling

How do you recognise who is a stranger in your neighbourhood? To rephrase my original question in this way is to point to the relation between the recognition of strangers and one's habitat or dwelling: others are recognised as strangers by those who inhabit a given space, who 'make it' their own. As Michael Dillon argues, 'with the delimitation of any place of dwelling, the constitution of a people, a nation, a state, or a democracy necessarily specifies who is *estranged from* that identity, place or regime' (1999: 119; emphasis added). At one level, this seems to suggest the relativisability of the condition of strangers: any-one can be a stranger if they leave home (the house, the neighbourhood, the region, the nation).³ However, in this section I want to argue that forms of dwelling cannot be equated in

order to allow such a relativisation. Some homes and neighbourhoods are privileged such that they define the terrain of the inhabitable world. The recognition of strangers brings into play relations of social and political antagonism that *mark some others as stranger than other others*.

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

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

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

labour requires failure as its moment of constitution (to this extent, then, the organic community is a fantasy that *requires* its own negation).

It is symptomatic then of the very nature of neighbourhood that it enters public discourse as a site of *crisis*: it is only by attending to the trauma of neighbourhoods which fail that the ideal of the healthy neighbourhood can be maintained as a possibility (which is then, endlessly deferred as 'the real', as well as endlessly kept in place as 'the ideal', by that very language of crisis). Such failed communities are the source of fascination: they demonstrate the need to regulate social spaces. On British television in 1998, there were a number of programmes dedicated to 'neighbours from hell', neighbours who are dirty, who make too much noise, who steal, and who are 'at war' with each other. On *Panorama's* 'Neighbours from Hell' (30 March 1998), urinating in the street becomes the ultimate expression of the antisociability of stranger neighbours. The passing of bodily fluids in public spaces becomes symptomatic of the failure to pass as neighbours. In the United Kingdom, new powers of eviction for local councils give further power to the community to reassert itself against these stranger neighbours. The imaginary community of the neighbourhood hence requires enforcement through Law.

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

Neighbourhood Watch schemes are more common in middle-class areas, where residents are more likely to want to co-operate with the police, and where there is more 'property' with value to protect (Hill 1994: 150). The value attached to certain spaces of belonging is enforced or 'watched' through schemes that allow middle-class spaces to become valued: the subject who watches out for crime, is also *maintaining the value of her or his neighbourhood*. The link here between value of spaces, the protection of property, and the maintenance of social privilege helps us to theorise how the defence of social boundaries against unwelcome intrusions and intruders produces certain categories of strangers—those who don't belong in the leafy suburbs—that are socially legitimated and enforced. In Elijah Anderson's work, there is a discussion of how the concern with safety amongst residents means that, 'they join their diverse counterparts in local struggles to fight crime and otherwise preserve the ideal character for the neighbourhood, forming town watches and shoring up municipal codes that might discourage undesirables and encourage others more to their liking' (1990: 4). The production of safe spaces that have

value or 'ideal character' involves the expulsion of unlike and undesirable 'characters'. In Anderson's work, these characters have *already* materialised or taken the form of, 'wandering homeless people, aggressive beggars, muggers, anonymous black youths, and drug addicts' (1990: 238).

How does neighbourhood watch work to produce such safe spaces? The literature produced on the Neighbourhood Watch schemes by the Home Office in the United Kingdom certainly links the designation of value to social spaces with the detection of strange events, and the expulsion of strangers. There is a double emphasis on the improvement of community living and on security and crime prevention. So Neighbourhood Watch schemes are described as both providing 'the eyes and ears of the police' and as providing, 'the soul and heart of the community' (Home Office 1997). The NWS link the production of safe spaces with the organic growth of a healthy social body: 'Neighbourhood Watch is not just about reducing burglary figures—it's about creating communities who care. It brings local people together and can make a real contribution to improving their lives. The activity of Watch members can foster a new community spirit and a belief in the community's ability to tackle problems. At the same time, you feel secure, knowing your neighbours are keeping an eye on your property' (1997). There is a constant shift between an emphasis on a caring community and a safe one: a safe community moreover is one in which you feel safe as your property is being 'watched' by your neighbours. A link is established here between safety (in which safety is associated with property), a discourse on good neighbourliness (looking out for each other) and the production of community as purified space ('a new community spirit'). Hence, 'it is widely accepted that within every community, there is the potential for crime prevention. Neighbourhood Watch is a way of tapping into this and of drawing a community together'. Neighbourhood Watch hence constitutes the neighbourhood as a community through the protection of the property of nearby others from the threat posed by the very proximity of distant others.

