Chapter 2

Demarcating Strangers: Space, Membership, and Modes of Regulation

2.1. Demarcating Strangers: Space

The primary means of demarcation utilized in the definition and determination of Strangers are space and membership. Theories of social organization allow us to think of space not merely as geography, but as territory, psychic terrain, space that is *claimed*. Territories may be fixed—claims to physical geography supported by law and custom—or situational, spheres of temporary validation like public washrooms or telephones. Personal items such as purses demonstrate an *egocentric* space, indicating a mobile transference of subjectivity (Goffman, *Relations* 29). The notion of what constitutes personal space is a prime demarcative between cultures. Harman comments on the role of proximity in defining the Stranger. He divides proxemics into three categories: *spatial, social,* and *cultural*. Spatial proximity relates to "nearness and remoteness…in terms of geography" (12). This, in turn, is related closely to sociological studies of the individual as what Goffman refers to as a "vehicular unit" (5) and his description of the mobile personal *umwelt*, or surrounding sphere of identity, which provides a base set of criteria for detecting identity-threatening danger. Social proximity refers to "within-group distanciation…usually on the basis of built-in structural inequality between dominant and subordinate groups" (13). Included in this notion of social proximity are some elements of body language and auditory nuances of dialects and intonation, such as stress and volume. Cultural proximity "refers to elements concerning communicative competence

between cultures" (13). These rules of proximity are broken constantly by Insiders as well as Strangers (the determination of status not having been made, in many cases, before the offence is committed), without, however, exacting similar consequences.

Goffman uses the term *umwelt* to describe an individual's "surround"—"the sphere around the individual within which these *potential* sources of alarm are found" (250). Within an individual's daily life there are found two primary forms of relationship: *anchored* or *pegged* relationships where mutual knowledge is extensive and shared, and *anonymous* relationships, "patterned, mutual treatment between two individuals who know each other solely on the basis of instantly perceived social identity" (189). While there are variations of these relationship forms, and the possibility of transformation from one form to the other, Strangers fit uneasily within this loop of knowledge. For example, she or he may demonstrate appropriate etiquette with regard to tie-signs—objects in a space which are markers of possession, such as a purse left on a chair, or other demonstrations of possessional behaviour—while misinterpreting others. A Stranger may have an anchored (intimate and permanent) relationship with an Insider which can mitigate their status to some degree, but it is unlikely that any individual within such a polity has the ability to completely transform communal perceptions of a Stranger. The limited degree to which status transformation is generally allowed the Stranger is equally a result of the actions and appearential conformity of the Stranger herself. With regard to this, even reaction time to social stimuli is connotatively crucial: "[the Stranger] acquires a survivably short reaction time – the time period needed to sense alarm, to decide on a correct response, and to respond" (249). Lacking the dialogistic vocabulary of "supportive interchanges" (64), the rituals and observed behavioural patterns offered as a

symbolic code to buttress a shared identity, the Stranger may engage in remedial interchanges (108-9): accounts, apologies, and requests, designed to redress a perceived offence. However, acts of remediation require, at the very least, a sense of what kind of corrective behaviour, enacted as social ritual, will ameliorate the perceived offence. This sense is initially founded on the Stranger's past experience with a home culture and then evolves based on experience within the "new" community. A pattern of persistent remediation may act as a form of indictment in itself. More frustrating for the Stranger is the fact that the offence may be *virtual* (114). The offending subject may simply be *perceived* to have transgressed. Customs and mores do not transfer from one culture to another, and perhaps even one micro-community to another, without altering in some respect. Thus, according to his or her own precepts for appropriate behaviour—and even within those of the new host community—a Stranger may be acting in a perfectly normal manner. In Stranger discourse, however, perception is tantamount to reality, and even acts that have not been performed by Strangers may be imputed to them (106). An individual takes her *umwelt* with her wherever she goes:

> the *Umwelt* or surround is an egocentric area fixed around a claimant, typically an individual. …As the individual moves, some potential signs for alarm move out of effective range (as their sources move out of relevance) while others, which a moment ago were out of range, now come into it. A bubble or capsule of events thus seems to follow the individual around, but actually, of course, what is changing is not the position of events but their at-handedness; what looks like an envelope of events is really something like a moving wave front of relevance (255).

