

Chapter 1

What is Strange about Strange Spaces?

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Introduction

When crossing the Malaccan strait between Malaysian Penang and Indonesian Sumatra travellers board a ferry – or perhaps a facsimile of a ferry – that used to commute between the two Swedish islands of Öland and Gotland in the Baltic Sea in the 1970s and 80s. Now ostensibly transposed to this part of Southeast Asia, the boat is a *strange space*, refurbished with worn-out and ill-suited airplane seats, reeking of cigarette smoke. By force of being in the wrong place, these seats carry heavy connotations of disaster: in (and even *under*) water, they seem to tell a story about a recent or ominous emergency. The boat travels in waters repeatedly hit by pirate attacks in one of the most important cargo routes for shipping trade in the world. Such circumstances bring additional thrill or fear to this space, invoking a cinematic sense of emotional estrangement. News reports about capsized and submerged ferries in this area add to the strangeness of these ferry lines on a symbolic and representational level; at least for certain foreign travellers. For Swedish tourists spending their past summers on Öland or Gotland, additional obscurity is afforded to the experience since the relocated boats evoke the sunny memories of other holiday geographies, far away and far back in time.

This ferry constitutes an example of what Michel Foucault suggestively termed a *heterotopia*: a space in which spatial and temporal discrepancies converge and where different sites that are in themselves incompatible or irreducible to one-another are juxtaposed (Foucault 1967/1998). The boat, Foucault argues, is the ‘heterotopia par excellence’. As it moves it is nowhere and somewhere at the same time. It is also a finite space which is a reserve for infinite imaginations: ‘The boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea’. Foucault holds that boats fuel cultural fantasies and that ‘[i]n civilizations without boats dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates’ (1967/1998, 244). The arcane and semiotically overloaded space of the ferry is not only a symbolic ‘watershed’, a transitional vessel that moves back and forth between one national and cultural terrain and another, but also a space of displacement on several levels, bringing about an immensely obscure spatial experience.

This book approaches those bewildering and sometimes unspeakably bizarre spaces where disruption or disarray leave social subjects *estranged* and out of place. It engages the *emotional* and *mediated* geographies of uncertainty and in-betweenness; of cognitive displacement, loss, fear or exhilaration. It expands on *why* space is sometimes estranging and for *whom* is it strange. What kinds of perceptual, material and mediated transformations render space strange and obscure? What does it mean to be in estrangement?

In the *Oxford Dictionary of the English Language* estrangement has nine entries: to remove something from its familiar place; to make someone a stranger to a condition of place; to withhold from a person's perception or knowledge; to render alien; to alienate in feeling or affection; to make unlike oneself; to render strange or unfamiliar in appearance; to be astonished. Such definitions have in common the sense that strange spaces are produced by and produce moments when we are faced with *a transformed state of affairs*: either by a dazzling light, a sudden flash, or by gradual unfolding of moments foreboding something unknown or new. Overlapping with affections evoked by otherness, such as the 'exile', the 'obscene', the 'deviant' or the 'queer', strange spaces also call for a separate discussion ranging from unplanned spaces to vanishing spaces in states of ruin or decay; from spaces of decadence or disorder to spaces glowing with celebrification and wonder. Strange spaces are here conceived of in terms of *change*, involving processes when the consciousness registers a form of loss or difference 'as the habitual suddenly or by degrees is transformed into the site of exile, discomfort, and sometimes novelty, astonishment and awe' (Smith 1996, 4).

This is to say that in this book we want to approach strangeness not merely in terms of the 'unfamiliar' or 'other', but rather as a psycho-cultural spectrum of spatial opacity, marked not only by interpretive conflict or surprise, but also by an embodied sense of paradox, bewilderment and moral unease. Still, given these demarcations, there is of course a great body of relevant literature covering aspects of both strangeness and spatial production; literature waiting to be reinterpreted and combined in new ways. Similarly, empirical explorations of the mediated aspects of strange spaces, or the strangeness of media spaces, are dispersed and most often non-explicit. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to offer a realm of theoretical associations and linkages in order to initiate a profound discussion of 'what is strange about strange spaces'; a question that each of the following 14 chapters will provide empirically grounded, yet partial answers to. We begin with a broad exploration of views, concepts and methodologies within social and cultural theory, under the headings 'Space is Strange' and 'Everyday Elsewheres'. A discussion of the role of 'communication', 'mediation' and 'representation' follows, aiming to position the book within the emerging field of *communication geography*. Finally, we present the thematic structure of the book.

Space is Strange

Following Henri Lefebvre, this volume places the *opaque* at the centre of spatial exploration (1974/1991). Inaugurating an analysis of the socially produced interplay between spatial practices, representations of space and lived experience, Lefebvre showed that while representations of space and representational spaces seemingly naturalized space, they simultaneously made them made them contradictory, even making them evaporate. Lefebvre argued that ‘the illusion of immanence’ had made us believe that space was utterly and straightforwardly *knowable* while in fact it is encoded by multiple and differing meanings. And although representations of space express a lot, Lefebvre maintains that they hide, lose and set aside a great deal more – that is, those unfathomable, vague and strange dimensions of spatiality.

If opacity informs the fundamental human experience of space, for Julia Kristeva, estrangement and exile lie at the heart of subjectivity. Subjective existence is unhomey and the most intense forms of estrangement are produced by poetic language (Kristeva 1991). The poetic word takes subjects beyond themselves when language compensates for an original loss of the mother. The landscapes of literature are inhabited by a foreignness which makes all of us travelling there imaginatively into exiles: in order to take pleasure in reading, one needs to let go of the habitual, to become strangers to ourselves. What is strange about strange spaces, however, lies beyond imaginative travels and subject formation by means of *reading experiences* and arises out of a shift in perception and a change of the state of affairs, involving the whole body, the senses and the emotions. But their strangeness also, as this volume seeks to explore, have a great deal to do with the current transitions in the media landscape and the momentous and significant mediatization of society during the twentieth century. Coming to terms with strange spaces thus forces our attention on to a particular form of spatial obscurity: mediated obscurity. In our media age, incongruities sometimes occur because of a kind of overburdening of space by means of representation. Thirdspaces (as will be further elaborated below) are the real-and-imagined spaces where the mythological and symbolic landscapes of mediation converge with physical spaces resulting in ambivalences, ambiguities and confluences between the material and mediated (Soja 1996). Obscurity is thus increasingly, we argue, a mediated and mediatized trait of our media age and *Strange Spaces* pays particular attention to the relationships between space and media and to the specificities of mediated strangeness. Moving from physical to textual/visual/mediated spaces into representational spaces or mediatized outer space, or further into the unutterable thirdspaces, nowheres and underworlds, this book endeavours to unearth both the architectonics and agencies of strange spaces.

