SOCIAL IDENTITY

Third edition

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1

IDENTITY MATTERS

Many of us, much of the time, are able to take identity for granted. We seem to know who we are, we have a good enough working sense of who the others in our lives are, and they appear to relate to us in the same way. There are occasions, however, when identity becomes an issue . . .

You telephone the order line of a clothing catalogue to buy a new jacket. The young man who answers asks for your name, address, credit card number and expiry date, your customer reference number if you have one, establishing your status as someone to whom, in the absence of a face-to-face encounter, goods can be dispatched in confidence. And also, of course, putting you on the mailing list if you're not already there.

On a train, the stranger in the opposite seat smiles and excuses herself: she has noticed you reading last week's newspaper from a small town several hundred miles to the east. You explain that your mother posts it to you, so that you can keep up with the news from home. She recognised the newspaper because her husband is from your home town. You, it turns out, were at school with her sister-in-law. Before leaving the train she gives you her telephone number.

It is a cold Friday night, rainy and windy. You are dressed for dancing, not the weather. Finally you reach the head of the queue outside the club. The bouncer – or, as he prefers to be known, the doorman – raises his arm and admits your flat mate. He takes one look at you and demands

proof of your age. All you have is money. But you don't have enough. You walk home alone.

You hand your passport to the immigration officer behind her glass screen. She looks at your nationality, at where you were born. Your name. She checks your visa. These declare your legitimacy as a traveller, your desirability as an entrant. She looks at the photograph; she looks at you. She asks you the purpose of your visit. She stamps the passport and wishes you a pleasant stay. Already she is looking over your shoulder at the person behind you.

In situations such as these, once identity is established or verified, life goes on much as before. But identification is not always so mundane or trivial.

You come home from work and sit down at your computer. The screen saver is on. Strange: who's been eating your porridge? Clicking the mouse reveals that the machine is not only switched on, but is online. Facebook appears. Someone called 'sexonlegs911' is apparently still logged on. On your pc. There are no recognisable photos, and the details – female, twenty-three, into a whole set of stuff that's only identified by acronyms – don't match anyone who lives in the house. There is a message from someone called 'rawflesh21'. Do you read it? Do you answer it?

The morning of your sixty-fifth birthday, in addition to birthday cards and presents, brings retirement: a pension instead of a salary, a concessionary public transport pass, and special rates every Tuesday at the hairdresser's. Beyond that, free medical prescriptions and invitations to the Senior Citizens' Club at something called the 'Day Centre' are intimations of dependence and disability. Death. It may be the same face you see in the bathroom mirror but you will no longer be quite the person that you were yesterday. Nor can you ever be again.

It is the annual company dinner. You have always gone alone, and always left alone, early. This year, however, you have someone to bring. What will your colleagues, the MD especially, think of her? There is a promotion coming up in February, and you know what they're like about that kind of thing. You take a deep breath, push open the glass door, and walk into the bar of the hotel dining room restaurant that has

been booked for the evening. Your boss, smarmy Mark, comes across, hand out, glass of red in his hand: 'Susie, lovely to see you.' He turns slightly, there is a question in his eyes . . . Big deep breath: 'Mark, this is my partner, Alison.'

You hand your passport to the immigration officer behind her glass screen. She looks at your nationality, at where you were born. Your name. She checks your visa. She looks at the photograph; she looks at you. She types something into her computer terminal. She asks you the purpose of your visit. During the conversation she checks again the screen beside her and presses a button under her desk, to alert airport security. Abruptly you find yourself being removed from the queue of incoming passengers by two male officers and led away to an inter-view room. Already she is dealing with the person who was in line behind you.

A rainy afternoon in Belfast in 1973 and you leave work early to discover that the buses are off. Finding a public phone box that works you try for a taxi. Your usual number has nothing available: a bomb scare's tying up the traffic. Do you walk home? No, it's too far and it wouldn't be safe. You find what's left of the phone book and start dialling other taxi companies. Eventually you get one. Ten minutes later it comes and you settle in for the ride home. It doesn't take you long to realise that instead of heading up Divis Street to the Falls Road you're driving over the bridge into Protestant East Belfast. The next afternoon, when you come round in hospital, a voice that you don't recognise is telling you that you were lucky to get off with a shot through the kneecap, some burns and a bad beating.

So, who we are, or who we are *seen* to be, can matter enormously. Nor is identification just a matter of the encounters and thresholds of individual lives. Although identification always involves individuals, something else – collectivity and history – may also be at stake.

Mass public occasions such as the Sydney Mardi Gras, or Gay Pride in London, are public affirmations that being gay or being lesbian are collective, as well as individual, identifications. For participants these occasions may – or, indeed, may not – affirm their individual sexual identities, but, before they are anything else, they are shared rituals, celebrations of collective identification and political mobilisation.

Imagine a contested border region. It might be anywhere in the world. There is a range of ways to settle the issue: violence, a referendum, international arbitration. Whatever the means adopted, or imposed, the outcome will have consequences for people on both sides, depending on who they are. While some will accept it, some may not. Populations may move, towns and regions may be 'cleansed', genealogies may be rewritten. The boundaries of collectivity may be redrawn.

Finally, here are two cases that are not drawn from my own experience or general knowledge. They illustrate the interplay of individual and collective identity, the consequences of identification, and the magnitude of the historical themes that everyday situations may evoke.

In 1935 a fair-skinned Australian of part-indigenous descent was ejected from a hotel for being an Aboriginal. He returned to his home on the mission station to find himself refused entry because he was not an Aboriginal. He tried to remove his children but was told he could not because they were Aboriginal. He walked to the next town, where he was arrested for being an Aboriginal vagrant and placed on the local reserve. During the Second World War he tried to enlist but was told he could not because he was Aboriginal. He went interstate and joined up as a non-Aboriginal. After the war he could not acquire a passport without permission because he was Aboriginal. He received exemption from the Aborigines Protection Act – and was told that he could no longer visit his relations on the reserve because he was not an Aboriginal. He was denied permission to enter the Returned Servicemen's Club because he was.[1]

In October 2007, in north-eastern Italy, a dispute erupted over the wearing of the *burqa*, which covers the body from head to foot, apart from a small mesh at eye level. The Prefect of Treviso in north-east Italy announced that he would now permit it, despite national anti-terrorism legislation, dating from the 1970s, outlawing clothing that prevents the wearer from being identified. He said that women who wore the *burqa* for religious reasons were free to do so, but would have to reveal their features if required to do so for purposes of identification. In Treviso, moreover, the *burqa* was the target of a specific ban. Three years earlier, the city's Mayor, a member of the anti-immigrant Northern League, had introduced a bylaw banning the garment, as 'a mask that can be permitted at carnival time, but not throughout the year'. The Egyptian-born Deputy Editor of *Corriere della Sera* attacked the Prefect's initiative for 'leading us straight to the suicide of our civilisation'; were

it endorsed at national level, he argued, Islamic women 'could soon be going to school, taking jobs and going around freely, completely veiled'. The Prefect's boss, Giuliano Amato, Interior Minister in Italy's centre-left government, and the Prime Minister, Romano Prodi, had each previously spoken out against the *burqa*. Mr Amato said that it 'offended the dignity of women'.[2]

Each situation above illustrates how identification affects real human experience: it is the most mundane of things and it can be the most extraordinary. Whichever way we look at it, identification seems to *matter*, in everyday life and in sociology.

BUT . . . DOES IDENTITY MATTER?

It isn't enough for me simply to insist that identity matters. Some recent contributors to the literature have expressed serious doubts about whether identity and identification matter as much as social science appears to think they do. Their scepticism has some justification, and is a useful reminder that we should not take identity for granted.

First, and most fundamentally, there are doubts about whether identity, in itself, actually causes behaviour. Martin, for example, has insisted that 'identity', despite its high profile in accounts of recent conflicts, such as in the Balkans, 'fails to provide an explanation . . . [for] *why* actors are making certain utterances or *why* certain events are happening' (1995: 5). This was a response to claims that explicitly connected identity to actions, assertions that under the circumstances the people concerned could not have done otherwise (and were, hence, blameless). Recently Malešević (2006) has also put forward arguments broadly similar to Martin's.

In order to begin thinking about this issue, we must decide what we mean by 'identity'. As a very basic starting point, identity is the human capacity – rooted in language – to know 'who's who' (and hence 'what's what'). This involves knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are, and so on: a multi-dimensional classification or mapping of the human world and our places in it, as individuals and as members of collectivities (cf. Ashton *et al.* 2004). It is a process – *identification* – not a 'thing'. It is not something that one can *have*, or not; it is something that one *does*. Following Martin and Malešević, it cannot be said too often that identification doesn't *determine* what humans do. Knowing 'the map' – or even just approximately where we are – does not necessarily tell us where we should go next (although a better or worse route to our destination might be suggested).

The matter is made more complex, however, by the fact that knowing who's who isn't merely a matter of neutral classification. Or, rather, classification is rarely neutral (something that I discuss further in Chapter 9). At the very least, classification implies evaluation, and often much more. Humans are generally not disinterested classifiers. This is spectacularly so when it comes to classifying our fellow humans (and them us). Cognitively, classification is organised hierarchically: A and B may be different from each other at one level, but both are members of the meta-category C. Classification is also hierarchical interactionally and socially: one may be identified as a C in one context, but as an A in another. In addition, because identification makes no sense outside relationships, whether between individuals or groups, there are hierarchies or scales of preference, of ambivalence, of hostility, of competition, of partnership and co-operation, and so on.

From this perspective, identification and motives for behaviour might seem to be connected: to identify someone could be enough to decide how to treat her. However, our classificatory models of self and others are multi-dimensional, unlikely to be internally consistent, and may not easily map on to each other. Hierarchies of collective identification may conflict with hierarchies of individual identification, which means that the following can make complete interactional sense: I hate all As; you are an A; but you are my friend. Taken together, these points suggest that categorical imperatives are unlikely to be a sufficient guide on their own, and that the ability to discriminate between others in subtle and fine-grained ways is an everyday necessity.

A further issue, to which I will not give extensive attention here because it is discussed in Chapter 14, is the emotional charge that may, or may not, attach to identification. There are perhaps two things to say about this, the first of which is that, even allowing for social psychological studies of identity (see Chapter 9), we do not have a clear picture of the relation between emotion and identity. Perhaps the most that we are entitled to say at the moment is that emotion appears to be bound up with identi-fication – typically through attachment – in some circumstances but not in others (Ashton *et al.* 2004: 90–92). The second point, which can perhaps be made with greater confidence, is that where identity does appear to be an emotional matter – and hence capable of influencing actions – this does not seem to be inevitable, or natural. Identification has to be *made* to matter, through the power of symbols and ritual experiences, for example.

So, while identification may be connected to motivation and behaviour, the connection is not straightforward or predictable; which suggests that

when Rogers Brubaker, for example, insists that ethnicity is a cognitive matter, of classification and categorisation (Brubaker 2004: 64–87; Brubaker *et al.* 2004), the key point is not that he is wrong – because he isn't – but that other factors must also be taken into account. To repeat, classification is rarely disinterested.

This raises the question of the role of interests: is it the pursuit of interests, material or otherwise, which matters, or is it identity? This debate has a considerable history, and the alternative positions appear in useful contrast if we compare two influential perspectives on identity: Barth's social anthropology (1969) and Tajfel's social psychology (1981a). Despite points at which their understandings of identification resemble each other – not least in their emphases on process – they differ sharply in this important respect. Barth argued that identification and collectivity are generated as emergent by-products of the transactions and negotiations of individuals pursuing their interests. He was dissenting from a taken for granted, structural-functionalist orthodoxy in social anthropology that explained what people did by reference to their identity, in particular their membership of corporate groups or 'cultures', such as lineages, clans and tribes. Tajfel, by contrast, argued that group membership – even if it was only arbitrary assignation to a group under laboratory conditions – is sufficient *in itself* to generate identification with that group and to channel behaviour towards in-group favouritism and discrimination against out-group members. He was taking issue with social psychological accounts of identity (e.g. Sherif 1967) that emphasised 'realistic competition' and conflicts of interest as the basis for co-operation and group formation.

In fact, identification and interests are not easily distinguished. How I identify myself has a bearing on how I define my interests. How I define my interests may encourage me to identify myself in particular ways. How other people identify me has a bearing on how they define my interests, and, indeed, their own interests. My pursuit of particular interests might cause me to be identified in this way or that by others. How I identify others may have a bearing on which interests I pursue. And so on. Even the apparently single-minded, calculative pursuit of material self-interest does not exist in isolation from organisational and other identifications – jobs, positions and reputations – and shared understandings of value and optimal behaviour that are informed by more abstract identity categories such as 'rich', 'clever' or 'successful'.

This is not to deny that people may sometimes pursue interests that appear to conflict with how they are publicly identified, individually or collectively. It does, however, return us to the proposition that classification (identification) is unlikely to be disinterested. Identification is, at the

very least, consequential and reciprocally entailed in the specification and pursuit of individual and collective interests:

> in practice, interest and identity claims are closely intertwined. What I want is in some sense shaped by my sense of who I am. On the other hand, in clarifying my interests I may sometimes begin to redefine my sense of self. But there remains for me a fundamental distinction between my objectives that do not threaten my identity and those that do.
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> (Goldstein and Rayner 1994: 367–368)

Can this really mean that a threat to my identity is more serious than a threat to my interests? Given that it is not easy to distinguish one from the other, the answer has to be: only if I think or feel it is. There is no evidence that everyone does think or feel that.

In fact, identity 'in itself', independent of other considerations such as interests, may not be a plausible proposition. Just because much contemporary political, and other, rhetoric seems to set a supreme price on identity (Malešević 2006) doesn't mean that we should. As critical social scientists we, in fact, are obliged not to. Even where individual or collective 'identity politics' appears to be intense, the extent to which collective or individual interests are subordinated to the categorical imperatives of 'identity' should be a matter for empirical discovery, rather than *a priori* theoretical presumption (although there are epistemological issues here, since identifying the interests of an individual or a group is not a straightforward matter).

As the final thread in this debate, scepticism about whether identity matters has inspired scepticism about the nature of social groups. This reflects the fact that group identities are often treated as the most powerful forms of identification, in terms of their capacities – whether rooted in socialisation, peer pressure, perceived shared interests or Tajfel's social identity effects – to mobilise people. It is in this context that the question has recently been posed: are groups 'real'? Given that 'the group' is among the most fundamental of social scientific concepts, this is not a minor matter.

'The group' is such a basic notion, in fact, that most social scientists take it completely for granted, as part of the conceptual furniture. Not everyone does, however. As one of the most consistent critical voices in this respect, Roger Brubaker (2002; 2004: 7–27) insists that ethnic groups, as he believes they are generally conceptualised within social science – as clearly bounded, internally fairly homogenous and distinguished from other groups of the same kind – are not real. What is real is a shared sense

of 'groupness', of group membership. By this argument, the participants in ethnic conflicts are individuals and organisations, rather than ethnic groups. Ethnicity, for Brubaker, is cognitive, a point of view of individuals, a way of seeing the world (Brubaker 2004: 64–87; Brubaker *et al*. 2004). But it is not how the substance of the human world is really organised.

Brubaker goes on to argue, using similar logic, that identity in general is not a 'thing' that people can be said to have, or that they can be; thus it is not real, either (Brubaker 2004: 28–63; Brubaker and Cooper 2000). In this sense identity does not, and cannot, make people do anything; it is, rather, people who make and do identity, for their own reasons and purposes. So, instead of 'identity', we should only talk about ongoing and open-ended processes of 'identification'.

Brubaker's arguments have much to commend them. It's true, for example, that the only reality that we should attribute to a group derives from people thinking that it exists and that they belong to it (an issue that I discuss further in Chapter 9). It's also true that identity is a matter of processes of identification that do not determine, in any sense, what individuals do. Individual behaviour is a complex and constantly evolving combination of planning, improvisation and habit, influenced by emotional responses, health and well-being, access to resources, knowledge and world-view, the impact of the behaviour of others, and other factors, too. Group membership and identity are likely to have some part to play, but they cannot be said to *determine* anything.

In the above respects, Brubaker is right, and in considerable agreement with the arguments that have been put forward in earlier editions of this book. He is, however, right only up to a point.[3] The definition of groups that he presents as wrong-headed, social science conventional wisdom – as clearly demarcated and bounded, relatively homogenous collectivities that are distinct from other groups – is not universally accepted. Another, more minimal definition, which commands considerable support across a broad social science spectrum, simply says that a group is a human collectivity the members of which recognise its existence and their membership of it: there are no implications of homogeneity or definite boundaries. From this point of view, Brubaker's distinction between non-existent groups and real 'groupness' doesn't make sense, in that groups are constituted in and by their 'groupness'.

In a search for unambiguous '*really* real' analytical categories, Brubaker pushes a broadly sensible argument to its logical extremity and winds up somewhere less sensible. He is attempting to impose theoretical order on a human world in which indeterminacy, ambiguity and paradox are part of the normal pattern of everyday life. Although as social scientists we must

aim for the greatest possible clarity, our concepts must also be grounded in the observable realities of the human world. If we try to impose concepts that are too straight-edged on this messy reality we risk divorcing ourselves from it, substituting the 'reality of the model' for a 'model of reality' (Bourdieu 1990: 39).

What, then, of groups? Brubaker's argument is underpinned by the well-worn proposition that the collective-stuff-of-human-life is not a sub-stantial reality and does not have the same ontological status as individuals. Human individuals are actual entities; groups are not. They cannot behave or act, and they do not have a definite, bounded material existence in time and space. Only the individuals who constitute supposed groups – their members – can be said to exhibit these attributes, not the groups themselves. Although Calhoun's characterisation of Brubaker, as offering a social theoretical version of Margaret Thatcher's observation that there is 'no such thing as society', is uncharitable (Calhoun 2003a: 536), it is not hard to understand its inspiration.

It is uncharitable because the 'Thatcher position' is not as foolish as it is often taken to be; it has real foundations in everyday experience. Groups and other collectivities are more elusive than embodied individuals (Jenkins 2002a: 73–76). They are difficult to grasp. They are not merely arithmetical aggregates: what constitutes and defines them is more than merely the fact of their members, even if those members could all be gathered in one place. What's more, although individuals can't be in two or more places at once, in some senses a collectivity can (and is quite likely to be).

Organisations – which can be formal or informal, extending in size and complexity from a regular pub quiz team to a multi-national corporation or a nation-state – are perhaps the most substantial kind of group. But even organisations are somewhat fuzzy and unclear. In addition to their members – and who counts as a member is not always obvious – organisations are constituted in implicit behavioural norms and customs, in explicit rules and procedures, in criteria for recruitment, in divisions of labour, in hierarchies of control and authority, and in shared objectives. None of these things are necessarily obvious at any given moment, let alone all at the same time. To complicate the matter further, organisations may persist despite membership turnover. People come and go, but the organisation can continue. There is more to an organisation than its membership, and the same is true for any group or collectivity.

So there is a sensible issue to be addressed with respect to the ontological status, the *reality*, of groups and other collectivities. There is a question to be asked, and its answer isn't self-evident. Brubaker's response is that groups are imaginary, and since we don't treat imaginary entities as

analytical categories we should not accord this status to groups. It is only the sense of 'groupness' that is real. Real, but illusory: an important part of his argument is that beliefs in the reality of ethnic groups, and actions informed by these beliefs, create pressing contemporary problems. In a world of ethno-political entrepreneurs and organisations, 'groupness' constrains the landscape of options, and offers foci of identification to which uncompromising loyalty can legitimately be demanded, which transcend and disguise the sordid pursuit of base interests. There is more than a suggestion of 'false knowledge' about his argument at this point.

Once again, Brubaker is right in part . . . but definitely wrong in the end. Groups may be imagined, but this does not mean that they are imaginary. They are experientially real in everyday life. In this respect, the empirical questions we should ask are: Why do people believe in groups? Why do they believe that they themselves belong to them? And why do they believe that others belong to them? The first reason that they do so is that we all live in an everyday world of observable, very real – even if modest – groups. Small informal groups exist, and are an aspect of local reality for each of us. Whether they are families, peer groups or friendship circles, our own experience tells us that groups are real. Formal organisations – also groups, let's remember – are real, too. So, whether informal or formal, whether more or less organised, groups look and feel real enough. They are actually anything but elusive. We all belong to some groups.

These small local groups are embedded within, and help to produce and reproduce, larger groups. To stay with Brubaker's primary interest, ethnicity, families, peer groups and friendship circles are regularly identified along ethnic lines and help to constitute larger ethnic groups. Small-scale formal organisations may also be deeply implicated in the everyday construction of ethnic collectivity: sports clubs, religious con-gregations, schools, voluntary organisations, businesses and political party branches may all be significant in this respect. So, in local everyday experience, there is a three-dimensional experiential materiality to supra-local ethnic groups. They can be grasped and 'seen' without having to make any effort of the imagination. They are, in other words, 'real'. Small wonder that people should believe in their existence.

There are also other reasons why people might sensibly believe in the existence of ethnic, or other, groups. Size, for example, doesn't seem to be a barrier to the social reality of groups. There is no reason why all the members of any particular group should be capable of assembling in one place, for example, or should know every other member of the group. This is manifestly true for large organisations and there's no reason why it shouldn't hold for groups of any kind. Large collectivities may be very

abstract indeed to their members, but may nonetheless have observable local, immediate representation or presence. The absence of formal co-ordination or collective decision-making across a large ethnic population – the fact that there is no central committee and that the group may be internally divided in various respects – does not necessarily undermine its status as a group, either. Even small groups can be uncoordinated, leaderless, fractious or amorphous: families are often good examples of this (and are no less 'real' because of it).

Returning to my earlier argument, the minimal reality of a group is that its members know that it exists and that they belong to it (although what counts as belonging may take many forms). Returning to Brubaker, it is only the definition of groups that he uses – as definitely bounded, internally more or less homogenous and clearly differentiated from other groups of the same basic kind – that allows him to reject their reality. Judged against the observable realities of the human world, the concept of 'the group' that Brubaker uses as his yardstick is, indeed, a mirage. That does not, however, mean that groups do not exist.

A further important issue also needs to be considered, albeit briefly: people categorise others, all the time and as a matter of course. Categorisation is as much a part of our subject matter as self-identification. This is the external aspect of the process of identification, which I will discuss at length in subsequent chapters. The point in this context is that categorisation makes a powerful contribution to the everyday reality – the realisation, if you will – of groups. Attributions of group member-ship feature routinely in how we categorise others, and the categorisation of out-groups is intrinsic to in-group identification. Who we think we are is intimately related to who we think others are, and *vice versa*. Categorisation also makes an important contribution to the distribution of resources and penalties, and is central to both conflict and conflict avoidance strategies: part of the experience of being a group member is categorisation by others and its attendant consequences. It is very real.

To invoke the first principle of social constructionism, groups are real if people think they are: they then behave in ways that assume that groups are real and, in so doing, construct that reality. They *realise* it. That groups are social constructions doesn't mean that they are illusions. Ordinary everyday life is full of real encounters with small groups and manifestations of larger groups. It is the distinction that Brubaker draws between groups and 'groupness' that is an illusion, and it does not help us to understand the local realities of the human world.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE ABOUT IDENTITY?

My argument so far is that, if for no other reason, *identification* matters because it is the basic cognitive mechanism that humans use to sort out themselves and their fellows, individually and collectively. This is a 'baseline' sorting that is fundamental to the organisation of the human world: it is how we know who's who and what's what. We couldn't do whatever we do, as humans, without also being able to do this.

On the other hand, identification doesn't determine behaviour, and patterns of identification don't allow us to predict who will do what. This is so for a number of reasons: people work with various 'maps' or hierarchies of identification, these hierarchies of identification are never clear cut, unambiguous or in consistent agreement with each other, and the relationship between interests and identification is too complex for individual behaviour to be predictable in these terms.

Given these conclusions, what should social science do about 'identity' and 'identification'? Let's turn to Brubaker once again (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; reprinted in Brubaker 2004: 28–63):

> [Identity] . . . is too ambiguous, too torn between 'hard' and 'soft' meanings, essentialist connotations and constructivist qualifiers, to be of any further use to sociology.
>
> (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 2)

> the term 'identity' is made to do a great deal of work. It is used to highlight non-instrumental modes of action; to designate sameness across persons or sameness over time; to capture allegedly core, foundational aspects of selfhood; to deny that such core, foundational aspects exist; to highlight the processual, interactive development of solidarity and collective self-understanding; and to stress the fragmented quality of the contemporary experience of 'self', a self unstably patched together through shards of discourse and contingently 'activated' in differing contexts.
>
> (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 8)

> People everywhere and always have had particular ties, self-understandings, stories, trajectories, histories, predicaments. And these inform the sorts of claims they make. To subsume such pervasive particularity under the flat, undifferentiated rubric of 'identity', however, does nearly as much violence to its unruly and multifarious forms as would an attempt to subsume it under 'universalist' categories such as 'interest'.
>
> (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 34)

On the one hand, Brubaker and Cooper argue that the term 'identity' is overused to the point of becoming almost meaningless. On the other, they insist that one blanket term cannot adequately deal with the human world's rich variety of identification processes. Either conclusion suggests that we should abandon the term.

Brubaker isn't the only person to have pronounced a death sentence on 'identity'. Siniša Malešević (2002, 2003, 2004, 2006) offers a sustained argument that, as an analytical concept, identity – by which he generally means *ethnic* identity – is confused and confusing, means too many things and encompasses too many different processes to be of any social analytical value. Identity has, he suggests, become reified in social science as a phenomenon the existence and importance of which can be taken for granted. Nor is Malešević more kindly disposed to everyday commonsense uses of 'identity': he argues that it is an ideological notion – basically 'false knowledge' – of recent historical origin, which power elites manipulate politically to their own advantage. It is certainly not, in his eyes, a generic or universal aspect of the human repertoire.

I agree with some of Brubaker's and Cooper's, and Malešević's, diagnoses. I certainly sympathise with their impatience with a good deal of recent writing about identity. However, discarding the notion of 'identity' for social analytical purposes is no solution (cf. Ashton *et al*. 2004: 82). It cannot really be done, if only because the genie is already out of the bottle. 'Identity' is not only an item in sociology's established conceptual toolbox; it also features in a host of public discourses, from politics to marketing to self-help. If we want to talk to the world outside academia, denying ourselves one of its words of power is not a good communications policy.

What's more, even were we to stop talking about 'identity', we would still need a way of talking about the fundamental human processes that I have been discussing in this chapter. We would still require abstract, shorthand terms that allow us to think about 'knowing who's who' and the fact that people are, in their own eyes and the eyes of others, identified as this, that or the other. While replacing 'identity' with 'identification' is an alternative that has its attractions, in that it refers explicitly to process, it isn't much of an improvement, because it is stylistically so cumbersome.

We need to find a compromise between a complete rejection of 'identity', in the style of Brubaker and Malešević, and an uncritical acceptance of its ontological status and axiomatic significance. Such a compromise calls for more care about what we say, and more modesty in how we say it. Since both 'identity' and 'identification' are nouns, and therefore potentially vulnerable to reification, what matters most is how we write and talk about them, not

an artificial and mutually exclusive choice between them. Throughout this book I shall, unapologetically, use both terms.

