

# **The Stranger in Crisis: Spectacle and Social Response**

By

Joey Brooke Jakob

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Sociology  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

© August, 2010 by Joey Brooke Jakob

## Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Part 1 – <i>The Stranger</i>	
1. Who is the Stranger?	15
2. Stranger Culture and Crisis	39
Part 2 – <i>The Spectacle</i>	
3. Media, Power and Ideology	54
4. Reception, Meaning and Response	59
Conclusion	78
References	81

Thesis - July 2010

## **THE STRANGER IN CRISIS: SPECTACLE AND SOCIAL RESPONSE**

### **Introduction**

On March 13, 1964 Kitty Genovese was raped and stabbed to death outside of her apartment building in New York City. The same man in a thirty-five minute time span attacked her three different times. According to police, at least 38 people overheard or viewed at least one of the incidents. Not one of them came to her aid and only one called police, after the third attack had killed her. The witnesses who were interviewed indicated their fear of becoming involved. Police indicated that if someone had called the authorities after the first attack, Genovese might have survived. Research on the Genovese case sparked psychological research on the ‘bystander effect’<sup>1</sup>, the collective indifference to the plight of others based on the assumption that ‘surely someone else will help’. Additionally, Genovese’s killer indicated that he selected a woman to attack because women offer less resistance, making them easier to kill (Long 2009).

Yusuf Hizek, a 79 year old man, was robbed on a Toronto subway around 8:30pm on Saturday, April 24<sup>th</sup>. Two men sat down beside him, on a half-filled subway car, and asked him for money. Hizek told the men he had none to give. The two men then grabbed Hizek and took his wallet. Hizek tried to activate the passenger assistance alarm but could not reach it. Hizek struggled with the two men, called out for help, but no one on the subway responded to his pleas. Police stated they were glad no one stepped in to attempt

---

<sup>1</sup> I am not researching the bystander effect because I am not interested in the psychological processes involved in assuming that someone else will come to the aid of another in crisis. Rather, I am interested in the social conditions present when someone decides to ignore the pleas of someone unknown in crisis. The Genovese case helps to build an understanding of patterns of non-help to a stranger in crisis, particularly in illustrating that the phenomena of ignoring a stranger’s plea for help is a historical as well as a contemporary issue.

to physically restrain the two thieves but were confused why no passengers pulled the assistance alarm or even called 911 (Boesveld 2010).

A homeless person of colour, Hugo Alfredo Tale-Yax died on a busy sidewalk April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010 in New York City. The incident happened around 6:00am. Tale-Yax had intervened in a fight between a man and a woman, resulting in Tale-Yax being stabbed. The man and the woman left immediately following the incident. A surveillance camera outside a building caught Tale-Yax stumbling and falling, where he then lay there unable to move. Video footage shows at least seven people going by, some stopping to look and one even lifting his body, before walking away. Another individual took Tale-Yax's photo with a camera phone only to leave him there a moment later. Around 7:20am, someone called 911. When police and firefighters arrived a few minutes later, Tale-Yax was dead. Officials say that it is possible Tale-Yax was still alive for a while, spanning some of the duration when passers-by opted not to help (Flam 2010; Sulzberger 2010).

Why do some people decide to help strangers in crisis while others ignore pleas for help? How is it that people can be aware of another person's plight and at the same time be unmotivated to act to remedy that plight? Is it possible that the suffering of an other can take on the form of a spectacle, in which the reality of a person's plight is denied? This situation is one example in a particular subset of 'the stranger in crisis'. 'The stranger in crisis' brings about reactions in witnesses, but these reactions are different from other situations involving strangers in *need*, such as instance situations whereby individuals are confronted by strangers who are homeless.

Is it possible that in deciding when and whom to help, we are influenced by whether the person in crisis is known to us? Are we less likely to assist someone

unfamiliar, a stranger? And just whom do we consider a ‘stranger’? This project focuses on how the stranger is conceived and conceptualized in (post)colonial<sup>2</sup> neoliberal Western culture. These ideas help frame and conceptualize where this research originates and what perspectives are used. In this thesis I argue that media-induced compassion fatigue has an impact on the stranger in crisis. I will show how the following series of concepts formulate a model of explanation for why we do not help: compassion fatigue, neoliberalism, the stranger, stranger culture, spectacle, and blasé attitude. I propose a conception of the stranger, in light of both classical and contemporary ideas of what constitutes ‘the stranger’. I will show how the concept of ‘stranger culture’ refers to an environment where the stranger is perceived as dangerous. Stranger culture is an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior beyond xenophobia. Stranger culture involves questioning how those of dominant groups relate to the stranger. Stranger culture is the social creation of those who belong to the dominant culture, as contrasted with those who do not belong, strangers. The dominant cultural group constructs a fantasy culture of ‘strangers’, those who are ‘not like you and me’. I recognize the need to further explore how definitions of the stranger may change according to social construction and how different circumstances produce different types of strangers.

The political and economically based social system of neoliberalism fosters an

---

<sup>2</sup> Sara Ahmed claims that postcolonial times are, literally, those in which a society exists *after* primary colonization has taken place, which is not to say that colonial legacies are forgotten and not felt (2000: 10-11). Taiaiake Alfred writes of the ongoing colonialism at work in Indigenous people, as contemporary colonization in the form of “post-modern imperialism”. According to Taiaiake Alfred, contemporary colonization exists in identities that are socially constructed, for instance, in politicized lived experience of Indigenous peoples (2005: 597). Contemporary social interactions are based on ‘legacies’ of colonization, both current and past. ‘Legacies’ are remembered and carried into present day ways of relating to others. These ‘legacies’ are continually being felt as current colonization. I use the term (post)coloniality to describe both of these aspects, drawing from both Ahmed and Alfred.

individualistic perspective that informs people's actions when confronted by a stranger in crisis. When a stranger is witnessed in crisis, the witness follows the lead of the neoliberal individualistic social structures that deny the plight of those in crisis. The stranger is feared and left to fend for herself in her plight. The creation of spectacles and imaginary notions of 'stranger danger' as combined with individuals having blasé attitudes reinforce an individualistic perspective. The mass media help in circulating an archive of images in which the stranger is dangerous, different and to be feared. Because these images are so available, and have become expected, compassion fatigue is set in motion when people are confronted with images of strangers in crisis; compassion fatigue is reinforced by the surrounding individualistic social structures.

I am interested in the connections between spectacle and crisis. I define a spectacle as memorably theatrical and constructed human interaction that is publicly exhibited and viewed. Spectacles have an effect on how people interact with a stranger in crisis. I am interested in the situations in which those who are in a position to respond, respond in such a way that the stranger's crisis is not alleviated because the plight is perceived as a spectacle. Are people in a position to respond to the stranger in crisis and why or why not? Response to a stranger in crisis can be found in understanding how reception of information and meaning occur. We can understand why people do not respond to those they think of as strangers if we examine how people witnessing an event of crisis receive the event and make meaning from it.

The phenomenon of the individual that spectates the stranger in crisis, who does not attempt to relieve the stranger of her plight, is referred to as 'compassion fatigue'. Compassion fatigue occurs over time where 'information overload' occurs by reception

and interpretation of media. Information overload happens when the media bombard spectators with images and ideas to the point where a response to alleviate plight is unlikely. Compassion fatigue does not mean that people do not care, but that other aspects of social life prevent people from working to alleviate the plight of others. I will argue that the 'blasé attitude', coupled with media overstimulation, can lead to compassion fatigue.

### *Project division and Research Questions*

This project will be divided into four chapters organized into two parts. The first section will be titled "The Stranger", and will feature Chapter One, "Who is the Stranger", and Chapter Two, "Stranger Culture and Crisis". Section two will be titled "The Spectacle" and will include Chapter Three, "Media, Ideology and Power", and Chapter Four, "Reception, Meaning and Response".

The question that connects all parts of this thesis is: Why do people in (post)colonial neoliberal Western cultures sometimes spectate a strangers' suffering but indifferently do nothing about it? Other questions will be considered in specific sections of the paper. Chapter One, "Who is the Stranger", will address the questions: what characteristics make up the stranger, and how is the stranger socially constructed and maintained? Chapter Two "Stranger Culture and Crisis" will feature the questions, what is 'stranger culture'? Are we afraid of the stranger? Does stranger culture produce a culture of fear? What is crisis? Chapter Three "Media, Ideology and Power" will ask, do mass communications media produce disengagement or inappropriate response to a stranger in crisis? How? Does media production create the illusion that all events are

spectacles, created or staged? Chapter Four “Reception, Meaning and Response” will ask, what is response and how is it generated? How does reception of images occur and how are meanings interpreted? When does the viewer become accountable to the stranger for a response, when a crisis occurs?

### *Methodology*

For this project I will not engage in empirical data gathering and analysis. My methodology takes the form of theoretical synthesis and analysis. Following Herbert Blumer’s lead as indicated in “What is Wrong With Social Theory?”, I use social and cultural theories for setting research problems and to suggest connections among social phenomena through *sensitizing concepts* (Blumer 1954: 4). Blumer states that accurately assessing concepts allows for valuable theory-based inquiry (Ibid.: 5). Accordingly, I will use concepts to sensitize rather than to be definitive. Blumer writes that “whereas definitive concepts provide prescription of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look” (Blumer 1954: 7). The “what to see” directs the reader to understand what is common to a class of objects by attributed or fixed benchmarks. I am “suggesting directions along which to look”, using the work of several sociological and cultural theorists in order to develop a set of sensitizing concepts for thinking sociologically about media-induced compassion fatigue regarding the stranger in crisis.

To further this analysis, I look to Simmel for a way to study social forms. According to Simmel, social forms are the result of social forces that operate within the individual who exists in society. In this type of research, “one must inquire into the



processes – those which, ultimately, take place in the individuals themselves – that condition the existence of the individuals as society” (Simmel 1971: 8). I am looking at how the stranger is created and maintained as different through social forces comprised by individuals who embody belonging within the greater society.

### *Obligation to Others and Cosmopolitanism*

There are many questions that arise when considering if there is an obligation to respond to a stranger in crisis. Cosmopolitan theory can address concerns for obligation to others and relations with the stranger. Cosmopolitanism is the theoretical framework from which I begin my analysis. Cosmopolitan theory asserts that strangers are different, but this difference is not a problem. The difference of the stranger is not to be avoided, and yet there exist barriers to parity in this difference. Kwame Anthony Appiah discusses how habits of coexistence need to be better developed in order to foster communities and social ties (Appiah 2006: xix). In order for this fostering of communities and social ties, I examine what it is that creates distance from the stranger. While the questions asked in the cosmopolitan section address normative claims, latter parts of this thesis address explanatory claims. Cosmopolitanism here describes how people *ought* to behave toward strangers and does not necessarily describe what people actually do. How people ought to behave describes values, which are socially variable. Human beings do not all have the same set of values, thus do not have the same influencing actions. Cosmopolitanism provides a frame, providing justification of concern for the stranger.

Appiah describes the “foreignness of foreigners and the strangeness of strangers” as real (Ibid.: xxi). Uncertainty or fear of the unknown is practical, a survival mechanism

even. But fear and uncertainty can spin out of control, be exaggerated, eventually dividing people. Segregation and seclusion of groups is no longer an option for the world in which we live; technology has taken away the ability to successfully hide from those with which we wish not to interact (Appiah 2006: xx).

I follow Appiah's lead in addressing the crisis of a stranger with cosmopolitan theory. Cosmopolitanism is "universal concern and respect for legitimate difference" (Appiah 2006: xv). Before addressing what constitutes response, a question emerges about obligation – why should I assume that individuals who are witness to a stranger in crisis are obliged to respond? Access to knowledge is reason; awareness is powerful in that it provides information. As Appiah states, "each person you know about and can affect is someone to whom you have responsibilities" (2006: xiii). The information age has provided many people with access to limitless radio, TV, telephone and Internet, where events and circumstances of others elsewhere can be known about quickly. People can be affected by lives anywhere through communication technologies. As Ossewaarde states:

With a global media, corporations and governments can no longer keep atrocities a secret, while people, instant spectators, can no longer feign ignorance as if they did not know about what happens to strangers. Ignorance no longer provides an alibi: to remain silent is to plead guilty. To keep one's conscience clear, cosmopolitanism proposes to cultivate the goodwill of locals or nationals to become engaged with strangers, to cultivate a global sense of responsibility for the fate of strangers in distress, regardless of their group identity or social distinctions. (2007: 376)

The ability to access information is not the be-all-and-end-all; importance rests in what individuals *do* with information about strangers. It is the responsibility of the spectator to help the stranger in whatever way she can, if she is aware of the other's plight. To ignore

the plight of another is aiding and abetting the crisis that affects the stranger. We have an obligation to help others. More specifically, from a cosmopolitan perspective, we have an obligation to help others if those others are experiencing a crisis that we could help alleviate.

According to Ossewaarde, the definition of humanity includes sociality and is dependant on social roles (2007: 367). If humans are beings with social characteristics, it seems inevitable that with so many people on one planet, we would not all know each other personally, and so, need a system of respectful interaction with those who are unknown. Cosmopolitanism legitimates strangerhood by remapping what is considered local and global, known and unknown. With the respectful inclusion of strangers, a “society of strangers” is formed (Ossewaarde 2007: 376). Within a society of strangers, it is recognizable and legitimate that not everyone knows each other. A society of strangers builds community with those who exist within a given space, regardless of affinity.

Cosmopolitanism legitimates the inclusion of strangers within society since strangers are seen as normal. Strangers are not strange, but of the norm. Strangers are not deviant or hazardous, and possess the same humanity as locals, despite difference in social characteristics (Ossewaarde 2007: 377). What needs questioning in terms of societal inclusion of strangers is how social bonds are formed. If bonds between locals “somehow become weaker, less binding and less partial, and more abstract, universal, indeterminate and virtual”, the stranger can be accepted (Ossewaarde 2007: 368).

