

Rethinking concepts of the strange and the stranger

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RETHINKING CONCEPTS OF THE STRANGE AND THE STRANGER

Introduction

European cities, as well as cities in the global context, are witnessing unprecedented levels of migration and population change. This has led to cities becoming increasingly diverse, associated not just with international migration, but also with population ageing, residential mobility and life style choices. Stuart Hall (1993, 361) has claimed that “the capacity to live with difference is... the coming question of the twenty first century”. Therefore in this era of super mobility and super-diversity, how do people negotiate these differences? Whilst there have been celebrations of diversity, others have argued that in the twenty first century we are faced with increasing levels of distrust and uncertainty, characterised in social and spatial distancing of ‘others’. Threats to individual personhood and nationhood, seen in threats from ‘the outside’, alongside increasing austerity measures and what is ‘known’, or indeed, stable, have further increased levels of distrust and uncertainty of others. In combination with these elements Danielle Allen (2004) outlines that we have, from a young age, been taught not to speak to strangers through a fear of what this unknown figure might mean for our own personal safety. As places, and indeed peoples, become characterised by levels of uncertainty, change, and distrust, it is crucial to think about how we might negotiate our individual and collective relationships with others, especially those unknown, or indeed, strange, to us, those who are seen as outside of our daily practices of interaction, and outside of the social materiality of our everyday lives.

However, though we argue that we need to think about how we see ourselves in relation, as well as connection, to others who might be strange it is necessary to deconstruct the notion of the stranger itself in order to facilitate conversations across and beyond ideas of ‘the stranger’ as something static or bounded, or indeed something which might be problematic. The relevance of this responds to the global uncertainties outlined above, which is a crucial dilemma for those in

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2
3 the social sciences more broadly. How we develop the capacity to live with difference outlined by
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5 Hall (1993 above) is the key challenge of the twenty first century and therefore we need to fully
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7 understand and appreciate the complexities of the negotiations of self and other, familiar and
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9 stranger, before we can seek to overcome the barriers that might be in place. In this paper we
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11 investigate ideas of 'the stranger', calling into question the way in which strangers are constructed
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13 and represented, challenging conceptions of who is considered a stranger and why. In developing
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15 perceptions of who is a stranger, where, how and why, we focus on the differences *between*
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17 accounts of the stranger to introduce a more inclusive approach to the discussion of 'others' both
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19 within and outside of the discipline. Thinking through the complexity of the stranger might also
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21 allow us to contribute to literatures on encounters by looking at the strangeness of encounters,
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23 focusing on the very moments at (or in) which strangers are encountered and the consequent
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25 impact of this. Discussions around the stranger may thereby allow us to develop ways to facilitate
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27 meaningful contact (Valentine 2008) amongst or between groups of strangers, or groups of
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29 difference. We trace the historical and temporal assumptions of the stranger before moving on to
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31 outline empirical examples of how strangers have been researched. Further, we discuss the
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33 theoretical complexities of the stranger, noting how the concept of 'stranger' has itself evolved
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35 over time as multi-scalar and as both positive and negative in its assumptions. In drawing
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37 together a critique of these different approaches we suggest new directions for researching the
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39 concept of the stranger, focusing on more contemporary issues of familiarity, multiplicity and
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41 associated issues of super-mobility.
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48 **The stranger as evolving concept**

