Making Identity Matter

Identity, society and social interaction

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For
Bryn Williams 1910–1985
Catherine Williams 1913–1988

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Chapter 1
Introducing identity

In this book I describe and assess a number of claims concerning the nature and significance of the concept of identity within the discipline of sociology and closely related human sciences. I will be concerned with the origins and consequences of different versions of what is meant by identity in these disciplinary contexts and also with the question of why identity matters so much both to ordinary actors and to many of those who currently practise and study the human sciences. I realise that the range and scope of work informed by such disciplinary interests in identity have been extensive and that in attempting to order and structure this variety I have neglected many contributions and simplified others. My treatment of the topic of identity is less comprehensive and more selective than I might have hoped, but perhaps the desire to find or create order is always partly a desire for exclusion and simplification.

But why write about identity at all?

Norbert Elias once wrote persuasively of a series of 'unquestioned assumptions', ways of thinking about events and objects in the world that make possible the certainties on which the meaning and order of our lives depend. For Elias, one such 'fundamental precondition' was 'the basic structure of the idea we have of ourselves and other people' (1998: 270), an indispensable certainty, lodged within language and its conventional usages, without which individual orientation, interpersonal communication and joint action would all be impossible. It was important to Elias to be able show that the elements of such a basic structure were subject to variations in form and, moreover, that – compared to such structural necessity – the arbitrariness of any particular historical variant was something of which people are usually unaware: 'it usually presents itself to the person concerned as something natural and universally human, as *the* form of human self-consciousness, the image that people have of themselves at all times' (Elias, 1998: 270). If 'identity' is one such unquestioned assumption, how can we avoid giving it some consideration? At the very least, it seems worth asking what it is that matters about identity in human social life that qualifies it as a candidate for inclusion within such a collection of assumptions. Perhaps an orientation to identity is an invariable and universal precondition of meaningful human life? Perhaps this orientation is better thought of as a temporally and geographically situated variation, one amongst many ways of representing and organising the relationship between ourselves and others?[1] Or perhaps what matters about identity is something much less weighty and more diffuse than these foundational suggestions. Consider some of the following remarks:

Our discussion of identity indicates rather that it belongs to the class of the inescapable, i.e., that it belongs to human agency to exist in a space of questions about strongly valued goods, prior to all choice or adventitious cultural change.
(Taylor, 1989: 31)

The language of autonomy, identity, self-realization and the search for fulfilment forms a grid of regulatory ideals, not making up an amorphous cultural space but traversing the doctor's consulting room, the factory floor and the personnel manager's office, and organising such diverse programmes as those for the training of unemployed youth and those for the electoral composition of political parties.
(Rose, 1996: 145)

Identity as such is about as boring a subject as one can imagine. Nothing seems less interesting than the narcissistic self-study that today passes in many places for identity politics, or ethnic studies, or affirmations of roots, cultural pride, drumbeating nationalism and so on.
(Said, 1998: 7)

Identity as a concept is fully as elusive as is everyone's sense of his own personal identity. But whatever else it may be, identity is connected with the fateful appraisals made of oneself – by oneself and by others.
(Strauss, 1969: 9)

To fuck with identity. It's just a name.
(Brian McKinnon, quoted in Parker, 1997: 120)

Five characterisations of the significance of identity:

1. as a necessary and commendable feature of full human existence;
2. the speciously 'natural' product of practices for the regulation of oneself and other individuals;
3. as tedious and irrelevant narcissism;
4. as an interactionally consequential avowal and ascription;
5. as an eradicable nominalist fiction.

Certainly the varied content and the manner of expression of these comments serve to remind us just how common is the use of some – positive or negative – notion of identity whenever people now talk about the nature and meaning of their own and others' lives and actions. Views differ about why this is so. One possibility is that we – especially those of us living in 'modern' societies at the beginning of the twenty-first century – remain deeply uncertain about a number of important boundaries: between individuality and community; between same and different; between essence and appearance. Another is that the wider social background against which we (the same 'we') think about who we are and what we can become has radically changed – so much so that previous ways to think about these matters have ceased to work. There are plenty of writers eager to tell us that the sources of our identities have shifted from being derived from our positions within relations of production to our new locations based on consumption and leisure (e.g. Tomlinson, 1990; Featherstone, 1991), but

such assertions are easily made, and they may turn out to be grounded in the theoretical presuppositions of the analyst (for example on the relative significance of material and cultural matters) rather than in any observations of the lived world of social actors. Whatever is the case, there is a wide range of fictional representations of identity matters in contemporary society, and a large number of both speculative and empirical studies of identity in academic study, many of which make radically differing claims of what identity is and why it does or does not, should or should not matter to us. Publishers' catalogues are filled with books that use the term or its cognates in titles or subtitles, and most journals in literary studies and in the human sciences are liberally sprinkled with reference to identity matters. Many of these are concerned to advertise the vices rather than the virtues of the use of the term and there have been plenty of people willing to announce the demise of identity, or at least recommend its examination as a concept 'under erasure'.[2]

In introducing identity, it might be useful to start with something that seems straightforward: to say that people know their own identity is to say that they know 'who they are'. Equally, to claim knowledge of the identity of others is to claim to know 'who they are'. But what will count as 'knowing' who someone is, even when that someone is oneself? What are the necessary and sufficient contents of such knowledge that can sustain such a claim? Where is such 'knowledge' stored for retention, inspection and modification? Who may have access to it, and how?

Perhaps this simple idea of identity is made more clear if it is expressed as knowledge of 'sameness' – that over time, an individual's actions can indeed be seen to be the actions of the one singular self-same person. Yet while we may be confident that our observations of our own actions have sufficient backwards reach to legitimate such a claim, we often claim to know the identity of some specific other without prior knowledge of her or his biographical past. Here, the sameness that seems to underpin our confidence may not be the sameness of each person with themselves over time, but their sameness with other persons within a common category to which they are assignable for some currently relevant purpose. In this second case, peoples' identities can suddenly seem to be an effect, an artefact, of something that has been done to or with them rather than something that can be said to be true to their understanding – or knowledge – of themselves. But, anyway, how can these, and many other possible accomplishments of identity, be made subject to systematic interrogation and investigation within the human sciences?

Defining identity

One traditional way of starting out on such investigations has been to establish clear definitions of relevant terms, along with an indication of the limits of their use. In the case of identity, this proves to be something of a challenge. In a paper published in the early 1980s, Philip Gleason (1983) commented on the developing significance and shifting uses of the term identity as used in social science – especially sociological – literature since the end of the Second World War. He demonstrated the startling novelty of its spread by comparing two editions of the *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*. The first

(published between 1930 and 1935) contained no entry for the term 'identity', although it did contain an entry on 'identification' that carried descriptions of common forensic investigations used in the detection of crime. However, the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia* (published between 1968 and 1979) contained a number of pages dealing with the uses of the term of identity in social-psychological and in political science investigations. Two or three decades later, no contemporary dictionary or encyclopaedia of the social sciences could fail to devote substantial space to the definition and use of this concept across a broad range of disciplines.[3]

Gleason's article repays detailed reading. He writes as a historian independent of the disciplinary pretensions of sociology and social psychology, while describing their rapidly expanding use of varying conceptions of identity in specific historical contexts. He makes some blunt observations on what he regards as the 'loose and irresponsible usage' that had accompanied the growth in the popularity of the term identity, and he is confident enough to recommend briskly to fellow practitioners in his own discipline that 'a good deal of what passes for discussion of identity is little more than portentous incoherence, and the historian need not be intimidated into regarding it as more than that' (Gleason, 1983: 931). While his expression is severe, it does draw attention to an interesting feature of the recent history of uses of the concept of identity: that its increased use has coincided with an increased variability and instability of meanings with which it is associated.

Some seek to define identity through its close association with one or several possible synonyms. For example, Lyman and Scott (1970: 136) asserted that the terms 'identity' and 'role' are synonymous, adding only that 'roles are identities mobilised in a specific situation; whereas role is always situationally specific, identities are trans-situational'. Almost thirty years later, Hall, Sarangi and Slembrouck (1999: 293) make a similar suggestion, i.e. that the concepts of identity and role are 'mutually sustaining' in that identities are 'the reflexive enactment of roles in social interactional terms'. Others, however, argue for the necessity of demarcating 'identity' from its close conceptual associates. For example, Wiley (1994a: 130) asserts that identity 'usually refers to some long-term, abiding qualities [which] ... individuate and allow us to recognise individuals, categories, groups and types of individuals'. So in this usage, identities are the specific local collections of varying human traits whose generic and universal form is 'the self'. They are 'nested within and express the qualities of selves and collections of selves' (Wiley, 1994b: 1). For Wiley, such localised identities 'imply habit' and thus are related to Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', in so far as the latter assumes the existence of shared traits amongst those who have learned to act and think about themselves and others in common ways through shared social experiences over long periods of time. Yet for Mennell (1994: 177), habitus and identity can be differentiated: 'The difference is perhaps that "identity" implies a higher level of conscious awareness by members of a group, some positive or negative emotional feelings towards the characteristics which members of a group perceive themselves as sharing and in which they perceive themselves as differing from others'. An even more complex process is outlined by Jenkins (1996). When writing about social identity, he describes a mutualist view of self, understood 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 ... of the internal–external dialectic of identification as the process whereby all identities – individual and collective – are constituted' (Jenkins, 1996: 20).

It is of course possible to respond to the deafening volume of assertions and discussions of identity by refusing to specify a single definition. This strategy was used as early as the 1950s by Strauss when he wrote that he would not define identity despite an interest in 'theorising about and doing research upon, the social processes from which identity emerges' (Strauss, 1969: 13). It was also used by Erik Erikson in his preface to a collection of his influential essays on identity first published in 1968, where he wrote that his refusal to provide such a definition was because 'the more one writes about this subject, the more the word becomes a term for something as unfathomable as it is all-pervasive' (Erikson, 1994). Hall's (1992) discussion of possible changes in modern identities as following on from major changes in the structural properties of contemporary societies, asserted that 'the very concept we are dealing with – identity – [is] too complex, too underdeveloped and too little understood in contemporary social science to be definitively tested' (Hall, 1992: 274). Finally, the author of a more recent study of social constructionism and the constitution of human identities also began his book by declining to provide any stipulative definition for the term on the grounds that the essential vagueness of the concept seems a necessary – thus ineradicable – feature of its widespread use: 'it is this very definitional amorphousness that gives the concept of identity its resonance' (Michael, 1996: 7). For reasons that should become clearer later in this book, I am sympathetic to this reluctance to prejudice a discussion of the issues that surround the uses of the concept of identity in the human sciences by providing too constraining a version of the shape and limits of its application.

Despite this sympathy, however, I still want to introduce my own discussion by finding a way to indicate the overall shape of the variable but recurrent meanings that have been most often realised in references to identity matters in the human sciences. Even though the vast majority of human science practitioners who write with or about the term usually restrict, demarcate, or limit the parameters of its use, these stipulations themselves exhibit an order, and the origins, nature and consequences of this order are matters which will form the focus of many of the later chapters of this book. One early treatment of identity matters (first published in 1963), included a discussion of this order and I think it is useful to review its content here.

In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Goffman (1968a) explored the social situation of those individuals in danger of permanently or temporarily being denied the social acceptance of others. People with such 'spoiled identities' are found amongst those with 'abominations of the body', 'blemishes of individual character' or who are members of 'discreditable or discredited' minority social groups. In the course of his attempt to describe the dynamics of the relationship between the stigmatised and the 'normal', Goffman makes a series of remarks about the range of conventional meanings and uses of the term identity. To do this he qualifies the generic term by the use of three adjectives:

1. 'personal identity';
2. 'social identity';
3. 'ego (or felt) identity'.

I find these distinctions a useful starting point for thinking about the order that underlies a range of uses of identity in the human sciences and this is why I want to summarise and illustrate them now.

The term 'personal identity' refers to that 'which distinguishes an individual from all others' (Goffman, 1968a: 74), and Goffman notes that in contemporary society, it is this sense of identity that normally corresponds to what counts as legal identity. His discussion of personal identity focuses on the variety of ways in which all individuals may be said to have a set of characteristics that are uniquely theirs and which thus comprise such an identity for them. According to Goffman, two ideas come together in the way that we think about this idea. The first he describes as the 'positive mark' or 'identity peg' of an individual – the image or trace of this particular person as available in photographic or other material or mental records and representations. The second is the unique place occupied by an individual within a network and history of relationships of some kind. In both cases, the defining feature of this notion of personal identity is the idea that only one person can be uniquely identified by such a representation or by his or her place in some network. For Goffman (1968a: 74–5), reference to such personal identity rests on 'the assumption that the individual can be differentiated from all others and that around this means of differentiation a single continuous record of social facts can be attached, entangled like candy floss, becoming then the sticky substance to which still other biographical facts can be attached'.

Goffman's second usage is that of 'social identity', a term which reflects the fact that we have available to us 'the means of categorising persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories' (1968a: 11). In discussing such social identities Goffman points out that the attributes which together comprise any such category are likely to be complex and varied, since they include a wide range of cognitive, attitudinal, personal and social features. Given his interactionist focus, these social identities are largely of interest to the extent that they function for ordinary actors as available templates for the organisation and understanding of one another's conduct in specific social settings. They are both anticipations and 'righteously presented demands' deployed when people interact with others. In addition, however, this sense of identity can also be seen to be relevant to wider social circumstances: the content of such social identity categories functions as a guide to what is assumed to be true of members of the relevant category as well as what may be expected of them in a variety of social and discursive contexts. It is common for people to speak and write of a 'common identity', of a kind of sameness between some 'kinds' of people. While references to this commonality may seem to contradict the notion that identity needs to carry some sense of uniqueness or fundamental difference from others, such a seeming contradiction does not appear to invalidate either or both of these standard uses. Certainly it is an interest in the continuity of identity across persons, rather than across time and place for one person, that has led to recent concerns with the 'politics of identity'. I will touch on the significance of such identity politics in Chapter 3, but it is worth noting now that when a general sense of social identity gives way to a more specific claim about the necessary connection between social and political 'interests' and 'collective identities', then we may find ourselves in difficult territory. Ever since Marx's discussion of 'classes-in-themselves', there have been serious problems with assertions concerning the significance of 'collective actors', whether the collectivity is defined in a single identity category (e.g. African-Americans, Women, English) or in an ever more complex combination of such categories. Yet however much the notion of such collective actors might have been seen as problematic in the human sciences, the rhetorical capacity of such an idea to mobilise and shape the affiliations of individuals and groups is often – explicitly or implicitly – drawn on in contemporary political discourse.

If we may think of personal identity as referring to what differentiates each individual person from all others, and social identity as referring to those – particularly cultural – attributes that individuals share by virtue of common membership of a social category, both of these are distinguishable from a third sense of sense of identity which Goffman argues may be found in lay and professional accounts of individuals and their conduct. He calls this third usage 'ego identity' or 'felt identity' and he defines it as 'the subjective sense of his own situation and his continuity and character that an individual comes to obtain as a result of his various social experiences' (Goffman, 1968a: 129). The meaning of such ego identity may be distinguished from that of personal identity (which is also concerned with the unique singularity) by its character as a subjective and reflexive accomplishment. In Burns' (1992) phrase, it is 'felt' rather than ascribed or ascribable. Ego identity then, it is argued, refers to what most of us think about when we think of the deepest and most enduring features of our unique selves that constitute who we believe ourselves to be. There is no necessary difference between the content of the avowed and ascribed attributes which are drawn on in the constitution of ego identities on the one hand, and personal and social identities on the other. The difference, Goffman argues, is that with ego identity, the individual 'exercises important liberties in regard to what he fashions' (1968a: 130). Most important here seem to be the capacity of individuals to choose amongst a set of available attributes, and a concern with the coherence and consistency discernible within the variety of characterisations accepted by individuals to be true of themselves independent of time and location.

Let me be clear: I think that Goffman's adjectival modifications to the concept of identity are useful suggestions to encourage consideration of the range and scope of identity matters; I do not propose their use as a fixed vocabulary for the summary expression of all that has been written about identity in the human sciences. In some treatments of identity matters, it is evident that one understanding of identity may well be dominant and others are subordinate, depending on the theoretical context in question. In other treatments, there may be an attempt to integrate two or all three such meanings, and in still others it may be argued that only one kind of meaning matters for identity at all. In fact, of course, one of the real attractions of the term identity is precisely

that it can be deployed to make simultaneous – explicit or implicit – reference to at least two, and sometimes all three, of these separate uses. It is because – given sufficient discursive flexibility – its multiple senses can be allowed to resonate with, rather than negate, one another, that it seems all the more attractive a device for filling any discernible gap between an account of social collectivities on the one hand and an account of social actions on the other, a gap whose visibility has often been problematic for the practice and claims of sociology. However, before I say more about the issues that arise when we examine studies of identity matters, I want to outline the structure of the book as a whole, and the argument that I shall make in the forthcoming chapters.

The argument of this book

In an attempt to give some shape to the otherwise amorphous 'essential contestability' of identity, Williams (1995) has argued that there are two different discourses in which the variety of meanings of identity are most often expressed: the first metaphysical, the second social. The metaphysical discourse contains questions about 'what or who a person is' and has provided a major focus for a series of philosophical inquiries. Williams describes two in particular:

1. the problem of 'the one and the many' – 'how many things of a certain sort there are at a certain place or over a certain period of time';
2. the 'form and matter' problem – how many of the constituent parts of a thing can change before we think of it as a different thing.

Separate from – and additional to – this metaphysical discourse, Williams argues that there exists a social discourse in which the topic of identity is also raised and discussed. In this discourse, he argues, the typical question is 'What or who am I?' – the question of the identity of the person as a social being.[4]

In fact I think that the distinction between the two types of discourse is difficult to sustain. They have persistently intermingled, and it is not accidental that one of the main features of so many sociological treatments of identity is that they respond to, and also claim to have relevant things to say about, the nature and significance of prior metaphysical accounts. For this reason, Chapter 2 is devoted to an examination of such metaphysical accounts of self and identity. Five early writers are discussed: Descartes, Locke, Hume, Hegel and Nietzsche. No attempt is made to provide a complete or authoritative account of the complex range of studies undertaken by these writers, but I do try to describe the different ways in which each of them approached questions of identity, and I also outline the frameworks they proposed for the solution of recurrent problems in understanding how and why identity matters to human beings.

In the subsequent chapters I describe several approaches to the study of identity in sociology, each of which has responded differently to the problems and resources generated by these earlier accounts of human selfhood and individuality. It is useful to order these approaches by thinking of each as a member of one of two differently sized families. The several members of the first family are related to one another by their common interest in the deployment of identity as a theoretical resource both within human science – especially

sociological – analysis and in the application of such analysis in practical social undertakings. Often this deployment has rested on the exploitation and modification of prior philosophical understandings in which self and identity appeared as universal and generic properties of individuality, and the reframing of these understandings in the light of a claim that social and cultural changes have made more visible the 'shifting and differentiated nature of human self-awareness and human action' (Cave, 1995). At the same time, these modifications have meant that references to identity could be pressed into service to supplement earlier classical sociological accounts of abstract individuality by providing a vocabulary for the collective differentiation of individuals, as well as a version of how such individuals are integrated within cultural and social structures. Amongst others, Downey (1992) has argued that the increased attention given to the issue of identity directly reflects this kind of use – as a placeholder to mark the intersection between agency-based and structure-based approaches in sociology. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) have pointed to the history of this usage from classical sociology onwards, and Gleason (1983: 926) has noted the way in which identity has been used by human scientists in the late twentieth century as a term which has 'elucidated the conceptual linkage between the individual personality and the ensemble of social and cultural features that gave different groups their distinctive flavour'.

Despite this underlying genetic commonality, however, approaches to theorising and researching about identity by members of this first family also differ in a number of relevant details. Within them, accounts which give primary significance to agency on the one hand and those which privilege social structure on the other hand are both concerned with the significance of socially constituted positional identifications (what Goffman called social identities), but they differ in their understanding of the nature and sources of these positions. The best way to comprehend these differences is by examining the range of images of identity that are found within the family as a whole. These images are visible in a series of theoretical accounts and are also reflected in the empirical studies informed by these theories. They are described in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of this book.

In Chapter 3, I discuss two of these images. In the first, identity is portrayed as the subjective achievement of individual actors, albeit actors that are no longer viewed as universal and ahistorical. Instead they are explicitly located within the social relations and social institutions that constitute the societies in which they live. According to this image, individuals achieve a sense of who they are through internal reflection on the range of recurrent actions and events in which they are involved and also on those personal characteristics and qualities that they avow as their own, or that are ascribed to them by others. The multiplicity of these events and attributes is subject to an interpretative process in which individuals accord particular significance to some experiences and attributes, treating others as accidental, contingent or irrelevant to this sense of who they are and who they want to be. Studies informed by this image give considerable attention to the general societal context in which such interpretation occurs and also ask questions about the extent to which different large-scale social formations encourage, facilitate or make problematic this essential process of identity formation.

A second image of identity is presented in the latter pages of Chapter 3. In this image the distinctive and coherent set of attributes that make up the identities of individuals is understood as the ascription to the person of common properties that distinguish the character of particular social groups or social categories defined by social, historical or geographical location – or by a combination of such locations. The most significant of these 'quasi-natural' (Wagner, 1996) identities have been based on one or more of: nationality, class, gender, sexuality, 'race' and ethnicity, as well as a range of other more fluid social categories.

Chapter 4 deals with two other images of identity which I place within the first family of approaches. Both emphasise the claim that identity formation is a sociocultural rather than an individual accomplishment and they offer varying accounts of what it means to assert that identity is a social effect. These accounts differ both from views of identity as the achievement of pre-existing individual subjects (however socially or interactionally located such subjects are portrayed as being), and also from an understanding of identity as the reflection or outcome of structural or cultural categories within such collectivities. In the first of these two images – that of identity as effect – identity matters are portrayed as the product of a series of 'discursive practices' originating in disciplinary forms of regulation which operate to construct and regulate the form and content of human subjectivity – and therefore identity – within particular historical and social collectivities. This means that identity is produced simultaneously as a feature of both individuals and social positions, these being constitutive elements in the overall production of human subjects.

The second image outlined in Chapter 4 prefers a portrayal of identity as a 'performative effect', the outcome or expression of speech or action rather than an individual or collective property avowed by the individual or ascribed by others and subsequently realised in speech and action. Such performative effects are seen to result from the deployment of linguistic or material conventions which produce the appearance of recognisable identities, although no necessary human subject is discoverable outside of these conventions. This image, then, emphasises the insubstantial, fugitive and even deceptive nature of the identity of human subjects.

Two final images of identity that find expression within this first family are discussed in Chapter 5. Both of them share a view of the significance of subjective identity as essential to the orderliness of personal and social life, but argue that earlier metaphysical accounts failed to provide adequate treatments of the dynamics of its formation. The first of these images depicts identity as a rhetorical construction by replacing prior ideas of 'internal reflection' with the suggestion that identity is assembled by the individual person through the use of a repertoire of cultural resources available for the construction of identity in specific social locations. Especially important here are studies of the availability and deployment of narrative templates for identity formation within this overall understanding. One additional feature of some of these studies is that they encourage an attentiveness to the role of personal and social relationships in the formation and use of such subjective narratives, and this emphasis leads to consideration of another image of identity matters. This second image presents identity as an interactional rather than an individual accomplishment, which means that identity becomes portrayed as the relational product of interaction

rather than the subjective product of individual reflection or the product of discursive or linguistic forces. Studies informed by this understanding have often been concerned with the way in which identities are constituted and deployed within invariant – or simply common – interactional processes found in a variety of social formations, and attention may be given either to the recurrent ways in which identities are accomplished for or by the person, or to the content of such interactionally relevant identities.

Chapters 6 and 7 present a second, smaller and less internally differentiated family of studies of identity, which differs fundamentally from the first family in its view of the nature and significance of social theorising, its methods of investigation and the kinds of substantive descriptions it provides. This second family puts to one side the many stipulative definitions of identity that have been constructed to maximise its potential as a theoretical supplement capable of clarifying the relationship between the individual and the collectivity. It eschews direct engagement with most of the various proposals, puzzles and claims that have arisen in the course of these explicitly theoretical projects, since it understands the repertoire of such concepts of identity as 'at bottom analytical abstractions from categories employed by members in organising their own activities' (Wilson, 1991: 27). It argues that as soon as identity matters are detached from their local contexts, abstracted and reformulated by reference to a professional human science vocabulary, it becomes unclear how such theoretical constructions relate to the co-ordinated actions from which they derive and which they are used to explain. Because of this, it proposes an alternative focus: on identity matters as an amalgamation of a range of local, revisable occasioned relevances of social actors. Largely informed by this 'respecification' of aim and interest, this alternative family perspective rejects the necessity to evaluate metaphysical assertions concerning the 'true nature' of identity, and refuses to propose an alternative 'theory of identity' of its own. It does not choose between those alternative strategies which investigate identity matters as preformed positions, generic sociocultural effects or as the externalised expressions of subjective states. It replaces these strategies with one that investigates identity matters as they arise and are dealt with in the socially organised practices of everyday life. Some of these investigations focus particularly on the ways in which talk-in-interaction provides both the resources and the occasion for the realisation of identity matters. Generally members of this second family are concerned to explicate what is involved in identity matters as they are made available by and to situated actors in the course of their co-construction of the orderliness of specific social contexts – identity not as an attribute of a person but as a 'course of treatment'. The methodological slogan of this approach is the 'priority of the particular', and I try to indicate the rewards of adopting this descriptive approach to the practical rationality of identity by providing some detailed examples of work which demonstrate the richness and complexity of the way that such identity matters are both a resource for and a feature of the organisation of everyday social action.

The combination of this new orientation to identity along with the distinctive methodologies deployed in such studies has produced different kinds of writing about the matters that are of interest in this book. So the chapters that deal with this second family focus on transcriptions of verbal interactions in naturally

occurring settings, with detailed explications of those interactions. Some may find the disjunction between the material contained in these chapters and the preceding ones uncomfortable. However, it would be impossible to demonstrate the distinctiveness of the perspective without recourse to such detailed presentations and I hope that readers previously unfamiliar with this kind of study will be willing to accommodate to this presentational difference. I believe that such patience will be rewarded, and in the concluding remarks that make up Chapter 8 I argue that there are substantial advantages to be gained from the willingness to follow leads provided by those who have undertaken these kinds of studies.

Notes

1 This is how Albrow understands the issue: 'The problem of individual and society has moved away from what used to be the central issue, agency and structure, to the problem of identity' (Albrow, 1996: 150).

2 One of the less well-known of these negative accounts is Parfit's (1984) critique of a number of common beliefs about human nature in which he describes 'personal identity' as a flawed concept and proposes to replace it with an understanding of 'a person's life as a series of successive selves'.

3 Wiley (1994a) has provided an interesting update and development of Gleason's account.

4 Williams suggests that one way of seeing that there are important differences between the two discourses would be to consider what would be understood by the meaning of 'losing identity' in each case. Loss of metaphysical identity would mean that a relevant object was simply unavailable: one would not be able to talk of a person as existing at all in cases where the criteria for personal identity could not be met. However to lose one's identity in the discourse of the social is to be 'conscious of one's own loss' (Williams, 1995: 8) and of course it is this kind of more familiar claim that we recognise when people talk of threats to and losses of identity in many areas of contemporary political and social life.

Chapter 2
The metaphysics of self and identity

> *Human beings regularly fabricate artful and sometimes fanciful behaviour as part of a quest, which is native to our species, for meaningful life. By undoing what it has fashioned with such elaborate care, the imagination employs creative tropes that revise and sometimes reject responses that were previously valued but are now considered outdated or uninteresting.*
> (Singer, 1994: xi)

Most of the sociological studies of identity matters that are discussed in later chapters of this book outline, clarify and position their claims by reference to one or more earlier philosophical arguments concerning the nature of self and identity. While these philosophical arguments are not the main focus of this book, I want to provide a rough outline of their contours so that what follows may be understood better. I do this in the hope that students of the topic of identity may become more confident that they understand the significance of expressions like 'the Cartesian self', 'Locke's criteria of identity' and 'Nietzsche's illusory self' for subsequent arguments concerning identity. In addition I hope that a description of some of this earlier work may better inform a consideration of why and how it is that later sociological accounts variously seek to endorse, modify, historicise or overcome such fixed points of reference.

I begin this by considering two of the most influential early understandings of self and identity, and the writers who gave them expression. The first of these offers a rationalist account in which it is asserted that the only reliable way to arrive at a solid foundation for the understanding and further investigation of self and identity is through disciplined thought about logically necessary features of the internal and external world. The second provides an empiricist account in which the evidence of the senses is examined to reveal the outline and character of self and identity as they are made available through experience. I begin with the immensely influential account provided by René Descartes (1596–1650) whose work is used as the background against which almost all other accounts of the nature of selfhood and identity are most often situated and considered.

Descartes

In the course of a radical attempt to establish certainty in scientific knowledge, Descartes argued that we have to begin to do this by considering what he called 'the activity of knowing'. This activity of knowing – how it is we gain knowledge – is made up of a complex repertoire of practices and Descartes argued that such practices were 'mental' in character, being located within the cognitive capacities of individual actors. Given such a starting point, it is inevitable that

the figure of the knowledgeable individual agent as the primary human subject was set at the very centre of his philosophy. Furthermore, in order to evaluate any claims for empirical knowledge – to establish the certainty of such knowledge – it was necessary to solve 'the problem of the observer', and in his *Discourse on Method* of 1637 he sought to determine of what and how any human individual could claim to have certain knowledge, and also to specify the grounds on which any such knowledge claim could be defended.

The solution he proposed required a radically sceptical method of reasoning. According to this method 'all that can be doubted is discarded'. What was left following the application of such corrosive doubt turned out to be the figure of the doubting thinking being itself, whose doubting and thinking could not itself be doubted – the unassailable residuum of the self or the 'I':

> *While we thus reject all of which we can entertain the smallest doubt ... we cannot in the same way suppose that we are not while we doubt the truth of these things; for there is a repugnance in conceiving that what thinks does not exist at the very time when it thinks. Accordingly, the knowledge,* I think, therefore I am, *is the first and most certain that occurs to one who philosophises orderly.*
> (Descartes, 1912: 167) [my emphasis]

Having established the certainty of this first principle, Descartes then moved on to argue that it could be used to ground all other forms of knowledge, including knowledge of the external world of nature. Descartes' main concern was not to secure a foundational account of the nature of the human subject in and of itself; rather it was to secure a foundational account of knowledge in general. However, in the course of that project he provided arguments that came to constitute a canonical version of the nature of the self in Western European societies. His 'new conception of inwardness, an inwardness of self-sufficiency, of autonomous powers, of ordering by reason' (Taylor, 1989: 158) offered a powerful and innovative understanding of what we now see as the modern subject. His text described the human person in a way which turned out to be immensely consequential for considering all accounts of self and identity in modern societies in general and especially for the way in which selves and identities could be described and discussed within the disciplines of the human sciences. However, it has provoked hostility as well as admiration, and has served as a target of attack as much as an object of attachment. The reasons for such criticism become clearer if we examine the way in which Descartes goes on to describe the properties of this citadel of certainty that he claims to have discovered within – and as – himself. He writes:

> *But what then am I? A thinking thing, it has been said. But what is a thinking thing? It is a thing that doubts, understands (conceives), affirms, denies, wills, refuses, that imagines also and perceives.*
> (Descartes, 1912: 89)

The world of this Cartesian self is founded and centred nowhere else but in the practices and products of individual thought. This self is isolated from all external matters through a conscious reduction; it is solitary and interior. Indeed it is precisely this secure separation from all external influences that establishes the

strength and certainty of self knowledge for Descartes. The self knows itself, it knows what it is, it knows its own identity, in and through this set of essentially private cognitive operations. Personal identity is therefore essentially and only located 'within' each person's unique self – and the self and its identity can be known by us directly. This Cartesian self is independent of social relations, which are of secondary significance as objects to which attention may be given. It is also independent of material relations since, while the body functions as a necessary container for mind and its activities, it cannot be known in the way that I can know my thinking self. So the body too is secondary, and has to be considered separately from mind. Descartes offered a dualist account of the person in which a significant hierarchical relationship exists between the different realms of mind and body.

This dualism, and the privilege it accords to the phenomenon of mind, is understandable when seen against the background of his attempt to develop a rational scientific outlook capable of side-stepping prior and contemporary religious commitments to distinctions between body and soul and between spirit and matter. However, when it is put alongside his other preference for the treatment of the individual as an asocial or presocial subject, it serves to produce difficulties for those seeking to extend or develop his metaphysical discourse to take into account any notion of other people, considered either individually or collectively as part of a wider social reality. If bodies are the insignificant containers in which mind and the self really reside, then how are we to have knowledge of other people, whose bodies may be visible to us but whose minds are not? If identity appears as the correlate of self-constituting individuality and is understood as an essentially subjective achievement of rational and individuated self consciousness what – if anything at all – is the significance of other people and of social relationships to this self-constituting individuality? Perhaps they are the derivative of this central certainty? Or perhaps other individuals, and the arrangements under which they live, provide a background which may serve either to support or to threaten the operation of this essentially subjective individual process? But why should either be the case? What will the discourse of the social be like if our view of the individuals within it is based on such a narrow conception of the kinds of beings we are? We are given no guidance and few clues with which to answer these questions from Descartes himself.

But of course the nature and variety of the cognitive operations that Descartes attributes as constitutive of the person are more varied than they may appear at first sight. In the well-known passage quoted above in which Descartes describes what is meant by the 'I', he lists as equivalents or near equivalents: doubting, understanding, affirming, denying, willing, refusing, imagining and the receipt of sensory perceptions. This is a very mixed bag indeed. It might be very difficult – indeed impossible – to concede to Descartes the argument that all of these operations are capable of being understood as both wholly internal to the individual and as cognitive operations independent of the embodiment of the individual concerned. The strength of his foundational argument rests on the claim that all of these matters are discoverable by self interrogation in a world without others. Yet how, for example, could affirming or denying something be learnt if we were without the notion of another who receives such affirmations or denials? Yet any suggestion that these internal

dialogues could be understood as a derivation from what it is like to talk to another person would only serve to undercut the grounds for the certainty Descartes is concerned to protect.

Descartes' account of the 'problem' of other people certainly shows the difficulty that is faced by any account of the social that tries to work outwards from the notion of a primary and originary individual and still give any substantial significance to the presence of others. In fact, in Descartes' account other people actually appear less accessible to us than other – simply material – natural phenomena. If, as he has asserted in the case of ourselves, the most important properties about us are features of our private mental life, how are we to get access to such vital matters occurring below the surface appearances of other people? We can witness their bodily workings and a variety of emissions from them, but these remain at best secondary and derivative features. Other minds are inaccessible stuff and there is no interpersonal equivalent to introspection. While one might argue that individuals share a common identity through the similarity of their construction, this is no more than the identity of replaceable monads: such monads may be exactly alike in construction but they would always remain unable to know more than trivial truths about each others' being. Certainly in most important senses such persons would be condemned to remain profoundly asocial beings. Descartes himself in his 'Second Meditation' writes of looking through a window at figures passing in the street and being aware of the vulnerability of the belief that what he sees are thinking beings: 'what can I see bedsides hats and coats which may cover automata?' (1954: 73).