So, how should we write and talk about 'identity' and 'identification'? Well, first we need to recognise the limitations of both terms when it comes to explaining or predicting what people do (as opposed to how they do it). We also need to recognise that if we use 'identity' to talk about everything, we are likely to end up talking about very little of any significance. We need to remember that we are talking about processes, and to beware of casual reification. We need to unpack these processes of identification, rather than treating them as a 'black box'. We need to recognise that identification is often most consequential as the categorisation of others, rather than as self-identification. Last and absolutely not least, we need to adopt a critical stance towards public discourses about 'identity', rather than simply taking them at face value. This book, I hope, takes all of these cautionary suggestions to heart. Not least, because identity – and understanding identity – really does matter.

2

SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE

There are many questions to ask about identity and identification. How do we know who we are, and how do others identify us? How does our sense of ourselves as unique individuals square with the realisation that, always and everywhere, we share aspects of our identity with many others? How can we reconcile our routine sense of ourselves as consistently 'who we are' with the knowledge that we can be different things to different people and in different circumstances? To what extent is it possible to become someone, or something, other than what we now are? And is it possible to 'just be myself'?

This book offers a sociological framework[1] within which to think about these questions. Identification is a particularly seductive sociological topic because of the way in which it focuses the sociological imagination on the mundane dramas, dreams and perplexities of everyday human life. It brings together C. Wright Mills' 'public issues' and 'private troubles' and makes sense of each in terms of the other. To put this in another context, 'identity', as a meta-concept that, unusually, makes as much sense individually as collectively, is strategically significant for social theoretical debates about 'structuration' and the relationship between the individual and the collective (Parker 2000; Stones 2005)

DEFINING IDENTITY

In principle, the notion of identity applies to the entire universe of creatures, things and substances, as well as to humans. Its general, non sociological, meanings are worth considering. *The Oxford English Dictionary* offers a Latin root – *identitas*, from *idem*, 'the same' – and two basic meanings:

- the sameness of objects, as in A1 is identical to A2 but not to B1;
- the consistency or continuity over time that is the basis for establishing and grasping the definiteness and distinctiveness of something.

From either angle, the notion of identity involves two criteria of comparison between persons or things: *similarity* and *difference*.

Exploring further, the verb 'to identify' is a necessary accompaniment of identity. There is something active about identity that cannot be ignored: it isn't 'just there', it's not a 'thing', it must *always* be established. This adds two further items to our starter pack:

- to classify things or persons;
- to associate oneself with, or attach oneself to, something or someone else (such as a friend, a sports team or an ideology).

Each of these locates identity in practice: they are both things that people do. The latter also implies a degree of reflexivity.

Which brings us back to *social* identity. While this third edition retains the book's original title – marketing considerations carry some weight, after all – I prefer, wherever possible, simply to talk about 'identity' or 'identification'. This is for two reasons. First, if my argument is correct, all human identities are, by definition, *social* identities. Identifying ourselves, or others, is a matter of meaning, and meaning always involves interaction: agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, communication and negotiation. To add the 'social' in this context is somewhat redundant (cf. Ashton *et al*. 2004: 81). Second, I have argued elsewhere that to distinguish analytically between the 'social' and the 'cultural' misrepresents the observable realities of the human world (Jenkins 2002a: 39–62). Sticking with plain 'identity' prevents me from being seen to do so.

Much writing about identity treats it as some*thing* that simply *is*. Careless reification of this kind pays insufficient attention to how identification works or is done, to process and reflexivity, to the social construction of identity in interaction and institutionally. Identity can only be understood as a process of 'being' or 'becoming'. One's identity – one's identities, indeed, for who we are is always multi-dimensional, singular *and* plural – is never a final or settled matter. Not even death freezes the picture: identity or reputation may be reassessed after death; some identities – sainthood or martyrdom, for example – can only be achieved beyond the grave; and graves and memorials – testaments of identity, in some respects – are not unchanging points in a static landscape (Hallam and Hockey

2001; Sudnow 1967). Bearing this in mind, for sociological purposes identification can be defined minimally thus:

- 'Identity' denotes the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their relations with other individuals and collectivities.
- 'Identification' is the systematic establishment and signification, between individuals, between collectivities, and between individuals and collectivities, of relationships of similarity and difference.
- Taken – as they can only be – together, similarity and difference are the dynamic principles of identification, and are at the heart of the human world.

Like most of the ideas in this book, the notion that similarity and difference play off each other is not new. In 1844 Karl Marx wrote the following, in a letter to Feuerbach:

> The unity of man with man, which is based on real differences between men . . . what is this but the concept of society!
>
> (Marx, quoted in Wheen 1999: 55)

More than seventy years later, in a similar vein, Simmel argued that

> the practical significance of men for one another . . . is determined by both similarities and differences among them. Similarity as fact or tendency is no less important than difference. In the most varied forms, both are the great principles of all internal and external development. In fact the cultural history of mankind can be conceived as the history of the struggles and conciliatory attempts between the two.
>
> (Simmel 1950: 30)

Thus, identification is a game of 'playing the *vis-à-vis*' (Boon 1982: 26). Identity is our understanding of who we are and who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us). It is a very practical matter, synthesising relationships of similarity and difference. The outcome of agreement and disagreement, and at least in principle always negotiable, identification is not fixed.

DISCOURSES OF DIFFERENCE

The approach to identity and identification that I explore in this book is at odds with an influential body of contemporary social theory that distinguishes between 'identity' and 'difference', as different *kinds* of

phenomena, and emphasises the pre-eminence of difference. Identity is, at best, confined to a supporting role, in relationships based either on similarity alone or on identification with someone or something.

This 'difference paradigm' has roots in a varied range of debates over the last three decades. One such debate was about theoretical alternatives to structuralism: inspiration was sought in Derrida's notion of *différance* and psychoanalytic models which understood identification as dissociation from ego's earliest significant other(s). Elsewhere, a celebratory emphasis on difference was part of postmodernism's abandonment of modernist grand narratives and universalism. The reconstruction of theory and strategy on the political broad left, following the collapse of European state socialism and the rightward reorientation of politics in the Western social democracies, was also significant. New political alliances were expressed in ideas such as 'identity politics', for which 'difference' provided an organising theme. In this context, the campaigns of a range of interest groups and movements – women, ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians, disabled people, for example – have asserted the positivity of diversity and difference, and the ethical and political value of pluralism.

Notable theorists of difference include Seyla Benhabib (1996), Judith Butler (1990), Paul Gilroy (2006), Stuart Hall (1996), Luce Irigaray (1993), Steven Seidman (1997) and Charles Taylor (1994). If nothing else, this brief roll call suggests that theoretical discourses focusing on difference are, as one might perhaps expect, characterised by intellectual and political heterogeneity (for useful surveys, see du Gay *et al.* 2000; Taylor and Spencer 2004; Woodward 1997a). Even so, there is some agreement, and, in the context of my argument, it is important to emphasise that key elements of this broad understanding of identification are right.

Anti-essentialism is perhaps the most obvious of these. To insist that identity is not fixed, immutable or primordial, that it is utterly socio-cultural in its origins, and that it is somewhat negotiable and flexible, is the right place to begin if we are to understand how identification works. However, this perspective is not new – it is certainly not post-modern – nor is it as radical as it is often presented. It has been particularly influential in social anthropology, post-Barth (1969), but it has an even longer history in interactionist sociology, stretching back through Goffman, to Hughes, Simmel and Weber. At best, this wheel has been reinvented.

A healthy distrust of political universalism – of inclusive, apparently equal, citizenship – also imbues the work of many of these authors. Gutmann, introducing Taylor's seminal essay 'The Politics of Recognition', describes universalism as 'totalitarian' (1994: 7), while Irigaray puts it thus: 'supposedly universal values . . . turn out to entail *one part of humanity*

having *a hold on the other*' (1993: 16, her emphasis). These are important and defensible views: difficult questions need to be asked about the potential tyranny of compulsory inclusion. The recent convergence in Western Europe of social integration policies with the 'war on terror' is only one case in point. Arguments that diversity is valuable – necessary even – do not conflict with the understanding of identification set out in this book.

Having acknowledged common ground, I must now disagree with two core propositions that are broadly shared by difference theorists. The first insists that knowing who's who is primarily – if not wholly – a matter of establishing and marking differences between people. Hall summarises this point of view with particular clarity:

> [identities] are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity . . . Above all, and directly contrary to the form in which they are constantly invoked, identities are constructed through, not outside, difference . . . identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude.
>
> (Hall 1996: 4–5)

From this perspective, knowing who I am is a matter of distinguishing and distancing myself from you and you, and from that person over there. The recognition of 'us' hinges mainly upon our not being 'them'. In Benhabib's words, 'Since every search for identity includes differentiating oneself from what one is not, identity politics is always and necessarily a politics of the creation of difference' (1996: 3). Note the use of words such as 'only', 'always' and 'necessarily'. Note too that identification *with* and differentiation *from* are seen as dissimilar processes: 'differentiation from' permits 'identification with' to happen, and is thus logically prior and apparently more significant. Difference almost appears to have become the defining principle of collectivity, the fulcrum around which the human world revolves.

The second proposition shared by the difference theorists about which one should, at least, be very sceptical is their argument that difference and identity have become more marked and more significant over the last few decades: 'cultural diversity is, indeed, the fate of the modern world' (Hall 1992: 8). We are, apparently, living in a new globalised epoch of diversity and identity politics. Since I will discuss this further in Chapter 3, I will merely register my disagreement here and move on, to focus on two reasons for rejecting the notion that knowing who's who is primarily a matter of difference.

SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE

In the first place, and leaving aside the established meanings of the word 'identity' discussed earlier in this chapter – for definitions can always be contested – emphasising difference misses the utter interdependence, whether in abstract logic or messy everyday practice, of similarity and difference. Neither makes sense without the other, and identification requires both. And, indeed, some of the writers against whom I am arguing appear to recognise, to some extent, the necessary interplay of similarity and difference:

> identity is always particular, as much about difference as about shared belonging . . . identity can help us to comprehend the formation of the fateful pronoun 'we' and to reckon with the patterns of inclusion and exclusion that it cannot help but to create. This may be one of the most troubling aspects of all: the fact that the formation of every 'we' must leave out or exclude a 'they', that identities depend on the marking of difference.
>
> (Gilroy 1997: 301–302)

Gilroy appears to acknowledge the role of similarity, or 'shared belonging'. Having done so, he nonetheless privileges difference: it remains, for him, the active principle upon which knowing who's who depends.

Against this, the point is that, logically and in everyday interaction, it doesn't make sense to separate similarity and difference in this way, or to accord one greater significance. We cannot have one without the other: to identify something as an A is to assert that it has certain properties in common with all other As, and that it differs from Bs, Cs and so on. To say who I am is to say who or what I am not, but it is also to say with whom I have things in common. For example, one's personal name is one of the definitive markers of individual difference. But, to name oneself is generally also to establish one's public gender. To those with the appropriate contextual knowledge it also positions one in terms of family or kin-group membership. Further local knowledge may enable one's ethnicity or religion, or both, to be established. Thus, while a personal name signifies individual distinctiveness, it also positions its bearer in terms of collective similarities (and, of course, differences).

And there is a more serious problem. If it were possible to assert one's distinctive difference from others without simultaneously indicating those with whom one might have stuff in common, all one could actually do is communicate who or what one is not. Unless one could exhaustively deny the entire array of possible persons, or kinds of person, that one might be

– bar one, of course – it would not be sufficient to communicate who or what one is. Even if one could perform such an implausible feat, it is not clear how one would then give substance to what or who one might claim to be. Difference on its own is simply not enough to establish who's who. It doesn't work.

The conventional solution to this problem is to use the concept of 'identity' to denote relationships of similarity, and to say that 'identity' and 'difference', although utterly distinct, should be thought about together, a view that can be traced back at least as far as Locke in the late seventeenth century (see Anthias 1998; Benhabib 1996; Taylor 1998; Woodward 1997b). This might be fair enough, although it arguably underestimates the degree to which similarity and difference, in order to make any sense at all, must each imply the other. It also flies in the face of what some of the difference theorists actually say. Hall, for example, is emphatic that he is not concerned with 'identity in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness . . . without internal differentiation)' (1996: 4). His model of identification and attachment – derived from a cultural reading of psychoanalysis – depends upon the exclusion of others and the establishment of difference as the foundation of personal meaning and self-regard. Similarity is not even in the frame.

A more significant difficulty with this position is that separating identification and differentiation from each other seems, in practice, to end up privileging the notion of 'identification *with*'. In this mode, identity becomes coterminous with uniformity and conformity, if not outright conformism. Butler, for example, seems only able to understand identity as attachment and subjective conformism. In pursuit of the liberating power of difference, her argument for the subversion and transcendence of identity – or, rather, of what she sees as the illusion, or trap, of identity – is grounded in 'the presumption that identities are self-identical, persisting through time as the same, unified and internally coherent' (Butler 1990: 16). The similarity to Hall's view, quoted above, is striking. It is only Butler's understandings of identity and difference as utterly distinct from each other, and of identity as identification *with*, that allows her the luxury of even imagining the transcendence of identity. The emphasis upon 'identification with' ignores two linked realities: that identification is also a matter of classifying oneself and others, and that classification depends upon the interplay of similarity and difference. Against the utopian possibilities evoked by Butler, it is vital to recognise that absolute differentiation from others – no less than absolute absorption in others – is likely to be a very rare bird indeed (not to mention flightless and in constant danger of extinction).

To summarise the argument so far, knowing who's who involves processes of classification and signification that necessarily invoke criteria of similarity and difference. Attending to difference on its own, or even simply emphasising difference, cannot provide us with a proper account of how it is that we know who's who, or what's what, in the human world. To say this does not, of course, imply any 'objectively real' sense of similarity or difference. It is constructions or attributions of similarity and difference, made by people engaging in the identification of self and others, with which I am concerned.

The above criticisms converge in a recognition that foregrounding difference underestimates the reality and significance of human collectivity. Whatever else might be involved in knowing who's who, it is undeniably a matter of similarity and solidarity, of belonging and community, of 'us' and 'we'. In this, as in other respects, the focus on difference arguably flies in the face of the observable realities of the human world.

'Us', 'we', 'community', 'solidarity' are, however, words that should carry a health warning. They are deeply political – communitarianism and nationalism are good examples of their ideological potential – and we should at least approach them with apposite caution. Charles Taylor's or Judith Butler's discussions of the dangers inherent in 'identity as sameness', and their arguments for, respectively, the foundational necessity to democracy of the recognition of difference, or the progressively subversive character of difference, are worth remembering. So, too, is Samuel Johnson's famous eighteenth-century characterisation of patriotism as the last refuge of the scoundrel. We should also remember that these notions are imagined. In Anthony Cohen's words (1985), they are 'symbolic constructs'. They are, however, capable of being extremely powerful imaginings, in terms of which people act. They are anything but imaginary, in that they are enormously consequential. Solidarity, once it is successfully conjured up, is a powerful force.

We should also recognise that invocations of similarity are intimately entangled with the conjuring up of difference. One of the things that people have in common in any group is precisely the recognition of other groups or categories from whom they differ. It cannot be otherwise: Hughes understood this in the late 1940s, and Barth developed the idea further (Barth 1969; Hughes 1994: 91–96). But to acknowledge this is a far cry from calling up difference alone – or even mainly – as the primary arbiter of who's who. The human world simply doesn't work like that.

THEORISING IDENTITY

My other basic objection to the difference paradigm is that concentrating on difference makes it difficult to deal with the core questions of social theory, or even, perhaps, to engage in social theory at all. In this context, I take the consistent, and connected, core concerns of social theory to be: 'How should we understand social change?' and 'How are we to understand the relationship between the individual and the collective?' (Jenkins 2002a: 15–20).

Focusing only, or even mainly, on difference is unhelpful if one wants to understand social change, in that it doesn't accord with observable realities. Put simply, collective mobilisation in the pursuit of shared objectives is a characteristic theme of history and social change. It may not be the only important process at work, but it is to be found wherever one looks, and, unavoidably, collective politics involves collective imaginings of similarity as well as of difference (witness the remarks of Marx and Simmel, quoted earlier). To make the point from a different direction, the consequences and processes of the change from agrarian to industrial lifestyles and production – as Durkheim outlined in 1893, in *The Division of Labour in Society* (1984) – can, at least in part, be understood by looking at the interplay and significance of relationships of similarity and difference.

Moving on to the relationship between individuality and collectivity, the problem is even more fundamental. I am not sure that it is possible to have any comprehension of the collective dimensions of social life – other than a merely additive, arithmetical model – if we emphasise difference. If knowing who's who is essentially, or even largely, a matter of fission and exclusion, then where does the 'more-than-the-sum-of-the-parts' that is an enduring mystery of everyday human life come from? In this context, it is noteworthy that most theorists of difference – with the exception of Butler – routinely use collective notions such as 'culture' or 'society' that are in considerable tension with their fetishisation of difference. Perhaps they simply have no choice.

There is also a more general point to be made. Theory of all kinds depends upon three linked processes: abstraction, generalisation and comparison. Social theory is no exception. A model of the human world that prioritises difference offers, at best, only very limited scope for generalisation and comparison. At least one difference theorist has acknowledged this:

> One of the dangers of focusing on difference may be a retreat into empiricism. For the very assertion of the existence of *differences* involves

> taking at face value the appearance of living in a diverse and fragmented universe. There is a failure to interrogate what may lie behind or beneath these surface appearances, to find connections and commonalities.
>
> (Anthias 1998: 509, her emphasis)

Apropos empiricism, Anthias is right, although she may understate the case. The problem that she identifies may – and only apparently paradoxically – explain why discussions of difference are so rarely based in systematic empirical research; why there is a dependence, at best, on loose qualitative description; and why the essay is the dominant form. Perhaps this is the only way to disguise, and keep at bay, the ever-present threats of empiricism and a-theoria.

Finally, there is something other to think about than social theory, and something more important. One source of the difference paradigm was the post-1989 realignment and reorientation of left-wing politics; it is easy to sympathise with it as a political move that was appropriate to the times. One of the ethical impulses that stand behind the emphasis on difference is a plea, not just for tolerance of difference, but for its enthusiastic embrace:

> If ever-growing social complexity, cultural diversity and a proliferation of identities are indeed a mark of the postmodern world, then all the appeals to our common interest as humans will be as naught unless we can at the same time learn to live with difference.
>
> (Weeks 1990: 92)

Leaving aside the supposed historical novelty or post-modernity of difference, we have returned to Taylor's 'politics of recognition' (1994), a call to arms, whether liberal or radical, on behalf of pluralism. A call that is difficult to ignore. These are values that need to be defended, nurtured and supported, no less today than fifty or a hundred years ago.

They are not, however, enough. There are pressing public issues that are simply not addressed by proclaiming the positivities of difference, or arguing for tolerance and pluralism. They concern collective belonging, collective disadvantage and, not least, the relationship between the freedom to be different, on the one hand, and equality and collective responsibility, on the other. Thinking about these issues – none of which is either new or simple – requires a model of identification that places similarity and difference at its heart, on an equal footing with each other. Even if it is not, to echo Bauman (1999: 190), time to 'recall universalism from exile' – certainly not an unreconstructed universalism, anyway – it is, perhaps,

time for a return to a politics which recognises responses to collective ills other than the purely privatised and individualised.

WHO'S WHO (AND WHAT'S WHAT)

I have argued here, and in Chapter 1, that the human world is unimaginable without some means of knowing who others are and some sense of who we are. Since, unlike other primates, we don't rely on smell or gestures – although these aren't insignificant in face-to-face identification – one of the first things that we do on meeting a stranger is attempt to identify them, to locate them on our 'mindscapes' (Zerubavel 1997). The cues that we rely upon include embodiment, clothing, language, answers to questions, incidental or accidental disclosures of information, and information from third parties. Our efforts are not always successful, either: 'mistaken identity' is a common enough experience to be a staple of folktales and literature. Equally familiar is the theme of 'lost' or 'confused' identity: people who can't prove who they are, who appear not to know 'who they are', who are one thing one moment and something else the next, who are in the throes of 'identity crises'.

Situations such as these provide occasional cause to reflect upon identity. We try to work out who strangers are even when we are merely observing them. We work at presenting ourselves, so that others will work out who we are along the lines that we wish them to. We speculate about whether so-and-so is doing *that* because of 'her identity'. And we talk. We talk about whether people are born gay or become gay because of their upbringing. About what it means to be 'grown up'. About the differences between the English and the Scots (or the Welsh, or the Irish). About the family who have just moved in round the corner: we shake our heads, after all you can't expect anything else, they're from the wrong part of town. About 'Arabs', 'Muslims', 'rag heads' and 'terrorists'. We talk about identity all the time (although we may not always use the word itself).

Change, or its prospect, is particularly likely to provoke concerns about identity. The transformation of everyday life in the affluent West during the 1950s and 1960s, for example, occurred amid argument and conflict about gender, sexuality, generation, race, class, imperialism and patriotism; all of which speak very directly to our topic here. More recently in the United Kingdom, monetary union in Europe – and, indeed, every other aspect of the European Union, from decision-making in the Council of Ministers to the regulations governing sausage manufacture – conjures up the ghosts of centuries of strife with our continental neighbours and is interpreted as another attempt to undermine British national identity.

Public concern about identity may wax and wane, but the perpetual bottom line is that we can't live routine lives as humans without identification, without knowing – and sometimes puzzling about – who we are and who others are. This is true no matter where we are, or what our way of life or language. Without repertoires of identification we would not be able to relate to each other meaningfully or consistently. We would lack that vital sense of who's who and what's what. Without identity there could simply be no human world, as we know it. This is the most basic sense in which identity matters. Accordingly, my focus in the rest of this book is primarily on the mundane matter of how identification works, and the production and reproduction of identities during interaction. Before getting down to this in detail, however, there is one final issue to address, the relationship between modernity and identity. This is the subject of the next chapter.

3

A SIGN OF THE TIMES?

Identity has been one of the unifying themes of social science for the last twenty years, and shows no signs of going away. Everybody has *something* to say about identity: anthropologists, geographers, historians, philosophers, political scientists, psychologists, sociologists. From debates about the modernity of self-identity, through feminist deconstructions of gendered social conventions, to urgent attempts to understand the apparent resurgence of nationalism and ethnic politics, the field is crowded. Identity, it seems, is bound up with everything from political asylum to credit card fraud, shopping to sex. And the talk is about change, too: about new identities, the return of old ones and the transformation of existing ones. About shape-shifting, on the one hand, and the deep foundations of selfhood, on the other.

IMAGE AND POLITICS

One obvious reason for social scientists' fascination with identity is that we have no monopoly on the notion. The advertising industry, for example, has long understood how to sell people more, and more expensive, stuff by selling them an identity: a 'new look', a 'make-over', a 'new me'. The diversity of identification has become part of the self-conscious stock in trade of advertising and marketing, in the identification of niche markets and categories of consumer and the careful negotiation of the myriad possibilities for consumer alienation and offence (Costa and Bamossy 1995). On the other hand, the appropriation of brand names and mass products for assertive and very specific identity projects is increasingly well

documented (e.g. Lamont and Molnár 2001), as is the more general significance of consumption patterns for identification (Bourdieu 1984; Lamont and Fournier 1992). While anthropology suggests that identification, consumption and display have always been connected, what *may* be new – although I'm not wholly convinced – is our disenchanted awareness of what we're doing and self-conscious collusion with the sirens of the global market (even after we've read *No Logo*).

Moreover, the market in identities doesn't just involve buying new clothes or a new car. Some people seek their 'new me' in different marketplaces, in psychotherapy or spirituality. For others, the pilgrim's way leads to the beaches of Goa or the bright lights of the big city. For many of us, however, the pursuit of new or alternative identities never gets beyond our daydreams. The routine stability and constancy of ordinary lives, and the uneven distribution of the resources that are necessary to play the makeover game with any seriousness, are often lost to sight amid all of the talk about identity.

In international politics, to take another example, identity seems to have become a symbolic public good the defence of which asserts a legitimacy that is beyond criticism or opposition. Reified into a sacred and holy apotheosis, identity is something to which everyone has a *right*. It allows the pursuit of narrowly sectional interests to pass – covered by at least a fig leaf of sincerity – as a defence of the ineffable (Malešević 2006). It is a difficult card to trump (although, as ever, another kind of common sense – based in *Realpolitik* and the pursuit of business interests – still shapes foreign policies).

Issues of identity are also deeply rooted in national politics. In an increasingly globalised world, politicians far from the extreme right seem to feel perfectly comfortable wrapped in the patriotic certainties of the flag. On the left – such as it is at the beginning of the twenty-first century – 'identity politics' still attempts to appeal to disadvantaged constituencies that are based on shared experiences other than class-based exploitation. Gender is important in this respect and it has become an established basis for politics in its own right. For decades women all over the world have been questioning and confronting their conventional identities and striving to establish more equal and self-determined ways of being women.

Indigenous peoples, too, have begun to identify themselves as political actors, distancing themselves from the metropolis, establishing new relations of difference and similarity within which to challenge unchecked tourism and the expropriation of environmental resources. Their national governments, in turn, are discovering that although the well-shod tourist's fascination with the downtrodden of the earth may be as shallow as their

lifestyle holiday – the contemporary equivalent of the nineteenth-century European grand tour, perhaps – it is precisely that which encourages them to spend their hard currency.

Elsewhere, in the former state socialist countries of Eastern Europe, the politics of local identity continue to mushroom in the rubble of bureaucratic centralism. Meanwhile, Russia is reasserting itself and Russians are calling themselves a 'people' again. And no discussion of identity written after 11 September 2001 would be complete without an acknowledgement of the re-emergence of religion as a major index of who's who and what's what. Within and between nation-states, and from the shadows and holes of the few remaining indeterminate borderlands, faith and sect have returned to centre-stage, to teach us that modernity may turn out to be not quite what we had expected. Identity, it seems, is the touchstone of the times.

MODERNITY AND IDENTITY

Some recent social science about identity resembles too closely what the politicians and advertising executives say. The urgency of the issues at stake may mean, for example, that *what* identity is – or, indeed, *that* it is and that it *matters* – is often taken for granted in analysing the local specifics of messy situations. Less excusable, perhaps, is the celebration of collective or individual *self*-identification, or the presumption that what we buy is *necessarily* an expression of who we are. More critical distance between social scientists and their subject matter may be needed.

Arguments that concerns about difference and identity are historically recent phenomena – and perhaps even diagnostic or definitive of post- or late modernity – are largely the specialist prerogative of social theorists, however. Here is a moderate version of this thesis:

> At earlier historical moments, identity was not so much an issue; when societies were more stable, identity was to a great extent assigned, rather than selected or adopted. In current times, however, the concept of identity carries the full weight of the need for a sense of who one is, together with an often overwhelming pace of change in surrounding social contexts – changes in the groups and networks in which people and their identities are embedded and in the societal structures and practices in which those networks are themselves embedded.
>
> (Howard 2000: 367–368)

This has already been discussed briefly in Chapter 2, and the arguments are not convincing. It's true that *how* we talk about who's who and what's

what is historically and culturally specific, so the present epoch will have its own terms and themes. It is probably also true that the *volume* of discourse about identity has reached new magnitudes, if only because global noise and chatter about everything have increased with the population and the widening availability of communication technologies.