Keeping in play these uncertainties and opacities of space, the volume seeks to expand on Foucault’s enigmatic notion of the *heterotopia*, a concept

which may allow for strange and unforeseen explorations. The heterotopia is a counter-site that simultaneously expresses core ideals and values of a respective society. A heterotopia is an ‘effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted’ (1967/1998: 239). These counter-sites, existing in every society, *are there*. They are both openly acknowledged as existing, yet not freely accessible; they are institutionalized places, places which are outside of all other places, but nevertheless linked to them (such as the cemetery, the Chinese garden, the ward or the museum). Heterotopias come in two forms: heterotopias of crisis (hidden or forbidden places of people in crisis or of disorder: adolescents or menstruating women) and of deviance (rest homes and prisons for example).

What is *strange* about the heterotopias? Some specific heterotopian traits may crucially inform our discussion of strange spaces. Heterotopias are subject to historical changes and they may function in different ways at different times; they juxtapose irreconcilable sites within themselves and they come about *when people are displaced* through a break with the ordinary routines of temporality. What is strange about them is further the twofold way that they either create a space of illusion which discloses that the real world is even more illusory or the way that they create an *other space*; which makes us aware of the incompleteness of our messy and jumbled spaces (Foucault 1967/1998, 243).

Heterotopias are known physical spaces with certain predictable functions. Strange spaces may however appear to us in ways we never expected. They are not even in our wildest dreams. We neither had knowledge of such strange spaces, nor could we ever have imagined their existence. They shake our spirits. Still the strangeness of space sets in motion a search for apprehending something else ‘beyond each plane surface, beyond each opaque form’ (Lefebvre 1974/1991, 183). This is why strange spaces, that leave us speechless and bemused, are neither impenetrable nor completely unknowable: ‘Everything knows itself, but not everything says itself, publicizes itself. Do not confuse silence with secrets! That which is forbidden from being said, be it external or intimate, produces an obscure, but not a secret, zone’ (Lefebvre 1992/2004, 17). Taking our cue from Lefebvre, we are in search of whys, hows and whereabouts of estranging spaces – of their social production. Michel Foucault, who was most of all concerned with the prohibitions of/in space and with the margins of spatial organization (the prison, the cemetery, the psychiatric clinic) shed light on *deviance* in a way that contributes to our inquiry into strange spaces: deviance may sometimes be both the product and the process of estrangement. Resembling this is Lefebvre’s notion of the power invested in space and the power exerted on subjects *by* space: ‘Activity in space is restricted by that space, space “decides” what activity may occur, but even this “decision” has limits placed upon it. Space lays down the law because it implies a certain order and hence also a certain disorder (just as

what may be seen defines what is *obscene* [...]’ (1974/1991, 143). This implies that the social production of space always incorporates the opposites and the unspoken ‘obscenities’, as constitutive of social and spatial arrangements.

A dominant allegory for the strange space of the ‘postmodern city’ is that of *collage*. Within this imaginary it is posited as a largely illegible ‘text’, a shifting complex entity, an unfathomable, heterogeneous web of practices and relations. Depending upon where you stand, Michel de Certeau argues, you appropriate the city differently: either in terms of an aerial overview and an omniscient gaze upon an urban spectacle in the distance – those mediated image ideals that express the grand narratives of ‘concept space’ or from the street level, encompassing the messy routines, spatial practices and seemingly unreadable urban cultures of the *quotidien* (de Certeau 1984). Calling into question the very idea about coherence, the collage city is an ambiguous and contrary space where different voices collide and where order and disorder, sanitation and defiance, planning, and uncertainty, image ideals and urban cultures are irresolvably entangled. If we embrace this position of the city as a differentiated space belonging to several ontologies – to poetry and geometry, emotion and struggle, image and materiality – it cannot be understood as a synthetic totality. The city is a multi-sited spatial formation produced across diverse discursive regimes, representational modes and material everyday practices, perhaps in some respects strange by its very form (cf. Balshaw and Kennedy 2000). This volume seeks to bring out the polyvalency of strangeness yet without resorting to a comfortable postmodern position where for example city space is posited as complex, chaotic and inscrutable *a priori*. We intend to move beyond the face value of the obscure and to expound the *sociality* of strange spaces and attend to them as produced within society – as laden with power geometries (Massey 1994, 2005). Important questions to be raised are: for whom is the naturalized, invisible spatial texture we take for granted strange? For whom is the strangest of places perfectly lucid, familiar, even ‘at home’?

As spatial experiences are contextually bound, these meanings shift over time, but they also depend upon the intersectional power asymmetries that produce spaces lived and experienced differently by different people (see e.g. Rose 1993). Sexual or racial discrimination for example – in its varied forms and across multiple intersections – is apart from humiliating also quite estranging, resulting in bizarre orders, obscure spaces and systems of oppression (for example the slavery system, the brothel, the harem, the suburban home of 1950s America). What was termed ‘consciousness-raising’ by second-wave feminism, the ability within emancipatory movements of whirling (spatial) norms – of estranging what seems normal or natural in a specific societal, historical and cultural context – will convey a counter-narrative about strange spaces. Queer theory for example raised the awareness of heteronormativity, a term suited for disclosing and turning upside-down the normality of straight spaces (Butler 1990; Bell and Binnie 1994; Skeggs et al. 2004).

But what is perhaps less projectable is that being positioned in estranging, yet *normative* ways, may also engender ‘strange responses’ or even a form of unanticipated empowerment emanating from the obscene (or non-seen) off-spaces of the oppressed (de Lauretis 1987). An obscure order – patriarchy – turns woman into, for example, an impossible position to occupy. The strange space of the female body is massively burdened by representation and hence it is left, as Teresa de Lauretis says, vacant. Such vacancies potentially generate new and unexpected positions. de Lauretis’s critical feminist project evoked a subject for feminism through theorizing those undefinable (and yet potentially liberatory) elsewheres that we are curiously roaming in throughout this book:

For that ‘elsewhere’ is not some mythic distant past or some utopian future history. It is the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots or the space-off, of its representations. I think of it as spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparatus. (ibid.: 25)

Teresa de Lauretis describes the potential of empowerment from within: of movements from spaces represented by/in discourse and by/in the gender system to the ‘the space not represented yet implied (unseen) in them’ (ibid., 26). This is described as a movement ‘between the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere of those discourses’. Such discursive and social other spaces, de Lauretis argues, exists *within* hegemonic discourses, albeit on their margins (ibid.). Strange emancipatory space is constituted, according to de Lauretis, of what the representation leaves out, or, more pointedly, what it makes unrepresentable. The movement between represented space and off-space is not a dialectic or an integration but is made up of tensions of contradiction, multiplicity and heteronomy.