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50 There have been many theoretical discussions about 'the stranger' (Simmel, 1908; Schutz, 1944;
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52 Ahmed, 2000; Allen, 2004; Amin 2012) and conversations of who, or what, is strange, which
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54 have developed over time. Though there appears to be a common sense understanding, and in
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56 essence we all feel that we know what or who 'the stranger' is, there have been various
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3 perceptions regarding the stranger which try to map out these distinctions in particular ways.
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5 Perspectives of the stranger have shown some assumptions that are rooted in associations with
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7 history, memory, heritage and a sense of temporal location. Here, the stranger may be seen as a
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9 sense of shared history and identity, and shared heritage which defines an inside/ outside binary.
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11 For example, Schutz (1944) outlines that the Stranger becomes essentially the man (sic) who has
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13 to place in question nearly everything that seems to be un-questionable to the members of the
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15 approached group. To him (sic) the cultural pattern of the approached group does not have the
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17 authority of a tested system of recipes, and this, if for no other reason, because he does not
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19 partake in the vivid historical tradition by which it has been formed. From the stranger's point of
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21 view, too, the culture of the approached group has its peculiar history. The stranger, therefore,
22
23 approaches the other group as a newcomer in the true meaning of the term. As outsider, the
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25 stranger does not share the common identity or heritage of the established group. Such a notion
26
27 of memory, of heritage, and of shared identity is thus important in defining who and how
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29 strangers come to be. However, such reflections have also noted the temporal processes involved
30
31 in the production and maintenance of the stranger, or indeed a stranger identity.
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38 Simmel's (1950) stranger, considered the fundamental foundation in this area of thought, was
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40 seen as temporally fixed in the context of wandering. However, as temporal location, the stranger
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42 may also be seen as a process of becoming (Koefoed and Simonsen 2011, p.2) wherein "it is not
43
44 possible, it is argued, to simply 'be' a stranger; one becomes a stranger through specific,
45
46 embodied encounters... The stranger is a relational figure, constituted in a spatial ambivalence
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48 between proximity and distance". Further, the stranger might be seen as a processual condition
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50 of being (Iveson 2005). These understandings see the stranger as process rather than practice, as
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52 becoming rather than being, a fleeting moment which is defined through its opposition to fixity.
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54 Though shared history and memory are important facets of the identity of stranger, we might
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56 further suggest that it is in the stranger's temporality where we find the questions of how such an
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3 identity might be practised in contemporary, everyday, life. Associated with a condition of being
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5 rather than with individuals (Dillon 1995, p.95 in Iveson 2005, p.76) we see that it is not
6
7 necessarily 'who' is strange, but what, where and how such 'strangeness' occurs. As such, it is the
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9 process of becoming, the very moment of how and where, encounters with strangers occur.
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11 What does this mean for individuals coming to the encounter, and how are such individuals
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13 changed (or not) by encounters between strangers. The role of temporality in the creation of the
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15 stranger as a figure, as a situation, and as an emotion should indeed be considered.
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21 Though the historical and temporal roots of the stranger have begun to explore particular
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23 conditions and ways of being, more empirical discussions of the stranger have focused upon
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25 tangible examples in their attempt to 'explain' the stranger phenomenon. Such discussions have
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27 developed the definition of the stranger by focusing on examples such as women's fear of crime,
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29 for example focusing upon the city as a place of danger (Lupton 1999). The stranger as threat has
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31 been discussed with regard again to women's individual personhood through an account of the
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33 experiences in women's bath houses in Toronto (Cooper 2007). Focusing on the example of the
34
35 urban, concepts of strangers as together in the cosmopolis (Iveson 2005) alongside discussions of
36
37 familiarity amongst or indeed between strangers (Paulos and Goodman 2004) have taken central
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39 stage. Here, cities have also been seen as the refuge of stranger (Kahn 1987 in Iveson 2005), with
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41 a focus also on the psychological dimensions of the stranger in the city (Ibid). Responding to a
42
43 number of the contemporary issues outlined in the introduction, discussions of the stranger
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45 concept have also looked at the combination of citizenship identity combined with residential
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47 status, such as Koefoed and Simonsen's (2011) research on citizens of Pakistani origin in
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49 Copenhagen. The stranger as embodied in the contemporary migrant has been discussed by
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51 Chambers (2013), whilst the role of stranger as a status and state of being has been researched in
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53 terms of regional migrant and refugee settlement and the role of relevant policy rationales in
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55 Australia (Boese 2010). These examples demonstrate that there have been numerous attempts to
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categorise and document the experiences of, and indeed attitudes towards, strangers through individual personhood, a sense of the nation and shared heritage, as well as a broader navigation of contemporary urbanity. However, many of these examples look at individual aspects of the strange, the stranger, and the experience of stranger. Reflecting the complexities that we have begun to flesh out in terms of shared history, memory and a sense of temporality as well as a state of being, we find that a number of these discussions are too simplistic and haven't looked at the multivariations of the stranger in each individual context. We therefore turn back to the theoretical groundings of 'the stranger' in order to understand further the missing complexity within these accounts.

Theoretical discussions of the stranger have sought to explore some of the complexities we have thus far highlighted. Theoretical perspectives regarding the stranger have consequently explored the philosophical roots of the stranger, outlining its status as inside/ outside position, as a combination of near and far, as known/ unknown, and as decided/ undecided; these definitions may be combined to form a basic structural assumption of 'the stranger', characterised by otherness. In Simmel's definition (1950, p. 404) the stranger "results from a particular structure composed of nearness and distance"; the proximity of the stranger is thus crucial to how the stranger may act and interact in different circumstances. Discussing the stranger as unknown, both Lofland (1973) and Simmel (1908) argue that it is impossible to 'know' everyone and that we therefore have frequent encounters with unknown strangers. Referring to the stranger in this way, Lofland outlines that the term "is often used to mean anyone with whom we are not acquainted, whom we have never met, even though we may possess a great deal of biographical information about the person... Less frequently, the term refers to persons who are 'different' in some way from an established group, the latter being used as a point of reference" (1973, p.17). Lofland's use of the term refers to "any person who is personally unknown to the actor of reference" (1973, p.18). A stranger might also be anyone personally unknown but visually

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3 available to them (Ibid), someone who has not knowingly been encountered before (Nielson
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5 2004).