Communal bodies can function as destructive instruments: "When an individual is in the open presence of others (and they are openly in his presence), he becomes

vulnerable to them in certain standard ways in consequence of his character as a perishable organism and their character as an instrumentality" (302).

In Newfoundland outport culture, as has been related by Firestone (71), a knock on the door means a Stranger has arrived; in traditional outport life, doors were left unlocked, as every community member was known. Only someone unfamiliar with the individuals and customs of the community (or perhaps one estranged from those individuals and customs) would be required to knock on a door. Pete Soucy's play *Flux* (1994) provides an example of this marker of Strangeness. Jill, formerly Claude's girlfriend, has moved out and begun a relationship with a feminist woman who disapproves of Claude. As this has developed Jill has continued to come and go casually from the house, until at last she returns one night and a point of no return is reached, acknowledged by both parties:

> **CLAUDE:** You knocked.
>
> **JILL:** Oh. Yes. I stood there wondering about that, myself. I guess I felt I should, somehow.
>
> **CLAUDE:** (beat) I understand. (Silence.) How's Jacqueline? (197)

Norms such as the Strangeness of knocking on a door come to be reified through continuous repetition over time, adding the imposing weight of tradition to their propriety.

A sense of space and what defines it is therefore required before one can determine the social definition of Inside and Outside, and the consequences of life within or without. Space is territory, both physical and psychic, its boundaries (such as borders)

often promoted as timeless, fixed and immutable, yet it is fluid enough to be in a state of constant redefinition. Physical and psychic territory, carrying with it the *sense* of space, is defended with all the vigour and zeal one attributes to the protection of the self. A community of people identify themselves through their shared geography, both physical and social.

Within such boundaries, member individuals define *personal space* (Goffman 29), socially-approved and acknowledged surrounding zones which, when breached, produce a feeling of encroachment. Different cultures, for example, have distinctive notions of the appropriate amount of space allowed between individuals waiting in a line. A Stranger may unknowingly encroach upon a member/Insider's personal space by brushing up against him while waiting. Conversely, a Stranger may feel encroachment in such a situation if local norms dictate a tactile, physically close association in line-ups.

Goffman also describes the notion of *the stall*, a bounded personal space that is temporarily held by an individual on an "'all-or-none' basis" (32). This can be tangible or intangible in nature. An office cubicle functions as a stall, as does a seat taken at a movie theatre. In most North American cultures, someone who takes the seat next to an individual in an otherwise empty movie theatre is guilty of inappropriate or even suspect behaviour.

The *turn* (Goffman 35) is of particular interest in that Insider knowledge is required in order for a Stranger to fit within approved boundaries of behaviour. In certain situations, such as during a fire alarm, formal and informal orderings are acted upon, often without explicit verbal confirmation of their existence. Women and children may be allowed to exit first, to take the first "turn". Waiting lines are themselves not common to

every culture. In English Canadian culture, a person who walks to the front of a line is perceived to be "cutting in" or cheating, while the individual, if a Stranger, may simply be following the accepted practice of his or her home culture.

The *sheath* describes the skin of an individual as a territory (Goffman 38). There is a body of academic study which concentrates upon the human body and its territoriality, especially in feminist schools of inquiry: for the purposes of this study it is sufficient to think of the human body as a collection of zones which, within a particular culture, are considered either sacrosanct or open to contact.

Possessional Territory (Goffman 38) refers to objects considered as belonging to an individual which create a zone of possession when they occupy a shared physical space. Such objects can range from temporary to more permanent possessions: a desk in an office, for example, is more likely viewed as a long-term possession than a newspaper read at a coffee shop. While a newspaper is in the hands of a reader, however, it may be viewed as a breach of social etiquette if it is taken without permission by another. People can also function as possessional objects within this frame of reference; for example, a mother may vigilantly scrutinize any individual who comes too close to, or makes contact with, her child.

There are many fields of scholarship which touch upon the nature and use of space. The terms outlined above are those chosen for the purpose of analyzing how Insiders, Necessary Outsiders and Strangers utilize space within communities to establish and maintain identities and to define membership.