Our attempt to get a grasp on strange spaces may also be conceived as the retaining of such irreducible contradictions and as a project which potentially relocates subjects in ways that may generate *new spaces* for critical exchange and radical response. Silence and prohibition, deviance and marginality may thus be conceived of as *one* dimension of strangeness, one facet that does not exhaust the matter. We wish to bring spatial obscurities – which arise either out of outlawing and outright discrimination, or out of surprises, shifts, transitions and complexities in our everyday lives – onto a plane where they become observable, noticeable and analysable, always in awareness that as much as strange spaces need to be teased out in relation to their social cultural and political context, their opacities and obscurities are never reducible to them. In addition, their strangeness cannot be reduced into one formula or form of explanation. From such a vantage point we may for example acknowledge that modernist spaces of ordered perfection, reason, abstraction and spectacle (Lefebvre 1974/1991; Debord 1967/1994) may be equally estranging as their

messy odds and ends, worn out leftovers, unplanned in-betweens and ageing residues sometimes are. And, perhaps counter-intuitively, leisure spaces of phantasmagoria in (postmodern) cities – theme parks, movie theatres, laser domes, online game worlds etc. – are not always the given sites of emotive disarray or dislocation, but rather lucid in their spatial organization, rigorously following the ‘pleasure principle’. In consequence, as the contributions will display, strange spaces need to be addressed through less conventional methods and approaches. The following section will detect ways of understanding strangeness in the ‘taken for granted’ realm of the everyday.

Everyday Elsewheres

If it is true that strangeness follows from transition, as we have argued above, it implies that what is strange about strange spaces tends to escape the explanatory fixity of perceptive and theoretical categorizations (cf. Sheringham 2006, 223). An understanding of a certain space as strange involves a sense of being *here and now*, while at the same time *elsewhere*, losing oneself between what *normally is* and *what seems to happen*, not primarily to space, but to *normality as such*. Phenomena that seem ‘normal’ or unproblematic are no longer ready to be grasped and enacted, although they are clearly *there*. What we *do understand*, or feel, under such conditions, is that we cannot rely upon our own senses and judgments, but are mentally displaced. We cannot locate or fix what is strange, since its estranging force seems to reside *elsewhere* – beyond the space at hand; thus we must suspect that it resides within our own minds. Strangeness as so conceived thus implies a distortion of the interpretive schemes and embodied understandings we apply for making sense of everyday life.

What we encounter here seems to be a world of daydreaming and hallucinations – and to a certain extent it is. But it is also, as we will see, daydreaming in reverse – an ethnomethodological world of mundane estrangement. ‘In point of fact’, Gaston Bachelard contends in *The Poetics of Space*, ‘daydreaming, from the very first second, is an entirely constituted state. We do not see it start, and yet it always starts the same way, that is, it flees the object nearby and right away it is far off, elsewhere, in the space of *elsewhere*’ (1958/1994, 183–4, italics in original). What Bachelard sets out to explore is the phenomenological constitution of ‘intimate immensity’, the sense of limitless mental movement fostered through daydreaming. While daydreaming is indeed experienced as a realm of fantasy and wonder (see also Schutz and Luckmann 1973) it is not, however, strange in itself – precisely because daydreaming is daydreaming. The crucial point in Bachelard’s poetic analysis appears when the elsewhere of daydreaming gives meaning to certain expressions in the visible world. Using the example of what it means to lose oneself in a deep, or immense, forest – as often portrayed in poetry – he shows how phantasmagorical categories and perceptions soon produce a certain

form of spatial anxiety; the anxiety of being in a space without limits, that is, without no clear beginning or end. In other words, the forest is gradually becoming strange to us: 'One feels that there is *something else* to be expressed besides what is offered for objective expression. What should be expressed is hidden grandeur, depth' (Bachelard 1958/1994, 186, italics in original).

From Bachelard we can derive a phenomenological sensitivity to the estranging fluctuations of seemingly clear and stable spaces; that is, how strangeness emerges from the elsewhere deep within ourselves, engendering either peace or anxiety. This condition particularly applies to vast spaces, such as forests, plains, plateaus and the depths of the sea, where '*being-here* is maintained by a being from elsewhere' (ibid., 208). In addition, the phenomenological correspondence between the immensity of world-space and the depth of inner space, that Bachelard makes us see, points to the confusion of proportions that saturate daydreaming, so that immensity can be found in the most intimate of spaces. Indeed, such experiences, when interlaced with the proceedings of everyday life, can be classified as bizarre. A complementary example can be drawn from Walter Benjamin's description of how one summer-day in Marseilles, after long hesitation, he took hashish:

Versailles, for one who has taken hashish, is not too large, or eternity too long. Against the background of these immense dimensions of inner experience, of absolute duration and immeasurable space, a wonderful, beatific humor dwells all the more fondly on the contingencies of the world of space and time. I feel this humor infinitely when I am told at the Restaurant Basso that the hot kitchen has just been closed, while I have just sat down to feast into eternity. (Benjamin 1986, 138)

It is no coincidence that Benjamin, allegedly the most prominent interpreter of modernity as a dream state, explores strangeness through the lens of personal experiences and indeed illusion. Throughout his work, and particularly in his writings on the modern metropolis, there is an inclination to allegory – an ambition to reconstruct modern, urban mythology through reproduction, even imitation. As in the hashish experience, urban space appears as a simultaneously enticing and repulsive, beautiful and grotesque, immense and intimate landscape. Through such overlapping dreamlike experiences, the metropolis is often understood as an alienating force, a strange space, produced through mythology. What appears in the city might rightly be taken for a dreamscape, balancing between ruination and redemption. As Graeme Gilloch (1996, 137) points out in a discussion of Benjamin's work, the allegorical gaze involves precisely this movement. On the one hand, it brings the ruination of things, through a destruction of context. On the other hand, reducing the world to ruins implies that fragments can be recollected and reused. Through allegory, or hallucinatory experiences, strangeness might be brought to the fore, as an overcoming of myth. No wonder, then, that ruins,

and especially modern ruins, still lingering in the consciousness of collective memories, often evoke bewildering feelings of nostalgia – as if they were speaking of an historical elsewhere, while at the same time, precisely through their vanishing and fragmentary state, reinforcing mythology ‘here and now’ (see also Trigg 2006).