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9 Characterised by their unknown-ness, strangers are identified as unpredictable, someone who is
10 outside one's known circle of family, friends or neighbours (Lupton 1999, p. 13). This unknown
11 characteristic is where our *fear* is situated, suggesting that "the figure of the stranger is disquieting
12 because it cannot yet be categorised as either friend or enemy and is therefore disorderly, blurring
13 boundaries and division" (Lupton 1999, p.13-14). The stranger is undecided, with a difference
14 between personally knowing another individual and 'categorical knowledge' based on objective
15 characteristics (Lofland 1973). However, theoretically speaking, the stranger is constructed in
16 language towards the other (Alexander 2013). The language of strangeness creates the strangeness
17 of a particular status, a way of being, an identity; it is in this very construction that we note that
18 the root of the stranger has evolved over time, reflecting core concerns and contextual values.
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33 Harman (1988) explored how the concept of the stranger changed through the twentieth century
34 as urban life and demographics shifted. These basic understandings of stranger have shifted, with
35 the central tenant of the definition shifting from that associated with soil and land, through to a
36 focus on the urban site of the stranger, towards contemporary concerns regarding the individual
37 identity of the stranger, or the stranger as a question of identity more generally. Such a move
38 demonstrated the reflexivity of this concept and its ability to mirror the social and cultural
39 context of everyday life as Harman explored. In 1908 George Simmel's seminal essay discussed
40 the stranger as a newcomer approaching an established group. In this, Simmel's stranger was
41 constructed as an outsider- someone who does not belong. This stranger was determined by the
42 intersection of proximity and distance- the stranger has to be near to know that he is also far.
43 Territorially defined, Simmel's stranger was defined through notions of 'ownership' of land, and
44 having rights to that land. Taking this definition further, the notion of 'birthright' or birthplace
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3 was also seen as underlining definitions of the stranger (in relation to soil) (Derrida 2000). Such
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5 perceptions of the stranger have also informed perspectives on citizenship and nationality with
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7 territoriality a common feature amongst the context of the time. Concerns in this era reflected
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9 nation-state formation, reiteration of boundaries, establishment of national identities and ties of
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11 citizenship in an era of empire. Consequently, a territorially defined and rooted stranger, where
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13 individuals did not travel/ migrate so easily and where origin was especially important for sealing
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15 one's fate was developed. This 'outside coming in' or 'unknown approaching an established
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17 group' assumption of the stranger was thereby predicated upon some knownness, an inside, an
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19 sense of ownership, potentially contributing to negative perspectives of the stranger which we
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21 later discuss.
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27 In 1970 McLemore argued that since the stranger phenomenon was receiving substantial
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29 attention within the marginality tradition, the development of a more productive sociology of the
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31 stranger required an explicit focus on the newcomer and a concomitant recognition that Simmel's
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33 (1908) essay had been well advanced by later students, especially Wood (1934) and Schuetz
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35 (1944) thereby classifying Simmel's stranger as outdated for this time. The central concern of the
36
37 stranger in this era revolved around the urban, the cosmopolis, and the potential
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39 cosmopolitanism of the stranger as wanderer and as mobile; such definitions formed central
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41 tenants of thought from the mid-20th century through to more contemporary discussions in the
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43 face of super-diversity and mobility. In 1973, Lyn Lofland's book 'world of strangers' began to
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45 look more in depth at the idea of the stranger in the city. She theorised that the modern city was
46
47 the product of a general shift in the way in which society deals with the presence of strangers in
48
49 public space. The presence of strangers was in itself not modern; neither was the basic categorical
50
51 way of identifying a person. What changed, Lofland argued, was the dominant source of
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53 information upon which the categorical labelling took place. Lofland critiqued Simmel (1950) and
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55 Schutz's (1944) work on the stranger, arguing that they limited themselves in the main to two
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3 situations: one, that the newcomer approaching an established group and becoming assimilated,
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5 and two, the newcomer approaching an established group and remaining marginal. Lofland
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7 argued that “while these are certainly fruitful analytic foci since they recur in all places and times,
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9 they are hardly the only ‘stranger situations’ worthy of consideration” (1973, p.183). Lofland’s
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11 work, then, opened up the way in which the stranger was conceived of and in the processes of
12
13 everyday life laying the foundations for thinking of much more complicated conceptions of the
14
15 stranger. Further still, Harman (1988) argued that in an era of residential mobility and social
16
17 diversity, the stranger may be better seen as a cosmopolitan, expert navigator- moving between
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19 and making sense of the different communities in which she or he temporarily resides (in
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21 Chambers 2000). Others, conversely, have described the stranger as a position of interpretive
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23 failure or dispossession- the one who cannot, or who can no longer, understand the signs and
24
25 symbols through which public communication takes place (Cooper 2007, p.203). Such
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27 perceptions of the stranger, arising primarily at the end of the 20th century, began to focus more
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29 resolutely on the stranger as identity facet, reflecting contemporary social concerns regarding
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31 individuation and the loss of community.
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38 Danielle Allen’s (2004) text discusses the concept of the stranger in regards to negotiating these
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40 differences in identity in order to overcome the structural inequalities within the world and to
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42 produce lessons in ‘good citizenship’. Here, Allen argues that in conversing across strangeness,
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44 and in navigating the trajectory of the stranger we might indeed become better acquainted and
45
46 therefore better able to deal with difference, inequality and injustice. More recently, Ash Amin’s
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48 (2012) book ‘land of strangers’ builds on Allen’s work, looking at the notion of a collapse in close
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50 social ties and the habits of modern living. In tracing these broad theoretical discussions of the
51
52 stranger we can thus see that conversations of who, or what, is strange, or indeed stranger, have
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54 developed and changed over time. However, what is not clear is exactly who ‘the stranger’ is in
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56 terms of contemporary social life, characterised by higher levels of uncertainty wherein everyone
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3 might be strangers and we might be strangers to ourselves. For example, there now exists debates
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5 over whether we live in a land perpetuated by the eternal stranger (Amin 2013) wherein we do
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7 not interact or connect with others, but instead live at a distance from them; this is demonstrated
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9 through individuation and a notion of internalising one's emotions and sense of self, the erosion
10
11 of community and the rise of 'familiar' strangers. We therefore further unpack the way in which
12
13 the language of stranger has been utilised, teasing out the consequent complexities of this term
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15 which is rooted in and through its everyday understandings to the way in which 'strangers' might
16
17 be negotiated in and through the practice of everyday life at a multitude of scales. The social and
18
19 cultural positioning of the stranger is therefore crucial to our contemporary understanding of why
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21 such relations occur (Cooper 2007).
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27 The changing core component of the stranger over time demonstrates the way in which the
28
29 stranger is situated contextually (Koefoed and Simonsen 2011). Here, the stranger can take a
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31 different role not only at different times but also in different places and sites; we therefore need
32
33 to pay attention to this further layer of complexity. The problem we identify lies in trying to bring
34
35 these different perspectives together which is indeed a difficult task. The discussions we have so
36
37 far highlighted conceptualise and materialise the stranger in different ways. We therefore need to
38
39 make sense of the 'stranger' by looking at the common themes that run throughout all of these
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41 texts. It is only by doing so that we may begin to see not only the complexity(ies) we are dealing
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43 with, but also highlight particular key questions that begin to emerge.
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48 **Stranger as identity: perceptions and developments**