Allowing for the concerns of the age and a rise in the noise level, reflections upon identity have a long history. An established sociological and psychological literature about identity goes back to the turn of the century and before: James, Cooley, Mead, Simmel come to mind immediately. In the present (post-)modern hubbub this body of work has been somewhat neglected, but it remains fundamental to social theory and the sociology of identity. Going back further, Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, for example, published in 1690, includes a chapter on 'Identity and Diversity'. About a hundred years earlier, when, in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare wrote 'All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players: They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts', among other things he anticipated Goffman. Six hundred years before Locke and Shakespeare, similar themes and issues were important to Indian philosophers (Harré 2000: 64–66). We sacrifice historical perspective if we neglect the variety of intellectual traditions that have reflected on identity: there is nothing intrinsically new about these issues (Williams 2000: 13–30).

This is not to deny the reality of contemporary concerns about identity and identity-related issues, or their definitive modernity. These concerns reflect the uncertainty produced by dramatic changes: reorientations of work, gender and family, class and status mobility, migration, medical and technological innovation, the redrawing of political borders, the intrusive reality of global media. Our cognitive maps do not always fit the landscape of others around us. We encounter people whose identities and natures are not clear to us. We may no longer even be sure about ourselves. The future may no longer appear as predictable as it seems to have been for earlier generations. Who's who, and what's what, may not always be obvious.

But change – the confrontation of languages, traditions and ways of life; the transformation of divisions of labour; demographic flux; catastrophe and calamity; progress and social improvement – is not in any sense recent or modern. It is arguably the norm in human experience. It isn't anachronistic, for example, to recognise 'crises of identity' in early modern witch-hunting or in the medieval persecution of heretics, Jews, lepers and homosexuals, or to interpret these in the context of contemporary change and upheaval (Moore 1987). Or to see in the almost perpetual motion of a city such as Wroclaw, in today's Poland – also known, between the

eleventh century and the twentieth, as Wrotizla, Vretslav, Presslaw and Breslau, ruled by Poles, Czechs, Germans, Bohemians, Austrians, Prussians and then Germans again – struggles about identification: about who's who and what's what in that particular corner of central Europe (Davies and Moorhouse 2002).

Globalisation is a shorthand term for a complex package of comprehensive changes that, in many ways, defined the twentieth century (although some of these processes began centuries earlier). Whatever we think about globalisation's history, it has had an impact on the nature and salience of identification in the modern world. In particular, globalisation means that people are aware of living in a global rather than a local context: 'all the world's a stage' has become 'the stage is all the world'. And this is true almost everywhere we look. Some of the Maasai of Tanzania, for example, inspired by external non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the campaigns of circumpolar and Amazonian peoples, now participate in the international 'Indigenous Peoples' movement, exploiting the symbolic capital that attaches to that global identification in their dealings with the state (Igoe 2006). On a different tack, what it means to be 'authentically' Irish has become, at least in part, defined in complex – sometimes ironic, sometimes not – relations with a global audience, and with a global marketplace in which 'authentic Irishness' is bought and sold (Mays 2005).

Globalisation is also widely believed to have made human life more diverse. This is an important part of the argument, discussed in Chapter 2, that difference has become the dominant (post-)modern theme when it comes to knowing who's who. Some of this is obvious and hard to deny: due to vastly increased volumes and speeds of movement and communication, and capitalism's abhorrence of a market vacuum, more experiences and elective identities are on offer today than ever before. On the pavement of any modern city we are confronted with diversity as a matter of routine everyday expectation. There are, however, three good reasons why acknowledging globalised diversity does not necessarily get us very far.

In the first place, to do so tells us nothing about the meanings of diversity *then* compared with the meanings of diversity *now*. There is every reason to think that in the past, as now, diversity had a range of consequences for people's everyday experience, depending upon historical, local and personal contingencies. Diversity in itself – if we can sensibly talk about diversity *in itself* – may not actually be particularly significant, so whether or not there is 'more' or 'less' of it is unlikely to tell us much about what it means.

Second, the literature about globalisation suggests that, alongside diversity, globalisation brings in its train greater homogeneity, particularly

in organisational settings. Ritzer's *McDonaldization of Society* (2004) is an influential version of this thesis and despite some telling critiques of his argument (Smart 1999) it would be perverse not to recognise that it has captured something important about modernity. But – much like diversity, in fact – homogeneity may not be particularly important *in itself*, either. If nothing else, it is likely to be mediated by other factors and processes. For example, Hannerz (1992) and others have argued that the economic, political and cultural impacts of being homogenised or globalised may inspire local responses that, in various ways and for a range of reasons, (re)invent diversity in the guise of 'tradition' and 'heritage', reassert existing identifications or customise the global into local forms. To use a word that Robertson (1995) kidnapped from the discourses of international management, this is 'glocalization'. Much like similarity and difference, the global and the local keep each other close company.

Finally, although globalisation has made it more likely that more people will, in the routine of their everyday lives, encounter Others and Other ways of doing things, an alternative narrative of globalisation is at least as significant. 'Glocalisation' and 'globalisation' are not options that have been available to everyone. The history of the expansion of globally powerful nation-states has been a chronicle of ethnocide and genocide. Hunters, fisherfolk and subsistence agriculturalists have not simply had to adapt, they have in many cases been exterminated. The last of the Beothuk people of Newfoundland died in 1829, the last indigenous Tasmanian in 1876 and the twentieth century saw further extinctions. Less dramatically, in Europe and elsewhere the nation-state project – the worldwide standard-isation of which has been a significant dimension of globalisation – has usually involved the suppression of local and regional ways of life (e.g. E. Weber 1976). The world is arguably less diverse in important respects than it was several hundred years ago.

So, if diversity is not new, what of the fragmentation and contradiction that apparently (e.g. Woodward 1997b: 15–23) characterises post-modernity, and post-modern identities? If by this we mean that people are identified in a multiplicity of ways, and that these do not always fit well together, producing personal troubles and public issues to which they and others have to respond, then once again the argument about their historical novelty seems, at best, unproven. The great and ancient literatures of the world, religious and secular, seem to suggest that such things are nothing new. To draw upon my Methodist upbringing, the Bible is full of examples of issues and troubles of this kind. The story of Joseph is one such; the parable of the Good Samaritan – with its telling response to a telling question about identity, 'Who is my neighbour?' (Esler 2000) – is another.

Change also reveals itself in the intimate details of individual lives, and the privacies of the person occupy a particular and important place in contemporary social science discourses about identity. 'Reflexive self-identity' is among the phenomena hailed as peculiarly and diagnostically modern by some social theorists, most notably Giddens. *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991) expands upon his earlier critique of the concept of post-modernity (Giddens 1990), to take in the intimacies of selfhood and their apparent transformations at the end of the twentieth century. Giddens is concerned to understand the politicisation of the personal, the private and the intimate. He argues that self-identity is a distinctively modern project within which individuals can reflexively construct a personal narrative for themselves which allows them to understand themselves as in control of their lives and futures. Apparently, 'life politics' has emerged in the capitalist democracies to fill the vacuum left by the decline of the politics of class, and therapy and counselling are now among the characteristic – perhaps even the most distinctive – discourses of modernity (Giddens 1991: 33). To appropriate an expression with its origins in the women's movement of the 1960s, 'the personal is the political' provides the sub-text for Giddens' argument about our contemporary concern with identity.

This argument, predicated as it is upon definitions of rationality, reflexivity and self-identity that tie them to the modern era post-Weber and post-Freud (thus effectively foreclosing on any debate before it begins), is *at least* an overstatement, revealing more about the conceits of Western modernity, and its intellectual elite, than anything else. Where, for example, does it leave the many millions of people, in Europe and the United States, never mind anywhere else, who, for whatever reasons, do not spend much, or even any, time agonising over 'life narratives' and 'personal growth'? Who have other things – not better, please note, just *other* – to fret about? Are they outside the loop of the 'late modern age', stranded in a historical cul-de-sac?

It is also an argument that privileges a secular understanding of both identity and modernity. It is not straining interpretive licence to see in religions of personal redemption thoughtful, *reflexive* responses to 'ontological insecurity' (Giddens 1991: 53). Salvation is as much a project of the self – although that word begs as many questions as it answers – as 'personal growth' or 'psychological integration'. Ideologies of spiritual salvation seek to understand and identify the essentials and the meaning of individual conscious existence no less than ideologies of personal development. Both offer a raft to cling to in the storms of life; in both, the relationship between self-deception and self-knowledge is intimate. Saint

Augustine's *Confessions*, for example, written about 1600 years ago, is a testament to the possibilities for re-forging the self – personal growth – offered as an example to others. Stepping back nearly another thousand years, one can understand Buddhism as a project for the reformation of the self (Carrithers 1985).

Finally, there is another reason why we should be deeply suspicious of claims for the historical novelty of either diversity or reflexive self-identity. They bear a close family resemblance to other claims about the novelty – and superior wisdom or sophistication – of the here and now. Among the other aspects of the human world that are apparently distinctively modern are childhood and privacy. The smug anthropologist in me wants at this point to insist that arguments such as these may reflect poorly on the ethnocentricity and comparative ethnographic – and historical – ignorance of their authors. However, I suspect that what they really tell us about are the conceits of modernity, and the propensity – even among those who identify with post-modernism – to see the past as no more than a lengthy prologue to the present. Historicism is a pervasive temptation.

PUTTING IDENTITY INTO PERSPECTIVE

Allowing for the reservations that I have just expressed, our concerns about identity at the beginning of the twenty-first century are, of course, to a considerable extent specific to their moment, as are their contexts and the media in and through which they are expressed. There is something distinctive about where we are now, as there is something distinctive about every time and place. It would, for example, be foolish to suggest that the women's movement has not been a major historical development, and modern to boot.

There is nothing to be gained, however, from labelling notions such as difference, identity or reflexivity as definitively modern: are we really to believe, for example, that people did not know who they were, or think about it, before the twentieth century? Some of these claims are simply too ponderous to carry their own weight. There is, for example, the well-known argument that the individual 'subject', having first appeared as a definitive and unique product of the European Enlightenment, has disappeared under conditions of post-modernity (Jameson 1991). At best, this rests upon a notion of subjectivity and agency that is too narrow – too trivial, indeed – for sociological use. At worst, it takes the presumptions of modernity too much at their own, self-serving face value. With respect to both of its major claims – at the dawn and the supposed dusk of modernity – it can and should be challenged empirically.

Empirical critique aside, there are other grounds for concern about the social theoretical implications of these discourses about (post-)modern identity. The disquiets of Brubaker and Cooper and Malešević have been discussed in Chapter 2: by their lights 'identity' has become too overburdened with meanings to mean anything at all. Bendle has also suggested (2002) that the ways in which identity is understood by Giddens and others[1] – as a fundamental essence of individual selfhood, vital to personal well-being, on the one hand; as evanescent, utterly constructed and situationally contingent, on the other – combine to produce incoherence and theoretical incapacity. Although these critiques may go a little too far – and risk throwing out the baby with the bathwater – they are necessary and important anti-theses to a self-sustaining body of theory whose authors have forgotten the fundamental importance of systematic inquiry into the observable realities of the human world, increasingly (mis)taken the proper subject of social theory to be social theorists and, one suspects, (mis)understood their own existential crises to be universal problems of the age.

It is nothing new to be self-conscious about identity: about what it means to be human, what it means to be a particular kind of human, what it means to be an individual and a person, whether people are who and what they appear to be, and so on. It is nothing new to be uncertain about these matters from time to time, or to think that they are important. To suggest otherwise risks assigning most of human experience to a historical anteroom, waiting for modernity to turn the lights on, and reinvents ethnocentrism and historicism under the reassuring sign of post-modernism's break with both. What we need instead is a generic framework for understanding how identification works that will accommodate its roots in human nature as well as its construction and contingency, allowing us to get on with the sociological business of approaching all human experience on its own terms in order better to understand it. The rest of this book offers just such a framework.

4

UNDERSTANDING
IDENTIFICATION

One of the assumptions that much social science has in common with the 'everyday thinking' of 'common sense' or 'common knowledge' is a radical distinction between the individual and the collective.[1] This means that *collective* identity and *individual* identity are typically understood as different kinds of phenomena, and the relationships between unique individuality and shared collectivity tend to be unexamined or treated as axiomatic. Much otherwise sophisticated sociological argument, for example, offers a 'black box' where there should be an attempt to understand identification processes. Even social psychology – such as 'social identity theory' (Brewer and Hewstone 2004; Capozza and Brown 2000; Hogg and Abrams 1988; Robinson 1996) or 'discourse theory' (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998; Potter 1996; Potter and Wetherell 1987) – which *does* look at process and typically focuses on individuals, treats 'personal' identification and 'social' identification as different psychological conditions or constructs, and understands groups in a coarse-grained and reified fashion. Something important is still taken for granted, something important still missed (and a recent psychological contribution that begins to look at this absence is Ashton *et al*. 2004).

In this book I adopt another approach. This perspective, which is not dramatically new, argues that:

- with respect to identification, the individually unique and the collectively shared can be understood as similar in important respects;
- the individual and the collective are routinely entangled with each other;

- individual and collective identifications only come into being within interaction;
- the processes by which each is produced and reproduced are analogous;
- the theorisation of identification must therefore accommodate the individual and the collective in equal measure.

The most significant contrast between individual and collective identification in this model may be that the former emphasises difference and the latter similarity. This is only a matter of their respective *emphases*, however: each emerges out of the interplay of similarity and difference.

The clear-cut differentiation of the individual and the collective is often underpinned by a further ontological assumption: that one or the other is the more substantial or 'real'. Common sense and psychology – even at its most 'social' – both tend to privilege the individual. Sociologists (and social anthropologists) tend to the reverse. While some may espouse methodological individualism – the view that the only acceptable *data* are statements about individuals and aggregates of individuals – sociologists are, with a few exceptions such as ethnomethodology and rational actor theory at its most extreme, unlikely to embrace the radical theoretical individualism of psychology (or economics).

This is not to say, however, that sociology is definitively collectivist while common-sense knowledge is individualistic. Neither proposition is, in any straightforward sense, true. In the first place it depends on how one defines sociology. C. Wright Mills offers a view that still commands considerable support:

> The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals . . . to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society . . . Perhaps the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between 'the personal troubles of milieu' and 'the public issues of social structure'.
>
> (Mills 1959: 5, 6, 8)

There is nothing collectivist about this: the individual is, in fact, placed at the heart of the enterprise (although not more so than the collective). What Mills calls 'society' – and I call the 'human world' (Jenkins 2002a: 3–5) – is the field upon which the individual and the collective meet and meld. This view is an important foundation for the understanding of identity offered in this book.

Characterising common sense, or common knowledge, as individualistic raises different issues. Primarily, we must ask *whose* common sense or knowledge? Staying close to home, within 'Western common sense' or 'Western European common sense' there is enormous diversity: even within national borders – the United Kingdom or France, for example – the differences in everyday thinking are as remarkable as the similarities. Individualism, for example, is a broader and more heterodox church than is suggested by the dominant Western political ontology of liberalism. How, for example, should we characterise the distinctively Scandinavian attachment to corporatist social democracy *and* individualist egalitarianism? What about the core platform of Christianity, with its combination of communion and congregation with the pursuit of individual salvation? On the other side of the balance sheet, let's not forget that socialism is originally a distinctly European ideology. Looking further afield than Europe, it is clear that there is considerable variation, across time and space, in how people understand what we think of as 'the collective' and 'the individual': in this respect, there may be an almost infinite plurality of 'non-Western' common senses.

We may move closer to the intersubjective[2] realities of everyday life – and, indeed, everyday thinking – if we view the individualist viewpoint as a pragmatic interpretive framework which permits actors to construct a first line of sense and defence in a human world which, whatever else, is peopled by embodied individuals, of which we are each one, and with whom we each have to deal. We are all to some extent – and of necessity – pragmatic individualists in our dealings with others. As suggested by the quotation from Mills above, *pragmatic individualism* is a prerequisite for the exercise of the sociological imagination rather than a barrier to it. It is also the only possible foundation for understanding identity.

The pragmatic individualism of this book is grounded in an understanding of the human world that I have developed elsewhere (Jenkins 2002a: 68–76; 2008: 55–69). Leaning heavily on Erving Goffman and, to some extent, Anthony Giddens, I suggest that the world as constructed and experienced by humans can be best understood as three distinct 'orders':

- *the individual order* is the human world as made up of embodied individuals and what-goes-on-in-their-heads;
- *the interaction order* is the human world as constituted in relationships between individuals, in what-goes-on-between-people;
- *the institutional order* is the human world of pattern and organisation, of established-ways-of-doing-things.

This is a way of looking at a complex but unified phenomenon, the human world, and viewing the same observable realities – humans and their works – from different points of view, paying attention to different stuff: embodied individuals, interaction and institutions, respectively. The three orders are simultaneous and occupy the same space, intersubjectively and physically. As may become apparent below, it is almost impossible to talk about one without at least implying the others. The notion of the 'order' both emphasises that the human world is ordered, if not always orderly, and reminds us that this is a classificatory scheme, intended to further our understanding of the human world and nothing more.

The proper sociological place for the concept of 'identity' is at the heart of our thinking about the relationships between concrete individual behaviour and the necessary abstraction of collectivity. As I have already suggested, this isn't a radical proposition and the model of identification that stems from it is, in most important respects, not new. The ideas of George Herbert Mead, Erving Goffman and Fredrik Barth have been particularly influential in shaping it: the line of intellectual kinship connecting them is the genealogy of this book. The work of many other authors has been significant – particularly Karl Marx, Georg Simmel, Gilbert Ryle, Howard Becker, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, Henri Tajfel, Anthony Cohen, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens and Ian Hacking – but Mead, Goffman and Barth remain my real inspirations.

THE INDIVIDUAL ORDER

If identification is a necessary prerequisite for human life as we understand it, the reverse is also true. Individual identity – embodied in selfhood – is not a meaningful proposition in isolation from the human world of other people. Individuals are unique and variable, but selfhood is thoroughly socially constructed: in the processes of primary and subsequent social-isation, and in the ongoing interaction during which individuals define and redefine themselves and others, throughout their lives. This view derives from American pragmatism, via the seminal contributions of Cooley (1962, 1964) and Mead (1934). From their work, an understanding emerges of selfhood as an ongoing and, in practice, simultaneous synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others. This offers a template for the basic model, which informs my whole argument, of the *internal–external dialectic of identification* as the process whereby all identities – individual and collective – are constituted.

Mead distinguished the 'I' (the ongoing moment of unique individuality) from the 'me' (the internalised attitudes of significant others).

Although this formulation requires considerable modification – and gets it in Chapter 6 – the general idea does not: while I argue for a unitary model of selfhood, that unity is a dialectical synthesis of internal and external definitions. Mead further insisted that self-consciousness, indeed cognition itself, can only be achieved by taking on or assuming the position of the other, in his terms a collective 'generalised other'. This is another idea that cannot be swallowed whole. However, and drawing also upon Ryle's philosophy, the view that 'mind' is processual, interactional – rather than radically and individually autonomous – and reciprocally implicated in identification is central to the model which I outline here. In everyday terms, Mead suggests that we can't see ourselves at all without also seeing ourselves as other people see us. For him the collective reality of 'society' is no more than an extension of this basic theorem of identification.

Mead is equally clear that mind and selfhood are attributes of *embodied* individuals. The embodiment of identity is another thread in my argument. That human beings have bodies is among the most obvious things about us, as are the extensive communicative and non-utilitarian uses to which we put them. The human body is simultaneously a referent of individual continuity, an index of collective similarity and differentiation, and a canvas upon which identification can play. Identification in isolation from embodiment is unimaginable.

Individual identity formation has its roots in our earliest processes of socialisation. Recent post-Piagetian understandings of learning in infancy and childhood and the 'new' sociology and anthropology of childhood allow the development of cognition and the development of identification to be located side by side in primary socialisation. This further suggests that identities which are established this early in life – selfhood, human-ness, gender and, under some circumstances, kinship and ethnicity – are *primary identities*, more robust and resilient to change in later life than other identities. Although change and mutability are fundamental to identification, some identities are more changeable and mutable than others. The primary identifications of selfhood, human-ness and gender, in addition to their deep rooting in infancy and early childhood, are definitively embodied (as local understandings of kinship and ethnicity may be too). Where locally registered embodiment is a criterion of any identity, be it individual or collective, fluidity may be the exception rather than the rule.

THE INTERACTION ORDER

To return to the internal–external dialectic, what people think about us is no less significant than what we think about ourselves. It is not enough simply to assert an identity; that assertion must also be validated, or not, by those with whom we have dealings. *Identity is never unilateral*. Hence the importance of what Goffman (1969) famously described as 'the presentation of self' during interaction. Although people have (some) control over the signals about themselves that they send to others, we are all at a disadvantage in that we cannot ensure either their 'correct' reception or interpretation, or know with certainty how they are received or interpreted. Hence the importance, too, of what Goffman calls 'impression management strategies' in the construction of identity. These dramatise the interface between *self-image* and *public image*. Impression management draws to our attention the performative aspects of identity and the fact that identification is a routine aspect of everyday life.

An important assumption made by Goffman (and, indeed, by Barth, about whom more below) is that individuals consciously pursue goals and interests. They seek to 'be' – and to be 'seen to be' – 'something' or 'somebody', to successfully assume particular identities. This raises two important questions. First, does a self-conscious decision-making model encourage a better understanding of human behaviour? Second, is this kind of choice-making with respect to identity peculiar to modern, industrialised societies? My answers, which underpin the entire argument, are a qualified 'yes' to the first question and an emphatic 'no' to the second.

Bourdieu (1977, 1990), another anthropologist heavily influenced by Goffman, offers a helpful perspective on these questions when he emphasises the improvisational quality of interaction. Improvisation is facilitated and encouraged by 'habitus', the domain of habit, which, in the presentation of self, operates neither consciously nor unconsciously, neither deliberately nor automatically. Although the notion of habitus may in some respects be problematic (Jenkins 2002b: 74–84), it resonates loudly with my perspective on identity: habitus is simultaneously collective and individual, and definitively embodied.

Not only do we identify ourselves in the internal–external dialectic between self-image and public image, but we identify others and are identified by them in turn. One unfairly neglected account of this dialectic is offered by the labelling perspective in the sociology of deviance (e.g. Becker 1963; Matza 1969). It describes the interaction between (internal) self-definition and definition by others (externally) as a process of internalisation. Internalisation may occur if an individual is authoritatively labelled

within an appropriate institutional setting. This model of internalisation isn't, however, sufficient. The capacity of authoritatively applied identification to constitute or influence individual *experience* affects whether or not individuals internalise the label(s) concerned. This is a matter of whose definition of the situation *counts* (put crudely, power). Identification by others has *consequences*. It is the capacity to generate those consequences and make them stick which matters. Labelling may also, of course, evoke resistance (which, no less than internalisation, is an 'identity effect' produced by labelling). Although the labelling perspective emerged from the study of deviance and control, the model works in other contexts – education and the labour market, for example – and for positive as well as negative labels.

THE INSTITUTIONAL ORDER

Moving on to more collective identities, Karl Marx distinguished between a 'class in itself' and 'a class for itself'. The first is unified only in the eye of the beholder, in that its members are believed to have something significant in common (in this case their relationship to the means of production). In the second, those individuals realise that they share a similar situation and define themselves accordingly as members of a collectivity. Appropriating the methodological distinction between groups and categories, a distinction can be made between a collectivity which identifies and defines itself (a group *for* itself) and a collectivity which is identified and defined by others (a category *in* itself).

To avoid reifying the 'reality' of collectivities, it makes further sense to insist on the centrality of process: *group identification* and *categorisation*. Revisiting the internal–external dialectic further makes the point: group identification and categorisation can feed back upon each other, and are very likely to do so. Problematising the group–category distinction also underlines again the centrality of power, and therefore politics, in identity maintenance and change. Asserting, defending, imposing and resisting collective identification are all definitively political. In general, one of my core arguments is that the external or categorical dimensions of identity are not only indispensible but have been insufficiently recognised in social science accounts of identity.

Tajfel's social psychological work in the 1970s, as developed into 'social identity theory' and 'self categorisation theory' (Brewer and Hewstone 2004; Capozza and Brown 2000; Hogg and Abrams 1988; Robinson 1996), suggests that group identification and categorisation are generic processes – and real for individuals – in the human world, with collective

identifications emerging in the context of 'external' *inter*-group relations. This is also a reminder that distinctions between the individual, interactional and institutional orders are only heuristic: here we are, under the rubric of 'the institutional order', folding the argument back into individualist social psychology.

A model of collective identification that is broadly similar in many respects can be traced in the slightly earlier anthropological theories of Barth (1969, 1981). Owing an explicit debt to Goffman, Barth offers a model of ethnic and other identities as somewhat fluid, situationally contingent, and the perpetual subject and object of negotiation. One of his key propositions is that it isn't enough to send a message about identity: that message must be accepted by significant others before an identity can be said to be 'taken on'. As a consequence, identifications are to be found and negotiated at their *boundaries*, in the encounter between internal and external. Staying with Barth, but drawing also upon Anthony Cohen's discussion of the symbolic construction of community (1985), group identification is characteristically constructed across the group boundary, in interaction with others. Boundaries are permeable, persisting despite the flow of personnel across them, and identity is constructed in transactions at and across the boundary. During these transactions a balance is struck between (internal) group identification and (external) categorisation by others. Barth's distinction (1969) between 'boundary' and 'content' – the 'cultural stuff' which is supposed to characterise an ethnic group, for example – allows a wider distinction to be drawn between *nominal identity* and *virtual identity*: between the *name* and the *experience* of an identity. It is possible for individuals to share the same nominal identity, and for that to mean very different things to them in practice, to have different consequences for their lives, for them to 'do' or 'be' it differently. Nominal–virtual may be related to the group–category distinction but isn't coterminous with it (not least because it can be applied to individual identification as well). It also reaffirms the importance of the consequences of identification, as in the discussion of labelling above.

The nominal–virtual distinction is important. The name can stay the same – X – while what it means in everyday life to be an X can change dramatically. Similarly, the experience may stay relatively stable while the name changes. Both can change. *Either* group identification or categorisation, or both at the same time, can contribute to the array of possibilities. Power and politics are unavoidable, again. To return to Marx, the transformation of a category into a group is a political process of mobilisation, which may be influenced from within and/or without. It is a change of virtual identity that may also become a nominal change. Nominally, the

categorisation of people, by state agencies for example, may be subject to change and it may be resisted. It may also be part of a virtual change in their conditions of existence and quality of life. While the nominal and the virtual are analytically distinct, in the real human world they are everywhere chronically implicated in each other.