If each person in society only desires what she herself wants, an individualist rationality, this creates distance between people. In a time of crisis, this distance is the barrier to seeing a person, who may be a stranger, as someone needing help. The type of

society in which this occurs might foster “collective experience of powerlessness, manifested in feelings of personal meaninglessness, loneliness, mistrust, insecurity and anxiety (Ossewaarde 2007: 385). Cosmopolitanism cannot exist or ceases to exist when locals neglect the observance of cultural patterns, when one local cannot anticipate the actions or response from another local. Trust dissolves and the individuals become strangers, not simply those who are unknown, but those who threaten and produce fear. What results is anomie and alienation (Ossewaarde 2007: 384-385). What is left in such a society is a lack of certainty or communal goals and values; the norms that regulate social life dissipate. The resulting nihilism and rejection of group life reinforces the need for cosmopolitan ethic, the communal existence of people. Cosmopolitanism acts as the criticism of isolationist cultural patterns and is a rejection of traumatic segregation experience, like the Holocaust. Group experience gone awry must be fixed in order to prevent “technical extermination of humanity” (Ossewaarde 2007: 379).

This is not to say that there exist no challenges in fostering cosmopolitan societies. The common aims of humankind cannot prevail with the current neoliberal political climate of competition, rivalry and petty ambition (Ossewaarde 2007: 368). The cosmopolitan challenge is to cultivate an intellectual ability to dispute cultural patterns of local group life in which knowledge of acquaintance is displaced. Instead, the cultural pattern is based on what is beneficial to collective life. Detachment from old patterns will enable the ability to foster a borderless “society of strangers”. Distinction between individuals as locals or strangers, friends and enemies, civilization and barbarism, and the West and the Rest is abolished (Ossewaarde 2007: 384).

Perhaps the assumption of the stranger as negative is the problem. Why is it bad to not know everyone? Why does a situation where interaction with a stranger occurs necessitate an undesirable response? The stranger does not have to be a terrible mystery that incites fear. The stranger could be an unknown person who has a life similar to “our” own. In the society in which we live, the stranger is not the same as us, but different. An “all-inclusive society of strangers” can be established, where social categories are transformed, and those who are different from the locals or dominant group are accepted *for* their differences. The world citizen with cosmopolitan virtue is socialized to recognize the “common humanity before particular sociality in strangers” (Ossewaarde 2007 : 376). This wider identification cultivates humanity to be inclusive and respectful of differences, while not being obsessed with the differences. In doing so, fear of the stranger is reduced.

Cosmopolitan questions ask what kinds of responsibilities are demanded from people. These questions build the normative framework that seeks answers about how people *should* behave towards each other. The remainder of this thesis is interested in explanatory questions, which seek to understand *what people actually do* and *why*.

### *Social Forms*

To help situate this issue, I look to Simmel and his discussion of social forms. Social forms allow for an understanding of interaction patterns that emerge in society. Simmel writes “society is conceived as interaction among individuals, the description of the forms of this interaction is the task of the science of society in its strictest and most essential sense” (1950: 21-22). Society is constantly being realized through the

connectedness of individuals by “mutual influence and determination” (Simmel 1950: 10). Not only does society come about through action – through things people *do* – but it also is a result of “sociation”. Sociation is the accumulation of action in society, of individual connectedness through interaction (Ibid.). To study phenomena of this manner is to conduct a particular type of sociology. ‘Sociation’ is the description of *forms* of interaction.

“Pure” or “formal” sociology is the social analysis of society and its forms (Simmel 1950: 21). A social form is a pattern or reoccurring type of behavior. According to Simmel, forms of interaction can be broken down in the same way grammar can be, separating content from form of language; forms come to life from the contents (Ibid. 22). Some types of behavior are or describe “superiority and subordination, competition, division of labor, formation of parties, representation, inner solidarity coupled with exclusiveness toward the outside” (Simmel 1950: 22). These forms can be found in various attributes of society, from components of the state, the family, economics, or religious communities. With all this diversity, the forms of sociations in which the interests of members or social groups are accomplished can be identical. Interactions take specific shape or form in order for communication to be attained. In order to study and understand social forms, “Identification, the systematic ordering, the psychological explanation, and the historical development of the pure forms of sociation” need to be problematized (Simmel 1950: 23). While social forms are dependent on individuals who interact with one another, social forms are not simply reliant on the individual. Social forms are a result of complex social forces at work. Sociation is the synthesis of

individuals' interaction, as fused by relationships. Social forms can be understood within structures of society.

Simmel's concept of 'social forms' is complex. The term 'social form' leads to the understanding of a visible shape or configuration of something. For instance, the identification of what and who are to be studied, or what surrounds the individuals who are studied in terms of the *condition* or *state* – what actions are warranted for the individuals and for those who interact with them. I use the study of social forms here as a mechanism of exploration into social *type*, specifically, the stranger. 'Type' is a subset of social forms, indicating a particular group who share common identifiable characteristics. Types of groups of individuals are, for instance, the poor, the miser and the spendthrift, the adventurer, the nobility, and the stranger (Simmel 1971: v-vi). Analysis of the stranger looks at insiders, or locals, and outsiders, strangers or 'others'. Analysis begins with identifying forms of behavior, more specifically, mechanisms of superiority and subordination, the formation of groups, and who is considered 'inside' or 'outside' these groups and why.

## **PART 1: The Stranger**

### **Chapter One: Who is the stranger?**

#### *Neoliberalism*

As the number of those with exorbitant wealth expands, the ‘social fabric’ of community living continues to fray. The decline of social provision is accompanied by government deficits. What those in the lower and middle class tax brackets are provided with, for a few hundred dollars of tax breaks annually, are deteriorating schools, inadequate public transit, declining public areas like parks, and a sick healthcare system. Ellwood says of the trend: “this failure to protect these ‘public goods’ diminishes us all, makes us less capable for caring for each other and prohibits us from advancing together as a cohesive, mutually supportive community” (Ellwood 2006: 121). His summary of the trend reinforces how neoliberal and globalized politicized economic systems sabotage the ability for people to have time and energy to care for each other. This trend leads to the possibility of the stranger being neglected in a time of crisis. Since neoliberalism reinforces individualist attitudes, people focus on worrying about themselves; fear becomes a motivational force. We might hesitate to get involved in something we witness because of fear. This fear is based on becoming a target of violence or another form of crisis. Neoliberalism projects a ‘dog eat dog world’, whereby the only obligation is to ‘ourselves’. To become a part of a crisis threatens individuality. Neoliberalism perpetuates individuality and supports the search for individual wealth, with little to no need to rely on the social system. Individuality creates and encourages a hostile environment between people in order to maintain the ideals of a neoliberal system. This fear can also be extended to worry over being responsible for someone else’s



circumstances. Social bonds are frayed by individualist social policies, which reflect an ‘each-for-themselves’ attitude. This attitude can be legitimated by beliefs that the stranger’s plight is something that they have brought on themselves. Individualism fosters the notion that each individual, or clusters of the same types of individuals (such as families), looks after herself or themselves. Everyone is on their own.

Neoliberalism has informed global shifts of social, political and economic climates that affect social interaction. According to Phillip Green, neoliberalism stems from the capitalist structure where “a few benefit unequally from the labour of many” (1998: 65). Division of labour enables private enterprise, a system that profits a “free” labour market. But for the capitalist structure to transform into neoliberal ethos, an important shift occurs: globalization. According to Manfred B. Steger, “the term *globalization* should be used to refer to a *set of social processes* that are thought to transform our present social condition into one of globality. At its core, then, globalization is about shifting forms of human contact” (Steger 2003: 8). Wayne Ellwood (2006: 127) describes globalization as an economic movement of people, goods, capital and ideas driven by the self-interest of wealthy nations and corporations. Globalization, in its predominant current form, is an undemocratic process that does not consult the people who are most directly affected. Some say that globalization has been positive for boosting growth and saving millions from poverty, however this viewpoint ignores the massive amount of inequality growing from this type of economic system.

World War I and the Great Depression of 1929 affected all global economic markets. After the economic crash new ideas and structures were realized. The 1930s saw the first wave of The New Deal come into effect, spearheaded by then American

president Franklin D. Roosevelt. The New Deal gave birth to reinvestments in public works and the modern welfare state. The second wave of The New Deal was fueled by the ideas of John Maynard Keynes. In 1936, Keynes published *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. In this work, Keynes states that the free market, left unchecked, creates unemployment (Ellwood 2006: 28). Keynes also claimed that profits and a certain amount of unemployment go together. With technocratization came the laying off of workers and the lowering of wages for the remaining, with fewer people who could afford to buy what goods were produced. What subsequently occurs: demand and sales fall together (Ellwood 2006: 28). To plump up the economy, Keynes suggested governments intervene by spending on public goods – education, health care and infrastructure. The Keynesian solution was adopted in the mid 1940s by ‘desperate Western governments’ to prevent economic stagnation (Ellwood 2006: 29). Not everyone saw The New Deal and its series of new economic programs as progress. In 1962, Milton Friedman wrote his first book, *Capitalism and Freedom*, which Naomi Klein claims would become the “global free-market rulebook”. The ideas behind neoliberalism were born, along with the laissez-faire economic agenda for the neoliberalist movement (Klein 2007: 17).

According to Ellwood, neoliberalism took a strong hold through globalization during the 1980s. The change began with the emergence of the fundamentalist free-market governments in the UK and the US, and the disintegration of the state-run economy of the Soviet Union. The regulatory role of the state was reduced by Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US (Ellwood 2006: 21). Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek and University of Chicago academic Milton Friedman,

believed that the problem was meddling governments – they believed the market should be in control. Companies should be able to open up shop anywhere in the world, to maximize profit and minimize costs. Within a few years, the ‘big players’ of Europe, Japan and North America expanded into each other’s markets and the Global South (Ellwood 2006: 22).

Klein cites the “policy trinity” of neoliberalism as: the deregulation of the public sphere; total liberation for corporations, also known as ‘privatization’, a shift from government agencies to private corporations as provider of social services; and, skeletal social spending or cutbacks (Klien 2007: 65). This three-part formula prioritizes business over people, offering limited protection to local industries or ownerships. Individualism is fostered in this type of society as policy. This type of society no longer only exists within the U.S. border, but has expanded worldwide through globalization. As business and political ideas spread, so too do ideas regarding relations with others, especially those who are unknown (Klien 2007: 65). Ellwood cites the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, that summarizes in one of its studies what has become of neoliberal economic policies: “Families have had to work longer and longer hours in order maintain the same level of earnings from employment and the idea of an affluent leisure society made possible by technological progress has become little more than a bad joke” (Ellwood 2006: 118). For example, in Canada between 1989-1999, disposable income fell on average 3.3%. This trend coincides with economic policies of drastic cuts in government expenditures and reduction in taxes (Ibid.).

Some argue that neoliberal globalization enables multinational corporations to be the ‘ambassadors of democracy’. This belief comes from the idea that free markets and

political systems are inextricably connected. As Ellwood points out, what currently exists does not support what is claimed: “market economics flourish in some of the world’s most autocratic and tyrannical states and multinational corporations have shown surprisingly little interest in, and have even less effect on, changing [these] political systems” (Ellwood 2006: 60). Private companies drive economic neoliberal globalization as these companies have more power than many nations. ‘Efficiency’ and ‘competition’, once strictly business values, now dominate social policy, public interest and the role of the government. Corporate decision-making occurs unchecked, disregarding the social, environmental and economic consequences. Public impacts of these decisions are rarely considered (Ellwood 2006: 59).

Neoliberal globalization is seductive. Its logic follows the simple principle of a free market with few constraints. Proponents of neoliberal globalization present it as self-evolving, creating and continuing the flow of employment, wealth and prosperity (Ellwood 2006: 112-113). But although aspects of this system are beneficial, there are clear indications that it intensifies income inequality. Ellwood writes: “unfortunately, there is no evidence that improvements in public well-being result from tax cuts for the rich or lower wages for the rest of us. If the reverse was true and tax cuts were directed towards those at the bottom of the income ladder there might be some impact” (Ellwood 2006: 117). In this type of political and social system, distance exists between individuals and is created through inequality. Neoliberalism reinforces how politicized economic systems damage the way people relate to each other by fortifying individualism.

*Classical Conceptions of the Stranger*

Simmel describes the stranger not as “the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the man [sic] who comes today and stays tomorrow” (1971: 143). Simmel describes the stranger as someone who makes a living through trade, who brings things from the outside into a particular social space in which she, the stranger, is different. This implies, however, that the stranger who comes today and stays tomorrow is different, an outsider, from those to whom this stranger is compared, the insiders. In this way, the stranger may exist within the social space of the group, but the insiders of the group impose distance and separation on the stranger. Because the stranger settles down in this social space, in which observable differences are noticed between the stranger and the insider, the stranger’s position is more apparent.

Social space is an important aspect of Simmel’s conception of the stranger. Simmel describes the stranger as being excluded from land ownership (Simmel 1971: 144). To own land is to determine what becomes of that social space. This opportunity creates authority for those who own space. For those who are excluded from land ownership, social space is on loan to them from those who own the space. The stranger therefore does not have the opportunity for spatial authority. Conversely, the owner exercises the power that comes with ownership of space on the stranger. Insiders can be owners; outsiders are continuously strangers in the space they occupy. Strangers, and their occupied space, ultimately comment on issues of mobility.

Mobility for the stranger goes beyond aspects of physical social space. The limited movement allowed to the stranger reflects the authority that is not afforded them. Mobility is bound to the paradox of nearness and remoteness. The stranger has

opportunity to be mobile, as anyone who exists in the same social space. But the stranger is seen as suspicious and does not have free movement, leading to distance from the insiders (Simmel 1971: 145). The restrictions on the stranger generate a condition of separation from those who are insiders, defined by strangeness.

Strangeness, as explained by Simmel, occurs in any form of relationship through a combination of commonalities and isolation. Specifically, insiders in a group have organic connections with other people in the group through specific shared traits. The stranger also shares commonalities with insiders of a group, but these qualities are of a more general nature. These general qualities universally connect all individuals, insiders and strangers alike. Through their generality they create the opportunity for isolation: a similarity so widely shared could easily unite each individual with all individuals, so this kind of connection is not special. Without a specific connection, the meager aspect of both being human cannot unite two individuals, an insider and a stranger. This non-specific similarity connects a great many people and does not create a solid reason for building a relationship. Therefore, isolation grows out of this commonality (Simmel 1971: 146-47).

To attribute strangeness to someone is to imbue them with defiance and rebellion. Because all relations, whether they are between two insiders, two strangers, or an insider and a stranger, can be based in the general human condition, closeness is a part of any relationship. However, to consider a closeness between an insider and a stranger is to devalue the more “real” nature of relations between two insiders; for strangers to be included within the most general group, to belong, is to potentially include everyone, which the insider does not want (Simmel 1971: 148). The stranger has no positive

meaning, ultimately resulting in unpleasantness projected from the insider onto the stranger.