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51 Focusing on contemporary assumptions of the stranger as underpinned by identity we begin to
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53 ask who is a stranger, in what situation, how and where do strangers, or indeed strange
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55 encounters, occur? To answer these questions we draw on how 'the stranger' has been perceived
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57 in different ways throughout geography and the social sciences. There are a set of literatures that
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3 focus on the stranger as something negative. These concerns are broadly discussed as
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5 ambivalence, as discomfoting, frightening, as an invasion, or indeed as a moral panic.
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9 Douglas' (1966) work regards the stranger as creating ambivalence in place, arguing that, with
10 their liminal status, they are 'matter out of place' (in Lupton 1999). Further, Lupton's (1999)
11 discussion of fear of harassment also demonstrates the risk associated with encountering the
12 unknown whilst Amin's (2013) research on biopolitics as regulating the balance of conviviality
13 and aversion at the state level is rooted in associations of risk and the stranger. Here, Amin
14 argues that it is this risk which controls our fears (and perceptions) of others. The stranger is
15 hereby seen as a permanent state of ambivalence (Koefoed and Simonsen's 2011) and a constant
16 threat to the order of the world, they bring the outside into the inside and poison the comfort of
17 order with suspicion of chaos" (Bauman 1991, p.56 in Lupton 1999, p.14). However,
18 Sandercock's (2000) depiction of the stranger as chaos is most distinctive. Here, "the stranger
19 threatens to bring chaos into the known world, whether that be the imagined community of the
20 nation or of the neighbourhood. Individual strangers are a discomfoting presence. In numbers,
21 strangers may come to be seen as an invading wave or flood that will engulf us, provoking
22 primitive fears of annihilation or of the dissolution of identity" (2000, p.205). Strangers are not
23 'like us' and therefore they are threatening. And yet this strangeness may be both *frightening and*
24 *enticing*.
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46 Rooted in notions of trust/ distrust, fear of the stranger is characterised by theories of 'stranger
47 danger'. In Scott's (2003) discussion of male strangers and male fear of strangers, he argues that
48 reinforcing these assumed rules of stranger danger can lead to moral panic around particular
49 identities. Lupton (1999) finds that this fear comes from the unpredictability of the stranger
50 which builds on Douglas' (1992, p.58) assertion that 'people come already primed with culturally
51 learned assumptions and weightings'. Discussions of fear and the stranger have tended to focus
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3 on women's fear of crime (Pain 1997; 2000) or more broadly on the fear of the behaviour of the
4 stranger within public space (Valentine 1989, 1990). Fear of the stranger is not only created in
5 assumptions and stereotypes of the other, or assumed knowledge, but is also created in and
6 through more generalised fears- for example the fear of modern life or society and the
7 breakdown of community relations. These fears are then projected onto unknown others as
8 harbourers of these fears. Such fears are context specific, and we all move in and out of shades of
9 fear over our life courses, influenced by our own experiences and by spatial, social and temporal
10 situation (Valentine 1989; Stanko 1990a). However, Sandercock (2002) argues that such fear of
11 strangers will kill the modern city, and that we need to negotiate simultaneously our fears *and* our
12 desires in order to construct identities and affiliations. Our fears of others as strange are context
13 specific and may alter over time (i.e through diurnal rhythms) or where particular groups are
14 situated in a context specific situation. What is clear, however, is the formation of the fear
15 through assumed knowledge of an 'other'. Such negative constructions of the stranger can be
16 seen at a range of scales, from individual perceptions of the body or self, through to the scale of
17 the nation.