Streeck (1992: 131) summarises Descartes' combination of rationalism and asociality as amounting to a 'loner' version of self and identity: 'held captive in a body, his mind seeks to reach out. All it finds are similar bodies; other minds are non-transparent. Everything else is analogy, projection. Even the loner himself is present only by stipulation'. As Streeck points out, any theory that holds to or deploys this 'loner' version but still has a concern with understanding joint or more complex forms of social action is forced to theorise 'bridges' which serve to connect together those individuals who are seen as engaging in such activities. The nature – and success – of some of these bridging operations will be something that will concern us in a later chapter.

Certainly Descartes' conceptions seem to limit the scope of our thinking as we approach those issues of identity that occur within what Singer (1994: 145) describes as the 'thronging busyness that is the social or interpersonal life that human beings live and often consider meaningful'. If each self inhabits its own subjective realm and if each person's mental life has an integrity prior to and independent of its interaction with other people, the picture of the individual that emerges is necessarily a profoundly asocial one. Other people can hardly figure as fellow participating subjects, except in an abstract sense. Rather they appear in our lives as particular kinds of objects – features of an external world known only through the mediation of our ideas and what can be gleaned from the inspection of their surface properties. Because it is not obvious how we may move from Descartes' privatised and disembodied selves to the world presupposed in common by those who go about their everyday business in contemporary life, some have argued that this – and perhaps any similar –

attempt to specify human nature in an abstract and universal way has little to offer more specific questions concerning who we are as individuals in any particular here and now. Schrag (1997) echoes Williams' remarks about the nature of the metaphysical discourse of identity when he argues that Descartes was really concerned with the question of what we are rather than who we are, and that this has made it impossible to approach the second question – located within the social discourse of identity – if we accept his answers to the first question. For Schrag, the terms of reference for the two questions are simply too different. However, in spite of these observations, it remains remarkable how much influence Descartes' approach to the problem of identity and the self has continued to exert, even if his own solutions appear so problematic. At the very least he has been such a central figure in the general development of modern thought that even when his formulations are opposed, the act of opposition serves to reminds us of his significance. Much of the apparatus of the human sciences seems to rest on foundations that could not have been built without reference to his work and ideas.

Locke

The specific character of Cartesian rationalism and essentialism and its consequences for an understanding of self and identity can be thrown into greater relief if we compare his approach with that of another seventeenth-century philosopher who provided a series of alternative suggestions concerning how and why identity should matter to us as human subjects. In some ways the work of John Locke (1632–1704) – first published some fifty years after the Cartesian meditations – shared some of Descartes' concerns and interests. Both Locke and Descartes sought to provide compelling reasons for accepting what were individualist and universalist accounts of the nature of the human self and – more especially in the case of Locke – of personal identity as an integral feature of such a self. Each thought that such an account was an essential preliminary to the development and evaluation of knowledge of the external world of other people and natural objects. However, their philosophical methods were profoundly different and so was the resulting character of each of their accounts. Descartes' radical insistence on himself as a purely thinking substance required the abandonment of any reliance of what he saw to be the deceptive character of the senses, and therefore a principled indifference to immediate experience. In contrast to this introspective rational strategy, Locke's application of an empiricist method in which irreducible and ineradicable sensory experience forms the solid foundation on which rational certainty can come to rest produced a different solution to the problem of the nature of the self and the question of the nature of personal identity. Accordingly his solution offers some additional resources which are not available from Descartes' work.

In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* of 1690, Locke (1975) asked two questions:

1. How do I know that I am the same person that I was yesterday, last month or last year?

2. Why does the answer to this question matter to me?

It can be seen that Locke was generally concerned with the notion of identity as referring to the continuity and sameness of something over time, and he argued that the meaning of such a continuity or sameness may vary according to the kind of thing or object we have in mind. In working out what different kinds of things needed to be dealt with by such an account, Locke differentiated between 'man' and 'persons' as a way of distinguishing between our general properties as biological beings and our more specific properties as human beings. Locke asserted that the continuity of the former (a type of continuity shared with other animate beings whose lives can be followed throughout their course) is assured simply by 'participation in the same life form', by which he meant continuing to live in the same body, or at least a body that, despite some changes, is made up of the same material substance over the course of its life. However, he argued that our sense of the continuity of ourselves as persons also requires the continuity of self-recognised identity. Such self-recognised identity Locke thought to be the accomplishment of 'a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection and can consider it as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places' (Locke, 1975: Book II, xxvii.9).

This is why identity matters to us – it is the way in which we think about ourselves as remaining one selfsame being in spite of the series of internal physical and external contextual changes that are likely to affect us over time. But if this is why identity matters to us, there remains the other question that was raised earlier: how can we be sure that over any such period of time we really do remain the selfsame person we believe our self to be? Locke's answer to this question was formulated in terms of what Taylor (1989) has called the 'punctual self' – a person that makes itself an object of its own experience, an object which can be disengaged from all other particular actions or thoughts. It is a conception that relies on the difference between 'the sense of self' on the one hand and the simple 'experience of one's inner and outer actions' on the other (Danzinger, 1997: 47). While each experience is separable from and isolated from all others, the 'sense of self' is derived through the accumulation and comparison of such experiences through the 'reflective' capacity of the mind. Moreover, mind is not only able to reflect on such sensory expressions, it can also turn its view upon itself and in doing so make its own ideas the stuff of its experience and reflection in the same way that external objects may be treated. In so far as our own prior experiences can be re-examined by us – and this is a basic and universal property of persons – we can be sure of the continuity of our selves and our identities. Our identity is constituted and sustained by the set of recalled experiences that are unique to ourselves, and as long as we retain this recollection we remain the same person.

Locke is often described as having framed his account of identity in terms of memory. In particular it is said that he claimed we have selves or identities derived from, or dependent on the workings of, our memory. While this may be broadly true (and subsequent critiques and modifications of Locke have proceeded on this basis), 'memory' is not the word used by Locke when he writes of the cognitive processes involved in the establishment and maintenance of identity. What he writes about is 'consciousness', and he comments that: 'As

far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person' (Locke, 1975: Book II, xxvii.9). This is not exactly the same as the notion of memory, and Noonan (1989) has pointed out that Locke uses the term 'consciousness' in the 'strong sense of the 17th Century' in which consciousness as self knowledge, knowledge of one's own thoughts and actions is often used synonymously with conscience as an aspect of moral reasoning. While this difference between an emphasis on 'memory' as opposed to an emphasis on 'consciousness' may seem a minor quibble, it is in fact an important reminder of the fact that Locke's account sought to emphasise not only the psychological nature of the self and its relationship to identity but also the pragmatic and moral character of our concern with these issues. Locke's concern was with the way in which the moral accountability of human beings rests on understandings of their continuity – and thus identity – and in this matter he differs from Descartes. This is not to say that his approach rejects the Cartesian concern with the nature of sure knowledge of ourselves and of the world, but rather that he pursued a dual interest in the logic and morality of everyday activities, and the establishment of firm foundations for our knowledge of nature.

Locke's approach may seem to have advantages over the prior Cartesian account, which serves largely to immunise the self from investigations other than those of intuition. However, there are problems here too. Like Descartes, Locke falls prey to a reductionist argument. Danzinger (1997) has argued that the application of a mentalist and empiricist logic to the issue of identity requires us to seek the reality of such a phenomenon through a focus on the most elementary components of mind – paralleling empiricist accounts of the world of nature with their focus on the most elementary components of matter. Yet Locke's empiricism may be less radical and less secure than it might seem at first sight. His argument is that identity remains dependent on our ability to bring our past actions and thought into consciousness. If my own prior actions and thought can be summoned for examination by my current consciousness, then it can be asserted that I am identical with the person who undertook those actions in the first place. There is a problem here, however, and it is the degree to which I can be certain that the actions that are made available to consciousness in this way really were my own actions and thoughts. Since there are no strictly empirical methods for determining that we can be sure that this is the case, Locke's argument concerning continuity may simply have assumed what it was he was seeking to prove in the first place.

Hume

Certainly when David Hume (1711–76) considered the problem of identity using only such a similarly radical empiricist approach, he reported that he failed to find what Locke had (although his work targets Descartes for criticism as well as Locke). In his 1739 *Treatise on Human Nature*, Hume described himself as having looked for a 'self' amongst the myriad of sense impressions that he received from the external world, but found no sensation to correspond to such an entity:

> *For my part, when I enter most intimately what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never catch myself at any time without a perception and never observe anything but the perception.* (Hume, 1979: 176)

Having examined his own impressions, Hume found that he could find no impression that corresponded to the idea of identity, and no fixed point from which a collection of inner experiences could be marshalled. He argued that consciousness cannot be aware of consciousness, that the knower can never be known empirically because knowledge of this knower presupposes another who has this knowledge, and so on ad infinitum. In making this argument he rejected the possibility of the knower as a transcendental subject – as the condition of the possibility of such experience in the first place. But this does not mean that he wanted to abandon altogether the ideas of self and identity as nonsense; persons are fictions, collections or aggregates of other things, and while the concept of the self is thus not an illusion, it remains an unsuitable idea for incorporation into the vocabulary of his moral science. He does consider why such a fiction is so widely believed, and he attributes this belief to two sources, the most important of which is memory. But contrary to Locke, Hume argues that memory 'contributes to the production' of identity rather than being the mechanism by which identity is recovered. Self, person and identity are not substances, they are merely ideas ('Thought alone finds personal identity') without connection to specific sense impressions. They can therefore be set aside by those concerned to allow only sense-certain phenomena into their philosophical and critical apparatus. Self is simply a collection of experiences; it is not anything separable from those experiences. Hume's conclusion is derived from the application of a rigorously empirical method to investigate Descartes' assertion of the existence of self-contained mental substance, and the resulting 'epistemological stalemate' (Schrag, 1997) ends in the necessity of his denial of the relevance of the concepts of self and identity. Hume would encourage us to believe that while the idea of personal identity is not an eradicable fiction – its central place in our cultural practice is too important – the basis of our belief in such a phenomenon is essentially contestable since it is devoid of any rigorous empirical foundation.

However, before accepting this argument for the abandonment of Locke in favour of the 'era of doubt and suspicion' (Ricoeur) that derives from Hume, it is worth revisiting the other element of Locke's account mentioned earlier: its concern with the moral character of human action. This is a feature of identity that was never offered for analysis within Hume's empiricist and reductionist compass. After all, Locke had added an interestingly formulated non-psychological fact about identity when he argued that one of the reasons we cannot fail to be concerned about our own identity is that 'personal identity is a necessary and sufficient condition for warranted accountability' (Noonan, 1989: 49). In this respect, at least, an interest in identity is given an additional and rather different significance by Locke. It appears here as part of the moral background against which we live our everyday lives, and this makes clear that some notion of the social, however seemingly secondary in significance, was present in the background of Locke's thoughts. As Hacking (1995b) points

out, Locke's concern to reject prior accounts which locate identity and the self in a religious or spiritual space (a strategy pursued in common with Descartes) does not lead in his case to a definition of the person entirely isolated from social contexts. In fact he chooses to locate this largely psychological reality within a network constituted by the intersections of 'commerce, law, property and trade' (Hacking, 1995b: 146). However, while the social has relevance for a consideration of identity, it does not figure in the constitution of identity. For Locke, identity mattered because moral responsibility depends on it, although a thorough grasp of its properties was still seen as requiring a metaphysical rather than a social investigation.

Despite their differences, the work of both Descartes and Locke tended to license a good deal of subsequent approaches to the person as 'an abstracted insular knowing subject' (Schrag, 1997). Despite having different aims and different methods, all three early investigations of self and identity were conceived in a similar way: primarily 'as a matter of the relationship between the individual person and evidence, reason, consciousness, nature, or God' (Solomon, 1988). Cartesian rationalism, Lockean empiricism and Humean scepticism all approach the issue of the self and its identity through an investigation of what is envisaged as an isolated subject – a subject without history. In Descartes' account the social is at best secondary, and probably irrelevant. Locke does attend to a social framework within which a concern with identity is significant and consequential, yet at the same time, his account of the nature of identity itself remains located entirely on the operation of mental processes. Hume recognises that there is a common belief in the significance of identity as a substantive fact of human life, but he characterises that belief as a fiction and argues that it can be abandoned by those of sufficient intellectual rigour. Such denials or removals of social convention and context may seem to produce the appearance of universalism in thinking about topics of self and identity, but we will see shortly that this appearance serves only to conceal what for others turns out to be vitally important.

Hegel

I want now to introduce two other accounts of self and identity, both produced in the nineteenth century and, despite their differences, both providing startling and liberating contrasts to prior accounts. The first is that of Hegel (1770–1831), to which I will give more space, and the second is that of Nietzsche (1844–1900), which I will deal with in less detail. Their work throws into greater relief the approaches and claims of the work that I have so far described and they facilitate vastly different resources for use in subsequent studies of the topic of identity.

Both Hegel and Nietzsche make innovatory claims that the identity of persons is best understood not as a fact about the essential and universal features of their inner being but as response to, or an effect of, the activities of others. Human selves and their identities are not substances sedimented prior to persons' participation in collective life or persons' relationships with one another, but are constituted as properties only in and through the forms of human subjectivity that arise from and inform that participation and those relationships. Hegel's

difficult *Phenomenology of Spirit*, first published in 1807, represents his attempt to provide a phenomenological foundation for the study of self in social life, and Richard Norman (1976) has argued that this phenomenology of self consciousness contains three important innovations.

- The first of these is that it develops and extends previous conceptions of the subject (of the kinds I have already discussed) by the addition of non-cognitive elements into an account of self consciousness and also by the abandonment of a simple dichotomy which universally distinguishes subjects from objects.
- The second innovation comprises Hegel's willingness to treat the issue of self consciousness as a form of action rather than a form or product of isolated thought, since for Hegel 'consciousness depends upon agency'.
- The third innovation lies in Hegel's emphasis on the socially situated nature of action rather than a wholly abstract conception of action, as the source of consciousness.

Taken together then, these three Hegelian innovations make possible novel accounts of consciousness, and thus of selves and their identities, which are predominantly social and historical rather than individual and universal in character. *Phenomenology of Spirit* provides an account of a common 'phenomenological pattern' – a common pattern of ideas – which Hegel argues can be discerned in the progressive development of human knowledge as such knowledge moves from its beginnings in the immediacy of 'sense-certainty' eventually reaching its end in the 'absolute knowing' of scientific certainty. At each level within this progressive development, Hegel argues that conscious thought works in the same way, attempting to get closer to its own experience of knowledge by an iterative process in which the object of thought is reconstructed, then thought itself is re-examined, followed by an examination of the relationship of thought to the object, next returning to the object and so on.

In the course of several chapters of his book, Hegel describes a number of necessary conditions required for human beings to be able to develop knowledge of themselves and their identities in accord with the kind of developmental sequence I have just described. These necessary conditions have been the subject of very considerable scholarly attention and they have been interpreted in a number of different ways. They can be listed simply as:

- 'recognition'
- freedom
- disciplined work
- 'fear of one's life'.

These conditions, some of which may seem rather odd at first reading, are dependent on a set of social arrangements which make them possible, so they cannot be treated as a set of exclusively cognitive operations. They require: 'the existence of a free society in which everyone is recognised as a person, and in which all men work freely, serving not the needs of an individual master but the needs of the whole community, and subject only to the discipline of reason' (Norman, 1976: 54).

Hegel argues that it is necessary to distinguish between the way that we can be conscious of things external to ourselves on the one hand and conscious of ourselves as subjects on the other hand, this latter consciousness being a necessary condition for the constitution of identity. Consciousness of other things has a single object brought to our scrutiny through the certainty of the senses. To be conscious of ourselves, however, we have to be able to examine two objects, not one. We have to add to what he describes as sense-certainty a second object of attention and interrogation – that of self-certainty. His account of the distinctiveness of self consciousness is built from this basic foundation and it provides the framework for his critique of prior accounts of the self as well as the source of a number of subsequent theories of identity. The important question then is: how do we achieve this 'self-certainty' which is necessary for the full development of self consciousness? The first point to note is that Hegel asserts that we cannot answer this by considering rational cognitive processes alone. An essential feature of the consciousness of self is the experience of 'desire':

> *Self-consciousness is thus certain of itself only by superseding this other that presents itself to self-consciousness as an independent life; self-consciousness is Desire. Certain of the nothingness of this other, it explicitly affirms that this nothingness is for it the truth of the other; it destroys the independent object and thereby gives itself the certainty of itself as a true certainty, a certainty which has become explicit for self-consciousness itself in an objective manner.*
> (Hegel, 1977: 109)

Desire marks a double boundary: first between contemplation and action, and second between how things are and how a subject wishes them to be. In Kojève's (1980) rendition of Hegel, it is desire that forms and reveals the subject to himself and to others 'as an I, the I that is essentially different from, and radically opposed to, the non I. The (human) I is the I of a Desire or of Desire' (Kojève, 1980: 3–4). There are a number of forms of desire. For example, we may desire to possess, to transform, to use, or to destroy any number of objects of desire, but these typical desires of the body are necessary but insufficient for the constitution of the kind of desire found in Hegel's full sense of self consciousness. For Hegel, there is one additional form of desire that is constitutive of fully human self consciousness: the desire to be desired (later, described as the desire for recognition). Self consciousness – dependent on desire – only comes fully into existence when desire is directed not towards a thing that can be possessed, transformed, used or negated, but 'towards a nonbeing – that is towards another Desire, another greedy emptiness, another I' (Kojève, 1980: 40). Fully human subjects are, then, constituted through their desire being directed towards others' desire:

> *Thus in the relationship between man and woman for example, Desire is human only if the one desires, not the body, but the Desire of the other; if he wants 'to possess' or 'to assimilate' the Desire taken as Desire – that is to say if he wants to be 'desired' or 'loved' or rather 'recognised' in his human value, in his reality as a human individual.*
> (Kojève, 1980: 6)

This Hegelian stress on the significance of a specific form of desire, the desire for the recognition of one's value in the eyes of another, served to establish his view of self consciousness as an intersubjective rather than a subjective phenomenon. The nature of the value desired in question may be variable, but at its most basic and necessary, it refers to the *recognition* 'of another person as an independent and autonomous agent' (see Norman, 1976: 48). In this account, then, full consciousness of self is impossible without the consciousness and responsiveness of others. Cartesian and Lockean positive accounts of self and identity fail to grasp this requirement and from this Hegelian standpoint, remain unsatisfactory. The isolated solitary figure of their accounts would be incapable of Hegelian self awareness, and would have no sense of identity. In Norman's summary, 'in order to see myself as being equally a person in just this same manner, I must not only recognise others as persons but also be recognised by them as a person. Thereby my own existence is given an objective validity' (Norman, 1976: 47–8).

One element in Hegel's depiction of the ways in which subjects secure recognition, however, has been the cause of much difficulty and dissension amongst those seeking to make use of Hegel. It is clear that the kind of recognition that he writes about – the willingness of self to recognise the value of another – is far from an automatic process. In fact the expressions which Hegel uses to describe the process by which such recognition is secured are often violent and disturbing ones. Throughout the relevant sections of the *Phenomenology*, his language is the language of war and aggression. For Hegel, recognition is secured through contest and conflict, and it is not unusual to find references to violence, and even murder and death, both in his writing and that of scholars influenced by him. For example: 'Therefore, to speak of the "origin" of Self-Consciousness is necessarily to speak of a fight to the death for "recognition"' (Kojève, 1980: 7).

Why is the issue of self consciousness, and therefore the formation of identity, pictured in this aggressive and oppositional way? It is important to note that in the section of the *Phenomenology* in which this theme is developed, Hegel's account takes the form of a parable. Hegel invites us to imagine early, simple self consciousness: 'self-equal through the exclusion from itself of everything else. For it, its essence and absolute object is "I"...What is "other" for it is an unessential, negatively characterised object. But the "other" is also a self-consciousness; one individual is confronted by another individual' (Hegel, 1977: 113). At this early stage, the nature of this confrontation is not realised by each other: 'Each is indeed certain of its own self but not of the other, and therefore its own self certainty has no truth' (Hegel, 1977: 113). As each self consciousness strives to be recognised, control of its identity passes from its own hands into the hands of another since recognition must, by definition, come from another. The loss of this control can only be regained by negating, or destroying that other, and this situation is duplicated when viewed from the standpoint of the other. Hegel argues that it is only by what he describes as 'risking one's life' in this way – by putting oneself at the mercy of another and acting in the light of the consequence of that risk – that one becomes fully aware of oneself as a free autonomous agent. In fact, of course, the actual death of either one of the parties would lead to an 'abstract negation' in which

there would be no other to provide recognition to the surviving protosubject. This is why the resolution of such contests for recognition lead not to negation in death, but to the 'enslavement' of the 'loser' by the 'winner'.

In one of the most famous sections of Hegel's work, he goes on to consider the question of what such 'enslavement' amounts to, in other words to ask who has really been victorious when one subject acquires domination over another in such a 'master-and-slave' form. While at first sight the victor may seem to be whoever has mastery over another, further reflection suggests that since the recognition of this individual by an other is secured only by force, the identity of such a master 'fails to achieve objective confirmation' (Hegel, 1977:118). At the same time, the slave finds 'in the product of his labour' an expression of his own identity unavailable to the master, and Hegel adds that the slave is more 'conscious of his existence' as a result of the fear experienced in and through enslavement.

Hegel's parable of the master and the slave has always intrigued – and often seduced – those interested in his understanding of the reciprocal character of identity, but in fact this parable is really only one element in a larger historico-mythical narrative. Following on from a description of the master-and-slave as a social form, Hegel offers a further three such formations, calling them 'stoicism', 'scepticism' and the 'Unhappy Consciousness'. It is not necessary to go on to outline these forms here since my interest in Hegel's work is largely confined to grasping its overall intention rather than the painstaking details of its execution and application by Hegel himself, in particular the fact that he makes available a new conception of self and identity that is so markedly different from that which went before him.

It would be difficult to provide an adequate survey of the number of ways in which these aspects of Hegel's work have been taken within the human sciences. There are certainly important essentialist readings in which the 'fight for recognition' is seen as an ineradicable component of human interaction, and Kojève and Sartre have been especially responsible for carrying forward that interpretation of Hegel's work. Sartre's (1969) *Being and Nothingness*, for example, proposes a view of all human relations as essentially alienating because of the attempts of others to objectify us and our attempts to objectify them in turn. Other scholars, such as Charles Taylor (1992a, 1992b), have provided more positive versions of Hegel when writing about the role played by recognition in the achievement of identity. I think it is helpful to follow Weir's (1996) recommendation that we may best think of Hegel's work as a fable which offers us a powerful and persuasive alternative to a tradition derived from Cartesian reductionist views of self and identity:

> *In opposition to this account, Hegel's description of the necessary character as well as the paradoxical outcome of the struggle leading to domination and slavery serves to encourage in the reader the 'recognition that self and other, subject and object are in fact not opposed but united, integrally related.*
> (Weir, 1996: 20)

However, Hegel is not the only writer who produced a social – though abstract and metaphorical – account of self and identity which offers an alternative to the metaphysical speculations of earlier centuries. I want to end this chapter by considering one final set of philosophical assertions concerning identity matters, one which departs from each of the writers so far considered and which offers another set of resources subsequently taken up and used by writers on these topics.

Nietzsche

In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, first published in 1887, Nietzsche offers a 'historically informed' critique of 'our moral prejudices'. What makes these 'moral prejudices' *our* prejudices for Nietzsche was that they received expression in the Judaeo-Christian ethical code, a code which he claimed underpinned the value systems of Western European society. One element in this moral order concerns a commitment to the value of human individuality, and is supported by beliefs about its essential nature. Nietzsche argues that the expression of these beliefs has taken a number of varying historical forms ranging from theological versions of the soul to the Cartesian version of the substantive self described earlier in this chapter. Despite differences of detail, however, all of these forms serve to express and justify confidence in the idea that there exists some kind of coherent, unified and stable personal identity at the core of each person. In *The Will to Power* (Nietzsche, 1967), he describes such unified identities as invented, as a fiction and as a play on words, and he seeks to develop a consistently sceptical stance to all such accounts of what he called the 'soul hypothesis'. In the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* he writes that 'the subject (or to adopt a more popular idiom, the soul) has therefore been perhaps the best article of faith on earth so far' (Nietzsche, 1996: 30). His scepticism towards the 'soul hypothesis' parallels that of Hume, although it is differently derived and has certainly had a different effect on subsequent thinking. It arises from a specifically historicist argument that conceptions of self and identity are best understood when seen in their 'real character' as historical and social artefacts. The historical variability of social conditions generates a variety of forms of subjectivity amongst human actors rather than merely providing different contexts in which the 'monstrous' universal subject may act. Identity formation, maintenance and change are not to be understood as comprising a common universal process internal to the individual person, but as a way of portraying, and thus controlling, individuals in specific social and historical settings.

Nietzsche identifies two origins of the persistent tendency to attribute such a false concreteness to the notion of the 'subject':

1. a linguistic origin
2. a social origin.

The first – a variety of linguistic determinism – arises from the common use of ordinary language, usage which can lead to an elision between the conception

of the subject as presented within the rules of grammar and a conception of the subject as the object of metaphysical inquiry. The grammatical structure of Western languages, argues Nietzsche, requires a distinction between subject and predicate, and an orientation to this requirement seduces us to treat all natural and human actions as the effects of substantive subjects – we confuse a mere part of speech with the presence of substance. We model the world on the basis of our habits of language and our use of the words 'I' or 'me' encourage a false belief in a unified substantive subject that derives from this usage. However, there is no necessary connection between grammatical and ontological subjects, and the deployment of the former neither requires nor justifies a belief in the existence of the latter. He uses an example to show us that we would be wrong if we were to infer from the expression 'lightning has struck my house' the existence of an ontological subject 'lightning' represented by the grammatical subject and separated from the predicate 'has struck'. It is more difficult to see, however, that the same confusion could arise when we utter a sentence which describes a person who acts with passion. Nietzsche wants us to treat the second instance in the same way that we treat the first, arguing that in neither case is it necessary to think of the action as having arisen from a prior subject that exists as a 'substratum' to the action: 'But no such substratum exists; there is no "being" behind doing, acting, becoming; "the doer" is merely a fiction imposed on the doing – the doing itself is everything' (Nietzsche, 1996: 29). It may not be obvious why Nietzsche wants to assert that there is an absence of necessity here and why he seems to prefer an account of human action in which reference to 'doings' or performances can effectively replace reference to 'doers' or performances without leaving behind some necessary but unexpressed remainder. His account of how we have come to make this avoidable 'error' of coming to believe in the existence of substantive selves and their integral identities requires reference to what he thinks is the origin of the attribution of false concreteness to the human subject. This origin has to do with the historical and social nature of self and identity, and more especially the social nature of memory and consciousness as essential features of our belief in and orientation to these fictions.

An essential line of demarcation between the natural and the social for Nietzsche lies in the fact of the moral accountability of the person. This moral accountability consists in the ability to hold persons responsible for making and delivering specific kinds of acts like agreements and promises, as beings who can be seen to be acting generally in relation to some intention or another, and as capable of pursuing values as well as following or breaking rules (Schacht, 1983). Nietzsche (1996: 39) refers to all of this as 'the breeding of an animal which is entitled to make promises'. In his description of this essentially accountable character of moral life, Nietzsche makes an early mention of the significance of memory for the kinds of accomplishments listed above. At first sight, this focus on memory may seem to bring his view closer to that of Locke who also gave attention to the connection between the persistence of identity in memory on the one hand and moral accountability on the other. However, closer inspection shows that the two differ significantly not only on the source of their reasoning (Locke's empiricism contrasts sharply with Nietzsche's speculative method), but also in the value that each author attributes to these

correlates of conceptions of self and identity. For both Locke and Nietzsche, the consistency and predictability of people's behaviour both to others and to themselves is a necessary feature of social life, being visible in the persistence of patterned ways of acting and feeling over time, perhaps even over a lifetime. But while for Locke social life is secondary, arising naturally from the existence of these universal features of human life, Nietzsche attributes primacy to social arrangements, arguing that it is these which forcibly impose the demand for these features onto individuals. Locke's assumption that the surface of social regularity and moral order arises from the depth of the self consistency of personal identity is reversed by Nietzsche, who asserts that the appearance of such depth beneath the surface of orderly conduct is an illusory effect, albeit a convenient and cunning one.

We can understand the nature of this illusion once we apprehend the social – and therefore variable – origins of what have been presented to us in previous theories as a priori or empirical universals. The Cartesian error was to rely on the seeming primary verities of autonomous conscious reflection while neglecting the source and origins of such a capacity. Nietzsche argues that consciousness and memory can both be seen to have social origins – they both depend on socially acquired competences and in the case of the latter, on socially imposed practices. Even the identification of actions or thoughts as the result of free conscious choices made by the individual already presupposes the availability of a series of common categories and distinctions whose origin – for Nietzsche – can only be social. He describes this in the following way:

> *how much man must first have learnt to distinguish necessity from accident! To think in terms of causality, to see and anticipate from afar, to posit ends and means with certainty, above all to be able to reckon and calculate! For that to be the case, how much man himself must have become calculable, regular, necessary, even to his own mind.*
> (Nietzsche, 1996: 40)

To be made fit for social life – and here Nietzsche reasons speculatively about the prehistory of human kind – individuals have to be commanded to think of themselves as having these fictionally ascribed identities, organisational self unities that transcend and organise their desires and immediate circumstances, and individuals have to be brought to act on the basis of the belief that this unity of self persists through the variety of changes that assail them. This 'late fruit' of humanity is a matter of both external and internal discipline, and at its core for Nietzsche is identity understood as the effect of a form of discipline applied to the person, the application of this discipline being the work both of others and of the person concerned. This idea of an externally derived but dually imposed discipline is most clearly expressed by Nietzsche in a rather hyperbolic assertion concerning the role of force and pain involved in the 'triumph over forgetfulness' – his expression for the faculty of memory. There is, he asserts 'nothing more frightening and sinister in the whole pre-history of man than his technique for remembering things. Something is branded in so that it stays in the memory: only that which hurts incessantly is remembered' (Nietzsche, 1996: 42).

Nietzsche's use of a historical method to examine the issue of identity may seem, at first sight, to bring him very close to Hegel, but it is important to note the differences between the two before describing the substance of Nietzsche's historical account. Nietzsche rejects Hegel's assertion of the inevitability of a long-term and progressive historical development of human subjectivity and his own alternative version is neither determinist nor progressivist. Instead his voluntaristic 'genealogical history' is concerned to identify the variety of historical sources and social forces which, working together, can be seen to have engendered whatever phenomenon is his focus of interest – in this case, the structure of contemporary moral thinking. The outcome of such a field of forces is indeterminate and unfinished, and his description of his way of working on this material draws on an analogy with the tracing of an ancestry backwards through a family tree and discovering the complex and multivalent connections and developments embedded in such an organic process. His procedure is clearly differentiated from one like Hegel's which seeks to uncover invariant historical laws which taken together define the direction of the arrow of destiny.

Nietzsche's scepticism is too deep to permit any alternative 'positive' version of identity. Instead he provides us with a challenging interpretation of the nature of the human subject that emphasises identity as contingent rather than necessary, as well as one which urges us to attend to the historical origins and social consequences of any seemingly strongly based universal and metaphysical claims about ourselves. For Nietzsche, a belief in a stable and unitary identity both provides a way of organising experience and also makes possible a way of controlling those who can be persuaded or tricked into acting according to such a belief. Such an 'Appolonian' construction is of course in constant tension with Nietzsche's 'Dionysian' alternative of chaos, desire, excess. Reason and discipline are the driving forces of the former; will is the engine of the latter. Identity is contained and unified in the former, but it is erased in the latter.

Conclusion

The accounts of the metaphysics of self and identity that I have introduced in this chapter have provided vocabularies, questions, problems and issues which have informed later understandings of human subjectivity and will therefore figure in the accounts of identity matters presented in the following chapters. These several philosophical assertions have made strong, though differing and contrary, claims, and these claims have continued to exercise a hold over both personal and disciplinary imaginations since their inception. Most modern studies of identity can be located by reference to these earlier accounts, and in some ways those who provided them have so clearly established their territories that no ground can be occupied that has not already been marked by their prior presence. However, at the same time, the variation amongst their claims provides the freedom for the existence of a range of construals of identity matters which have been drawn on to inform contemporary theory and research.

Cartesian formulations of self and of the nature and significance of identity have clearly been central to an understanding of both lay and professional accounts of identity matters in modern societies – despite strenuous efforts to resist and modify these formulations. Such efforts have focused critical attention

on the asocial character of Descartes' version of the self and its identity, and on the application of his distinction between the mental and the material in understanding human action. Locke's continued emphasis on the abstract subject and on the significance of memory as the basis for the identity of such a subject has raised questions for those concerned with the nature of memory and its location 'within' the person, as well as providing a platform for the discussion of other ways in which the continuity of individual identity may be asserted both by the individual and by others. The shared legacy of Descartes and Locke in continued but modified formulations of identity as the inherent essence and subjective achievement of the individual is something to be discussed in Chapter 3.

Hume's commentary on the self may seem to rule out serious investigation of what for him counts as mere belief, whereas sociological accounts concerned with 'all that passes for knowledge' in particular societies have no hesitation in subjecting to analysis the nature of any such seemingly fundamental beliefs or the way in which actions can be seen to be informed by them. Elements of this sceptical conception are preserved in the work of at least one of the figures whose work I consider in Chapter 5 – Erving Goffman. However, Nietzsche's more critical, and hyperbolic, account of the 'persistent illusion' of the self and its identity and his historicist and relativist vocabulary for the expression of this illusion have proved more useful (or more used) than Hume's empiricist one. A number of accounts of identity discussed in Chapter 4 which seek to emphasise its discursive or performative origins or nature get much of their distinctive character from the Nietzschean elements that they borrow, or on which they elaborate.

Descartes, Locke and Hume found differing ways of treating identity as a matter of individual – and universal – subjectivity. Nietzsche and Hegel, on the other hand, proposed alternative approaches that stress the ineradicably social character of identity as a resource for and outcome of human interaction. Tensions within and between these two opposing positions have generated a changing repertoire of subsequent assertions and contestations about identity matters in the human sciences. The following chapters consider the recurrent form taken by many of these.

Chapter 3
Repositioning identity

> *An individual without a sense of core identity is without direction, without a sense of position or place, lacking the fundamental assurance that he or she is a worthy person.*
> (Gergen, 1994: 202)

Introduction

In Chapter 2 I was concerned to outline – in varying detail – several approaches to the study of the metaphysics of self and identity:

- Cartesian rationalism;
- Lockean empiricism;
- Humean scepticism;
- Hegelian historicism;
- Nietzschean relativism.

The first two of these described what they claimed were the intrinsic properties of the person as a natural kind, whilst the three others raised objections to the accuracy or universality of such descriptions and suggested alternative approaches to how we should understand better the nature and significance of an agreed long-standing concern with the identity of persons. Descartes, Locke and Hume all based their accounts of self and identity on an analysis of the 'thinking' of idealised and individualised actors who they imaginatively displaced from the social contexts of their everyday lives. Having executed such a displacement, they were able to treat concrete actions in mundane social contexts as derivative and secondary, even perhaps irrelevant contaminants, to these theoretically refined understandings of abstract human individuality. One of the results of this strategy is that the rich but commonplace details of identity matters – of the substance of *who* people are rather than *what* people are – are given no attention. Instead, such analysis offers a characterisation of individuals in outline only, as constituted by 'powers of reason' and a set of drives, instincts or predispositions. While these properties are held in common with all others, formulated as universal features of humankind, individuals are attributed no 'shared qualities' that spring from participation in communal arrangements (Dunne, 1995: 138). Individual persons with such identities are portrayed as wholly self-sufficient beings whose contact with other people is limited by the relative impermeability of both parties to each other. These are individuals outside of both history and language, agents only of enlightened reason, and each such self-sufficient agent engages – ideally – with other similarly constituted agents in rationally ordered freely chosen exchanges.