Preceding Benjamin’s poetic urban explorations, the confounding temporal play of dreaming was also one of the foundational themes addressed in August Strindberg’s dramaturgic work around the turn of the twentieth century (see Ericson 2004). As Strindberg stated in the foreword to *A Dreamplay* from 1901 – a surrealist story of how Agnes, the heavenly daughter of Indra, descends to Earth and experiences the torments of being human – his intention was to imitate the disrupted, but seemingly logical form of the dream, in which illusion creates strange textures of memory, experience, invention and improvisation. Such disruptions and illusory reflections saturate the entire play, as in this scene where the old Officer suddenly finds himself in a classroom at school (Strindberg 1918, 279–80, our translation from Swedish).

THE TEACHER *to the Officer.*

Well son, can you tell me now how much is two multiplied by two?

THE OFFICER *remains seated; searching with pain in his memory without finding the answer.*

THE TEACHER.

You are supposed to stand up when you are being asked.

THE OFFICER *in pain, stands up.*

Two ... multiplied by two ... Let me see! That is two two!

THE TEACHER.

Really! You haven’t done your homework!

THE OFFICER *ashamed.*

Yes, I have, but ... I know what it is, but I can’t say it...

THE TEACHER.

You are trying to dodge! You know it, but can’t say it. Perhaps I can help you!

He pulls the Officer’s hair.

THE OFFICER.

It’s awful, it’s awful!

THE TEACHER.

Yes it’s awful that such a big boy doesn’t have any ambition...

THE OFFICER *in pain.*

A big boy, yes, I am big, much bigger than the others here; I’m grown-up, I’ve finished school ... – *Like awakening* – I am promoted ... So why am I here? Am I not promoted?

THE TEACHER.

Sure you are, but you must sit and mature, you see. You must mature... Isn’t that correct, you think?

Bachelard, Benjamin and Strindberg have in common their notion of strange spaces as the harbours of interlaced dreams and memories – heterotopian spaces of discontinuities, disproportions and dislocations. Strangeness is thus not necessarily tied to any particular spatial form or category, but rather to the co-existence of familiar and phantasmagorical elements.

Starting out from a phenomenology of space, however, there are also other methods of exploring the obscurities of modern life besides poetics and allegory. One may get just as close to the day-to-day experiences of ordinary people if the dreamlike facets of social life are revealed not through allegorical abstraction and recollection, but through a destruction of what phenomenologists (e.g. Schutz and Luckman 1973) call the *natural attitude*. This is to say that what the ethnomethodologists propagated from the 1950s and onwards was an entirely *different kind of awakening*, a social awakening based on defamiliarization through interventions in the lifeworld. Following Harold Garfinkel's (1967/1984) statements in *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, we might conceive of this approach as 'daydreaming in reverse' – a process through which subjectivity is not escaping the 'here and now', but drastically brought back to, and overwhelmed by, that very reality, however strange it might seem:

Procedurally it is my preference to start with familiar scenes and ask what can be done to make trouble. The operations that one would have to perform in order to multiply the senseless features of perceived environments; to produce and sustain bewilderment, consternation, and confusion; to produce the socially structured affects of anxiety, shame, guilt, and indignation; and to produce disorganized interaction should tell us something about how the structures of everyday activities are ordinarily and routinely produced and maintained. [...] I have found that they [my studies] produce reflections through which the strangeness of an obstinately familiar world can be detected. (ibid., 37–8)

As Garfinkel points out, even the most ordinary spaces involve more or less 'senseless features' that, if multiplied, might distort our basic social trust and understanding. The peculiar thing about this method is that spaces are not entirely transformed, but socially, and/or morally altered, exaggerated – *seen anew*. Since ethnomethodology invokes a clash between deep rooted spatial expectations and strange appearances, as social actors we are taken off-guard, as in a candid camera performance, unable to set aside the established typifications we normally live by. We are forced into a daydream-like elsewhere, unveiling itself here and now, in the midst of ordinariness.

The theoretical legacy of ethnomethodology and the broader stream of social interactionism, is valuable for any exploration of how 'strange spaces' are socially embedded, negotiated and sometimes desired. The tension-field between strangeness and ordinariness is one that not only ethnomethodologists

but also 'ordinary' people, seek out and explore. Notably, strangeness is brought about through a breakdown of the codes and conventions normally governing morally and/or aesthetically legitimate social appearances. Such transformations or transcendences tend to balance between the unspeakable attraction of the illegitimate and the aversion towards the obscure, perverse, grotesque or bizarre. What Erving Goffman (1959) has termed *back region behaviour* often involves a routinized estrangement of the legitimate codes and procedures that mark the performances of front regions. As he found in a study of a Shetland hotel, while the kitchen staff, once back-stage, regularly referred to their customers by belittling code-names, the customers, when in their own circles, described the staff 'as slothful pigs, as vegetable-like primitive types, as money-hungry animals' (ibid., 169). Similarly, people in general tend to behave in a rather 'uncivilized', de-disciplined manner once out of reach of public exposure, be it in terms of talk, dress or sexual behaviour. In this way, back regions are always more or less strange spaces, or estranging, when viewed from the outside – that is, from the viewpoint of 'legitimate' forms of activity (which is of course always a relative social construct). They incorporate environments normally hidden to 'outsiders' and expose people in unexpected, even unthinkable ways – sometimes in terms of 'immoral extravagancies', sometimes in terms of plain, but just as shocking, 'ordinariness'. Pierre Bourdieu (1979/1984) has pointed to this estranging moral ambiguity, through which the most common of practices are often judged as de-cultured, decadent and thus strange:

In the face of this twofold challenge to human freedom and to culture (the anti-nature), disgust is the ambivalent experience of the horrible seduction of the disgusting and of enjoyment, which performs a sort of reduction to animality, corporeality, the belly and sex, that is, to what is common and therefore vulgar, removing any difference between those who resist with all their might and those who wallow in pleasure, who enjoy enjoyment. (ibid., 489)

In a similar way, back regions are spaces of social and cultural de-differentiation, and therefore threatening to moral judgment, order and control. They constitute a kind of omnipresent, ordinary-strange elsewhere – so close but yet so far away. What happens when 'the door is closed', when 'the lights are out', or (in a media age) when the 'camera is turned off', is a general source of human curiosity, fascination and daydreaming.