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38 Looking at the scale of the body and the self, Lupton's (1999) research on fear of crime focuses
39 on the stranger as being, a different body to 'us' (Koefoed and Simonsen 2011). Research on the
40 stranger as existing in/ through public space, Cooper (2007) focuses on community. Women's
41 fear has also been explored through public space through perceptions of local neighbourhoods
42 in Reading (Valentine 1989). The nation, however, continues to remain the dominant 'site' in
43 negative ideologies around strangers. Associated with migration, one can see discussions of
44 'floods' of immigrants, a threat from this external other (Chamber 2013). For example, in
45 Hughes' (2007) research on asylum seeking and community cohesion he outlines "the term
46 'stranger' is employed to capture how the outsider and outcast are categorised, managed and
47 controlled as well as the uncertain contestations of such processes by various actors, both by
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3 'strangers' themselves and others engaged in encounters with 'them'" (2007, p.934). Such
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5 conceptions of the stranger, as negative, regarding the nation, then can be seen through a sense
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7 of imagined community (Anderson 1983), as an inside and an outside, though this may be seen
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9 as predicated upon bonds of soil and territory, as well as identity.
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14 Negative perceptions of the stranger, may, however, be seen as a social construction (Cooper
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16 2007), influenced directly by others' views and opinions. Consequently, we take these views into
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18 our own consciousness to form opinions of the stranger that we may not come to 'know'
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20 personally. This also means that the stranger may be viewed in positive terms, reflecting
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22 Sandercock's (2000, p.204) assertion that "the strangeness of strangers appears frightening *and*
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24 enticing". The stranger may be characterised more positively through its exoticism. Cooper's
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26 (2007) discussion of Nielson's book, licence to harass, explains that as the stranger is seen as
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28 something different from the self, characterised by its distinctiveness, its other, and that there
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30 may therefore exist romanticism, or a desire to get to know the stranger, or at least celebrate the
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32 uniqueness of such a character. Further, as outsider, the stranger may be defined by conditions of
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34 hospitality-welcoming the stranger as a guest (Derrida 2000). Such welcoming ensures the 'place'
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36 of the stranger, as outsider coming in. Westmoreland (2008, p.4-5) depicts hospitality as
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38 occurring when the master of the home, the host, welcomes in a foreigner, a stranger, a guest,
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40 without any qualifications, including having never been given an invitation. Hospitality is most
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42 often discussed regarding the nation and of the hospitality associated with immigration (Barnett
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44 2005). However, Sirryeh (2013a; 2013b) explores conditions of hospitality and 'threshold spaces'
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46 in the welcoming of some unknown into intimate and familiar spaces of the home as a private
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48 and intimate setting, discussing hospitality as a way of negotiating risk from the unknown in a
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50 more positive manner. Conditional hospitality, and the associated norms and practices, assume
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52 some sense of ethical and moral obligation to the unknown other. David Bell (2007) looks at the
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54 formation of mundane hospitality in the city, on making the city, as a 'land of strangers' (Amin
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3 2012) as an important part of making the city hospitable. The stranger may better be seen as a
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5 cosmopolitan, an expert navigator, an everyday notion of habitus, moving between and making
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7 sense of the different communities in which she or he temporarily resides (Harman 1988 in
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9 Chambers 2000). There is thus a move to suggest that the stranger is hybrid and all-
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11 encompassing, that we are 'all strangers' at some point or time. However, Iveson argues against
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13 the simplification that 'we are all strangers' suggesting that living in a city is defined by people
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15 who are strangers to each other, but that this brings people together *as* strangers (Sennett 1994,
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17 p.25-26, in Iveson 2005, p.71). The stranger is thereby a notion of being in the world, and is
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19 situated both spatially and temporally. Everyone may be a strangers at some point in that we all
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21 share processes of mobility, and of hybridity and subsequently our very nature of being is never
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23 fully known by all.
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29 These positive accounts of the stranger also traverse multiple scales including a focus on the
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31 everyday, the home and city. As noted above, Sirryeh's (2013a; 2013b) research focuses on the
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33 intimate space of the home as a site of welcome for the stranger, looking at some of the
34
35 associated intimacies. Focusing on the sites and spaces of encounter in the everyday, Wilson
36
37 (2012) and Darling (2009) further develop some of the encounters between those unknown to
38
39 each other; Allen (2004) too, turns her attentions to the everyday conversations between
40
41 strangers as a way to alleviate social difference. Ash Amin's (2002; 2010; 2012; 2013) focus on
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43 strangers within the city (see also Iveson, 2005) demonstrates the positive notion of
44
45 throwntogetherness (2010) as well as an ethics of care for the stranger (2012). However, we find
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47 that many of these particular conceptions of stranger are again associated with territory and soil,
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49 as a sense of physical location in the world connected with one's place. Discussing the stranger as
50
51 outside, as other, these considerations may potentially be outdated, disregarding the interscalar
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53 positionality of stranger experiences rather than the stranger as a psychological notion of being in
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55 the world. Consequently, we find that many of these accounts deny the very fluidity, temporally,
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3 socially and spatially, of 'the stranger'. Lofland (1973), for example, suggests that the line between
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5 stranger and personally known other is a fluid one, and social life teems with transformations
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7 from one to another; the stranger is both outside and inside at the same time (Koefoed and
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9 Simonsen 2011). The stranger is therefore not simply temporally situated but also socially and
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11 spatially constructed, defined by its fluidity and complexity. Therefore, as we have alluded to, the
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13 very definition of the stranger is denoted in reference to its social construction as category and
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15 complexity.
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20 **The stranger as a social construction**