2.2 Demarcating Strangers: Membership

Necessary Outsiders are able to shift inward along the line of alienation in a community not only through the perceived value of a professional skill or an affiliation with an Insider, but through learning, by virtue of their presence in the community, a sufficient amount of received information about local history, customs, and beliefs. Such localized information is most often passed on informally, as oral history, gossip, and conversation, though it may exist in a more general form in local publications. Insiders are expected to know local references, in terms of both past events and current practice, and to refer to them in appropriate terms, at appropriate times, in appropriate ways. The history and culture of a settlement can be used as a means of determining affiliation: micro-histories are typically rendered orally. In some cases they may exist in more formal versions, such as books and articles, but the sheer amount of detail and the emphasis placed on currency of knowledge of people, places and things at the local level militates against up-to-date formal documentation. The immediacy of oral discourse provides its primary advantage over written records as a membership demarcative in micro-communities.

The oral nature of a community's Insider knowledge indicates that this knowledge is contingent on intimate, long-term affiliation. A visitor might read a community newspaper to learn more about local issues, but this mode is unlikely to communicate the linguistic nuances of local discourse: argot and slang, taboo subjects, the order in which subjects should appear in the conversation, and in what manner opinions are to be expressed. Linguistic aspects of what Fishman calls a "speech community"—a group bonded by a shared, distinct use of a common language (22)—alter quickly, and a

returning voluntary Exile may find his Insider knowledge has become obsolete, and as a result carries less social currency. In such a situation, Necessary Outsider status might be the consequence of such non-current knowledge, when the returning Exile might reasonably have expected to reacquire Insider status. A new, or returning, resident might quickly pick up some of the external, explicit codes of behaviour without difficulty if they are what Stonequist calls an "internationalist" (179).[1] Such people possessed of a "dual consciousness"—that is, one that splits between a native environment and a new environment—confront fewer obstructions from their learned native culture in adapting to a new environment and may achieve more or less fluent *communicative competence*. However, the fact of this competent execution of communication symbols is complicated by the importance of the way in which this information is expressed and in what context it is applied. Local speech, often involving specific variant dialects and local idioms, is virtually impossible for a newcomer to adopt. This is an effective means of ensuring that Strangers remain identifiable.

Recognition of the Stranger follows from a complex set of semiotic codes. What Lofland calls *appearential ordering* (27)—dress, speech, and other presentational symbols, as well as *spatial ordering*, and the sense of what is appropriately found in a familiar space—are initial markers of separation from the host organism. None of these markers can be utilized without a pre-determined model of membership against which to measure them. Markers are not only used as separators but to confirm the identity of the other. Thus the *notion* of the Stranger must exist before a Stranger can be perceived and identified. The figuration of the Stranger necessarily follows as the extreme manifestation of Strange behaviour.

Strangers do not merely pass unrecognized. The Strangeness of the foreign body which has entered (or been identified within) the environment of the social organism is noted. This recognition in turn is based on a pre-determined idea of what is Strange; not only what is unfamiliar but, within a range of acceptability, what demands active attention. The Stranger, even in prospect, is real, a "body", or in Ahmed's phrase, "some-body" (53), that is, more than a conjured object, even if defined more by its absence than its presence.

Elijah Anderson has demonstrated in his studies of how communities are established that a fear of crime often mutates into a fear of Strangers (5). This fear results not only in shared criteria for Strange behaviour, but a shared way of responding to stimuli within the community, a means of Insider identification as crucial as the knowledge of Strangeness. The observant citizen is *looking* for Strangers. These "collective definitions" (216) allow the subject-citizen to move through its space in an appropriate (i.e. non-Strange) manner.

As has been mentioned, membership in the multitude of micro-communities and affiliative circles which make up a community is constantly shifting, as the boundaries of these micro-organisms mutate and transform. New members are taken in, while old ones disappear. What is important in terms of membership with regard to an individual's status within a community are the number and perceived significance of memberships held. An individual who possesses few affiliations is at risk of gravitating beyond the orbit of communal life.

2.3 Space and Membership: Outports as Neighbourhoods

Within most macro-community polities are smaller micro-communities known as neighbourhoods. The study of how neighbourhoods work—how they self-regulate, respond to perceived threats, what binds them—is germane to any analysis of Newfoundland and its outports. Neighbourhoods are cells within a greater community organism, comprising both micro-communities and affiliative circles with their own codes and means of regulation. Outports function as neighbourhoods that are physically detached from other neighbourhoods. They are, in the terms used by Howard Hallman in *Neighbourhoods*, "symbolic communities" bounded by "limited territory" (16). Only Insiders can accurately furnish definitions of what the community represents and where it begins and ends. To the traditional links of soil and blood one may add the binding quality of propinquity. Michael Dillon argues that "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" (19).