Communication Geography and Strangeness

In media studies space was, for a long time, treated primarily as context – the context of the production, transmission and consumption of texts. However,

new media technologies and cultural forms have in themselves contributed to a problematization of these contexts and processes. The increasing convergence, interactivity and mobility of 'new media' create spatial ambiguities in terms of a relativization and blurring of contexts and text-context relationships. In the era of digital media there are thus few clear-cut 'media spaces', but rather an omnipresent, dynamic and multifaceted realm of communications, saturating our entire lifeworld (see Morley 2000; Couldry and McCarthy 2004). This development partly explains why, since the mid-1990s, media studies have seen a *spatial awakening* taking place, involving not only a new concern with the quite obvious spatial ephemerality of (post)modern media societies, but also an increased understanding of *space as a construct* – a category whose qualities have *always* emerged through representation and communication. Studies of the space-communication nexus, and the emergence of *communication geography* as an interdisciplinary research field (see Falkheimer and Jansson 2006), are thus closely related to a rethinking of the cultural history of media spaces. Such studies may involve our strange and phantasmagorical late modern networked cities, whose buried and vague traces cut across the physical landscape and shape it into a landscape of power with an eerie, invisible yet decisive presence (Graham and Marvin 1996, 2000). On the global market for attention cities also become spaces of subliminal *futurity*, strange spaces replete with the mythologies of capitalism. Digital and technological cities produce endless re-enchantments of a disenchanted urban modernity as they are inscribed with emotions and fuse reason with magic (Jansson and Lagerkvist 2009).

Does this also mean that mediatization is making space increasingly strange? On the one hand, as we saw above, one may, with Lefebvre and others, think of space as something that is strange by its very nature and argue that the strangeness of space largely has to do with its representational dimensions. As Lefebvre (1974/1991, 208) contends, spaces of representation (lived and imagined) constitute 'the obscure counterpart to that luminous entity known as culture'. From this view, mediatization – seen as the multiplication of technologically circulated representations of space – can easily be (mis)interpreted as a process of mythologization and mystification. As spatial representations agglomerate and collapse into our everyday lives, transposing our spatial experience into 'hyper-reality' (Baudrillard 1983a, 1983b; Eco 1986) or 'thirdspace' (Soja 1996), there is indeed something 'strange' happening. But that is just one side of the coin.

On the other hand, from a more phenomenological viewpoint, even the most miraculous and thrilling experiences of our media age are successively transformed into mundane conditions, incorporated as parts of the taken for granted textures of space. Feelings of strangeness and uncertainty may emerge just as well when we find ourselves in spatial pockets of demediation, or in decaying spaces of dying media, where dreams and promises of media society have been broken or put into question. Strangeness does not stem from the

‘amount’, ‘range’ or ‘impressiveness’ of mediation, but from the qualitative relationships between perceived, conceived and lived spaces. One of the central objectives of communication geography is to encircle these *more or less estranging* relationships; to frame and name them by attentively representing them with respect to their vast and ever-growing complexity.

While the general vagueness and opacity of (media) space might be brought to the surface by way of theory, in this book theory is primarily used for interpreting how phenomenologically strange spaces – that is, spaces that (some) people perceive as strange – are produced in and through mediation. In the two following subsections we will further unfold these entwined dimensions of mediated strangeness.

The Confounding Spaces of Representation and Magical Media

Allegedly the most provocative perspective on how mediatization estranges people from society and reality, Baudrillard’s writings on postmodern simulations, hyper-reality and implosions cannot be overlooked in a discussion of mediated strangeness. Extending Debord’s (1967/1994) post-Marxist notion of the spectacle society and surpassing Jameson’s (1991) post-semiotic, yet materialist view of a depthless visual consumer culture, Baudrillard’s ironic assertions have profoundly altered our ways of perceiving media culture. His thoughts are ironic because his basic understanding of information society (developed mainly in the 1980s) as a society without sociality, produced through communication without content, kills the very target of what seems like a harsh critique (see Baudrillard 1983a, 1983b, 1987). Indeed, this method of unpacking and reconstructing information society as a state of hyper-reality, disabling all claims for truths, values and critique, unveils a strange state of affairs. It is also fair to say that Baudrillard’s thoughts have gained broader relevance and legitimacy in the face of the escalating processes of digitalization and globalization. His postmodern views reveal the most bizarre aspects of a mediatized lifeworld. Regardless of their take on ‘post’, ‘late’ or ‘liquid’ modernity, many contemporary theorists have been united with Baudrillard in this critical fascination with the knowable world sliding into the image (e.g. Eco 1986; Sorkin 1992; Kellner 1995; Ritzer 1999; Clarke 2003).

Still, whether we embrace or refuse postmodernism, what can be theoretically singled out as bizarre and paradoxical is different from people’s everyday understandings of the same phenomena. Thus, Baudrillard’s most exciting accounts of strangeness are not to be found in his theoretical notion of the hyper-real, but in his personal anecdotes and narratives of what it is to live in a mediatized world – such as his 1980s reflections on America emanating from his own journeys across the continent (Baudrillard 1986/1988). One of the most enchanting things about America, Baudrillard finds, is that the entire country is ‘filmic’. The metropolises are like ‘a screen of signs and formulas’, created as reflections of cinematic images. To grasp the secret of American

cities, New York and Los Angeles in particular, one must thus start in the representational realm, understanding that this realm saturates the entire cityscape. In an intriguing passage of the book, Baudrillard, one winter morning in New York, reflects upon the sight of a passing truck with the golden text MYSTIC TRANSPORTATION INCORPORATED painted on its sides, contending that this appearance somehow encircles the very meaning of New York and its mystical view of decadence – the bewildering mixture of filth, promiscuity and special effects – which he sees as the city's *fourth dimension*. Such anecdotes show that, while not understating the relevance of postmodern theory, in order to grasp what is strange about media society we must look at specific *time-space constellations and passing experiences* rather than overarching structural patterns or fixed spaces.