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22 From what we have seen above the stranger is not a natural but rather 'given' category. This very
23
24 definition of the stranger warrants further attention in order to fully map out the complex
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26 interplay between stranger and known, between self and other, and between same and different.
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29 A critical approach to the discussion allows us to flesh out the existence as well as experience of
30
31 'the stranger' in contemporary life; looking at the stranger as *socially organised and defined*, as fear of
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33 the outside, the other, the unknown, is created socially and allows the stranger to gain potency.
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36 The stranger is defined through individual perceptions and through the constructions of others
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38 of who to fear, who does not belong, is a threat, is outside, or indeed unknown. As Ahmed
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40 (2000) highlights, strangers are not real structures but socially constituted, discursively produced
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42 positions. Further, Noble (2013, p.32) suggests that "the rhetorical power of talking about
43
44 strangers is that it rests on binaries- citizen and stranger, inside outside, pure and impure". Here,
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46 Noble argues, the nuances and subtleties implicit in such constructions are lost in the binary and
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48 therefore the position of the stranger should not be reduced to such simple classifications.
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51 Alexander (2013, p. 81) further critiques the binary assumptions, suggesting that Simmel's
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53 stranger "focuses almost exclusively on determinate forces of a spatial and ecological kind. In
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55 Simmel's conception the stranger becomes familiar through reciprocal relationships, developed
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57 through their emotional connection. However, Alexander states that we must focus on the
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3 cultural interpretation of social structures and the categories within which these active
4 interventions are made, rather than strangeness as reflecting spatial position and behavioural
5 relation (Simmel's argument). Alexander therefore argues that we need to focus on the *construction*
6 *of difference* and the active employment of distinctive standards of interpretation. Strangeness is
7 always also produced in culturally-mediated ways that reference constructions of the subjective
8 motivations of the actors themselves, thereby "strangeness is produced by the conviction that the
9 other is not fully human" (Alexander 2013, p.98).
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20 Though we cannot deny the situatedness of social agency and context in constructions of the
21 stranger, we want to develop this socially constructed understanding of the stranger to connect
22 the multiple scales, sites of becoming, processes, emotions and interactions that produce
23 strangers and strange encounters. In so doing, we believe that discussions within the discipline,
24 reflecting the complexity of this term, might begin to extend understandings rooted in real life
25 situations and contexts. We believe that this approach will go beyond binary categorisations of
26 'the stranger' which currently dominate. Our approach, then, suggests that we must further
27 unpack the social, cultural and political assumptions that are implied as well as the spatio-
28 temporal contexts in which these discussions take place. In essence, we ask how conversations
29 across or between strangers take place, how they are negotiated, where, by whom and why.
30 Looking at these complexities, we are able to begin answering questions such as 'when is a
31 stranger not a stranger?' When is a stranger something more positive versus when the stranger is
32 seen as a threat? These questions allow us to look at the role that context and complexity play in
33 defining the stranger and enables us to think through re-classifying the stranger in an era of
34 super-diversity.
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55 **Re-categorising the stranger in an era of super-diversity**