Hallman understands neighbourhoods as arising from a concern for others combined with concern for oneself (11). Central to Hallman's thesis is the notion that some neighbourhoods are more *neighbourly* than others. Certain neighbourhoods make "better" communities in terms of achieving collective and individual objectives. An effective community, as defined by Hallman, is one in which citizens regard the good of the community as their own good. There is a sense of shared investment, and as a result a greater investment in the community is made.

Effective communities are those with a high degree of what Matthew Crenson calls "social homogeneity and solidarity" (256). As Crenson notes, there is evidence that a united response to a perceived threat is useful, if not essential, in helping to create a sense of fellow-feeling amongst residents (257). Different reasons explain why communities lack this sense of shared values. The space in which they exist may not be defined or perceived as "local" (American-style suburbs, for instance) because of its magnitude or the community's inability to define or defend it. Ethnic diversity of a sort that combines conflicting or widely disparate cultural practices may prevent unity of purpose. Class distinctions, made through level of education of financial status, may act as barriers to shared purpose.

Outports, as micro-communities akin to neighbourhoods, have historically been ethnically homogeneous and spatially defined. Outport residents were able to identify Strangers in their midst through their knowledge and application of received knowledge and recognition of the unfamiliar. In addition, outports, like neighbourhoods, are marked by an intense intermixing of what Susan Keller determines to be the three essential dyadic relationships of friend, relative, and neighbour (24-6). Keller adds that "neighbouring" is a highly formalized activity, involving obligations and voluntary exchanges which are designed to accrue social currency (44). Such exchanges, often taking the form of informal gossip or street-side chatter, fulfil key functions within the community: aid, information on resources, tools to manage problems, context for behaviour and social control. These interchanges represent an informal apparatus which monitors levels of *dyadic bonding*, reciprocally-generated social debt. Informal information-gathering and sharing have been traditionally a key aspect of outport life,

where small groups of people are clustered together in relative isolation from other communities. Within the context of Newfoundland studies this has been documented by Firestone and Chiaramonte (1969).

This aspect of interaction is also reflected in dramatic treatments of outports such as Russell's *The Holdin' Ground*, where the residents rely upon one another for news about the Stranger who has arrived. The visitor Michael, as the son of esteemed Insiders who had reluctantly departed the community many years before, is treated, after his identity is revealed, with all the privileges and respect accorded an Insider with strong dyadic ties, although he has never set foot in Pigeon Inlet or Muldoon's Cove.

Further, neighbourhoods and outports share characteristic attitudes to the use of time and space. There is an implicit agreement on what constitutes "normal" use of public space, and, in fact, what constitutes public, semi-public, semi-private, and private space, information that a foreign-born Stranger may not be privy to unless they transgress (Newman 4).

This idea of "normal" usage applies equally to the concept of time. Certain times of day carry expected functions within a neighbourhood: "work time", "social time", "shopping time", and so on (Hallman 21). With these general criteria comes a visual picture of normal activity within a community; what a street "should" look like at four in the afternoon, for instance. All of these criteria combine as a non-juridical means of security enforcement within a small community such as an outport.

2.4 Enforcement: Self-Monitoring, Neutralization and Fetishization

A critical element in the creation of the Stranger figure involves the Stranger's acknowledgement, acceptance, and adherence to the standards of "good citizenship", in terms of the role they are assigned within this framework. The Stranger may break the law, or breach the unwritten laws of a community, but in so doing s/he is aware, or is made aware, that these written and unwritten laws exist, and implicitly accepts their primacy in the community. This acceptance may also act to mitigate the Stranger's status to that of Necessary Outsider. As Goffman relates, if their admission of transgression is perceived as a *remedial act*, they may earn a degree of inclusion (113).