The assumption of Descartes, Locke and Hume that a particular understanding of the nature of identity in human beings is a universal feature of meaningful human life (justified by reason for Descartes, by experience for Locke, and merely as a matter of common belief for Hume) is thus clearly and deliberately unresponsive to the social and historical locations in which individuals are made to encounter identity matters. On the other hand, both Hegel and Nietzsche provided alternative accounts of the development and maintenance of self and identity – as features of individuality in which previously universal and necessary features of full human consciousness were instead made to appear as the outcome of recurrent social processes. These social processes were themselves historically conditioned. Hegel's sketch of this history is methodologically and substantively different from that of Nietzsche, but neither of them provide a history whose claims for validity could be measured against any record of real events. Instead they provide 'natural histories' of a kind common to the nineteenth century. Such 'natural histories' operate by very different standards from those applied in the kinds of histories familiar to the contemporary reader, and for this reason they are best understood as offering alternative programmes of study that demand an attentiveness to the historical and social contextualisation of identity, rather than claiming to provide substantive accounts of the detailed nature of specific historical and social contexts.

Identity and society

The influences of these programmes of study can be found in those sociological accounts of identity that have been concerned to develop a historically informed empirical approach to the topic, and which have therefore sought ways to characterise and assess the nature and relevance of the shifting societal contexts in which identities are located, as well as the changes in the social resources on which identity formation seems to depend. Of course these accounts deploy a generic (or perhaps the defining) strategy of sociology, a strategy which seeks to formulate (and assign determinative properties to) the social formation within which some apparently natural – therefore presocial – feature of human thought or action is given expression. Elias' (1998: 270) rhetorical formulation of the use of such a sociological 'suspension' as a way in which we can 'escape the contradictions and inadequacies of a deceptive certainty' is one of many formulations of a disciplinary practice which asserts the socially determined character of human nature – and therefore the general priority of the social in explanations of human conduct.

Such relativising and historicising investigations have varied in their scope and reach. Some have sought to give a comparative account of a wide range of ways in which different understandings of the nature of human selves and their identities have been formulated and given expression in a number of societies and cultures in differing historical periods. An interesting example of such investigations is Kavolis' (1980) ideal-typical account of a range of 'cultural logics of selfhood', a phrase he defines as referring to the 'most basic alternatives for discerning what the "genuine self" consists of and how it is arrived at' (1980: 42). His paper describes four such logics of selfhood, only the last two

of which approach the kinds of versions of self and identity that I discussed in the previous chapter.

In the first of these 'logics of selfhood' (which he calls a 'co-incidence' logic), the identity of the true self is defined in terms of the degree to which the core of the individual's experience accords with the 'essential structure, or fundamental quality, of the universe' in which the individual is located (Kavolis, 1980: 44). This transcendental standard is applied both to each individual and to social relationships subject to this logic. Most of the conceptions of identity of this kind are associated with religious cultures and Kavolis cites a variety of 'mystical' and 'monastic' frameworks from Indian, Chinese and other societies to illustrate the forms taken by this logic.

A second logic is characterised as portraying the true self as a 'submerged luminosity (or a hidden savagery)' that is available to the individual subject 'only in moments of the most vivid, or purest peak experiences' (Kavolis, 1980: 45). While such an image appears in some Western romantic traditions (and can be seen in both Rousseau and Rimbaud), Kavolis cites the case of the identity of the 'trickster' from some native North American cultures to show the distinctive form of this understanding of identity. Such peak experiences through which identities are realised are differentiated from the mundane experience of self and identity by their particular characteristics, including feelings of heightened consciousness, energetic force, and the 'unbridled exuberance of fancy'.

A third logic sees the true self as 'a process of casual encounters by an individual with external situations, entered into either passively or manipulatively' (Kavolis, 1980: 47). This 'casual-encounter' self is given expression largely in literary and some human science accounts, and Kavolis mentions Montaigne, Henry James and others amongst those who have provided versions of such a self. Such a logic can also be seen in Goffman's version of self as a game-player or as a performer, in which identity is in part a matter of deception, and mutual recognition is more likely to be a matter of strategic appearance than genuine commitment. It is occasioned, according to Kavolis, by cultural and social crises in which the resources for the shaping of self and identity are in question or under threat in some way.

The final logic, the 'unique-pattern self' (that includes amongst its variants Cartesian and Lockean understandings), is described by Kavolis (1980: 42–3) as one in which 'at least one essential component of the true self is conceived as a unique pattern of enduring internal coherence'. Such coherence can arise through fate, or can result from effort on the part of the individual. The literature of Ancient Greece and twelfth-century Europe are given as examples of the former version, and the modern understanding of the 'self-made man' is used to illustrate the second. Kavolis (1980: 43) suggests that the roots of the modern version lie in the 'military-hero self of the Nordic peoples', but it can also be found in other societies in which freely formed groups of individuals exist with minimal interference by a central state. In more modern (especially capitalist) societies, such unique-pattern selves and their identities are given a central place through ideas of 'self-realisation', of 'finding one's true identity', and of 'working on oneself' (Kavolis, 1980: 44). It is in each of these cases that identity is conceived as a matter of the internal coherence of a pattern of actions, thoughts

and feelings, rather than as the objective avowal or ascription of any particular identity category.

Identity as subjective achievement

Few studies of the social and cultural contexts of identity formation offer such a wide historical and comparative sweep.[1] However, those with ambitious, if slightly more limited, temporal and geographical scope have also provided accounts of particular identity frameworks and their consequences. An important and influential example of these is Charles Taylor's (1989) history of the sources of modern understandings of subjectivity, which stresses the ethical and moral basis for our interest in issues of self and identity, as well as the way in which an understanding of identity based on the external alignment of the individual with political, social or religious collectivities has been replaced by the 'attempt to locate identity in an interior self' (Cave, 1995: 104).[2]

Better known within sociology is Norbert Elias' account of the changes in conceptions of self as part of a long-term trend in European history, which he describes as the increasing 'constraint towards self-constraint'. According to Elias (e.g. 1982, 1998), there is a structural and cultural 'civilising process' at work in which individual desires and impulses are subject to increased levels of control, and in which the locus of that control also moves from external coercion to internal coercion. This trend towards greater 'inwardness' results from unplanned social processes: 'the motive force of this change of individual self steering is provided ... by pressures arising out of the manifold intertwining of human activities ... bringing about shifts in the form of relationships and in the whole social fabric' (Elias, 1982: 326). These changes, particularly those through which the dependence of individuals on one another increases, contribute to what Mennell (1994: 186) has described as a more '"psychological" view of people, involving precise observation of oneself and others in terms of longer series of motives and causal connections'. It is as part of that view that the cultural assumption spreads that the determinants of conduct, as well as the unity imposed on conduct by an orientation to identity, come from 'inside' the individual rather than from the wider set of social arrangements within which individuals are located.

However, the majority of sociological studies that have been concerned with the relationship between social structure and identity matters have confined their attention to an even shorter historical span, focusing largely on recent industrial societies, especially those of North America and Western Europe. In particular there has been a large body of work in which the formation of identities in modern societies is understood as the product of a series of tensions to which individuals are subjected within those societies – tensions that have arisen as new forms of social organisation, social experience and social regulation have confronted prior understandings of self and identity operative within immediately earlier social formations. Typically, this work has still retained elements of the Cartesian and Lockean understandings of identity as an individual achievement, but it has modified those understandings by providing a depiction of the external social and historical circumstances relevant to the facilitation or shaping of such identities.

Many of those who have written on the origins of sociology (e.g. Alexander, 1982; Dawe, 1970, 1979; Wrong, 1961; Somers and Gibson, 1994) have commented that the concepts of society and social structure established during the latter half of the nineteenth century – and thought to be essential for the establishment of this new discipline – were advanced alongside a corresponding neglect of the study of human agency. A focus on the description and explanation of collective action and collective social arrangements was given primacy over a concern with the interpretation of individual motivation and voluntary action. Classical sociological accounts, in which questions of identity were raised and dealt with, therefore necessarily gave overwhelming priority to the social arrangements within which human action was largely seen to be determined and constrained. Nevertheless, Durkheim, Marx, Weber and Simmel all commented on the origins and social significance of conceptions of the person and human action within individualist philosophy and discussed its role in the societies of nineteenth-century Europe. Both Durkheim and Simmel wrote about individualism as a feature of modern society, stressing its valorisation of choice and freedom of action and belief as features to be explained and, in part at least, to be celebrated. Both attributed the increased attention paid to issues of individuality and subjectivity in social affairs to the same process of social differentiation based on changes in the division of labour. Likewise, Marx and Weber provided critiques of those social forces that they saw as producing a narrowing of individual freedom, arising either from the developments in organisation of the means of production or from more generic features of increasingly penetrative legal–rational authority. Despite such remarks, however, classical sociological theory tended to replace the Cartesian fiction of an originary subject with a new fiction of an abstract social subject (see Somers and Gibson, 1994).

While the term 'traditional society' may have an uncertain empirical basis, and descriptions of its lineaments may be vague in scope and reference (e.g. Kellner, 1992, refers to it as having 'anthropological folk-lore status'), its use – as a stable descriptive background against which more recent forms of social organisation can be contrasted – has been an essential feature of most historical and structural sociology since the origin of the discipline. The standard account of such a traditional society stresses its concentration on agricultural production as the main form of labour, its authority systems based on inheritance, religious affiliation and military domination, the relative lack of geographical and social mobility and its prescientific cognitive bias. The predominant qualities predicated of the identities of individuals living in such social formations are those of clarity, externality and fixity. These features, so such accounts suggest, operate to constrain all individuals so that individuals' understanding of their own identity on the one hand, and the typical properties of individuals sharing a common social location on the other, are indistinguishable from one another. Indeed, one of the reasons that identities in traditional societies have been described as so 'unproblematic' is that (it is asserted) such societies did not make the issue of individual identity a matter of critical reflection or the object of serious doubt. The distinctively modern understanding of identity as problematic – the outcome of inner turmoil and struggle or the consequence of having to choose from or resist a repertoire of available identity templates –

was seemingly unavailable to premodern individuals. This is not to say that identity wasn't a premise of action (Calhoun, 1994), but it was not a premise subject to individual choice or negotiation. Such premodern identities are conventionally understood as having been determined externally, by the occupation of social roles that were themselves the expression of kinship position and group affiliation, and behind these external determinations of identity lay religious or cosmological accounts which functioned both to explain social arrangements and to provide the framework for individual and collective action.

However, these allegedly stable identity arrangements became subject to change as a result of large-scale processes of modernisation. Massive changes in the material and social environment and in the economic and political organisation of Western societies extending from the end of the seventeenth century to the first part of the twentieth century comprise the underlying trajectory of modernity. The novelty and rapidity of such political and economic changes are often asserted to have facilitated either a change in, or a challenge to, prior patterns of identity formation. Descartes' and Locke's ideas were themselves developed against the background of some of these changes, in particular the diminishing power of religious certainty in which the self-evident and certain nature of human individuality guaranteed by theological doctrine was losing ground to an increasingly secularised account. Both Descartes and Locke tried to reconstruct the basis for certainty within personal thought and observation, and in this sense early modernity made individuals' knowledge of themselves the necessary reference point for their knowledge of the world. Such an innovation in self consciousness clearly has both benefits and costs. While people's individuated experiences become more central to the formation of their own identities, simultaneously they are less able to depend on stable external direction for the resolution of doubts concerning the nature and meaning of their own and others' actions. It is in this sense that Bauman (1996: 18–19) describes identity as 'a problem from its birth', as an issue that became of concern because of 'that experience of under-determination and free-floatingness' associated with the decline of traditional society and its replacement by the social forms of modernity. His remarks echo those of Holzner and Robertson (1980: 3–4), who describe the corollary of modern forms of economic and political organisation as one in which the effect of a clear and singular external authority on the individual in the mutually reinforcing contexts of kinship, locality and religious certainty, begins to be diminished. For them, it is the loss of such internalised authority in the form of conscience that begins to raise 'the question of identity in its modern form'. Previously encompassing frameworks for identity fail to provide certainty in modern societies, and at the same time templates for identity based on differentiated experiences of both production and consumption provide a novel multiplicity of choice for identity formation.

Such claims as these rest not only on an understanding of the significance of changes concerning the external circumstances within which individual identities are realised, they also contain assumptions about the internal dynamics of identity formation, assumptions which amend or replace prior Cartesian or Lockean accounts of such dynamics. The subjective correlates of the collapse of external authoritarian certainty as an essential element for the formation of 'traditional' identities may of course be imagined in different ways, although

one of the most famous such imaginations of the essential ambiguity of the experience of modernity is characterised by Berman (1983: 15) in the famous observation that:

> *To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and our world – and at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are ... [Modernity] pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, 'all that is solid melts into air'.*

Berman's own understanding of these mixed consequences of modernity for the formation of identity is largely positive and optimistic, and he comments on the excitement that accompanies the experience of change and the creative potential released within the social and cultural processes of modernisation. But this optimism has not always been shared by other writers on the experience of modernity as it relates to the formation of identity. More common have been darker, more negative or more ambiguous commentaries, summaries and understandings. One influential example of a more negative portrayal is Simmel's (1978: 484) depiction of the way in which in modernity, 'inner security is replaced by faint sense of tension and vague longing – secret helplessness and helpless urgency which originate in the bustle and excitement of modern life'. The organisation of production under conditions of modern capitalism demanded punctuality, precision and calculability, and Simmel argued that these qualities became embedded in the 'modern personality'. Yet at the same time, the modern control of 'those irrational, instinctive sovereign traits and impulses which aim at determining the mode of life from within' (Wolff, 1964: 413) was inimicable to elements in individualism deriving from nineteenth-century Romanticism and its understanding of the interior life of the person as 'a protean succession of contrasting moods and tasks, beliefs and feelings' (Levine, 1971: 224). For Simmel, and for others, this juxtaposition of the imagination of Romanticism and the constraint of formal organisation cannot fail to produce conflict and tension for the individual person, and so called 'Post-Enlightenment Romanticism' provides a perspective in which identity is produced in and through the struggle of the self with an external – and in the case of modernity, a hostile – environment. As Langbaum (1977: 7) argues, the 'strong individuality' of this romantic impulse has to struggle against increasing alienation in a world subject to urbanisation, industrialisation and specialisation, but at the same time runs the risk of solipsism – of treating itself as the only secure object of its own knowledge. Such security may seem especially important and difficult to achieve under conditions in which a greater differentiation amongst individuals is accompanied by a greater dependence of individuals on one another – thus producing the necessity for co-operating with others increasingly unlike oneself.

A central feature of many pessimistic accounts of identity in modernity is the recurrence of claims concerning the difficulty caused to individuals by the degree of flexibility, choice and variability amongst the resources for identity formation in complex and heterogeneous societies. If modernity implies that individuals are able to incorporate within themselves a selection from the variety of experiences and values typical of complex societies, then the problem becomes

that of choosing and defending the solid grounds from which individuals can make and sustain and justify any such seemingly arbitrary selection. If identity is not about the assimilation of the person within a particular collectivity, but about a person's willingness to affirm some of a range of potentially identificatory experiences, then there are novel problems that have to be confronted. In *The Homeless Mind*, Berger, Berger and Kellner (1974) provide an influential postclassical account of the source of the alleged difficulties that can arise for individuals in this kind of societal context. More importantly, they also describe the subjective elements of individual experience, motivation and action that, they argue, comprise internal psychological responses to and correlates of this novel external environment. For this reason their account is worth detailed attention, and I will describe its main features in the following pages.[3]

The life-worlds of modernity

The Homeless Mind begins with the assertion that the identities of individuals in modern society are in a state of permanent crisis, and the description of this crisis is one element in Berger *et al.*'s wider critique of the 'homelessness' of modern individualism as the 'root pathology of the modern era'. Their account gives primary emphasis to the way in which the large-scale social changes that make up the trajectory of modernity – especially the specialised division of labour involved in technological production and the spread of bureaucratic organisation at all levels – brings about a 'plurality of life-worlds' within which individuals are located in modern society. They define the phenomenological term 'life-world' as referring to the totality of shared meanings that 'allow the individual to navigate his way through the ordinary events and encounters' of social life (1974: 18). Without claiming that all individuals in traditional society necessarily occupied the same unified, unchanging and undifferentiated social and cultural space, they do argue that the variety of actions undertaken by such individuals – intimate, productive, political and ceremonial – were integrated with one another, and a common life-world was held together by an orientation to a limited set of transcendental religious beliefs which brought meaning and order to the juxtaposition of different activities.

In contrast, modern society is a segmented society based on occupational specialisation and social differentiation. This means both that individuals come to have dissimilar life experiences, and also that each individual person is involved in a range of social activities and social contexts whose significance for identity matters is not held together by any overarching transcendental orientation. For Berger *et al.*, the cognitive view of modern society does not see reality as an 'ongoing flux of juncture and disjuncture of unique entities', but as a series of self-contained units, concrete instances of which can be understood abstractly in terms of general categories and also manipulated by those who have knowledge of their distinctive attributes. From this point of view the division of the social world into distinct spheres, or different institutional sectors, has specific implications for consciousness – and thus identity – as one of its features. The different sectors are associated with different 'cognitive styles' in terms of the way that they organise the 'worlds of meaning and experience'.

While the most fundamental division of life-worlds and their associated cognitive styles occurs between the public sphere and the private sphere, there

are also differences within each sphere: each is itself 'pluralised'. In the public sphere, Berger *et al.* find differences between the life-world of material production and the life-world of state-regulated bureaucratic organisations, and they comment on the way that each of these has required individuals to operate distinctive but related cognitive styles when they work within them or are subject to their workings. This claim can be illustrated by selecting two of the many features they discuss:

1. 'anonymity'
2. 'instrumentality'.

It is essential to the modern organisation of technological production that individuals who work within such productive processes be treated as 'anonymous functionaries', so that concrete features of individuality do not affect their deployment or treatment within the routinised social relations of work. However, social relations in the work setting necessarily involve individuals in interaction with concrete individuals who require and promote personal relationships, relationships which cannot be predicated on treatment of people as 'anonymous functionaries'. Because of this, a 'double consciousness' develops in which other people are experienced both as particular human beings and as 'abstract complexes of action'. Berger *et al.*'s discussion of abstraction and anonymity in the process of production focuses on the position of the worker, while the discussion of these topics in state bureaucracies focuses on the position of clients. Within these two types of formal organisation, the same feature of double consciousness can be seen to arise, albeit it in a different way. In the latter case, Berger *et al.* emphasise the importance for bureaucratic order that individual clients be assigned to an appropriate category of clients and also that the organisation provides depersonalised treatments of each individual according to his or her categorical assignment. Both of these features are necessary for the bureaucracy to be seen to be working according to principles of abstract justice in its treatment of clients. The client, like the worker, then becomes both concrete individual and anonymous category member.

The experience of such double consciousness in each of these public life worlds, may lead to a number of different reactions on the part of workers and clients, but what interests Berger *et al.* most is the way that this feature is internalised so that that it becomes something that is applied to the individual's own identity. In so far as people can know themselves both as uniquely differentiated from others but also as 'anonymous functionaries', they are able to develop a sense of distance from particular features of their own identity. However, the management of this 'subjective distance' from particular features of one's own identity is not necessarily a simple matter. As individuals learn to organise the different components of their identities – as workers, as bureaucratic subjects, as members of families, as friends, etc. – they have to learn to control their emotional attachment to the various components that make up their identities, as well as decide what levels of commitment to give to these components on different occasions. In this way, the 'emotional economy' of the individual becomes both more complex and also more vulnerable to disturbance.

A second distinctive feature of the life-worlds of the public sphere discussed

by Berger *et al.* is that of 'instrumentality'. The world of work for most people in modern society requires them to adopt what is described, following Veblen (1961), as a 'problem-solving inventiveness', a general 'tinkering attitude' based on a repertoire of procedures and the capacity to manipulate and experiment with their implementation. Generally, then, this process is one in which individuals may select from or develop a repertoire of means to gain a predetermined end. For those who are subject to or work in a bureaucratic organisation, however, less separation is permitted between means and ends. Process and procedure are fixed and valued for their own sake and clients have a right to expect the 'proper handling' of their cases. This difference means that different cognitive styles are required from individuals when they act within each of these differing public contexts, and of course, both of these differ from the cognitive style thought appropriate to other social contexts. Individuals may attempt to deploy either of these cognitive styles when dealing with their intimate relationships in the private sphere, but there are strong barriers to doing this, most particularly the fact that the cognitive style of the private sphere favours the values of naturalness and emotional attachment rather than either experiment and manipulation on the one hand or the rigid application of procedural rules on the other.

And not only is this internally differentiated public sphere separated from the private sphere, but the private sphere in modern society also provides a multiple rather than a unitary context for the formation of identity. The intimate world of the domestic realm is not a singular and undifferentiated space since geographical mobility, urbanisation and the growth of mass communications have all contributed to a pattern in which people are brought together who have different experiences resulting from their prior involvement in different life-worlds. In addition, individuals may continue to develop novel or changed patterns of action and belief which differ from those which they originally brought to an intimate life shared in common. Likewise children discover themselves to be committed to different preoccupations or attachments that serve to differentiate them from their parents and others in the family.

The trajectory of identity

If individuals are not able to determine the meaning of their lives by reference to any external transcendental story, how is such a meaning to be arrived at? Berger *et al.* argue that this overarching role is played by individuals' own 'life plans', that their projection of their own biography is what relates them 'to the overall web of meanings in the society' (1974: 70). Thus it is this – variously vague or specific – life plan that is the 'primary source of identity' in modernity, and the variety of generally agreed features of modern identity can be best understood by reference to the idea of such life plans.

The first of these features is the 'openness' of modern identity, by which Berger *et al.* mean that individuals remain more open to the possibility of change and transformation in identity throughout life. It is in the context of this openness that biography comes to be seen as the 'realisation of a number of possible identities' (Berger *et al.*, 1974: 73) rather than the working out of a predetermined destiny for each individual. Secondly, identity becomes more 'differentiated' and complex since its parameters reflect the range of different

experiences of oneself generated within the different life-worlds in which individuals move. The seeming depth and continuity of this differentiated and complex experience of self becomes more valued in comparison to the more superficial, fleeting and discontinuous experiences of a variety of life-worlds. Thirdly, Berger *et al.* argue that identity in modernity is 'peculiarly reflective' – that living within and between a variety of institutional arrangements, along with the necessity of making decisions and choices of the kind that constitute a 'life plan', force individuals to make themselves an object of 'deliberate attention and sometimes anguished scrutiny' (1974: 74). Finally they suggest that modern identities are 'peculiarly individuated', by which they mean that the autonomy involved in the formation of plans, the choosing of styles of living and the maintenance or transformation of one's identity are all matters that are treated as being moral issues rather than purely pragmatic ones, a feature of identity that is supported by ideological and legal institutions.

It is important to note that this list of features – openness, complexity, reflexivity and individuation – is seen by Berger *et al.* to produce a series of negative consequences for the modern individual. They argue that the continuous migration of the individual through changing public and private contexts and the life-worlds that are constituted within them produces critical problems for individual consciousness and identity. The shifting definitions of oneself as one moves from one context to another combined with an increasing reliance on subjective experience in place of a belief in a seemingly objective social reality are seen as a source of insecurity and anxiety in identity matters. A reliance on the significance of self examination and self interrogation in a world without secure external anchorage leaves the individual vulnerable either to chronic self doubt or to the fleeting opinions of others. It is these negative evaluations that are aggregated to form the suggestion of a 'permanent identity crisis' for the modern individual and summarised by the assertion that 'modern man has suffered from a deepening condition of "homelessness"' (Berger *et al.*, 1974: 77).

Accounting for modern identity

This kind of critique of modern identity is advanced by many other writers, although some eschew the particular phenomenological vocabulary favoured by Berger *et al.*, and many disagree with their social and political suggestions for resolving the tension between personal autonomy on the one hand and the security of belonging on the other. Views differ on the origins of the emphasis on identity as unitary or unifying project or plan, on the kinds of unifying identity projects that are typical of modernity, and also on the kinds of problems that such identity projects both encounter and engender. For Bauman (1997), it is the modern state that has transformed identity from a matter of collective prescription to one of individual aspiration, making the achievement of identity a matter of individual work and responsibility. In his account this came about as a logical and individualised corollary of the societal 'project' of modernity, where the idea of such a project (at both individual and collective levels) involved 'a clear vision of the final shape, careful calculation of the steps leading towards it, long term planning and seeing through the consequences of every move' (Bauman, 1997: 20). For Bauman, this modern form of identity was also an

implication of the attempt by the modern state to diminish the influence of previous forms of identification which had emphasised the natural location of individuals within, and their allegiance to, local rather than national social formations.

Bauman suggests, then, that we should not treat the problem of identity as an unintended consequence or simple offshoot of modernity, but rather realise that 'psychically, modernity is about identity: about the truth of existence being not-yet-here, being a task, a mission, a responsibility'(1997: 71). The same notion, that the 'identity project' is less of an unintended consequence and more of an obligation of modernity, can be seen in Lash and Friedman's (1992) emphasis on the Weberian version of such a project. They comment that Weber's 'ethics of responsibility' can be seen as a reminder of the work of piecing together our identity from the decentred subjectivity arising from multiple life-spheres: 'Mature modernist identity of Persönlichkeit for Weber meant a coherent and measured acceptance and taking on of these plural demands' (Lash and Friedman, 1992: 5).

In Frosh's (1991) account, however, identity as a 'project' operates as a form of resistance against the mechanisation and organisation of modernity, and it does this because of the way in which individuals' needs and desires are incorporated into their identities. While such identities are partly constituted by our relationship with an external world, they are not wholly constituted by it and as such they are essential features of a 'self which is real, not fictitious and hence worthy of respect and protection' (Frosh, 1991: 19). The suggestion that such an individualised identity project is better understood as a threat to, rather than a resource of, modernity is also emphasised by Bell (1976), who has argued that the orderliness and rationality of modernity is vulnerable to traditions in which true identity is understood to be solely the work of the individual self, free from the impositions of conventional morality. His account, contra Elias (1982), focuses on the difficulty for modern societies caused by a collapse of restraint in human conduct arising from an understanding of identity formation which emphasises a belief in the value of instinctual ways of acting and which commends subjective attention to emotion and its realisation in action.

Certainly many other writers have argued that there exist pathological forms of 'identity as project'. For Lasch (1979) the integrity of the personal sphere is threatened by the rationalisation of the public sphere, and the response of individuals to this rationalisation is a retraction of the self into a central defensive posture in which the preoccupation with self and its identity becomes the primary concern as a matter of survival. The consequence of such retraction is a loss of 'cultural anchorage' as individuals lose their commitment to more general communal values and projects in favour of more personal ones. Likewise for Richards (1989: 45) the intensive focus on subjectivity as the source of identity is often accompanied by a corresponding neglect or denial of the significance of others, in which 'to endure life is to endure the existence of others – which is also to endure oneself as a separate, conflicted individual'.

In the explosion of writing on identity that occurred in the years after the end of the Second World War, the character of identity as trajectory, plan or project was given several different inflections in a series of attempts to

characterise 'new' or newly relevant forms of self and identity that arose as expressions of, or reactions to, further changes in the social forms and contexts of modernity itself. Common to most of them was a willingness to offer abstract accounts of such matters while providing little detailed evidence of how these forms could be discerned in the details of human conduct. Some examples may provide a sense of the claims made by such studies.

Alder's 'antinomian personality' (Adler, 1968) was one such characterisation, and underlying his descriptions was the widespread assumption that the construction of self and identity requires an external context of stability and order. Faced with an external social world lacking institutional order, some individuals may come to rely on 'the physical, the visceral and the concrete' (Alder, 1968: 327). Valuing immediacy, the antinomian personality emphasised the impulsive self of desire in place of the conventional self of duty. While Adler linked this kind of identity to already established principles of modern identity formation, he saw the production of such antinomian personalities – or identities – as an increasingly common and contemporary social form.

Similar features were described by Kavolis (1970) in his contrast between a modern personality type (rationally organised, unemotional, concerned with social rules and their appropriate application) and an 'underground personality' (anarchically romantic, impulsive, expressive, mystical, ecstatic and concerned with metaphysical problems). And a few years later Bell (1976, 1978) offered his more structural, though equally pessimistic variant on this theme. For Bell, the idea of antinomianism was used not to describe one form of self or personality; instead it was elevated to become a principle of modern culture. As such, antinomianism was taken to emphasise values of self realisation and enhancement and fulfilment through creativity, the pleasures and expressivity of the body, the denial of boundary and limit, and the valorisation of the present. The radical subjectivity of this kind of self formation, although a product of the culture of modernism, also simultaneously contradicted the structural principles of modernism. These principles made very different demands on the self, according to Bell (1976: 477): 'the idea of delayed gratification, a compulsive dedication to work, of frugality and solemnity ... which was sanctified by the morality of service to God and the proof of self-worth throughout the idea of respectability'.

Bell's account is one in which these principles of self organisation – 'bourgeois character structure' – existed alongside their cultural antithesis which was based on the same values of nineteenth-century Romanticism that were described by earlier writers like Simmel. Lifton's (1968) 'protean self' also exists in a social space fractured by historical dislocation from tradition. It is a multiple, transient, shifting self with a sense of the absurd, a 'suspicion of nurturance as a threat to autonomy' (Lifton, 1968: 15), as well as an ambivalent preoccupation with issues of change. Writing in a confessional mode, Lifton (1968: 17) describes himself as having a number of masks which he can take on and off: 'the question is: is there, or should there be, one face which should be authentic? I'm not sure that there is one for me ... For me there is not a single act I cannot imagine myself committing'. The expressive excess of this kind of identity as project will resurface later when we consider subsequent understandings of identity that fall outside of, or come after, this largely modernist framework.

Late modern identities

A recent influential and positive (though not entirely uncritical) interpretation of the nature of identity formation in modern society has been advanced by Anthony Giddens. In a series of related books, especially *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990), *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991) and *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992), Giddens has provided his own wide-ranging understanding of the modern self and its identity, set within his concern with the variety of forms of control and mastery exercised over individual conduct in societies over a longer time period. A central feature of such control and mastery involves an orientation to 'self-identity', defined by Giddens (1991: 7) as 'the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography'. This understanding is an essential part of what constitutes ourselves and others as persons. Such understandings – and therefore identities – are made visible in conduct, and in the orientations of individuals to one another's conduct. Nevertheless, for Giddens the notion of identity itself remains a largely subjective and cognitive phenomenon, being found 'in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going' (1991: 53).

Giddens' formulation reasserts the classical concern with personal continuity as an essential feature of identity, but makes this continuity the outcome of a process of interpretation rather than recollection on the part of the individual. Identity in contemporary society is marked both by the intensification of a basic 'reflexive monitoring of action' – the ongoing and constant attention paid by individuals as they question and assess the basis or grounds for their current conduct – and also by the availability of new resources that shape the form and content of this attention. These new resources arise in part from the development of human science knowledge, the theories, concepts and techniques of which can be interpreted and applied by individuals to their own conduct. So Giddens' argument is that the nature of reflexivity in modernity shifts from an emphasis on the continuity of tradition and the past – the way things have always been – to a more conscious evaluation and integration of social knowledge, including the knowledge generated by a range of human and science expertise:

> *The reflexivity of modern life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character.*
> (Giddens,1990: 38)

The 'incoming information' Giddens refers to is that produced by the social sciences as a 'specific genre of expert knowledge', and the consequence of the deployment of such knowledge is that 'the social sciences are actually more deeply implicated in modernity than is natural science, since the chronic revision of social practices in the light of knowledge comes to affect institutional arrangements themselves' (1990: 40).[4] This is why, a few pages later in the same book, Giddens (1990: 43) is able to assert that 'modernity is deeply sociological'.

Like many earlier analysts, Giddens characterises typical 'tribulations' experienced by modern individuals: 'Feelings of restlessness, foreboding and desperation may mingle in individual experiences with faith in the reliability of certain forms of social and technical framework' (1991: 181). He identifies a series of recurrent 'dilemmas of the self' to which modern individuals are

subjected, two of which he sees as especially important for identity matters. The first he describes as 'unification versus fragmentation'. The 'openness of the modern world' occasioned by technological and organisational changes in modern societies provides for each individual the possibility of an expanding range of experiences and forms of action. The increased diversity amongst those experiences and actions can be seen as creating problems for the attempt to retain and develop a coherent narrative of who one is, and failure to accomplish this means that identity fragments – rather in the way that Berger and others argued earlier. However, Giddens also points to another possible outcome:

> *A person may make use of diversity in order to create a distinctive self-identity which positively incorporates elements from different settings into an integrated narrative. Thus a cosmopolitan person is one precisely who draws strength from being at home in a variety of contexts.*
> (Giddens, 1991: 190)

The second dilemma of the self arises from qualitative differences between the types of experience that are available to the individual in modernity. Giddens (1991: 196) distinguishes between 'personalised experience' and 'commodified experience': 'Modernity opens up the project of the self, but under conditions strongly influenced by standardising effects of commodity capitalism'. If the project of the self and its identity is defined by reference to externally manufactured and traded material goods or ready-made styles of life, then individuation and the maintenance of distinction from others becomes increasingly difficult to sustain. To some extent therefore, according to Giddens, the reflexive project of the self has to be pursued in opposition to one of the most powerful and insistent features of the contemporary world. Yet at the same time he argues that 'not all aspects of commodification are inimical' to the construction of authentic identities in modernity, if only because of individuals' capacity to exercise choice over their dealings with the marketplace. Individuals are able to modify the meanings of ready-made commodified forms of experience and also to define their identities through a resistance to them, in which narratives of respect and protection of a self are able to become separated from – and critical of – the consumption practices of modern society.

Some gloomy commentators have seen modern identities falling prey to the pressures of narcissism as individuals are forced to focus inwards to discover alternative forms of certainty to replace prior community support. Others portray individuals as increasingly fragmented and unstable as they come to reflect the manipulative social relationships necessitated by their relative powerlessness. However, Giddens offers a more positive view than either of these. He sees contemporary concerns with fulfilment and control over one's own circumstance as 'in part a positive appropriation of circumstances in which globalised influences impinge upon everyday life' (Giddens, 1990: 124), and for him the self in what he chooses to call 'radicalised modernity' is not so much a 'site of intersecting forces' but rather an 'active process of reflexive self-identity ... made possible by modernity' (1990: 150).