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3 We believe it is important to think of how we might define the stranger in an era of hyper-
4 mobility and super-diversity (Vertovec 2007). Developing the notion that ‘we are all strangers in
5 some context’ (Chambers 2000), we have shown that the stranger might also be familiar and that
6 such interactions with the familiar stranger might take place on a much more micro-scale than
7 one would assume. The familiar stranger is an individual who is recognised from regular
8 activities, but with whom one does not interact or communicate (Paulos and Goodman 2004).
9 First identified by Stanley Milgram (1972), it has become an increasingly popular concept in
10 research about social networks. Developed further by Ahmed (2000), there is familiarity *in*
11 strangeness in that we have to have met the stranger to mark them out as different. These ideas
12 of familiarity in strangeness allow us to ask questions regarding whether we are becoming more
13 familiar at the same time as we are becoming strangers to each other. These conditions of
14 modernity were initially discussed by Lofland (1973), with a focus on the urban context.
15 However, in an era of super-mobility and super-diversity we find that one lives with increased
16 levels of strangeness and strangers in everyday life. Amin’s (2012) research looks at this very
17 concept, on how interactions with ‘strangers’ take place in everyday, localised settings whereby
18 the stranger becomes familiar through contact. Familiarity in strangeness continuously constitutes
19 and redefines the boundaries between strange and familiar. Reflecting claims that the relationship
20 we have with familiar strangers is indeed a real relationship in which both parties agree to
21 mutually ignore each other, without any implications of hostility. Familiar strangers form a border
22 zone between people we *know* and the completely *unknown* strangers we encounter once and
23 never see again. Because we encounter them regularly in familiar settings, they establish our
24 connection to individual places and subsequently we can identify the strangeness of places
25 themselves as part of this process. The conditions of the familiar stranger in the context of super-
26 mobility and super-diversity consequently requires us to not only think about binary relationships
27 of inside/ outside, known/ unknown, fear/ safety, familiar/ unfamiliar, as defined in theoretical
28 assumptions of the stranger, but also allows us to develop further the complexities of the status
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3 of stranger through a critical engagement with the reality of this subject position. Though we
4
5 have discussed above the formation of strangers in and through social constructions, marked by
6
7 boundaries as well as familiarity, it is still not clear 'who' the stranger is. Whilst there has been
8
9 reference to migrants, asylum seekers and refugees more broadly, we suggest that defining groups
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11 of, or individual, strangers is much harder in the context of everyday social lives where we might
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13 indeed 'all be strangers', both to ourselves and to others. The 'everyday stranger' that is at once
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15 situated and multiple not bound by categories and simultaneously emotional, embodied and fluid
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17 is what we seek to capture.
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22 Scalar approaches to the stranger have been overly simplistic, focusing on moments in time, mere
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24 fragments of socio-spatial relations. What about more intimate scales or sites (or indeed
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26 practices) of strangers, the encounters with strangers in the emotional, embodied and personal
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28 meetings wherein individuals come together? What are the complexities of time and context in
29
30 affecting the negotiation of this status? The particular distinctions of inside/ outside used to
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32 define stranger in many of the examples we have discussed do not demonstrate the *messiness of*
33
34 *everyday interaction*. Key questions that we feel arise from these discussions are therefore, how to
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36 live with strangers, both daily and permanently (Bauman 1997, p.88). How do we *overcome* this
37
38 sense of strangeness? (Sandercock 2003), or should we indeed be concerned with overcoming the
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40 stranger rather than in a celebration of diversity – i.e do we see the term 'stranger' as exclusive or
41
42 inclusive and how might we begin to navigate the categorical or binary assumptions of the term?
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44 Finally, what is the impact of contrasting emphases on the temporal or the spatial, the relational
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46 and the topological, the fixed and the mobile, the ontological and the epistemological, thereby
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48 responding to Noble's (2013) call to take into account of the diverse processes and positions at
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50 stake, not simply to polarise them.
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57 **Stranger, strangeness and strange encounters: Situating the stranger as complexity**
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3 Thus far we have discussed existing approaches to the stranger, situated historically, temporally,
4 and empirically. We have also explored the changing nature of the stranger over time, informed
5 by socio-spatial context. Further, we have demonstrated the positive and negative perceptions of
6 the stranger, and how such imaginations have played out across different scales of analysis.
7
8 However, we argue that these discussions of the 'the stranger', situated in specific contexts, at
9 specific times, and focusing on particular scales of analyses, do not understand or explore the
10 inherent complexity of the positionality of 'stranger' as a fluid and multiple entity, as a becoming.
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12 There is a significance of time and space as to how the stranger is constructed, and by unpacking
13 these particular social constructions we might begin to uncover the answer to questions on the
14 creation and maintenance of meaningful encounters across difference and otherness. We argue
15 that understandings of the 'strange encounter' may offer a way to facilitate meaningful contact,
16 formed through an ethic of care, a sense of hospitality, which is informed by positive
17 perspectives of the unknown. Reflecting broadly on the geographies of encounter as the 'coming
18 together' of strangers in particular moments, unpacking the complexities involved in the
19 negotiation with and of the stranger is of paramount importance in negotiations of difference and
20 the other. We look toward aspects of familiarity and the 'known' versus the 'out of place' and the
21 unknown to inform such ideas. By understanding how negative perceptions of 'the stranger' are
22 formed, and the social and cultural conditions of such formation, we may begin to elicit more
23 positive perspectives toward the unknown, deriving these perspectives as a predecessor to
24 contact. When the stranger is seen as a threat which cannot be controlled this leads to a sense of
25 being overcome by the stranger, and by the encounter itself. In creating some sense of familiarity
26 in unknowness, or indeed some sense of positivity, a sense of exoticism or a desire to 'get to
27 know' the unknown, we might be able to foster more positive relations. However, how might we
28 begin to do this? We look to Park and Burgess' (1921) study on the stranger and social contract.
29 They make clear the importance of migrants as originators of social contacts and describe the
30 study of the newcomer as illuminating our understanding of solidarity, spatial mobility, and the
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3 growth of civilisations. Facilitated by an ethic of care for the stranger (Amin 2010), there is a
4 sense of visible versus invisible 'strangeness' in terms of how such strangeness may be received
5 and consequently acted upon. It is therefore possible to facilitate positive encounters between
6 strangers based on notions of curiosity, exoticism, a desire to know more, and the belief in care
7 for others.
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16 What we call for, then, is a more careful consideration of the stranger; a consideration which
17 acknowledges these different types of encounter and recognises the importance of fluidity of
18 action. We therefore do not challenge the notion of the stranger; instead, as geographers, we
19 want to further flesh out the intimate details of strangers, strange encounters, and contact *between*
20 strangers. We argue that it is in the minute detail of the encounters that are at once intimate, local
21 and global, that we find the specificity of the stranger concept. We want accounts of the stranger
22 which are *detailed and specific* and consequently what we propose is a multi-scalar, everyday and
23 complex perspective of the stranger as fluid and multiple rather than fragmented or indeed still.
24 We want to see a fleshing out of the detail of strangers and strangeness in order to shape the
25 facilitation of meaningful encounters. We want the complexities, localities and existences
26 explored by looking at the coming together of strangers in multiple sites and at multiple scales
27 such as the workplace, the everyday, the habitual routines of practice, in a wide array of places
28 and situations, through different types of contact. We want to recognise strangeness not simply
29 as people, but as process, as practice, as performance. We argue that we need to see strangeness
30 in place and place relations, but also in place marketing and place stories, across nationalities,
31 through everyday habitual processes and unconscious thoughts and feelings. We therefore look at
32 the intimate complexities of these negotiations, focusing on the stranger as relations, as
33 'becoming' and most importantly as processual dynamic. We argue for research on specific cases
34 at a multitude of scales which intersect, interact and connect. In so doing we might begin to
35 answer questions regarding the role of context and how we might begin to connect stories
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3 regarding strangers across space and place. Further, such research would allow us to challenge
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5 binary conceptions that 'the stranger' assumes, transcending more static assumptions.
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8 9 **Conclusion**