This self-monitoring is described by Michel Foucault as the subject adopting the gaze of the other (207). Each Stranger is assumed to come from a "home" community where, at least potentially, similar precepts are held. Thus it is not merely by interpellation or enforcement that the foreign organism is identified and regulated, but through a process of identification initiated by the foreign body. The Stranger is positioned *within the occupied space,* as an alien element fundamental to the working of the organism, one which validates and helps maintain its structures of order and self-definition.

2.4.1 Surveillance

In his exploration of the evolution of the modern prison, *Discipline et Surveillance [Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison]* (1977, 1995), Michel

Foucault examines how modes of social control have developed from punishment-based mechanisms, constructed and executed by institutional authorities, to forms of enforcement enacted by citizens upon themselves and each other. The French title of Foucault's work provides a clearer idea of what he regards as the primary shift in social control, from punitive to corrective, and from imposition to self-imposition. This last demonstrates a shift in the exercise of power from object to subject position, as the resident or citizen assumes responsibility for the enforcement of social order through an awareness of the constancy of the object gaze (200). In this way discipline becomes a mechanism not only for identifying transgression but as a means of Insider education, an ongoing process in implementing self-regulation (198). This process has the social benefit of the subject's investment in the maintenance of social order, no matter whether they are transgressing its regulations or adhering to them. Self-imposed enforcement is less overt than institutional regulation, covers a wider number of informal situations, and is effectively cost-free. Fewer physical manifestations of discipline are required, and the institutional representatives of order (both human and structural) maintain an iconic presence. They present a constant reminder of order without being forced into public displays of regulation that would open them to scrutiny (and the possibility of rebellion). Foucault observes that "the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary" (201). The implication of this statement in the context of social regulation is that those most interested in the maintenance of the status quo, the established elites, benefit from the assumption of social regulation by ordinary citizens. These citizens are, in effect, giving up crucial aspects of their ability to govern themselves under the delusion of having been accorded a measure of power, while affording the elites—

unqualified Insiders—the opportunity to conceal the repressive aspects of their social agenda.

In a small community such as a Newfoundland outport, both Insider and Stranger know they are being observed. Though subjects are constantly aware of being under surveillance, they may not be certain from whence, or whom, it originates, because *watching* has become a communal obligation. A census, gossip traded between acquaintances, the church-going family member reporting back and forth on the service and on her family members; one is *known*, and therefore one is *observed*. In such a social context, the individual acknowledges the requirement to observe oneself, an act that validates and renews the social order.

Various informal agencies long-established in outport communities take on the responsibilities of maintaining surveillance and discipline. Charities, church groups, hospitals, schools, and social clubs all perform this role through the reaffirmation of community values and Insider education. The dissemination of information as a means of enforcement is pervasive and difficult to avoid, as it exists within the framework of both the formal and informal information-gathering structures of a society. As Foucault notes, social discipline consists of partitioning—houses, institutional buildings where people meet, work spaces on the one hand—and verticality, or degrees of social status, on the other (220). Each citizen is subject to enforcement. The consequences of transgressive behaviour involve partitioning (isolation) or diminished social status (inhibited contact). Foucault notes that discipline is an "anti-nomadic technique" (218). This has practical significance in a population subject to the ravages of economically-motivated migration, as is the case in Newfoundland.

The construction of a "good citizen" is dependent upon the notion that if social capital is not being exchanged, the activity must be regarded with suspicion. As Hallman notes, Strangers *appear* to lack a legitimate function within the defined space (159). This relationship may be demonstrated by the following equation:

$$\text{Community} = \frac{\text{Space (definition)} + \text{Citizens (purpose)}}{\text{Outside (agents, actions, purposes)}}$$

The Outside acts as a divisive force. The factors of space and membership are divided into smaller units, placing the definition of the community under duress. When these units constitute, or re-constitute, in determining the Outside identity of the agents involved, the community succeeds in re-establishing its identity.

In order to retain its integrity as a micro-community, a collective must guard against such a division of the community, and act upon it when it occurs. The *prospect* of a permanent and crippling division of community identity must be continually promoted, in the interests of maintaining vigilance. The potential for a community to fail is a pre-requisite for a community's survival (Ahmed 26). If an enemy does not exist, one must be created.