In an earlier Neighbourhood Watch pamphlet (Home Office 1992), the reader is addressed more directly, 'Deciding to join your local group means you have made a positive commitment to act against crime in your community. You have also become one of the largest and most successful grass-roots movements in the country.' Here, the reader is praised for her or his community spirit: not only are you a good neighbour—willing to look out for your neighbours—but you are also a good citizen, who has displayed a positive commitment to 'act against crime in the community'. Neighbourhood watch purifies the space of the community *through purifying the life of the good citizen*, whose life becomes heroic, dedicated to fighting against crime and disorder. Significantly, then, the praise given to the reader/citizen involves a form of reward/recognition: 'You can also get lower insurance premiums from some Insurance companies' (1992). The reward demonstrates the value given to social spaces where subjects watch out for the extraordinary sounds and signs of crime, or the sounds and signs of that which is suspect and suspicious.

But how does Neighbourhood Watch involve techniques of differentiating between the ordinary life of the purified neighbourhood and the extraordinary events that threaten to contaminate that space? The Home Office pamphlet is cautious, 'Sometimes it is hard to tell if you are witnessing a crime or not. You must rely on common sense. . . . You may also become suspicious if you notice

something out of the ordinary. Don't be afraid to call your local police station to report the incident' (1992). Here, common sense should tell the good citizen what they are witnessing. Whatever happens, the good citizen must be a witness: a witness to an event that might or might not be a crime, an *event that unfolds before the patient eye and ear*. The last sentence moves from the importance of differentiating between extraordinary events through common sense (is it a crime?), to the differentiation between ordinary and extraordinary. Here, you might be made suspicious by *some-thing* out of the ordinary. The good citizen is a citizen who *suspects rather than is suspect*, who watches out for departures from ordinary life in the imagined space of the neighbourhood. The good citizen hence watches out for the one who loiters, acts suspiciously, looks out of place. As a Chief Inspector explains in a letter to *The Independent*, 'Neighbourhood Watch is about looking after your property and that of your neighbours, taking sensible crime prevention action *and reporting suspicious persons to the police*' (Scougal 1996, emphasis added). According to the leaflet given by the Divisional Commander to Neighbourhood Watch coordinators, Neighbourhood Watch 'rests on the concept of good neighbourliness', which means that, 'Neighbours are encouraged to report suspicious persons and unusual events to the police'. With such an exercise in good neighbourliness and good citizenship, the neighbourhood comes to police itself: not only is it 'the heart and soul of the community', but in being the 'heart and soul of the community', it is also *'the ears and eyes of the police'*.

The signifier 'suspicious' does an enormous amount of work in Neighbourhood Watch discourse precisely insofar as it is *empty*. The good citizen is not given any information about how to tell what or who is suspicious in the first place. It is my argument that the very failure to provide us with techniques for telling the difference is itself a technique of knowledge. It is the technique of *common sense* that is produced through Neighbourhood Watch discourse. Common sense not only defines what 'we' should take for granted (that is, what is normalised and already known as 'the given'), but it also involves the normalisation of ways of 'sensing' the difference between common and uncommon. That is, information is not given about how to tell the difference between normal and suspicious, because that difference is already 'sensed' through a prior history of making sense *as* the making of 'the common'. The good citizen knows what they are looking for, because they know what is common, and so what departs from the common: 'You must rely on common sense' (1992). Neighbourhood watch is hence about *making* the common: it makes the community ('the heart and soul of the community') insofar as it looks out for and hears the threat to the common posed by those who are uncommon, or those who are 'out of place' in 'this place' ('the eyes and ears of the police').