Giddens' first two books dealing with issues of identity in modernity (1990, 1991) are focused largely on the extension of the abstract control systems of modernity as they come to restructure the psychological and bodily work that

individuals do on themselves 'against the backdrop of external transitions and transformations'. However, his subsequent treatment of intimate relationships (Giddens, 1992) emphasises both the role played by such relationships in the formation of identity and, in turn, the centrality of identity matters in the formation, management and development of these important aspects of individual and social life. He argues that there has been a transformation of intimacy in modern society such that the ideal form of this type of relationship is that of the 'pure relationship' which he defines as 'a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with one another' (Giddens, 1992: 58). Such relationships may be abandoned when they no longer provide such satisfactions.

This pure relationship has a number of features, the one most relevant to the interests of this chapter being the requirement for mutual self-disclosure. Mutual self-disclosure is based on personal trust, and it is this that best enables individuals to develop the reflexive ordering of self narratives that Giddens sees as the essential feature of modern identities. Giddens' account of the process by which identities are formed emphasises the role of consciousness and the rational assessment of experience even though this dynamic is worked out – in part at least – within interaction with others. In so far as Giddens' treatment of identity is conditioned by his overall 'structurationist' understanding of the relationship between human agency and social structure, then the latter – as ontologically prior to particular experiences and actions – is always accorded a degree of determining and constraining force.

Some have been critical of the overall thrust of Giddens' theory of structuration, and others have been especially critical of the limitations of Giddens' account of subjectivity.[5] For example Boyne (1991) and Craib (1998) share the view that Giddens fails to do justice to the complexity and depth of many of the resources that he draws on to support his particular account of subjectivity. Both point to the fact that his simultaneous acceptance of the relevance of the unconscious for an understanding of the dynamics of subjectivity along with his deliberately limited conception of it as a repository of tacit knowledge, leave unanswered many questions about the value of such a synthesis of initially Freudian and phenomenological vocabularies. What Boyne describes as a raid on the territory of an intellectual enemy for goods to be put to his own use, Craib (1998: 73) describes as a synthesising simplification, or a 'theory of simple complication' which depends ultimately on the loose fit between a range of general concepts.

Nevertheless, the attraction of the kinds of sociopsychological and sociological resources deployed by writers like Berger, Berger and Kellner, and Giddens, is that they seem to offer a vocabulary that makes possible a radical replacement of accounts of individual identity formation as purely rational and direct interrogations of current and past experiences. For Berger *et al.* (1974), and others, the establishment of self is seen as an affirmative act in the face of a potentially disorderly and meaningless outer world, although Giddens has also emphasised the importance of existing and developing forms of socially available (sometimes expert) knowledge that are used in the process of self making – a process which he once likened to the making of other cultural objects. Such selves and their identities have to be understood as moral phenomena

even though they are arrived at through the pragmatic play of internal tensions within the person and the emergence of egos through the identifications we make with others.

Identity and rationality

I have already indicated that this largely optimistic version of the subjective processes involved in self making has been criticised by some as giving too much emphasis to rational and cognitive features of subjectivity; also that this version has existed for some time alongside a negative double in which the self is understood as a pathological illusion which permits us the pretence of autonomy and integrity – the sovereign subject and its identity is a destructive fantasy and the search for the truth of subjectivity is an enterprise without value. The concurrence of Nietzschean and Freudian elements in this negative doublet will be the subject of Chapter 4, but for now I want to make some concluding remarks about the variety of positive versions of modern identity understood as a subjective achievement, often in the form of a search, of personal work and a personal project. Despite differences in their vocabulary many such versions seem to agree on two central points:

1. However much the social context seems to determine the parameters of identity, modernity's social complexity and the resulting differentiation of human experience provide an important space in which an individual's cognitive and evaluative processes are given free reign to assert identity claims as well as to grant or refuse recognition of the identity of others.
2. The process of arriving at a coherent and unified identity seems an endless one. In this respect, Giddens' observations at the end of the twentieth century remain close relatives of Simmel's at the end of the nineteenth century. Both see an open-ended process at work in which the completion and closure of an identity project is impossible.

These two points together, then, make up one of the main themes pursued in many accounts of identity in modern society: the suggestion that we have to understand identity as a projected coherence and unity of self arising from the work that individuals do on themselves. This work was necessitated by the novel social formations in which individuals lived following the decline of traditional societies and the rise of modern democratic industrial societies.

In the image I have been presenting, modern societies permit individuals the freedom to select, or require them to select, from amongst the range of positions they occupy or categories to which they can be assigned, and to incorporate those they regard as significant. The resulting selection constitutes their subjective sense of their own identity. The modernist account of individuals who create and sustain the unity of their identity by self interrogation and self work argues that this is a general feature of the universal and essential subjectivity of human self knowledge. As such, one may expect it to be found in all human societies, even though it is often suggested that the work of identity becomes more difficult in contemporary industrial societies. In such societies human subjectivity is affected by the density, complexity and rate of change of structural arrangements, while at the same time there remain strong social pressures for

each individual to conform to the ideal of self-directed unitary identity. These pressures may be understood as part of the politics of subjectivity, and the fact that this issue has both individual and collective significance is evidenced in the widespread and expanding prevalence of technical and professional occupations (such as counselling, psychotherapy, psychology and psychiatry) that claim expertise in dealing with problems of subjectivity and identity, as well as in the growth of many public and private organisations (such as those for adopted children, for parents with 'schizophrenic' children, for people who want to 'find the real me') that are concerned with general or specific identity matters.

However, it would be wrong to assume that all approaches to the issue of identity which insist on its placement within a specific social context – in this case modernity – have formulated identity as a matter of individual projection and biographical planning. They have not. The kinds of understandings of self and identity discussed above certainly differ from those derived from metaphysical speculation on behalf of universal asocial subjectivities, but they may continue to be criticised for remaining overcommitted to the notion of identity as involving generalised and internalised cognitive processes of self interrogation, even when those processes are described with the use of a psychodynamic vocabulary and nested within descriptions of social and cultural structures. Such descriptions implicitly accord prominence to primarily privatised understandings of identity, notwithstanding the fact that the methods for its uncovering may occasionally involve the therapeutic intervention of others, and that identity is understood to be a feature of human subjectivity that has been historically and socially shaped. These types of account do focus on the significance of large-scale historical shifts for the understanding and self understandings of individuality, and they certainly place emphasis on the social frameworks that make possible and constrain either the formation of particular types of identities or the local and historical understanding of what identity is taken to mean by societies, cultures or social groupings. Yet despite this feature, many such theories have portrayed social arrangements as if they impinged on, affected, or in some way distorted some more basic or quotidian quality or form of identity which was threatened by them.

The view of identity held in these kinds of theories, then, continues to resonate with Cartesian and Lockean accounts in so far as they understand identity ideally as both firmly located and unitary. These accounts direct us to find our identities through the realisation of coherence and continuity in our understandings of ourselves as subjects, albeit subjects who live in specific societies and in particular forms of relationships within social institutions. The mechanism that generates these identities remains a subjective one based on each individual's concern with coherence and consistency within her or his actions and feelings over time and across social contexts. I think it would be right to think of this image as a modified – and socialised – version of the interior interrogation of classical identity theory.

Identity as social position

The image described above has in turn become the object of criticism in a body of work that has attempted to characterise the nature and significance of the

social location of identity matters rather differently. In this alternative strategy, the attributes that make up the content of individual identities are treated not as the production of individual subjects or selves, but as the instantiation of properties of collectivities or communities of individuals defined in relation to social and institutional structures. In the preliminary definition I offered in Chapter 1, I suggested that one part of what we mean by identity – what Goffman (1968a) called 'social identity' – reflects the fact that individuals regularly identify themselves, and are identified by others, with reference to a set of standardised categories or positions within the society in which they are located. Specifying individuals' presumed or observed characteristics by applying a term to them drawn from a repertoire of collective categories ('working class', 'Welsh', 'male', 'old', etc.) is one of the ways in which identity is made to happen for and to such individuals. For those who conceive of identity in this way, or who focus on this understanding of identity, attention is given to those features of individual consciousness and action that can be attributed to the common natures, experiences, or ways of living of particular categories of individuals. These features, and the categorical identities in which they are collected, may then be used to position the person in relation to a wide variety of cultural and social objects, histories and projects. Such conceptions of identity have often argued that the cognitive and behavioural attributes which comprise the identity of only one particular social group have been projected onto other social groups without acknowledging the significance of fundamental differences between them. Such arguments have arisen particularly concerning the relationship between identity and difference matters with regard to ethnicity, sexuality and gender.

From this perspective, then, the seeming flexibility of identity formation, and the apparently negotiated character of the deployment of identities in modern society, do not necessarily diminish the significance of the objective availability and the fixed content of these positional or collective identities. Indeed, some have argued that the fragmented nature of contemporary social experience reflects and facilitates the increased importance of differentiated identities that contain attributes, experiences and projects that category members share in common. For some social analysts the existence of a range of such differentiated collective identities throws into doubt the modernist assumption of the universal subject. If subjectivities are the reflection of category membership then identity formation is surely a function of such membership, and it is these categories or positions that serve to determine the dimensions of individual identity rather than the internal ratiocination of particular individuated subjects. Searching for and achieving an identity according to this image is simply to search for the category to which one really belongs and finding from its characteristics who one really is. In contemporary society, the list of such categorical or positional identities is well known and is accorded practical significance through the attentiveness of individuals and organisations to these identity matters. Ethnicity, 'race', nationality, gender, age, class, sexuality, occupation and preoccupations are all regularly deployed as part of such identity furniture in our society. This fact – amongst others – often encourages us to replace a universal, if troubled subject, with a number of socially situated subjects whose identity has been defined by a series of structurally determined attributes considered singly or in

combination. Critiques of the use of a 'universal' subject as representing only the identity features of one such socially situated subject have been common, and many of them have proposed accounts of the identity of gendered, 'racialised', sexualised or otherwise differentiated subjects who were arguably excluded from this prior version. For example, Chodorow (1978, 1989), MacKinnon (1989), Iragary (1977) and Gilligan (1982) have all proposed accounts of gender-specific identities based on differing assumptions concerning the socialisation, materiality or moral nature of such identities.

There is no shortage of social groups that argue for the particular, and sometimes predominant, relevance of one or another such categories for the framing of what, for them, really matters about identity. Smith (1995) has discussed the way in which membership of different cultural categories (like ethnicity, religion and nationality) as well as membership of categories that have cultural dimensions (like social classes, genders, age groups and regionally based collectives) have been deployed as identity-based social and political claims. For Smith, they provide:

- a sense of the stability and rootedness of the collectivity within a larger social world;
- a sense of the significant differences that distinguish that particular collective identity from any other;
- a sense of the history and continuity of the current collectivity in relation to the (usually long-term) past;
- a sense of the 'destiny and mission' of the group which consists of the shared hopes and aspirations of its members.

In attending to the availability of these structural and collective identity categories and their deployment in particular social contexts we may be reminded of at least part of the Hegelian model of identity – in particular the notion that identity is not simply the result of the cognitive activity of isolated individuals as they filter and appropriate those parts of their experiences that can help form their subjective sense of who they were, are and want to become. However, another part of the Hegelian model, which stresses a dynamic tension between avowal and ascription, is not always a feature of accounts which stress the significance of structural ascriptions. In Althusser's (1971) approach for example, a process of 'interpellation' of 'hailing' both names and positions such subjects, and here identities are not understood as the product of individual self-conscious activity, rather they are unconsciously copied from the template provided.

In one common version of this partly Hegelianised understanding, the whole apparatus of the modern reasoning self and its identity is formulated against the background of an alternative and devalued 'other', with this other being located either in our own social-historical past (as earlier described in this chapter), or in the present character of contemporary social formations.[6] In another version, more narrowly defined, substantive identities (based for example on class or gender divisions) may be characterised as distorted by social relations alienated from some true nature. Ideas of false consciousness, for example, are based on the idea that what are taken to be the desires, beliefs

or reasoning powers of a necessary and universal subject are in fact the properties of an oppressed subject. It is often argued that these kinds of understandings of subject positions have played a part in the growth of 'identity politics' in contemporary society. At least this latter observation would suggest that the rhetorical significance of the claim that identities are based on structural category membership is well established. Nevertheless we may still seek to question its usefulness for a more sustained and measured analysis of identity itself. How valuable is it to substitute the image of an abstract universality with one that stresses the multiplicity of such socially situated but categorically essentialised subject identities? Does it serve to avoid the difficulties of formulating accounts of identity as subjective achievement if we assert that individuals are not free to determine for themselves the relevance of their membership of a given category or position? Are there categories or positions that are always to be given causal priority in describing and explaining individual and social action? Or is there some other mechanism to be uncovered which permits order to be sustained amidst a multiple set of possibilities?

There can be no doubt that such categorical identifications are clearly used by individuals and social groups as part of their own individual or collective projects. But Calhoun (1994: 28) is right to remind us that this is because individuals and groups have chosen to make use of their rhetorical and pragmatic potential, not because they have simply and unavoidably been aligned to their 'objective' social positions. It is difficult to justify the essentialist claims often made in relation to such categorical identities when their historicity is ignored. Political and other public disputes which centre on resource claims tied to identity categories can be vague and ambiguous, often requiring participants in them to answer the difficult – perhaps ultimately unanswerable – question 'Does what I get really recognise who I am?' (Goldstein and Rayner, 1994). Somers and Gibson (1994) have argued that versions of identity based on such categorically positioned subjects succeed in denying the totalising fiction of the universal subject constituting its own identity, only to replace it with another fiction: that one categorical identity selected from a total set of those which may serve to locate any person will always dominate the other categories and function as the determining identity of that person. In their phrase, it 'will over-determine any number of cross-cutting other differences' (Somers and Gibson, 1994: 55). Likewise, both Scott (e.g. 1996, and see also Butler and Scott, 1992) and Spivak (1988) have argued against the social essentialism that they see as underlying the imposition of categorical subject-statuses, and suggest that the assumption of the fixity of such categories disguises both the dynamics of category development and the pragmatics of their application: 'Each category taken as fixed works to solidify the ideological process of subject-construction, making the process less rather than more apparent and naturalising rather than analysing it' (Scott, 1996: 395).

There is, then, a large conceptual gap between the fact that any individual may correctly be ascribed to one or several social categories and the idea that such category membership constitutes a relevant, consequential and fixed collective identity for this individual. There is a distinction between the application of the identity category 'Welsh' to individuals for some pragmatic purpose on the one hand, and the identity category 'Welsh' as constituting a

self-aware group identity, collectivity or potential collective actor on the other. There can be ethnic categories, just like other identity categories, which constitute a group on the basis of one or more shared characteristics, but individual members of that category remain merely aggregated together rather than being individuals who can be said to share a common identity.

Somers and Gibson (1994: 79) assert that 'there is no reason to assume a priori that people with similar attributes will share common experiences of social life, let alone be moved to common forms and meaning of social action'. Smith (1995: 130) also argues that the fact that individuals can be seen to share some common collective identity doesn't mean that we can predict their actions or dispositions, but 'only the kinds of contexts and constraints within which they operate'. Even when such commonalities do sometimes eventuate, we cannot assume any guarantee of stability within the configurations of identity that comprise such a category or group. These collective representations of identities are little more than the site for struggles over their definitions and properties, and we need to be wary of the many attempts to collectivise identity derived from the assertion of a common set of identity properties associated with particular categories of persons. Both Somers and Gibson (1994) and Gergen and Davis (1985) have pointed to the fact that many proponents of such collective identity categories simply reproduce the prior formulation of a closed but unified individual actor with a version of a closed and unified collective one. Judith Butler (1992) has been especially effective in pointing to the dangers involved in any attempt to replace the notion of the universal subject and its singular identity with equally problematic categorical identities of the kind listed above. She has argued – here in relation to feminism – that reliance on any single identity category for the grounding of political affiliation fails to deal with either the multivalency or the historicity of such categorical identities:

> *any effort to give universal or specific content to the category of women, presuming that guarantee of solidarity is required in advance, will necessarily produce factionalisation, and that 'identity' as a point of departure can never hold as the solidifying ground of a feminist political movement. Identity categories are never merely descriptive, but always normative and as such, exclusionary.*
> (Butler, 1992: 16)

The claim that such identities are necessarily constraining or determinative is best understood as resting on or invoking rhetorico-moral, rather than sociological, arguments and concerns (see for example Watson, 1992). Greenwood (1994) has provided an interesting treatment of the problems that arise when this is overlooked.

Identity and collectivity

Greenwood begins by describing Durkheim's distinction between 'social collectives' (groups which have an internal structure made up of 'sets of arrangements, conventions and agreements' (Greenwood, 1994: 80) to which their members are subject), and 'aggregate groups' whose members simply share one or several attributes. He modifies this dichotomy and proposes a tripartitie distinction between:

1. 'intrinsically social groups or social collectives', described as those 'whose members are parties to a set of arrangements, conventions or agreements governing their behaviour';
2. 'derivatively social groups' whose members share a common property or properties that are socially significant according to some convention or agreement;
3. 'non-social aggregate groups', defined as those whose members merely share a common property or set of properties (Greenwood, 1994: 85–8).

Greenwood argues – like many others that I have already mentioned – that identity formation has an intrinsically social character, and cannot be considered simply as the product of individual consciousness since it is 'constituted by reference to such 'commitments to recognised arrangements, conventions and agreements' (1994: 86). But furthermore, as an intrinsically social phenomenon, identity is necessarily 'relational since it is constituted and individuated by reference to the fact that agents – to whom identities ... are attributed – are parties to sets of arrangements, conventions and agreements' (Greenwood 1994: 94). For Greenwood, we cannot sensibly talk about identities at all in the absence of the commitment of individuals to such joint arrangements. On this basis he argues that any attempt to define identity simply by locating the individual amongst a matrix of subject positions in the way that I have described is likely to be inadequate. Such accounts treat identity as what he has already called 'derivatively social', and he argues that the majority of categories drawn on for such accounts of identity do not necessarily provide the possibility of managing individuals' concerns with self development or self management: 'they do not provide the conceptual or practical resources for identity projects' (Greenwood, 1994: 129). The standard list of ascribed categories such as gender, race and ethnicity only count as genuine identity categories for Greenwood when social collectives are actually formed on their basis. They do not function as such, merely through avowal or ascription. His argument is an interesting one and he puts it very clearly:

> *identity is a social phenomenon in a much stronger sense than is usually acknowledged by many 'social' theories of identity. It is an intrinsically social and strongly relational phenomenon: the product of a person's engagement in moral careers whose contents are derived from and evaluated by reference to conventionally possible passages of success and failure within social collectives.*
> (Greenwood, 1994: 132)

This argument is not offered as a denial of the significance of those claims which assert that appeals to collective identities do play a part in contemporary political life. The logic of such 'identity politics' assumes that individuals will form groups and act on the basis of their common category membership and shared attributes, and that these individuals may assert that '"I act because of who I am" not because of a rational interest or a set of learned values' (Somers and Gibson, 1994: 53). Williams (1995) points to the ambiguous mixture of passive and active meanings contained in such 'politics of self-realisation', an ambiguity which he believes reflects the inherent tensions and difficulties in the

term 'identity' in the first place. It is certainly useful to remember that one of the reasons for the invention of new categories, as well as the constant recasting and renaming of old ones, is to provide for greater inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the groups concerned. The pragmatics of category development – even categories that claim to represent groups on the basis of material or historical identity – require close attention.

While we cannot easily dismiss the view that identification depends on the application of social categories, we cannot solve the problem of identity in modern society simply by replacing an assertion of the existence of some universal subjective mechanism that generates identity with an assertion of the relevance of some thinly specified local social mechanism. Identity categories enable actors to distinguish 'behaviour whose meaning is congruent with the identity from behaviour that is incongruent' (Downey, 1992: 92), but such categories provide neither 'fixed plans of action' nor constraining norms of conduct. At the same time, there may be benefit to be derived from the examination of historically conditioned inventions and applications of identity categories. Such studies can certainly show us how it is that externally generated identity ascriptions can come to play a part in the life-worlds of those who are subject to their use.

Identity preferments

A recent paper by Paul Starr (1992) discusses some of the issues that are raised for the modern liberal state by the use of identity categories of the kind I have been describing earlier in this chapter. He begins by reminding us that such categories 'do not float above society in a "superstructure" of mental life. They are sewn into the fabric of the economy, society and the state. They are "entrenched"... in the structure of institutions' (Starr, 1992: 154). He then goes on to argue that an understanding of these identity classifications requires attention to historical context, as well as to collective action and political choice: 'Categories accumulate ... but [they are] subject to regrouping and rearrangement as a result of changes in culture and social structure and the collective mobilisation of social classes and other interests' (Starr, 1992: 154–5). He argues that such official classifications have to deal with issues of the legitimacy of the classification itself (what categories are allowed to be used), and legitimate inference (whether and how they should be used to evaluate and respond to the behaviour of individuals). Liberal states struggle with these issues since there is a preference to allow groups to identify themselves where possible and also to treat people as individuals in certain key areas of social provision and governance. Nevertheless, identity categorisation is seemingly unavoidable for such bureaucratically organised states.

Starr uses the example of the development of racial and ethnic categories in the USA to illustrate how the structure of political choice and group action help to shape classification practices. Racial and ethnic identities are not formed as a response to the essential similarity of cultural practices; instead, he argues, 'the similarity they sense takes shape against the backdrop of a larger world' (Starr, 1992: 166). A system of political choice promotes particular forms of attachment and entrenches them in daily life. Starr describes the fact that children of migrants to the USA find themselves filling in forms, responding to requests, making applications etc. on which their identity as, say, Hispanics will be constantly registered. In this way 'Hispanic must become part of their identity, regardless of the deep differences in culture and class that separate them. At one moment a political choice – the category Hispanic – gradually becomes fixed as a cognitive commitment and component of social structure' (Starr, 1992: 166). Following Goodman, Starr argues that the politics of such official classification rest on a number of 'preferments'.

The first of these has to do with the identification of those categorical identifications that are important, as well as the underlying principles of each classification. These differences arise historically – only in certain periods are particular domains seen as requiring a bureaucratic response. The second has to do with the criteria for the inclusion of individuals within each available category in question. Here there is scope for tension since there can be arguments about what the criteria should be both in general and as they are applied to particular individual cases. A third preferment has to do with the names chosen for categories, the issue here being the fact that the associations attaching to particular names can be seen to trigger difficulties. The fourth preferment relates to the ranking of terms within a categorical system. Depending on context, the repertoire of categorical identifications can vary in clarity, consistency and complexity. Starr provides the interesting example of the San Francisco healthcare system 'which requires six categories for its classification of sex, depending on the patient's genetic type, bodily type (which may be surgically altered) and presentation of self' (Starr, 1992: 165).

In the course of his paper, Starr is concerned to show the complexity of the origins and developments of what may seem at any one time to be a stable system of identity categories. He summarises his account with the observation that:

> *however distant, their origins lie in political choice, and that dependence becomes apparent whenever novel circumstances generate new claims and cases that do not fit the existing framework. Although the conventional, hard-nosed view is that politics is about 'who gets what', the prior question is who 'who' is.*
> (Starr, 1992: 176)

Conclusion

In this chapter I have been concerned with two different but related efforts to enlarge the role of the social in a consideration of identity matters. Both of them have targeted criticism at earlier accounts in which identity was seen as the process and product of the self determination of sovereign subjects. In the first of these, identity is seen to be the outcome of a personal effort to sustain the unity of the self amidst a multiplicity of potential identities. In the second, identity is seen to be a reflection of individual membership of particular social categories or collectivities. While Descartes asked questions about the nature or the essence of self and provided an answer with his discovery or invention of a '*res cogitans*', a thinking or mental substance, this abstract universal human nature turns out to have little to offer us as a definition of self and its identity as

we move from the metaphysical into the social – when we ask questions about *who* we are rather than *what* we are (see Schrag, 1997: 12).

A common sociological response to this problem has been to retain a commitment to the idea of identity matters as being at the core of a person's individuality, while arguing that such a core is always realised under specific social and historical conditions. Different social and historical conditions enable, constrain or shape the continuous and inevitable – because humanly constitutive – struggle for self realisation. An alternative approach to this focus on the subjective accomplishment of individual coherence and continuity suggests that human identities are better thought of as each individual's avowal or attribution of a collection of attributes, experiences and forms of action that derive from externally derived biological or socially organised differences between groups of individuals. From this perspective it is argued that the mechanism that generates identities is not a feature of each individual subject, but rather derives from natural or social processes in which individual subjects simply occupy already defined structural positions. Such categorical schemes certainly play a part in the way that identity matters to us since, at the very least, they constitute standard resources for the description and evaluation of our own and others' conduct. However, an acknowledgement of the practical and rhetorical significance of such positional categories does not entail acceptance of the assertion that identity formation is simply either a matter of the ascription to an individual of membership in one or another such categories by others, or a matter of their avowal by individuals who place themselves within them. While we may pursue an interest in the origins and uses of those identity categories that seem to have specific local or global valency, we do not have to accept either that the application of such categories to individual actors is a necessary and essential determinant of individual identity, and/or that such categories necessarily imply the possibility of collective agency in identity matters. There is some evidence of increasing attention to the role of reflexivity in the construction of individual identities within such categorical frameworks, especially when identity categories are understood as more mutable than fixed. Nevertheless, the deployment of a non-reflexive social essentialism still informs many accounts of collective identities.

Neither of these two versions has been successful at locating identity matters in a more adequate treatment either of the cultural and social resources used for the avowal or ascription of identities, or of the nature of the social arrangements which enable and structure such resources. In the next chapter I will turn to some work which has attempted to deal with one or both of these shortcomings.

Notes

1 There are some related studies, e.g. those concerned with 'indigenous psychologies' (see Heelas and Lock, 1981). See also Battaglia (1995) for another kind of approach to these matters.

2 This single piece of work by Taylor is sufficiently substantial to merit separate treatment, let alone his application of his overall understanding to contemporary political issues (e.g. Taylor, 1992a and 1992b), but I do not have space to provide that here.

3 The same overall account is developed in different ways in related publications, especially Berger (1966, 1967, 1979), and Berger and Luckman (1967).

4 One example Giddens gives of this is the way that an awareness of the social facts and sociological interpretations of the breakdown of marital relationships comes to play a part in the kinds of decisions and commitments that people make in the area of intimate relationships (Giddens, 1990).

5 Useful collections of papers on Giddens can be found in: Held and Thompson (1989); Bryant and Jary (1991); Jary and Bryant (1996). Other critical accounts include: Cohen (1989); Craib (1992, 1994, 1998); Tucker (1998).

6 There are too many studies that invoke such ideas to mention here, but see especially: Butler and Scott (1992); Cohen (1994); Curti and Chambers (1996); D'Emilio (1993); Gates (1985); Hall (1991, 1992); Hall and du Gay (1996); Rutherford (1990); Said (1991); Spivak (1988); Weeks (1985, 1987).

Chapter 4

Identity without agency

Introduction

The last chapter was concerned to present two images of identity, the outlines of which have been shaped by particular responses to the theoretical and methodological consequences of a long-standing dichotomy in the human sciences: that based on the distinction between 'agency' and 'structure' in the study of society and social action. The description and explanation of freely chosen individual action whose origins lie in the private experience and motivation of each person purged of references to social context and social resources cannot produce a compelling or even recognisable account of the nature of such action. On the other hand, the description of determinative social and institutional structures without reference to the way that these are made up, in part at least, of the meaningful actions of individuals that are subject to them seems to provide an account of human action that ignores its interpretative and wilful character. One of the attractions of the concept of identity – resulting in part perhaps from its complex multivalency – is that it seems to promise some way in which important aspects of agency and structure can be adequately integrated, or at least brought into closer and more harmonious alignment. However, I have already pointed to some of the difficulties that have arisen in the course of attempts to achieve this end.

In this chapter I want to consider a different approach to the subject matter of the human sciences, one which seeks to demolish the distinction between structure and agency by making the latter a production of the former, and which therefore forces us to think of identity matters in ways that are very different from those already discussed. From this perspective then, the matter of identity is neither the subjective achievement of the rational individual subject alone or with others, nor the reflection within the individual subject of already existing stable collective attributes. Identity is a feature of human life produced – alongside other attributes of human subjectivity – as an effect of the operation of social and cultural structures which are necessarily prior to meaningful individual thought and action.

We can locate many of the origins of this perspective in the work of the fifth figure whose ideas about identity I described in Chapter 2: Friedrich Nietzsche. According to Nietzsche, the idea of the reasoning, feeling, substantial human subject, a self that creates, copies or interactionally manages its stable unitary identity through its avowals and actions is no more than an illusory deception; it is understood better as one of the ways in which the natural spontaneity, unpredictability and wilfulness of human conduct is made continually subject to social and moral control. Consciousness, the self and its identity are all merely 'tools of the collective life', and therefore a proper

approach to questions of how and why identity matters requires an understanding of the properties of these tools as well as the practical uses to which they have been put. In this chapter I will be concerned with two differing approaches to the analysis of identity that derive – at least in part – from these Nietzschean origins.

In the first approach (in which the major figure is Michel Foucault) these observations are used to generate and develop a historical account of the precise forms that such tools of the collective life have assumed, along with an analysis of the ways in which they have been used in the formation of different kinds of human subjects and their identities. This approach treats identity as a 'discursive production', and I will examine some variations of this general understanding.

In a second approach, the sceptical tenor of Nietzsche's philosophical approach is given free reign, and an understanding of identity as a foundational expression of what the individual or others discover or create the self to be is treated as one of a series of recently discredited beliefs (like beliefs in social and cognitive progress, objective truth and the logic of reason) which analysis can now show to be without the incorrigible foundation on which they were once assumed to rest. Here the image of identity is that of an illusory substance, an unstable effect produced only through a persuasive performance or in the telling of a story about a character that exists nowhere except in its being described. This is the postmodern account of identity in which the 'over-determined illusion' that we are substantial subjects is forced to give way to the realisation that 'the self is multiplicity, heterogeneity, difference and ceaseless becoming, bereft of origin and purpose' (Schrag, 1997: 8). The interesting analytical question about identity here is simply how those illusions of unity, totality and self-sameness which are constitutive of identity have been – and to an extent continue to be – accomplished.

Identity as discursive production

I begin with a consideration of the first image, that of discursive production. Foucault's 1969 essay 'What is an author?' directly invoked Nietzsche when asserting that 'God and man have died a common death' (Foucault, 1986: 105)'. The 'man' Foucault wrote about here was man as 'originating subject', that free being of 'absolute character' who had previously been accorded the founding role not only as the author of literary enterprises, but also as the author of social enterprises too. This 'originating subject' had been supplanted by a novel conception of the subject, a subject henceforth to be conceived of as 'a variable and complex function of discourse' (Foucault, 1986: 18). Despite the colourful language of Foucault's formulations here, this text – like his work generally – is not a call for the abolition or dissolution of the subject, or for the abandonment of identity as one of those things that have mattered to subjects. Rather it is a call for the development of knowledge about how such subjects and identities have been brought into being, albeit based on investigations 'purged of anthropologism', that is to say without specifying some original, essential, presocial human nature which exists independent of the way in which the arrangements of knowledge and power themselves constitute human subjectivity.

In a later summary of his work Foucault (1982) tells us that over a period

of 20 years, his objective 'has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects'(Foucault, 1982: 208). The phrase 'human beings are made subjects' signals the use of what Zaretsky (1994: 210ff.) describes as Foucault's alternative vocabulary of subjectivity and identity. In this vocabulary, it is not only the disciplinary distinctions between 'agency' and 'structure' that are open to question, but also more fundamental ideas of what is 'inside' and what is 'outside' the person, what is 'internalised' by the person, and so forth. Foucault proposes a radical social and cultural contextualisation of all understandings of the individual and of the relationship between the individual and social and cultural (including scientific) structures and resources, writing of the necessity of discovering how subjects are constituted 'though a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc.' (Foucault, 1988: 97). The most frequent expression of this 'multiplicity' refers to the existence of 'discourses' or 'discursive practices' – comprised of sets of linguistic expressions that serve to describe and explain actions and events, along with the kind of practical interventions that are made possible by reference to such expressions. The unification of a variety of linguistic expressions and practical activities may be based on the fact that they have a common object, a common style, a shared set of 'permanent and coherent concepts' or a common theoretical orientation. For Foucault, discourses are not simply 'groups of signs' (which would be the preferred reduction of alternative structuralist analysis), but are groups of 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak, practices which obey certain rules' (Foucault, 1972: 49).

Rabinow (1986) suggests that Foucault described three predominant ways in which such discursive practices have worked to constitute persons and their identities and he calls them:

1. 'dividing practices';
2. 'scientific classification';
3. 'subjectification'.

In the first of these ways, categorical identity systems are applied to the person, with special emphasis on the necessity for the spatial and social exclusion of those with certain of these identities. Three of Foucault's studies in particular were concerned with these systems: *Madness and Civilisation* (1967), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973) and *Discipline and Punish* (1977). In these works Foucault was especially concerned with the ways in which human science disciplines have themselves developed categories and classifications of human individuals which were then deployed in the practical management of individuals, in particular for the division of individuals into different groups made subject to a variety of forms of control and containment.

A second set of practices through which subjects and their identities are constituted are those of 'scientific classification'. These are found exclusively in the operations of the disciplines of the human sciences themselves where they serve to constitute the 'speaking subject' of linguistics, the 'labouring subject' of economics, the 'vital' subject of biology and so on. Rabinow comments that

such an approach to subject constitution is contained in *The Order of Things* (1970) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972). While there are overlaps between these scientific classifications and the other 'dividing practices', it should be obvious that the former has a much more immediate interest in the practical management of human subjects than does the second.

The third and final manner in which Foucault analyses the making of subjects. Rabinow calls 'subjectification', and it is this mode which is of particular significance for understanding earlier and current versions of the process by which individuals 'construct' or 'discover' their identities either through internal inspection or in interaction with others. Subjectification is a term which refers to the practices through which human beings turn themselves into disciplined subjects. While this active process of self formation is undertaken by persons themselves, the substantive terms and the methodology of the process are informed by external expertise drawn on by the individual actor. In some historical contexts this expertise is likely to be religious in character, while in contemporary societies it is more likely to be based on one or another of what Rose (1985, 1997) has called 'the psy disciplines' – psychology, psychoanalysis, psychiatry and related discourses. Foucault's analysis of the reflective Cartesian individual as an instance of such self-formed individuals asks questions about what can be meant by the basic assumption of 'self-determination' once the significance of these externally generated constitutive practices has been taken into account. However, at the same time he argues that it is the notion of a 'deep' self 'whose truth we are obligated to know' (Foucault, 1982: 208) that produces the need for that series of diagnostic, confessional and therapeutic practices (including those of the human sciences) to which, in turn, we come to be subject.

This study of 'subjectification' was elsewhere formulated by Foucault in terms of the 'technologies of the self', as a set of practices by which individuals sought to transform themselves 'in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality', a way of framing such studies which was suggested, it is said, by his reading of Lasch's (1979) *Culture of Narcissism*. These technologies of the self constituted a fourth kind of such human technologies, the other three being:

- technologies of production (which permit the production and transformation of material objects);
- technologies of sign systems (which relate to linguistic and other symbolic systems);
- technologies of power (which determine the conduct of individuals by others).