Even though the stranger may coexist in the same social space as insiders, she is never accepted as an insider, which creates the nearness and distance associated with the stranger. This nearness and distance creates a tension born of only having the absolutely general in common, effectively focusing on and highlighting that which is not common to the insider and the stranger. The special emphasis on differences, that which is not common, creates the perception that strangers are not individuals, but strangers of a certain type (Simmel 1971: 148). The typing of these outsiders as *not* individuals solidifies the category of the stranger and disassociates the stranger from those who belong.

Simmel makes brief mention of a specific type of stranger, the Jewish person. He describes this person as being a special and isolated case, where taxes are applied to this person simply for being a Jew (Simmel 1971: 148). He writes that in Frankfurt and elsewhere in the Middle Ages, those who were Christian paid taxes according to their wealth, whereas for the Jews, the taxed amount was fixed. “This amount was fixed because the Jew had his [sic] social position as a *Jew*” (Simmel 1971: 149). Simmel writes of this stranger as having the invariable element of limitation simply for being who she is.

To help draw out the classical conception of the stranger, I also look to Alfred Schütz. Schütz’s stranger is complex. While the stranger seeks inclusion in the dominant group, she does not strive to become one of the locals. This type of stranger also poses greater danger to the locals, compared with Simmel’s stranger, as Schütz conceives of the

stranger as an intruder who has limited capacity to offer anything valuable to locals. Even while living amongst locals, this stranger is never fully integrated and is deemed a *strange local* (Schütz 1944: 506). This stranger does not come to appreciate and participate in local life and is therefore excluded from the local's cultural experiences.

Schütz's stranger is also an objective observer of the local culture because she has been socialized elsewhere (Schütz 1944: 506). With knowledge that is from somewhere else, combined with information about the local group of which she is never a full participant, this stranger is pulled between two different cultural patterns. For this stranger, distance is created because she is aware of each distinct cultural pattern, while not fully participating in either. This critical distance makes her objectively and painfully aware of what it takes to "fit in" with the new locals. It becomes necessary to renounce the old cultural patterns of guidance and intertwine herself with the cultural patterns of the new locals, while being aware that simply fulfilling this act will not insure that she is recognized as a local. Whether by her own doing or by that of the new locals, she is constantly reminded of the discrepancy between her old culture and the new one, thus not only being a stranger to the new locals, but entering a new era, perhaps as a stranger to herself.

Simmel and Schütz each write of the stranger differently. Simmel writes of the stranger from the perspective of the stranger, looking as the stranger at her surrounding circumstances, while for Schütz, the stranger consists of the point of view of the stranger, including how the local or insider sees the stranger. Simmel wrote *The Stranger* in 1908 as a 'foreigner' who sells and trades merchandise. Simmel's reflexive conceptions of the stranger are affected by his perspective as a Jewish man surrounded by anti-Semitism. He



writes of 'the stranger' as an individual who is not entitled to land ownership, who has limited mobility and is disallowed spatial authority. These limits placed on the stranger were limits he encountered as a Jewish person. He writes of himself being defiant in his difference, as compared to the locals. Simmel writes of the isolation Jews feel regarding being a part of the generality of humanness while not being united with the rest of humankind because of their 'differences'. His stranger is subordinate to insiders. Simmel identifies with the stranger; he himself is a stranger amongst the locals.

Schütz wrote his essay on the stranger in 1944. His categorization of the stranger is objective in that he does not make use of his own identity and experience. Schütz is not reflexively aware; he does not place aspects of himself, nor does he mention any likeness to himself, within the confines of the 'stranger'. Schütz, while being Jewish as well as Simmel, emigrated from Austria to the U.S. in 1939, fleeing Nazi invasion. Schütz makes no mention of this 'strangeness', of being a 'stranger' himself in Austria as well as being a 'stranger' in the U.S. Instead, he writes in a general way of the stranger, from the perspective of the stranger trying to blend in with the insiders, with minimal examples to illustrate his theory. What he does state is that his stranger wishes to 'blend in' with those that belong, thus disowning the self, the stranger, as perceived as dangerous. Schütz sees the stranger as neither superior nor subordinate to the insiders; he merely sees the stranger *as is*, striving for equality in resourcefulness or some version of sameness. A reference to sameness or resourcefulness occurs when Schütz discusses the stranger as being socialized elsewhere, thus offering an objective perspective on surroundings. Schütz's stranger wants recognition for being valuable to society.

*Contemporary Conceptions of the Stranger*

Sara Ahmed's conception of the contemporary stranger challenges classical conceptions by bringing in further considerations of anxieties and fears. This isn't to say that contemporary conceptions, and specifically Ahmed's, don't give privilege to the locals, but that classical conceptions are based on the locals having a different kind of power. This power is bound up with belonging, as the locals are from the particular place, while the stranger comes from somewhere else. Contemporary conceptions of the stranger bring in a complication: the stranger is now from the same place as the locals. But these locals are still strangers; the contemporary concept of the 'stranger', then, is more abstract and harder to understand. According to Ahmed, there is a 'visual economy' in which others are placed, stacked against each other, allowing for processing of the 'other' to *see the difference* (2000: 24). At this point, there is registration of 'alike' and 'unlike' bodies. If the body is deemed to be alike, this 'stranger' is not seen as strange. When faced with the 'unlike' body, there is a shift to physically remove these bodies from 'our' space. The skin is registered in the minds of those viewing others, those who are spectating. Alike and unlike bodies depict 'characteristics', featuring aspects of sameness or difference (Ahmed 2000: 50). These characteristics are a product of social encounters, formulated through social construction. For encounters to be familiar, there must be 'gestures in common' with the other when confronted with a stranger. Gestures allow for us to understand or not understand the stranger. If understanding occurs, this person ceases to be a stranger. The lack of understanding is based on different cultural histories as expressed through corporeal schema. Uneasiness toward and resistance to the stranger are 'felt on the skin' (Ahmed 2000: 50). The discussion of 'uneasiness toward

the stranger as felt on the skin' is indicative of racism, and will be explored further in relation to the topic of multiculturalism.

Now that both the stranger and the locals may be from the same place, new anxieties arise. Structures of power appear to be different in contemporary models of the stranger, as these models express ideas of this new fear toward the stranger by the locals (Ahmed 2000: 4). The stranger in the contemporary sense is one that is too fearful to be known; this stranger is to be avoided. Ahmed relies on the term "stranger danger" to exemplify this notion in action (Ahmed 2000: 22).

Ahmed begins by considering how the stranger is represented in popular culture as an extraterrestrial alien. By labeling a stranger as an alien, locals may not have to even try to understand her, as she comes with a ready-made label that has its own meanings. Extraterrestrials are different, not only in patterns of cultural interaction but even in the way they look -- which gives appropriateness and authority to the act of separating the alien stranger from the locals (Ahmed 2000: 26). We see this again and again in science-fiction films; overrepresentation of the science fiction alien gives the viewer the sense that the unknown individual, the stranger, is dangerous.

Ahmed investigates the stranger as an alien within a community of citizens (Ahmed 2000: 3). To be categorized as a citizen is to belong. This notion of belonging is something that Ahmed examines by contrasting the stranger to the neighbor. Forms of social difference are outlined as the neighbor represents a safe space, an easily determined and recognizable location where individuals are representative of home; neighbors are the people associated with the nearness and safety of one's own home where no strangeness or strangers exist (Ahmed 2000: 21). Home is the place of

reassurance, where perhaps comfort and safety could be represented by things like sweat pants and slippers; these items juxtaposed next to the stranger create an atmosphere that is jarring and uncomfortable (Ibid.: 4). But social life is impossible without strangers; individuals run the risk of interacting with those who are unknown if they leave their home. By getting closer to strangers we begin to see that the stranger is not from far away but coexists right next to us. The phenomenon of “the stranger coexists right next to us” is indicative of multiculturalism.

Ahmed writes that discomfort toward the ‘unlike’ body of the stranger produces the need to *physically* remove the stranger. The notion of the stranger as ‘physically removed’ is ambiguous and incomplete without an extension, since through various human rights acts, it is illegal to pursue such endeavors. I would argue that strangers’ bodies are first metaphorically removed, by acts such as multiculturalism, and second, physically removed through social mechanisms. Multiculturalism paves the way for physical expulsion from a locale by implementing lawful, expected and predictable mechanisms, based in racist ideology.

Eva Mackey describes a “new racism” or “cultural racism” when defining what constitutes difference among people within multiculturalism. The new racism has done away with old, crude perceptions of biological superiority and inferiority. What exists now is “a language of race that excludes by using concepts of national culture and identity” (Mackey 1999: 8). Exclusion of others occurs within a bordered nation where insiders and outsiders coexist; the outsiders, or stranger, exist next to the insiders. This is a racism that “avoids being recognized as such” (Ibid.). There is a lasting taste on our proverbial cultural palate of colonial homogeneity as Whiteness, which is vulnerable to

attack from outside as well as inside. “Cultural difference” is everywhere; all around “us” is “them”, with difference of skin colour, body ability, sexuality, perceptions of class, standards of beauty, age and perceptions of knowledge, etc. When others – who are different from ourselves because of colonial legacies – confront us, we treat “them” as a threat. Nations and nationalism may be as big as mapped boundaries or as small as personhood. What we define as “ours” is in need of protection from negative outside, or insider-as-threat, influence.

Differentiated identities come with multiculturalism. In order for multiculturalism to exist, ideologies of “tolerance” must be constructed (Mackey 1999: 65). Recognition of difference also puts limitations on difference. Outlines and parameters are set up with discussion of what particularities make up difference. Ways of being different and its guidelines are about portraying the acceptance of difference. In doing so, it seems as though everyone is accepted, by *acknowledging* that difference exists. But does tolerance really indicate *acceptance* of difference as equality, or is tolerance a public relations mechanism of commonly saving face? The “stranger coexists right next to us” represents multiculturalism in the way we *tolerate* differences among people but do not necessarily *accept* those who are different from our “own”.

To help further contextualize the contemporary stranger, I look to Marinus Ossewaarde and Rudolf Stechow. Ossewaarde’s vision of the stranger is a cosmopolitan one that signals a shift from sociality to humanity, which sees an all-inclusive society of strangers as an end result (2007: 367). Stability, coherence and concreteness of society can be found by breaking down group boundaries, opening up new possibilities for remapping social order (Ossewaarde 2007: 373). Ossewaarde further states that doing

away with obsessive attachments to cultural identities as difference would provide the space to move forward in postcoloniality. I use Ossewaarde's ideas as a starting point for discussing the elimination of *obsession* with difference. To discuss the needs of a stranger in crisis, a spectator must remove the obsessive lens of difference in order to view the stranger as part of her own group, at the very least to be humanized and entitled to comfort and respect.

Rudolf Stechow sees the modern everyday experience of interaction through a lens of indifference as a normal attitude towards unknown people, strangers. He sees interactions with the stranger as fleeting – strangers are either invisible or omnipresent, losing their status as distinct social figures (Stechow 1997: 8). Stechow defines the stranger as resting solely in the city. He explains this emphasis on the city by claiming that non-urban settings offer the potential for interaction with a stranger. In the countryside the stranger proves to be a friend of a friend, a relationship that offers some social proximity (Ibid.: 10). The stranger in the city remains an unknown person, “His [sic] strangeness becomes a normalcy to be expected which loses its disturbing aspects so that there is no longer a need for doing some remedial work on his strangeness” (Ibid.). The stranger, then, remains forever an unknown and unseen person.

One problem with this analysis is that Stechow oversimplifies how the stranger comes to be known in rural settings, as contrasted to the isolating city. Stechow's vision of non-urban settings as a place where everyone is a friend of a friend may have applied to some homogeneous rural areas (and might still today). However, it ignores the possible presence of racial difference in non-urban settings. As a result, Stechow's definition fails to recognize ‘racialized others’ as strangers, distinct in embodying a different

‘difference’ than simply someone who is ‘unknown’. In a social climate in which ‘cultural racism’ and ‘tolerance’ stand in for political terms such as multiculturalism, ‘racialized others’ as strangers are masked as foreign or dangerous, not even to be discussed.

Ahmed’s, Ossewaarde’s, and Stechweh’s conceptions of the stranger are all problematic. Ahmed oversimplifies the definition of the ‘stranger’. Her depiction focuses on racialization, where the stranger ceases to be seen only as someone ‘unknown’. She is ambiguous about the stranger’s territory. Ahmed writes of the stranger as being from the same place as the local, which is an exciting new way of looking at the stranger; she moves beyond the classical notions of the stranger as being from elsewhere. However, not all strangers are specifically *racialized* Others. Ossewaarde’s cosmopolitan conceptions of the stranger are too simplistic. While it would be wonderful to think of all individuals as included in an ‘all-inclusive society of strangers’, he fails to address *how* this is to occur. He discusses that it is necessary to break down group boundaries to remap social order, and that obsessive attachments towards ‘difference’ should be done away with – but, again, how is this to be done? Lastly, Stechweh describes attitudes toward the stranger as ‘indifferent’ and that this perception is ‘normal’. He furthers this notion by stating that strangers are invisible or omnipresent, thus ceasing to be distinct social figures. These statements are contradictory: if the stranger is invisible, why write of her at all? Stechweh’s argument would be stronger if he stated that the stranger is *seen*, but *ignored*.

Ahmed, Ossewaarde and Stechweh provide reflexive theoretical accounts that further define the stranger. Each of their own conceptions of the stranger further define

aspects of what ‘difference’ and ‘strangerhood’ mean, from the position in which they find themselves to be. Perhaps all three have been both an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider’. Perhaps people who write about strangers are strangers themselves.

### *City Life and the Blasé Attitude*

While Simmel did not use the phrase ‘compassion fatigue’, he did write about how living in a metropolis, or city, contributes to having a ‘blasé attitude’. He describes the metropolis as a part of modern life that has an effect on psychological aspects of individuals. These effects are acted out, specifically, with regard to how individuals interact. Simmel’s concern for how individuals interact stems from the shift toward individuality that city living brings, in contrast with the greater communitarianism of rural life. In city life, autonomy and individuality replace community and caring for others. The problem for Simmel arises when individuals wish to remain autonomous while being bombarded by the social forces of heritage and external culture (Simmel 1950: 409). While Simmel did not use the term ‘neoliberalism’, his definition of the blasé attitude echoes neoliberalist ethic: individualistic existence causes a disruption of community building.