2.4.2 Neutralization and Fetishization of the Stranger

Given this acculturated fear of the foreign, and the individualization of the community through knowledge-gathering structures, the means utilized to neutralize the figure of the Stranger expand beyond the legal remedies available to a citizenry. An agent

adjudged a Stranger, at a level or within a context where the law is seen as an insufficient means of correction, is liable to extra-juridical enforcement measures normally considered beyond the sanctioned actions of a polity. In the case of such "extreme" Strangers, extra-legal violence may be implicitly sanctioned. The use of the Stranger figure enables a community to perceive itself as free of *inherent* violence. In this manner, the concept of violence is considered to be Outside community norms by both parties, one believing it justified, the other not.

Newfoundland drama presents various examples of the enforcement of social order through both legal and extra-legal means. Perhaps the most intriguing text in this regard is Berni Stapleton's *Woman In A Monkey Cage*. The central character, Woman, has been placed in a cage at a zoo. The play begins at "day 30": it becomes clear that Woman is the last inhabitant remaining from the destruction of the planet. The presence of several animals in other cages around her, and her diminishing ability to recall the details of her past existence, lead Woman to question the value of her humanity. Utilizing a post-apocalyptic setting and the presence of aliens as a metaphor, Stapleton tells a story of an estranged woman who has been "caged" and stripped of her human associations simply for having lost her membership community.

Not all Strangers present the same degree of danger. An alternative approach to punishment and remediation is *neutralization.* As has been described in the social anthropology work *Christmas Mumming In Newfoundland* (1969), residents in isolated Newfoundland communities will welcome a Stranger with effusive displays of hospitality (Firestone 71).[2] In exchange for the offer of a special chair reserved for visitors, food, drink, and a bed for the night, the hosts will seek answers to their questions. With each

question the Stranger is demystified, or, given the implied threat the Stranger represents, disarmed, through a process that effectively arms the Insiders.

This mitigation process should in no way be confused with that of becoming an Insider; the visitor is simply rendered less Strange. Another way of neutralizing the Stranger figure involves fetishization. If demystifying the Stranger through friendly conversation and social niceties may be described as a process which *diminishes* the Stranger, the process of fetishization performs the opposite feat, albeit with the same objective, that of enhancing the Stranger's value while muting its perceived threat. A Newfoundland version of the fetishized Stranger is the *runaway*, a character so-called after the ship's hands who abandoned their boats and came to shore in the 1800s (Firestone 71). This form of Stranger may not approach a social organism with any malignant intent. The term, however, highlights the element of instability presented by this Stranger. He has no home, knows no one, and his behavioural parameters are not known.

Newfoundland's poetry and literature are filled with references to the fetishized Stranger figure, as in the depiction of "the bogeyman" or of mainland Canada as "the Canadian Wolf". The tradition of *janneying*, or mummering, also fits within this social construct. In one example of this activity, micro-community members take on disguises during the twelve days of Christmas and venture from house to house as Strangers. A game is played in which the hosts attempt to guess the identity of each visiting mummer. Such practices take place at specific times and are planned and regulated within the social construct of the community. The Stranger is constructed safely within society to perform a cautionary role.

What the plays mentioned above, and others, underscore is why Stranger discourse fits so fluidly within a dramatic framework—it is inherently active. Strangers are never allowed to exist within a community without challenge, and Necessary Outsiders, although they are more integrated within the community nucleus, may act as a source of dissension and communal asymmetry. The challenge presented to and acted upon by the community is active, even when framed in passive terms. A response is required, and when it occurs it causes a consequent action. The Stranger must adapt, be demystified, or be expelled; the Necessary Outsider must acknowledge the validity of community precepts or risk the conferral of Stranger status. To paraphrase Ahmed, plays set in a home environment "always involve encounters between those who stay, those who arrive, and those who leave" (88).

The line of alienation enables the community to be viewed as continuously contested (Ahmed 94). Its values, borders, and membership are in constant flux. This contest is dynamic, filled with conflict, and played for life and death. These are elements common to great drama. The drama of Newfoundland and its depictions of the Stranger provide a window through which we may view this struggle and better understand the motivations behind such actions.

Notes

[1] Stonequist is referring to transnational situations, but this term can be equally applied, I would argue, when a Stranger arrives in any foreign environment which requires adaptation.
[2] Melvyn Firestone, one of the contributors to *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland*, is at pains to note that these displays of hospitality are sincere, even though they have an underlying purpose (71).