Institutions are among the more important contexts within which identification becomes consequential. Institutions are established patterns of practice, recognised as such by actors, which have force as 'the way things are done'. Institutionalised identities are distinctive due to their particular combination of the individual and the collective. Particularly relevant are those institutions which the sociological literature recognises as *organisations*. Organisations are organised and task-oriented collectivities: they are groups. They are also constituted as networks of differentiated membership positions which bestow specific individual identities upon their incumbents.

In addition, identity is bound up with *classification*. In order for persons to be classified, however, a classificatory lexicon must exist: positions and categories, for example. Since organisations – whether formal or informal – are made up, among other things, of positions, and procedures for recruiting individuals to them, they are important vehicles of classification. The constitution and distribution of positions are the outcome of political relationships and struggles, within and without organisations. Institutional recruitment procedures, in allocating persons to those positions, authoritatively allocate particular kinds of identities to individuals, drawing upon wider typifications of identity to do so. This is one of the ways in which nominal and virtual identification are implicated in each other: the allocation of positions (names) is also the allocation of resources and penalties (consequences). Consistency in recruitment practices between organisations – in the labour market, for example – contributes to the formation, maintenance and change of consistent collectivities, classes of persons characterised by similar life-chances and experiences.

Thus individual and collective identities are systematically produced, reproduced and implicated in each other. Following Foucault, Hacking (1990) argues that the classification of individuals is at the heart of modern, bureaucratically rational strategies of government and control (which is not a backdoor admission of the distinctive modernity of discourses of identity, or reflexive identity itself). Identities exist and are acquired, claimed and allocated within power relations. Identification is something *over* which struggles take place and *with* which strategems are advanced – it is means and end in politics – and at stake is the classification of populations as well the classification of individuals.

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVE

So far, two basic threads run through my argument. First, identity is a practical accomplishment, a process. Second, individual and collective identities can be understood using one model, of the dialectical interplay of processes of internal and external definition. To return to the model of the three 'orders', there is more at stake here, however, than a better understanding of identification. Perhaps the most persistent issue in social theory is the 'structure–action' problem, most recently incarnated as the debate about 'structuration' (Parker 2000; Stones 2005). From Marx to Weber to Parsons to Berger and Luckmann to Giddens to Bourdieu, broadly similar questions have been asked:

- How to bring together analytically the active lives and consciousnesses of individuals, the abstract impersonality of the institutional order, and the ebb and flow of historical time?; and
- How to bring public issues and personal troubles into the same frame?

As one of the rare concepts that make as much sense individually as collectively (cf. Ashton *et al.* 2004), identity is a strategic concept in broaching these questions:

- Although identities are necessarily attributes of embodied individuals, they are equally necessarily collectively constituted, sometimes at a high level of abstraction. In identification, the *collective* and the *individual* occupy the same space.
- If identity is conceptualised in terms of process, as identification at work and at play in the interaction order, the distinction between *structure* and *action* may be avoided.
- If those processes are conceptualised as a perpetual dialectic of two analytically (but only analytically) distinct moments – the internal and the external – then the opposition between the *objective* and the *subjective* may also be sidestepped.
- Since identity is bound up with shared repertoires of intentionality (such as morality) *and* interactional networks of constraint and possibility, it is an important concept in our understanding of action and its outcomes, both *intended* and *unintended*.
- The *institutional order* is, at least in part, a network of identities (positions) and of routinised practices for allocating positions (identities) to individuals.
- There is a direct relationship between the distribution of *resources and penalties* and identification: identity both is a criterion for distribution

and is constituted in terms of patterns of distribution (means and end again).

- In the internal and external moments of identification a necessary connection is made between *domination and resistance* and identification.
- The *classification* of populations as a practice of state and other agencies is powerfully constitutive both of institutions and of the interactional experience of individuals.

This list is not offered as an exhaustive catalogue. It has the virtue, however, of moving the debate from the stratosphere of grand theory to the more oxygenated altitudes of what Merton (1957: 5–10) called 'theories of the middle range'. The basic question becomes: how can we relate individuals and collectivities to each other so that neither is privileged, neither is reified or caricatured and, above all, we are enabled to understand better the real human world?

THE INTERNAL AND THE EXTERNAL

At which point more needs to be said about the external–internal distinction. As with Mead's choice of 'I' and 'me' – one of the contexts in which the distinction first appeared, and first appeared to be problematic – this usage is unfortunate in some senses. There is a danger of reifying or objectifying a distinction that, in the interests of explanation and illustration, commits necessary violence to the complexities and subtleties of being. It should be understood metaphorically, and does not imply necessary sequence: first one, then the other. The expression 'moments of identification' is intended to suggest that in principle and in practice the 'external' and 'internal' may be simultaneous (and simultaneity is *very* difficult to write about, since sequence is one of the things that makes language make sense). In this dialectic the focus is firmly upon the synthesis.

Nor is it my intention to suggest a difference of kind. Your external definition of me is an inexorable part of my internal definition of myself – even if I only reject or resist it – and *vice versa*. Both processes are routine everyday practices, and neither is more significant than the other. At most, I am indicating different modes of mutual identification that proceed, not side by side, but in the same interactional space. While it may, for example, be possible and analytically necessary to distinguish different kinds of collectivities – groups and categories – in terms of the relative significance to each of internal or external moments of identification, this is only a matter of emphasis.

That identity is, so to speak, both interior and exterior is one reason why it's significant for the integration of the individual and the collective within social theory. So, too, is the centrality of *time and space* to identification, as is already apparent with respect to sequence and simultaneity (see also Jenkins 2001). The three dimensions of space, and their material coalescence into a 'sense of place', are implied by the interior–exterior metaphor. Identification is always from a point of *view*. For individuals this point of view is, in the first instance, the body. Individual identification is always embodied, albeit sometimes imaginatively, as in fiction or myth, or Internet chat rooms. Collective identities are usually located within territories or regions, and these too can be imagined, as in diasporic myths of return or charts of organisational structure. In that bodies always occupy space, the individual and the collective are to some extent superimposed.

Philosophers have long understood that time is bound up with space in one's experience of self and others (Campbell 1994): space makes no sense outside time. Apart from the inexorable *passage of time* during interaction, a sense of time is inherent within identification because of the *continuity* which, even if only logically, is entailed in a claim to, or an attribution of, identity. Continuity posits a meaningful past and a possible future, and, particularly with respect to identification, is part of the sense of order and predictability upon which the human world depends. We are back to knowing who's who and what's what. The past is a particularly important resource upon which to draw in interpreting the here-and-now and forecasting the future. Individually, 'the past' is memory; collectively, it is history (although individuals do have histories and it isn't absurd to talk about collective memory, even if it might be a potential reification). Neither, however, is necessarily 'real': both are human constructs and both are massively implicated in identification.[3] That they are imagined does not, however, mean they are imaginary.

The argument summarised in this chapter relies heavily on the work of others and is not dramatically innovative. It combines perspectives – particularly from social anthropology, social psychology and sociology – which, as will occasionally become clear, sometimes frustrate me in their apparent mutual ignorance of each other. The goal is a synthesis that is greater than the sum of its parts, a theoretical space within which 'self' and 'society' can be understood as different abstractions from the same phenomenon, human behaviour and experience. I shall begin with the 'self'.

5

SELFHOOD AND MIND

What do we mean when we talk about 'the self'? *The Oxford English Dictionary* charts the word's known pedigree back more than a thousand years to Germanic roots. Four basic meanings emerge from several pages of usages and examples:

- the first indicates uniformity, as in the 'self-same', for example;
- the second, and most common, refers to the individuality or essence of a person or thing – herself, yourself, myself, itself, self-interest – simultaneously evoking consistency or 'internal' similarity over time and difference from external others;
- the third takes in introspection or reflexivity, as in 'self-doubt', 'self-confidence' and 'self-consciousness'; and
- finally there is a sense of independence and autonomous agency, as in 'self-improvement', 'self-propulsion' and 'she did it herself'.

Thus the meanings of the word 'self' parallel the general meanings of 'identity' discussed in Chapter 2: there are the core features of *similarity*, *difference*, *reflexivity* and *process*. This is no coincidence. It leads me to propose a definition of the self as an individual's reflexive sense of her or his own particular identity, constituted *vis-à-vis* others in terms of similarity and difference, without which she or he wouldn't know who they are and hence wouldn't be able to act.

SELFHOOD (. . . AND PERSONHOOD)

The literature about the self[1] is so vast, and so varied, that I cannot pretend to survey it comprehensively. A theme running through much of it is the distinction between the *self* and the *person*. A longstanding conventional understanding of these notions distinguishes the private, internal self from the public, external person (e.g. Harré 1983; Mauss 1985). The self is the individual's private experience of herself or himself; the person is what appears publicly in and to the outside world.

Some distinction between the internal and the external is unavoidable. Not everything going on in our heads and hearts is obvious to others, nor is there always harmony between how we see ourselves and how others see us (or how we imagine they do). Since this is fundamental to the view of identity I am offering, we need some way of talking about it. However, an absolute distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' obscures that view. Against the well-established conventional distinction between 'self' and 'person', I want to insist that selfhood and personhood are completely and utterly implicated in each other.

Finding a metaphor for this simultaneity is difficult: 'different sides of the same coin' might catch it; describing them as eddies in the same stream is better. Selfhood/personhood are aspects of individual identification, and in each the internal and the external cohabit in an ongoing process of identification. The notion of the internal–external dialectic of identification attempts to communicate this. The internal and external aspects of this process can be regarded as simultaneous moments, implying temporality, process and materiality, but not necessarily sequence. One should not necessarily be seen as following the other (which isn't to say it can never happen). The word 'moment' is another metaphor, derived from applied mathematics: *moment* expresses the forces around a central point as com-bined functions of mass and distance. The central point is, if you like, the identity at issue, the synthesis of the external and internal. Mass and distance suggest the interactional factors that determine the strength of the identification process, whether internal or external.

It's also important to recognise that we often don't differentiate self and person in everyday speech. If I speak *personally* to you, for example, my claim to authenticity relies upon my implied selfhood. In general terms, in fact, the difference between selfhood and personality is not clear, a confusion which exists as much in psychology as in common sense. This might, as Mauss suggested (1985: 20), reflect a historical convergence of meanings in this respect in European culture: the public persona has increasingly been defined in terms of the psychological characteristics of the self.

However, an equally plausible reason why selfhood and personhood are difficult to distinguish might be that the 'internal' and the 'external' are, for each of us, inextricably entangled.

European intellectual traditions recognise two polar models of humanity, the 'autonomous' and the 'plastic' (Hollis 1977), each with its implicit model of the self. The autonomous self evokes reflexivity and independence. The emphasis is on the internal. Although this may be how we would prefer to see ourselves in the mirror, it is also an image of anxiety and uncertainty, of an existential world in which individual moral judgements derive from personal preference or feeling, rather than from external authority or the responsibilities of position. Resembling the fragmentation which Marx called alienation, and even more closely Durkheim's *anomie*, this has been characterised by Alasdair MacIntyre (1985: 31ff) as the 'emotive self'.

At the other end of the spectrum, the plastic self is an epiphenomenon of collectivity, determined rather than determining. Here the emphasis is on the external. Structural-functionalism and structuralism, each drawing on Durkheim, are conventionally regarded as sociological exemplars of this theme (although Parsons or Lévi-Strauss read in their own words reveal more moderation in this respect than textbook summaries often suggest). This model of the self reaches its logical end in Althusser's argument – of which there are loud echoes in Foucault – that the 'autonomous subject' is an ideological notion which fools individuals into misunderstanding their own domination as self-willed. Therefore they 'freely' accept it: 'There are no subjects except by and for their subjection' (Althusser 1971: 182).

Images of autonomy and plasticity each contain more than a grain of truth. Each, just as obviously, is inadequate. There are as many good reasons for rejecting a model of selfhood defined in terms of individual interiority, autonomy and reflexivity, as for refusing to accept a view of the self as externally determined. The first suggests an essential self that is, at least in part, untouched by upbringing, knowing its own mind but little else. The second denies the reality of a 'creative' or 'authorial' self (Cohen 1994: 21–54), able to make up its own mind and to act. To borrow Dennis Wrong's famous expression (1961), where one is undersocialised, the other is oversocialised. Both are manifestly out of kilter with the observable realities of the human world and our own experience of our*selves*.

With respect to these themes, and before discussing them further, it should be pointed out that my account of selfhood – in this book's first edition – has been criticised for denying the interior subjectivity upon which individual authenticity depends. Craib, making a stark distinction between consistent personal 'identity' and contingent 'social identity', suggests that I ignore 'half the picture, that half which goes on "inside" the

bearer of identity or identities, and the process of internal negotiation which this involves' (Craib 1998: 4). Vogler goes further:

> he [i.e. Jenkins] emphasises the external social dimension to a much greater extent than the individual dimension and omits the unconscious and emotional dimensions of identity entirely.
>
> (Vogler 2000: 21–22)

I plead guilty to neglecting the unconscious. As I've argued elsewhere (Jenkins 2002a: 78), the problem with 'the unconscious' is that it cannot be shown to exist. Although conscious rationality isn't the sum total of the human 'mind' – we dream, we forget and remember stuff, our decision-making can be intuitive and elusive, we improvise as we go along, our emotions are powerful, control of what we are doing isn't always possible, and so on – the existence of a mental territory called '*the* unconscious' is epistemologically and ontologically problematic. It cannot simply be assumed. As a rhetorical device of psychotherapy 'the unconscious' may have its uses, but it isn't a usable sociological concept rooted in the observable realities of the human world.

Moving on to emotion, it may not have had an index entry in the first edition, but it wasn't omitted either. It's there, among other places, in the discussions of the affective power of primary identification (see Chapters 6 and 7) and ritual and symbolisation (Chapter 14). With respect to the interiority of individual selfhood, the entire point of the model of the internal–external dialectic of identification underpinning my under-standing of identification is to avoid privileging either side of that relationship. I leave it to the reader to decide whether I manage that balancing act in what follows.

MINDS AND OTHER MINDS

That neither autonomy nor plasticity is a convincing image of the exercise of *rationality* by thinking actors who share knowledge, meaning and morality with others suggests that, in order to come to terms with the self, we need to understand *mind – consciousness* and *thinking* – as well. Given that the mind is more *and* less than the brain, what is it? A sociological approach to this question suggests an answer that doesn't collapse into physiology, psychoanalysis or metaphysics, thus: the mind is the sum of our organised processes of consciousness, communication and decision-making. A model of this combination of perception, information handling and intentionality – which, apropos Craib and Vogler, all involve emotion

– is a prerequisite if we are to understand human agency, including identification.

For many people, mind and self are axiomatically synonymous. This appears to be reasonable: a self without a mind is unimaginable, and *vice versa*. However, such an equivalence of self and mind is deeply problematic. Does a damaged mind mean a damaged self? Do differing grades of intellectual competence have implications for selfhood? These are awkward questions to ask, let alone answer. They are at the heart of debates about the treatment of impaired foetuses or neonates, or the legal and personal status of people with learning difficulties. The issues they raise are ambiguous, delicate and profound. For the moment, suffice it to say that although mind and selfhood are difficult to contemplate in isolation from each other, they're not the same phenomenon.

Another pertinent difficulty is familiar to philosophers as the 'other minds' problem (Wisdom 1952): how can we know what is going on in someone else's mind, since we cannot observe or hear it? Hence, how can we understand someone else's selfhood? This is a mundane question, of a type which confronts us in everyday life, but it's also fundamental to social science epistemology. According to one answer, the only mental processes to which we can ever have access are our own. Reflecting upon these, all we can do is to assume that those of other humans are similar in their workings if not in their content. This view often entails a second presumption that there *is* something special upon which to reflect, which differs from – and is causally prior to – overt behaviour. Anthony Cohen – much as Craib and Vogler – adopts both positions, arguing for 'the primacy of the self'. Whether it be soul, spirit or mind, in this view every individual has, or is, a cloistered essence of selfhood: 'Selfhood rests on the essential privacy of meaning; in what else might it consist?' (Cohen 1994: 142).

Before attempting to answer Cohen's question, his argument, like those of Craib and Vogler, raises epistemological issues. For example, he describes his scepticism about the 'reasonable' assumption that uniformity of behaviour within a group indicates uniformity of thought, as 'purely intuitive' (1994: 89). The issue is not whether he's wrong: I'm in fact sure that he's right. Nor is it that he seems to have missed Wallace's convincing logical argument that 'cognitive non-sharing' is, in fact, a 'functional prerequisite' of collective organisation (1970: 24–38). No, the problem is that in *presupposing* the existence of a private self that has causal 'primacy' as a core of individual being, Cohen is led into metaphysical assertion rather than defensible argument. His position, which closely resembles Craib's, is inscrutable, and thus can be neither wrong nor right. The same is true,

arguably to an even greater degree, of Vogler's assumption that 'the unconscious' exists.

Why are there epistemological difficulties with respect to the self and, by extension, the mind? Well, first, the 'other minds' problem is real. We cannot 'read' other people's minds. But this doesn't demand that we accept an interior–exterior model which identifies a domain of selfhood that is accessible only privately and uniquely to each individual, about which others can only intuit, at best. If that was true, everyday life would be very difficult indeed. How would we come to know other people at all, let alone get to know them well? Life is full of surprises, but it would be impossibly unpredictable if we couldn't know something – enough to be going on with – about the minds of others. And much sociological research would be in vain. So, perhaps the wisest thing to do where possible is to avoid, as incapable of resolution, ontological arguments about the nature of selfhood. Instead, making a simplifying assumption that there *is* a self – as defined at the beginning of this chapter[2] – I will ask, 'What can we know about it?'

NETWORKS AND INTERACTIONS

Gilbert Ryle, in his robust critique of the Cartesian dualism of the mental and the physical, argues that an individual's understanding of herself is no different in kind from her understanding of others:

> The sorts of things that I can find out about myself are the same as the sorts of things that I can find out about other people, and the methods of finding them out are much the same. A residual difference in the supplies of the requisite data makes some differences in degree between what I can know about myself and what I can know about you, but these differences are not all in favour of self knowledge.
>
> (Ryle 1963: 149)

The data Ryle has in mind are visible behaviour, talk (whether silent to oneself, vocal to oneself or vocal to others) and other communicative practices – such as writing – and their products. 'Unstudied talk', which is 'spontaneous, frank, and unprepared' (*ibid*.: 173), is particularly important. Our methods for deciding what we are about and what others are about, Ryle describes as *observation* and *retrospection*.

For Ryle, introspection is implausible, requiring a capacity to do something and to think about doing it – thus to do two things – simultaneously. He uses this very particular definition of introspection to

argue that actors possess no privileged way of knowing themselves, compared to their ways of knowing others. But he overstates the case about doing two things at once. The point is literally true. Just as no two physical 'things' can occupy the same space at the same time, no two words – whether uttered or thought – can issue from the same speaker simultaneously. But I can, for example, engage in a conversation while, during the same performative flow of time, reflecting on the conversation and the behaviour of all the parties to it (including myself). Although this is, strictly, *retro*spection, it can be understood as a species of introspection: my reflections will always be at least a micro-second behind the action, but interactionally they are contemporaneous with, and part of, their object. By this argument, retrospection isn't possible until the business of interaction is actually finished. If this is correct, introspection doesn't require privileged access: it is observing oneself rather than observing others.

Reflexivity, therefore, involves observation and retrospection, and is similar whether I am considering myself or others. Potentially I have different data available in each case. I may have more information about myself, including recollections of my talk with myself, and biographical data only I know. On the other hand, I cannot observe myself in *quite* the way that I can observe others. Ryle is correct: self-knowledge is not necessarily more accurate than our knowledge of others, and self-awareness does not entail 'privileged access' to the mind. Accepting this, we can begin to account for the common realisation that our understanding of ourselves is *at least* as imperfect as our understanding of others (something which Cohen, for example, doesn't sufficiently acknowledge).

A further possibility that Ryle doesn't consider is *projection*. To know what we are doing and who we are, we must have some idea of what we are going to or might do. Intentionality is thus an important aspect of mind (and therefore selfhood). But more than intentions are involved: planning involves drawing on direct and indirect experience, on theoretical reasoning and on the hunches of implicit practical logic, in the attempt to make the future more predictable. However, projection is concerned with more than reducing uncertainty. It is a human characteristic to look beyond the here and now, to locate oneself as the link between a past and a future (Clark 1992; Jenkins 2001). Thus it makes sense to include projection with retrospection and observation in the repertoire of reflexivity.

For Ryle, minds are not occult or secret: 'Overt intelligent performances are not clues to the workings of minds; they are those workings' (*ibid*.: 57). If the mind is conceived of as mental *processes*, then these are to be found 'out there' as much as 'in here'. This doesn't uncouple individual minds from embodied individuals: that would be absurd (and, anyway, individual

persons are also 'out there'). But it does suggest that minds work as much *between* bodies as *within* them. Ryle's is a model of 'mind' – as well as '*the* mind' – which offers the prospect of a theoretical framework bringing together individuals and the collective human world without either being seen to determine the other.[3]

While this view doesn't sit easily with the presumptions of common sense, other writers agree with its basics. Bateson's 'ecology of mind' (1972) pictures the relationship between individual organism and environment as a cybernetic network within which information flows backwards and forwards: 'mind obviously does not stop with the skin' (Bateson 1991: 165). Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' (1977: 72–95; 1990: 52–65) is also suggestive, and in the same way. Habitus is a corpus of dispositions, embodied in the individual, generative of practices in ongoing and improvisatory interactions in, and encounters with, 'social fields' of one kind or another. The key point is that individual habitus only 'works' in the context of a social field, which itself is a kind of collective habitus: the one seems to flow into and out of the other; which is not *too* dissimilar to Wittgenstein's argument (1974) that for humans the 'outside world', rather than existing in the eye of the beholder or in objective reality, is a contingent product of our negotiated language-games.

Drawing upon Wittgenstein, Harré and Gillett's notion of the 'discursive mind' is perhaps more straightforward. Rooted in what Harré (1979) calls the ethogenic revision of social psychology, with its emphasis on meaning and agency – and drawing, too, upon recent critiques of behaviourism's model of mental process as a 'black box', unavailable for inspection – Harré and Gillett understand 'mental life as a dynamic activity, engaged in by people, who are located in a range of interacting discourses and at certain positions in those discourses' (1994: 180). Mental processes are thus *always* interactional. Even more thoroughgoing is the mutualist perspective, rooted in the ideas of James, Dewey and Vygotsky, that argues that to talk about 'interrelations' is insufficient (Still and Good 1991).[4] Through the use of metaphors such as 'steeped and dyed in' – drawn from William James – and dialectical models of process, mutualism emphasises the utter perceptual and cognitive interdependence of human beings.

MIND, SELF AND G. H. MEAD

William James and John Dewey belong to the heterogeneous, largely American, pragmatist philosophical tradition. Pragmatism emphasises the purposive dimension of human behaviour, and derives meaning and

criteria of judgement from behaviour's practical outcomes: 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating'. Sociologically, the key pragmatists are Cooley and Mead, and the direct sociological descendent of their arguments about mind and self is symbolic interactionism. Charles Horton Cooley uses the metaphor of an orchestra to emphasise that mind, the 'social mind', is an organic whole, though not necessarily one that is either 'made up' or in agreement. It is a system of which individuals are active parts:

> everything that I say or think is influenced by what others have said or thought, and, in one way or another, sends out an influence of its own in turn.
>
> (Cooley 1962: 4)

Writing in 1909, Cooley doesn't mention Durkheim. It would have been perfectly appropriate of him to do so. Each in their fashion flirts with metaphysical notions of the 'group mind' (Parsons 1968: 64), and each tends towards a consensual view of the human world. However, the difference between Cooley's 'social mind' and Durkheim's *conscience collective*, systematically discussed in 1893 in *De la division du travail social*, is each's starting point. Durkheim begins with the collective, Cooley with the individual. For Cooley, 'society really has no existence except in the individual's mind' (Mead 1934: 224fn).

Although critical of Cooley, George Herbert Mead acknowledges his influence.[5] Describing his own position as 'social behaviorism', Mead begins with two related assumptions: that 'no sharp line can be drawn between individual psychology and social psychology' (1934: 1) and that interaction produces consciousness, not the other way around:

> the whole (society) is prior to the part (the individual), not the part to the whole; and the part is explained in terms of the whole, not the whole in terms of the part or parts . . . from the outside to the inside instead of from the inside to the outside, so to speak.
>
> (Mead 1934: 7, 8)

Mead argues that our perception of an environment of objects – the consciousness which creates meaning – depends upon being able to see *ourselves* as objects (a proposition which resonates psychoanalytically with Winnicott's theory of object-relations [1965] and Lacan's notion of the 'mirror stage' in human development [1977: 1–7]). The perceptual basis of cognition is an internal–external dialectic between mind and

environment. Interactionally, consciousness emerges within the pre-linguistic 'conversation of gestures' with others, and in the basic other-oriented behaviour of taking up attitudes (which doesn't here mean 'values' or 'views') towards others.

However, the development of language, the symbolisation of that conversation of gestures, is the crucial step. Speech, says Mead,

> can react upon the speaking individual as it reacts upon the other . . . the individual can hear what he says and in hearing what he says is tending to respond as the other person responds.
>
> (Mead 1934: 69, 70)

Thus an individual can adopt the attitude *of* the other as well as adopting an attitude *toward* the other. The point made earlier, that I cannot observe myself as I can another, indicates the limitations of gesture and attitude without language. Mead argues that with language one can *hear* oneself in the same 'objective' way that one can hear another, and the situation is transformed: 'Out of language emerges the field of mind' (*ibid*.: 133). In language, reflexivity, which is for Mead the principle uniting 'mind, self and society', comes into its own:

> It is by means of reflexiveness – the turning-back of the experience upon himself – that the whole social process is thus brought into the experience of the individuals involved in it; it is by such means, which enable the individual to take the attitude of the other toward himself, that the individual is able consciously to adjust himself to that process, and to modify the resultant of that process in any given social act in terms of his adjustment to it. Reflexiveness, then, is the essential condition, within the social process, for the development of mind.
>
> (Mead 1934: 134)

Reflexive interaction doesn't just introduce the wider human world into the individual's interior world. Without language there is no distinctively human interior world. Without the stimulus of interaction with others there would be nothing to talk about or think. (The) mind is thus simultaneously 'internal' and 'external'.

Collins argues persuasively (1989: 15) that, although Mead's great contribution is to demonstrate the *possibility* of a sociology of mind, his theory is underdeveloped; that he overemphasises the impact of the collective on the individual, and like Durkheim (or, indeed, Cooley) 'slides into the assumption that society is unified'. Be that as it may, it is less easy

to agree with Collins that Mead reduces consciousness to mere behaviour or reflex. In fact, Mead's insistence that mind emerges out of co-operative interaction is more reminiscent of Marx than Durkheim: 'language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men' (Marx and Engels 1974: 51).[6] Mead offers us the prospect of placing the thinking of individuals at the centre of the human world without lapsing into either precious subjectivity or mechanical objectivity. Mental processes become neither wholly interior nor wholly exterior.