The psychological state that Simmel refers to when discussing metropolitan life is created by an increase in nervous stimulation: “The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli” (Simmel 1950: 409-410). He acknowledges that the mind has a direct impact on how an individual may respond to another, based on stimuli. When an individual exists in the



city, there is such an overwhelming amount of detail to contend with that the mind and body are affected. This affect is coupled with the central drive in metropolitan life: money.

For Simmel, the shift to individuality stems from the motive for moving to the city, the “money economy” (1950: 411). The city offers multiple opportunities in one location, to participate in the economy and make money, with the goal of furthering the self, the individual. The same opportunities are not available in rural life, where commerce is less developed, driving individuals to metropolitan life. The migration to the city from the country for financial reasons is based on ‘intellect’. Intellect in this sense means the ability to reason what is progress in terms of finding a more viable and economically sound lifestyle. The city lifestyle fosters a ‘matter-of-fact’ attitude when dealing with other people, which reduces patience and friendliness, while increasing one’s desire for timeliness (Simmel 1950: 411). This type of attitude is also described as a hardness or bluntness, which manifests itself in inconsiderate treatment of others.

Along with the characteristic of hardness comes a way of relating that is highly impersonal. Impersonality is coupled with personal subjectivity, whereby the individual thinks for and of herself, and of what she needs and wants, over and above others (Simmel 1950: 413). Personal subjectivity is a form of pleasure seeking whereby individual thinking can turn into a blasé attitude. Personal subjectivity can become a blasé attitude when one’s own needs are challenged by the needs of others. Individuals receive pleasure in doing what they want for themselves. If this pleasure is challenged, a reasonable way of responding is to ignore or deny whatever is getting in the way of personal satisfaction (Ibid.).

In Simmel's metropolitan world, the individual is forced to clear away the cloudiness of the needs of others in order to clearly see what she needs and wants, leading to a blasé attitude; the needs of others are effectively removed from the vision and mind of the one who is witness to the needs of others. Simmel explains that the blasé attitude is caused by the 'nerves' over-stimulating the brain, resulting in a response of indifference (Simmel 1950: 413-414). The 'nerves' are over-stimulated for so long that agitation occurs. The individual, who is witness over a long period of time, finally ceases to react at all. The 'nerves' tire from being pulled in many directions; what once may have warranted an outcry of response now receives merely a passing glance. The individual thus becomes incapacitated from responding with similar energy.

While the discussion of 'nerves' is dated and not necessarily sociological, this account aids in the understanding of the blasé attitude. Simmel discusses how the nervous system is connected to thought process. In being over-stimulated, the individual's responsive system is worn down, effectively changing how the individual views others and their actions or situations, which ultimately has implications for strangers and social interaction. Agitation to the point of unconcern is an important aspect of the blasé attitude as it helps explain why people become over-stimulated. Agitation to the point of being blasé describes a process similar to the contemporary theoretical account of compassion fatigue, which I will discuss in Chapter 4.

Simmel is clear that the blasé attitude does not mean that people or situations in public are not *seen*, but rather, that they are not *perceived*. What is viewed is attributed with the value of insubstantiality. Simmel defines the blasé person as seeing in evenly flat or gray tones with nothing deserving preference over anything else. Discrimination has

been dulled by the surrounding metropolitan overstimulation (Simmel 1950: 414). In the cases of Genovese, Hized, and Tale-Yax, it can be concluded that witnesses in all three incidents *saw* and/or *heard* the plight of the victim. In all three cases, witnesses were in the vicinity of the plight. In the Genovese case, at least 38 witnesses were interviewed who attested to seeing or hearing the plight of Genovese. In the case of Hized, the subway car was half full, indicating that witnesses were present. In the case of Tale-Yax, at least seven witnesses were caught on surveillance footage looking at or interacting with the body of Tale-Yax. All three of these incidents indicate that the plights of the victims were seen and/or heard. But the negation of response to the plight indicates that it is possible that *perception* of the plight may not have occurred, just as Simmel described with a blasé attitude.

#### *Construction of a 'Different' Stranger*

At this point I wish to introduce a different concept of the stranger, taking aspects from each source. In doing so, a new, comprehensive and complimentary argument of who the stranger is emerges, creating a complex social form in order to synthesize and analyze the stranger. The stranger in classical theory is the 'unknown' individual, who is difficult to know and remains 'unknown', because of perceptions of the stranger as a threat. Contemporary conceptions build on classical conceptions of the 'unknown' aspects of the stranger, adding a particular element of focus: 'difference'. The unknown individual can be 'different', but this difference is not always unknown, as various technological means allow the availability of the knowledge of others to materialize. For instance, with the rise of mass media, many individuals have access to numerous cultures

and ‘different’ individuals. The *difference* in this concept of the stranger is that being *aware* of ‘different’ individuals does not necessarily mean that ‘different’ individuals are *personally known*. The concept of ‘strangers’ is transformed from classical to contemporary conceptions because of media. Today, people in the country can be made aware of things just as easily and readily as those who live in the city, with TV and the internet. The ‘things’ people can be made aware of include people, both ‘like’ and ‘unlike’ themselves. The ‘stranger’ is a changing concept, based on aspects of what is ‘like’ or ‘unlike’ the spectator of the stranger. Also, because of media strangers no longer have to be *physically* present in order for us to witness their suffering, or to develop a blasé attitude toward them; territory and space are collapsed through media. This deterritorialization creates a deterioration of social connectivity to the stranger. This is because media, particularly the internet, provide abstracted, decontextualized illustrations of who the stranger is, such that this stranger can be anybody. The internet, as a medium, intensifies this effect because the internet is a realm of media ‘strangers’ who are not known, are not trusted, whose very existence can be uncertain. Everyone that one encounters on the internet is a stranger, someone who could be anyone; this uncertainty instigates a fear of or an anxiety about those who are unknown or different. And yet, we can learn about strangers, if we trust the information provided through the media. The trouble is, there is so much information that the media provides about strangers. Wading through the vast sources of information may be overwhelming. If one becomes blasé about learning who the ‘stranger’ is, perhaps information overload has occurred, and the stranger remains unknown and different.

Assuming that we have the ability to ‘know’ everyone through access to media, is it possible to say that strangers no longer exist? No, because the *concept* of ‘stranger’ continues. The idea of people having the ability to ‘know’ everyone does not mean that there is *comfort* with everyone or that certain people cease to be seen as a threat. In fact, the illusion that we *can* ‘know’ everyone has the ability to socially foster the notion that we *do* know everyone. But how much of the mediated knowledge of ‘others’ is based on stereotypes and false connections attributed to ‘individuals of a certain type’? Perhaps we come to know ‘strangers’ as ‘individuals of a certain type’, those who come to be known as *different* from the ‘self’, the spectator. Who the stranger is *changes*, with time, surroundings, and attributable aspects.

Contemporary theories of the ‘stranger’ involve aspects of ‘difference’ but this ‘difference’ is localized in social constructions. As mentioned previously, classical conceptions of the ‘stranger’ do have aspects of ‘difference’, but the focus was on attributes of the unknown in difference. A major shift occurs between classical and contemporary conceptions of the stranger when their ‘difference’ is labeled not as ‘unknown’ but as ‘racially different’; the stranger can be a ‘racialized other’. The stranger can also represent other types of social difference, such as age, ability, sex, or homelessness. For instance, Tale-Yax was emblematic of a ‘racialized other’ stranger as a person of colour, and perhaps represented a stranger more so because he was, and resembled, a homeless man. The stranger can also be isolated for his age, perhaps as someone elderly, who no longer possesses the same ability or likeness to those who are younger. Hizel is an example of this case, as he was an elderly man. The stranger can also be a person who does not fit the stereotypic patriarchal norm of maleness; that is, the

stranger can be a stranger simply for being a woman. Genovese represents the stranger in this case as her killer singled her out simply for being a woman. The discussion of the ‘male gaze’ in Chapter Four will examine this further.

However, racialized groups do not all fear each other equally; there are social characteristics and historical settings that have created unequal relationships of distrust. Some fears of ‘others’ are more apparent, understood and valued than others. Colonization, and now neoliberal globalization, have created climates of concern about those who are ‘different’. Certain voices expressing concern and fear are heard louder and clearer because of ‘privilege’. Historically, and still today, ‘racially different’ skin carries with it less opportunity for equality to those with privilege, those with White skin. ‘Racially different’ skin is ‘non-White’, which is a key aspect to focus on; those who are ‘racially different’ are so in *comparison to* those who are White, those with privilege. Incidentally, those who are White become the *norm* – the ‘ideal person’. Those who are ‘different’ are not ‘normal’. Those who are ‘different’ deviate from this norm, creating questions, concern, distrust, and fear. In this context, those who are ‘racially different’, as a ‘racialized other’, are doubly strange. The ‘racialized other’ is both ‘unknown’ and ‘different’, becoming a ‘double-stranger’. The ‘double-stranger’ has even less privilege than a person who is either just ‘unknown’ or ‘racially different’. Perceptions of the ‘double-stranger’ are even more powerful in terms of fear and distrust.

But conceptions of the ‘racialized other’ as ‘different’ overlook an important issue: those labeled as ‘racialized others’ may themselves have feelings of fear toward those who are ‘different’ from themselves, those who are normalized as ‘ideal people’. What if after all the hardships ‘racialized others’ have encountered, they have distrust and

fear for those who are ‘the norm as ideal people’, those who are White? This is a rational response to centuries of brutalization and oppression. Assuming this is the case, no one can be trusted. And so people operate as though those who are ‘unknown’ and ‘different’ from them are eternal strangers.

Based on some of Simmel’s social forms of behavior, I tease out certain aspects of each theorist’s depictions of the stranger. I have concentrated on aspects of ‘subordination’ over ‘superiority’ because the ‘stranger’ is ‘strange’ and inferior. Social forms of the ‘stranger’ indicate that the stranger is subordinate to the ‘locals’. Two other considerations that help define the stranger are ‘representation’ and how the stranger is separated from ‘insiders’. I use Simmel’s conception of the ‘stranger’ as ‘foreign’ combined with the notion of the stranger perceived as defiant and rebellious. Both of these ideas contribute to a spectator’s view of the stranger as dangerous. I draw from Ahmed’s conception of the stranger as a ‘racialized other’, and combine it with notions of the stranger as a kind of extraterrestrial in order to frame who the stranger is in these mass-mediated times. The stranger I am concerned with embodies ‘difference’ and is not fixed or ahistorical. For the stranger encompasses many perspectives and contexts and is not the same in *all* situations; the stranger changes *based* on the situation. The stranger is the person who is ‘different’ from and ‘unlike’ the ‘insider’ or ‘local’, regardless of race. Of course, the ‘local’ and the ‘stranger’ in each situation continually changes.

## Chapter Two

### Stranger Culture and Crisis

#### *What is 'Culture'?*

The term 'culture' is tricky. It has a complex past and has come to mean different things over time. Raymond Williams has spent time identifying and understanding culture's past. "Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (Williams 1967: 76). The root of the word stems from husbandry, the tending of natural growth, which began in the fifteenth century. Williams cites the range of meanings this word claims to have: to inhabit, cultivate, protect, and honour with worship (Ibid.: 77). Part of the difficulty in understanding the origins and definitions of 'culture' is because of its formations through several European languages. The noun *culture* in French is derived from the Latin *cultura*, meaning to grow or cultivate. The now obsolete French verb *culturer* is derived from Medieval Latin *culturare*, meaning to tend to something or cultivate. In 16<sup>th</sup> century Middle English, culture referred to the cultivation of the soil, and then came to mean the cultivation of the mind or manners in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. To add to the difficulty in precisely understanding the word, the concept appears in several distinct and incompatible intellectual disciplines, each using it differently in the post 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ibid.). For instance, biological sciences use 'culture' to indicate the cultivation of tissue or cells; fine arts and humanities use 'culture' to signify works of art or creative expression; social sciences use 'culture' to indicate formations and processes of social institutions or customs.

Even though the definition of culture has changed it still remains a noun of process – the tending of something (Williams 1967: 77.). The term culture can be thought



of as a process of human development, involving the human mind, thought that could be turned into practice, and not solely dealing with crops or animals. There are no definitive dates for changes in definitions, as meanings have folded into one another throughout the existence of the concept. The two crucial changes in the meaning of this word are that human tending to something is implicit, and that culture has moved from a particular to a general process, making the word more abstract. This abstract process of human development is about becoming “civilized” or “cultivated” (Williams 1967: 78).

Further development of the word begins to describe intellectual works and practices, especially artistic activity (Williams 1967: 80). Since the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, culture has come to refer to works of music, literature, painting, sculpture, theatre and film, as well as works that comment on these. It is necessary to note, though, that within each discipline that uses the word, conceptual clarifications are needed. Here, I use culture to imply a practiced way of interacting that is socially constructed, which has members who are included and excluded based on perceptions of the other members. I define culture this way because it helps shape the questions I ask and directs me toward an analytic that can begin to understand ‘the stranger in crisis and social response’ project. My use of the term culture extends beyond a basic classification of ‘the way of life’. Instead, I am focusing on formations and processes of social institutions or customs that lead to patterns of interaction. I am interested in combining this definition with a more cultural studies definition, whereby ‘culture’ is studied in terms of contemporary popular cultural politics, namely compassion fatigue induced by audiovisual news media.

*Xenophobia as stranger culture?*

Ahmed talks of strangers' bodies as being "temporarily assimilated *as* the unassimilatable within the encounter" (2000: 54). Strangers' bodies are temporarily assimilated because we make these bodies what we want them to be for the time they are in front of us. We see the stranger as "strange" for as long as we see them; when they leave the vicinity over which we can pass judgment – in front of our selves or within our own mind – they cease to be known as we know them. The stranger is not strange among her own kind.

Ahmed mentions how the stranger's body is constructed through a process of "movement between inside and outside" (Ahmed 2000: 54). The strange body becomes "strange" by possessing traits that incorporate the dominant idea of what it is to be strange, while not partaking of the dominant idea of what it means to 'fit in' with the dominant group. Possession of qualities or physical attributes of belonging are not options for those who do not 'fit in'. Where she once may have fit in within her own dominant group, she now moves to the outside, becoming strange, as a stranger.