Foucault's work has made possible a novel and distinctive way of approaching and depicting matters of identity, and a considerable number of scholars have carried out more detailed work in response to his innovation. However, as Farrell (1994) has suggested, variations within this work can be aligned to two differing interpretations of Foucault's theoretical claims concerning the nature of subjectivity and identity. Following and modifying Farrell's terminology I will refer to these interpretations as 'radical' and 'liberal'.[1] In a 'radical' interpretation, Foucault is taken to be suggesting that the

application of the discursive practices of division, classification and subjectification serve to generate 'deep constructions' of selves and their identities. Here there is no substance or entity that awaits categorisation or liberation from classification, rather the whole of such selves are constituted in and through a series of discursive practices. An alternative 'liberal' interpretation suggests that these same discursive practices are understood partly to discover, and partly to invent the parameters of subjectivity and the contents of identity. They both 'adjust to the articulations' of an already available material and social world, and also contribute to the illumination and development of one aspect of it 'so as to make some classifications significant and some not' (Farrell, 1994: 272).

'Radical' readings

One example of the radical interpretation can be seen in Rose's (1996, 1997) comments on the implications of studies of the practices of subjectification. In both of these texts Rose has commended Deleuze's metaphor of the 'fold' or the 'pleat' ('le pli'), which can be found in his commentary on Foucault (Deleuze, 1988) as well as in a number of other books (especially Deleuze, 1992). Rose argues that the use of this metaphor encourages us in an effort to erase a view of identity as substance and instead consider the ways in which attention to identity matters can give order and form to the organisation of social actions and social events. The metaphor imagines this formal order as an infolding of practices which create surfaces that enclose an area without constituting an impermeable barrier between an outside and an inside. If we think of identity and the self in this way, we need no longer remain locked into the effort to resolve problems of the difference between two seemingly separate realms – an individual interior world and a social external one. Instead we can focus on the ways in which both are constituted through the pliability of lines of practical actions. Rose reminds us that we have a common understanding of such a process or property when we think of the human body as including such enfolded interior surfaces – in particular, the organs of digestion and breathing can be thought about easily in this way. Such folds 'incorporate without totalising, internalise without unifying, collect together discontinuously in the form of pleats making surfaces, spaces, flows and relations' (Rose, 1996: 143). The metaphor colourfully expresses the way that subjectivity is the product of discursive practices, in particular that:

> *The human is neither an actor essentially possessed of agency, nor a passive product or puppet of cultural forces; agency is produced in the course of practices under a whole variety of more or less onerous, explicit, punitive or seductive disciplinary or passional constraints and relations of force. Our own 'agency' then is the resultant of the ontology we have folded into ourselves in the course of our own history and our practices.* (Rose, 1997: 189)

As far as Deleuze is concerned, a series of 'forces' make up the lines that are folded in on themselves in this construction of spaces for the self. Rose prefers to write in a more grounded way of lines of 'authority' and argues that such authority is incorporated into 'assemblages' or 'machinations' of

subjectification practices. These assemblages are made up of 'bodies, vocabularies, judgements, techniques, inscriptions, practices' (1997: 182), and they are put to work in the multiple and differentiated contexts in which subjectivity is activated, including those of education, work, intimate relations and morality. Four matters are the recurrent target and outcome of such practices, all of which make possible a variety of forms of human action and thought:

1. the object or the focus of the practice (e.g. the 'self' or the 'body');
2. the priority given to one type of authority over another (e.g. theological or scientific authority);
3. the 'relation of our being to truth' (e.g. analytic or empirical truth);
4. the teleology of the practice (e.g. to secure a virtuous life or salvation after death).

Rose has a particular interest in that way that the disciplines of psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy and psychoanalysis have come to play an essential part in contemporary versions of such practices and therefore in our conception, enactment and regulation of the nature of subjectivity. An important element in this has been the creation and regulation of a 'project of identity' within such technologies, and the regimes that they license. Rose's studies of the detailed working of these disciplines seeks to enhance our understanding of their significance and effect.

However, I think it is perfectly possible to approach the ways in which identity is made to matter in social life without having to begin or pursue an approach through the abstract fields of 'disciplinary discourse'. Indeed it may be more useful to remind ourselves of the dependence of these disciplines themselves on the 'conventional procedures and presuppositions' involved in the avowal or ascription of any features of cognition or action on which an application of the 'psy' technologies is built, rests or makes possible. There may be a number of different kinds of practice that both depend on and make possible the infolding of identity into persons, but these are not necessarily best thought of as the expression of generalised versions of the 'psy' sciences any more than they may be the expression of universal generic subjectivity. Lynch's (1993) comments on Foucault's project seem relevant here. He commends Foucault's descriptive studies of specific disciplinary techniques and routines, but argues that detailed studies of practical actions in specific occasioned contexts show that such actions and relevant entitlements 'do not carry over from one coherent language game to another' (Lynch, 1993: 130). That is not to deny that the 'psy' disciplines can often be shown to be highly relevant to particular identity ascriptions and avowals, but it is to suggest that the large collection of generalised contexts that Foucault – and Rose – often join together in such list of 'related discourses' may offer less analytic purchase than the study of the particularities of actions that take place within one context rather than another (see Lynch, 1993: 130–2).

'Liberal' readings

If the radical interpretation of Foucault may be seen to exaggerate the coherence and power of the disciplinary forces and practices that create and sustain forms of human identity and subjectivity *ex nihilo*, a liberal interpretation provides the space to consider other possibilities. In particular the possibility that such practices are not only more local and varied than may have been assumed, but also that their operation confronts at least some obdurate natural and social phenomena to which they are forced to accommodate. Such an interpretation brings Foucault's concerns into alignment with the approach taken by Ian Hacking to the role of discursive practices in the production of identity. In several different places Hacking has written about his interest in what he describes as 'human kinds', 'kinds of persons', conditions of personhood and 'ways to be persons' (Hacking, 1986: 225). Hacking (1992b) has discussed the variety of meanings given to the term 'natural kinds' and is concerned to distinguish all of these from 'social kinds' of which human kinds are one type. Hacking shares Taylor's concern to understand the differences between the object world of the natural sciences and the world investigated by the human sciences: 'Perhaps the fundamental difference between the natural and the social sciences is that the natural sciences investigate indifferent kinds, while the social sciences are on the whole concerned with interactive kinds' (Hacking, 1997: 15). In the natural sciences, awareness of classification is not an issue; in the social sciences, there is an interaction between the classification and the subject of its application.

Two things are particularly interesting about Hacking's proposals and the work that he has done following them through. The first is that he always focuses on an interaction between the history of the construction of such kinds and the effect of the application of such categories on the individuals concerned: people, he argues, are capable of understanding the categories used to identify them, and change their conduct accordingly. The second is that he asserts that his interest in uncovering the detailed histories of the invention and application of kinds is not driven by an attempt to systematise or generate any general theories comparable to those of Foucault. Where Foucault was concerned with general properties of discursive practices, Hacking is concerned only with the investigation of categories and practices 'in their sites' – that is, in the local contexts of their use. Of course Hacking's studies are informed by a general understanding of the significance of 'human kinds' and their correlates, since he believes that the 'constructed knowledge' of such kinds 'loops in upon people's moral lives, changes their sense of self worth, re-organises and re-evaluates the soul' (Hacking, 1995a: 351). He has pursued this understanding in a series of historical studies of a range of types of persons, actions and their classifications. Most recently he has been concerned with the historical discovery of child abuse, with the issue of 'multiple personalities' and with 'recovered memory syndrome' (see Hacking, 1995b, 1999). In such studies, Hacking argues for what he calls 'dynamic nominalism', a position which asserts that 'our classifications and the objects thus classified emerge hand in hand, each egging the other on' (1986: 228), and he has illustrated this dynamic nominalism by comparing examples of objects that are typical of three categories of 'things': horses, gloves and multiple personalities. While horses could be reasonably be said to have existed

before the category horse was used to identify them, the concept of glove 'fits glove so well because both the concept and the glove were made to fit one another' (Hacking, 1986: 229). The identity category multiple personality is, he argues, more like the category glove than that of horse since the category and the people so categorised 'emerged hand in hand'.

However, for Hacking there is to be no general theory of the making of such identities since the particularities of each case, being determined by particular and specific cognitive and material properties and by the exigencies of the history of their development, will make it impossible to produce singular generalisations – it is a matter of giving different accounts of the making of each kind. His approach is embodied in his slogan: 'The motto is motley' (1992a: 192). Somers (1996) has indicated the value of such studies – at least in prospect – by commending the way that Hacking traces the meanings of social concepts over time, and addresses the way that such meanings are shaped by the exigencies of their applications in specific social locations:

> *Hacking (1990: 359; 1984: 110) calls this level of conceptual analysis looking at words 'in their sites.' It is another approach to historicizing by locating conceptual problematics not only in time but in conceptual space ... sites include 'sentences, uttered or transcribed, always in a larger site of neighbourhood, institution, authority, language' without which ideas would just be words, not concepts. Looking at the rise and fall of moral and social concepts as words in their sites and in time reveals their existence as historical – and thus contingent.*
> (Somers, 1996: 75)

Hacking's sensitivity to the interaction between the vocabulary for persons and their interpretative and pragmatic response to the categorical identities within that vocabulary, leads him to examine this interaction from both sides. Thus he talks not only about 'labelling from above' in terms of the practice of a community of experts who create a reality that some people make their own, but also about 'the vector of the autonomous behaviour of the person so labelled, which presses from below, creating a reality that every expert must face' (Hacking, 1986: 234). He also suggests that the variety of descriptions applied to human subjects and their activities can have retrospective as well as prospective effects on those persons: 'events in a life can now be seen as events of a new kind, a kind that may not have been conceptualised when the event was experienced or the act was performed' (Hacking, 1992b: 191). According to this suggestion, classifications interact with those classified retrospectively, such that what we believed our identity to be in the past is no longer what be believe our identity to be following the application of a novel category to our action or beliefs. In addition, his work provides a reminder of the value-laden character of the variety of human identities or 'kinds':

> *they present value-laden kinds to be or not to be, to do or not to do. And just because of the implied value, so people sorted under those kinds change, or work back upon the kind ... Human kinds can change our evaluations of our personal worth, of the moral kind of person that we are.*
> (Hacking, 1992b: 191)

Categorisations and the identities they predicate, then, are matters of moral and practical choice, and ways of living are determined in relation to such categories and identities.

Gender as an 'interactive kind'

Hausman's (1995) *Changing Sex* is an account of what Hacking calls the 'looping effect' that characterises the way in which the development and application of identity categorisations interact with individuals so classified. Her work provides an interesting historical account of the early deployment of the identity category 'gender', a category whose qualities and uses have subsequently figured prominently in many discussions of structural and phenomenological identity categories and their significance for individual and collective action. She seeks to show that an important early use of the category arose from technological developments within medicine in the 1950s, in particular technologies for altering the bodies of intersexual and transsexual patients. For Hausman (1995: 7) '"gender" was first introduced into medical discourse to signify the social performance indicative of an internal sexed identity'. A key resource for this conceptual innovation was the work of surgeons Money, Hampson and Hampson, and Hausman's book discusses their introduction of the term 'gender role', which they defined as:

> *all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself of herself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman respectively. It includes, but is not restricted to, sexuality in the sense of eroticism. A gender role is not established at birth, but is built up cumulatively through experiences encounters and transacted ... In brief, a gender role is established in much the same way as is a native language.*
> (Money *et al.*, quoted in Hausman, 1995: 94)

It seems that later Money came to prefer a different term, gender identity/role, in which 'identity' referred to private experience and 'role' to public performance. Together these constituted a dense texture of forms of thought and action developed through socialisation, and were therefore to be distinguished from any biological substrate. Clinically, gender identity/role was to be established:

> *in relation to the following: general mannerisms, deportment and demeanour; play preferences and recreational interests; spontaneous topics of conversation in unprompted conversation and casual comment; content of dreams, daydreams and fantasies; replies to oblique inquiries and projective tests; evidence of erotic practices and, finally, the person's own replies to direct inquiry'.*
> (Money, quoted Hausman, 1995: 97).

It was Stoller (1968) who subsequently disturbed the identity/role congruity assumed in Money's couplet by drawing attention to the claim of transsexuals that there was an incongruity between their gender identity and their gender role. In interrogating this incongruity, Stoller distinguished not only gender (cultural) from sex (biological), but also identity (subjective conviction) from role (observable appearance and conduct). Stoller used identity to refer to 'one's

awareness (whether one is conscious of it or not) of one's existence and purpose in the world, or put a bit differently, the organisation of those psychic components that preserve one's awareness of existing' (1968: x). Such 'core gender identity' ('I am male, I am female') is a matter of conviction perhaps rather more than mere awareness, and this is distinguished from 'gender role', which refers to the more externally observable features of 'masculine' or 'feminine' modes of conduct.

These categorical formulations and distinctions were elaborated within a clinical medical discourse necessitated by developments in endocrine and surgical knowledge and procedures which made it possible for 'individuals to simulate the bodies of either sex' (Hausman, 1995: 104). For clinicians, the problem was the basis on which treatment should be offered, a question which in turn depended on the issue of which sex the patient 'really was' – and perhaps which sex they should be allowed to become through surgical intervention. An unintended consequence of these local issues was that these new categorisations provided a view of 'gender' with considerable 'discursive power, as it suggested both the depth of individuals' investments in gender and the variability (within any given individual) of those investments' (Hausman, 1992: 105). These developments are significant because, according to Hausman, we can better understand the contemporary debates about gender identity once we can trace the relatively recent modern uses of the concept back to its origin in the treatment of intersexed subjects. She writes that:

> *What the researchers and clinicians did not account for was their active role in producing discourse and therefore enabling new subject positions. In effect they codified a whole new way to be a sex, enabling their intersex patients to be legitimate and entitled members of one sex or the other. There was no way to exclude other subjects from capitalising on this discursive development.*
> (Hausman, 1995: 108–9)

Hausman does not pretend to give a complete account of the deployment or origin of such specific structural and phenomenological identity categories, but her work does demonstrate that the significance of identity categories – including those positional categories that I discussed in Chapter 3 – can be understood by examining both their historical origins and the intricacies of their use within sets of specific material and discursive practices, rather than by simply asserting their general socio-ontological priority for the ascription of identities to persons. In the radical interpretation of Foucault, of course, notions of the objectivity of identity categories, as well as the propriety of their deployment, arise and are settled within such practices. In the liberal interpretation, this is still largely true but more emphasis is given to the observation that such claims are resolved in a less arbitrary fashion – by reference to extradiscursive matters. What Farrell (1994) calls 'parochial realism' and Hacking (1999) calls 'dynamic nominalism' function to remind us that while subject formation and identity ascription are more contingent than we might think, there remains the fact that the 'world' resists just any formulation of what people are in general or who they are or can become as specific subjects.

I commented earlier that Nietzsche's ideas on subjectivity have provided a

significant resource for the development of such work on subject formation. While the intensity of this influence may be moderate – especially so in the case of researchers like Hacking – these same Nietzschean ideas have proved more significant for the development of a another novel – and often hyperbolic – critique of the condition of the human sciences in modern society. A large number of studies associated with conceptions of 'postmodernism', 'postmodernity' and 'the postmodern' assert the recent disappearance, or diminished relevance, of the seemingly fundamental and recurrent idea of the sovereign individual human being for the understanding of social action. In so doing, such studies discover and celebrate a new series of problems for those with an interest in identity matters.

Identity and postmodernity

The term 'postmodern' and its correlates 'postmodernism' and 'postmodernity' have been used in a wide variety of ways both in the human sciences and in contemporary cultural commentary. Perhaps this lack of unitary – or even agreed – meaning is hardly surprising given the epistemological prejudices of those who find it useful to deploy any of these three terms. Nevertheless, this has not prevented a variety of legislative attempts to differentiate and standardise their meanings. Whilst the original formulations of 'postmodernism' derive from aesthetic commentary and criticism, this term and its cognates have subsequently become widely used throughout the human sciences – sometimes to refer to a type of theoretical practice, argument or position, sometimes to a particular historical period, and sometimes to both. Good and Velody (1998: 3) have discussed the variety of such references and summarised three recurrent uses: to refer to a particular set of cultural forms;[2] to characterise a particular kind of social and economic structure;[3] to express a specific evaluation of the condition of the human sciences.[4]

But of course each of these different uses may be drawn on to support and provide evidence for the propriety of the other. The shortest – and best-known – definition of postmodernity is Lyotard's (1984: xxiv):

> *I define postmodernity as incredulity towards metanarratives.*

Later in the same text he lists its three constitutive features as:

1. the renunciation of 'a horizon of universalisation';
2. a loss of 'confidence placed by the last two centuries in the idea of progress';
3. a process of self reflection in which modernity subjects itself to examination (Lyotard, 1984: 7–10).

Following Lyotard, a characterisation of postmodernity as a series of intellectual 'refusals' or 'negations' of modernity is a standard depiction of a number of commentators. Amongst them, Hebdige (1988: 186) describes three such interrelated negations. The first is an opposition to, or renunciation of, the 'totalising' conventions typical of many traditions of human science

theorising in which general theories of society or history, or exhaustively universal theoretical standpoints have been significant goals. The postmodern critique of these calls into question all those treatments of human nature and collective order that provide or commend essentialist, transcendental, or otherwise systematic frameworks for the description and explanation of such matters. Such treatments are examined and shown to reveal the concealed interests that lie beneath their content and deployment, as well as the neglect or dismissal of some category of persons or places that the framework had falsely claimed to represent. Amongst the most 'pernicious' of such totalisations are some of the kinds of metaphysical thinking that I outlined in the first part of Chapter 2, and many postmodernist investigations of the parameters of 'self', 'identity', and related concepts are modelled on Derrida's heroic effort to undertake a radical interrogation of what he characterises as the Western metaphysical tradition. The deconstructive impetus of postmodernism collides head on with a commitment to the autonomous self-constituting modern identity of this tradition, at least as it is characterised by Derrida,[5] and in the course of this collision the postmodern critique rejects 'grammars of unity, totality, identity, sameness and consensus' (Schrag, 1997: 7), preferring instead to activate differences in the form of 'heterogeneity, multiplicity, diversity, difference, incommensurability, and dissensus' (Schrag, 1997: 8). This critique is of course offered not only at the level of individual subjectivity and identity but it also operates at the level of society, in so far as the term 'society' necessarily carries connotations of presence and unity, thereby serving to mask or conceal the reality, persistence, and significance of social difference.

The second postmodern 'negation' comprises a renunciation of (conventionally favoured) metaphors of surface and depth for the analysis of individual and collective action, as well as an associated scepticism towards the provision of causal accounts of social events. In the case of individuals, attempts to explain the surface phenomena of individual human desire and pleasure by reference to depth psychology or to an underlying substrate of biological necessity are both renounced by the postmodern impulse. Marxism, Freudianism and structuralism – key intellectual resources and exemplars of modernity, are called into question in so far as they each depend on the attribution of properties of appearance and essence, or surface and depth, to any of the social or personal objects of their attention, and subsequently accord causal or interpretative privilege to the first property at the expense of the other. Baudrillard (1988), for example, has been particularly critical of the hermeneutic promise of human science interpretations to 'set meaning free' by probing the surface appearance of action and language in order to locate those structures and properties argued to lie at a deeper level. Such interpretations, he argues, are merely seduced by their own forms, terms and appearances until they become intellectual games 'intended to persuade, deceive and flatter others'. Certainly as the modern is abandoned in favour of the postmodern, the search for, and reliance on, such interior or hidden determinants is abandoned, as is the corresponding attempt to formulate social collectivities as 'societies' which are then attributed causal powers.

The third postmodern 'negation' is a suspicion of the influence of progressivist or teleological narratives typical of the modernist approach to

knowledge of both the social and natural worlds. Narratives of the progressive accumulation of knowledge – even occasionally of the direction of 'history' itself – have played an important if not essential part in most post-Enlightenment thought, and by attacking such narratives wholesale, postmodernism brings its critical gaze to bear on the overwhelming majority of the products of the human sciences since their inception. Equally, the pretensions of the natural sciences to the progressive uncovering of the facts of nature and the mastery of the natural world have become the subject of postmodern scepticism.

Rosenau (1992) has suggested that the variety of forms in which these negations appear can be reduced to two general orientations – two kinds of postmodernisms. The first – sceptical postmodernism – 'speaks of the immediacy of death, the demise of the subject, the end of the author, the impossibility of truth and the abrogation of the Order of Representation' (Rosenau, 1992: 15). It emphasises fragmentation and disintegration of both the individual and the collectivity and relies only on the immediate pleasures of the momentary and transitory to replace a commitment to prior universal values of virtue or truth. The second, affirmative, orientation shares with its sceptical relative a suspicion of the totalising conventions of the human sciences, but argues for the possibility of alternative positive – but non-positivist – forms of knowledge, giving 'priority to local and regional spaces' (Rosenau, 1992: 22) and to heterogeneous forms of representation, a celebration of emotion alongside reason and the recognition of plurality and difference amongst social actors and social meanings.

Both sceptical and affirmative versions share an understanding of the ways in which significant large-scale social changes have undermined those social arrangements which deploy and protect previous modernist commitments to:

- the power of totalising social theories;
- belief in the revelations made possible by distinguishing between appearance and essence;
- confidence in perpetual cognitive and social progress.

The transformation of time and space made possible by technological innovation especially in the field of communication technology, the movement of individuals across the boundaries of nation states and the reorganisation of those boundaries into new political groupings, the development of economic systems at a global level – all of these changes have produced a restructuring of social relations as individuals and social groups are connected to each other in new and unsettling forms of interdependency.

> *The image which is the most vibrant metaphor for modern reality: the image as on a television screen, with no substance behind it, creating, playing, disappearing. all in an instant gone. This image is subversive because it is fluid and provocative, but it is anarchistic because it offers no roots and no sources of value.*
> (Frosh, 1991: 31)

The deployment of Nietzschean resources for the postmodernist attack on modernist understandings of subjectivity, self and identity is both obvious and much celebrated. It was Nietzsche who first wrote of the absence of 'being' behind 'doing' in his rejection of the substantive self and its identity, arguing that the idea of such a substance may provide a useful fiction for the organisation of disciplined action, but it is one that has no objective basis. Such claims have been made by others prior to the more recent postmodern uptake of his work. For example Honig (1992: 219) has reminded us of Arendt's argument that the self is not expressive but performative: 'Prior to or apart from action, this self has no identity; it is fragmented, discontinuous, indistinct and most certainly uninteresting ... this self becomes a "who" by acting'. And some of the postmodern uses of Nietzsche have also incorporated additional understandings in order to support and extend an attack on the unified self and its identity. The deployment of Freud is one such addition, and here it seems that the attractions of Freud's portrayal of the fictive and arbitrary character of unitary identity outweigh a disdain for his reliance on a distinction between the surface of conventional consciousness and the depths of the unconscious, the latter fathomable only by the use of specific technical practices and an accompanying vocabulary. What makes this deployment easier is the argument that Freud's later work provides a suitably pessimistic view of the human condition and the human subject in society, at least more so than did his earlier studies. An earlier version of the unity of the individual's identity achieved by making a choice between a number of possible ways of satisfying desire is replaced by a version in which such inner sameness is the result of forces of repression, regression and projection. An essentially fragmented and incomplete, yet superficially unitary, identity arrived at and sustained through force and self deception is a very different kind of identity from the identity unified through self-assembled coherence in the face of diversity of desire and experience.

Certainly with the use of both Nietzsche and – at least some – Freud, sceptical postmodernism has frequently described and sometimes prescribed the weakening of a commitment to the achievement of unified identity as the sign of the self-sustaining subject, and where such a commitment is not abandoned altogether, at least it remains 'under erasure'. So it may seem that conceptions of the author, the subject, 'ego', self and self identity have been variously displaced, dissolved, eroded, or deconstructed, along with the intentional fallacies and the other conceptual baggage which we are told had accompanied the prior modern attentiveness to and reliance on these terms. Instead, a series of common linguistic and/or material conventions operate to produce the illusion or fantasy of individual identity. Here, the dissipation of identity is to be celebrated as a Nietzschean – and Dionysian – release.

The instability of identity

One strategy – of the sceptical version of postmodernism – invokes the contemporary presence and growth of new kinds of individuals without singular identities, or indeed any of the conventional attributes of stable subjectivities. Such individuals are portrayed as the product of their own autonomous actions chosen without regard to consistency, alignment with collectivities or attachment

to moral values. They are: 'wary of general rules, comprehensive norms, hegemonic systems of thought' (Rosenau, 1992: 54). Michael (1996: 40), for example, describes such postmodern subjects as '"un-controlled", decentred, multiplicituous, transgressive, oriented towards affect, image and simulation'. This stress on the fragmentation, incompleteness and contradictory nature of what have previously been essentialist identities can appear a liberating one. It draws attention to the political implications of rejected modernist essentialising manoeuvres, and moreover it also suggests the inadequacy of any simple model of the relationship between collective identities, personal projects and social arrangements. Probyn (1993) writes of such selves and their identities as a 'combinatoire', a shifting selection and arrangement of individual attributes. Haraway's (1992) knowingly incomplete selves derive strength from their partiality, since such a feature makes them more able to recognise, communicate and interrogate others – to share a perspective without claiming a common identity. However, it is easy for these kinds of postmodern subjects to find themselves 'disintegrated into a flux of euphoric intensities, fragmented and disconnected' (Kellner, 1992: 144), and as they do so a notion of identity which derives from a sense of continuity or coherence becomes increasingly irrelevant.

Such a postmodern formulation of identity, argues Bauman (e.g. 1996, 1997), requires not remembering but forgetting the past. It is based on episodic and ephemeral moments which 'come unannounced and go away without notice' (Bauman, 1997: 24). In his phrase, it is a 'palimpsest identity' – an identity in which new versions of whoever one has now become are simply written on top of older versions of whoever one had earlier been. Integration of the new with the old on the level of the individual is irrelevant, and no concern need be shown with the continuity of prior alignments between the individual and any collective. Neither 'society' nor the 'nation state' are understood to constitute unified collectivities, being better thought of as collections of collectivities. New transient and fluid collectivities form across and within such boundaries anyway, and traditional forms of social organisation give no shape to such identities because culture provides too many possibilities that are capable of continuous combination and recombination:

> *And so the snag is no more how to discover, invent, construct, assemble, (even buy) an identity, but how to prevent it from being too tight – and from sticking too fast to the body. Well-sewn and durable identity is no more an asset; increasingly and ever more evidently, it becomes a liability. The hub of postmodern life strategy is not making identity stand – but the avoidance of being fixed.*
> (Bauman, 1997: 89)

But what then remains of oneself and of others when identity is said to take the form described above? If we are no longer confident about or concerned with the subjective achievement of a unified identity, and no longer believe in the fixity of positional ascriptions of common identities, then all that remains seems to be an idea of identity as play or an image of identity as performance. Certainly for Bauman (1997: 88) the distinction between the necessary and the accidental in the case of identity is irrelevant and there is no way of distinguishing 'determination from contingency: there are but the moves of the players, the art of playing one's hand well and the skill of making the most of one's cards'.

One answer to these questions has been offered by a second strategy of postmodernism in which a radical revision of previous approaches to subjectivity is seen to be either the correlate, or the outcome of the kinds of collective contingencies described above. This strategy seeks to 're-theorise subjectivity as multiple and contradictory, largely irrational' (Rosenau, 1992: 51), and it does this through a consideration of language and its relationship to subjectivity, identity and authority. It portrays the illusory unity and depth of identity as an element in modernity as ideological – serving as an ideological prop to its order by asserting a universal and unchanging human nature, by providing a means for the detection of 'anomalies' and their correction, and by generally locating responsibility for identity matters within the individual. Foucault's insistence that the subject itself is an effect of power already exposed such an ideology to sustained investigation and this subject finds itself further exposed in Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence and Lacan's assertion of the 'imaginary' nature of the unity of identity. Alternative formulations locate the subject in the intersection of forces and technologies. Baudrillard, for example, reframes the classical subject as positions or terminal points in an open network of possibilities: 'we no longer exist as playwrights or actors but as terminals of multiple networks' (Baudrillard, 1988: 16). Such assertions reduce meanings of self and identity to mere reference points at which co-ordinated action happens to take place.

Identity as performative effect

Dunne (1995) has described the strategy of 'linguistic monism' that has typically informed these postmodern studies of identity as Nietzsche's 'doing' without a 'being'. The strategy gives primary emphasis to the role of language in the articulation of experience, then moves swiftly to the claim that language is 'neither responsive to those who speak it nor bound to a world beyond itself' (Dunne, 1995: 141). Words are not understood as corresponding to external entities beyond language but rather as related to one another within language – a relationship between signs within a system of signs. The codes and rules which govern the use of these signs are features of the system which operate independent of individual users and in Dunne's (1995: 142) words, this perspective works to permit 'no personal centre of experience that can assert itself against the great monolith of language'. Identity, then, becomes no more than the effect of the performance of speech acts.

Examples from the work of two different authors may illustrate what such a perspective reveals when it is brought to bear on particular issues. Both portray identity as a linguistic effect and thereby raise questions about its ontological status.

The grammar of the self

Rom Harré would hardly affiliate himself to the general programme of postmodernity, but I reference his work here because of the way that it expresses so well those assumptions about the nature of language and its relationship to

human action that constitute important features of the postmodern temper. Harré has published a series of studies in which the grammatical conventions through which we are able to make statements about our own and others' selves are taken to be constitutive of the phenomena of identity. Rather than pursuing the variety of metaphysical assertions concerning the self and seeking to resolve the ambiguities and contradictions amongst these, Harré (e.g. 1985, 1987, 1988, 1991) has argued that we can perfectly well understand all of these matters as the product of the grammar of self description. This grammar operates within a series of discursive practices used in the course of everyday talk as individuals seek to defend their own actions, comment on the actions of others, express doubts and shortcomings, make claims on their own behalf, resist the claims of others, tell their biographies, and so on. Such discursive practices are taken to be the basis (sometimes the only basis) for a variety of social phenomena of which identity is an instance.

For Harré there is an important distinction between the 'public fact of the identity of a human being as a person' (Harré, 1988) and an individual's 'sense' of his or her own identity – a distinction between what is meant by 'person' and what is meant by 'personal identity'. The former notion is located in a moral discourse and is specified in terms of moral and linguistic properties in which personal responsibility is especially important. Such persons however 'do not belong to the same ontological category as selves – or personal identities: the former are real while the latter are (indispensable) fictions' (Harré, 1988: 365). These fictional accomplishments provide for the possibility of the synthesis of 'thought, feeling and action', but they are not to be understood as if they were objects. They reflect features of the public world of objects, including other persons. Indeed, Harré argues that the 'intrapersonal commentary' characteristic of the concern with personal identity derives its structure from the public practices of 'interpersonal commentary'. Accordingly, an understanding of the nature of personal identity requires an examination of referential practices in conversational acts in and through which identity matters are activated, especially those acts which involve the use of personal pronouns. In summary: 'self is a fiction carried by the concept of the transcendental ego through which self-predication is made intelligible to the very being who acquires it' (Harré, 1988: 367).

In Sabat's and Harré's (1992) study of patients suffering from Alzheimer's disease, this perspective is applied to understanding the issue of 'identity loss'. Sabat and Harré write of personal identity as the experience of 'the continuity of one's point of view in the world of objects in time and space' (1992: 445), and they argue that this is joined to the notion of personal agency in the sense that actions also derive from such a point of view. Nevertheless, personal identity has no specific content, and is constituted wholly through discursive devices like that of the first person pronoun 'I'. They remind the reader that '"I" is not used to name or refer to oneself or to one's body. Its use expresses one's personal identity' (Sabat and Harré, 1992: 445). This 'formal unity' of identity depends on neither internal continuity nor external recognition. It requires only that the individual be capable of the correct deployment of first person indexicals: 'to be able to index one's discourse in this way is to have a personal identity' (Sabat and Harré, 1992: 447).

Identity and performativity

A more self-consciously radical stance than that of Harré is taken by Judith Butler, whose argument about identity matters is contained in two important books that she has written on the topics of sex and gender. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1991) offers an analysis of the ways in which the relationship between sex, gender and desire, have been used together in forming an idea of the human subject. Her aim is to persuade us that we cannot successfully undertake that analysis if we fail to notice that the coherence of gender identity – like all other identities – arises as a Nietzschean regulatory fiction. In Weir's (1996: 113) words: 'Butler's fundamental claim is that any identity is always and only the product of a system or logic of power/language which generates identity as functions of binary oppositions and seeks to conceal its own workings by making those identities appear natural'. This extreme linguistic conventionalism which 'refuses to allow that there is any natural dimension at all to human subjectivity' (Soper, 1995: 129) is expressed differently in Butler's later books, but the theme remains largely similar. However, Butler (1992: 4) asserts that the kind of critique of the subject that she, along with a wide range of other postmodern writers, provides, is not concerned to dispense with all conceptions of the subject but rather to seek out the 'process of its construction and the political meaning and consequentiality of taking the subject as a requirement or presupposition of theory'. She argues that her concern is with how 'contingent and contestable presumptions' come to take the form of foundational metaphysical certitudes within particular theoretical discourse.

In her initial study of gender Butler deploys a common constructionist argument, but she radicalises it by moving it from the terrain of gender to that of sex. She argues that sex is the product not of nature, but of a specific kind of discourse and practice – that of gender, through which such a discourse attempts to ground itself in a prediscursive nature (Soper, 1995: 128). For Foucault, the materiality of the body is a production of relations of power and knowledge as inscribed in specific scientific discourses, but Butler prefers a rather more encompassing account in which a generic conception of language becomes the grounds and means of its being. Butler's strategy is to reject the possibility that both selves and sexes are features of prediscursive subjects and to replace it with her own view of gendered identity as a performative accomplishment. She argues that her notion of performativity encourages us to consider identity as a normative ideal, a view partly based on Foucault's claim of the ways in which subjects are produced in discourse, and that this claim always presupposes a certain figure or trope of production.

As part of this argument Butler deploys Derrida's rewriting of Austin to suggest that production actually always happens through a certain kind of repetition and recitation. For her, 'performativity is the vehicle through which ontological effects are established – the discursive mode by which ontological effects are installed' (Butler, 1991: 25). This means then that 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (Butler, 1991: 25). Gender and sexuality are established in and through repeated performances 'that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance,

of a natural sort of being' (Butler, 1991: 33). She also uses Foucault to add to Derrida's emphasis on iteration the power of discursive formations that situate the performative as an act of both complicity and resistance. The authority that enables the performative to restructure reality is a 'voiced authority of language' that simultaneously constructs the internality and externality of identity through a 'public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body' (Butler, 1991: 136).

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler (1994) continues her argument further by considering the way in which the materiality of the sexed body is constituted discursively. Again, wanting to avoid the ontology of substance, she seeks to 'pose materialist questions without having to revert to a materialist ontological framework' (Hughes and Witz, 1997: 55). She does this by resuming a Foucauldian argument in which she encourages 'a return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as a process of materialisation that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter' (Butler, 1994: 9). Refusing the choice between a commitment to materiality on the one hand or the negation of materiality on the other, Butler argues that she wants only to 'call a presupposition into question' in order to 'free it up from its metaphysical lodgings'(Butler, 1992: 17). This is accomplished by using the postmodern critique of the metaphysics of substance which asserts that language imposes order on something that is not orderly. When language does this, it carries a claim to 'an essential substantive or metaphysical reality prior to the word', and it is also repressive in its 'fixing or freezing of multiplicity into a unity which excludes and closes off difference and possibility' (Weir, 1996: 115).