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

humanism. Such a humanism—Neighbourhood Watch is ‘about creating communities who care’ (1992)—conceals the exclusions that operate to allow the definition and policing of the ‘we’ of the good neighbourhood. The definition and enforcement of the good ‘we’ operates through the recognition of others as strangers: by seeing those who do not belong simply as ‘strangers’ (that is, by not naming *who* are the ones who do not belong in the community), forms of social exclusion are both concealed and revealed (what is concealed is the brute fact of the matter—only some others are recognisable as ‘the stranger’, the one who is out of place). In this sense, the policing of valued spaces allows the legitimation of social exclusion by being tied to a heroic ‘we’ who takes shape against the figure of the unspecified stranger. The production of the stranger as a figure that has linguistic and bodily integrity conceals how strangers are always already specified or differentiated. Neighbourhood Watch becomes definable as a mechanism for ensuring, not only that certain spaces maintain their (property) value, but that *certain lives become valued over other lives*. The recognition of strangers within the neighbourhood does not mean that anybody can be a stranger, depending on her or his location in the world: rather, some-bodies are more recognisable as strangers than other-bodies precisely because they are already read and valued in the demarcation of social spaces.

What is also significant about the Neighbourhood Watch concern with seeing and hearing the difference (becoming the eyes and ears of the police), is that it involves the production of a model of ‘good citizenship’. The discourse on good citizenship involves an individualising of responsibility for crime (Stanko 1997). This model of the good citizen, which Stanko’s work suggests is very much gendered as masculine, takes such responsibility in part through a form of self-policing by, in some sense, *becoming the police*. Certainly in post-Foucauldian work on surveillance, the emphasis is on the shift from public forms of monitoring—where the subject is watched by an anonymous and partially unseen and partially seen Other—to self-monitoring, when *the subject adopts the gaze of the other* (Foucault 1975). My analysis of Neighbourhood Watch might complicate this model of displacement from the gaze of the other to the gaze of the self. The ‘eye’ of the good citizen is certainly the site of labour—it is this ‘eye’ that is doing the work. However, that ‘eye’ does not simply return to the body, as that which must be transformed and regulated as ‘the seen’, but looks elsewhere, to and at others. In other words, ‘the good citizen’ is one who watches (out for) suspicious persons and strangers, and who in that very act, becomes aligned, not only with the police (and hence the Law), but with the imagined community itself whose boundaries are protected *in the very labour of his look*.

Furthermore, self-policing communities are inscribed as moral communities, those that care. Caring evokes a figure of who must be cared for, who must be protected from the risks of crime and the danger of strangers. So Neighbourhood Watch ‘reassures vulnerable members of the community that you are keeping a neighbourly eye on them’ (1992). The construction of the figure of the vulnerable member/body alongside the heroic good citizen provides the moral justification for the injunction to watch; it detaches ‘watching out for’ from ‘busybodying’ (1992) by redefining it as ‘watching out on behalf of’. The discourse of vulnerability allows self-policing to be readable as the protection of others: the risk posed

by suspects and strangers is a risk posed to the vulnerable bodies of children, the elderly and women. The figuring of the good citizen is built on the image of the strong citizen: in this sense, the good citizen is figurative primarily as white, masculine and middle-class, the heroic subject who can protect the vulnerable bodies of 'weaker others': 'crime cannot survive in a community that cares—Neighbourhood Watch Works' (NNWA).

The 1997 pamphlet also describes the newer scheme 'Street Watch' (there are currently over 20,000 in operation in the United Kingdom) which, 'covers many different activities, ranging from providing transport or escort services for elderly people, to walking a specific route regularly, keeping an eye out for trouble and reporting it to the police'. Here, the good citizen is valued not only for his heart, eyes and ears, but also his feet.⁴ He takes specific routes, but most importantly, according to the Home Secretary responsible for the introduction of the scheme, Michael Howard, he is 'walking with purpose' (Bennetto 1995). Street Watch is described as 'patrolling with a purpose'.

We can consider here Hallman's definition of who and what must be watched in his work on neighbourhoods: 'people who seem to have no purpose in the neighbourhood' (Hallman 1984: 159). Strangers are suspicious because they 'have no purpose', that is, they have no legitimate function within the space which could justify their existence or intrusion. Strangers are hence recognisable precisely insofar as they *do not enter into the exchanges of capital that transforms spaces into places*. Strangers are constructed as an illegitimate presence in the neighbourhood: they have no purpose, and hence they must be suspect. You can recognise the stranger through their loitering gait: strangers loiter, they do not enter the legitimate exchanges of capital that might justify their presence. In contrast, the street watcher is constructed as a heroic figure whose purpose is the very detection of those who are without a legitimate purpose, of those whose purpose can hence only be explained as suspicious, as criminal, as a crime (Young 1996: 5). The stranger's presence on the street is a crime (waiting to happen). The proximity of such loitering strangers in the purified space of the good neighbourhood hence requires that the heroic citizen take a specific route: those who are recognisable as strangers, *whose lack of purpose conceals the purpose of crime*, need to be expelled through purposeful patrolling in order that the value of property can be protected.