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11 In this paper we have discussed the way in which the stranger has been considered in human
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13 geography and the broader social sciences literature. Critiquing these bodies of literature, we have
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15 developed an argument which calls for a more nuanced understanding of the stranger beyond
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17 commonplace assumptions and distinctions, focusing instead on the complex interactions and
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19 multiple positionalities of the stranger as subject position, as a process of becoming and as a
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21 sense of knowing and being in the world. Our critique has drawn light to these discussions,
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23 drawing them together to demonstrate future possibilities of research on strangers, strangeness
24
25 and strange encounters. We have demonstrated that the stranger as concept, as being and as
26
27 identity, is multiple, messy, context specific, existing in and through multiple scales of interaction.
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29 In so doing we provide no strict definition of the stranger but instead provoke a set of principles
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31 which might be taken forward in order to develop geographical critiques of the stranger and
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33 strangeness and the impact of such associations in the context of multiple scales of interaction.
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39 Further, we have argued that connecting intimate and global sense(s) of the stranger through the
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41 notion of practice and performance as multiply situated, multi-scalar, and as formed through
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43 messiness of interaction and the social construction must be considered, thereby developing
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45 detailed positions on the strange, the stranger and the strange encounter. Whilst we do not seek
46
47 to 're-scale' debates around the stranger in isolation, we seek to acknowledge the complexity that
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49 arises due to these different scales and therefore pay more attention to the finer details. Though
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51 everyday discussions around the stranger, and the strange encounter (Ahmed 2000), have
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53 materialised, we want to further extend these considerations. We focus on the negotiation of
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55 difference (Valentine 2008) in and through contact between 'strangers' as simultaneously
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3 momentary, fleeting, meaningful, and as disruption. We argue that the very 'site' of the
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5 encounter, its context and situatedness, is important and that it is in these micro-moments of
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7 encounter that discussions of not only who strangers are, and how they come together, but also
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9 how such encounters alter perceptions of the strange and the stranger must occur. We look to
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11 the complexity of an everyday ethics of care for the other (Amin 2010) and argue that micro-
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13 geographies and the intimacy of these situations require careful negotiations of the stranger. For
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15 example, what are the emotions inherent within the stranger and the strange encounter, how are
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17 these defined and experienced and what are the consequences of such considerations? We
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19 therefore ask for the inclusion of more intimate scales or sites (or indeed practices) of strangers,
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21 and encounters with strangers in emotional, embodied and personal meetings wherein individuals
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23 come together.
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29 Taking these debates forward, we make three recommendations which we believe will add to
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31 conceptual and methodological assumptions of the strange, the stranger and the other in human
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33 geography. Firstly, we argue that there is a need to re-scale debates regarding the stranger, here
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35 demonstrating the connectedness of scales and experiences. Secondly we argue that there is a
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37 need to understand the complexities of these debates, the emotions involved, and the practices
38
39 (and performances) that strange encounters are situated within, as well as the role of context in
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41 containing such debates or conversations. Finally, we suggest that aims one and two should be
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43 met through a fleshing out empirical examples of 'strangers' which seek to connect the theoretical
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45 positionalities of 'stranger' with real, lived, and 'fleshy' examples and narrations of who, what and
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47 where the stranger is and the practices of these encounter(s). Such considerations, we believe, will
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49 lead to more practical, as well as detailed accounts of the stranger as specificities as well as
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51 complexity(ies).
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56 57 **Acknowledgements** 58 59 60

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