Europeans' journeys in America are particularly apt examples of the preoccupation with the lines between the real and the imagined. Baudrillard was not the first to be confounded by America; the Swedish author and film maker Vilgot Sjöman who travelled in the US in the late 1950s, preceded him by decades. Sjöman was both repulsed and fascinated by *Forest Lawn*, a deeply puzzling burial ground in Los Angeles, which was simultaneously a park filled with media attractions and duplications:

And Forest Lawn is built on the idea of reproduction – at worst on the idea of recreation. Recreation is when you transfer Leonardo's The Last Supper onto a colored glass window. Or when you make the Sistine Madonna of Rafael into a sculpture – without being at all troubled by the original structure of the art piece. And Forest Lawn does not hide that all the Michelangelo sculptures are reproductions – on the contrary, they tell with pride. If only the copy is 'exact' and made out of Carrar-marble 'from the same quarry that Michelangelo used', then the copy is equal to the original! And Forest Lawn may, at the utter bewilderment of the foreigner announce that they've got 'the biggest collection of masterpieces of Michelangelo outside of Europe.' (Sjöman 1956, 90–91)

The disorienting simulations that European travellers are faced with in America – overlaying the physical geography itself – are also what fascinated and intrigued British author J.G. Ballard and it became the impetus for the writing of his novel *Hello America* (1994). In the introduction to this phantasmagoric literary journey through the US, he underlined that:

Whenever I visit the United States I often feel that the real 'America' lies not in the streets of Manhattan and Chicago, or the farm towns of the Midwest, but in the imaginary America created by Hollywood and the media landscape. Far from being real, the sidewalks, and filling stations and office blocks seem to imitate the images of themselves in countless movies and TV commercials. Even the American people one meets in hotel lobbies

and department stores seem like actors in a huge televised sit-com. 'USA' might well be the title of a 24 hours a day virtual reality channel, broadcast into the streets and shopping malls and, perhaps, the White House itself ... (Ballard 1994, 4–5).

Ballard underscores Baudrillard's observations about the American simulacrum. This potential for *deceit* in a world saturated by media is another major theme in response to the confounding spaces of representation, shared by Sjöman and Ballard. In the gaudy Hollywood film *The Truman Show* (directed by Peter Weir, 1998) this is taken to extremes. The protagonist of both the film and the show, Truman, lives his whole life in a small town reminiscent of an eternal 1950s America, which is in fact a gigantic TV studio, controlled by the maker of a 24/7 live broadcast, who is a demonic director playing God. Truman is, as the tagline for the TV show repeats, 'On The Air. Unaware.' His spouse, his mother and best friend are actors and the whole world turns out to be a stage with scripted movements and product placements. Here the film represents mediatized spaces as obscure and belittlingly portrays them as profoundly alienating. The film gives full weight to pessimistic views on media society and reality TV. It also thematizes broader cultural tendencies as mediatizations and mediations of space become intimately enmeshed with our inner dream worlds and consequently with experiences of 'real places', amounting to specific knowledge of phantasmagoric psycho-geographies.

Imaginary spaces resting somewhere between the media representations that people consume (and in a context of ICTs, increasingly also produce) and the materiality of the world, are termed *thirdspace* in the geographer Edward Soja's (1996) spatial theorizing. Thinking about space in these terms takes account of the trialectic interplay between three enfolded dimensions: it includes the *firstspace* objectivity that Lefebvre termed 'spatial practices' and *secondspace* mediated qualities, that Lefebvre (1974/1991, 74ff) discussed in terms of 'representations of space'. Strange spaces contain both these aspects – material settings and their 'mappings' or representations of them. But it is only in terms of *thirdspace experience* that they appear to us to retain their full mystery and thrust of sensory-emotive convulsion. Thirdspace equals Lefebvre's lived space, representational space, and is distinguishable from spatial practices and representations of space; still it encompasses both of them. Such poignant and affective spaces bring about expanded and seemingly inscrutable spatial knowledge. According to Lefebvre, who privileged the spaces of representation in his philosophy of spatialization – including the realm of experience and the body – these are constituted by 'a strange interplay between the magical and the rational' (ibid., 203). Hence, they comprise the enigma of space itself.

Edward Soja sees thirdspace as carrying a broad potential. Pervaded by myths and symbols it is also a 'strategic location from which to encompass, understand and potentially transform all spaces simultaneously' (1996, 68).

Thirdspace is an interstitial realm that allows for an expansion of what is possible, thinkable and projectable. Thirdspaces are also more than symbolic spaces. They are

... vitally filled with politics and ideology, with the real and the imagined intertwined, and with capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and other material spatial practices that concretize the social relations of production, reproduction, exploitation, domination and subjection. (ibid.)

According to Soja, since they are the dominated spaces, the spaces of the marginalized are also *the chosen spaces for struggle, liberation and emancipation*. We will propose that strange spaces allow our attention to linger on those incompatible facets of space that may potentially foster new projections and directions. It may thus be inferred, not only that audiovisual fantasies generate *spaces in-between*, but that they may entail a capacity of informing and giving rise to *series of ambivalences*: that is, spatial uncertainties. This allows for moving beyond strange spaces understood in terms of fixed contradictory points of reference into embracing the conflicting and incompatible notions and affections implied in a mediatized world. It further calls for opening up the geographical as well as ‘communicational’ imagination. In highly mediated spaces, the real-and-imagined, the known (knowable) and the unknown (unknowable), are held *in thirdspace suspense* (Lagerkvist 2008). The hypermediated city struck by terrorism is also an uncanny and strange place due to a similar doubling of its imaginary and material actualities and to the strange repetitions and loops of imagery. Hence, as Brian Jarvis argues, New York on 9/11 produced an uncanny effect which occurs ‘when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality’ (Freud in Jarvis 2006, 49), that is, through the effacement of the real and the imagined that produces, in addition, a crisis of temporality:

9/11 is not over. In the case of millennial disaster movies, some of the most important images after 9/11 were replayed before the attacks even took place. 9/11 is a time of uncanny doubling and *déjà vu*. The attack on the city was foreseen in film, it was seen in the first attack, it was repeated in the second attack. The images of the Twin Towers subjected to a twin attack then endlessly repeated. (Jarvis 2006, 56)

Image dependent terrorism may thus be ‘the uncanny of capital itself’ (ibid., 62), that is of its logic of waste and destruction, but terrorism is but one drastic example of rendering the urban everyday strange.