Cognition and consciousness may seem to be some distance from identity. An interactional view of (the) mind is, however, vital for an understanding of identification. The self is unimaginable without mental processes, and *vice versa*. Identity without selfhood is similarly implausible. Both mind and selfhood must be understood as embodied within the routine inter-action of the human world, neither strictly individual nor strictly collective. To make safe the foundations of the account of identity offered here, mind and selfhood must be understandable within the internal–external dialectic model. The arguments of Ryle and Mead have provided perspectives that allow us to do that. Some of their further implications will be explored in the next chapter.

6

EMBODIED SELVES

Ian Burkitt calls 'the idea that there is a basic division between society and the individual . . . a nonsense' (1991: 189). If he's right – and on balance, depending on what he means by 'division', I think he is – why is it such plausible and popular nonsense, as attractive to social theorists as to more mundane folk-in-the-street? Are the concepts and issues involved in thinking about individuality and collectivity so obscure, and so *difficult*, that gross simplification is the only way to deal with them them? Perhaps. Leaving 'collectivity' to one side for discussion elsewhere, Chapter 5 has left unresolved some important matters to do with individuality and selfhood.

THE PROBLEM OF 'I'

Gilbert Ryle describes 'I' as an 'index word', that locates what is being referred to with respect to the speaker. Like 'here' or 'now', it is always uttered from a point of view, and those points of view are always changing: spatially, over time, from individual to individual. There cannot be *an* 'I'; only my 'I', your 'I', her 'I', etc.

In everyday life, according to Ryle, people find this 'I' – selfhood – perplexing and 'systematically elusive' (1963: 178). Yesterday's self seems to be substantial and easy enough to account for and explain, but the self of the ongoing moment is fugitive, harder to pin down. This is his argument about introspection again: he argues (*ibid*.: 186) that the one item of my behaviour about which any commentary of mine must necessarily be silent

is itself. Self-reflexivity, for Ryle, is always *retro*spective: the 'I' that does something has to wait until later before it can be considered. 'I' cannot look at itself: 'I' can look at 'her' or 'you', but not at 'I'.

Ryle may be logically correct, but interactionally he is wrong. Whatever people do they do within or over *periods* of time – even if very short periods – not in successive nano-seconds. I can approach myself, look at myself and comment on myself in the present, which is a relatively stable time zone of the here and now (Jenkins 2001). I can, for example, tell someone over the phone that 'I'm sitting in the garden enjoying the sun'. I can stop in the middle of a very busy day and take stock of what I'm doing. I can say that 'I'm pissed off', and explain why. And so on: the present-tense first-person singular, 'I am', makes very straightforward sense.

Giddens, too, argues that 'I' – in his case when compared to 'me' – is especially problematic (1984: 43), and he is no more convincing. It is not clear why 'I' should be more elusive than other index words: you, here, there, now, then, etc. For all of the perplexity which Giddens and Ryle accuse it of producing, 'I' is a much-spoken word that is relatively unprob-lematic in use: when I use it I know who I am referring to and so do you (as do I when you use it, and so on). It is testament to the ordinariness of 'I' that individual difficulty with the word's use may be taken to indicate cognitive or emotional disorder (Erikson 1968: 217).

So, what *is* the problem here? In rejecting the dualism of mind and body, Ryle argues that Mind and Matter are different, non-comparable *kinds* of things. While this allowed him to restructure the philosophy of mind, it prevented him from recognising the embodiment of mind and selfhood. He simply ruled the body out of court. Since the point of view of index words is *always* that of a speaker existing in time and space, and hence embodied, we may begin to appreciate why 'I' seemed so elusive to Ryle. This centrality to selfhood of an embodied point of view (Burkitt 1994) is probably the major reason for the plausibility of the categorical distinction between the individual and the collective. As already discussed briefly in Chapter 1, embodied individuals exist in common sense and experience in a way that collectivities do not (Jenkins 2002a: 63–84). Hence the 'pragmatic individualism' discussed in Chapter 4: embodied individuals are the space-time co-ordinates of minds and selves and are thoroughly and reciprocally implicated in, and constitutive of, human relationships and the human world.

Cooley, writing in the first decade of the twentieth century, talks about the 'empirical self' (1964: 168): actual people who acknowledge their presence and their actions in the world. For Cooley, that empirical self always implies the presence of others. It is always an *interactional* self, similar

to and different from others. Part of this is summed up in his image of the 'looking-glass self':

> A self-idea of this sort seems to have three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification . . . The thing that moves us to pride or shame is . . . the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind.
>
> (Cooley 1964: 184)

To Cooley, this dimension of selfhood is fundamental to collective life: to the adjustment of self to others, the internalisation of collective norms, and the production of an ordered and orderly human world. It is particularly important, he suggested, in the early socialisation of children.

THE 'I' AND THE 'ME'

Cooley draws heavily on William James, and in turn he provides part of the inspiration for Mead's more systematic model of selfhood. However, Mead's interest in actual, embodied people – for him 'society' is objectively something more than an idea in the consciousness of individuals – leads him to criticise Cooley's models of selfhood and mind (Joas 1985: 111–112). Mead wants to establish a cognitive foundation for selfhood in the 'internalized conversation of gestures . . . the origin and foundations of the self, like those of thinking, are social' (Mead 1934: 173). For Mead the self is more than 'the bare organization of social attitudes'; he characterises it as a *relationship* between 'I' and 'me' (concepts also derived from William James). Mead appears to be talking about 'selves' or a 'plural self' rather than 'the self':

> The 'I' reacts to the self which arises through the taking of the attitudes of others. Through taking those attitudes we have introduced the 'me' and we react to it as an 'I' . . . The 'I' is the response of the organism to others: the 'me' is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes.
>
> (Mead 1934: 174, 175)

The 'I' is the acting self: the 'ego' that moves 'into the future', the individual's often unpredictable answer to others, the custodian of initiative (*ibid*.: 177). The 'me' is the other side of the argument: it is what 'I' react against, the voice in part of others, the foil which gives form and substance

to the 'I' (*ibid*.: 209). It might catch the spirit of the 'me' to call it the 'what me?' Although it represents external control, Mead's 'me' is not a Freudian censor: the 'I' is capable of winning the argument. The 'me' exercises a moral, not a mechanical, imperative over the 'I'. Mead's self is not determined by the internalised voice of others to the same extent as Cooley's looking-glass self. Reflexivity, which is of the essence for Mead, involves a conversation with *oneself* (Blumer 1986: 62–64; Burkitt 1991: 38).

Mead and Ryle have something in common.[1] Mead's 'I' cannot be apprehended in the here and now, either: 'I cannot turn round quick enough to catch myself' (1934: 174). As soon as someone remembers her 'I' of a minute ago, it has become a 'me', something with which 'I' can only enter into dialogue. The 'I' is not directly available in experience. Here Mead is trying to reconcile the cumulative, organised, learned resources of common sense and common knowledge, which we draw upon in the ongoing production of our lives, with the evanescent immediacy of being in the world, which is perpetually in the present tense: 'the "me" is the individual as an object of consciousness, while the "I" is the individual as having consciousness' (Joas 1985: 83). Mead doesn't mean, however, to imply a 'split personality':

> The 'I' both calls out the 'me' and responds to it. Taken together they constitute a personality as it appears in social experience. The self is essentially a social process going on with these two distinguishable phases. If it did not have these two phases there would not be conscious responsibility, and there would be nothing novel in experience.
>
> (Mead 1934: 178)

Even so, the two are not on an equal footing: ideally, the 'me' is more in charge than the 'I'. It is the source of an integrated personality.

At this point, Mead hypothesises the existence of a 'generalized other', representing the organised community to which an individual belongs and against which she is poised and defined. Simply taking the attitude(s) of specific individual others – a looking-glass self – might produce a series of 'me's, rendering the self inherently unstable over time (the 'me' would thus be similar to the 'I'). A degree of personal consistency in the self can, therefore, only be assured by taking on consistent attitudes. Hence the 'me' also adopts the internalised voice of a generalized other. This differs from Durkheim's *conscience collective* or Cooley's 'social mind' in that it is the product of ongoing encounters between individuals within group relationships. Every person will, in principle, have their own generalised other; but every group member will, also in principle, have much in common

with every other. Without the generalised other, the Meadian self is incomplete:

> only in so far as he takes the attitudes of the organized social group to which he belongs toward the organized, co-operative social activity or set of such activities in which that group as such is engaged, does he develop a complete self . . . only by taking the attitude of the generalized other toward himself, in one or another of these ways, can he think at all; for only thus can thinking – or the internalized conversation of gestures which constitutes thinking – occur.
>
> (Mead 1934: 155, 156)

Here we return to the origins of cognition in interaction. The generalised other is acquired early in childhood; it is the parent of mind and self (and its 'voice' is often literally a parent's). Although Mead doesn't say that 'society' is 'all in the mind', he insists that without the generalised other 'organized human society' (*ibid.*: 155) is impossible. Unless collectivity is *also* in the minds of its members – *as well* as 'out there' in actual people and their behaviour – there can be no universe of discourse, no meaningful human relationships, no human world. Since for Mead 'mind' is as much 'out there' as it is anywhere, it adds up to the same thing, from whichever direction you look at it.

In Mead's social theory, 'mind, self and society' are not different *kinds* of thing. 'Society' is relationships between individuals, and individual humans cannot exist outside those relationships. Without relationships human mind and selfhood would not exist. For Mead, selfhood is intrinsically interactional, emerging out of the reciprocal relationship between the individual dialogue in the mind between 'I' and 'me', on the one hand, and the individual's dialogue with others during interaction, on the other. 'Society' is a conversation between people; the mind is the internalisation of that conversation; the self lies within and between the two.

THE UNITY OF SELFHOOD

Giddens' remark that 'the "I" appears in Mead's writings as the given core of agency, and its origins hence always remain obscure' (1984: 43) is representative of a standard criticism of Mead, to which there are several, related answers. To start with, questions about origins are of doubtful value: it isn't clear how one could ever answer fully a question of this kind. Rooting the self in cognition, Mead simply argues that human physiology entails the capacity for/of mind (1934: 226n). Given that capacity, mind

and selfhood emerge from the conversation of gestures, from interaction. The 'I' is thus part of the response of our species-specific capacity for intelligence – 'the physiological mechanism of the human individual's central nervous system' (*ibid*.: 255) – to the stimuli provided by other humans. It is also, by this token, an aspect of 'human nature': Mead nowhere suggested that mind and self are *only* constructs (Honneth and Joas 1988: 59–70). Finally, to meet Giddens' comment head on, the 'I' isn't the 'core of agency': the dynamo of agency in Mead's model is the *relationship* between 'I' and 'me'.

Giddens' comments do, however, suggest that the the terms 'I' and 'me' – implying as they do a plural or multiplex self – are not straightforward. Despite these problems, to which I return below, Mead's account of selfhood offers a basis for a general sociological theory of identification. In particular, it encourages us to understand intimate processes of mind and selfhood as an internal–external dialectic. Despite its discussion of 'society', how-ever, it isn't the basis for an adequate theory of the human world in all of its collectivity. This point can be made in two ways. First, in a manner which recalls Cooley, Mead sees 'society' as essentially consensual and relatively simple: power and domination aren't recognised. In particular, the 'generalized other' makes little allowance for institutionalised conflicts or differences in common knowledge (Burkitt 1991: 52). 'Being able to see the other person's view' held out to Mead the prospect of a defensible collective rationality (or rational collectivity). Conflict, in this view, is largely the product of poor communication.[2]

Which leads on to the second point. Meadian selfhood, rooted in cognition, is cerebral and pragmatic. Mead dismisses Freudian psycho-analysis, for example, because of its focus on 'sexual life and self-assertion in its violent form' that is outside 'the normal situation' (1934: 211). Compared to Durkheim, for example, Collins argues that 'Mead has a flat, unidimensional world. Utilitarian actions of individuals are primary; social interaction enters merely as means to these ends' (1989: 14). Collins further suggests that Mead overlooks the human drive to sociability. We relate to each other because it is in our natures to do so, we cannot do otherwise: 'sociality' is an adaptive feature of *homo sapiens sapiens* (Carrithers 1992). This criticism isn't wholly fair. As we have already seen, it's clear that Mead understands the intersubjectivity on which his theory depends to be part of the basic human repertoire: human nature. But it's also true that there is little room for emotion, frivolity, passion, doubt or conflict in Mead's world.

Mentioning emotion suggests a need to explore further the genesis in interaction of intimate psychology and personality (Burkitt 1991; Craib

1998; Giddens 1984: 41–109; Harré 1986), which is beyond the reach of this book. There is, however, one related matter requiring attention: the apparent resemblance between Mead's 'I' and 'me', and Freud's 'ego' and 'superego' (Freud 1984: 351–401).[3] In particular, the superego, as the internalised parent(s) and the internalised voice of external control, looks *very* like the 'me' and the 'generalized other'. And even when Transactional Analysis reconstituted psychoanalytic selfhood as a trio of ego states – parent, adult and child – the internalised parental voice remained (Berne 1968: 23–32). Freud, Mead and Berne, in their different ways, agree that selfhood is interactionally constructed within what I have called an internal–external dialectic of identification. They all attempt to integrate the internal regulation of autonomy and the external constraint of plasticity. However, they also share a serious shortcoming – touched upon during the discussion of 'the unconscious' in Chapter 5 – in their characterisation of selfhood as a system of different 'bits': in Freud modelled as zones or territories (which have frontiers), in Mead and Berne as entities (who have identities and hold conversations).

This is problematic because most of the time we don't seem to experience ourselves as an assembly of different bits, and particularly not as a plurality of entities. Perhaps the most important source of our consistency – in the eyes of ourselves and others – is, as Burkitt argues (1994), the embodiment of selfhood. Although over time and across situations we recognise conflicts and different possibilities within ourselves, these don't constitute a committee or a cast of characters. Consider, for example, the notion of the internal conversation (which is something very like Craib's internal negotiation, discussed in Chapter 5). Is it really a conversation? Probably not. I recognise the experience of 'talking to myself' and I don't confuse it with a conversation with some*body* else. Giddens is right to say (1984: 7–8) that talking about the self as if it's peopled by 'mini-actors' is unhelpful and unnecessary: talking about 'moral conscience' is, for example, a straightforward substitute for 'super-ego' (or the 'me' and the 'generalized other').

Dividing the self up into 'bits' loses sight of the fact that most humans most of the time live their lives as more or less unitary selves. Not everyone, however: when unity appears to be threatened or fragmented, serious personal disorder may be diagnosed by medical, religious or other specialists. If we are to acknowledge a continuum of differentiation between those who experience such states and 'most people most of the time' who do not,[4] we need a model of the self as routinely more or less unitary. A similar point can be simply made: although we can talk about someone 'being in two minds', there is no equivalent sensible remark about 'being

in two selves'. To have two selves transgresses one of the roots of selfhood, a degree of individual consistency over time.

Perhaps the most fundamental objection to 'bits models' is that they are actually much too *simple*. To acknowledge the many facets of selfhood would require the proliferation of bits into potentially infinitely complex, and infinitely unmanageable and implausible, models: the committee of three would become a very unruly assembly indeed. By contrast, adopting a unitary model allows us to recognise self*hood* as simultaneously cognitive and emotional, a rich amalgam of knowledge and feelings, both individual and collective, and thoroughly interconnected and interdependent (it probably wouldn't 'work' otherwise). *Inter alia* this mixture includes:

- an embodied awareness of being in the spatial world;
- emotions;
- sensual memory (tactile, visual, olfactory, etc.);
- creativity and imagination;
- tacit embodied competences;
- retrievable information.

Some is this is easily reviewed and recalled, some not; some is in contradiction, some in agreement; some is imperative, some merely 'take it or leave it'; some is painful, some joyous; some is a matter of life or death, some just in-flight entertainment; some is frankly mysterious; and some completely fantastic or imaginary. Individual selfhood encompasses all this and more. It symbolises the distinctive cognitive and emotional complexities of real people – ourselves *to* ourselves, no less than others – so as to imbue those complexities with the minimal sense of consistency that we expect and require in everyday interaction.

Retrospection offers access to things that we have done or said, that others have done or said, and so on. Some of what is going on we observe as it happens. Other material is not retrospective: knowledge about how things are or how they might be. Other stuff is simply difficult to get at. And there are many other possibilities. More complicated than a structure of a few bits, this model is also more plausible. It allows for disagreement and dissensus. It allows for variability: some people may, for example, have a rich vein of material deriving from their parents, others may not. For some who do, the parental stuff may be very controlling, for others not. Etcetera.

A final problem with 'bits models' is their tendency to reduce process to structure. Mead, Freud and Berne might each argue that selfhood is dynamic, but when they draw maps of the self or people it with characters

– even if only metaphorically – misplaced concreteness is added to the problems described above. This makes it even more difficult to place self-hood in interactional context. Although Mead, for example, consistently writes about selfhood as constructed within an intersubjective external world, his manner of talking about it makes that image difficult to hold. Despite Mead's protestations to the contrary, the human world for the Meadian self often appears to be internalised, condensed into a 'generalized other', part of the structure of the self rather than actually 'out there'.

EMBODIED SELVES

So, then, what about the apparently elusive 'I'? If Ryle and Mead can't turn round in time to catch their 'I', it is because they *are* it. The self is a unifying point of view, and that point of view is always *here*. Thus, so am 'I': always here. When I reflect on myself I am not reflecting on someone – a 'me' – 'over there'. If I say, for example, 'That's just me, that is', I am either reflecting on myself *here*, which is also *now*, or reflecting on myself *then* (which could have been *here*, or in a range of *there*s). I am a complex character, capable of realising myself in different ways in different contexts, but I am me (and *vice versa*), and I am here, the centre of my own compass.

Where 'here' is requires further consideration, however. It is embodied, certainly. Selves without bodies don't make much sense in human terms. Ghosts or spirits, if we recognise them as human, once had bodies; even the disembodied world of cyberspace depends, in the not-so-final resort, on bodies in front of computer screens (Hakken 1999: 69–92). We reach out with our selves, and others reach out to us. The self participates in an environment of others; to recall Bateson, like mind selfhood does not stop at the skin. But it always *begins* – literally or figuratively – from or at the body. There is nowhere else to begin.

'Here' is not, however, limited to the spot which my body currently occupies. When, for example, a large number of people arrange to gather in a big room, it makes sense to ask, 'Is everybody here?' Thus there are various 'heres', depending on context. 'Here' from the point of view of an assembled group, and its individual members, is not the same as 'here' from the point of view of an individual performing solo. 'Here' can be a spot or a territory, as indeed can 'there' (a similar point to my earlier argument about the 'present': the here-and-now is a zone rather than an instant). As with all index words, point of view is crucial. Each individual is the embodied centre of a universe of self-and-others, the locus of perpetual internal–external comings and goings, transactional inputs and outputs,

some of which are incorporated into the sense of selfhood and some of which are not.

Selfhood is constitutive of our sense of who and where we are, which also implies some sense of what we are doing. But the reciprocal entailment of mind and selfhood is more than logical. 'The mind' and 'the self' are different ways of referring to the same phenomenon, the embodied and developing point of view of the human individual, living with other human individuals (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1999). While we distinguish cognition (mind) from emotion (selfhood), we also recognise their co-existence and relationships – it isn't easy to capture the simultaneity I am aiming for here – in the embodied point of view: it makes sense when we speak of our 'feelings' clouding our 'reason'. 'The mind' and 'the self' may not be the same thing, but they are ways of *talking* about the same thing.

Common knowledge and shared symbols – 'culture' – constitute mind and selfhood. Exploring this point illuminates the difference between the two: mind is more universalistic or collective than selfhood. Selves are interactional, but they are by definition individual. Mind is something else. It makes as much sense to talk of individual minds as of individual selves, but the ability to talk about 'mind', without the definite article, is telling. 'Mind' is not just 'cultural': in some senses it *is* 'culture'. We can be 'of one mind', but it makes no sense to say that 'we are of one self'.[5] This suggests that (the) mind and the self are not 'things' or 'objects', other than grammatically: they are processes. The mind and the self are perpetually in motion, even if it sometimes appears to be slow motion. They are perpetually in a state of 'becoming', even if what becomes is similar to what has been.

INDIVIDUALITY

To insist that minds and selves, whatever else they might be, are attributes of individuals is not to accept the 'primacy of the self' (Cohen 1994; Craib 1998; Vogler 2000). Selves and minds are *not* definitively private essences of individuals, ultimately causally prior to their behaviour. In what people do and say we witness minds and selves at work. Minds and selves are thus knowable. Not perfectly knowable, but nothing is. How we 'know' ourselves is basically the same as how we 'know' others, depending upon observation, retrospection and projection.

Selfhood does have its own particular status, however, in that it can be thought of as a *primary* (or basic) identification. This is not an allusion to the psychoanalytic concept of the infant's primary identification with an other. It draws, rather, upon the useful basic distinction between primary and secondary socialisation (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 149–157).

Selfhood is arguably the earliest identification that humans develop, and the most robust (as well as the most vulnerable during its earliest formation). It can perhaps be understood as offering a template for all subsequent identities, a stem stock onto which they are grafted. During the initial emergence of self-recognition, the infant becomes aware of her presence as against others: her difference from and similarity to them; that she is one of them, but they are not her. The sense of self may be coloured with secure self-regard that reflects the regard of others. It may not. Her name enters into her identity. So do the names of other people and things, and her relationship to them. Subsequently, primary self-identification becomes elaborated in many ways: 'Mummy says I am a good girl', 'I hate Aunty Meg', 'I am bottom/top of the class', etc.

Selfhood is not the only identity which may be conceptualised as primary, in the sense of developed during primary socialisation and subsequently exhibiting great solidity. Gender is also best understood as a primary identity, organising the earliest experience and integrated into the individual sense of selfhood. Depending on local context, ethnicity may be, too (Jenkins 2008: 48–50). Mentioning gender and ethnicity in this context emphasises that primary identifications are neither fixed nor timeless. Identification is something that individuals do, it is a *process*. As decades of interactionist sociology have documented in detail, even the reproduction of the status quo requires perpetual work of one sort or another. What's more, primary identifications are only *resistant* to change, they're not set in concrete. Change is routine in the human world, occurring for all kinds of reasons, and selfhood, gender and ethnicity are in and of that world.

To characterise selfhood as a primary identity – perhaps even as *the* primary identity – doesn't imply that it is simply or only individual. Paying attention to others is at the heart of selfhood from the earliest moments. It is a species-specific trait:

> babies are born predisposed to learn about sounds and sights that are characteristic features of *people*. They are particularly attentive to shapes and patterns that are like faces and to sounds that fall in the frequency range of the female human voice. As babies they learn especially fast about stimuli that change in a way that is contingent upon their own behaviour.
>
> (Dunn 1988: 1)

The embodied point of view – mind and selfhood – emerges into, and within, an intersubjective human world of others and objects and the effects

which the individual has upon them. Agency is central to selfhood and it is central to infancy.

Mind and selfhood, then, operate/exist within and *between* individuals. To focus on selfhood and self-identification, this is so in at least three senses. First, individual human selfhood is initially realised *vis-à-vis* others: they are the necessary foils against which we come to know ourselves. The human developmental process is an interactive process and cannot be otherwise.

This process continues, second, throughout our lives, as our individual identities (and minds) adapt and change. Self-identification involves the ongoing to-and-fro of the internal–external dialectic. The individual presents herself to others in a particular way. That presentation is accepted (or not), becoming part of her identity in the eyes of others (or not). The responses of others to her presentation feed back to her. Reflexively, they become incorporated into her self-identity (or not). Which may modify the way she presents herself to others. And so on. As presented here, it appears simple, sequential and linear. It is in fact multiplex, simultaneous and often tortuous.

Third, the presentation and elaboration of self-identification draw upon a wide palette of accessories in the human world. These are often other people: family, sexual partners, children, friends, colleagues, etc. Who I have relationships with, and the nature of those relationships – who I identify with – contributes to who I am, and says something to others about me. What's more, other people can either validate who or what I claim to be, refute it or attempt to float an alternative: power and authority are critical in determining whose definition counts. Nor are people the only resources that I can draw upon in self-identification. Clothes, religious practices, house, neighbourhood, music, car, occupation, pets: things of all kinds can be put to use. The world, in this respect, seems to be our oyster.

The self is, therefore, altogether individual *and* intrinsically inter-actional. It arises and is maintained within the internal–external dialectic of identification. It draws upon the environment of people and things for its content. Even though it is the most individualised of identities – we might call it customised – selfhood is absolutely interactional. It depends for its ongoing security upon the validation of others, in its initial emergence and in the dialectic of continuing identification.

A unitary image of selfhood – rather than a model of the self as a collation of bits – doesn't imply a *simple* self. Quite the reverse: selfhood is complex and multi-faceted, as is the lifelong process of self-identification, involving a range of others in a range of situations, and drawing upon a range of resources. Nor is a unitary self in complete charge of itself. In the first

instance, the foundational experiences of early life are largely – although not completely – outside the infant's control. And they are extraordinarily consequential for later life. During that later life, during the ongoing dialectic of identification, the responses of others are, at best, only predictable or manipulable to a degree. Nor is how we receive them and incorporate them into our self-identification likely to be within our full control. Everything that we know about individual psychology suggests that the early formation of selfhood – warm or cold, secure or insecure, rich in experience or poverty-stricken, well fed or hungry – is enormously influential in equipping us with the resources required to respond to the categorisations of us offered or imposed by others.

Other constraints are grounded in embodiment. That selfhood is routinely entangled with identities that are *definitively* embodied, such as gender/sex, ethnicity/'race' or disability/impairment, makes the matter more complicated than my attempt to deal with it via punctuation can communicate. Nor are the accessories of identification equally available to each individual. The world is not really *everyone*'s oyster. Various factors systematically influence access to the resources that are required to play this game: in any given context, some identities systematically enhance or diminish an individual's opportunities in this respect. The materiality of identification in this respect, and its stratified deprivation or affluence, cannot be underestimated.

In Chapter 4 I called my point of view 'pragmatic individualism'. As a sociological perspective this permits an engagement with the 'empirical selves' of real people acting in the world, who know what they are doing and who they are (although it doesn't follow that they know everything about what they are doing or who they are). As actual people they embody mind and selfhood as points of view located in space and time. As actual people they talk about themselves and others as 'persons'. But 'selves' and 'persons' don't fit together with any consistency. As I argued in Chapter 5, the two are not systematically distinguished in common sense: there is a loose equivalency, with the presumption that each or either word has a taken for granted and understood referent. Even where they are defined and differentiated – philosophically, for example – there is sufficient variety and lack of agreement, and so much conceptualisation by decree, that, when taken together with problems of translation between cultures and epochs, 'the risk of sheer incoherence is alarming' (Hollis 1985: 220).

So, as far as possible, I intend to avoid differentiating the *self* from the *person*. Instead I start from *unitary selfhood*, as the embodied point of view of the individual. It is the individual's reflexive sense of her own particular identity, constituted *vis-à-vis* others in terms of similarity and

difference, without which she would not know who she was and hence would not be able to act. That particular identity, in this model, is always a to-ing and fro-ing of how she sees herself and how others see her. These represent opposite ends of a continuum, one her *self-image*, the other her *public image*. Each is constructed in terms of the other and in terms of her perceived similarity or difference to others. The difference is who is doing the perceiving, who is doing the constructing. This is the internal–external dialectic of individual identification.