Such a construction of the good citizen through the figure of the loitering stranger is clearly subject to forms of social differentiation: in one reading, the good citizen is structured around the body of the dominant (white, middle-class) man, who protects the vulnerable bodies of women and children from the threat of marginalised (black, working-class) men. However, these differences are concealed by the very modes of recognition: the figure of the stranger appears as 'the stranger' precisely by being cut off from these histories of determination (= stranger fetishism). That is, the recognition of strangers involves the differentiation between some others and other others at the same time as it conceals that very act of differentiation. What is significant about Neighbourhood Watch is precisely the way in which it links the formation of community with safety and the detection of crime: such links produce the figure of the stranger as a *visible danger* to the 'we' of the community, and hence as the necessary condition for making what 'we' have in common.

Stranger danger

If the construction and enforcement of purified spaces of belonging takes place through the production of the figures of the good citizen, the vulnerable body and the loitering stranger, then how is this linked to the social perception of danger? In this section, I examine the discourse of stranger danger as a way of analysing how strangers are already recognised as posing danger to property and person, not just in particular valued dwellings and neighbourhoods, but also in public life as such. I want to consider, not only how the construction of stranger danger is tied to valued and devalued spaces, but also how strangers are read as posing danger *wherever* they are: the projection of danger onto the figure of the stranger allows the definition of the subject-at-home, and home as inhabitable space, as inherently safe and valuable. One *knows again* those whom one does not know by assuming they are the *origin* of danger.

Partly, this concern with public life involves a consideration of urban space and cities as 'a world of strangers' (Lofland 1973). Lofland suggests that cities, in particular public spaces within cities (such as streets and leisure spaces), involve perpetual encounters between people who are not personally known to each other, although they may be known through forms of visual identification and recognition (1973: 15–16). As a result, he argues that cities involve particular kinds of social and spatial encounters. I would not want to refute the premise that there are different kinds of spaces that involve different kinds of encounters between others (such as urban and rural spaces, or such as different forms of the public within urban spaces). However, Lofland's account does involve a form of spatial determinism—these spaces determine these encounters between others—which shifts quickly into a form of cultural determinism—cultures have different spaces and therefore involve different encounters between others.⁵ What I am interested in is how the very encounters that take place between others involve the forming of both cultural and spatial boundaries: that is, how the (mis)recognition of others as strangers is what allows the demarcation of given spaces within 'the public domain', but also the legitimisation of certain forms of mobility or movement within the public, and the delegitimation of others.

I am positing here a relationship between dwelling and movement:⁶ spaces' are claimed, or 'owned' not so much by inhabiting what is already there, but by moving within, or passing through, different spaces which are only given value as places (with boundaries) through the movement or 'passing through' itself. The relationship between movement, occupation and ownership is well documented in feminist work: for example, women's restricted movement within public spaces is a result, not only of the fear of crime, but of the regulation of femininity, in which 'being seen' in certain spaces becomes a sign of irresponsibility (Stanko 1997: 489). Women's movements are regulated by a desire for 'safe-keeping': respectability becomes measured by the visible signs of a desire to 'stay safe'. In this sense, movement becomes a form of subject constitution: *where* 'one' goes or does not go determines *what* one 'is', or where one is seen to be, determines what one is seen to be.

Elijah Anderson's work on how communities are established through the concern with safety examines how the fear of crime becomes a fear of strangers. Such

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

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

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

The knowledges embedded in street wisdom are linked by Anderson to a kind of 'field research' (Anderson 1990: 216). The wise subject, the one who knows where and where not to walk, how and how not to move, who and who not to talk to, has an expertise that can be understood as both *bodily and cultural capital*. It is such wise subjects who will prevail in a world of strangers and dangers: 'To prevail means simply to get safely to one's destination, and the ones who are most successful are those who are "streetwise"' (Anderson 1990: 231). In this sense, the discourse of stranger danger involves techniques of knowledge that allow wise

subjects to prevail: to arrive at their destination, to leave and return home and still maintain a safe distance between themselves and dangerous strangers. Community is not just established through the designation of pure and safe spaces, but becomes established *as a way of moving through space*. Becoming street wise defines the subject in terms of the collective: the wise subject has collective knowledge about what is, 'safe, harmless, trustworthy' and what is 'bad, dangerous and hostile' that gives that subject the ability to move safely in a world of strangers and dangers. The stranger is here produced as a figure of danger that grants the wise subject and community, those who already claim both knowledge and capital, the ability to prevail.