I must make a distinction between xenophobia and stranger culture. Stranger culture does have roots in xenophobia, fear of the stranger, but has become something bigger than fear alone. Stranger culture takes fear of the stranger and adds to it an embodiment of that fear, instigating performance, including social action. Stranger culture, then, is the consequence of xenophobic *thought*, placed in *action*. Xenophobia is based on psychic projection, a conception of the other. Stranger culture is relationship based, involving how individuals socially interact with those who are unknown.

The stranger's body is produced. In this production, the stranger becomes a phobic object, where the site of the strange body produces fear (Ahmed 2000: 54). What the actor who envisions the individual's body as strange does not acknowledge is the *re-forming* of a safe body into an unsafe one. There must be a body to compare another one to in order for one body to illicit fear, or no one could ever be trusted.

Affective moments are present when anyone encounters another; the other who is encountered can be strange or safe (or safe enough for some interaction). If the individual is deemed unsafe and strange, they are seen as a stranger, and the individual who deems the other "stranger" withdraws from interaction. To withdraw from a stranger is to register the other's skin as "different" (Ahmed 2000: 54). Xenophobia is the action of one's own feelings of fear, derived from labeling the other as strange. Xenophobic actions do not have to be *recognized* as feelings; a person can just feel the feelings or act their feelings, without making the connection to being personally xenophobic.

### *Stranger Danger*

In contemporary theory, the stranger emerges out of the postcolonial situation, that is, out of the time after formal decolonization. In this time and space, the stranger possesses power because she has not been fully assimilated. The stranger, while practicing cultural patterns of the locals with great fluidity and replication, still carries with her visual reminders of her difference – a difference that was not obliterated and consumed by Western standards. Locals can see her difference as rudeness because this difference has not been completely washed away; this difference then is a possible threat.

The difference has survived, as she has, carrying with her a new form of power. This power is represented by fear, stranger danger, as the locals are anxious in her presence.

For Zygmunt Bauman, every society produces strangers, but the defining characteristic is that they are socially produced to be unique (1997: 46). Bauman sees the stranger as bound up with state power. In modern times, clarity and certainty should prevail, but the mere existence of strangers disrupts this stasis – strangers exude uncertainty and ambiguity. Strangers thus threaten the rational order on which the modern world was built, creating a culture in which assimilation or exclusion are the only two possible outcomes for a stranger (Ibid.: 47). The stranger is either made to look like those who belong, or the stranger is altogether expelled from the community.

According to Bauman, the assimilation of the stranger complements the liberal project by making the stranger “pliable and amenable to reshaping” (Bauman 1997: 48). If the stranger is to be excluded, the nationalist/racist project reigns. This project fosters the idea that certain individuals can never be reshaped into something that they are not: “They are, so to speak, beyond repair. One cannot rid them of their faults; one can only rid them of themselves, complete with their oddities and evils” (Ibid.). This is a creative destruction and is a way to assimilate people using innovative means; by thinking creatively, assimilation can be disguised and not seen as a destruction of an identity. This creative destruction produces an environment of uncertainty – strangers, once assimilated, may vanish as a threat. However, assimilation is not immediate because it takes time for ideas to become a part of dominant culture. The insiders must live with the outsiders, the strangers. Until full assimilation can occur – if ever – those that belong

must coexist with strangers. This situation engenders what Sarah Ahmed calls a culture of “stranger danger”.

To begin to understand Ahmed’s conception of stranger danger, we first look at understanding what it means to recognize a stranger (2000: 21). The label of stranger exists until we learn that the stranger is someone who is to be recognized. This process of recognition raises questions about how we come to know who a stranger is. To see a stranger as a stranger is to acknowledge and understand them as a stranger, rather than simply failing to see who and what they are, a person who is unknown. To label someone a stranger is to imbue them with qualities of knowing *something* about them. This something is not necessarily knowledge of who they really *are* as a person, but thoughts of who they *might* be. Ahmed says that to see a stranger is to acknowledge and understand a person who is unknown, rather than simply failing to see them for anything at all. To recognize is to know again. The stranger then, has already taken shape, implying that we know what shape to look for when determining who is a stranger (Ahmed 2000: 22). A stranger, while representing the unknown, inspires a fear based on what we have come to know and deem appropriate regarding who the stranger is and how the stranger will act. In effect, labeling a person a stranger means that while we don't know who they are, we believe we know that their actions towards us threaten who we are.

Ahmed says there are techniques that allow for the recognition of a stranger as different from those who belong to a given space, such as neighbors or fellow inhabitants. Identity and belonging are involved in the ideology of stranger danger (Ahmed 2000: 21). Neighborhoods and those that are seen to belong within that space are thought to be

organic or pure in organization. The social perceptions of outsiders as dangerous are tied in to the understanding of moral and social health well being (Ahmed 2000: 26). Using Ahmed's conception of the makeup of stranger danger, cultural patterns take shapes that involve spatial boundaries and notions of belonging or exclusion. These patterns and notions affect the legitimated forms of mobility within the public domain (Ibid.: 32).

### *Collection of Ideas*

Using James Clifford's theories of art collection, I draw upon his notion that collection involves elements of hierarchy and value judgments, based on conceptions of authenticity and worth (1988: 231). Authenticity and worth are aspects of something to be remembered; once this is established, a system of assessing what is viewed is drawn from value judgments of common social hierarchical conceptions. Clifford further explains, "the system classifies objects and assigns them relative value. It establishes the 'contexts' in which they properly belong and between which they circulate" (Clifford 1988: 223). For a piece of art to become valued, a discourse is developed that illustrates why the item is sought after; it carries with it authenticity. This authenticity, likely representing a culture of an artist that is unlike the collector's own, allows the art piece to function as an archive of who created the art and what the art projects, thereby becoming cultural property. The collector, then, is seen to possess what the art depicts, in "having a culture" (Clifford 1988: 217). This type of cultural possession is one of an outsider looking in, never actually becoming or representing the images and ideas being collected. The artist experiences the work of art as existing in the present, while the collector experiences the art as representing the past (Clifford 1988: 250). In this type of

appropriation, the collecting is not about the artist and her creation, but about the collector.

Although Clifford speaks of collection in terms of art culture, I am extrapolating from his insight that collection can occur with anything – including ideas. The collection of ideas is discursive. There is social power in the collection of ideas, not to simply describe the world but for use through discursive means, with the ability to affect sociality. Thus ideas of strangers come into our minds from somewhere, and since these ideas are retained, they ultimately could produce stranger danger. It can then be said that individuals collect ideas of who strangers are. After all, an elaborate justification that strangers are dangerous cannot be developed without some form of organizing and data keeping, which can be summed up as a collection of ideas. Collected ideas function as an archive of images of the stranger because the ideas are remembered and can be called upon for later use.

### *Interaction and Etiquette with the Stranger*

Erving Goffman discusses how proper action in social circumstances results from a system of etiquette whereby the actors present respect each other. Alienation can occur in social interaction, through improper action (Goffman 1967 114). His work is descriptive in that it classifies without expressing feelings of judgment. Goffman's sociological analysis of interactions denotes behaviour that contributes to the maintenance of 'social order'. Choosing and retaining what or whom to focus on relies upon attention spans. The choice of where and to whom to pay attention is bound up with social constraints; attention spent is either proper or improper (Goffman 1967: 115). A

proper way involves illustrating commitment in the interaction, and is necessary when an individual is conversing with another. Attention can be paid either to the topic of discussion or the individual whom you are interacting with, or to social obligations of etiquette. There is a ‘social order’ of things related to interaction; each of our own actions affect others’ actions (Goffman 1967: 115).

Improper ways of interacting involve the concept of failed obligation. Obligation to others exists in all social interaction. When in the presence of others, the social norm is to be mindful of each other. This is a form of social control; the individual owes the other their attention, regardless of what they may feel is owed to themselves. “Spontaneous interaction” can happen when an incident inciting interaction occurs between individuals, and can be unplanned or not searched out. There is an obligation to know and understand the kinds of needs others may have when in their company, and be expected to “modulate his [sic] expression of attitude, feelings and opinions according to the company” (Goffman 1967: 116). The comfort of others is a duty to be fulfilled if there is something that can be done.

Improper ways of interacting also involve distance between individuals. To become distanced from spontaneous interaction is common. Goffman outlines four ways in which distance creates improper interaction with others. The first is *external preoccupation*. This type of preoccupation can distract the focus of attention, and involves being completely disconnected from what is being discussed between the individuals or even from the people present. These distractions “ought to have ceased” before entering the interaction, to avoid being offensive. The preoccupation can be



involuntary, due to deep involvement in vital matters outside the interaction (Goffman 1967: 117-118).

The second source of distanced interaction is *self-consciousness*. This occurs when attention is paid to the self when interacting with others. When interacting with others, “the self” is different from the self when alone. The self becomes the self others see us to be, want us to be, or think that we are. If while interacting with others an incident occurs that raises the self’s standing in relation to others, self-consciousness occurs by way of someone rejoicing to herself. Conversely, if an incident threatens one’s self-image or embarrasses her, self-consciousness occurs as the self retreats to her own mind as a way to protect herself (Goffman 1967: 119).

The third form of distanced interaction is *interaction-consciousness*. This is to become aware of what may be the appropriate way of interacting in a particular social circumstance at a given moment. This is referred to by Goffman as a “common-sense” preoccupation (Goffman 1967: 120). For instance, the host of a party feels obligated to ensure the enjoyment of her guests because she invited them into her home. It is her space; she is more knowing about the space and therefore more comfortable than her guests. If the guests do not have a good time, she is to blame. Another example is that when two individuals who do not know each other well are talking, the norm is to conduct “small talk” of general and commonly known topics. When no more topics for small talk are available, “painful silence” can occur (Ibid.). Both of these examples illustrate the woes of social etiquette and common sense gone awry due to one’s consciousness of the interaction.

The fourth state of distanced interaction is *other-consciousness*. This is distraction from someone due to the presence of another person, where the other person draws the attention away from the present interaction (Goffman 1967: 121). This distraction can take the form of affection. Alienation occurs because of perceived eagerness: “what is one man’s [sic] over-eagerness will become another’s alienation” (Ibid.: 123). Discomfort rests in one’s unexpected perceptions of eagerness in someone else as involvement in the interaction has changed.

A final note on Goffman’s conceptions of etiquette and interaction: different customs can lead to alienation. When members of different groups interact, misunderstandings can occur because of different perceptions of commonly accepted social practices in the form of unsuitable behavior (Goffman 1967: 124). Members of the different groups will interpret what passes differently based on their particular cultural socializations.

While the above etiquette with regard to strangers makes sense for day-to-day interaction, what is to be done if there is a crisis? What is an appropriate way of responding to a crisis of a stranger? Etiquette guides do not outline the specifics of how to act during disaster, but as has already been stated, the foundation of ‘civilized behavior’ is outlined in these manuals.

Emily Post wrote a ‘good manners’ guide for what is deemed appropriately respectful behavior. Her guidelines are prescriptive in imposing rules and methods for social conduct. Post’s work, while being prescriptive, is important when considering the social place of etiquette. Her guidelines have circulated all over the world in the last century. While these guidelines may not be highly cited today, Post has been considered a

popular expert on the subject of proper social interaction. At the peak of her influence, Post's guidelines were considered authoritative. Chapter Five of her book outlines interaction with those in public, discussing how to regard others: "Consideration for the rights and feelings of others is not merely a rule for behavior in public but the very foundation upon which social life is built" (Post 1922: 82). Post reminds her readers that even those who are unknown to us deserve respect.

Post's etiquette guide was so successful that her granddaughter has been writing new editions of her works. In the 15<sup>th</sup> edition, the chapter on everyday manners has a section on the "consideration of strangers". The section discusses how to appropriately interact with those who are unknown: "Whether on the road or going through a door, respecting the rights and sensitivities of others, even total strangers, is part of what civilized behavior entails" (Post 1992: 89). An example of the considerations outlined for strangers involve the grocery store. It is customary to allow a person who has only three items to checkout ahead of oneself. When done shopping and wheeling the cart out to the car, do not push the cart into an empty parking spot when done, as another person may need to park there. Following these guidelines allows for a society to operate respectfully and efficiently (Ibid.).

Etiquette guides offer insight into what the general public would be more likely to read, in contrast to Goffman's academic writing. Susan Roane, an expert on socializing today, discusses the topic of the stranger in a different way. She explains how we have come to culturally know the stranger. First, Roane has the reader recall what adults often say to children: don't talk to strangers. But in order to exist in the social world, Roane points out that talking to strangers is essential – we do it all the time, from business

transactions to social engagements. The solution Roane provides is to redefine the term “stranger” (2007: 19). While she admits that not everyone is always a safe person, not everyone is a serial killer, either. In order to overcome fear of the stranger, she suggests finding commonalities between the self and the stranger. A common interest can bring people together, unifying individuals based on who they are, as individuals who are alike (Roane 2007: 20).

### *What is Crisis?*

As defined by Neil Britton, disaster and crisis are social products (1986: 254). Human organization and mobilization has the ability to create or intervene in a crisis with vulnerability or preparedness. If preparedness is fostered in the community, crisis can be dealt with more quickly and efficiently. Vulnerability to crisis can be determined by analyzing social dynamics before disaster strikes (Britton 1986: 255).

‘Crisis’ and ‘disasters’ are ‘summative concepts’ or ‘sponge words’ according to Britton. Their meanings are diffused and can be multiple. They can be incorporated into compound terms to derive even more meaning; for instance, if the phrases “collective stress situation” or a “social crisis period” are used, the meaning derived is a *crisis that affects a community*. Disasters and crises affecting communities are reinforced by individual mental processes of a vulnerable social experience (Britton 1986: 257). The experience then is pervasive in being difficult to escape its overwhelming nature; not only does the affected community feel the effects, but so too does the individual.

According to Britton, there are three types of situations labeled disasters or crises: social and environmental, based on the effects or impact felt afterwards; collective stress

situations that leave expected conditions and goals unattainable which are generally considered necessary for the sustainability of life, like safety, food and shelter; and, situations exceeding the capacity of individuals or society to respond to appropriately (Britton 1986: 259-260). These types of disaster or crisis situations are not mutually exclusive; a situation may only fall under one type, or all three types can occur in one situation.