And there are other issues about the choice of words. I have outlined two complementary understandings of the self: as the embodied point of view of each human individual in her or his context, and as a way of talking about the complex consistency – or the consistent complexity – of those human individuals. Each of these suggests that we should talk about *selfhood* rather than about *the self*. This usage minimises the pull towards reification implicit in '*the* self' and emphasises the processual character of selfhood. We are talking not about a 'thing', but about an aspect of the human condition.

The definite article must be retained in some circumstances, however. It makes sense, for example, to talk about the self or selves of a specific individual or individuals: *their* embodied point(s) of view. Nothing else will do if we are to remember that selfhood is an attribute of actual individuals, 'empirical selves' in Cooley's words. And indeed all identities must, at some point, refer to individuals if they are to have substance. Embodiment is not optional: just as all individual identities are interactional, so all identities attach or refer to individuals.

While some identities position individuals alongside other similarly identified individuals within collectivities, some identities differentiate individuals, *as* individuals, from each other. This distinction is crude and only analytical. Individuals differ from each other in their characteristic portfolios of collective identities, and the similarities of members of a collectivity typically presuppose their difference from the members of other collectivities. The interplay of similarity and difference is the logic of *all* identification, whether 'individual' or 'collective'. Allowing for these reservations, however, it remains useful to distinguish *individuality* from *collectivity*. The chapters immediately following focus upon identities which are, to differing degrees and in different ways, individual.

7

ENTERING THE HUMAN WORLD

Any newborn human is the product of interactions that take place before birth. At least two people have to have had *something* to do with each other. There are family histories and a pre-existing context of emotion and relationships. There may be metaphysical and ethical debate about the status and identity of embryo and foetus. During pregnancy new identifications and relationships are constructed, tried out and worked into, particularly parenthood and *particularly*, perhaps, motherhood (Bailey 1999; Baker 1979; Smith 1991, 1994).

Nonetheless, birth, as the moment at which the embodied individual enters the human world, is a convenient point at which to begin here. Issues of identification attend every birth. Is the baby a boy or a girl? Who does he or she resemble? What is he or she to be called? There may be questions about paternity. There may be ritual initiation into the community concerned (baptism, circumcision or a variety of other practices). Modern civil society requires the bureaucratic registration of name, place and time of birth, and antecedents, which may in turn establish the individual's claim to citizenship. In each of these cases, individual identification also locates the child within collectivities.

HUMAN-NESS

Some early questions of identification are, however, pointedly individual. The risks and uncertainties of pregnancy and birth, and the precariousness

of life throughout most of human history, suggest that these must have been addressed by all people at all times. Perhaps the most pertinent is whether the baby is 'alright'. Depending on their severity and nature, perceived impairments can quickly raise doubts about the humanity of the child. Questions of individual human-ness are enormously consequential: although few, if any, mutual obligations are established on the grounds of fellow humanity, an attribution of 'non-human-ness' or 'sub-human-ness' has dramatic implications.

How human-ness is understood is locally and historically variable. Acceptable human-ness is attributed to individuals on the basis of explicit or implicit collectively defined criteria (Hirst and Wooley 1982). As a categorical problem, philosophers perceive it better than they can resolve it (Cockburn 1991). Modern medicine has rendered the issue more rather than less perplexing as fragile lives are increasingly maintained or prolonged. The question 'Should the baby live?' is a big question, and no less so when it is implicit and unvoiced (Kuhse and Singer 1985; Lee and Morgan 1989; Singer 1994). On the other hand, modernity in the shape of National Socialist Germany's 'euthanasia' programme has also produced the most extensive and systematic attempt yet to kill those who fall short of acceptable human-ness (Burleigh 1994; Burleigh and Wippermann 1991: 136–167). Even then, however, when it might appear that the identification of the 'ab-human' was thoroughly routinised and collectivised, each decision required authoritative *individual* categorisation (in which it differed from the mass murder of the Jews and other peoples).

The question of whether a child should live does not always hinge on the individual attribution of flawed human-ness. It may be a response to environmental conditions: abandonment, infanticide or abortion in times of famine or other stress are well documented in the ethnographic and historical records (Williamson 1978). But even these practices are typically related to understandings of human-ness. Infanticide may be permitted at need if full human status – whether in terms of spirit, name or whatever – is understood as something children acquire, rather than possessing at birth.

There are also definitively collective identifications – 'race', for example – which may compromise human-ness in the eyes of others. At birth and in early infancy, however, the question of human-ness is posed individually. If selfhood is the primary identity of internal definition, human-ness is the primary identity of external definition. It is necessarily the work of others, with reference to perceived and interpreted bodily characteristics, to categorise individual neonates as acceptably human or to decide the nature of their human-ness. More accurately, in the absence of evidence

to the contrary, adequate individual human-ness is likely to be *assumed* at birth by significant adult others. Human-ness is largely taken for granted, and, once granted, human-ness is for most of us largely irrelevant thereafter. However, precisely because human-ness is axiomatic and vague it is at risk in the face of life's hardships. Subsequent factors such as perceived intellectual competence or acquired physical impairment may undermine it.

Human-ness and selfhood, as primary identities, are typically entailed in each other: there seems to be a close connection between perceptions of one and perceptions of the other. Anthropologist Robert F. Murphy, for example, in a moving account of his own progressive immobilisation by a spinal tumour, describes profound disability as, in the eyes of others, 'a form of *liminality*' (a state of being betwixt and between), in which 'humanity is in doubt' (1990: 131):

> Alienation from others is thus a deprivation of social being, for it is within our bonds that the self is forged and maintained. This loss of self, however, is inherent in the social isolation of paralytics, who have furthermore become separated from their bodies by neural damage and from their former identities. Their plight is that they have become divided from others and riven within themselves.
>
> (Murphy 1990: 227)

This relocation – not merely onto the margins of the human world but onto the margins of the human, a withdrawal of mutual recognition neither sought nor embraced by the individual concerned – is difficult to resist, even for adults equipped with resilient resources of selfhood. In this particular internal–external dialectic, others hold most of the cards. Human-ness is largely in the eye of the beholder. Murphy tells us of his vulnerability when other people neglected, or refused to continue to recognise, his full human-ness and individual selfhood. Others' definitions of the situation became so dominant as to carry the day. Thus as alienation from others feeds back upon self-perception and reflexivity, individuals become alienated from themselves and their sense of selfhood. Public image may become self-image. Our own sense of humanity, of who and what we are, is a hostage to the categorising judgements of others.

INFANTS, CHILDREN AND OTHERS

Birth inaugurates the process of individual initiation into the human world and the assumption of identities within it. While this process necessarily

takes place from an embodied individual point of view, the human world is *always* a world of others, and during infancy the balance is in favour of the identificatory work done by those others. If Shotter's account (1974) can be accepted, an infant is not a being independent of its mother (or, presumably, other consistent carers). Shotter draws on Spitz to characterise the relationship between infant and carer as 'psychological symbiosis'. While this image acknowledges the infant's agency and predisposition to learn, it recognises the indispensable role of the other(s) in the infant's development of mind, selfhood and identity. For Shotter, 'making' a competent human infant is an intended project of the other(s).

This suggests that, to begin with, the symbiosis is neither symmetrical nor equal. Kaye, for example, reviewing the evidence in support of the notion of the 'mother–infant system', argues that, because the mother is in the first instance the locus of agency in the interaction, there is no system as such. Persons are not born, says Kaye, they are the creations of their parents:

> the temporal structure that eventually becomes a true social system will at first only have been created by the parent, making use of built in regularities in infant behavior rather than actual cooperation or communication. Another way of stating this is that evolution has produced infants who can fool their parents into treating them as more intelligent than they really are . . . it is precisely because parents play out this fiction that it eventually comes to be true: that the infant does become a person and an intelligent partner in intersubjective communication.

> (Kaye 1982: 53)

Kaye's interpretation relies on a strict notion of agency: because the infant is at first doing what seems to come naturally, her behaviour doesn't count. Two comments about this are necessary. First, it may be a naïve observation, and obvious, but agency is integral to human nature – an evolutionary endowment – and much of it, whether in adulthood or childhood, is neither deliberate nor reflexive. Second, the evidence Kaye was surveying – evidence that has since grown (e.g. Mehler 1994) – can be interpreted otherwise:

> The mind of the infant is neither simple nor incoherent. They do not develop intentional integrity by the linking up of sensory-motor reflexes through conditioning, as the behaviourists said they did. They seem, rather, to be seeking to refine their reactions to particular events and

> formulate specialised skills within a coherent general ability to perceive and understand both physical objects and persons. They are born with several complementary forms of knowing, and they use these to develop experience of the particular world they are in, assisted by communicating.
>
> (Trevarthen 1987: 363)

The difference between these versions of early human development isn't total. They agree that human infants are utterly dependent, that they have the necessary instincts or reflexes – such as suckling – to ensure survival, that they are not blank slates and that the contribution of others to their very early development is determinate. Much recent developmental psychology seems to see no paradox in a vision of active infants-in-their-own-right who require the work of others to realise their potential (see Lindesmith *et al.* 1999: 217–282). That vision is, in fact, pretty much the image of human nature that informs the account of identification offered here.

So, what is the place of identification in the processes by which the infant is 'routinely completed as a cognitive and social being' (Harré 1981: 98)? First, the infant recognises self and significant others (in the beginning, perhaps, significant *other*). Turn-taking is arguably the most basic – or even, recalling Mead's 'conversation of gestures', the *only* basic – interaction process (Goffman 1983: 7). To call it the atom of the human world may be no exaggeration. It provides the framework for attachment and mutuality of recognition. It is also the context within which language is acquired: recognising names, being able to ascribe them correctly, acquiring appropriate discursive forms. The capacity to make others respond bestows upon them significance, creating signifier and signified. Objects as well as persons fall into the identification process: their materiality and their uses, the practical possibilities that they afford (Gibson 1979; Winnicott 1965). Learning who she is, and her place in the world of others and objects, is an integral part of the infant's acquisition of language, and *vice versa*.

Identification is a two-way process between infant and caretaker, but in its early stages the exchange is dominated by incoming signals. Some of the earliest contributions to identification may, what's more, come from interactions that don't involve the infant, taking place away from her. Gendering, for example, often begins, unknown to the infant, from day one (or even before, now that the foetus can be sexed). In Britain, for example, naming aside, accessories such as clothing, toys and nursery colour scheme may be brought into play, creating a gendered world that the infant

encounters and takes for granted, and that structures the responses to her of others.

Gender is only the most obvious aspect of infant identity that is partly constructed during interactions between others. Being 'a grandchild' is another example, perhaps less momentous. Grandparents may open savings accounts for their grandchildren, attempt to influence this or that aspect of their upbringing or revisit inheritance plans. They may vie with each other for position in the politics of the family. And in the process 'grandchildhood' is constructed as much during interactions between others – largely in the circle of parents and grandparents – as between grandparents and infant grandchildren (and in that process, of course, 'parenthood' and 'grandparenthood' also come into being).

Infants *very* rapidly become babies, however, and just as rapidly children. Incrementally, they enter into relationships with others that are increasingly autonomous of other relationships. They identify themselves as they identify others, and as they are themselves reciprocally identified. Dunn (1988) argues that self-efficacy develops in the child early in life, hand in glove with a concern about and with others. From at least as early as eighteen months, children exhibit an understanding of the world of self and others as a moral world in which actions have consequences; from about three years old they begin to show signs of interest in and understanding of minds, of their own mental states and those of others (see also Cicchetti and Beghley 1990; Kagan and Lamb 1987).

There is a distinctively human pattern in this process, although specialists may dispute its detailed chronology, and local variation modifies it. Poole's overview of far-flung ethnographic and other evidence (1994: 847–852) suggests the following general sequence for the routine 'emergence of identity in childhood':

- An individualised attachment to mothers and caretakers becomes apparent by seven to nine months.
- From twelve months onwards naming and categorisation emerge and are directed to an understanding of the human world.
- By the age of two basic conversational capacity is established.
- Thereafter the child's capacity to represent and act out everyday individual others and their practices in the abstract – 'in pretend' – grows in complexity.
- By early childhood (two to four years), the child's narratives and understandings of self and others indicate 'the appearance of a more elaborated map of persons in an experientially expanding sense of community', entailing 'Self-identification of and with other persons

through observation, differentiation, imitation and affiliation' (Poole 1994: 850).

- During the same period, gender becomes an important dimension of selfhood.
- By middle childhood, from five or six years, the child begins to assume a degree of interactional and moral responsibility for her actions, begins to understand the statuses she occupies, with their related roles, begins to acquire a public 'face' to control how she is perceived by others, and (ideally!) begins to do as she would be done by.
- As the child moves through middle childhood, towards adolescence, the peer group, often segregated by gender, begins to replace the family as the primary context within which identification occurs and develops.

It is necessary to question the late timing in this scheme of the child's attachment to mother or other carers, and the universality of phases such as 'early childhood', 'middle childhood' and 'adolescence'. However, viewed as a broad-brush impression rather than a technical drawing, Poole's account offers a useful ideal-typical model of some very general processes that draws comparatively upon a wider range of sources than most.[1] The 'new' sociology and anthropology of childhood that coalesced during the 1990s (Corsaro 1997; James 1993; James and James 2004; James *et al.* 1998; Jenks 1996) also has much to teach us about identification processes during childhood. Species-specific developmental patterns such as those summarised by Poole notwithstanding, the founding propositions of this revisionist approach are:

- that children and childhood are experienced and understood differently in different places and times; and
- that children should be understood, and approached by researchers, as active contributors to and makers of the human worlds of which they are members.

This is a matter of 'personifying children' (James 1993: 31), of treating them as conscious, human persons possessing agency. Children are actors in their own right, not merely appendages of the adults in their lives, and there is no universal, objective category of 'childhood':

> Although clearly childhood can be seen as a permanent feature of any social structure, the particular social and cultural parameters which define and regulate . . . 'childhood' . . . are all temporally – that is generationally – situated. Any account of the unfolding of childhood in

children's lives must therefore acknowledge the effects of such historical structuring.

(James *et al*. 1998: 64)

although children may share in a common biology and follow a broadly similar developmental path, their social experiences and their relative competences as social actors must always be seen as contextualized, rather than determined, by the process of physiological and psychological change . . . Global paradigms, it is suggested, may over-standardize models of childhood as a particular segment of the life course by according priority to age and thus induce a determined and determining conformity which might underplay the impact of local social and environmental contexts on the everyday lives and experiences of children.

(Christensen and James 2000: 176)

'Childhood' is thus a matter of time, both historically and in the everyday lives of children: it is a matter of collective definition (by others) and individual becoming (on the part of children).

The implications of this approach for our understanding of identification are obvious. Accepting that there is an early imbalance in favour of 'external' moments in the internal–external dialectic of identification, and that young humans rarely have the cognitive, experiential or other resources available to older humans, there is no reason to imagine the post-infancy world of childhood as strikingly different to, or isolated from, the human world(s) experienced by adults. They are in large part the same world(s). Children actively construct their own identities – and, indeed, the identities of others – and identification *works* for children much as it does for adults. The everyday processes involved, rooted in the internal–external dialectic, are no different.

The new sociology and anthropology of childhood, in insisting that childhood is socially constructed, relative and relational, also reminds us that childhood is not a 'stand-alone' identification or state of being. Much as similarity and difference cannot make sense independently of each other, childhood and adulthood depend on each other for their meaning. Nor can either be understood outside a more complex set of identifications and identificatory processes that make local collective sense out of, and order, the organically embodied changes of individual human ageing: the life course is among the most powerful institutionalised domains of identification (Hockey and James 2003) and among the most consequential in the lives of individuals.

GENDERED IDENTIFICATION

One of the developmental processes on which Poole focuses is the assumption of 'social personhood' (1994: 851). He defines personhood in contrast to selfhood, and much as discussed in Chapter 5: as a public moral career with connotations of responsible agency and jural entitlements (*ibid.*: 842), which he sees as developing in middle childhood. Unfortunately, his version of the self–person distinction confuses institutional identification (jural entitlements) with individual cognitive and emotional development (responsible agency), and conflates an analytical category of 'the person' with local categorisations of agency and status. One reading of his account, for example, might suggest an equivalence between adulthood – as locally defined – and personhood, while another might question whether, within many local understandings of gender differentiation, women can be considered persons at all.

Poole's scheme is, however, a useful peg on which to hang the exploration of a number of general themes. For example, if, as already suggested, selfhood and human-ness are *the* primary identities *par excellence*, then gender is something similar. Gender differentiations, rooted in biological differences (Jenkins 2002a: 119–129), are ubiquitous in the human world. Their specifics and content are locally variable, but that there *is* differentiation is not. Human infants are defined in terms of gender from their earliest appearance, the environment of infancy is structured in terms of gender, and children come early to an embodied identification of themselves as gendered (Damon and Hart 1988: 30–31).

It may be objected here that gender is a collective rather than an individual identity. It isn't that simple, however. While the biology of sex differentiation has considerable generality, and some collective consequences for humans (generic male domination, for example), and gender, as the local coding of sex differences, is enormously significant in everyday life, no *general* principal of attachment, obligation or even mutual recognition is collectively established between actors on the basis of sex *or* gender. In any local context there may be, but it isn't universal (very far from it, indeed).

To introduce a distinction of which more will be made in subsequent chapters, gender is a *categorical* collective identification before it is a principle of *group* formation. In this it differs from kinship or ethnicity, which are in the first place – and by definition – principles of group identification. Furthermore, the gender of every individual must be established at birth, it isn't predictable from the local co-ordinates of birth, unlike kinship or ethnicity. One is not born into a gender in the same way,

for example, that one is born into a family, a lineage, a community or an ethnie.

At which point it's necessary to qualify the argument further: despite the individuality of gender, all human communities and all local views of the world are massively organised in gender terms. This is a collective matter. Gender is one of the most consistent identificatory themes in human history, and one of the most pervasive classificatory principles – arguably the most pervasive – with massive consequences for the life-chances and experiences of whole categories of people.

Gender is thus simultaneously individual and collective in equal degree, and in this it may be distinctive. Although all human identities, individual or collective, are definitively interactional, where the individual emphasises difference the collective is weighted towards similarity. Gender identities are fairly evenly balanced in this respect. Gender is a binary classificatory scheme, and the demographic distribution of the root male–female differentiation is approximately equal. Thus each main gender is the classificatory intersection of one basic relation of difference and one basic relation of similarity.

The internal–external dialectic of identification is also relevant. Gender as a category, no matter what else it may be, is always massively externally defined. This is so with respect to initial individual identification and subsequent practices of identification. In the institutional constitution of the human world and its rewards and penalties, an individual's gender becomes interactionally real in large part because of her membership of a collective category. On the other hand, gender – rooted as it is in sex differences – is at the centre of the embodied point of view of selfhood and the internal moment of the dialectic of individual identification. Collectively, the sharing of similar life-experiences, which may be powerfully embodied, also allows gender to be a principle of group formation: this is the internal moment of collective identification. The twentieth-century women's movement can, for example, be understood as an attempt to transform individual identification based on categorical differentiation into collective group identification asserting shared similarity.

How do selfhood, human-ness and gender relate to each other? A sense of gender is typically powerfully incorporated into the embodied individual point of view of selfhood. Collective gender differentiation, on the other hand, may relate to local conceptions of human-ness, via gendered notions about 'human nature' or embodied models of the 'natural' or the 'normal'. For example, behaviour that is locally gender-inappropriate may be identified by others as 'un-natural', and the individual may perceive herself to be 'un-natural' too, or must struggle not to do so.

PRIMARY IDENTIFICATIONS

The model of an internal–external dialectic of identification fits with both Poole's account of child development and the recent renovation and expansion of the sociology and anthropology of childhood. During early-life experience, however, the external moment of that dialectic is necessarily the more significant. Very young humans are dependent: there is much that they must discover about the world and their place in it. All other things being equal, they are hard-wired to be voracious learners, and they must learn who's who and what's what. But if they do not learn this from others, they will never know. Children soon begin to exercise autonomy in this respect as in so many others, but it comes after, and only on the back of, a somewhat different early experience.

This suggests that identities that are established during infancy and childhood may be less flexible than identities that are acquired subsequently. There are a number of reasons for making this suggestion. On the face of things, identification is neither remorselessly permanent nor frivolously malleable. The most adamantine identity has some leeway in it, if only as a sense of possibility. Identities are flexible because the dialectic of identification is, in principle, never wholly closed. Given the uncertainty and unpredictability of life this is useful, even vital. Arising within and out of bilateral processes of mutual recognition which are often rooted in specific situations, identities are generally contingent, 'for the time being', and somewhat tolerant of inconsistency or contradiction.

But the more unilateral the internal–external traffic, the less negotiable the resultant identity is likely to be, the smaller the room for manoeuvre. Identifications entered into in early life are experienced as more authoritative than those acquired subsequently: at most, infants and very small children can only muster weak responses of internal (self-)definition to modify or reject them. Assumed during the most foundational learning period, they become part of the individual's axiomatic cognitive furniture: 'the way things are'. *Pace* Mead, this is all the more so given that children are learning to talk during this period, and language, and talk in particular, is central to identification (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998; Gumperz 1982; Potter 1996; Potter and Wetherell 1987). Very young humans lack the competence to counter successfully their identification by others. They have limited capacities to question or resist, even if they are disposed to. And they may not be: during and before the process of language acquisition the powerful human learning predisposition leaves the individual open to forceful and consequential definition by others. Further, inasmuch as gendered identity (for example) is incorporated into

individual selfhood, a powerful set of mutual reinforcements, with change posing a threat to the security of selfhood, are likely to be set in place.

The security of selfhood has, of course, sources other than authoritative inculcation during early childhood. As Giddens has argued (1984: 50ff; 1990: 92–100), individual ontological security – the common sense that all that is solid, including oneself, does *not* melt into air – relies upon routine and habit. This is arguably more so for children than for adults. Certainly infants and children are well known to resent the disruption of their routines: insisting upon routine may be among their earliest interventions in the human world. Further, the world of early childhood is often largely, if not totally, sheltered within an immediate domestic group. Routine is easily established, carers well known and the world relatively simple. Under such circumstances, primary identities are acquired in ordered settings which the child experiences, and to some extent creates, as homogeneous and consistent. Minimal disruption may encourage the experience of primary identification as universal, globally independent of context and situation, providing the individual with a subsequent taken for granted 'thread of life', to borrow a phrase from Wollheim (1984).

This is, of course an ideal-typical – even idealised – representation of early childhood.[2] None of it is inevitable: insecurity and inconsistency are to be expected. Not all parents and carers are or can be committed to their infants to the same degree. Interaction with baby, the all-important turn-taking, is perhaps as often neglected as not. The emotional climate of family life and kin networks is variable. Childrearing practices vary enormously. For parents and carers, the demands of the adult world routinely conflict with the demands of childrearing. More dramatically, children are rarely insulated from the tempests of the outside world: when life is turned upside down, they are turned upside down too.

Secure consistency and relative calm in the formative years may, therefore, be as much the exception as the rule. But this doesn't mean that the human world is peopled by individuals with fragmentary or insecure senses of selfhood and identity. Rather, I am suggesting that although most people, most of the time, experience life from the embodied point of view of relatively unitary and consistent selfhood, they are no strangers to uncertainty and insecurity either. Usually we know who and where we are, but not always. And if on occasions our security is threatened (or worse), it need not mean our internal moment of identification is fragile or wavering.

The human world can be unpredictable, challenging and unsupportive, and our bodies are vulnerable. Even so, the primary identifications of selfhood and gender are much more robust than most other identities.

Human-ness – a taken for granted assumption, ascribed by default – is different, but it can still be described as primary in that ascriptions of *compromised* human-ness are unforgivingly robust. What's more, although human-ness and gender may be distinct from selfhood, they are acquired so early, are so consequential and are so definitively embodied that they should be regarded as reciprocally entailed in selfhood.

Can any other identifications be called primary? One obvious candidate is kinship. The kin group is one source of enduring individual primary identification. No matter when or where, one of the most important elements in individual identification, by self and others, is kinship (Harris 1990; Holy 1996; Keesing 1975; Parker and Stone 2003). Kin-group membership epitomises the collectivity of identity, locating individuals within a field that is independent of and beyond individually embodied points of view. Naming, the identification of individuals in terms of collective antecedents and contemporary affiliations, is central to kinship and is given substance by the rights and duties of kin-group membership. Kinship identity establishes relations of similarity with fellow kin in terms of descent; it differentiates the individual from non-kin and, in classificatory terms, other members of the descent group. Kinship may also establish equivalence – similarity – with non-kin: principles of exogamy and alliance relationships between groups identify potential marriage partners, ritual or exchange partners, political allies and so on.

Looking at the internal–external dialectic, her individual name is among the earliest things a child learns. For most of us our name, for better or worse, is as it has ever been: there and part of us, we can't remember a time pre-name. Try imagining yourself by another name . . . it's not impossible (and people do change their names, or become called by other names) but it isn't easy. From learning her name follows a child's ability to name her parents, other significant kin, where she lives, etc. Thus kin-group membership – name and place – is likely to be significantly entailed in selfhood. The emotional charge on kin-relations is also significant. That kinship may be represented in terms of embodied family resemblance further encourages the incorporation of descent into self-identification. On the other hand, however, resemblance is in the eye of the beholder. And, certainly in childhood, our name isn't usually an identity which we bestow on ourselves. More generally, we should remember the old adage: unlike friends, one can't choose one's family.

Nor is kinship universally salient: in some local settings kinship is all, in others it has limited significance. It may be less significant within the immediate kin group (where it may be taken for granted) than in relationships outside it. Kin identification doesn't travel well, either. For

example, outside the family itself my family membership only matters in the face-to-face local context from which it draws its relevance. Elsewhere, my family name ceases to be a multi-stranded identification *with* others, becoming instead a uni-dimensional means of differentiating me *from* others.

The other possibly primary identification is ethnicity. There is some debate about whether ethnicity is *primordial*, essential and unchanging, or *situational*, as manipulable as circumstances require or allow (Jenkins 2008: 46–50). The notion of primary identification opens up some middle ground for this debate. As a collective identity that may have a massive presence in the experience of individuals, ethnicity – including, for the moment, 'race' – is often an important and early dimension of self-identification. Individuals often learn frameworks for classifying themselves and others by ethnicity and 'race' during childhood, certainly by about ten years old.[3] The ideologies of collective descent that frequently underpin ethnicity imagine it as distinctively embodied. And embodiment, even if stereotypical, is always individual and part of the point of view of self-hood. Although 'race' is likely to be more visible than ethnic differentiation based on behavioural cues, either may be established relatively early, albeit probably not as early as gender. Ethnicity may involve emotion and affect (Epstein 1978; Memmi 1990), suggesting that it can become significantly entailed in selfhood. Ethnicity, when it matters to people, *really* matters. The circumstances under which it matters are relevant, however. Ethnicity depends on similarity and difference rubbing up against each other collectively: 'us' and 'them'. Ethnic identification weaves together the fate of the individual with collective fate in a distinctive fashion, and it can be enormously consequential.