The discourse of stranger danger also involves the figuring, not only of the wiser subject who can move through dangerous places (a mobile subject who is racialised, classed and gendered), but also the vulnerable body, the one who is most at risk. Here, 'the child' becomes a figure of vulnerability, the purified body that is most endangered by the contaminating desires of strangers. Indeed, it is the literature on child protection that has familiarised 'stranger danger' as the mechanism for ensuring personal safety. One double page of the Home Office leaflet on crime prevention in the United Kingdom is hence dedicated to 'your family' and, 'to keeping your children safe' (the ideal reader/subject/citizen is always a parent, bound to Law and duty through the demands of parenthood). The pamphlet advises, 'Do not talk to strangers. Most well-meaning adults will not approach a child who is on his own, unless he is obviously distressed or in need. Tell your children never to talk to strangers, and to politely ignore any approach from a stranger. Get them to tell you if a stranger tries to talk to them.' Immediately, strangers are differentiated from 'well-meaning' adults, who would not approach children. Indeed, the child itself must become 'street wise': one colouring-in book produced by the Lancashire Constabulary in the United Kingdom is entitled, 'Operation Streetwise workbook' and aims 'to provide children with an exciting opportunity to learn and practice personal safety skills'. Here, growing up is narrated in terms of acquiring the wisdom to deal with danger that already stalks in the figure of the stranger.⁷

The figure of the child comes to perform a certain role within the narrative of crime prevention and stranger danger: the innocence of the child is what is most at risk from the proximity of strangers. The child comes to embody, in a narrative that is both nostalgic (returning to an imagined past) and fearful (projecting an unimaginable future), all that could be stolen or lost by the proximity of strangers. The child's innocence and purity becomes a matter of social and national responsibility: through figuring the stranger as too close to the child, the stranger becomes recognisable as an attack on the moral purity of nation space itself. It is over the bodies of children that the moral campaign against strangers is waged.

In recent debates in the press, the paedophile is hence represented as the ultimate stranger that communities must have the power to evict. A change in the law in 1997 allowed the British police force to inform members of the community when a paedophile is in their midst, on a 'need to know' basis. Community action groups, as well as some local councils, have redefined the need to know as *a right to know*: arguing that paedophiles should not be allowed into communities as they pose a risk to children, 'Recent moves include attempts by some councils to ban

paedophiles from their communities altogether, and campaigns to keep them in prison longer' (Hilpern 1997). The construction of sex offenders against children as monsters who do not belong in a community is clear in the following statement from John O'Sullivan, from the pressure group, *Parents Against Child Abuse*: 'If there is a wild lion loose in the street, the police would tell us. A paedophile in the neighbourhood is the same. They might not rip the flesh, but they are just as damaging to the mind of a child. We need to know who they are.' The number of vigilante attacks on suspected paedophiles in Britain in the 1990s suggests what this knowledge will be used for.

Significantly, then, the paedophile comes to embody the most dangerous stranger as he poses the greatest risk to the vulnerable and pure body of the child. The community comes together through the recognition of such dangerous strangers: they must expel him, he who is the wild animal, the lion, at loose in the street. The monstrosity of such recognisable strangers is figured through the tearing of the skin of the child. The monsters who must be excluded to keep children safe, prey on children: they require the heroic action of the moral community that cares. The imaginary community is constructed as a safe community where children's bodies are not vulnerable: the moral community itself becomes the child, pure, innocent and free. The recognition of dangerous strangers allows the enforcement of the boundaries of such communities: a definition of the purity of the 'we' against the monstrous 'it'.