To understand what makes up crises is to become familiar with the “disaster event and its impact with the social environment” (Britton 1986: 258). According to Piotr Sztomka, a crisis can be described as a sudden and violent change in environment that threatens life with unwanted consequences (Piotr 2000: 453). A crisis is an unplanned event with elements of uncontrollability once initiated. Some traumatic events leading to potential crisis due to cultural anxiety and panic are: unemployment; poverty; rising crime; a sudden inflow of immigrants; and corruption among the elites (Ibid: 456).

The third category of crisis outlined by Britton is the crisis situation exceeding the current society’s capacity to respond appropriately. This category opens up the possibility that the crisis rests in the current social system and its norms, and is not simply due to the agent of the crisis. In this type of crisis situation, vulnerability in social systems is the real crisis; knowledge and preparedness provide the possibility of disaster prevention (Britton 1986: 260).

Britton claims that there has been an investigatory shift in the sociological study of crises in the last two decades. This shift is primarily due to scholars moving away from inquiry into “what disasters are,” to “what disasters do”. What is now of interest are questions around what the different types of social stress crises are (Britton 1986: 262). I

will use the term ‘crisis’ to encompass all three types of emergency discussed above, involving individual or individuals who are witness to the stranger or strangers in crisis.

Britton’s analysis of ‘crisis’ informs my own working definition of the term. Generally, a crisis involves a time of intensity, trouble or danger for a stranger, where those who spectate the crisis must make a difficult or important decision. To be more specific, the ‘stranger in crisis’ experiences conflict as threat to personal safety. The threat in a crisis could involve the unknown actions of another person, where the perception is that at least one person involved in the ‘crisis’ is capable of causing harm to another person. The conflict within a crisis can also be comprised of only one individual, as someone who is experiencing a personal health issue that could cause serious injury or death. The crisis may also involve the inability for the one who is ‘under attack’ to defend herself, thereby necessitating the response of another or others to help. There might be more than one perpetrator of the crisis, as in the Hizek case, or possibly even more than one victim. It is possible that a spectator may only encounter the victim *after* the perpetrators have already departed, as in the case of Tale-Yax. My working definition of crisis posits that both perpetrator and victim of the crisis are strangers to the spectator(s).

## **PART 2: The Spectacle**

### **Chapter Three**

#### *Media, Power and Ideology*

Guy Debord has broadened the meaning of the word “spectacle”. A spectacle is memorably theatrical, constructed human interaction that is publicly exhibited and viewed. Debord added to this idea by analyzing the spectacle as authentic social life, even if the represented human activity is staged. The representation becomes a spectacle when attention is garnered or something makes people stop and notice a striking display. Debord begins with the goal of blurring the distinction between art and life and analyzes how lived experience can be known through understanding the visual representation of human interaction (1992: 63). He analyzed the spectacle as an “instrument of unification” whereby people would be united in the social practice of the gaze through looking at the spectacle. This understanding is necessary to accepting the power media possesses, as it not only has the ability to make people look, but can unite spectators through this act. Debord treated the spectacle as a metaphor for society; people on a daily basis live in an ongoing spectacle continually experiencing the world around them (Ibid.).

Debord offers a critique of contemporary society through the spectating lens of images. As a theoretician of the situationalist movement, his main critique targets Western capitalism and the accumulation of superficial spectacles as culture. He states that the “elite” consist of people interested in maintaining systems of domination (Debord 1988: 1). The hallmark of today’s era consists of decoys; information is intentionally omitted from the spectating public (Ibid.: 2) Imitation is used to lure the spectator away from concerns that could directly affect her. Instead, the imitation dilutes the issue and

becomes merely menial information. Certain topical information is intentionally omitted as a way to keep the public from knowing damaging details. These ‘damaging details’ incriminate the elite for striving to maintain systems of domination. The spectacle is about “the autocratic reign of the market economy” based on visual representations (Debord 1988: 2).

Debord states that there is revolutionary force in criticizing the content of spectacles. Uncovering the potentially disturbing nature of spectacles opens up the possibility of criticism regarding assumptions and historical judgments (Debord 1988: 3). The spectacle’s directive force can show how social conflict is laid out. Debord questions the power the spectacle possesses; as years pass and spectacles grow more powerful with more cultural acceptance, where has the power of the spectacle reached that it has not yet reached before? Debord discusses “the vague feeling that there has been a rapid invasion which has forced people to lead their lives in an entirely different way” (Ibid.: 4). He writes that, because of the ‘invasion of the spectacle’, it is inevitable that people would lead their lives in an entirely different way. He furthers this point by saying that this inevitability is widespread, spanning the entire globe. Thus, the spectacle has consequences that need to be focused on. Debord does not bring morals to this concept; instead he looks to spectacles to simply “record what is” (Ibid.: 5).

The power of the spectacle can either be ‘concentrated’ or ‘diffused’. ‘Concentrated’ spectacle power favors “ideology condensed around a dictatorial personality” (Debord 1988: 8). Concentrated power acts as a counter-revolution as expressed by those who want the general public to see items on an agenda without seeing the outline of the agenda. ‘Diffused’ spectacle power represents the Americanization of



bourgeois democracy and the seduction of those in more traditional nation settings. The diffused and concentrated versions of spectacles battle, the victor being the diffused in proving itself stronger, now forming the *integrated spectacle*.

The integrated spectacle is both concentrated and diffused. The concentrated aspects of spectacle have become the control centre, never occupied by a specific leader or clear ideology. The diffused elements of spectacle have become a major player in socially produced behavior and objects. The integrated spectacle has become reality, adding to what is already the spectacle, while reconstructing it continuously (Debord 1988: 9). This type of forged spectacle is no longer foreign but comfortable, permeating all reality: “the globalization of the false was also the falsification of the globe” (Ibid. 10). Culture, as well as nature, has since been transformed, polluted by creation of accrediting modes of falsified social forces through produced spectacles. The blurring boundaries of simulation and reality become simply reality, creating new memories for entire cultures. (Ibid.).

One of the features of the integrated spectacle is that of an eternal present (Debord 1988: 12). A society that has been conquered by the spectacle covers its historical tracks, “outlawing” history. History does not necessarily imply occurrence centuries ago; history can indicate events that happened hours or minutes prior. Removing history creates a tremendous advantage for those with the ability to do so. What is left is the knowledge that those with power want us to have (Ibid.: 15), especially those whose power comes from the creation of forms of media. With an entire world in which news stories are produced everyday, it is not possible to expect that one program will deliver *all* the facts of the day. But how is it decided what stories are presented? Contemporary events retreat

or are removed, unverifiable stories are presented with uncheckable statistics and unlikely explanations. The spectacle possesses unchallenged authority (Debord 1988: 16).

In Clifford's work on art collection and archiving, value judgments and elements of hierarchy are based on authenticity and significance. Since authenticity and significance are elements to be remembered for use at a later point, memory becomes an aspect of idea collection. A system to judge and assess what is seen is established. I argue that similar processes of memory and idea collection may also operate in day to day life – for instance, in how individuals catalogue the information within their own minds about others. How does an individual remember that she fears strangers? It is possible that those who witnessed the incidents of Tale-Yax, Genovese and Hixel were fearful of the unknown and possibly of the 'different' individuals involved, because they were strangers. How does a news story, and its portrayal of individuals involved in the event reported, communicate ideas? McCombs and Reynolds (2009) have studied how the news media shape the public discourse of political and social issues. They have found that "information provided by the news media plays a key role in the construction of our pictures of reality" (McCombs and Reynolds 2009: 2). Political and social issues featured in news media can have 'agenda-setting' effects, as the topics discussed in news media become normalized; as time passes, the public comes to see the issues emphasized by the news media as naturally important.

McCombs and Reynolds argue that the media inform viewers' 'pictures of reality', which become a kind of reality unto themselves. In this process, there is a difference between what is 'real' and what is 'true'. For instance, stereotypes are real but not true (even though there are those who believe the assertions to be true). This is how

racist stereotypes come to be, as the information presented about one particular incident and the people involved is generalized to others with similar traits, and recalled as real. The information presented can be recalled in the mind at a latter point, for instance when encountering a person with similar social identities. The news story and the individuals who have read, watched, or listened to the story, now have an understanding of the events organized by what McCombs and Reynolds call “pictures of reality”. The media foster ideas that circulate, repeat, and finally become the ingredients of a shared collective storehouse of political and social knowledge. The combination of all the information presented is received by the individual, who then responds to the information.

## Chapter Four

### *Reception, Meaning and Response*

To discuss reception and meaning, I primarily rely upon the work of Stuart Hall, supplemented by that of two other cultural and film theorists, Laura Mulvey and Lisa Cartwright.

According to Hall, it is useful to think of media as “distinctive moments”, comprised of circuits or loops, containing four parts: production, circulation, distribution/consumption, and reproduction (2004: 128). As the product of the process is apparent in each distinct moment, production and circulation are the specific moments where language and symbolism are initially deployed, where not only are each of these moments imbued with *how* to read the images but *what* content to pull from the images (Hall 2004: 129). Each of these moments require their own set of social relations, relying on both structure, for the ability to commonly understand what is being expressed, and agency, the option to disregard or accept the information presented. If disregarding is to happen, no meaning can be understood by the viewer, thus no consumption or distribution occurs. This process can be further explained using Hall’s specific concepts of encoding and decoding. Encoding and decoding structure the way an audience negotiates, opposes and interprets a text. Encoded messages take the shape of meaningful discourses in order for an audience to receive and understand the ideas portrayed (Ibid.: 130). In order for decoding to occur and be put to use within society, meaningful ideas must be understood when messages are revealed (Ibid.).

Because encoding and decoding flow reciprocally into each other, the viewer is both the source, or encoder-producer, and recipient, or decoder-receiver, of the message

(Hall 2004: 130-131). Degrees of identity or belonging are dependent on the completion of the circuit loop between viewer as source and recipient; non-identity occurs when a message is imperfectly transmitted, where distortion or interruption of meaning exists.

The topic of language must be discussed when the issue of reality has arisen in relation to messages. Reality exists *outside* of language but is mediated *through* language as a production of discourse (Hall 2004: 131). Discursive knowledge, then, is the articulation of language on real relations and conditions; the social world unwraps and explains how, why and what we know. For Hall, these are visual codes and developing an understanding of them can appear natural, not only because we are so enveloped by them, but also because we learn them so young. Visual codes are naturalized, as recognition appears to be universal, having the effect of concealing coding practices and ignoring habituation. Visual code is not natural, but culturally specific and socially constructed (Ibid.: 132).

Visual signs are different from and more powerful than linguistic signs, as linguistic signs possess none of the properties that actually represent the object(s) in the message. Conversely, visual signs appear to possess at least some of these properties by the very fact that pictorial quality is represented (Hall 2004: 131). Because visual representation provides qualities of the real, as opposed to linguistic form that conjures only the *idea* of something real, visual codes trigger more complex effects of power and ideology. Power and ideology are bound up in visual portrayals of social reality with meanings, practices, usages, power and interest (Ibid.: 134). A viewer can come across an image and be bombarded with her own ideas, as combined with the ideas presented within the image itself, called upon by the image she faces.

Representations of objects in the real world are iconic signs because they reproduce the visual codes within the viewer (Hall 2004: 132). Even if mostly by unconscious action, visual codes use a set of decoding operations. Visual codes act unconsciously by providing the ability to recall collected or archived images that carry personal meaning. These ideas will be explored further in the thesis, to better understand the social aspects of perception in the viewer who decodes visual discourse.

For Lisa Cartwright, the viewer is implicated in the spectacle by the act of viewing, and the possible knowledge of what another individual feels by imagining oneself to be the other (2008: 2). The viewer becomes a part of the spectacle because a spectacle is not a spectacle without someone viewing others in action. In order to imagine what another might feel in a situation is to question how empathetic viewing occurs, thus conjuring questions of types of viewing.

Cartwright writes primarily on the concept of empathetic identification whereby the idea of “we”, or belonging, is the link to understanding another (Cartwright 2008: 5). Empathetic identification can be stated by the formula: “empathy = I know how you feel” and “identification = I see as you see, from your position” (Ibid.: 23). While empathy relies on knowledge and perception, identification relies on vision and psychic displacement. In empathy, there is a moment in which “I” believe to know how “you” feel. In this way, I do not need to identify with you or even know about you. I do not see from your point of view, which is necessary to be able to feel empathy, and results in the feeling of pity for you (Ibid.: 24). This in turn allows for the creation of distance between us. I can feel sorry for you from where I am, without having to be you and where you are,

because I *understand* where you are. This distance allows me to feel badly for you without actually having to act in such a way that takes responsibility for your plight.

Identification moves beyond “I comprehend how you feel” – sorrow, anguish, pain – to “I know what you’re going through, from experience” (Cartwright 2008: 24). The nature of the experience is prioritized over the emotion. Identification becomes awareness by being “made to feel” what you do through shared experience.

Empathetic identification involves projection of “me on to you”. Projection is about “me”, the individual who perceives what is happening in a situation involving another or others. Projection involves comprehending what is happening to others besides the self. Projection involves identifying, moving beyond empathy, and taking a position about what is wanted for the self. “Projection is not ‘not wanting to know’ but ‘not wanting to be’” (Cartwright 2008: 25). ‘Not wanting to be’ means I understand the situation of the other, but do not wish to be them; I see what the other is going through and I don’t want to be that person. This is a “subject/outside world-object” distinction. It involves the viewer to recognize the self, the other, and the surrounding environment (Ibid.). Projection and empathetic identification are about control. The distance placed between “us” prevents “me” from becoming “you”, prevents me from becoming the other (Ibid.: 26).