On the other hand, the research of Barth (1969) and others suggests that ethnicity can be *very* negotiable. Individuals may, under appropriate circumstances, change their ethnicity, and sometimes they do. Even the embodied categorisations of 'race' have their flexibilities: 'passing' is not unheard of and, more important, the definitions and significances of 'race' are historically and locally variable. Nor does ethnicity as an organising principle of interaction and relationships, or a presence in early experience, have the same salience everywhere. All of which suggests that ethnicity is *not* primordial. It *may* however – depending on the situation – be a primary identification (which need not deny it some situational flexibility).

Thus whether kinship or ethnicity is a primary identification is always a local question. Unlike human-ness, selfhood and gender, they are not *universal* primary identities. Kinship or ethnicity may be salient early in the individual experience of identification, they may be enormously

consequential, they may be entailed in selfhood. That both involve embodied criteria of identification – family resemblance, physical stereotypes, 'race' – is likely to reinforce this. But neither kinship nor ethnicity is necessarily a primary individual identification. Depending on local circumstance and individual history they may be more negotiable and flexible than human-ness or gender.

THE 'OUTSIDE' WORLD

A gradual shift in the dynamics of the childhood dialectic of identification, towards increasingly bilateral relationships of mutuality and reciprocation, occurs sooner rather than later. Selfhood becomes more secure and consistent. Children become increasingly knowledgeable and competent actors. These changes are systematically entangled, and on each count the child develops greater resources with which to assert her internal moment of identification. She has a burgeoning, more confident and fuller sense of who she is. Infants soon become children, children eventually become adults.

There is more to it, however, than individual development or progress through local age-based identity categories. Although this will vary from place to place, she isn't very old before she starts to move in ever-widening networks. Increasingly she has to relate to other children, with whom interaction is more equitable and more of a contest. Families may have their politics, but the peer group is definitively political. Relationships with others become more negotiable and more negotiated (James 1993). And much less predictable. Other children need to know who she is. She needs to know who they are and what to expect of them. Who's who and what's what. Skills of self-presentation are acquired, and she learns to identify others on the basis of a range of cues. Reputation, public image in the eyes of peers, becomes important. If indeed it ever was, the regard of others is no longer unconditional. Hierarchy must be negotiated and status begins to matter. Friendship begins to be an affective domain of its own, distinct from kinship. Projective play – 'let's pretend' – provides opportunities for role-playing and the rehearsal of identities. And increasingly children cultivate the capacity to mobilise 'face' and 'front'. A sense of private selfhood begins to be important.

Before long the peer-group competes with the domestic group for the child's attention. She also has more adults to deal with, and proportionately fewer of them are familiar. Increasingly she is a member of formal institutional settings. Negotiating a path through and round these ever more complex environments, she is increasingly required to be self-resourcing

and resourceful and is expected to function autonomously to some extent. This entails the gradual assumption of more and more responsibility for her actions. One thing for which she may increasingly have to accept responsibility is her impact, acting in the part of the other, on the identification(s) of those with whom she interacts.

Most strikingly, every child has to learn to live with her public image. This may differ from her self-image, is not always within her control, and may vary from context to context. The internal–external dialectic of identification, the problematic relationship between how we see ourselves and how others see us, is now a central concern and theme of her life. Whether wholly consciously or not, identifications are increasingly entered into as projects, or resisted when they are imposed and unwelcome.

The face-to-face world of children very quickly comes to resemble the adult world in its strategies, its games, its stratification and its rules. It is, indeed, a model for the world of adulthood. This is the everyday world that Erving Goffman called the 'interaction order'. Goffman's work is one of the places where the next pieces of the jigsaw of identity will be found.

8

SELF-IMAGE AND PUBLIC IMAGE

Erving Goffman's work is approachable and subtle, combining sociology, social anthropology and social psychology in a manner that challenges petty disciplinarity. He is also among the most mundanely useful of writers. How many other social scientists can illuminate the full spectrum of our face-to-face encounters, from an evening in relaxed good company to the most formal of life-cycle rituals? He has no rivals in the sociological interpretation of everyday life. Even so, there are four established criticisms of his work:

- that, even if not merely descriptive, it isn't a systematic body of theory;
- that it doesn't integrate the everyday world within 'social structure';
- that his analyses are too specific to the modern (American) human world to be generalisable; and
- that his actors are hollow shells, that he offers no account of the formation of selfhood and only a cynical account of motivation.

Responses to the first three are not vital here. For those who are interested, Burns (1992), Collins (1988) and Giddens (1984: 68–73) offer discussions of the issues that are sympathetic to Goffman's project. The fourth criticism is, however, relevant.

SELFHOOD AND MOTIVATION

Hollis is representative of this strand of critique, arguing that 'Goffman owes us a theory of self as subject . . . to sustain an active base for its social transactions . . . Notoriously the debt goes unpaid' (1977: 88). He goes on to say, somewhat contradictorily perhaps, that Goffman's actors are pure individualists, bent only on the public pursuit of purely private ends and interests (*ibid.*: 102–103). MacIntyre is one of Goffman's harshest critics in this respect:

> Goffman . . . has liquidated the self into its role-playing, arguing that the self is no more than 'a peg' on which the clothes of the role are hung . . . For Goffman, for whom the social world is all, the self is therefore nothing at all, it occupies no social space.
>
> (MacIntyre 1985: 32)

This, too, seems contradictory: if MacIntyre is correct, if Goffman's self is merely its role-playing, then that self, such as it is, can *only* be 'social'.

What does Goffman himself say? There are two interdependent themes running through his work, the better known of which concerns *the routines and rituals of everyday interaction*. It can be summarised under four headings. First, there is the *embodiment* and *spatiality* of interaction. The individual has, and is, a physical presence in the world. The embodied actor is always, for Goffman, spatially situated: *vis-à-vis* others, and regionally, in terms of the local staging of interaction. The two main interaction regions are front-stage and backstage, public and private (Goffman 1969: 109–140). The body, particularly the upper body and most particularly the face, is the interactional presence of selfhood. Goffman's unit of analysis is the embodied individual, and the embodied self has its territories, preserves of space that can be respected or violated (1971: 51–87). So while Goffman's self is embodied, its boundaries extend into interactional space.

Second, he uses two metaphors to understand everyday routines or rituals: interaction as a *performance or drama* (1969) – hence front-stage and backstage – or as a *game* (1961, 1970). In each, interaction is co-operative, organised, ordered, rule-governed. However, it occurs in a world of negotiation and transaction. This is a world that is created and enabled by interactional routines, a universe in which implicit and explicit rules are resources rather than determinants of behaviour.

The variability and multiplexity of life and experience are summed up, third, in Goffman's concept of *framing* (1975). From the individual point

of view, and in the institutional constitution of the human world, specific settings are 'frames' – each with characteristic meanings and rules – within which interaction is organised. Individuals experience life as a series of different sets or stages, organised formally or informally. While each individual may have different understandings of these settings, and of what's happening within them, the shared frame creates enough consistency and mutuality for interaction to proceed. Frames are bounded in space and time and in this sense substantial. Frame analysis is thus a compromise between the relativism of social constructionism, in which the 'definition of the situation' is all (but all there is), and a commonsensical epistemology that recognises the existence of a 'real' world out there.

All of these merge, fourth, in Goffman's notion of *the interaction order* (1983): the face-to-face domain of dealings between embodied individuals. Remote dealings, over the 'phone or by letter, are not excluded – and it is about time we thought about the implications of mobile phones, e-mail and the Internet for the twenty-first-century interaction order (Katz 2006; Katz and Aakhus 2004) – but the emphasis is on the physicality of co-presence. It is an orderly domain of activity, in which the individual and the collective become realised in each other. Although, in Goffman's own words, this is the terrain of 'microanalysis', the notion of the interaction order may be regarded as his contribution to bridging the 'individual–collective' gap. The interaction order and 'social structure' are implicated in each other in a relationship of 'loose coupling' (1983: 11): each is entailed in the other, but neither determines the other.

One major problem with this framework is its vision of the human world as rule-governed, scripted or ritualised. Goffman himself glossed these possibilities as 'enabling conventions' (1983: 5), which is helpful, but the image of explicit and directed organisation lingers. A further problem is the implication that individual means–ends rational calculation is the wellspring of behaviour. Of course, much interaction is observant of rules or conventions, and means–end rationality is often important. But, *contra* rules or calculation, much of what people do is necessarily either habitual or improvisational. There is no scriptwriter – although there are repertoires – and rules can never be sufficiently flexible or comprehensive to deal adequately with the variability and unpredictability of life.

The importance of habit and habitualisation in human life is well-known (e.g. Berger and Luckmann 1967: 70–85). In fact, habit provides the space within which rational decision-making operates: if we had to make a decision about everything, we'd never be able to make a decision about anything. Goffman's emphasis upon ritual, routines and frames indicates his awareness of this. Apropos *rules*, however, Goffman overstates the

case. Bourdieu is on the right lines (1977, 1990), in theorising practical dispositions as embodied habit – habitus – and emphasising the improvisatory, non-rule-governed nature of much of what we do. In many situations neither habit nor rules nor calculation offer a way ahead; so, necessarily, we improvise. Improvisation can, however, be reflexive, resembling rational calculation, or spontaneously unreflexive, in which case it looks more like habit. Improvisation may also pay attention to rules and conventions in the ad hocery of the moment. Habit, rule-observance, calculation and improvisation, as ways of doing things, are, at best, only analytically distinct. Things are a lot less tidy in everyday interaction.

THE PRESENTATION OF SELF AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

The other important theme in Goffman's work is *identity*. Individuals negotiate their identities within the interaction order. Mobilising interactional competences within situational ('framed') routines, individuals present an image of themselves – of self – for acceptance by others. In my terms, this is the internal moment of the dialectic of identification with respect to public image. The external moment is the reception by others of that presentation: they can accept it or not. Individual identification emerges within the ongoing relationship between self-image and public image.

Goffman's work suggests that, interactionally speaking, the internal–external dialect of individual identification involves a number of elements. There are the arts of impression management: the interactional competences which 'send' particular identities to others and attempt to influence their reception. These include dramatic style and ability, idealisation (by which Goffman means individual identification with collectively defined roles), expressive control, misrepresentation and mystification. Many of these derive from early socialisation, and are routinised in embodied non-verbal communication in addition to language.

Interactional regions are resources for revealing and concealing particular identities. Backstage one can, to some extent, be free of the anxieties of presentation; it is the domain of self-image rather than public image. Hence the idea that I can 'be myself' in private. I can rehearse the presentation of an identity in a backstage area before trying to carry it off in public. As a teenager, for example, I learned to play guitar in my bedroom, but I also practised something more awkward, 'being a guitarist'. Front-stage, work is required by performer and audience, to collude in the mutualities of identification. Under some circumstances audience tact is required if the

performance is to 'come off' and the public image established in the setting in question.

Burns (1992: 270ff) discerns two understandings of self-presentation in Goffman. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1969) selfhood lies in expressive performance: hence the metaphor of the human world as a stage, and the criticisms of Hollis and MacIntyre. In *Frame Analysis* (1975), however, selfhood – as the thread of consistency from frame to frame – has become the source of the performance, sufficiently autonomous of context to be able, at need, to achieve distance from it. These visions of selfhood are complementary, not contradictory. Nor, arguably, is the second absent from *The Presentation of Self*: it is implicit in the discussion of discrepant roles (Goffman 1969: 123–146), and crystal clear in Goffman's distinction between the performed self-as-character, 'some kind of image, usually creditable, which the individual on stage and in character effectively induces others to hold in regard to him' (*ibid.*: 223), and the performer, 'a harried fabricator of impressions involved in the all-too-human task of staging a performance' (*ibid.*: 222). The individual as character is a public construct; the individual as performer is partly a psycho-biological creature and partly a product of the 'contingencies of staging performances' (*ibid.*: 224).

Apropos character in another sense, Hollis and MacIntyre are simply wrong, in that Goffman's individual is a moral creature, inhabiting a moral universe. Giddens correctly stresses (1984: 70) the emphasis in Goffman on inter-personal trust: on tact, collusion, interactional damage limitation and repair. Goffman's actors want to appear creditable to others; they want (or need) to make a good impression. Thus most people most of the time extend to others the minimal interactional support which they require themselves if their own identity performances are to succeed (or, at least, not fail). 'Do as you would be done by' seems to be the basic axiom. Thus the dialectic – a word which Goffman himself uses (1969: 220) – of identification has a moral dimension, rooted in reciprocity:

> when an individual projects a definition of the situation and thereby makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of his kind have a right to expect. He also implicitly forgoes all claims to be things he does not appear to be and hence forgoes the treatment that would be appropriate for such individuals.
>
> (Goffman 1969: 11–12)

If this were all Goffman had to say, his would be a mildly utopian model of a world in which actors do their best to get on with each other in a relatively equitable fashion. Fortunately, he also knows that things do not always go smoothly.

LABELLING

In particular, Goffman recognises that identity can be 'spoiled'; that identification, particularly within institutions, can be heavily biased in favour of its external moment; and that identification is often a matter of imposition and resistance, claim and counter-claim, rather than a consensual process of mutuality and negotiation. Leaving institutional identification until later chapters, what does he mean by 'spoiled identity'?

The key text, *Stigma* (1968a) is arguably the least satisfactory of Goffman's books. Under the rubric of spoiled or stigmatised identity he includes a range of things – from having a colostomy, to being a criminal, to being a member of an ethnic minority – which don't have much in common, even at second or third glance. The book is concerned with how individuals manage discrepancies between their 'virtual social identity' – their appearance to others in interaction (often on the basis of superficial cues) – and the 'actual social identity' which closer inspection would reveal them to possess. Individuals with a discreditable actual identity want to be 'virtually normal': stigma is the gap between the virtual and the actual, and the shame that attaches – or would attach – to its discovery by others. Stigmatisation is, moreover, a continuum of degree. We are all disreputable in some respects, and the information management skills required to control who knows about them, and to what degree, are routine items in our interactional repertoires.

In *Stigma*, Goffman also distinguishes between 'social identity' and 'personal identity'. Personal identity combines relatively consistent embodied uniqueness and a specifically individual set of facts, organised as a history or a biography. This is *not* reflexive selfhood: 'Social and personal identity are part, first of all, of other persons' concerns and definitions regarding the individual whose identity is in question' (1968a: 129). These distinctions – social and personal, virtual and actual – are less rather than more helpful. Apropos the social and the personal, *all* human identities are, as I have already argued in Chapter 2, 'social' identities. What's more, Goffman's notion of personal identity relies heavily on the self–person distinction which I have been avoiding. Finally, the virtual–actual distinction is problematic in that the use of 'actual' implies that one is more 'real' than the other.

However, *Stigma* offers much that is useful. It emphasises the demands that others make of us on the basis of our public image. As a consequence, trajectories that are anything but those we would choose can be thrust upon us. Others don't just perceive our identity, they actively constitute it. And they do so not only in terms of naming or categorising, but in terms of how they respond to or treat us. In the dialectic of individual identification the external moment can be enormously consequential.

In *Stigma*, Goffman drew upon the labelling perspective in the sociology of deviance.[1] Intellectually, this is an offspring of Mead, on the one hand, and Chicago sociologists such as W. I. Thomas and Everett Hughes, on the other. Beginning with the early work of Tannenbaum (1938), the labelling perspective was shaped into a coherent model by Becker (1963), Lemert (1972), Matza (1969) and others. Against the conventional view that social control was a reaction to deviance, the labelling school argued that social control necessarily produced deviance. This labelling theorem comes in three versions:

- rule-breaking is routine and endemic and only becomes deviance when it is authoritatively labelled as such;
- actors become deviants because they are so labelled; and
- rates of deviance are the product of the activities of social control agencies.

The classificatory logics of these arguments are unimpeachable. Compare, for example, Becker's view, that 'social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance' (1963: 9), with Douglas's proposition, that 'Dirt is the by-product of the systematic ordering and classification of matter' (1966: 48). Disorder is the product of ordering; definition generates anomaly; and similarity begets difference.

The labelling perspective has its vigorous critics (Gove 1980; Taylor *et al.*: 1973: 139–171). *Inter alia*, they argue that it isn't a systematic theory; that it is so relativist that nothing is *really* deviant; that it neglects power and structure; that it is an over-simple model of process; and that it sees actors as uni-dimensional at best and utterly determined at worst. Much of this resonates with the standard critique of Goffman, and invites similar responses; and, as also with Goffman, the labelling model has its staunch defenders (Plummer 1979).

BEING AND BECOMING

Although much of it isn't relevant here, some aspects of the labelling perspective are significant for a wider understanding of identification. Lemert, for example, distinguishes between *primary* and *secondary* deviance (1972: 62–92). Primary deviance is the basic act of deviance, with its origins in any number of physiological, psychological or interactional factors. Generally it is not dramatised as deviant, being normalised away or negotiated around. Excuses are made, mitigating circumstances discovered, the act redefined as not 'really' deviant, or whatever. We all do deviant things sometimes (or could otherwise be considered deviant) but hardly any of us *is* 'a deviant'. This is an individual identification that definitively requires the identificatory work of others. Depending on circumstance and the nature of the deviance, primary deviance may be recognised and defined as deviance, and the individual labelled deviant. Deviance is very much in the eye of the beholder. Secondary deviance is the internalised identity of 'deviant' produced by the act of labelling, and the subsequent deviance that identity generates.

The labelling perspective emphasises secondary deviance, the process whereby people are identified as deviant and come to identify themselves as deviant. In terms of my model, the external moment of identification is turned round on, and incorporated into, the internal. The individual's subsequent behaviour and biography become organised – by herself and by others – with reference to an identification which is now internal as well as external. Becker (1963: 25–39) refers to this as the *deviant career*, during which the initial external identification of 'deviant' becomes an internal identification. This internalisation occurs in the context of authoritative social control processes in which identification as deviant generates real consequences; in which the identity of deviant is sufficiently powerful to nudge or propel a rule-breaker towards 'becoming a deviant'. It is a question of whose definition of the situation, *and of the individual*, counts. The affinities with Goffman, and with my argument that identity must be understood processually, are clear: we should always be concerned with processes of identification, trajectories of *being* and *becoming*.

The labelling model is, of course, neither sufficient in itself to understand identification nor without shortcomings. In particular, it needs to recognise more clearly the capacity of individuals to resist external identification. More attention to the decision-making of individuals who are identified as deviant is also required. Insufficient attention is paid to *why* primary deviance occurs, not least in terms of motivation. Furthermore, much deviance is definitely not the secondary deviance of labelled individuals:

unlabelled 'primary' deviants often know that they are being deviant, and precisely how deviant they are being. White-collar crime is illustrative of this. With respect to 'lifestyle' deviance – and the jazz musicians about whom Becker wrote are actually a good example – individuals may actively seek out an identity in part because it *is* deviant. Classifications of deviance are public knowledge, they are altogether collective, and they can be drawn on and manipulated in different ways with respect to identity.[2] An individual does not have to be labelled a deviant to know that some of the things that she does count as deviance.

Allowing for these undoubted failings, the labelling perspective underscores the processual character of identity, and allows us to contextualise the internal–external dialectic of individual identification within the everyday realities of the interaction and institutional orders:

- it insists on the role of external identification in individual identification;
- it offers a way of thinking about *how* external definition becomes internal definition;
- it extends the dialectical model beyond primary socialisation;
- it offers a further view of the way in which collective identifications – of deviance in this case – can become incorporated into self-conscious individual identification;
- it emphasises the capacity of particular agents, occupying particular *positions* – the police, social workers, psychologists, judges and juries, and so on – authoritatively to identify others in consequential ways, moving us beyond the interaction order, into the institutional order.

The usefulness of the labelling perspective isn't limited to the analysis of deviance, either. Education is just one area in which labelling models have proven insightful (Cicourel and Kitsuse 1963; Mehan *et al.* 1986; Mercer 1973). The perspective is particularly suited to examining formalised practices of identification, but labelling operates with as much force in informal interpersonal settings.

In fact, the labelling perspective provides the basis for a *general* model of the external moment of individual identification. There is every reason to suppose that positive, valorised identities may be internalised in the same or similar ways, as negative, stigmatising identities: they too are labels and they too have their consequences. Perhaps the best-known piece of research to make this point is Rosenthal and Jacobsen's experiment (1968) in which the academic performance of individual children was found to correlate with the expectations of their progress that the researchers had foisted upon teachers via a spurious testing procedure. Those pupils

who were identified as about to experience a learning 'spurt' subsequently achieved more academically than their peers, presumably as a consequence of the extra attention, stimulation and encouragement offered – whether consciously or unconsciously – by their teachers.

NOMINAL AND VIRTUAL IDENTIFICATION

The 'expectancy' version of the labelling model exemplified by Rosenthal and Jacobsen's research brings me to the distinction between the 'nominal' and the 'virtual'. The *nominal*, in this context, is the label with which the individual is identified. The labelling perspective insists that a label alone is not sufficient for an identity to 'take': just because I call you a deviant, or a gifted child, doesn't mean that you will think of yourself as a deviant or clever, or that other people will. Nor is it enough for *you* to think of yourself as a deviant or clever. What is required is a cumulative labelling *process* over time, in which the label has consequences for the individual. This will be even more effective if that process is endowed with institutional legitimacy and authority. That the consequences lie in the responses of others to the labelled individual as well as in her responses to the identification means that labelling individuals with the same identification doesn't mean that they will be similarly affected by it. In each of their lives, for myriad reasons, the consequences of being so identified – generated in the internal–external dialectic between the behaviour of others and their own actions – may differ widely. Being labelled is neither uni-directional or determinate.

It is in the consequences of identification that the *virtual* can be discerned. Putting aside Goffman's unfortunate distinction between the virtual and the actual, and the use of virtuality to refer to cyberspace, the 'virtual' in its *Oxford English Dictionary* definition is something that exists for practical purposes rather than in name or by definition. Thus virtual identification is what a nominal identification means experientially and practically over time, to its bearer. Distinguishing the nominal and the virtual is important for several reasons:

- Identification is never just a matter of name or label: the meaning of an identity lies also in the difference that it makes in individual lives.
- A label and its consequences may not always be in agreement. Only if they are is there likely to be substantial internalisation.
- The consequences or meaning of any specific nominal identification can vary from context to context and over time. The nominal may be associated with a plurality of virtualities.

- Individual identities and differences are to some considerable extent constructed out of collective identities. We need, therefore, a means of distinguishing the unique particularities of the individual from the generalities of the collective. Distinguishing the virtual from the nominal allows us to do that: some part of the virtual is always individually idiosyncratic.

Two examples may illustrate these points. First, there is a situation where the virtual and the nominal are in disagreement. Nominally, people with learning difficulties over the age of eighteen in the United Kingdom are regarded by those who make policy about and for them, and provide them with services, as adults. However, the wider legal framework defining the adult status of people with learning difficulties is less clear: the matter is, at best, ambiguous (Jenkins 1990). On the other hand, the routine everyday responses to people with learning difficulties of many significant others – family, friends, care workers or the anonymous public – serve to compromise their adulthood (even though due lip-service may be paid to the notion). Subject to an almost constant supervision that is generally inappropriate to their competences (Davies and Jenkins 1995), they are *nominally* adult but *virtually* something else, the precise status of which is unclear. Although people with learning difficulties may be called adults, they are consistently treated otherwise. As a result it is, therefore, difficult for them to become adults, in their own eyes or in the eyes of others.

Apropos the individual and the collective, second, being a gay male is an important identity that, in any individual case, becomes publicly nominal once it is 'out' and visible. But although there are relatively consistent collective templates or stereotypes of male homosexuality, what it means virtually depends on individual circumstances. It is one thing to be a gay television producer, another to be a gay doctor and quite another to be a gay clergyman. Being gay in London, with a flourishing and supportive gay scene, is likely to be quite different to being gay in, say, a rural village in Norfolk. The same nominal identity produces very different virtual identifications and very different experiences. Nor is it only context and the responses of others which constitute the virtualities of identification: individuals construct the consequences of their own identification as and how they can, in engagement with a human world bursting with others. There are many ways to be gay, in Norfolk as in London.

Neither the nominal nor the virtual is the more 'real': both are real in the lives of individuals; both have their own substance. Nor are they separate in everyday life. The nominal and the virtual are aspects of the same *process*.

In fact, wherever possible we should speak about nominal and virtual identification, rather than nominal and virtual identities. On the one hand, there is the labelling or naming of individuals, by themselves and by others. On the other, the individual's actions and the responses of others are consequential experience. All identification combines the nominal and the virtual. It is in the interaction between them that identity careers, drawing together the individual and the collective, emerge as meaningful elements in biography.

9

GROUPS AND CATEGORIES

Individual identification emphasises uniquely embodied differentiation. During primary and subsequent socialisation, in everyday interaction and in institutionalised labelling practices, individuals identify themselves and are identified by others, in terms that distinguish them from other individuals. Individual identification is, however, necessarily about similarity too. Selfhood, for example, is a way of talking about the similarity or consistency over time of particular embodied humans. And, as Simmel understood (1955), public individuality in the interaction order is, at least in part, an expression of each person's idiosyncratic combination of collective identifications.

Collective identification, on the other hand, evokes powerful imagery of people who are in some respect(s) apparently similar to each other. People must have something intersubjectively significant in common – no matter how vague, apparently unimportant or apparently illusory – before we can talk about their membership of a collectivity. However, this similarity cannot be recognised without simultaneously evoking differentiation. Logically, *in*clusion entails *ex*clusion, if only by default. To define the criteria for membership of any set of objects is, at the same time, also to create a boundary, everything beyond which does not belong.

It is no different in the human world: one of the things that *we* have in common is our difference from *others*. In the face of their difference our similarity often comes into focus. Defining 'us' involves defining a range of 'thems' also. When we say something about others we are often saying something about ourselves. In the human world, similarity and difference are always functions of a point of view: our similarity is their difference and

vice versa. Similarity and difference reflect each other across a shared boundary. At the boundary, we discover what we are in what we are not, and *vice versa*.

Even when the matter is expressed as superficially as this, it is possible to see an internal–external dialectic of identification at work collectively, and to begin to understand how the same basic processual model of the construction of identity may be applicable to individuals and to collectivities. This is not to say individuals and collectivities are the *same*. They clearly are not (Jenkins 2002a: 81–84). It is, rather, to suggest that there may be much to learn from exploring the processual similarities and differences between individual and collective identification.

UNDERSTANDING COLLECTIVITY

Collectivity and collective identifications are vital building blocks in the conceptual frameworks of sociology and social anthropology (social psychology, as we shall see later in this chapter, is somewhat different). Without some way of talking about them, we can't think sociologically about anything. Even the intimacies of selfhood incorporate identifications such as gender, ethnicity and kinship which, whatever else they are, are also definitively collective. However, although the 'individual' is an easy enough notion to grasp – in the sense that the human world is peopled by real bodies that are also persons – a 'collectivity' is more abstract and elusive. So what might 'collectivity' mean?