No other realm of our contemporary media culture measures up to the complexities of representational space as ‘cyberspace’. Digital cultures and ‘new’ media forms of the information age – the web, virtual realities and game worlds – seemed, particularly in their infancy, quite *strange*. They

consequently evoked both astonishment and awe, partly because they brought about complex spatial dislocations. Digital geographies can either be viewed as existing parallel to our material world, or as challenging our perceived, lived and conceived spaces altogether (Crang et al. 1999). One may, for instance, think of computer games that alter spatial scales, causing extended notions of spatiality. The computer game and alternative reality *The Longest Journey* (with the sequel *Dreamfall*) (1999, 2006) is an adventure game that takes place in the year 2209. Players take on the role of April Ryan, who is the heroine with a mission to save the world. The core site within the game – through which the player moves as April explores new worlds, meets strangers and interacts with them – is a place, which is a recreation of Venice. This world, in turn, consists of *two parallel universes*: the so called world of science, or the ‘real world’ named *Stark*, and the virtual world named *Arcadia*. Ryan is called upon to restore the now unstable boundary between the two worlds of the game.

Here game space is actually a divided place inside another space, to where you log on from yet another place: our physical world (Sundén 2006, 284). There are strange parameters in such game worlds as well as in the user context, where the physical, real, virtual and imagined dimensions of space become complexly jumbled and sometimes inverted. Such obscurity inherent in digital geographies may also account for their appeal and attraction and perhaps for the utopian qualities endowed in them when they are ‘new’.

There is also a certain fetishistic strangeness attached to media technologies themselves, at least when they are brand new, as they are often dreamed of as bearers of supernatural powers (e.g. Gunning 2003; Gitelman and Pingree 2003). In our media culture the everyday is not only cognitively or semiotically overloaded. A stream of newly invented technologies constantly appears in our world and in no time they become part of our bodies, inscribed into our lives. Since they are incrementally used but unevenly mastered, media uses and practices are also rendered magical, spooky and strange. The *digital sublime* (Mosco 2004) – ‘the ghost in the machine’ – comes about through the complexity of media forms. Since we have no way of knowing or fully comprehending how they work, they become ‘technologies of captivation’ (Gell 1992), potentially sated with agency. Hence these incomprehensible yet lived aspects of our everyday digital cultures contain mundane obscurities that seem enchanting to some of us and outright confusing to others. But as media technologies quickly grow older, or as abstruse navigation in complex worlds of game design is turned into a habit, there is also a movement into a sense of second nature (Gunning 2003), and one day such digital spaces are emptied and left-behind. They are abandoned by both machines (with new, more advanced hardware) and people who use new toys and tools. Media technologies thus bring about *affective movements*. Before they are fully integrated in our daily lives, they even seem *alive* to us, but in the course of time and wear they lose

their magical grip, fade away and are potentially met with rejection or neglect – a phenomenon that will be further explored in the next section.

Fading In/Fading Out: Media Spaces of Uncertainty

In their book *Spaces of Uncertainty*, Kenny Cupers and Markus Miessen (2002) discuss the role of public space in cities more and more saturated by information networks and the commercial imperatives of visual culture. They pay particular attention to the seemingly empty, left over, or left behind places that can be found in even the most thoroughly planned cities – empty green areas around communication nodes, decaying zones around industries, cleaned spaces now used as parking lots, etc. While dull and gestureless, these black holes often seem to convey a secret story and therefore easily become the objects of fantasy, creativity and alternative appropriations. In their hiding of something, they also say something. While not loaded with architectural or commercial meaning, they are significant to the socio-cultural circuits of urban life, as well as for marking out the margins and boundaries of architecture and planning. Thus, as Cupers and Miessen argue, they are at the same time outside the city and integral to it.

This kind of urban in-between is a concrete reminder of Lefebvre's general view of spatial opacity:

Space contains opacities, bodies and objects, centres of efferent actions and effervescent energies, hidden – even impenetrable – places, areas of viscosity, and black holes. On the other, it offers sequences, sets of objects, concatenations of bodies – so much so, in fact, that anyone can at any time discover new ones, forever slipping from the non-visible realm into the visible, from opacity into transparency. (Lefebvre 1974/1991, 183)

The above-mentioned interplay between the visible and the non-visible, between fading in and fading out, cannot be fully grasped without assessing the role of mediation and representation. Urban black holes, for instance, are defined in relation to planning discourses, popular media, social scripts and so on. While grounded in tangible spatial practices, their in-betweenness must be understood discursively and phenomenologically. That is why mediations, and the media, are so important to the study of strange spaces – also when strangeness follows from the absence, attrition and death of such processes.

This way of reasoning also seems relevant if we approach mediation in more institutional and technological terms. What Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (2004) have termed *media space*, understood as the conceptual realm through which we can study the intertwining of media circulation and social space, clearly incorporates its own spaces of uncertainty – denoting not hyper-mediated thirdspaces, but spaces beyond, behind or between the dominant structures of control and exploitation. In media society, social

norms, expectations and power cannot be uncoupled from the media system. What is 'normal' and taken for granted follows from the mainstreaming of the 'important', the 'picturesque', the 'spectacular', the 'interesting', the 'new' and so on, as well as from the media's self-representation – their continuous efforts to reproduce themselves as the 'centres of society' (cf. Couldry 2003), and the 'magic systems' (cf. Williams 1980) through which social values and norms are spectacularized and sold back to the audiences as something desirable. In this way, the media work as a gigantic machinery of symbolic power through which norms and obscurities are invoked and exploited. What we understand as strange, however, may not be what the media regularly depict as obscure, perverse or deviant, but spatial phenomena and ensembles outside, or in the vague margins of these schemes of classification. As the media must regain or reinvent their centrality and magic, due to the fact that such things tend to become commonplace, the very expressions of that logic – whether the redesign of a television news room, the launch of a new 'provocative' reality show, or the advertising of a 'groundbreaking' digital camera – become the most commonplace of all features of media society.

As the chapters of this volume will show, strangeness is rather to be found in the elsewhere of opacity, figuring as disproportionality, discontinuity, decadence, decay, and so on. Some of these spaces are akin to what Rob Shields (1991) has termed *places on the margin*; that is, spaces occupying peripheral, marginal, or 'low', positions in relation to dominant geographical, social, and/or moral hierarchies. In an illuminating case study, Shields discusses how the English seaside resort Brighton developed during the 1920s and 1930s into a 'dirty weekend' destination; a place coded as liminal and partially uncoupled from the morality of everyday life. One of Shields' conclusions regards the social significance of 'place images', through which, for example, Brighton was turned into 'a sign of leisure, indolence, and ultimately, illicit sex' (ibid., 25); an issue which since the book was published has become more and more important to study due to the prevailing ideology of branding and place marketing. But again, strangeness always resides elsewhere. Just like spatial planning and architecture, marketing and media exploitation would successively exhaust the hidden secrets of social uncertainty. The beaches of Brighton might have been a strange space for a while, but reputation builds expectations, which in turn make even immoral or illegitimate social appearances seem less strange (in that space).