Several authors (e.g. Rose, 1997; Potter, 1996) however, point out that such a view of language continues to treat it as a set of representational devices, and that this view is based on a restrictive understanding even of the way in which descriptive concepts in language work, let alone of the overall use of language in social life. It is too easy to assert the significance of particular grammatical devices without examining their use within concrete occasions of use. Weir reminds us of Wittgenstein's argument that we can use words in a number of different ways without having to make any reference to the notion of an original or primary meaning locked up in them, and on a more general level, she points out that we have to understand 'language as a medium of shared understanding and dialogue, or the articulation of difference and not only as a force of deception and oppression' (Weir, 1996: 132). Cave (1995: 104) has also pointed out that assertions based on grammatical properties often bear 'little relation to the practical sense of positioning and repositioning which ordinary individuals go through to find a name and a place that they can consider their own', and further, that they convey no sense of the 'proper moral weight' which continues to attach to identity matters in contemporary society.

Both the Foucauldian and the more hyperbolic postmodern critique of self and identity arise from reflections on the nature of cultural change in the late twentieth century and also from an understanding that historical investigations of the origins and forms assumed by conceptions of human subjectivity demonstrate diversity and difference amongst basic presuppositions. Postmodernist arguments provide the occasion for the examination of the

possibility that social arrangements do not so much contain or enable the forms taken by the expression of some universal human nature, but that social arrangements are constitutive of this nature and what is 'natural' is merely what is made to seem so. The regulatory fictions of the human sciences, alongside those of legal, medical and other organised ideologies do not regulate those subjectivities that already exist; rather, regulation brings into being just those subjects. The postmodern critique of the substantive self of modernity involves the rejection of both the unification of identity through reflexive biographical work and the determination of identity through the notion of positional subjects. However, it is not clear that such a critique requires the total abandonment of identity as such, or even that it is to be accorded the seemingly residual status of a 'regulatory fiction'.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have been concerned with two groups of studies, both of which have portrayed identity (and sometimes subjectivity more generally) as a particular kind of effect. In one group, identity is effected as a discursive production; in the other, it is claimed that identity is a performative effect. I think there remain significant problems with both these accounts, despite their initial attractions. It is only too easy for notions of discursive practice to take on a highly deterministic character and there is a cost in the fact that they make problematic notions of human agency by locating this as an effect of the omnipresent discourse (Calhoun, 1994). It is not always easy to see what allows us to characterise some objects as 'discourse', nor how it is that these objects can be given such a powerful role in the organisation of everyday life. This is especially problematic since the abstract nature of many of these studies can easily lead us to neglect another equally important feature of the radical claims that have otherwise generated or sustained them: that even discursively constructed identities, identities that exist as effect rather than as the expression of subjective substance, owe their existence to their use in engagements, in encounters, where it is that 'we and everyone else, get our boundaries and our skins drawn' (Haraway and Bhavnani, 1994: 32). Silverman (1997: 25) has pointed out that there is no necessary reason to believe in a history of the dissolution of selves and identities, even though the attempt to write such histories remind us of the need to look more carefully than before at the ways in which identities are 'inscribed in local cultures'.

There have been as many critiques of the general claims of postmodernism as there have been varieties of its expression. Some (e.g. Frosh, 1991; Plummer, 1995) have pointed to the internal contradictions that arise when statements making systematic claims about the nature of society and history of individuals are made alongside assertions that surface appearances conceal no depths or that only momentarily desires are reliable. Furthermore, when the evidential basis remains seemingly arbitrary and anecdotal, it is difficult to know how they should be evaluated. Whatever the force of such general critiques, there are features of the postmodernist formulation of identity that provide useful resources for the wider sociological effort to disengage from metaphysical speculation about identity matters. By attacking prior conceptions as essentialist

and rhetorical, and by emphasising features of contradiction and fragmentation as significant elements in identity, postmodern approaches do at least gesture to the complexity that arises in trying to give an account of the relationship between subjectivity and the social.

From a postmodern perspective there is no Archimedean point with which we can lever apart those conceptions of self that are 'correct' away from those that are 'incorrect'. Neither is there any sense in which the historical ordering of these conceptions can tell us anything about their relative merits. Postmodernist arguments instead seek to remind us that however timeless or universal our basic categories may seem to be, such appearances are merely the product of constant reiteration and rhetorical usage. In this way, seemingly necessary features of individual and social life can be shown to be no more than local and historical productions and conventions – even though the historical periods in question may be of long duration. Certainly there can be no security in a reliance on memory as a source of continuity in the formation of the essential unity and coherence of identity, since this does not secure a safe haven for its accomplishment but merely acts as 'an inextinguishable, transcendental superstition constantly renewed in the telling of tales' (Rée, 1990: 1058).

A noticeable – and regrettable – feature of these versions of identity in which subjects are portrayed largely as the effects of discursive practice or of language conventions is that (with the exception of the work of Ian Hacking) they produce subjects without intersubjectivity and, despite the emphasis on language in both of them, it seems that it is a grammatical entity and not a speaking entity that is constituted as a materialised identity. In the case of Foucault, Gardiner (1996) argues that the subject fails to engage in dialogical relationships with others, despite Foucault's various gestures towards the idea of resistance. That Foucault invokes such resistance at all suggests to Farrell (1994) that he remains interested in this more 'ambiguous, sceptical, mobile and uncommitted self' that resists and manoeuvres in ways that are similar to those described by Goffman (e.g. 1968a and 1968b) in his treatment of self and identity. But even here, the form of resistance is aesthetic and individual rather than pragmatic and social. It 'encourages untrammelled self-determination, while simultaneously rejecting the need for epistemological, ontological, or moral foundations with regard to the pursuit of such activities' (Gardiner, 1996: 29). The defining elements of such a version of self as a work or art are described by Kavolis (1980) as a well-made artefact, the quality of whose manufacture transcends its functional utility and both 'compels admiration' and gives pleasure through its quality of excellence.

In the next chapter I will discuss several other figures for whom an understanding of the nature and use of language was vital to get a grip on identity matters. This was certainly the case for Bakhtin, for whom, argues Rockwell (1996: 70–2), 'the orchestration and convergence of discursive interaction is the base condition of all human existence'. But he also argues that while the 'I' of discourse presents an image of unity, it does this always as it 'responds to something, objects to something, affirms something, anticipates possible responses and objections, seeks support and so on'. What this means is that the kind of practice that language is – and therefore the way in which its

use constitutes the identity of a person – can best be understood as 'one of the modes through which human beings carry out dialogue'. It is this more lively sense of the multifarious character of language in use that seems missing from the linguistic monism of the kinds of studies I have described here. In Butler's account we are asked to imagine identities as the effect of speech acts, while these speech acts have no particular recipient or context, let alone the appropriate 'felicitous conditions' (Austin, 1962) necessary for their success. It seems that Butler would have us accept an account of the nature of identity as the effect of performativity while simultaneously neglecting the fact that performances are necessarily located productions, and that the idea of performance necessarily implies the idea of audience or recipient. Gergen (1994) makes this point well in relation to the performance of emotion, but the observation is of general relevance:

> *To achieve intelligibility the emotional performance must be a recognisable component of an ongoing chain of actions. There is good reason then to view emotional performances as constituents of larger or more extended patterns of interaction.*
> (Gergen, 1994: 23)

Notes

1 Farrell (1994) refers to these as a 'weak reading' and a 'strong reading'.

2 The *locus classicus* here being the work of Jencks (especially Jencks, 1980, 1984, 1986). Writing about postmodern architecture, Jencks (1980: 13) describes those who design and build such structures as departing from the prior modernist style by becoming open to 'popular and local codes of communication ... historical memory, urban context ... participation, the public realm, pluralism and eclecticism'. Other studies of the cultural claims and cultural resonances of postmodernism can be found in: Appignanesi (1986); Brooker (1992); Hutcheon (1984, 1989); Kroker and Cook (1986); McHale (1987).

3 See for example: Baudrillard (1983, 1988, 1990); Bauman (1990, 1992, 1996, 1997); Boyne and Rattansi (1990); Harvey (1989); Lash (1990); Lash and Urry (1987); Smart (1993); Turner (1990).

4 The key text here is Lyotard (1984). Other useful discussions can be found in: Crook (1991); Good and Velody (1998); Rosenau (1992); Seidman and Wagner (1992).

5 Derrida's (1974, 1978, 1981) deconstruction of the 'universal subject' (the notion of an 'essential subjectivity' in human existence) and its replacement with an understanding of the individual as a 'position' in discourse has generated a huge literature, but a few exemplary studies which have used or examined his perspective within social theory include: Flax (1990); Gates (1985); Nicholson (1990); Nicholson and Seidman (1995).

Chapter 5

Identity and intersubjectivity

Introduction

In the previous chapters I discussed the way in which some sociologists – and other human scientists – have sought to deal with earlier accounts of the metaphysics of selfhood and identity by repositioning identity matters within accounts of generic social processes and in large-scale social and historical contexts. I suggested that these efforts could be captured in a number of images:

- of identity as the achievement of the individual actor facilitated or handicapped by surrounding social institutions;
- of differentiated identities as ascribed and avowed instantiations of the common attributes of individuals sharing a common social location and associated categorical designation;
- of identities as discursive effects;
- of self and identity as linguistic fictions.

In this chapter I want to discuss two other approaches to identity matters. Both of them portray identity as the outcome of intersubjective work in which selves and others are mutually constitutive rather than being positioned in relation to others either as indifferent or opposing subjectivities or as determinative collectivities. The first approach focuses on the construction of identity in and through narrative accounts in which the mutuality of relationships between the individual subject and other people is understood to be an essential element in the construction and deployment of such narratives. The second approach focuses more directly on the dynamics of face-to-face interaction within which identities are constituted, and lays less emphasis on narrative as the necessary – or even dominant – form of identity expression. However, both share a common stress on the significance of the Hegelian theme of 'recognition' by another as a feature of identity which can only be understood through the analysis of social relationships.

A central idea about identity is that it rests on the existence of features of temporal continuity and coherence in human action. Traditionally this has been treated as a matter of individual action, although in Chapter 3 I mentioned attempts to relate such a feature to social groups as well. In the case of individuals, however, continuity and coherence have largely been understood as the product of cognitive reflection, in particular a set of recollections on which are based both experience and assertions of such continuity and coherence. The suggestion is that human subjects review events, actions and feelings from both the distant and recent past (as well as generate and organise expectations about such matters in possible futures), and that these recollections and

projections constitute essential grounds for the construction of individual identities.

Perhaps because of the phrasing that I have used, this claim may seem no more than a reworking of Locke's argument about identity in a more modern vocabulary. However, the narrative conceptions of identity that I will discuss in the first part of this chapter have actually sought to criticise and deal with what are arguably two shortcomings in Locke's prior account. The first of these is that Locke emphasised past recollection while failing to give any consideration to the relevance of future projection for identity matters. This means that he overlooked the fact that a concern with the continuity criterion of identity is as much a concern with the future as it is with the past – our identities are made up from what we expect to be able to do in the future as well as what we can remember of ourselves in the past. The second shortcoming is that Locke's assertion that identity is a matter of recognising one's own activities in the past takes for granted what it sought to prove – that it is oneself that is being recognised as identical. This is something first mentioned by Hume and which has been taken up by other critics since. Both of these problems arise from Locke's reliance on the claim that identity is constituted by the backward glance that consciousness takes at itself. They may be overcome by replacing the assertion that identity is built through the continuity of consciousness with the alternative suggestion that it is built through the continuity of narrative, in and through the stories that human subjects tell about themselves, to themselves, and to others.

Identity as rhetorical construction

There is a clear intuitive connection between the idea of the complete or elegant story and the achievement of an integrated identity. We tell our own and others' lives in the form of narratives, and for Winder (1997: 7) the story 'is the preferred form of our dreams and the way we compare notes with our own hopes, tracing the extent to which life has given us what we wanted, or refused us what we once aspired to'. This view – that identity is the product of, and realised in, narrative accounts of individuals' past, present and future – is held by a number of recent and contemporary writers from differing traditions (e.g. Bruner, 1990, 1991; Gergen, 1994; MacIntyre, 1987; Ricoeur, 1991, 1992; Shotter and Gergen, 1989; Strawson, 1959). The narrative perspective common to them all retains the idea that grasping identity requires the linking together of actions and ideas that occur in the course of biography, but it understands the form of that linkage to involve more than a succession of events registered in consciousness or available to consciousness through memory. Instead, it stresses the claim that such recollected and projected events have to be linked together by the individual as an ongoing process or sequence organised as an unfolding story.

In a wide-ranging review of the function of narrative for the organisation of experience, Polkinghorne (1988) summarises a narrative conception of identity as amounting to the claim that:

> *we achieve our personal identities and self concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by*

> *understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives.*
> (Polkinghorne, 1988: 150)

It is narrative then, not memory or other psychodynamic processes, that allows us to draw together and make sense of all of those features of ourselves that can be integrated into the distinctiveness of our identity. The sense we make of ourselves is the sense of a story about ourselves. Our material body in all its changes of form, our inherited characteristics, the history of our various social and cultural locations, and our relationships with other people are all brought together in such a story, and 'injury and illness, good fortune, success and accomplishments, and defeats and failures are all made meaningful in relation to the whole plot' (Polkinghorne, 1988: 152). Polkinghorne's own version of the significance of narrative has a highly phenomenological flavour and he describes a commitment to narrative as the replacement of a 'metaphysics of substance' by a 'metaphysics of potentiality and actuality'. Not all of those asserting the significance of narrative for understanding identity share this particular phenomenological preference, and there are a range of positions taken up. Despite their differences, they tend to share some general features.

Certainly a concern with narrative encourages us to think of identity as a construction rather than either a discovery or an attribution; stories are made and told rather than found as naturally occurring objects in either internal or external worlds. We may continue to focus on coherence and unity as essential features of identity but locate the source of these attributes in the plot of a story, while simultaneously acknowledging that the meaning of actions or characters in the plot are revised and revisable in the course of the unfolding of the whole story. We may heighten our awareness of the aesthetic qualities involved in identities as we notice the way in which they are told in and through stories. A narrative focus may allow more space for the inclusion of social dimensions in an understanding of identity formation by both making reference to the availability of common stories in a culture, and to the shared use of such stories by groups of individual actors. The relationship between identity and morality may also be understood to be predicated on, or related to, issues of narrative, character and plot, since stories themselves can be constructed (and thus interrogated) with implicit or explicit reference to virtues, consequences and rules of conduct. Finally, the investigation of narrative forms and their realisation in action permits the substitution of a publicly available hermeneutic method for the analysis of one's own and others' identities in place of private introspection as a way of knowing only one's own identity.

Ricoeur, narrative and identity

For the greatest narrative theorist, Paul Ricoeur (1986, 1991, 1992), identity is not to be dismissed as a Humean 'delusive imposition', but neither is it to be embraced as a Cartesian substance. Instead it is to be understood as a natural achievement arrived at through the telling and retelling of the stories of our lives to ourselves and to others. It is through the repetition, development and

revision of such narratives that the continuity and coherence of self-sameness is accomplished – the way in which an enduring though changeable identity is established over time. This notion of identity as achieved through narrative – or as narrative – allows Ricoeur to argue that he can set aside the assumption of an unchanging substance as a necessary feature of identity while seeking to retain a view of the ineradicability of identity as a necessary feature of meaningful human life. It also allows him to consider the relationship between the question of identity and ethical issues in social life.

Ricoeur asserts that the narrative theory of identity introduced in *Time and Narrative* (1986) and developed in *Oneself as Another* (1992) is designed to deal with the difficulty caused by the fact that there exist two equally valuable but different senses of the term identity and that confusion has arisen from the failure previously to differentiate them properly. In the first of these (from the Latin *idem*) identity refers to numerical identity, to permanence and to an unvarying sameness in an object over time. In the second sense (from the Latin *ipse*) the idea of an unchanging core is replaced by the idea of 'selfhood'. According to Ricoeur, Locke had tried to bring both of these two senses of identity together, and it was his failure to accomplish this that led both to Humean doubt and suspicion and also to the many subsequent philosophical efforts to explore the paradoxes that arise from this attempt at combination. In '*idem*-identity' we confront the idea of an unalterable unified singularity. The unvarying sameness of identity conceived in this way is impermeable to the effect of other things or other people. On the other hand '*ipse*-identity' is an identity that permits change and development over time, as well as allowing these effects to arise from events and persons outside of itself – in fact, others play a constitutive role in the formation and maintenance of identity understood in this latter way.

While Ricoeur seeks to show the distinctiveness of his approach from that of Locke, he doesn't wholly discard Locke's working assumptions. Instead he argues for the continuing relevance of a conception of sameness over time, and suggests that in the human world that idea is most often expressed by reference to individuals' 'character', where character is defined as 'the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognised' (Ricoeur, 1992: 121). These lasting dispositions are made up of two elements. The first element is habit: ways of acting that individuals develop over time and through repeated use are sedimented as character traits. These 'comprise a set of distinctive signs by which a person is recognised and re-identified as the same' (Ricoeur, 1992: 121). The second element arises from the identifications which individuals acquire over time: 'identifications with values, norms, ideals, models and heroes in which the person or the community recognises itself' (1992: 121). This feature has the merit of drawing our attention to the place of external principles, individuals and collective others in the formation of our lasting dispositions.

However, Ricoeur also argues that the usefulness of the idea of character is diminished by the fact that it continues to rely on the suggestion that such habits and identifications sediment to form a stable substrate within the person. It gestures towards the idea of *ipse*, of selfhood, rather than the simple and unvarying self-sameness of *idem* identity, in that it is willing to acknowledge the possible shifting character of these external features. Yet it also remains

distant from *ipse*, since the latter 'implies no assertion concerning some unchanging core of the personality' (Ricoeur, 1992: 2). *Idem* identity refers to objective criteria of identity as permanence or sameness, unbroken continuity, immutability, an abiding substratum, while *ipse* identity is the 'identity of selfhood', the sense of identity applicable to a person's character 'as a protagonist in a story'. What Ricoeur suggests is that we replace this dispositional version of character with an alternative narrative conception of character, in which character is given an identity based on its relationship not to itself but to a story or plot. Such a narrative character oscillates between sameness and selfhood and is also partly constituted through an ethical requirement of 'self constancy'.

Identity, then, for Ricoeur is as much an intersubjective as an intrasubjective phenomenon. This is true in three ways:

1. in the fact that the achievement of narrative identity rests on the deployment of already available plots, characters and other narrative devices;
2. because these socially derived and acquired stories that we come to be able to tell about ourselves then inform the ways in which we act in the world;
3. because the creation and realisation of such stories imply the presence of another – an interlocutor who hears and responds to stories, as well as offering stories of his or her own.

For Ricoeur, the Hegelian 'recognition' by another of the value and significance of continuities in one's individual characteristics over time as contained in narrative is both an analytical and moral prerequisite. It is important to note that Ricoeur's notion of the other person essential to the achievement of self identity is not the overwhelmingly negative 'Other' of some of the Hegelians and post-Hegelians. Ricoeur's notion of the other person resonates more harmoniously with the ideas of Levinas (1981, 1987, 1992), who portrays the relationship between self and other in a much more positive way. For both Levinas and Ricoeur, attentiveness to the other person is a simultaneously moral and meaningful necessity, there being 'no self without another who summons it to responsibility' (Ricoeur, 1992: 187).

From this perspective, then, identity is not self-substance, the product of a *cogito* abstracted from local circumstance as Cartesian versions would have us believe, but at the same time, neither is it a chimera nor imposition. Identity is the achievement of narrative, and narrative is developed in interaction with others as well as through internal recollection, interrogation and projection. Some of the ways in which the social enters the organisation and deployment of identity-as-narrative are described by Somers (1994) in the course of her demonstration that such narratives employ more than purely individual experiences. For example, she reminds us of the importance of 'public narratives' as stories told about supra-individual social formations, and argues that as 'the narratives of one's family, to those of the workplace (organisational myths), church, government and nation' (Somers, 1994: 619), they contribute to the formation of the various stories that we are able to tell of our own lives and the location of these lives in the wider social and historical world. Through the availability of these resources, Somers reminds us, it is possible to preserve an understanding of the personal project of modern identity alongside an

understanding of the salience of new forms of collective identity that may seem otherwise to undercut this project.

Like Somers, Scheibe (1986: 181) emphasises the culturally structured character of narrative resources and conventions: 'Self-narratives are developed stories that must be told in specific historical terms, using a particular language, with reference to a particular stock of working conventions and a particular pattern of dominant beliefs and values'. Sheibe's description of these resources is more generalised than that of Somers, and is concerned with the way that specific vocabularies of narrative may be understood as variations on universal dramaturgical themes. He pays particular attention to the issue of the introduction of episodes of adventure and risk into individual biography and the function played by such episodes in adding development and variation into otherwise orderly periods of life history. MacIntyre (1987), too, has described the typical narratives of fiction, myth and poetry as using a form already present in the material which such work seeks to represent. Once lodged in the culture, they are available for adaptation and performance by others and such fictions 'can provide more determinate and complete models of narrative explanation; enable us to tell better everyday stories or show us what moral and social investments our stories may have; help us try out our own models of identity' (Cave, 1995: 113).

Such fictions can also remind us of the complexities both of the content of narrative and of how we position ourselves within and alongside such narratives. For example, Vladimir Nabokov's writing is known for the complexity of his fictional representations and the complex variety of self/other relationships he portrays in the course of his work. His books constantly tease the reader with questions concerning how characters are related to one another and how their actions are related to differing features of their own individual identities. A shifting variety of forms of relationship between narrator, author and reader are also continually deployed to provide additional resources for the examination of identities and interactions. These and other features of Nabokov's writings are explored in Connolly's (1992) study of the 'Russian' phase of his work. In one series of books and stories dating from that period (1924–39), including *The Eye* and *Despair*, Connolly argues that Nabokov 'unleashes a fundamental bifurcation in identity' (1992: 4). Nabokov treats the main protagonists in this work as having 'two distinct identities arranged in a pattern of complementary contrast' (Connolly, 1992: 4). Each of them is given both an 'authorial self', which engages with and orders external reality, and a 'character self', which is defined and evaluated by others. This second identity (or sense of identity) resembles the identities given to more conventional fictional characters by their authors, but in Nabokov's case the constructions are portrayed as the work of others within the textual world, rather than the result of his work as authorial other and creator of the larger fictional space in which such individuals exist. Connolly (1992: 5) shows that in his later work, Nabokov is especially concerned with the ways in which 'the protagonists struggle to mediate the dichotomy between these authorial and character dimensions', and that as he pursues this concern his narratives become 'more involuted and self-reflexive'. The resulting confusions are created by Nabokov in order to expose the difficulties and assumptions of fictional writing in so far as this writing attempts to deal with

the complexities of what we mean by the narrative of identity in factual as well as fictional social life.

Narrative and the social

Kenneth Gergen has developed his understanding of the importance of narration in the formation of identity as part of an explicit criticism of prior substantive understandings of the identity of self, and has argued that narrative identities are 'not fundamentally possessions of the individual but possessions of relationships – products of social interchange' (Gergen, 1994: 186). In a series of related publications (e.g. Gergen, 1994; Gergen and Davis, 1985; Gergen and Gergen, 1983, 1988; Shotter and Gergen, 1989), he has argued the need to understand narratives of identity as 'forms of social accounting', features of discourse that create rather than reflect or shape any prior interior of the person. He does not see such narratives as arising from any inner necessity to find or create continuity amongst the experiences of the self, but asserts that they are better understood as ways of talking that 'sustain, enhance or impede various forms of action'. This emphasis on the constructive character of narrative as features of both language use and personal accounting serves to differentiate Gergen's version from those in which the authorship of narrative identity is located in the self. For Gergen, narratives provide 'ready-made intelligibilities' for the construction of identities, while being flexible and robust enough to be given individual shape by particular individual actors. Such narratives neither reflect a pre-existing potential core identity nor necessarily produce one; instead there are many kinds of narrative available for the construction of identity and not all of them constitute narrative identity as singular or unitary.

Gergen argues that an emphasis on intersubjective intelligibility in place of subjective interrogation helps us to notice the variety of social encounters in which identity is realised, a variety which in turn may well be reflected in the range of stories that we may tell about ourselves and the number of characters from such stories that may 'inhabit' us. This 'narrative multiplicity' provides a stability equivalent to that of narrative unity and while there may be situations in which such multiple narratives can be examined for their consistency with one another, there are other occasions in which such comparisons cannot be made. Individuals in contemporary society are likely to be involved in a wide range of social relationships and this may require them to use a range of locally appropriate narrative forms. Here it is noticeable that Gergen's view contrasts directly with that of earlier humanists and writers in sociology who generated a critique of modern society on the grounds that its institutional structure provided for an unwanted multiplicity at the expense of an inherent and universal human need for unified identities.[1]

Gergen also makes the intriguing suggestion that we are wrong to think that narrative is a way of giving shape to our otherwise disorganised memories of experiences and events. Rather, we should consider the way that memory itself is organised through narrative. It is the story, he argues, that determines which prior events, actions and experiences are regarded as important to one's identity. In his empirical study of the narrative accounts of identity given by American adolescents (reported in Gergen and Gergen, 1988, and Gergen, 1994),

he describes their common use of an identity narrative in which their lives are portrayed as moving from the happiness of childhood, then encountering and overcoming the difficulties of adolescence, and then – at the time of interview – reporting positive feelings about the realisation of their immediate futures. This common narrative form and content was not reflected in the reporting of common events as regularly remembered by Gergen's subjects. Rather, he suggests, the young people had 'used the available narrative form and employed whatever "facts" they could to justify and vivify their selection' (Gergen, 1994: 201). Such an observation reminds us of Gergen's assertion of historical shifts in the cultural availability of narratives. Elsewhere he has provided an account of the history of identity narratives paying particular attention to contemporary culture (Gergen, 1991), and he has also described the ways in which historical shifts have implications for which components of narrative constructions may be preferred. There are general features that constitute 'well-formed' narratives such as: the importance of the inclusion of positively or negatively valued outcomes, the provision of temporal ordering, the establishment of causal linkages between events, and the clear demarcation of the beginning and end of narrative sequences. However, Gergen notes that only some occasions of telling or hearing seem to demand of participants the application of these criteria. On other occasions, more flexible, reflexive and ironic versions of identity narratives – narratives that fit more postmodern sensibilities – may be preferred, or at least accepted.

It is clear that Gergen does not see culturally available narratives as directly determining individual identities but rather as providing resources for the negotiation of identity issues within social relationships: 'it is through interacting with others that we acquire narrative skills, not through being acted upon' (Gergen, 1994: 188). While narratives are 'interwoven within the culture', they are only brought to life by their use in dialogue between individuals, and it is social relationships that constitute the arena in which such dialogues take place and in which narrative identities are instantiated by and for persons. Gergen discusses several features of these relationship 'contextures', and their relevance to the selection and performance of narrative identities. The most important is that different kinds of narrative may serve different functions for individuals in particular relationships. He describes three of them (Gergen, 1994: 188–209):

1. 'Stable narratives', in which an individual's identity is seen to be coherent and consistent over time. These convey the assurance of continuity and commitment in both personal and more formal relationships.
2. 'Progressive narratives', in which positive changes in one's identity are provided for, albeit underpinned by a degree of inherent stability in which narrative identities are embedded. Gergen suggests that such narratives are often the favoured form for the telling of identities when relationships are beginning.
3. 'Regressive narratives', in which an individual's commitment to another person or to a task is rendered as diminishing, or his abilities are portrayed as being in decline or under attack in some way. Here the narrative format can function 'to compensate or seek improvement', so that the decline can be accommodated or resisted and the relationship restructured along these lines.

Gergen's insistence on the significance of relationships in the determination of narrative identities reminds us that any narrative configuration of self necessarily implicates others in the story. Action descriptions in narrative require the actual or implied presence of other actors as listeners. As Gergen (1994: 188) puts it: 'self-narrative is a linguistic implement embedded within conversational sequences of action and employed in relationships in such a way as to sustain, enhance, or impede various forms of action'.

A number of other studies have joined those of Gergen in the attempt to provide equivalently dialogical understandings of the role of narrative in identity formation. Schrag (1997: 37) comments on the problems involved in separating narrative form from its realisation in specific discursive contexts: 'We have to stick to the "between" – between the objectification of speech acts on the one hand and the abstractions and reifications of structuralist narratology on the other'. In addition, Shotter (1993) has also criticised a purely hermeneutic approach to narrative on the grounds of its failure to attend to the role of the circumstances and context in which actions take place. He claims that hermeneutic versions of narrative achieve orderliness though decontextualisation and in this way suggest a 'counterfeit' smoothness to our life stories which belie the 'not wholly orderly, practical living of our lives' (Shotter, 1993: 128). Commenting on Robert Fraser's (1984) account of his own psychoanalysis and the narrative nature of that analysis, Shotter argues that Fraser found himself being 'able to draw upon the fragments of his own past as and when he pleased, as practical-moral resources, to re-collect from then enablements (and constraints) of moment by moment relevance in judging how at present to best proceed in the realisation of who he felt he should be in the future' (Shotter, 1993: 129).

In his description of Fraser's account, Shotter is able to show us in a detailed way just how it is that the occasioning of a narrative participates in determining its form. It is not a simple matter of telling an abstract truth about one's life in such a story; it is more a matter of telling a story about oneself that is appropriate and true for the context of its occasioning. Shotter goes on to argue that it is not that individuals search for a 'proper' narrative, but that the construction of their identity in narrative is both occasioned and shaped by an immediate context. Narratives are to be understood as instruments for doing things, not ways of thinking about ourselves, or even ways of organising what we wish to say about such thoughts. As told stories they have to be understood in context and according to the relevance of their production:

> *the 'I' who at any one moment we are, is poised in that tense bridging position (the 'present' moment), and must link an indefinite number of remembered episodes from that present point of view, while being oriented to a future project, while – and it is this that we all forget – also noticing what is made available to us by way of the new opportunities in our current circumstances.*
> (Shotter, 1993: 129)

Haraway (Haraway and Bhavnani, 1994: 21) has also argued for the necessity to locate an understanding of narrative within a consideration of action rather than as a representation of the inner reality of personal identity,

commenting that 'identity is always a relational category' embedded in both stories and the encounters in which they are told. Such stories are collaborative co-productions of self and others rather than simply tellings of self: 'I've been playing around with the idea of cat's cradle, the making of string figures? I think of cat's cradle as a very interesting image for passing back and forth the patterns. You can build some of them yourself, but on the whole you can't, because you need more than two hands' (Haraway and Bhavnani, 1994: 24). So for Haraway, as for Shotter, it is not simply that identity is a matter of narrativity, or that building a self is just like writing a (docile) text, but that identity is a matter of the telling and hearing of narrative, of issuing and responding to narrative, where such processes are interactional accomplishments, not just oral versions of written text.

Self and other

These more dynamic understandings of narrative prompt further consideration of the relationship between self and other in the construction of identity, whether this construction is formulated in narrative terms or more generally. Hegel's account of subjectivity and identity was concerned to overcome previous accounts of self-sustaining subjects in which no attention was given to the relevance of their relationship with others. Such subjects cannot be transformed in and through communication with others since 'I am already securely given to myself prior to interaction and all that can be at stake in the latter is success or failure in realising my antecedently established ends' (Dunne, 1995: 139). But it was precisely this kind of understanding of self and identity that Hegel's work set out to oppose, and in this section of this chapter I want to consider some studies in the human sciences that have taken their bearings from readings of that work. There has of course been one tradition of work, particularly influenced by Kojève's reading of Hegel, in which the presence of others is understood as threatening and problematic, and where identity is achieved only through antagonism towards others. Sartre (1969) and Lacan (1977), for example, both consider others to be a threat because they judge us, and the effort to achieve the recognition of another has the effect of merely subjecting us to their judgement. For Sartre, the impenetrability of others arises from the fact that we can experience them only as objects – there can be no experience of them as subjects since the very fact that they are other than ourselves means that their experience is separate from, beyond our own: to understand another is to destroy their otherness. Noonan describes Sartre's interpretation of 'the look' which heavily emphases his version of the ineradicable duality present in the relationship between self and other:

> *Either I am an object for the Other, or, in order to escape the condition of being an object, I attempt to apprehend the Other as an object and thereby to re-apprehend myself as a free subject. Either I am a slave or I am a master. Therefore 'conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others'.*
> (Noonan, 1989: 52–3)

Despite the influence of such claims, however, there have also been more positive understandings of the role of dialogue and interaction in the formation

of identity positioned by reference to Hegel, though departing from some features of his work. Bakhtin (1968, 1981, 1984) has emerged as a major figure who provides resources for a revision of the human science tradition in which otherness has been defined as antagonistic and negative with respect to self. Bakhtin's rejection of Hegel's dialectics of human subjectivity – which he argued was only 'monological' – is central to this revision. This deficiency was to be repaired by the substitution of a 'dialogue of culture' in place of Hegel's 'dialectics of nature'. For Bakhtin, society precedes individuality just as intersubjectivity precedes subjectivity, and language is called on to play a central role in this argument: language is a 'constitutively intersubjective' phenomenon. He argues that it is impossible to conceive of any being outside of the relations that link it to the other: 'constantly and intensely, we oversee and apprehend the reflections of our life in the plane of the consciousness of other men' (Bakhtin, quoted Todorov, 1984: 94). The other, then, is necessary to accomplish a grasp of the self and its identity that would otherwise be partial at best. We are not self-sufficient beings and while we can find secondary substitutes for the other as we look in the mirror, spell out our own narratives, or paint our own portrait, these are derivative activities modelled on the primary recognition and formative activity of the other. For Bakhtin (1984: 310), self consciousness is possible only when individuals reveal themselves 'to another, through another and with another's help'. Instead of the image of the sovereign self secure within its own territory, Bakhtin prefers analogies of the borderland and the permeable boundary:

> *To be means to be for the other and through him, for oneself. Man has no internal sovereign territory: he is all and always on the boundary; looking within himself he looks in the eyes of the other or through the eyes of the other. I cannot do without the other; I cannot become myself without the other; I must find myself in the other, finding the other in me in mutual reflection and perception.*
> (Bakhtin, 1984: 311–12)

The linguistic constitution of subjectivity and self consciousness is also unavoidably dialogical for Bakhtin in that the utterance is always 'the product of the interaction of the interlocutors and broadly speaking the product of the whole complex social situation in which it has occurred' (Bakhtin, quoted in Todorov, 1984: 30). This fact – that utterances are found only in dialogue – is used by Bakhtin to mount a critique of Freud, whose interpretations of patients' language ignored the location of their talk within specific dialogical occasions. We have to look to the context of the therapeutic encounter and to the social dynamics of the relationship between analyst and patient in order to understand the sources of the accounts that patients give. We should not understand these accounts to be the true story of their inner lives, which it has become possible for them to reveal only with the help of such an expert; instead we should see that patient and therapist simply project into 'unconsciousness' elements of their situated relationship. The image of the individual in Bakhtin's account is that of 'an entity that is impelled in an existential sense to engage in a series of communicative acts with other selves' (Gardiner, 1996: 30). Since our own selves are the product of such engagements, then the intersubjective – or dialogical – basis of individual identity is derived from and sustains 'a relationship of mutuality, shared responsibility or answerability and unsolicited concern between human beings' (Gardiner, 1996: 31).