Sally Engle Merry's *Urban Danger: Life in a Neighbourhood of Strangers*, discusses how the fear of crime 'focuses on the threat of the violent attack by a stranger' (Merry 1981: 6). Such a fear means that the familiar is already designated as safe: one is safe at home, unless there is an intrusion from a stranger. One could comment here how such a reduction of danger to the stranger conceals the danger that may be embedded in the familiar: much feminist work, for example, demonstrates how the perception of the rapist as a stranger conceals how most sexual attacks are committed by friends or family. As Elizabeth Stanko argues, 'Danger many of us believe arises from the random action of strangers who are, we further assume, usually men of colour. Yet according to most people's experiences . . . danger and violence arise within our interpersonal relationships' (1990: 3). The projection of danger onto the figure of the stranger allows violence to be figured as exceptional and extraordinary—as coming from outside the protective walls of the home, family, community or nation. As a result, the discourse of stranger danger involves *a refusal to recognise how violence is structured by, and legitimated through, the formation of home and community as such*.

The stranger is here figured as the violent monster whose elimination would mean safety for women and children. Such a figuration allows the home to be imagined as a safe haven: an imagining that cannot deal with the violence that is instituted through the social relations within the home. As Merry argues, 'Violence at the hand of the stranger is usually perceived as dangerous, but an assault in the context of a fight with a known enemy or neighbour is rarely viewed in this way' (Merry 1981: 14). The notion of violence as domestic, while now recognised through Law as a result of years of feminist campaigning, remains a difficult one for the social imaginary: the violent husband is then read as a monster underneath, as a stranger passing as husband, rather than as a husband exercising the power

that is already legitimated through hegemonic forms of masculinity. According to stranger danger discourse, the stranger husband has intruded into the ideal home: he is not understood as an element *in the ordinary production of domestic space*, and in the formation of relations of power and exchange within that space.

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

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

Recognising Strangers

¹ To the extent that I am challenging the assumed opposition between strange and familiar (and also in Chapter 4, between home and away), I am following Freud, whose model of the uncanny emphasises how the strange leads back to the familiar. He also suggests that homely (*das Heimliche*) and unhomely (*das Unheimliche*) are intimately linked (Freud 1964: 225–226). However, Freud explains this intimacy of apparent opposites through a model of repression: 'this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through a process of repression' (1964: 241). In contrast, I am seeking to explain the familiarity of the stranger by considering the *production* rather than repression of that which is strange: the stranger is produced as an effect of recognition and as a category

of knowledge (see Chapter 2), and is henceforth familiar in its very strangeness. When we look out 'for strangers' we already know what we are looking for.

- ² In Chapter 2, I consider how the recognition of strangers involves an economy of touch, as well as a visual economy. We can also note here that recognition has become an important part of political struggle—marginalised groups struggle to be recognised, or *to be seen*, by mainstream politics, which is also a struggle against forms of misrecognition (Taylor 1994; Fraser 1997). A key debate has emerged within feminism on the limits of the politics of recognition (see also Brown 1995; Skeggs 1999). Although I can't enter these debates here, my analysis of how recognition operates as a visual economy in everyday life and social encounters between others might suggest some limits to a politics of recognition, although it might also suggest the difficulties of simply overcoming recognition. In Chapter 6, I complicate this model of recognition as 'seeing the difference' by considering the implications of the structural possibility that the difference might not be seeable as the subject may be passing as it 'passes through' the community.
- ³ For a discussion of the relationship between migration and strangers see Chapter 4. Here, I argue that migration does not allow us to relativise the condition of strangeness.
- ⁴ Alene Branton, secretary to the steering committee of the National Neighbourhood Watch Association in the UK, is reported to have said, 'We were set up to be the eyes and ears of the police. We never expected to be the feet as well' (Benetto 1995).
- ⁵ He contrasts the modern proximity of strangers with 'primitive cultures' where strangers are more at a distance.
- ⁶ I also consider the relationship between dwelling and movement in chapters 4 and 8 where I develop the notion of 'global nomadic citizenship'.
- ⁷ Importantly, stranger danger discourse attempts to define the stranger as anybody we don't know; it seeks to contest what I have called the recognisability of strangers, and the assumption that 'strangers' only look a certain way. As James Brewer puts it, 'Who are the bad guys? How can you recognise them before its too late? . . . What do the bad guys look like? They look like *YOU*' (1994: 15, 17). What this reveals, despite itself, is precisely the ways in which strangers are already recognised as looking unlike '*YOU*': the discourse of stranger danger seeks to contest the very familiarity of strangers, but can only do so, by first confirming that familiarity, and the 'common-sense' assumption that danger is posed only by certain bodies, who are marked by their difference from the everyday of the neighbourhood.