Cartwright further expands on the work of David Hume and Adam Smith, discussing the structure of the spectator, or agent. The spectator-agent relies on her senses, particularly sight, in declaring moral judgment: to act or not act. Citing Smith in his work *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Cartwright describes the spectator as someone who looks but is not involved by this act (Cartwright 2008: 230). Expanding on the work of

Foucault, Cartwright describes the “self-regulating inmate” as a function that exists within the individual as the ability to detach the self from feelings of response to someone who suffers. The self-regulating inmate is complex because questions of response emerge based on how someone else may respond to someone who suffers; we assess our own feelings, modify ourselves according to social norms, and take action (Cartwright 2008: 231). While there is the “interjection of the ‘sensibilities’ of others into one’s judgments”, responding because of identification with the one who suffers does not occur. The self-regulating inmate cannot exist without the social world. While this process exists within the mind of the spectator, the process depends on the relations with others in order to determine what the spectator deems an appropriate response to the immediate situation. Normal behavior stems from understanding appropriate social norms of this particular time (Ibid.). Ultimately, the self-regulating inmate accounts for the ability to witness an incident, detach the self from the incident, and act in such a way that is not identifying with the one who suffers. This limits response to the immediacy of the incident. The action that is taken avoids the one who suffers, perhaps due to denial.

A spectator who witnesses one who suffers must assess her own judgments before responding. If the assessment deems her judgment to be “abnormal”, for instance, if she feels pleasure in witnessing the suffering of another, a subsequent judgment follows. A feeling of pleasure can induce a performative response, against the original feeling of enjoyment. This new feeling can encompass concern, pity or grief, and hides the initial selfishness (Cartwright 2008: 231).

In a situation where proximity means being close to suffering, even if it is that of another, distance becomes the answer to moving beyond the suffering. Distance provides



relief in satisfying the self. The “I” is not comfortable being in the presence of suffering (Cartwright 2008: 234). Empathy provides a way out of the suffering situation. Because I have felt sorrow or pity for the suffering other, I have responded. I am absolved from responding further. In leaving the individual who suffers, I can get on with my life, and am not relegated to the sameness of the other. I am not the same as the one who suffers; I am beyond it. But I get to feel good about myself for at least *feeling* for another (Ibid.: 235). Complacency exists in the feeling for the one who suffers but not having to respond further.

Discussing spectatorship and its logistics, more specifically the “who is spectating” and “what does it mean”, is incomplete without mention of Laura Mulvey. She defines ‘the gaze’ as a male-defined practice of looking, influenced by the individual subject who is viewer and accompanying surrounding social formations. These formations are demonstrated through patriarchal social norms and become ways of looking at the world (Mulvey 2003: 133).

By examining patriarchal formations with the tools patriarchy provides, we can begin to tear down mis/conceptions. Social norms structure ways of seeing with the outcome of defining what gives pleasure in looking (Mulvey 2003: 133.). Conversely, what we do not want to see becomes relevant here: do we turn our heads away if we see something that does not give us pleasure? Is this type of looking determined by the male gaze or is it something else? If one sees a stranger in distress, is this stranger susceptible to cultural stereotypes, such as passivity or weakness, and feminized, and then ignored? What do we or don’t we want to see: the danger, or the stranger? Or might we want to see the stranger treated badly?

Mulvey essentializes gender by equating the masculine with the male, and the feminine with the female. Sex and gender are conflated in her writing. Mulvey describes the spectator position as ‘masculinized’, regardless of the sex of the viewer. “In-built patterns of pleasure and identification impose masculinity as ‘point of view’” (Mulvey 1989: 29). Furthering this, Mulvey writes, “the spectator is necessarily in a masculine position as looker-on and looker-in and looker-at. ‘He’ controls as voyeur, whatever ‘his’ sex’ (Ibid.: 136). Mulvey’s concept of the gaze, defined as male, finds its origins in psychoanalysis, where the female form acts as a stand-in for the male other, based in the phallogocentric notion that a woman is less than a man for lack of a penis. Mulvey further explains the phallogocentric difference of spectating by identifying the tendency to define females as passive and males as active (2003.: 134). Furthermore, females traditionally become an item for consumption: “woman is conventionally fetishized into cultural material” (Mulvey 1989: 192). Woman as a cultural consumer good is the focus of the gaze. Mulvey’s position is that the phallogocentrism of the gaze is psychologically innate. I am not writing from this standpoint. Rather, I am branching off from Mulvey’s work in order to begin understanding how and why the male-oriented gaze comes about socially. Mulvey’s position is valid to the extent that that everyone participates in these practices of looking, and there is no alternate option available, because society has not fostered a normative alternate culture of spectatorship. It is necessary to understand how we are socially and culturally influenced – even mandated by patriarchy – to see things in certain ways.

The ‘male gaze’ is an act of aggression (Mulvey 1989: 129). What accompanies this act of aggression is power. The ‘power’ rests in the assumed male spectator;

whatever occurs is created for his pleasure, including those who are the objects of his gaze. Those who are objects of the gaze are subjected to the passivity of being watched. Mulvey writes that “power is a trap that alienates, both into the making of history and transforming the other into pose” (Ibid.: 130). The one with the power to look, to gaze at the other, creates distance with this act. The ‘other’ is transformed into an object for viewing. An object of viewing is solidified, cast in stone or pose, and is set. The viewing of the ‘other’ is for the pleasure of the one who gazes; viewing is for the person with power. This act makes history through remembered and repeated social interaction (Mulvey 1989: 130). Even if this act is one of reverie, a fantasy, the images can be idealized and remembered for in person one-to-one interaction. Fantasy can represent social reality. Mulvey writes of the ‘collective unconscious’ as what myth grows from, and is the raw material of repression. “ Myth, with its ritual and safeguarding function, transforms this experience of pain and desire and reconciles it with terms that can fit social reality” (Ibid.: 128). Repression of another, particularly the female-other, can come from myth. The transformative aspects of the social world normalize myth, through ritualization.

Even though Mulvey writes strictly of the ‘female other’ as an object of the male gaze, her observations about this female other can be generalized to other ‘others’ who are different from the privileged male. The female other could also gaze at those who are deemed passive or less advantaged than this privileged male, particularly because the female other is trained through cultural and social traditions to day-dream the possibility of being the male with power, by the act of gazing. She is eased out of her own sex into another, thereby simulating the role of active male while still possessing female ‘othered’

vulnerability (Mulvey 1989: 32). The desire for the female to take on the fantasy as masculinized and active can occur by the cultural habit of trans-sex identification. But this 'sex-change' is not fixed; the change can only occur in the right conditions and is only borrowed (Ibid.: 33). Mulvey writes, "woman cannot be completely colonized and man is not completely in control. Male power has its own vulnerability...it is as though man, in exercising patriarchal power and freezing woman into spectacle, has also turned himself into a masquerade that can crack" (Ibid.: 130). With the potential of the masculine masquerade cracking, a sense of loss occurs. The feminine opposition confronts the rigidity of the masculine, resulting in the inability for the masculine to remain solid (Ibid.).

The 'female other' could be transgendered, a person of colour, a person of compromised ability, someone in senior years, or someone very young. The female other, then, is representative of someone, anyone, who represents the fragility and frailty of difference. The female other is the stranger.

As Mulvey points out, the feminized body is not necessarily conceptualized as 'different' but rather is in 'opposition' to the masculinized body (1989: 31). This opposition is based in the contrasting notions of whom is 'active' and 'passive'. The masculinized body takes on the role of being active, as representative of phallogentrism and the availability of 'choice' that comes with this role. The feminized other is passive; choice is not provided this body. This body is 'waiting' (Mulvey 1989: 32).

What does the privilege of active choice provide an individual? The privilege of not being labeled 'other' or 'different'. In the context of this privileged person being in crisis, someone could view them and not deem them a threat, thereby providing

assistance. Assistance may be provided when the responding individuals do not feel compromised by threat.

If according to Mulvey there is pleasure in spectating, then there is pleasure in the act of looking. The looking of the spectator is masculinized and active. The spectator views those who are feminized and passive. Those who are feminized are doomed in their passivity; the passivity causing the inability to be active, to respond on behalf of the passive, feminized self. The active-masculinized spectator spectates those in the passive role, as dictated by cultural formations of the gaze. The gaze sees pleasure in viewing the peril of another, of the feminized other.

If “woman = sexuality” (Mulvey 1989: 35), and sexuality is desirable in masculinized gaze, then viewing sexuality is desirable. If ‘woman’ is sexuality, and woman is also feminized and passive, then ‘woman’ and ‘sexuality’ also possess qualities of ‘feminization’ and ‘passivity’. This feminization and passivity can also be vulnerability. Mulvey writes of the dichotomies of masculine male and feminine female. In her work, identifying with those who are unlike the self is only possible for the feminine female, who spectates through the masculine gaze just as males do. But do feminine females identify with the masculine male and his masculinized gaze, or is the feminine female simply socialized to spectate in this manner, as though she does not identify with person she spectates.

Can it then be said that seeing the stranger treated badly is enjoyable? Mulvey did not comment on this particular situation. However, from her analysis it can be said that there is pleasure in witnessing those in vulnerable situations, based on the power of the masculinized gaze. The masculine gaze seeks looking where ‘he’ derives pleasure in ‘his’

authority over the feminized other. The pleasure-seeking masculine gaze is so powerful it has the ability to reduce who is being looked at to an object. Who is seen is given new meaning and significance (Mulvey 1989: 135). People as objects-viewed carry with them meanings of constraint. These meanings are symptoms of socially normative expectations. The spectated other, perhaps a stranger in crisis, becomes an expectation. This expectation is derived from the idea that society is dangerous and the 'other' is to be feared.

### *Compassion Fatigue*

Compassion fatigue is a phenomenon that occurs when the ability to care for the plight of others is impaired by one's own exhaustion in dealing with one's own life (Moeller 1998: 35). Compassion fatigue takes time to develop and occurs when one is repeatedly exposed to traumatic events. Exposure to traumatic events, while possibly being added to by one's own experience of trauma, can occur through viewing the trauma of others. Anxiety combines with hopelessness to disable a person from responding with action to help alleviate those who experience trauma or crisis. The saturation of the suffering of others leads to the desire to shut out or deny surrounding trauma or crisis, resulting in an actual 'belief' that those who suffer are not really suffering or that there is nothing that can be done to help. Exposure to trauma and crisis are reinforced by media, particularly audiovisual news media, by the way these events are depicted (Moeller 1998: 4).

Compassion fatigue can be linked to Simmel's conception of the 'blasé attitude'. For Simmel, the blasé attitude came about because of overstimulation in city life. In city

life, autonomy and individuality replace community and caring for others, and is reinforced by the social structure of neoliberalism. When an individual exists in the city, there is such an overwhelming amount of detail to contend with that the mind and body are affected, creating impersonal modes of interacting. Impersonality is coupled with personal subjectivity, whereby the individual can think for and of herself, what she needs and wants, over and above others. Impersonality combined with personal subjectivity creates a 'blasé attitude'. Compassion fatigue seems to be an extension of the blasé attitude; the blasé attitude, coupled with media overstimulation, can lead to compassion fatigue.

Susan Moeller's research on compassion fatigue makes two key points: first, that news media are not adequately delivering information to citizens; and second, that even though technology has enabled the public access to an unprecedented quantity of images and information, caring for others and the surrounding world is occurring less (1999: 4). More specifically, she is interested in why the haunting nature of images does not seem to make people care *more*. Furthering this line of questioning, Moeller inquires into the method and manner of journalistic news media coverage, how typically the methods and manner are effectively invisible, and how coverage of crisis can make viewers feel overstimulated and bored at the same time (Moeller 1999: 9).

News stories are created in a nexus of intersecting goals and stipulations. News production is created by companies in the business of selling advertising. Therefore, if there is not a large viewership, there is no money to be made. Profit is the reason behind high production values and sensationalizing news media. Without an audience watching, advertisers cannot sell products. If advertisers are not selling enough product, money

cannot be made for the news station. Without financial resources, there are no news stories (Moeller 1999: 20). The driving force is bad news; because negative news sells more than positive news (Moeller 1999: 11). What results are pornographic images of individuals in catastrophic events, struggling for their lives; human strife is now a commodity. Additionally, news production is reigned in by restrictions of time and space (Moeller 1999: 29). Compassion fatigue occurs from short attention spans, public boredom and continuous coverage of crisis in the media. The PEW Research Centre for People of the Press conducted a survey in 1996, which identified that American viewers<sup>3</sup> only pay attention to stories they can personally identify with (Ibid.:18). Another PEW study conducted in 1995 identified the following:

- a) 40% of international news stories featured conflict as the purpose for covering the event;
- b) Foreign events and disasters were usually more dramatic and violent in order to successfully compete with national news stories;
- c) 1/3 of international news stories are essentially about the U.S. *in* the world rather than *about* the world. (Ibid.:18)

With the above in mind, it can be concluded that news coverage features stories of dramatic and violent conflict where “sides” are taken and defended.

Compassion fatigue also comes about because of blurred boundaries between what is reality and what is a simulation. News media producers are comparable to motion picture houses for high drama and production values. In order for news stories to be successful, they need to attract an audience, and keeping them is based on entertainment (Moeller 1999: 19). If an audience’s attention is not garnered, it is because the stories and

---

<sup>3</sup> Moeller’s research is conducted in the U.S. on individuals and companies situated therein. As an American writer writing about American viewers, we can only assume she writes of compassion fatigue affecting viewers in the U.S. However, she does not point out, nor discusses, that many individuals worldwide have access to the same news programs. I believe her analysis suggests that, through mechanisms such as globalization, similar phenomena may exist in other countries.



images portrayed depict events of similar nature. Moeller cites a major American news network producer: “TV audiences are used to war movies. Real explosions have to look almost as good or there is a boredom factor. Without snazzy production values, a war sparks no interest” (Ibid.). Moeller describes this phenomena as the “I’ve-seen-it-before syndrome” (Ibid.: 2). News media have to continually seek to keep an audience’s attention, to shock with production values, pictures of pain, or sensationalizing by arousing with exaggerated detail. When this happens, the blurring of reality occurs, creating the inability to connect with ‘news’ for the desire of accurately reported information. No longer can viewers of the news simply watch the news to gather information, but instead require entertainment in order to *want* to receive the information. News-based information coupled with entertainment help in blurring the boundaries between what is reality and what is a simulation, thus desensitizing individuals to the plight of others.