Plummer's (1995) *Telling Sexual Stories* is concerned with the ways in which narrative accounts of sexual identities are constructed by individual actors, the resources that are drawn on for their construction, and the uses made of such narratives within contemporary politics of identity and intimacy. His account emphasises that such stories are a constitutive element of joint social actions. He also pays particular attention to the way in which such narratives are deployed in the process of community formation, within which individuals with similar sexual stories to tell find and form identities in common with others. Three different types of groups can be seen to be implicated in these processes of construction and deployment, which he describes as follows:

1. 'producers, tellers and performers' – those who directly provide such narratives in autobiographies or diaries (or have their narratives collected by others), and those who enact narrative understandings in performing bodies;
2. 'coaxers, coaches and coercers' – those who solicit narrative accounts from others, including counsellors, therapists, talk-show hosts and researchers like himself;
3. 'consumers, readers and audiences' of these accounts – those casual recipients of media accounts, those who study them and those who are concerned with such accounts as part of their professional practice.

All of these three groups are involved in the negotiation of the meaning of narrative sexual identities, since for Plummer (1995: 22) narrative meanings are 'never fixed but emerge out of a ceaselessly changing stream of interaction between producers and readers in shifting contexts'. His understanding of the development of these narratives stresses the changing social contexts in which they emerge, but also the social contexts that are constituted and changed through their reiteration and reformulation. Narratives are not simply resources within culture; culture is partly defined by the form and content of the narratives that inhabit it:

> *for narratives to flourish there must be a community to hear; for communities to hear there must be stories which weave together their history, their identity, their politics. The one – community – feeds upon and into the other – story.*
> (Plummer, 1995: 87)

This extended – and productive – use of a narrative conception of identity is located within Plummer's overall symbolic interactionist perspective. For him, narration is a part of a larger understanding of self work – of a concern with how selves are built and what is done with them within the variety of practical actions that make up the symbolic order in which we live. Such work continues to be informed by notions of an interior substantive self of some kind – albeit one which has been formed in dialogue, in relationships with others, in interaction, and all of this through its capacity to integrate the perspective of others and to internalise features of pre-existing identities into its own self

conception. The Hegelian elements in this image stand out clearly as they remind us of the significance for identity of the recognition of others and the validation of that recognition within ourselves. In some ways, as Kellner (1992: 142) argues, this is self consciousness coming into its own in modernity. This is no citadel self, but it remains represented as a subject who retains a significant inner core in which its identity is located.

Identity as interactional accomplishment

Within sociology it has been the pragmatist tradition of James (1890), Dewey (1925) and Mead (1929,1934) that has done most to encourage us to see that individuals have to be understood as both acting subjects and objects of their own and others' attention, and that this structuring of experience is a necessary feature of the way in which identities are accomplished. Mead found it useful to give names to these two orientations of subjectivity – the 'I' and the 'Me' – although he was careful to remind us that the names do not refer to substantive objects but serve only to provide a way to approach the description of the processes that constitute us as fully human and social beings. Mead's pragmatist self is 'dialogical, both interpersonally and internally' (Wiley, 1994a: 139) and it portrays individuals as both socially determined and subjectively directed through dialogue. Once again an intellectual relationship to Hegel's account of the self and its identity is a feature of these studies, although the relationship is a partial and nuanced one. Wiley (1994b) argues that Dewey and Mead developed their own understanding of the dynamic nature of self and identity formation by setting Hegelian accounts of the unfolding of the human spirit in history against Darwinian accounts of the process of natural selection in which biological variation was seen to be subject to an evolutionary process. In place of these, argues Wiley, they proposed an account which avoided biological reductionism while conceding the value of an evolutionary framework and adding important elements of reflexive self consciousness into an understanding of a process of evolution as it applies to individual conduct. The relationship between self and other, and the formation of identity arising from and reflected in this relationship, is described in a vocabulary of 'adaptation', 'response to resistance', 'manipulation of the environment' and 'emergence'.

All of these ideas find a place in Mead's version of self as a matter of process, not substance. The process here involves the operation of awareness and adjustment, especially awareness of one's own conduct and adjustment of that conduct in response to natural and social circumstances. This understanding is expressed by Mead (1934: 173) as follows: 'The essence of the self ... is cognitive: it lies in the internalised conversation of gestures which constitutes thinking, or in terms of which thought or reflection proceeds. And hence the origin and foundation of the self, like those of thinking, are social'. The Hegelian elements of this approach are clear. For Mead, there may be consciousness in the absence of other people, but there cannot be self consciousness. The requirement that people become objects to themselves depends not on direct experience, but on the indirect experience they have of themselves as objects of attention. Scheffler (1974) points out that the claim that such 'objectification' of the individual is possible only in and through interaction is paralleled in the

assertion of the internalisation of communication – the ability to have a conversation with oneself being the predominant way in which 'the individual is an object to himself, and so far as I can see, the individual is not a self in the reflexive sense unless he is an object to himself' (Scheffler, 1974: 124).

An important term in this approach to the formation of self and identity is that of 'gesture'. Gestures are essentially social phenomena since they co-ordinate behaviour between those who make and those who receive them. Thayer (1968) writes of them as social not only in this sense, but also in the sense that they have to be 'significant' before they fully possess sociality. Miller (1973) gives an account of Mead's two kinds of gesture: the 'non-significant gesture' and the 'significant gesture'. Such 'non-significant gestures' may be parts of a social act, but they do not evoke shared meanings amongst the individuals copresent. On the other hand 'significant' gestures (of which language symbols are the main example) are of more interest to Mead, since these are the kinds of gestures required for self consciousness. The 'possession' of a self and its identity depends on the intersubjective deployment of such significant gestures. We have to think of mind and the self as arising in and through the exchange of gestures rather than thinking of such exchanges as being the product of minds and selves, and Mead provided a developmental account of the process of self formation which took into account the deployment of such significant gestures. In the course of this account he sought to develop the idea of the 'generalised other' whose attitudes were incorporated into the self as an essential feature of identity formation. In particular he distinguished between the role of play and the role of games in the development of the generalised other – and thus of the development of self identity. Early play in childhood takes the form of performing the roles of particular others – the mother, the father, etc. – and such play requires the child to have an awareness of the other, although there is no reflective thinking and the play is without rules, being concerned only with performance. Mead goes on to distinguish play from games by asserting that in games, problems are set and behaviour is directed towards ends to be arrived at within a rule-governed context. For the individual player:

> *each one of his own acts is determined by his assumption of the action of others who are playing the game. What he does is controlled by his being everyone else on that team, at least insofar as those attitudes affect his own particular response. We get then an 'other' which is an organisation of the attitudes of those involved in the same process.*
> (Mead, 1934: 154)

Mead's famous formulation of the 'I' and the 'Me' can be better understood against the background of these ideas about self and other. Thayer (1968) comments that the distinction between the 'I' and the 'Me' served to 'explain and elaborate the fact of two evident aspects and interchangeable roles of the self: we not only act and respond to our own actions as others respond, we also often respond to the fact that we respond to our activities. We are aware at times that we are observing ourselves' (Thayer, 1968: 258–9). While the 'Me' is the social empirical self, 'that self which is able to maintain itself in the community, that is recognised in the community in so far as it recognised the other' (Mead, 1934: 196), identity is not derived only from this component of

the process of the self. This would reduce identity to a collection of social roles or functions and we would have no way of understanding the 'internalised conversation' necessary for the production and deployment of such role performances.

Mead writes about the 'I' as the other party making up this necessary 'conversation' of the self, a party that provides organisation without itself being organised. This 'I' for Mead is understood as immediate experience, as spontaneous and impulsive, as uncontrolled yet controlling. The 'I' can never be given a clear definition and it has no specific structure or content; it can never be brought to consciousness, since all attempts to represent the 'I' necessarily objectivise it, and in the act of objectification, the 'I' simply becomes a 'Me'. However, Mead's attribution of these properties to the 'I' as a feature of the human self does not require it to be treated as a presocial or otherwise natural property of the person. The 'I', just like the 'Me', emerges only through the thoroughly social phenomenon of language, and in this way its roots are socially embedded. If we remember that for Mead, the self is a process not a structure, then the 'I' is simply that which confronts and interrogates the 'Me'; it is the internal coconversationalist to which the 'Me' attends and responds. It is important to realise just how much stress Mead puts on the idea that the whole of this process of the self, and the 'I' and the 'Me' as elements which structure this process, is the product of social interaction and not a condition of it. He summarises this claim particularly clearly when he writes that:

> *I want to be sure that we see that the content put into mind is only a development and product of social interaction. It is a development which is of enormous importance, and which has led to complexities and complications of society which go almost beyond our power to trace, but originally it is nothing but the taking over of the attitude of the other.*
> (Mead, 1934: 191)

The individual is a thoroughgoing social product when viewed from the perspective of pragmatism, and individual identity is constituted in and through group life. But it is also important to note that, however much individuality is seen to derive from sociality, this derivation is described dynamically – as an active and intersubjective process – not as the product of a structural determination. While the general form of selves and identities are socially derived, the specific content of identities are not subject to determination by others. Spontaneity and freedom are as much social products as are repetition and obedience and the working out of this agency lies firmly within the orbit of each human subject. Individuals anticipate and respond to the judgements of others as they form, maintain, modify and defend their sense of who they are, but these anticipations and responses are the product of interpretative activities, not of a mechanism of stimulus followed by response.

In a long series of studies first published during the period 1959–68, Erik Erikson (1963, 1964, 1980, 1994) has also contributed to such mutualist understandings of identity by attaching to Freud's account of identity formation a vocabulary of cultural scripts and social frameworks, an attachment which has given a psychodynamic model of identity a stronger sense of the complexity of social context. Defining identity as 'the ability to maintain inner sameness

and continuity', Erikson (1994: 19) aimed to add a social dimension to psychoanalysis and thus was concerned to introduce into a psychoanalytical account, an understanding of the significance of the interaction between the individual and the collective. He was critical both of Freud's relatively closed version of the person and his romantic tendency to see man as psychologically alone and opposed to others. Instead of this, Erikson (1994: 22) describes a process of identity formation as being located both 'in the core of the individual' and 'in the core of his communal culture'. Since 'societies create the only conditions under which human growth is possible', identity has to be recognised not as a psychological achievement but as a psychosocial one. As Holzner and Robertson (1980) point out, the idea of the individual growing into or acquiring an identity directs attention both to the issue of the socialisation of individuals into such identities and also provides a model against which each individual's effort at such personal growth may be evaluated as having been more or less successful. Erikson valorises the ideal of an individual who has 'found' or 'realised' their personal identity and he characterises those individuals with such well-formed identities as 'mature and consistent' in their actions.

Erikson was especially critical of any accounts of the formation of personal identity that predicated the significance of an external environment to each individual's functioning, yet failed to provide a detailed description of the nature of such an environment (simply characterising it as an undifferentiated 'Umwelt'). He argued that the 'outerworld of the ego' is made up of the egos of other people and he wrote of a 'mutual affirmation' in which the individual is recognised and activated and in turn recognises and activates others. At the same time, however, it is clear that Erikson's own understanding of identity includes as a central element, reference to an individual's – conscious or unconscious – striving to a wholeness or unity of 'personal character', as well as a concern with the individual's alignment with the ideals and characteristics of particular social groups, those either positively or negatively 'chosen' by the individual. In *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, first published in 1968, he famously comments that:

> *identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him.*
> (Erikson, 1994: 22–3)

However, it is obvious here that despite an emphasis on the interactional formation of identities, or on an expanded understanding of the interactional environment in which identity is constructed or found, at the end of the day, approaches like those of Erikson and the pragmatists before him, retain a strong commitment to the central idea of internal cognitive processes for understanding what identity is and why it matters. Even where it is asserted that those processes are made possible and conditioned by interaction and a shared language, they remain described in an essentially mentalist vocabulary.[2] Some studies have

attempted to deal with these problems by moving away from a cognitive explication of the achievement and deployment of identity in interaction and towards a more detailed and nuanced behavioural account of these matters.

Goffman's treatment of identity, for example, places much less emphasis on the part played by individual subjects in the accomplishment of their own identities, and much more on the ways that generic normative requirements and local institutional arrangements constitute selves and their identities for those who act within them. For Goffman, individuals and their identities have to be 'given place' in local social environments, and throughout his work he reminds us that it is the normative requirements and patterning of interaction in such environments that provide the templates for the construction of self and identity. One of the most striking expressions of this underlying assertion is found in his essay on 'face work' in which he suggests that we think of the idea of universal human nature as a particular kind of social construct and that while 'the general capacity to be bound by moral rules may well belong to the individual ... the particular set of rules which transforms him into a human being derives from requirements established in the ritual organisation of social encounters' (Goffman, 1967: 45). Goffman's emphasis on the significance of such local arrangements for identity construction is particularly visible in one of his essays on the situation of mental hospital patients, in which he comments that 'the self arises not merely out of its possessors' interactions with significant others, but also out of the arrangements that are evolved in an organisation for its members' (1968a: 139). Near the end of the same essay he adds the assertion that:

> *The self in this sense is not a property of the person to whom it is attributed, but dwells rather in the pattern of social control that is exerted in connection with the person by himself and those around him. This special kind of institutional arrangement does not so much support the self as constitute it.*
> (Goffman, 1968a: 154)

For Goffman, a required 'decentering' of the common understanding of the self involves setting aside the 'warming fact' that people in interaction with others clearly have unique and differentiated identities, and instead examining the 'principled ways in which such personal histories are given place and the framework of normative understandings this implies' (Goffman, 1981b: 62). However, despite his focus on the social provision of identity frameworks, Goffman remains too much of an interactionist to endorse an understanding of identity that dispenses with all consideration of subjectivity. Throughout his work Goffman refers to a 'two-sidedness' in issues of self and identity – the relationship between 'subjective matters' and their 'objective traces'. His concept of 'moral career' expresses the tension of this two-sidedness, for here he is concerned to develop an idea that will link together 'what matters to the individual' (most particularly 'felt identity') with issues of social institutions and public settings.

Greenwood (1994: 110) commends the notion of moral career on the grounds that it does serve to locate individual identity matters within a collectivity 'of which the agent is a member', while providing for the possibility

of giving detailed treatment to the ways in which individuals manage this membership, a commendation based on Goffman's (1968a: 119) own claim that the idea 'allows one to move back and forth between the personal and the public, between the self and its significant society'. Goffman's concern here is to free the analyst from reliance on what actors report of their own identities, so that it is unnecessary to 'rely overly for data upon what the person says he thinks he imagines himself to be' (1968a: 119) – a remark which is particularly interesting since it suggests very clearly just how difficult Goffman takes the question of accessing individual subjectivity to be. He seems to imply the presence of four identity matters here, each of which is difficult to penetrate:

1. what the individual says;
2. what the individual thinks;
3. what the individual imagines;
4. what the individual 'is'.

Each of these is nested inside the issue that precedes it. Indeed, we know from what Goffman has written elsewhere that the deepest term in the collection – being, or 'to be' – is itself subject to further complex divisions. For Goffman, we experience such essential complexities of layering in dealing with our own and others' identity matters. In his famous discussion of 'secondary adjustments' in prisons, mental hospitals and other 'total institutions', for example, he argues that such layering is all that preserves the possibility of authentic action on the part of the inmate, since in such places 'we always find the individual employing methods to keep some distance, some elbow room, between himself and that with which others assume he should be identified' (Goffman, 1968a: 279).

The framework for Goffman's consideration of how identity comes to matter in face-to-face relationships is provided in his account of the 'interaction order' defined as 'that which uniquely transpires in social situations, that is environments in which two or more individuals are physically in one another's response presence' (Goffman, 1983: 2). Participants in interaction, argues Goffman, need to both discern and determine the relevance of an indefinite number of identity features amongst those copresent:

> *The subjective weighting of a large number of social attributes, whether these attributes are officially relevant or not, and whether they are real or fanciful, provides a micro-dot of mystification; covert value given, say, to race, can be mitigated by covert value given to other structural variables – class, gender, age co-memberships, sponsorship network – structures which at best are not fully congruent with each other. And structural attributes, overtly or covertly employed, do not mesh fully with personal ones, such as health and vigour, or with properties that have all their existence in social situations – looks, personality and the like.*
> (Goffman, 1983: 15)

Goffman did not want to reduce the whole of the social world to the workings only of this order – he refers both to 'structural variables' and to personal attributes, neither of which are wholly constituted by this order. In a

reply to a critique of his work by Denzin and Kellner, Goffman (1981b) described himself as no 'rampant' situationalist and argued that it was inappropriate to treat the order of interaction as the *ex nihilo* creation of coparticipants independent of wider historical and social arrangements. In earlier work Goffman had been attentive to the 'reality' of social structure while limiting its significance to the provision of a series of resources for the organisation and accomplishment of joint action. With regard to issues of identity, the question was always how structural attributes and other resources were put to work by participants and 'the value placed on these attributes as they are acknowledged in the situation current and at hand' (Goffman, 1964: 133). While a large number of 'externally grounded properties' are potentially available to people in the course of interaction, these 'must be melded to the internal, coupled in some way, if only to be systematically disattended' (Goffman, 1981b: 193).

These general ideas of his can be seen at work in 'The arrangement between the sexes' (Goffman, 1977). In this essay, while describing the situated expressive display of gender difference, he introduces the idea of 'institutional reflexivity' to express his view that beliefs in the biological basis of gender identity, and not biology itself, have to be seen as underpinning the arrangement for honouring and procuring such identity differences, rather than their consequence:

> *It is not, then, the social consequences of innate sex differences that must be explained, but the way in which these differences were (and are) put forward as a warrant for our social arrangements, and, most important of all, the way in which the institutional workings of society ensured that this accounting would seem sound ... In all one is faced with what might be thought of as 'institutional reflexivity' – a newish phrase for an old social anthropological doctrine.*
> (Goffman, 1977: 302)

Goffman argues that we could 'ask what could be sought out from the environment or put into it so that such innate differences between the two sexes that there are could count for something' (Goffman, 1977: 313), and the bulk of his essay is devoted to describing the way in which aspects of mundane social organisation confirm both common beliefs about gender identity and the propriety of the arrangement between members of the two sex-classes. While describing some instances in detail (aspects of work organisation, socialisation, toileting arrangements and 'identification systems'), he also seeks to show the general ways in which social arrangements make relevant, elaborate and stabilise biological difference – arrangements which do not derive from the facts of a non-social environment but constitute those facts to which arrangements merely seem to respond. It is a matter of staging scenes for identity performances rather than socialising nature: 'work[ing] situations for what can be found in them', not 'the expression of natural difference but the production of that difference' (Goffman, 1977: 324). Here Goffman describes the 'dialogical performance of identity' in which coparticipants in interaction exchange ritual symbols necessary for the full portrayal of the nature of human subjects.

His overall characterisation of the relationship between an orientation to identity within the interaction order on the one hand and the facts of both individual biographies and categorical identities on the other is that of the 'loose coupling' that links together interactional practices, structural features and individual identities. This loose coupling can, depending on the nature of the occasion, mean that one categorical identity rather than another may become relevant, that several categories may be recombined into one, or that a more specific identity relevant only to the local order of interaction itself becomes of major concern. It is a matter of 'gearing structures into interactional cogs', and of determining which structural or individual identities will be brought into play within structures which express specifically interactional matters:

> *The expressions themselves, such as priority in being served, precedence through a door, centrality of seating, access to various public places, preferential interruption rights in talk, selection as addressed recipient, are interactional in substance and in character; at best they are likely to have only loosely coupled relations to anything by way of social structures that might be associated with them. They are sign vehicles fabricated from depictive materials at hand and what they come to be taken as a reflection of is necessarily an open question.'*
> (Goffman, 1983: 14)

Goffman's assertions concerning the 'relatively autonomous' nature of the interaction order in general have been subjected to criticism by Giddens and others,[3] but regardless of these, his work does provide us with both the rationale and the imaginative resources for the close study of social situations – and with the realisation of identity matters within them. He also firmly focuses our attention on the ways in which identity matters are problematic for the pragmatic interests of participants as well as for the theoretical interests of social analysts. In his account of the management of 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1968b), he shows the ways in which individuals whose 'true' identities are currently unknown to those with whom they interact can seek to control the availability of information about themselves, and also the ways in which they manage interaction with others once such true identities are revealed. Although the specific site of these inquiries is concerned with those individuals who have attributes that are 'deeply discrediting' – what used to be referred to as 'abnormalities' of identity – Goffman is quick to point out that all the issues he is concerned with are issues of relationships, not specific attributes of the person as such. In some ways the whole study can be read as a concrete instantiation of the Hegelian concern with 'recognition' as a feature of identity matters, except that in Goffman's case, recognition is treated as 'one individual's part in a communication ceremony' rather than as an essential feature of identity formation and maintenance.

Conclusion

Conceptions of identity as a narrative construction and as interactional achievement provide the possibility of a more dynamic and socially situated understanding of identity formation than do the approaches described in earlier chapters. In particular they have offered a general understanding of why identity is important to sociological accounts of individual and collective action, as well as how identity matters may be formulated within such accounts. However,

it has also been argued (e.g. by Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995, and Widdicombe, 1998) that the commitment of such studies to the production and application of general *theories* of identity has meant that their examinations of the detailed ways in which identity matters arise and are dealt with within particular social interactions are allowed to be structured wholly by those theoretical interests. In doing so, they may have limited the scope of their inquiries and failed to notice the way in which a range of identity matters are addressed and dealt with in such mundane settings. The nature of this shortcoming may be better understood by considering – in the next chapter – the suggestion that all sociological accounts tend to exhibit the same general feature.

Notes

1 See especially Gergen (1991).

2 A good example of this is Shotter's (1981: 274) comment that 'people, unaware of doing so, construct worlds of meaning between themselves in the course of social interaction and in so doing determine the form of their own consciousness'. See Coulter (especially 1989) for an excellent and detailed treatment of these matters.

3 A useful guide to the secondary literature is Lemert and Branaman (1997), and the multivolume collection of such material edited by Gary Fine and Greg Smith (2000).

Chapter 6
Respecifying identity

Introduction

In the three preceding chapters I have been concerned with the ways in which sociologists and other practitioners of the human sciences have formulated a variety of theoretical understandings of identity matters, understandings that were both derived from and sought to modify or abandon one or more of several prior accounts of the metaphysics of identity. The common rationale for these theoretical developments and innovations was an argument for the necessary production of theory and research capable of recognising and illuminating the essential and ineradicably social character of the phenomenon of identity. The details of exactly what was meant by reference to such an essential and ineradicable social character was subject to variation. For some, it was sufficient to note the significance of the changing social contexts within which generic psychodynamic processes of identity formation were activated and conditioned. Some emphasised the observation that social structures provided a series of templates or positions with prespecified roles, values and identities, and thus located within the collectivity what had previously been treated as the product of the self interrogation of the individual in the construction of identity. Others asserted that the essentially social character of identity was derived from its incontestable origins within linguistic convention, dialogue or the dynamics of interaction.

Despite their differences – and their assertions about what identity 'really is' – all of these attempts share a common family feature: their work is governed by a dual interest in the significance of identity both as a naturally occurring topic (as something that can be seen to matter to ordinary actors) and as a resource to be deployed for the theoretical ordering of conduct (as such conduct is observed and/or imagined by themselves as analysts). This dual interest encourages analysts to make general reference to the understandings of the subjects of their enquiries, while establishing no particular necessity for the direct and detailed examination of the *in situ* deployment of such understandings. Moreover it also presumes the likelihood of the eventual displacement of such lay understandings (which may be represented as 'contradictory', 'ideological', and so forth) by the theoretical reasoning and methodological practice of the analyst, these skills being better suited to the construction of abstract generic accounts of social phenomena.

Such interests and presuppositions are part of the stock-in-trade of professional sociology. The classical sociological tradition comprised a series of critical accounts of the cultural and social features of the transition from premodern to modern societies in which it was common to assert knowledge of large-scale historical and social dynamics unrealised, or misunderstood, by the lay social actors that inhabit them. At the same time, however, most of those constructing such critical accounts – especially Marx, Weber and Durkheim –

expected them to have practical as well as scholarly relevance and consequence. Marx's concept of 'false consciousness', Weber's critique of 'rationalisation' and Durkheim's account of the 'true' nature of moral individualism not only furnished evidence of disciplinary potential, they also provided practical criticism of contemporary social arrangements. Such an image of the role of sociology lasted well into the second half of the twentieth century, and was given clear and influential expression in Wright Mills' term 'the sociological imagination' – the title of his book first published in 1959. For Mills, sociology was necessarily concerned with both the understanding of collective social formations and individual social actors, but the self understanding of such actors was conceived as limited and faulty, as this extract from *The Sociological Imagination* illustrates:

> *Seldom aware of the intricate connexion between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary men do not usually know what this connexion means for the kinds of men they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part.*
> (Mills, 1970: 12)

However, Mills also asserted that 'ordinary men', being aware of their own ignorance, want an adequate means of knowing the wider social and historical realities in which they may find the nature and origins of their private troubles. The contribution of 'the sociological imagination' to such a growth in self consciousness is fruitful and positive, based as it is on 'an absorbed realisation of social relativity and of the transformative power of history' (Mills, 1970: 14). This promise – of the informative and critical potential of sociology – has provided a useful slogan for a number of theoretical projects. However, few now believe in a version of any of the human sciences in which such disciplines provide, through the application of rigorously scientific methodologies, objective and incontestable correctives to the vulnerabilities of commonsense accounts of individual and collective action.

Instead, it is more conventional for contemporary human science writing to acknowledge the complexities and intricacies of the relationship between specialised disciplinary knowledge, and the beliefs and understandings that are integral to individual and collective action in everyday life. Both Bauman and Giddens have provided accounts of the two-way traffic that moves between human science theorising and lay understandings of social life. For Bauman sociology is best understood as a commentary on the knowledge of everyday life, as a 'self-reflective activity of interpretation and reinterpretation, as an ongoing commentary on the man-centred processes of interplay between relatively autonomous yet partially dependent agents' (Bauman, 1992: 90). Similar ideas inform Giddens' (especially 1974, 1984, 1987) formulation of the 'double hermeneutic' in which he emphasises the interpenetration and mutual influence of two kinds of understanding and their associated conceptual vocabulary – on the one hand, the 'meaningful social world as constituted by actors' and on the other hand the 'second order understanding of social scientists' (Giddens, 1984: 374). In this version of social knowledge, distinctions between lay and professional accounts are permeable (and smudged), although such permeability is productive for advancing the practical relevance of sociological theorising in modern society:

> *Sociology does not and cannot, consist of a body of theory and research built up and kept insulated from its 'subject-matter' – the social conduct of human agents ... Sociological observers depend upon lay concepts to generate accurate descriptions of social processes; and agents regularly appropriate theories and concepts of social science within their behaviour, thus potentially changing its character.*
> (Giddens, 1987: 30)

Singer (1994: ix) captures this permeability when he writes that novel philosophical claims or analyses are 'not only a refraction or redirection of what previous thinkers have asserted but also a contribution to the intellectual and emotional equipment that human beings need order to create meaningful lives for themselves'. All such remarks can serve to remind us of the historicity of the human sciences themselves: the concepts and theories of such sciences have to be understood as the product of historically located individuals and collectivities concerned to understand their own experiences and actions along with the changing contextual backgrounds against which those experiences and actions happen. There are too many detailed descriptions of such historically situated accomplishments to mention here,[1] but Gleason's (1983) account – referred to in Chapter 1 – can stand as a relevant example since it is focused particularly on the growth of interest in the concept of identity both within the human sciences and in the surrounding cultural contexts of those disciplines. In one part of the account, for example, he considers the significant effect of American government interest in the demoralisation of German and Japanese civilians on the development of academic work on 'national character', and therefore 'collective identity', and he also describes the success of particular individuals in providing explanations of important events that were later incorporated into the political and strategic understandings of public figures. In Erikson's case, according to Gleason, this can be seen in the acceptance and use of his psychodynamic description of Hitler's success in both feeding and responding to the 'anxieties and fantasies' of those Germans who experienced the humiliating loss of the First World War.

Yet at the same time, it is widely acknowledged that problems can arise when we try to follow through general and vague assertions about the propriety of sociological 'accounts of social life which differ from those offered by social agents themselves' (Giddens, 1987: 31), especially when these differences relate to issues of self determination and the detailed matters of human agency. If the responsiveness of researchers to the ordinary understandings of human actors is so partial and unstable, then they are unlikely to have any rigorous analytical concern with the degree of symmetry between their own theoretical descriptions of identity matters and the descriptions and understandings of such matters offered by the persons who live and act within the social contexts on which such studies depend. Any commitment to provide a central anchor for human science study in the analysis of ongoing local actions and interactions, what Smith (1996: 173) describes as 'a world of activity, the doings of actual people', is vulnerable to contradiction if it is made alongside a commitment to the development of 'second-order' concepts capable of clarifying, improving or reflecting on just those practical understandings of participants that are deployed in the course of their own activities.

Of course the relationship between theoretical descriptions of social actors and their actions on the one hand, and the local interpretations of specific social actors on the other, has been a matter of long-standing and general concern within the human sciences. Schutz (1962) reminds us that the human scientist has conventionally operated with deliberately 'unrealistic' models of human subjects to whom are ascribed:

> *a set of typical notions, purposes, goals, which are assumed to be invariant in the specious consciousness of the imaginary actor-model. Among these homuncili with which the social scientist populates his model of the social world of everyday life, sets of motives, goals, roles – in general, systems of relevances – are distributed in such a way as the scientific problems under scrutiny require.*
> (Schutz, 1962: 64)

While the accuracy of Schutz's characterisation of the practice of human science reasoning has gone largely unchallenged, his own proposals for the direct investigation of the relevance systems deployed in the course of the commonsense actions of ordinary persons have received a mixed reception. However, recent arguments in the human sciences – partly influenced by Schutz – have suggested the possibility of a radical alternative to the conventional working practice of the human sciences. In this alternative, the methods, resources and relevances of ordinary actors themselves become the primary topic of direct inquiry, and such inquiries typically place particular emphasis on the necessity for the close examination of human actions in the specific contexts of their occurrence, seeking to describe the locally organised social practices of actual people – as matters of 'practical rationality'. A commitment to this radical alternative is the distinctive and common attribute of members of the second family of identity studies that I mentioned in Chapter 1. This family is smaller than the one I have described in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, and the differences between its members are significantly less marked than some of those I have described amongst members of the first family. Nevertheless, there are some internal differences, and these have affected the typical methods and outcomes of a range of studies. The four members in question are:

1. Garfinkel's ethnomethodology;
2. 'conversation analysis';
3. 'discourse analysis';
4. 'postanalytical ethnomethodology'.

I will describe the outlines of the first three of these in this chapter before going on to illustrate their general claims by reference to some specific studies. I will reserve discussion of the last – postanalytical ethnomethodology – until towards the end of the next chapter.

Garfinkel's ethnomethodology

Garfinkel's (1967) 'ethnomethodology' is a programme of work which seeks to study the ways in which human subjects acting in concert with one another produce their own and recognise one another's' 'sensible' and 'accountable' embodied actions and utterances. There are many excellent accounts of this approach which describe its major characteristics and its relationship to previous and contemporary human science studies (e.g. Benson and Hughes, 1983; Heritage, 1984; Sharrock and Anderson, 1986; Button, 1991). Its objective is the provision of empirical descriptive studies of what Garfinkel called 'naturally organised ordinary activity', arguing that it is the production, recognition and organisation of such ordinary activity that constitutes the foundation of social order – what Garfinkel (1967: 1) refers to as the 'locally produced, naturally organised, reflexively accountable phenomena of order'.

It is now conventional for Garfinkel's programme to be described as a 'respecification' of the human sciences (see especially Garfinkel, 1991, 1996; Garfinkel and Wieder, 1992). According to such a respecification, the classical themes and standard vocabulary of the human sciences are treated as 'unexplicated terms' for those locally and naturally occurring social phenomena that are made the objects of disciplinary attention. The adoption of the programme changes how such objects of study in the human science are to be understood. Lynch and Bogen (1996: 273) have described such respecification as a procedure in which any human science concept or problem or method is re-examined as a 'matter of routine local relevance for a particular kind of practical inquiry'. It is expected that this type of re-examination will reveal how it is that social actors deploy any such concept, problem or method in the course of their everyday activity. Under the banner of 'respecification', phenomena described as – for example – 'rules, signs, production, causes, inquiry, evidence, proof, knowledge, consciousness, reason, practical action, comparability, uniformity, reliability, validity, objectivity, observability, detail and structure' (Garfinkel and Wieder, 1992: 177) are to be examined not as philosophical or theoretical problems requiring professional analytical solution, but as the 'mundanely and routinely avowed, ascribed and observably presupposed' phenomena of ordinary social actions.

While access to some of these phenomena traditionally has been seen as a source of special methodological difficulty for sociology, the respecification programme simply requires researchers to examine the ways in which they are deployed as part of the ordinary resources – albeit it contextually contestable resources – of human subjects in the practical circumstances of their everyday lives. Coulter (1989: 59) observes that such seemingly private (even when shared) mental predicates as some of these are, in fact, routinely available and presupposed in the social settings of ordinary life and are not in need of special methods of investigation for their discovery: 'it is not the sociologist's function, qua sociologist, to go about claiming what someone's "true" motives were, nor to assert unambiguously how someone may privately have interpreted some ambiguous situation. This is members' practical business for which they have occasioned, defeasible but public criteria'. The respecification programme asserts that only when we are able to examine the 'complicated and amorphous relevances of everyday usage' can we come to determine the usefulness of the

models and concepts that are the stock-in-trade of human science investigations. In several places, Sharrock and Watson (Watson, 1978, 1992; Sharrock and Watson, 1988) have begun to subject the fundamental agency/structure distinction of sociology to such a respecification. They have examined the practical significance that attaches to such an oppositional distinction on specific occasions of its use: 'In this way it becomes possible to examine what this dualism does when used in occasioned ways by members, for instance, in claiming *force majeure*' (Watson, 1992: 18).[2]

Garfinkel's programme insists on the essentially practical and interactionally endogenous basis for the accomplishment of meaning, action and context by ordinary actors: 'it is through the spontaneous playing out of the sequentially contingent and co-constructed external flow of interactional events that human beings bring these conscious, semiconscious and unconscious internal constructs and potentialities to bear on the constitution, management and negotiation of social reality and social relationships' (Jacoby and Ochs, 1995: 175). Methodologically, then, this approach asserts the necessity of replacing theoretically driven investigations concerning the relationship between individual actions, their co-ordination with others and the contextual location of their occurrence, by direct inspection of how it is that each of these matters is made relevant by the orientations of participants on specific occasions. These general arguments have been applied in greater detail to human science studies of subjectivity and the self by several scholars including Coulter (1985, 1989) and Watson (1998), and more specifically to the study of identity by Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) and several of the contributors to the collections edited by Boden and Zimmerman (1991), Drew and Wootton (1988) and Antaki and Widdicombe (1998).

In a paper especially concerned with the difference between such an ethnomethodological approach and pragmatist/interactionist approaches to consciousness and the self of the kind that I discussed in the last chapter, Rod Watson (1998) lists several features which mark the distinctiveness of the former. The features, regrouped for ease of presentation, are:

- a 'praxiological orientation' to the understanding of issues of consciousness and the self;
- a stress on the 'public availability' of participants' orientations to features of consciousness and the self;
- a concern with the occasioned use of categories of self and identity as embedded in processes of practical reasoning and co-ordinated action.