Similarity among and between a plurality of persons – according to whatever criteria – is the clearest image of the collective that I have offered so far. In sociology and social anthropology it is generally taken for granted that a collectivity is a plurality of individuals who either see themselves as similar or have in common similar behaviour and circumstances. The two facets of collectivity are often conceptualised together: collective self-identification derives from similar behaviour and circumstances, or *vice versa*. This understanding of collectivities dominated sociology during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and still informs much contemporary social theory. It underpins most, if not all, attempts to apply models of causality to the human world, allowing regularities in behaviour to be translated into the principles which are believed to produce that behaviour.

It also exposes a major fault-line within social theory: between an approach which prioritises people's own understandings of their interpersonal relationships and another which looks for and classifies behavioural patterns from a perspective which is outside the context in question.

Somewhat crudely, this is the difference between the *Verstehen* of Weber and Simmel, and the positivism of Durkheim, between 'the cultural' and 'the social' (Nadel 1951: 75–87), and between 'subjectivism' and 'objectivism' (Bourdieu 1977, 1990).

This might suggest that there are two different types of collectivity, and hence two different modes of collective identification. In the first, the members of a collectivity can identify themselves as such: they know who (and what) they are. In the second, members may be ignorant of their membership or even of the collectivity's existence. The first exists inasmuch as it is recognised by its members; the second is constituted in its recognition by observers. Nadel is, however, correct to emphasise (1951: 80) that these are not two different kinds of collectivity. They are, rather, *different ways of looking at* interaction, at 'individuals in co-activity'. He is equally right to insist that neither is more 'real' or concrete than the other: both are abstractions from data about 'co-activity'. These different kinds of abstraction provide the basis for the fundamental conceptual distinction between *groups* and *categories*:

> **category**. A class whose nature and composition is decided by the person who defines the category; for example, persons earning wages in a certain range may be counted as a category for income tax purposes. A category is therefore to be contrasted with a group, defined by the nature of the relations between the members.
>
> (Mann 1983: 34)[1]

This is a methodological distinction – expressed in social psychology, for example, in the contrast between sociological categories and psychological reference groups (Turner and Bourhis 1996: 28) – which constitutes the human world as a manageable object for empirical inquiry and theoretical analysis. Whether a collectivity is seen as a group or a category is a consequence of how it is defined. However, since in each case the definition is that of the observer, the difference is less clear than it appears. By this token a group is simply defined sociologically according to a more specific criterion – mutual recognition on the part of its members – than a category, which may, in principle at least, be defined arbitrarily, according to any criteria.

At this point Bourdieu's strictures against substituting 'the reality of the model' for 'the model of reality' (1977: 29) are worth considering. He warns – as indeed does Nadel – against the reification of interaction, against the linked fallacies of misplaced concreteness and misplaced precision. We should beware, for example, of investing collectivities with the kind

of substance or agency with which embodiment allows us to endow individuals (something that was discussed in the context of Brubaker's recent critique of the concept of the 'group' in Chapter 1). It is not that collectivities lack reality or the capacity to do things – if that were so they would be of little sociological interest – but they differ in these respects from individuals. Similarly, the boundedness of a collectivity is different in kind from the bodily integrity of an individual. Where a collectivity begins and ends is not mappable using the sociometric equivalent of a dressmaker's tape. Nadel and Bourdieu also remind us that our necessarily systematised and carefully drafted view of the human world is, after all, just that, a *view*. It is a necessarily abstract and simplified view, which we should not mistake for reality; and, what is more, it is a view that is always *from* a point of view.

However, groups and categories are not *just* sociological abstractions. Social scientists have no monopoly over processes of definition and abstraction, of identification. Sociologists engage in the identification of collectivities, but so does everyone else, in a range of everyday discourses and practices of identification. The sociological definition of 'group', above, explicitly recognises this. Group identity is the product of *collective internal definition*. In our relationships with significant others we draw upon identifications of similarity and difference, and, in the process, generate group identities. At the same time, our self-conscious group memberships signify others and create relationships with them.

Thus categorisation, no less than group identification, is a generic interactional process, in this case of *collective external definition*. I have, for example, already suggested that the identification of others – *their* definition according to criteria of *our* adoption (which they may neither accept nor recognise) – is often part of the process of identifying ourselves. More generally, categorisation is a routine and necessary contribution to how we make sense of, and impute predictability to, a complex human world of which our knowledge is always limited, and in which our knowledge of other humans is often particularly limited. Our ability to identify unfamiliar individuals as members of known categories allows us at least the illusion that we may know what to expect of them. This is the specialist concern of a branch of ethnomethodology that is concerned with the study of 'membership categorisation' (Eglin and Hester 2003; Housley and Fitzgerald 2002; Leudar *et al*. 2004; Stokoe 2003).So, although in the strictest of senses groups and categories exist only in the eye of the socio-logical beholder, the conceptual distinction between them mirrors generic interactional processes, external and internal moments of collective iden-tification: *group identification* on the one hand, *categorisation* on the other.

This means that groups and categories are something more than products of the sociological imagination. But what?

THE POWERS OF CATEGORISATION

It is an article of sociological faith for all but the most obdurate positivists that if people think that something is real it is, if nothing else, real in terms of the action that it produces and in its consequences. Therefore it is 'socially' and intersubjectively real. Deriving from W. I. Thomas at Chicago in the early decades of this century, this injunction recommends that sociologists not bother themselves too much with ontology and get on instead with the pragmatic business of trying to understand the inter-subjective realities in terms of which people act. How people define the situation(s) in which they find themselves is thus among the most important of sociological data.

From this point of view, a group is intersubjectively 'real'. Group members, in recognising themselves as such, effectively constitute that to which they believe they belong. In the first instance processes of internal collective definition bring a group into existence, in being identified by its members and in the relationships between them. However, a group that was recognised *only* by its members – a secret group – would have a very limited presence in the human world. What's more, its discovery (and categorisation) by others would be perpetually immanent. Furthermore, even if secrecy were maintained, such a group would necessarily be shaped to some extent by the categorising gaze of others: one of its identifying features in the eyes of its members would be precisely its freedom from external recognition. Thus categorisation by others is part of the reality of any and every group.

A category, however, is less straightforward, since its members need not be aware of their collective identification. Here we must focus on consequences. Can the extreme case – a category that is unrecognised by those who are identified by others as belonging to it, and which has no impact upon their lives – be said to have any reality? Such cases are not common; a category is not generally a secret to its members. But there is no reason why it could not be. Among the obvious possible examples are the classificatory schema of the social sciences.[2] These are often distant from the people to whom they refer, and their uses apparently arcane and remote.

It seems unlikely, for example, that anthropological debates concerning the Nilotic peoples of the southern Sudan – about whether 'the Nuer' are a definite collectivity in their own right, whether 'the Nuer' and 'the Dinka'

are separate collectivities, whether one is the other, or which one is which (Burton 1981; Hutchinson 1995; Newcomer 1972; Southall 1976) – have been audible to Dinka or Nuer themselves or have had any consequences for their lives. A similar point could be made about sociological debates concerning the categorisation of populations in terms of social class (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1993; Goldthorpe and Hope 1974; Marshall *et al.* 1988; Savage 2000; Stewart *et al.* 1980; Wright 1985, 1989). It doesn't seem likely that technicians, for example, spend much time pondering whether they are members of the 'service class', the 'non-manual working class' or some other analytical category.

However, these examples oblige us to return to an issue originally raised in Chapter 1 and ask whether categorisation can ever be disinterested. In the first place, neither example is wholly divorced from the people who are the objects of the classificatory exercise: 'Nuer' and 'Dinka' are locally recognised identities in Sudan, are part of the present political landscape (embroiled in the conflict between the Khartoum regime and the south) and earlier had resonance for colonial government (who also tried to 'pacify' them). Similarly, people in industrialised societies routinely identify themselves according to class, and those identifications have implications for everything from voting to courtship, housing and schooling choices – or their absence – and policing patterns. The precise ways in which these categories are defined and refined may not be part of the local common knowledge of the people to whom they are applied, but the categories themselves are locally grounded. They are not secrets to their members.

The role of categorisation in the production of disciplinary power is also worth considering. Foucault (1970, 1980), Hacking (1990) and Rose (1989) argue that the categorising, or classificatory, procedures of the social sciences are part of the bureaucratic practices of government of the modern state, and thus not wholly disinterested. Scientific notions of 'objectivity' and 'truth' derive their epistemological power in part from their grounding in procedures of categorisation. In turn, assumptions of objectivity and truth underpin the bureaucratic rationality that is the framework of the modern state. The categorisation of individuals and populations that is the stock in trade of the social sciences is one way in which humans are constituted as objects of government and subjects of the state, via censuses and the like. The reference to taxation in the definition of 'category' quoted earlier was apposite. More pointedly, 'objective' knowledge about the human world provides one basis – whether that is its rationale or not – for the policing of families and the private sphere which characterises the modern state (Donzelot 1980; Meyer 1983).

So, even the most apparently aloof categorisation is only apparently so. Whether directly, via the commissioning, direction and use of social science research by the state or other agencies, or indirectly, via the contribution of theory and research to the fecundity and potency of the categorical point of view of government (Foucault's 'governmentality'), categorising people is always *potentially* an intervention in their lives, and often more.[3] Although they may not be aware of their categorisation, that they have been categorised is always at least immanently consequential for a category's members.

It's more common that people know that they have been lumped together in the eyes of others, but aren't aware, or fully aware, of the content and implications of that categorisation. A category may be recognised by its membership without its implications for their lives being clear or obvious to them. We have probably all had the experience of realising that we are being categorised in a particular fashion – in a new workplace, perhaps, or on moving into a new neighbourhood – without knowing what this means in terms of the responses or expectations of others. Imbalances of this kind may be thoroughly institutionalised. Policies such as 'normalisation' and 'empowerment' may encourage individuals with learning difficulties, for example, despite their awareness of the general categories 'retarded', 'stupid', or whatever, to deny that these apply to *them* (Davies and Jenkins 1996). This consequence may be unintended, but the extent to which those categorisations shape their lives and exacerbate the routine cruelties of the world are nonetheless concealed. Both nominal and virtual are obscured.

This highlights another characteristic of categorisation. Group membership is a relationship between members: even if they do not know each other personally, they can recognise each other as members. Membership of a category is not a relationship between members: it doesn't even necessitate a relationship between categoriser and categorised. Any interpersonal relationships between members of a category only involve them as individuals. Once relationships between members of a category involve mutual recognition of their categorisation, the first steps towards group identification have been taken.

Categorisers are the other side of the coin. Categorisation may be more significant for categoriser(s) than for categorised. Our categories don't have to be consequentially 'real' to the people to whom they refer in order to have consequences for us. Although categorising others is one aspect of identifying ourselves, this need not involve explicit notions of difference *vis-à-vis* ourselves and those others. Nor need we have any expectations of them. The examples of the Nuer–Dinka, or social class, can help again to

make the point. The most important themes of these categorisations are not 'Nuer–Dinka are different from us anthropologists', or 'the working class are different from us sociologists' (although these sub-themes may be present). As aspects of their disciplinary world-views, categorisations such as these do other kinds of identificatory work for anthropologists and sociologists: recently, for example, Brubaker and Cooper (2000; Brubaker 2004: 28–63) used the Nuer case to establish and highlight their own differences from other social theorists of identity. Disagreements over categories may produce boundaries internally, between different 'sides' of the argument: in the case of class, for example, competing classificatory schema are associated with intra-disciplinary groupings and sociological feuds of some longevity and bitterness.

Another example may further illustrate what I mean. Style is an arbiter of youth identities in Western industrialised societies. One of the ways in which styles are delineated is through the categorisation of music and musicians. In my youth, for example, questions such as whether white musicians could play the blues, or whether Tamla-Motown counted as soul, had an urgency which seems disproportionate only in retrospect: the answers were a significant part of style and 'who's who and what's what'. Thus the categorisation of others is a resource upon which to draw in the construction of our own identities.

That categorisation has consequences, even if only trivial or immanent ones, returns the discussion to the distinction between the *nominal* and the *virtual*. Collective identification also has nominal and virtual dimensions. The nominal is how the group or category is defined in discourse, the virtual how its members behave or are treated. As with individual identification these are conceptually distinct. In practice they are chronically implicated in each other, but there is no necessary agreement between them.

SIMULTANEITY AND PROCESS

I argued in Chapter 4 that although the dialectic of internal–external definition might imply sequence – one, then the other – simultaneity is what I am trying to communicate. Collective internal definition is group identification; collective external definition is categorisation. Each is an inter-related moment in the collective dialectic of identification, suggesting that neither comes first and neither exists without the other. But is this actually the case?

Group identification probably cannot exist in a vacuum. Short of imagining an utterly isolated – and implausible – band, small enough to

lack significant internal sub-groupings, it seems sensible to suggest that groups necessarily exist in relation to other groups: to categorise and to be categorised in turn. Group identification therefore proceeds hand in glove with categorisation. Although it makes figurative sense to talk about groups being constituted 'in the first instance' by internal definition – after all, without their members relating to each other, and defining themselves as members, there would be nothing to belong to – this should not be misconstrued literally and chronologically, to mean *first* group identification, *then* categorisation.

There may, however, be situations in which group identification is generated by prior categorisation. But although categorisation necessarily conjures up a possible group identity, it doesn't inevitably create an actual one. Marx understood this when he talked about the difference between a 'class in itself' and a 'class for itself'.[4] He argued that the working class is constituted *in itself* by virtue of the similar situation of workers, their common alienation from the means of production within capitalism. By virtue of their shared situation, workers have similar interests (i.e. things that are in their interest). Marx argued that these interests cannot be realised until workers unite into a class *for itself* and realise for themselves what their interests are. This, for Marx, signifies the emergence of the working class as a collective historical agent. The process of group identification encourages and is encouraged by class struggle. Subsequent refinements of this model, particularly by Lenin in *What Is to Be Done?*, emphasised that class struggle would not 'just happen' as a consequence of the conflict of interests between classes; it has to be inspired or produced. Hence Lenin's notion of the 'vanguard party', and hence the need for politics.

Whether or not we agree with this, it illustrates my argument. Given appropriate circumstances, groups may come to identify themselves as such because of their initial categorisation by others. The point is that there was no class 'in itself' until its common interests were perceived and *identified*. The categorical constitution of the working class as a class in itself with a situation and interests in common – by socialists and other activists, on the one hand, and, as a 'dangerous class', by capitalists and the state, on the other – was a necessary although not a sufficient condition for the birth of the class for itself and, hence, for working-class politics (if not necessarily revolution). Before the working class could act *as* a class, working people had to recognise that it *was* – or they were – a class. In this recognition the working class was constituted as a politically effective group.

Distinguishing the necessary from the sufficient suggests that for a category to be defined it must be definable. There has to be something that

its members share. In principle this can be completely arbitrary. One could, for example, decide that all married persons with in-growing toenails were a category. But would this ever amount to more than an abstract, logical category? To become a category it would at the very least have to be recognised by appreciable numbers of others. In order for that to happen the condition of being married and suffering with in-growing toenails would have to possess some significance to those others. They would have to have an *interest* in the matter; there would have to be a *point* to it. In the case of the working class, capitalist wage-labour produced the common interest and the point, without which there would have been nothing 'in itself' to recognise. Although categorisation may in principle be arbitrary, it is actually unlikely ever to be so.

People collectively identify themselves and others, and they conduct their everyday lives in terms of those identities, which therefore have practical consequences. They are intersubjectively real. This is as true for categories as for groups. Or, to come closer to the spirit of this discussion, it is as true for categorisation as for group identification, since neither groups nor categories are anything other than emphases within ongoing processes of identification.

Two further points flow from adopting this position. First, collective identities must always be understood as generated simultaneously by group identification *and* categorisation. How we understand any particular collective identity is an empirical matter, for discovery. In one case group identification may be the dominant theme, in another categorisation; but, as argued above, both will always be present as moments in the dialectic of collective identification, even if only as potentialities. Second, identificatory processes are practices, done by actually existing individuals. There is thus nothing idealist about this argument. Collectivities and collective identities do not just exist 'in the mind' or 'on paper'.

The distinction between groups and categories is an analogue of the general *processes* of group identification and categorisation. Collective identities are no less processual than individual identities, and group identification and categorisation have practical consequences. Rather than reify groups and categories – as 'things' – we should think instead about identities as constituted in the dialectic of collective identification, in the interplay of group identification and categorisation. In any particular case it is empirically a question of the balance between these processes. Group identification always implies categorisation. The reverse is not always the case. Categorisation, however, at least creates group identification as an immanent possibility.

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVE . . . AGAIN

Groups and categories are fundamental to the social psychology of identity inspired by the work of Henri Tajfel (1970, 1978, 1981a, 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1979). Sometimes these are distinguished from each other in the way that I have distinguished them here: groups are defined by, and meaningful to, their members, while categories are externally defined without any necessary recognition by their members (e.g. Turner and Bourhis 1996: 27–30). More consistently in this approach, however, the distinction between groups and categories is weak and only implicit: a group is an actually existing concrete point of reference for its members, while a category is a collectively defined classification of identity, part of local common knowledge.

Looking for an alternative to the individualism that he saw as prevalent in social psychology and inspired by his earlier research on social perception, Tajfel was concerned to understand prejudice and conflict as something other than inevitable 'facts of life' and to reconcile cohesion and differentiation within one model of human group relationships. The resultant 'social identity theory', and its immediate development 'self-categorisation theory' (Turner 1984; Turner *et al*. 1987), can be summarised thus:[5]

- 'Personal identity', which differentiates the unique self from all other selves, is different from 'social identity', which is the internalisation of, often stereotypical, collective identifications. Social identity is sometimes the more salient influence on individual behaviour.
- Group membership is meaningful to individuals, conferring social identity and permitting self-evaluation. It is a shared representation of who one is and the appropriate behaviour attached to who one is.
- Group membership in itself, *regardless of its context or meaning*, is sufficient to encourage members to, for example, discriminate against out-group members. Group members also exaggerate the similarities within the in-group, and the differences between the in-group and out-group.
- Society is structured categorically, and organised by inequalities of power and resources. It is in the translation of social categories into meaningful reference groups that 'social structure' influences or produces individual behaviour. Social identity theory focuses on how categories become groups, with the emphasis on inter-group processes.
- Social categorisation generates social identity, which produces social comparisons, which produce positive (or negative) self-evaluation. Universal species-specific processes mediate between social categories and individual behaviour: cognitive simplification, comparison and

evaluation, and the search for positive self-esteem. These processes bring groups into being.

- The cognitive simplification that is required to manage the information overload produced by a complex world generates stereotypes of collectivities and their members.
- Comparison and evaluation between groups is generically bound up with the establishment and maintenance of in-group distinctiveness, in an interplay of internal similarity and external difference.
- Groups distinguish themselves from, and discriminate against, other groups in order to promote their own positive social evaluation and collective self-esteem.
- Individuals and groups with unsatisfactory social identity seek to restore or acquire positive identification via mobility, assimilation, creativity or competition.
- Moving from inter-group to intra-group matters, self-categorisation theory focuses on the universal psychological processes that produce group cohesion. Accentuating the in–out distinction, self-categorisation as a group member – the internalisation of stereotypes – generates a sense of similarity with other group members, and attractiveness or esteem.
- Individuals, in using stereotypical categories to define themselves thus, bring into being human collective life.
- Individuals will self-categorise themselves differently according to the contexts in which they find themselves and the contingencies with which they are faced.

This is merely a thumbnail sketch of a complex and still growing body of research and literature that has become an established social psychological paradigm in its own right (Brewer and Hewstone 2004; Brown and Capozza 2006; Capozza and Brown 2000; Hogg and Abrams 2003; Robinson 1996; Worchtel *et al.* 1998). Nor does it do justice to the twists and turns along the way. Tajfel, for example, in his last word on stereotyping (1981b), went beyond cognitive simplification as an explanation, adding the defence or preservation of values, the creation or maintenance of group ideologies, and positive in-group differentiation (see Chapter 12 for a further discussion of stereotyping).

As might be expected, three decades of development have generated considerable debate about 'social identity theory', within the approach itself and with external critics. One of the most pertinent issues concerns the empirical underpinnings of Tajfel's – and Turner's – foundational propositions. These data derived from explicit, controlled laboratory

experiments, most characteristically the 'minimal group' approach. This method involves typically small, artificial coalitions of subjects, doing tasks in the outcome of which they have no material or other interest. Among the most significant findings here is that, placed in otherwise meaningless groups by an experimenter, research subjects tend to discriminate against members of the experimental out-group, even though they stand to gain or lose nothing by doing so (Tajfel 1970; Tajfel *et al*. 1971).

Questions have been asked by both supporters and critics about whether 'social identity theory' can be generalised beyond its experimental context (e.g. Maass *et al.* 2000; Skevington and Baker 1989). To stick with the example above it may, for example, be at least partly *because* a minimal group is a simplified, no lose–no gain situation that experimental subjects discriminate against the out-group in this way. Within the checks and balances of the everyday human world, in which actions have real consequences, choices are likely to be more complex (or may not be available at all). More specifically, there are questions about whether the evidence supports generalisations about themes such as inter-group evaluation and bias (Crisp and Hewstone 1999; Hewstone *et al*. 2002), inter-group negative discrimination (Migdal *et al.* 1998; Turner and Reynolds 2004), the cognitive simplification effects of stereotyping (Oakes 1996: 98–100) and the maximisation of self-esteem (Abrams and Hogg 2004; Rubin and Hewstone 1998; Wetherell 1996: 277–280).

It is obviously important to be clear, and cautious, about what we can learn from laboratory experiments (which is not the same thing as rejecting them). To a sociologist or social anthropologist, reservations about the minimal-group approach seem to be uncontroversial: ambitious generalisations about large-scale collective processes deriving from the investigation of micro-micro-level situations – whether experimental or not – require considerable modesty in their formulation, even when they are not completely unsafe. This issue has, however, been hard fought and has yet to be accepted by most social psychologists, working as they do in a field in which the experiment is still the gold-standard research design.

From my point of view, there are other criticisms of psychology's 'social identity theory', not least its problematic basic differentiation between personal and social identity (as discussed in previous chapters). The equally fundamental problem of how to differentiate in this approach between its own concepts of social categorisation in general and social identification in particular shouldn't be underestimated either (McGarty 1999: 190–196). What's more, despite Tajfel's original ambitions, 'social identity theory' remains an individualist perspective: groups are, at best, taken for

granted as simplified and reified features of the human landscape, actual interaction is largely ignored, and identification appears to take place solely 'inside people's heads'. With respect to interaction, the particular lack of attention to the emergence of identification during talk and other discourse is noteworthy (Antaki and Widdecombe 1998; Billig 1996: 346–351), as is the frequent dependence on assumptions about weakly conceptualised motivational factors such as 'esteem', 'attraction' and 'liking'.[6]

These criticisms aside, some recent writing within this paradigm resonates loudly with the arguments advanced in this book. Deschamps and Devos (1998) have, for example, explored the relationship between similarity and difference and 'personal' and 'social' identity, while Deaux (2000) has looked at the range of motivations for social identification and the varying intensity of group identification. Abrams' account (1996) of how, depending on situational factors and goal-orientations, self-identification and self-attention may vary in their salience and interact to produce self-regulation of varying intensity, suggests fruitful lines of inquiry into the hows and whys of identification's variability. Finally, Ashton *et al*.'s review (2004) of the range of ways in which individuals do collective identification points to fruitful possibilities for work across disciplinary boundaries.

Specific research findings aside, important general themes running through this approach support the model of identification that I am exploring and advocating here:

- In the general spirit of earlier theorists such as Mead 'social identity theory' offers a vision of identification as rooted in basic and generic human processes, part of our species-specific nature.
- The minimal group experiments suggest that group identification is one of those generic processes and is *in itself* a powerful influence on human behaviour.
- These experiments further suggest that categorisation, in my definition – i.e. external identification, the process of placing people, in this case arbitrarily, into collectivities – is also an important generic process, which can contribute to group identification.
- The approach understands collective identification as not just an internal group matter, but as coming into being in the context of *inter*-group relations: thus groups identify themselves against, and in their relationships with, other groups.
- 'Social identity theory' also recognises that collective identifications are real for individuals – that they mean something in real experience – and seeks to understand how that reality *works*.

- 'Self-categorisation theory' acknowledges the situational variability of identification.
- There is a general appreciation of the necessary interplay within identification of similarity and difference.
- Although not well thought through, the significance for identification of the distinction between groups and categories is acknowledged.
- Finally, the emphasis – certainly in Tajfel's own writings – on power and inequality, while it may be underdeveloped, is an important reminder of the realities of the human world.

With benefit of considerable hindsight, one of the striking things about this school of thought is its apparent isolation from scholarship outside social psychology that, some time before Tajfel's seminal statements, outlined a vision of how identification works which, in some of its fundamentals at least, resembles 'social identity theory'. As I shall discuss in Chapter 10, during the 1960s Fredrik Barth, standing on the shoulders of earlier anthropologists and sociologists (not least Goffman), began to put together some *very* similar propositions. The resultant shift in the understanding of ethnicity and other collective identifications – the establishment of what I have elsewhere called 'the basic anthropological model' (Jenkins 2008) – seems to have been unnoticed by Tajfel and his associates, despite its conceptual harmony with much of what they were saying.

I doubt that this was mainly due to 'academic trade barriers' on the part of social psychologists eager to establish a distinctive niche for themselves within their discipline (Condor 1996: 309–310). Probably more to the point are personal factors, the nature of the discipline in question, and the power of normal science. Reading his own words and what his ex-students say about him – even when, like Billig (1996), they now seem to be at odds with much of his intellectual legacy – Tajfel's influence as a teacher and that of the force and direction of his intellectual leadership shine through. He seems to have been *trying* to establish a distinctive school of thought. The context for that project was an academic disciplinary field, psychology, in which natural science, rooted in the laboratory, held sway (even today, 'humanist' approaches remain a peripheral minority interest, often located outside mainstream psychology departments). Tajfel himself was committed to the natural science model: it isn't obvious that anthropology, for example, or the work of Goffman would have interested him. Finally, once established, the social identity and social categorisation theorists pursued their work within a taken for granted normal science paradigm. Most of them don't seem to have seen

any need to look elsewhere for ideas: the work they had in hand was enough, and the networks self-sustaining.

Nor, to be fair, should this mini intellectual history single out for comment only the social psychologists. After all, what goes on within groups, and how their members identify themselves, is also a function of what goes on *between* groups. And there is no evidence that the anthropologists showed any interest in, or were aware of, what Tajfel and his followers were doing (almost certainly for reasons similar to those that I have just sketched in). With little communication between the two camps, their relationship, if it can be called that, seems to have been characterised by distance and mutual ignorance rather than stoutly defended boundaries. 'Trade barriers' weren't necessary. Which was a shame: each might have benefited from talking to the other. That they didn't, however, is no more than might have been expected: they simply got on with doing their own stuff. It's a tribute to the force of disciplinary identifications and boundaries that, by and large, it's what they're still doing today.