In an attempt to prevent boredom, news media quickly move to other stories once the range of possible coverage has been exhausted (Moeller 1999: 2). What results is formulaic coverage where one catastrophic event replaces another (Moeller 1999:11). When similar types of crises are covered in the same way, it makes the audience feel as though they really *have* seen that particular news story before. The images seem to show the same victims, heroes and villains, the same “morality play” repeatedly being acted out (Moeller 1999: 13). In much the same way viewers may not wish to watch the same movie over and over, watching news stories seemingly on repeat exacerbates the “I’ve-seen-it-before-syndrome”. What viewers have come to expect from news, or ‘news values’, are not universal; they are socially constructed, culturally and politically

reinforced (Moeller 1999: 17). The ideological storylines produced in news values can be found in social interaction; how people relate to each other is played out in news broadcasts. Crises are turned into a comprehensible social experience through media depictions.

Compassion fatigue grips viewers en masse. Overexposure of individuals in crisis do not seem to be causing viewers to turn away. Rather, viewers watch, but only for a short time. The interviews Moeller conducted with news audiences found that people “don’t want to be reminded of their helplessness” (Moeller 1999: 37). Some reported feeling “drained by all the tragedy” and all the repetitive crises. Some people decided to “just give up” and limit their connection to news media, inducing a response of paralysis when confronted by the mediated tragedy of others. The media confront people with more stimulation and more opportunities to become overwhelmed. What does this say about how individuals might respond to witnessing a stranger in crisis in person, if in some aspects of their lives they already feel overstimulated by mediated accounts of strangers in crisis? Moeller does not discuss this.

Citizens around the world are spectating mediated dramatic, conflict-based and violent depictions of people treating other people with disrespect and personal harm. It is possible, then, that people are becoming desensitized to witnessing violence in person. Media depictions, because of how pervasive and readily available they are, can actually encourage people to not respond to the plight of others in person. Research on compassion fatigue indicates that the ability to care for the plight of others is impaired by one’s own exhaustion and personal issues. The ‘non-ability to care’ comes from being overstimulated, a similar state that occurs with a blasé attitude. Being consumed by one’s

own life, and not at all having concern for the lives of others, is symptomatic of individualism. In a state of individualism, what is reality and what is a simulation blur where media and crises are concerned. The blurring of reality and simulation can be illustrated in the Tale-Yax case with the individual who took his photo. After taking the photo of a wounded man lying on a sidewalk, this person walked away. The photographer likely recognized that this incident occurred in reality. However, through a mediated device, his camera phone, he created a simulated spectacle. The photographer was disconnected from the suffering of Tale-Yax in that he took out his phone and took a picture, instead of taking out his phone and calling 911. In seeing Tale-Yax lying on the sidewalk, the photographer's actions show a connection to his camera instead of Tale-Yax; a media device helped to minimize and devalue the suffering of a man who lay motionless on a public sidewalk.

*What is denial as a response to crisis?*

Cartwright discusses empathy involving the spectator "feeling themselves into", or as imagining those who are watched not as themselves, but as "theirs" – those who are their responsibility (2008: 235-236). The spectator may imagine herself as part of a "we", creating a kind of empathy or a sense of obligation to others. This empathy draws from a sense of belonging, linking individuals together and increasing the chance of social actors taking responsibility for someone. Cartwright discusses the spectator "feeling themselves into those we can imagine as ourselves" (Ibid.). Individuals we can imagine as "ourselves" provokes a sense of responsibility, thereby necessitating the desire to take care of those who are like "us". Given all we know of the stranger, it can be surmised that

the stranger is not one who is often imagined as our own or ourselves. How then is it decided to not act in response to the stranger in crisis, to deny the crisis?

The psychological concept of denial is useful in understanding social outcomes. “Denial is the refusal to permit a disturbing event access to consciousness” (Garland 2008: 25). The sociological dimensions of denial can be analyzed for social practices. Denial can be broken down in three ways: “*literal denial* (nothing happened); *interpretive denial* (something happened but it’s not what you think); and *imploratory denial* (what happened was not really bad and can be justified)” (Garland 2008: 25). As Moeller states, “In turning away we become culpable...but we can’t respond to every appeal. And so we’ve come to believe that we don’t care” (Moeller 1999: 9). Denial allows the individual, who spectates the traumatic events, to ignore that something terrible has occurred. In ignoring the trauma, the spectator can move on with her individualist life, thereby not feeling implicated as an individual who *could* be of aid in relief of the trauma; the spectator who denies crisis sees the crisis as ‘not her problem’.

Garland does not elaborate enough on how each type of denial may occur. It is difficult to know what type of denial people use when deciding not to help while viewing the trauma of the other. This type of questioning also broadens toward psychological investigation, which is not occurring here. However, it is interesting to consider what type of denial is used when considering how social relations affect those who are unknown to each other. Literal denial is quite straightforward, stating outright that ‘nothing happened’. This type of denial could involve possible delusions, however, if the individual is made to be aware of the trauma through images, say in the news. It is difficult to deny that after seeing a massive flood or the aftermath of an earthquake that it

*really did not happen*. It is believable, however, that an individual could view these images and think the crisis not to be as bad as people think or as bad as it is shown in the media. Interpretive and imploratory denials are more believable. This is so because it involves *accepting* what is presented as possible, while not believing that the depictions are *totally accurate*. In accepting that trauma happened to others but not believing all the information presented to be accurate or correct, it becomes possible to distance the spectator-self from the crisis, even more so than the already distancing mediated form. The spectator can accept what happened, without believing she is implicated in helping to relieve the trauma of those affected, because some of the information is missing. If some information is missing about the crisis, it becomes possible that the spectator *has it all wrong*, opening the door to literal denial because of *doubt*. Doubt is a powerful tool for a spectator deciding whether or not to respond to the aid of an other in crisis. Doubt allows for the potential that *nothing happened at all*. Witnesses interviewed in the Genovese case said that they knew something that invoked fear had happened to Genovese, and yet chose not to respond in a way to alleviate the victim's plight. This indicates the possibility that some form of denial took place. Also, the people who interacted with the body of Tale-Yax, by moving him, taking his photo, or even looking at him and walking away, acted in a way that is consistent with what denial looks like; people saw him on the sidewalk and decided nothing was happening that required a response. The aspects of non-response are connected to individualism of a neoliberal system, which opens up the possibility that spectators would walk past Tale-Yax and not help him, as it 'was not their problem'.

Denial of care for others is built into the neoliberal social system. The fraying social fabric is based on the decline of government spending on healthcare, public transit, parks and schools. As public goods diminish, so too does care for others and community. Neoliberal political economic systems incapacitate the ability for individuals to have time and energy to build community. Neoliberal social systems want less and less regulatory roles. Psychological states of denial develop through social structures that utilize denial, causing individualist distance between the self and others. Individualism within the structures of neoliberalism instructs that every individual should be able to care for herself and her family, without the help from anyone. There are not necessarily social policies that dictate that an individual should be left to care for herself. But neoliberally influenced policies foster the belief that if an individual relies on social services of the government for aid, she is a failure to that system. The phenomenon of denial has social dimensions in economic and political systems that 'trickle down' to the individuals within those systems. Minimal individualist social policies deny the need to care for others, along side individuals who struggle with their own lives in such a way that they cannot be accountable to care for others.

## Conclusions

The primary objective of this thesis has been to explain why people in (post)colonial neoliberal Western cultures can sometimes be aware of a stranger's suffering but do nothing about it. Media-induced compassion fatigue has an impact on the stranger in crisis. Through social forms and social forces at work, the 'stranger' is created and maintained. Simmel, Schütz, Ahmed, Stechweh and Ossewaarde each illustrate different aspects of the stranger. Using aspects of each of these theorists, I have constructed a non-fixed, contemporary conception of the stranger. This has allowed for the complexity of the stranger to emerge; she encompasses different 'differences', being a 'double-stranger' when perceived as a 'racialized other', or is 'othered' in being different based on age, sex or physicality. Perceptions of the stranger, based on dominant ideology, create 'stranger culture'. Stranger culture is the consequence of xenophobic *thought*, placed in *action*. The stranger is feared, producing 'stranger danger', created by knowledge not of who the stranger *is* as a person but who she *might* be. Ideas of who the stranger might be are collected, to be recalled and put to use during subsequent interactions with a stranger. Perceptions of fear override common historical modes of appropriate social interaction, challenging the 'social order' of etiquette with a stranger. When the social order for appropriate interaction with a stranger is challenged, the crisis of a stranger can cease to be registered in the mind of the spectator as something possibly needing response. Without the registration of the crisis *as* a crisis, the crisis is decoded as a spectacle, thus being likened to a simulated incident that mimics reality, creating and reinforcing a blurring of reality. With a blurring of reality, the spectator has no empathy for individuals she does not identify with, specifically the stranger. This type of situation

limits the potential for the spectator to respond to the aid of the stranger. The 'male gaze' outlines the privilege that comes with the embodiment of being an individual who is not threatening; the privilege of not being labeled 'other' or 'different'. To be perceived as 'other' or 'different' is to compromise the potential of being helped during a crisis. To cease to recognize a stranger in crisis is to succumb to the 'blasé attitude'. To become overwhelmed by spectacles and simulated worlds is to refuse the obligation to the stranger in crisis, producing denial, as mediated through mass media. 'Compassion fatigue' results when the ability to care for the plight of others is negated by one's own exhaustion. Neoliberal individualistic social policies deny the need to care for others, thereby removing individual *accountability* to care for others. If denial occurs as a response to witnessing the stranger in crisis, as the stranger in crisis is viewed as a spectacle, the crisis of the stranger ceases to be seen as something requiring response. The 'blasé attitude', coupled with media overstimulation, leads to compassion-fatigued inaction regarding a plight of the stranger.

There are a few things cosmopolitans can be doing to overcome the forces I have identified. The *distance from* the stranger and the *difference of* the stranger are called into question by contemporary cosmopolitans; distance and difference are the problem. Developments of better habits of coexistence with strangers are needed to improve social ties and to build communities. Social values need to be re-fostered to include the stranger. With the cosmopolitan perspective in mind, cosmopolitans need to create media that do not perpetuate negative depictions of the stranger. The stranger needs to be seen as possessing value; 'difference' needs to carry value. The stranger should also not be segregated but should be a part of normalized social interaction. In getting to know the



stranger, interaction between the 'known' and 'unknown' can occur. In this way, we will still not be able to 'know' everyone, but if difference and strangerhood carry positions of value, fear of difference and fear of the stranger subside. This type of society is also better prepared to respond to collective stress and individual crises, as thoughts of personal fear of the stranger soften.

## References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2000. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2006. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Bauman, Z. 1997. "The Making and Unmaking of Strangers " Pp. 46-57 in *Debating Cultural Hybridity* edited by Werbner, Pnina and Tariq Modood. London: Zed Books.
- Blumer, Herbert. 1954. "What is Wrong with Social Theory?" *American Sociological Review* 19 (1): 3-10.
- Boesveld, Sarah. 2010, April 26. "Mugged In T.O., Left For Dead In N.Y. – The Unkindness Of Strangers Is Universal". *The Globe and Mail*. Accessed 2010, August 6: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/toronto/mugged-in-to-left-for-dead-in-ny-brthe-unkindness-of-strangers-is-universal/article1547718/>.
- Britton, Neil R. 1986. "Developing an Understanding of Disaster " *Journal of Sociology* (22): 254-271.
- Cartwright, Lisa. 2008. *Moral Spectatorship: Technologies of Voice and Affect in Postwar Representations of the Child*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Clifford, James. 1988. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Debord, Guy. 1992. *Society of the Spectacle, and Other Films*. London: Rebel Press.
- Debord, Guy. 1998. *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Verso.
- Ellwood, Wayne. 2006. *The No-Nonsense Guide to Globalization*. Oxford: New Internationalist Publications.
- Flam, Lisa. 2010, April 26. "Video Shows People Passing Dying Man in NYC". *Aol News*. Accessed 2010, August 6: <http://www.aolnews.com/nation/article/kitty-genovese-2010-people-walk-by-dying-man/19454372>.
- Garland, David. 2008. "On the Concept of Moral Panic." *Crime Media Culture* (4): 9-30.
- Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interaction Ritual*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

- Green, Philip. 1998. *Equality and Democracy*. New York: The New Press.
- Hall, Stuart. 1980. "Encoding/Decoding". Pp 128-138 in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972-79* edited by Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis. Oxford: Taylor & Francis.
- Klein, Naomi. 2007. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. Toronto: Vintage Canada.
- Kweit, Mary Grisez and Robert W. Kweit. 2004. "Citizen Participation and Citizen Evaluation in Disaster Recovery." *The American Review of Public Administration* (34): 354-373.
- Long, Tony. 2009, March 3. "No One Helps As Kitty Is Slain". *Wired Magazine*. Accessed 2010, August 6: [http://www.wired.com/science/discoveries/news/2009/03/dayintech\\_0313](http://www.wired.com/science/discoveries/news/2009/03/dayintech_0313).
- Mackey, Eva. 1999. *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*. London: Routledge.
- Mayne, Judith. 1993. *Cinema and Spectatorship*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- McCombs, Maxwell and Amy Reynolds. 2009."How The News Shapes Our Civic Agenda" Pp. 1-16 in *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* edited by Bryant, Jennings and Mary Beth Oliver. New York: Taylor Francis.
- Moeller, Susan. 1999. *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*. New York: Routledge.
- Mulvey, Laura. 1989. *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Ossewaarde, Marinus. 2007. "Cosmopolitanism and the Society of Strangers." *Current Sociology* 55 (3):367-388.
- Post, Elizabeth. 1992. *Emily Post's Etiquette*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Post, Emily. 1922. *Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics and at Home* . New York. Published November 1999 by Bartleby.com [www.bartleby.com/95/](http://www.bartleby.com/95/). [16 June 2010]: Funk & Wagnalls Company.
- Roane, Susan. 2007. *How to Work a Room*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Schütz, Alfred. 1944. "The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology " *The American Journal of Sociology* 49 (6):499-507.

- Simmel, Georg. 1971. *On Individuality and Social Forms*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Simmel, Georg, and Kurt H. Wolff. 1950. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press.
- Steger, Manfred B. 2003. *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stichweh, Rudolf. 1997. "The Stranger: On the Sociology of Indifference." *Thesis Eleven* (51): 1-16.
- Sulzberger, A.G. 2010, April 25. "Questions Surround a Delay in Help for Dying Man". *The New York Times*. New York Region.
- Sztompka, Piotr. 2000. "Cultural Trauma: The Other Face of Social Change." *European Journal of Social Theory* (3): 449-466.
- Williams, Raymond. 1967. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Glasgow: Fontana.