In this context we must also consider the relationship between social subjects and the more or less mediatized scripts that guide their appropriation of space. Even heavily promoted and simulated environments may seem strange when the relationship between representations, social practice and imaginary geographies are altered or taken apart. Here we might recall the above discussion of Goffman's back regions and the strangeness one might experience when encountering mundane or illegitimate signs or practices in spaces otherwise appearing as very formal or representative. For most of us,

the back regions and underworlds – typically the spaces of infrastructure and maintenance, of hotels, shopping malls, cruise ships, broadcasting centres and so on – seem strange, inseparable as they are from their dominant representations. An interesting parallel can be drawn to Couldry's (2000) analyses of how 'ordinary people' experience their encounters with the stages of media production. Leaving one's ordinary position as audience, finding oneself in the setting of actual recording or performance work is a transition marked by contradictory, even bewildering experiences. While entering into the sanctum, the glowing realms of holiness, implies an experience of wonder and celebrification, the sense of 'being there' is paralleled by a sense of 'being the wrong subject in the wrong space and time'. Accordingly, since there are no common scripts as to the appropriation of these normally concealed spaces of media power, one might paradoxically think of them as black holes – sometimes even as back stages, hidden behind mediation itself – spaces that escape the classificatory forces of dominant meaning circulation.

Finally, many uncertainties related to media space can be understood as a function of time. As in the opening example with abandoned industrial wasteland or cleaned urban areas waiting for exploitation, media spaces may be affected by stagnation, cultural lags and processes of obsolescence and decay. Such temporal incongruence is typically defined at the intersection of technology and cultural form (Williams 1974). Flea markets and garage sales, for instance, where one can find once sophisticated media equipment and outmoded records together with old ceramics, toys, sports equipment and second hand clothes, are not only phantasmagorical, multilayered time-spaces in themselves, but also environments that remind us of the somehow bizarre circuits of goods characterizing media society, and how these circuits are functionally and emotionally interwoven with our own life biographies. Objects that were recently a source of personal pride and confidence can be re-encountered at the dusk of their lifespan, evoking feelings of contemplation and nostalgia (cf. Straw 2005).

However, it can be just as strange to encounter spaces where old media are in functional use. Who would today expect to hear the sound of a typewriter, a turning dial, or even a connecting telephone modem, in a high-tech office building? Still, certain institutions, in particular bureaucratic organizations marked by rigid structures, just slowly adopting new media technologies and forms, may incorporate a multilayered order of administrative techniques – combining rationality with slowness. Such contradictory patterns may seem odd to clients who are getting more and more accustomed to the instantaneity and impersonality of digital media infrastructures, such as on-line shopping and banking. Waiting in line outside different offices, answering personal questions and filling out complicated paper forms may be a more dreamlike experience than wandering through the media monitored consumer phantasmagoria of shopping arcades and international airports. Once again, this is to say that the

strangeness of strange spaces is a relational, phenomenological and discursive matter.

This Volume – Three Fields of Mediated Obscurity

In this introductory chapter we have outlined some key theoretical aspects from which the strangeness of strange spaces can be analysed and understood. We have also introduced several distinctions that encircle the more empirical terrain of *Strange Spaces* that we have chosen to present under three thematic headings – parts that will be more meticulously presented in this book in relation to the respective chapters.

In the first part of the book, ‘Scales of Opacity’ we approach the strangeness of mediaspaces with a focus on some of those miscellaneous scales involved in media geographical experience. The contributions move from a kind of phenomenological and transformative *condition of vagueness* in certain oppositional or alternative spaces challenging social norms of modern and mediatized spaces (Carney and Miller), to the milieu in which we all live and sleep and eat: the *home* in which our cherished, forgotten and obsolete media forms die and are resurrected (Löfgren). From there occurs a move through visual representation *into the body* – gauging the interior scales and strangenesses of our selves and bodies in modernity (Åhren and Sappol). Then the final chapter *lifts from the planet* into satellite spaces investigating media forms that escape our ordinary mundane knowledge and experience, while thoroughly interpenetrating our lifeworlds (Parks). Linger on scales makes this variation and complexity visible and researchable.

The second part ‘Dislocation, Disruption, Disobedience’ focuses instead on moments of inaugurated strangeness in trying to answer the question of when, how and through what means spaces become strange, and for whom? Our approach here is that a sense of dislocation occurs when a spatial code is lost or challenged through some kind of interruption or disruption, either through violence and noncompliance or a breaking off from general expectations of what normally occurs/should be in that space. The contributions interrogate mediated obscurity at an exhibition visited by the ‘wrong person’ (Habel); through the spatio-temporalities of a building where materialities of old media apparatuses and gender representations estrange visitors (Lagerkvist); within representational styles and aesthetics of sinful print cultures (Straw); in the overlaying of urban space with mediated murder stories (Wilbert and Hansen), and by emphasizing the communicative aspects of architecture (Hammond) – examples that form the media-spatial backdrop against which transformative or dislocational moments of strangeness occur.

In the final part, ‘Secrets and Wonders of Media Space’, the chapters focus on how mediaspaces themselves become strange, magical and alluring due to aspects of their secretive yet powerful omnipresence as mediators of

flows of images and texts, as technologies that define the everyday, and as institutions with the power to pervade our modern lives, practices and values. The chapters in this section show that there is something sacred to the media. New phenomena may highlight the many wondrous aspects of for example the media houses and machineries themselves (Ericson; Jansson), that the cultural history of representational techniques, such as the postcard, can teach us about the complex imaginaries of new machines and aerial space (Sloan), and that certain environments of mediated obscurity seem especially conducive to the film medium, such as museums (Jacobs) and the underground (Pike).

While opening up a highly dynamic and multifaceted research field, implicitly asking for interdisciplinarity and theoretical anti-orthodoxy, we aim to show that strangeness is reliant upon a cultural and social *situation* and that it is thoroughly *relational*. The empirical chapters comprise piecemeal and probing explorations into mediated obscurities – obscurities that may reside *beyond* mediation; *inside* its very core, or even *between* the mediated and the ‘real’. They open up a terrain where there is no neat, linear or consistent narrative to follow: it is not mediation as such that is strange, but also the spatial relationships and situations it produces. Strangeness may belong to one discursive order or another, to the body or to its habitat, to light or shadow, to the city or the countryside, to the streets or to the sky, to violent or extraordinary action, or to tedious, humdrum stillness.

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