I will describe these in more detail in the following paragraphs.

'Praxiological orientation' denotes the recommendation that reference to mental predicates and mental processes as features of consciousness or subjective knowledge are studied as they arise for, and are addressed by, individuals in the course of their joint actions. Such phenomena are treated as features of practical logic and practical actions, not as external and free-standing properties against which can be measured the adequacy of specific instances of the use of such logics and actions. Coulter (1985) discussed the example of 'memory' along such lines, arguing that if we take such a praxiological attitude, we notice how

issues of memory and its failures figure in the way that we deal with questions of knowledge claims within interaction. For example '"I forget X" can be used to imply that X was previously known, whereas the ostensibly similar "I don't remember X" need imply no such prior knowledge, making such an expression useful, for example as a courtroom "evasion device"' (Coulter, 1985: 132). In his discussion of this example, Edwards (1997: 283) makes the praxiological point that when we examine the use of mental concepts of this kind in mundane settings we can see that they don't function to express pre-existing cognitive states; rather they carry out one or another bit of interactional work – and he describes Coulter's example as illustrating 'the performative nature of the discourse of mental and intersubjective states'.

Watson also stressed the fact of the 'public availability' of the range of issues that relate to the topic of consciousness and the self as these topics arise and are dealt with in lay and professional understandings. While a good deal of effort has gone into attempts to theorise exactly how the human sciences should deal with the seemingly difficult 'subject–object' properties attributed to concepts such as self and identity, Watson suggests that these can be usefully set to one side in favour of an examination of the ways in which a phenomenon like 'the self' is 'inextricably publicly constituted'. There is, he argues, 'no element of the self per se standing even in part separately from the resources through which it is constituted' (Watson, 1998: 213), and for Watson, these resources are found in ordinary language expressions in situated speech.[3] From this point of view, then, there is little to be gained in engaging in the theoretical struggle over whether the contemporary self is better understood as 'protean' or 'fragmented' or 'narrative' self, since we know that we cannot find such a phenomenon outside of the domain of its discussion. What we can do is turn to an examination of the way that the 'nature and attributes of the self are methodically identified, defined, formulated and contested through action and interaction' (Watson, 1998: 214–15) in specific naturally occurring circumstances.

The third and final item on Watson's list (as I have modified it) refers to the issue of categorisations of self and other, stressing the necessity of examining their occasioned and contextual uses. He treats the issue of the distinction between categories of 'self' and 'other' not as inherent properties of essentially different phenomena, but as occasioned and shifting categories that can be shown to be relevant and oriented-to features of interaction. This is shown, for example, in studies of 'preference organisation' in interaction in which the ordering of actions is determined by conventions concerning whether self-as-speaker or others-as-hearers have the responsibility of dealing with particular practical problems – like those of misunderstanding and mishearing – that frequently arise (see Schegloff *et al.*,1977).

Watson's account of the respecification programme is helpful in establishing the nature of the concerns and assumptions on which the programme builds when it is used to study a number of related aspects of human agency. For instance, it can be easily observed that when individuals attribute or avow an identity they unavoidably do so by selecting and applying one or another category, classification or personal or social typification to the person concerned. Each such category implies a collection of specific features, so that when categories are ascribed or avowed, the collection is assigned to the person or

collectivity in question. The connection between categories and their attributes is an important feature both of the ways that identity matters and that identity categories can be put to work in the course of co-ordinated actions.

Garfinkel's observations on the indexical character of speech and action naturally apply to the application and use of such identity categories, and Widdicombe (in Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998) reminds us that since the choice and significance of identity categories are both sensitive to the context of their use and occasioned by the interests of individuals within it, any analysis and understanding of the workings of such categories has always to attend to these contextualising features. Avowals and ascriptions of category membership are made by participants as expressions of their orientations to those features of identity relevant to them in specific contexts, and we cannot legislate in advance of inspecting the details of these avowals and ascriptions what particular aspects of identity they will make matter. As Drew and Heritage (1992: 21) assert: 'context and identity have to be treated as inherently locally produced, incrementally developed and, by extension, as transformable at any moment'. An attachment to this assertion is designed to constrain the ability of a professional analyst to sustain claims about any general significance that should be attributed to some particular identity category in advance of the close examination of specific occasions. Schegloff is particularly alive to these issues, as can be seen from his (1991) paper 'Reflections on talk and social structure', in which he is concerned with how analysts may legitimately provide characterisations of the identity of persons whose actions in some specific context they are seeking to examine. What matters about the identity of individuals is:

> *Not then just that we see them to be characterisable as 'president/assistant', as 'chicano/black', as 'student/professor', etc. But that, for them, at that moment, those are terms relevant for producing and interpreting conduct in the interaction.*
> (Schegloff, 1991: 51)

Although it may seem that the ground was prepared for this kind of argument by Goffman's remarks on the nature of social situations (discussed in Chapter 5), his form and methods of analysis have not been endorsed by those whose work is located within the respecification programme. From such a perspective, Goffman is seen as insufficiently concerned to preserve and explicate the practical reasoning of actors, and overconcerned to prosecute his theoretically driven analysis of the kinds of competences he argues are involved in the productions of 'performing selves' (Watson, 1992: 12). In addition, his interpretations of action can be difficult to evaluate, sometimes because he fails to provide the detailed records of any naturally occurring events on which such interpretations are based, sometimes because the records he uses are summary in character, sometimes because the examples he offers are constructed by himself, and therefore uniquely fitted to the point he wants to be made of them.

Conversation analysis

If the detailed description of the local production of order has to be controlled by a concern with what can be shown to be the orientations of participants in specific contexts, then many traditional human science ambitions have to be put to one side. Instead, Schegloff (1991: 48) has insisted on the necessity of an analysis 'which departs from and can always be referred to and grounded in the details of actual occurrences of conduct in action'. It can be argued that the approach of 'conversation analysis' has realised Garfinkel's respecification programme by producing detailed studies of the ways that conversationalists co-construct the orderliness of those interactions in which they are present with others, and I introduce it here as the second member of the family of related approaches that propose novel approaches to the study of identity.[4] Conversation analysis seeks to examine routine everyday naturally occurring talk in fine detail, arguing that the natural organisation of social interaction has to be understood as the *in-situ* accomplishment of those who participate in it, and also that it is possible to uncover the regularities of conduct that produce and constitute that orderliness. This approach has focused on the sequential orderliness of interaction and the practical reasoning that such orderliness instantiates, in particular the ways in which tacit knowledge and understanding are embedded in what participants say, and in what they do with their sayings.[5]

Following Garfinkel's lead, Schegloff (1992a) has produced an elegant account of intersubjectivity not as a 'convergence of consciousness' but as co-achieved by individuals through their participation in real-world interactions: 'Intersubjectivity would not then be just convergence between multiple interpretations (whether substantive or procedural) but convergence between "doers" and recipients of action as co-producers of an increment of interactional and social reality' (1992a: 1299). This focus on the essential significance of 'intersubjectively ratified comprehension' (Coulter, 1989) and its relationship to the sequential co-ordination of action amongst participants leads to a treatment of the content, course and context of interaction – as co-constructions of participants – that is quite different from previous approaches to these matters. As Schegloff has pointed out, an observer may choose to summarise or describe and interpret the content, course and context of any specific occasion of interaction in innumerable ways, each of which can be argued to be the appropriate result of the application of a version of the sociological imagination. However, what should matter more than such interpretative propriety is what can be seen – and shown to be seen – to matter to the participants who renew and respond to what for them are the recognisable features that together make up the content, course and context of their actions. Conversation analysis provides a dynamic and recursive understanding in which such actions of human subjects are both shaped by, and in turn renew, the context of their occurrence.

Conversation analysis is a rigorous and empirically focused body of work concerned to describe the detailed working of what, at the beginning of this chapter and using Aristotle's term, I described as practical rationality. It provides not only an approach to the study of situated social action in general, but a set of methods and materials which give empirical shape to the idea of studying identity as a feature of locally occasioned practical actions. This kind of analysis indicates a vastly increased responsiveness to the voice of the human subject – a responsiveness witnessable not only in the substance of the research reports but also in the development of conventions for the representation of such talk-in-interaction as necessarily included in the text and available to readers.

Discourse analysis

The third member of this family of related approaches to the study of identity comprises a set of studies known as 'discourse analysis'.[6] First developed within British social psychology, discourse analysis has been characterised as being concerned with 'the way versions of the world, society, events and inner psychological worlds are produced in discourse', a concern which 'leads to an empirical research focus on participants' constructions and how they are accomplished and undermined' as well as 'a recognition of the constructed and contingent nature of researchers' own versions of the world' (Potter, 1997: 146). Most of those who practise such analysis explicitly align themselves with ethnomethodology and conversation analysis – indeed Edwards ascribes his central working principle, that discourse is a species of social action not communication, to a 'fundamental reconceptualisation' of conversation analysis. Such discourse analysis shares with ethnomethodology and conversation analysis an anticognitive, or at least anti-internalist stance to an understanding of 'subjective' features of human agency (including the view that self categorisation and the categorisation of others can be examined in the same way). As part of this it also shares an interest in the range of uses made of identity categories by participants in interaction, for example to explain their own and others' beliefs and actions. In Edwards' words, an interest in categorisation 'as something we actually do and do things with' (Edwards, 1998: 33). There are accounts of the pragmatics of identity in which 'discourse analysis' and 'conversation analysis' are used, if not interchangeably, then as near-identical twins (e.g. several of the contributors to Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998). And there are also texts on conversation analysis that illustrate central themes in this tradition by reference to discourse analysis studies (e.g. Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998). However, there are also some differences between the two approaches – and these have sometimes occasioned quite sharp debates between particular individuals.[7]

Wooffitt (1992) has described the development of discourse analysis (noting its incorporation of work from previous human science studies of spoken language and literary texts) and compared its main features with those of conversation analysis, noting two important differences. The first of these is that the strictness of the conversation analysis focus on naturally occurring interaction as a source of materials is slackened in the willingness of discourse analysts to supplement it by allowing consideration of interview and focus group data generated by researchers, along with other textual material. The conversation analytic view of the use of such materials is simply that their analysis will be forced to take into account the ways in which the relevance systems of human science and other professionals have been allowed to structure the events as recorded – something which might undermine the spirit, if not the letter, of the respecification programme to which both conversation and discourse analysis seemed to be committed. At the very least, the fact that the proximate context in question comprises answers and questions in an interview, or single and joint comments in a focus group, must be germane to the structure and detail of whatever co-constructions occur.

The second difference highlighted by Wooffitt (1992) is that the attention of conversation analysis to the detailed sequential organisation of conversation can be contrasted – at least to the early – discourse analysis interest in more

generic 'interpretative practices' or 'interpretative repertoires' that were said to underlie specific contextually located accounts and actions.[8] These differences in attention were argued to reflect a discourse analysis orientation to individuals and their 'cultural resources', as contrasted to the conversation analysis orientation to the orderliness of co-constructed interaction. This was certainly something that Schegloff noted and criticised in the early 1980s, but it has been argued by some (e.g. Silverman, 1998) that more recent discourse analysis studies have shown a greater concern with detailed sequential organisation and also that a focus on 'interpretative repertoires' has become less significant. However, while this is true, there remains a greater willingness amongst discourse analysts to supplement the conversation analysis focus on contextual relevances as being only those matters to which participants can be shown to have an orientation with a willingness to incorporate references to some interpretatively relevant 'extra-situational context which draws on wider social, political and cultural institutions and discourses' (Sarangi and Roberts, 1999: 25). Potter's (1996) emphasis on the continuing interest in 'rhetoric' as a concern with argument and contention may be viewed as a device which allows a subtle alignment of participant relevances with a continued interest in the wider 'politics of knowledge'.[9]

The common aim of both conversation and discourse analysis is the detailed explication of the organisation of naturally occurring activities and the practical reasoning that makes possible and is displayed in their co-construction by participants. To present examples of them here adequately I will have to include parts of the records of naturally occurring interaction which accompanied their original publication and to which analysis was directed. Attention to the details of individual instances is designed to avoid the 'premature theorising' characteristic of much of the sociology that is the target of criticism of these studies, and idealised or otherwise generalised descriptions of events are not to stand in for a record of the events themselves. A preference for taped and transcribed materials arises from the experience that relevant detail is not available in observational notes or in results derived from the application of precoded schema. Analysts recognise that there are important differences between the character and availability of actions to participants in the course of their occurrence on the one hand, and the character and availability of traces of actions in such records on the other. Nevertheless, such records remain the best available resource for permitting the repeated examination of the details of actions that are the focus of investigation (see Schenkein, 1978; Silverman, 1999; Watson, 1998). By setting descriptions alongside such records, claims for the successful explication of the orderliness of participants' orientations can be examined and, where appropriate, contested.

Harvey Sacks and identity categorisation

A fundamental resource for studies of identity in talk – for conversation analysis and discourse analysis – has been the work of Harvey Sacks (see especially 1992a, 1992b). I want to use the remainder of this chapter to focus on the way that Sacks himself initially managed to bring to our attention both an entirely new kind of material for study and a novel way of working with such material

that made possible a consideration of the ways in which identity matters arise and are dealt by coparticipants in mundane social interaction. I will present his ideas about, and demonstrations of, the ways in which identity can be seen to be a practically relevant matter to individuals in and through their invocation of, and orientation to, culturally available categorisations of persons. In the next chapter I will turn to look at work – by Sacks and others – that has chosen to focus on a variety of ways in which identity matters arise as both topic and resource for individuals in a range of naturally occurring interactions.

For Sacks, an important element in the orderliness of co-ordinated action is the fact that participants in interaction are able to agree on which categorisations of themselves and others are possible and relevant to any particular socially situated interaction. In the sixth lecture in a university course that he taught in 1964, Sacks (1992a: 40–8) first introduced what he referred to as 'a device basic to social interaction'. The topic of the lecture was generated by the observation that participants in any human culture are able to draw on a set of categories that they can use to classify any individual – including themselves – within a population of individuals. The common categories used in contemporary society and listed by Sacks include age, sex, race, class, and religion. I have already indicated in earlier chapters of this book that these categories, and some others, comprise the stock-in-trade of anyone seeking to characterise themselves or others within a fairly standard repertoire for the formulation of contemporary social identity. Sacks observes that these categories have the interesting feature of 'inference-richness'. What he means by this is that once a particular identity category has been chosen (by self or by other) as one that can be applied to a person, then a series of additional inferences may also be made about the character, ways of acting, beliefs, motives, of a person thus categorised. So if we are able successfully to place an individual into one or another such categories then we are also likely to claim knowledge of a good deal more about them than this simple fact of categorical identity membership: 'any member of any category is presumptively a representative of that category for the purpose of use of whatever knowledge is stored by reference to that category' (Sacks, 1992a: 41).

The practice involved here is described by Sacks (1992a: 40) as the use of 'the MIR (membership, inference-rich and representative) device'. He quickly points out a 'central problem of sociology' that can be seen once we give detailed consideration to such categorical identities and their use in social interaction. This central problem is that it is always the case that more than one instance of the available repertoire of such devices will be potentially applicable and relevant whenever we seek to draw on them for characterising any individual person. I have noted earlier that such an issue can be identified by social analysts as if it were a problem engendered by some putative historical shift in how we think of ourselves and others – as fractured or multiple rather than whole and single. In other words, a problem that requires theoretical thought along with the development of an appropriate technical vocabulary for its solution. But this is to mistake the nature of the issue, which is a practical one encountered and dealt with continually by competent social actors. Sacks reminds us that an essential feature of the use of such categories by social actors is that they already know that they are choosing amongst an alternative set and also that they are

doing so in some accountable way. Sociology, Sacks argues, has failed to explicate this feature either as it occurs in the course of ordinary social interaction, or as it arises within disciplinary discourse.

How does Sacks claim to develop our knowledge of this feature of identity designation and management? Two features of the 'MIR device' deserve more detailed description:

1. the issue of representativeness;
2. the notion of 'inference-richness'.

Sacks links the first of these – representativeness – to the operation of social control. He observes that often when we report and comment on the conduct of another person, we identify them not as a particular named individual (though that may well be possible), but as the member of a particular identity category – manager, student, partner, man, and so forth. Using such an identity category invokes the understanding that the observed or reported conduct of anyone so identified may be accountably treated as an exemplification of the conduct of members of that category. Using the same practical socio-logic, Sacks adds that individuals can also be required or reminded to act in ways appropriate to whatever category membership is accountably used to classify them: 'to become a member is to make state-able about yourself any of the things that are state-able about a member' (1992a: 43). He goes on to say that it is not the matter of external ascription – the view taken of members of one particular identity category by those of another – that is important. Knowledge of the properties of an identity category by those who are themselves members of that category is also important especially since, according to Sacks 'that knowledge is standardised across the categories' (1992a: 44). Finally, he adds that while this may be the case whether or not the categories are organised social groups, the common availability of this property may well become grounds for members of such identity categories to organise themselves in this way. Two-set classes make this kind of organisational work most effective since positioning one's own identity category against another is made more easy with a simple two-category comparison.

'Inference-richness' is discussed by Sacks in a number of different but related ways. He describes:

- the common monitoring of events that provide the accumulation of information about what members of particular categories regularly and accountably do;
- the common use of category modifiers in conversation where the usual inferences to be drawn from an individual's membership of a category are to be inhibited or altered in some way;
- the use of antimodifier modifiers where 'what everyone knows about that category membership is reasserted' (1992a: 45);
- the deployment of a particular category to assert something about another person that would not properly be said about them directly.

Sacks also suggests that there are two different kinds of category sets that operate in different ways. While for both sets there 'may well be a stable set of categories used by everybody' (1992a: 45), the application of some of these categories may differ from the application of others. He puts it in the following way:

> *But whereas for, say, sex and race it will be by and large the case that one can take it that whatever category somebody applies to somebody else or themselves, anybody else would apply that category, that is not so for categories like age and social class ... If any Member hears another categorise someone else or themselves on one of these items, then the way the Member hearing this decides what category is appropriate is by themselves categorising the categoriser according to the same set of categories. So if you hear B categorise C as 'odd' then you would categorise B to decide how you would categorise C.*
> (Sacks, 1992a: 45)

Thus the term 'inference-rich' clearly involves more than the claim that a large number of inferences can be made on the basis of the use of any particular identity categorisation. It also refers to the fact that a participant may make a choice of particular identity categorisations or make a choice amongst particular types of identity categorisation to accomplish a range of social actions. The width and variety of this range is illustrated in a number of places in Sacks' work. Lecture 8 of Sacks' autumn 1964 lectures gives an interesting example of the use of one such set in order to illustrate a general feature of the deployment of identity category selection. He notes that the device he has earlier outlined 'provides one of the basic ways that Members go about counting all sorts of things' (Sacks, 1992a: 60). Any population potentially present in some specific social occasion can be examined to determine how many members of some – or all – relevant category sets are present. In this way a sense of the 'success' or otherwise of the event in question may be offered for accountable examination. In his example, a staff–student party can be examined to see how many members of each relevant category (teaching staff, research staff, secretarial staff, postgraduate students, undergraduate students) have attended the event, and on that basis offer an accountable judgement of the quality of party it turned out to be.

A further example of the variety of uses of identity categorisation is demonstrated in Sacks' account of the interactional accomplishment of complimenting other people. In particular he describes the detailed practices of making 'safe' or non-committal compliments. He describes what he called an 'unsafe compliment' by reminding us that if one person in a social group is complimented by another by being commended for their membership of a category to which others copresent accountably belong, then 'those not so complimented may have reason to be aggrieved' (Sacks, 1992a: 598). His concrete example is drawn from a social occasion in which one participant in a social group compliments another by saying that 'it was nice having someone smart in the room'. Such a compliment, he argues, can accountably occasion a complaint from any others present in the room that the speaker's failure to select them as comembers of the category 'someone smart' leaves them with an alternative and less valued identity. However, in contrast to such 'unsafe

compliments' it is possible that an identity category can be used which differentiates one person from all other persons present – in Sacks' (1992a: 464) words, 'that someone is characterised by reference to a category that applies to nobody else'. In this case, he argues, a compliment can be paid without generating the possibility of the kind of complaint outlined above. In such a situation the search for a relevant identity category may be simple (e.g. the only man present) or more complex (e.g. the only person present who occupies a conjunction of several categories). The point here is that any choice of identity categories, or any formulation of identity-related matters has to be accountably relevant to what is being accomplished in and through its situated use. That this is so reinforces the point that it is the interactional practices that surround and embed the deployment of identity in the everyday dealings of individuals with one another that need close analysis if we are to understand what identity is and how it works in social life.

This is illustrated in Sacks' account of the occasioned identity formulation of a person named Louise as 'the opposite sex' and 'a chick' in the fragment reproduced below, which he uses to illustrate the production of just such a 'safe' or 'weak' compliment as those described above. In this particular case it is another participant in the occasion – Ken – who delivers the relevant utterance in the last turn at talk shown below.

Ken:	*Did Louise call or anything this morning?*
Therapist:	*Why, did you expect her to call?*
Ken:	*No. I was just kind of hoping that she might be able to figure out some way of coming to the meetings. She did seem like she wanted to come back.*
Therapist:	*Do you miss her?*
Ken:	*In some ways, yes. It was nice having the opposite sex in the room, ya know, having a chick in the room.*

(Sacks, 1992a: 461)

The identification of Louise is achieved by the use of the two-class identity category 'sex'. Louise is the only female member of the population of the group, and Ken's compliment praises Louise through her membership of the category 'opposite sex' since it is the category, not her, that is described as being nice. Sacks points out that while this makes the compliment a 'safe compliment' in his terms, there are three ways in which it also operates to weaken its force. First, because its choice permits no direct comparison of Louise with any other member of the population of the group as not being nice – there were no other members of the identity category of female present in the group. Secondly, it is a weak compliment because an alternative female member could act as a replaceable surrogate for Louise. Her absence then is 'not a personal loss but a categorical loss' (Sacks, 1992a: 464). Thirdly, it is weakened by the following feature of practical reasoning:

> *the two categories are such that any member can say of any – known or unknown – member of the other that it would be nice to have one around. In that case one is not merely missing her as a representative of a category*

> *of which she is a member, but one is speaking as a representative of the category one is a member of. And as such, any one of them could have said the same thing. It involves, then, no special commitment on his part, to some position vis-à-vis her, or vis-à-vis females, but he's invoking some well-formed relationship between men and women.*
> (Sacks, 1992a: 465)

Sacks' point here draws attention to the power of two-class identity categories for interactional work. In some ways, his remarks resonate with those of scholars with quite different disciplinary and philosophical affiliations who also write about 'self' and 'other' as two-class identities, but in Sacks' case the device is shown to be a useful source and product of practical social action rather than an ineradicable and problematic metaphysical fact of human nature and social structure.

Sacks' concern with the practical basis and consequences of the selection of identity categories was worked out differently in his later notion of 'Membership Categorisation Device', which largely replaced the MIR device. In spring 1996 Sacks gave two lectures (reworking material which he had presented in lectures during the previous year) which formed the basis for a paper first published in 1972 'On the analysability of stories by children' (1974). In these lectures he introduced his intention to construct an 'apparatus' which can provide for the production and recognition by members of 'possible descriptions' – in this case identity descriptions. His interest here was in considering 'describing' as an activity, as something done by people in the course of everyday interaction, rather than as an epistemologically problematic feature of scientific and disciplinary accounting. However, his concern with the latter set of disciplinary issues stood quite clearly behind his interest in the practical accomplishment of this activity considered more generally. His argument was that the absence of knowledge about how descriptions were successfully deployed in social life constituted a major weakness for any discipline that either adopted those descriptions as part of its research material or offered such descriptions as part of its corpus of findings. At the same time, he was not concerned to seek a method for the production of 'better' or 'more accurate' descriptions, but 'with how descriptions may themselves be described' (Sacks, 1992a: 245).

His proposed apparatus would have to be able to 'provide for how it is that any activities, which members do in such a way as to be recognisable as such to members, are done, and done recognisably' (Sacks, 1974: 218), and it turns out to be made of two elements:

1. a collection of 'membership categories';
2. rules for the application of such categories.

The two elements together constitute a membership categorisation device. For Sacks, membership categories are descriptive terms for categories of people, and his concern is to show the highly methodical nature of their deployment. It is the fact that they are used methodically that makes possible the recognisable and accountable adequacy of any descriptions that are offered. A membership categorisation device, then, is:

> *any collection of membership categories, containing at least a category, which may be applied to some population containing at least a member, so as to provide, by the use of some rules of application, for the pairing of at least a population member and a categorisation device member. A device is then a collection plus rules of application.*
> (Sacks, 1974: 218–19)

It can be seen from this definition that for Sacks, membership categories come in 'collections'. They are collections in the sense that within each membership categorisation device there cluster a set of such categorisations. Sacks gives the examples of the device 'sex' with its two categories of male and female, and the device 'family' with its categories of child, mother, father, brother, sister, etc. He also introduces 'a few rules of application'. The vagueness of the quantifier 'few' suggests that Sacks thought at the time of writing that there remained an unknown amount of work to be done to discover just how many such rules of application there might be, and certainly his work on the specification of such rules was unfinished. Nevertheless, two such rules are singled out for attention by Sacks:

1. the 'economy rule';
2. the 'consistency rule'.

The first of these rules asserts that 'a single category from any membership categorisation device can be referentially adequate' (Sacks, 1974: 219). In other words, while we may be able to describe any individual person by reference to a large number of such devices, there are circumstances in which that person may be satisfactorily referred to for some practical purpose by being described by means of a category from only one such device. A single category chosen from the collection of categories that make up a particular device can provide an identification and description of a person adequate for some practical referential purpose. The second rule, the 'consistency rule', holds that:

> *if some population of persons is being categorised, and if a category from some devices collection has been used to categorise a first member of the population, then that category or other categories of the same collection may be used to categorise further members of the population.*
> (Sacks, 1974: 219)

Benson and Hughes (1983: 133) argue that the significance of the consistency rule becomes clearer when we examine Sacks' corollary to it, which is stated initially as a 'hearers maxim': 'if two or more categories are used to categorise two or more members of some population and those categories can be heard as categories from the same collection then: hear them that way' (Sacks, 1974: 219–20). It is this corollary that permits us to resolve potential ambiguities which arise through the fact that many identity category names occur in more than one device and have different meanings that are attached to and arise from their use within one device rather than another. In Sacks' analysis of the story of the crying baby, our deployment of this corollary makes it likely that we will hear that it was the mother of the particular baby in question that did the picking up of the child.

As Sacks' work on the nature of the orderliness of interaction developed from its early beginnings, he became more concerned to integrate such studies of practical reasoning alongside the study of the sequential organisation of conversation. Because of this, the direct analysis of the two devices outlined above was given less explicit attention in his work. Nevertheless the underlying issue of the accomplishment and relevance of participants' identities within interaction, particularly as such identities are visible in participants' attentiveness to membership categorisations, remained of central significance to his overall undertaking. In the paragraphs that follow I shall try to show some of the different ways in which he continued to address these issues in his work.

In a lecture given in autumn 1965 and revised in spring 1966 Sacks offered a series of comments on the significance of the use of particular identity categories by different social groups, as well as the possible relationships between those who apply such categories and those to whom the categories are applied. He made it clear that identity categories can be examined 'to see who owns them' and that alongside this issue we also need to consider the relationship between ownership and application. Central to this consideration is the necessity to distinguish between 'those categories owned and developed by members of a group' (Sacks, 1992a: 172), and those applied to it by others. The lectures focused on two particular identity categories which allowed Sacks to bring out the significance of this point. Both identity categories can be used to characterise young people who drive cars: the categories are 'teenagers' and 'hotrodders'. These are 'fundamentally different types of categories', and Sacks aimed to demonstrate the difference in his account of the transcribed conversation that comprised the data for the lecture. Like his earlier work on membership categorisation devices, his interest was in what practical things people are doing 'when, like teenagers, they construct and attempt to use a category like "hotrodders"' (Sacks, 1992a: 172).

What does Sacks find so distinctive and interesting in the deployment of such a category? The identity 'hotrodder' is referred to by Sacks as a 'revolutionary category', a category that 'rebellious persons' use to characterise themselves, and it is used in preference to the equally referentially adequate term 'teenager', an identity category that Sacks describes as 'owned by adults'. He argues that a significant feature of the way in which rebellion is accomplished is by the development and use of a newly minted or otherwise adapted set of identity terms: 'one sets up a category you administer yourself, which others come to use and come to use in just the unique fashion that they used whatever category they used on you before' (Sacks, 1992a: 174). The new identity term thus denotes exactly the same group as the previous term while the connotations of its use have sharply shifted. The establishment and deployment of such 'revolutionary' – or perhaps oppositional – categories by members of the group to whom the category is to apply serve important functions for group members, according to Sacks. Any non-member who might attempt to use such a category does so 'under the extremely important constraint that what it takes to be a member, and what it is that's known about members, is something that the members enforce' (Sacks, 1992a: 173). In this sense, the identity designation 'hotrodder' works in a different way from that of 'teenager'. In the latter case – where the category is imposed by those other than group participants – what is known about those to whom this category may be applied is known by the adults who use it and has no reference to what the category incumbents themselves believe or know about themselves.

For Sacks, the development and adoption of the group members' own distinctive categorical identity collection marks the existence of a struggle for social control between members of the group and those external to it. In addition the use of such categories raises issues about legitimate group membership: 'one is a member by recognition of others who are members. And thereby, to successfully get membership, you have to do what it is that they provide is the way to become a member'(Sacks, 1992a: 174). Sacks is keen to emphasise that the issue here is not necessarily one of group cohesion (most of the identity categories in common use do not designate social groups as such), and neither is it indicative of the 'cognitive map' of some domain of users. Such category use has to be understood against the background of what Sacks had earlier referred to in comments on the 'MIR' device as the 'inference-rich' character of identity categories:

> *what we have is a mass of knowledge known about every category, and any member is seen as a representative of each of those categories, and any person who is a case of a category is seen as a member of the category. And what's known about the category is known about them, and the fate of each is bound up in the fate of the other. So one regularly has systems of social control built up around these categories which are internally enforced by the members, because if a members does something...then that thing will be seen as 'what a member does', not what the person with that name does.*
> (Sacks, 1992a: 401)

Schegloff (in Sacks, 1992a) pointed out that Sacks' work on the use of identity categorisations in talk dealt with the practicalities of interaction and reasoning following the selection of an initial identity category with which to characterise at least one individual amongst those co-present. There was, however, no general solution to the problem of which membership categorisation device should be selected to identify an individual when at least more than one would be a correct description. This finding – negative as it was – that initial identity choice as such seemed not to admit of any systematic description, was productive in so far as it forced him to focus attention on the occasioned character of any choice of category:

> *For example, analytically, any actually employed categorisation employed by a speaker in talk-in-interaction had then to be viewed as a contingent product whose achievement could be subjected to analysis by reference to the particulars of its local environment.*
> (Schegloff, in Sacks, 1992b: xxvii)

Sacks was able to make a number of interesting observations regarding the deployment of identity terms within particular sequential contexts. One of these involved the practice of 'identification reformulation', illustrated in the following example of Sacks' analysis, which also demonstrates how the choice of identification formulations used to characterise participants within a setting can be shown to be related to very particular local interactional concerns. In

this instance, the concern is the legitimation of copresence amongst those who form an interacting group in the particular setting. Sacks bases his analysis on the following conversational fragment:

> *so a bunch of us went over, and there were three of us gals and five or six fellas. And then one of the girls had to leave, about half an hour later 'cause she had to go home and let her roommate in. And uh, one of the other girls had to leave for something. And there I sit with all these young fellas. I felt like a den mother.*
> (Sacks, 1992b: 126)

Sacks' comments deal with the two identity terms that the speaker applies to herself in this account: 'us gals' and 'den mother'. Although he is especially interested in the second of these formulations, he also makes some remarks about the first. I have already indicated that he admits elsewhere that there can be no general rule for the selection of initial membership categorisation devices to be applied to a given person. However, while a general rule may be absent, he does comment here that 'situational relevance' can be shown to play some part in the issue of selection. While the people who went to the bar were all students at the same college class, 'student' or 'classmate' or class members' are not the identity categories chosen in the story told. Instead, argues Sacks, the initial choice of sex as a device for characterising members of the party prefigures the reorganisation of that group as 'a set of pairs' later in the evening. Although as Sacks points out, the provision of the relative numbers of men and women in this account also prefigures the possibility that not all of the party could end the evening as members of mixed sex pairs.

The story contains a reformulation of the self-identity terms used by the speaker: there is a shift from 'girl' or 'gal' to 'den mother', and this identification reformulation is accomplished by the speaker after she has described the departure of the other two women. Why is this of interest to Sacks? He begins by commenting that it would be commonly assumed that observers of social scenes can inspect those scenes to determine what any person within them might be doing there. Such a procedure will involve a search for an identity for those observed which accounts for both their presence and the details of what they are observably doing as part of that presence. Such an observer may well find that the initial copresence of those identified as 'gals' and 'fellas' was sufficient for such a practical purpose. However, the later configuration of one woman and five or six men would require a different solution from the observer. Sacks' argument is that the identity 'den-mother' accomplishes the work of witnessably accounting for the legitimate continued copresence of the relevant people.

In the course of this account, Sacks says something very powerful that concerns the relationship between identity as something 'felt' by the subject in question, and identity categories that are either publicly avowed by the subject and/or ascribed by the observer. He notes that in the transcript the storyteller declares 'I felt like a den mother'. Should we understand this categorisation, asks Sacks, as being the result of the person searching for some way to express what were gradually emerging, perhaps inchoate feelings about her continued presence in the bar with the six men following the departure of the other women? We should understand it, he argues, as 'the product of a search which located

how they could be legitimately co-present over those changes in personnel' (Sacks, 1992b: 129).

However, sequential locatedness need not necessarily imply the necessity for identity shifts over the course of one or several interaction sequences. There are other occasions in which a consistent and stable identity ascription – by self or other – may be relevant throughout a social situation. Relevant, that is, for all the activities that take place within it. Such matters form the interest of another set of Sacks' observations – those that deal with the notion of 'omni-relevance' in talk-in-interaction. The theme of 'omni-relevance' is introduced in lectures given in spring 1966. In the first of these, Sacks (1992a: 312–19) describes an omni-relevant membership categorisation device as:

> *one that is relevant to a setting via the fact that there are some activities that are known to get done in that setting, that have no special slot in it, i.e. do not follow any given last occurrence, but when they are appropriate they have priority. Where further, it is the business of, say, some single person located via the 'omni-relevant device' to do that, and the business of others located via that device, to let it get done.*
> (Sacks, 1992a: 313–14)

In one fragment that he examines, Sacks is able to show that the device that includes within it the identity categories of 'therapist' and 'patient' has this property of 'omni-relevance' through its use to organise certain interaction sequences (in the case he cites, a greeting–introduction sequence and a closing sequence). However, he goes on to suggest both that there may be other devices in the same setting that could also be omni-relevant, and that there are ways in which a device can be shown to be omni-relevant. Certainly Sacks is claiming something important when he writes later that 'omni-relevance has the property that the collection might be used in the session without other special introduction to provide the sense of the interaction' (Sacks, 1992a: 462). Omni-relevance however seems a special case of the general issue of identity relevance in interaction, and even when it is potentially available there may be reasons for participants to seek to introduce alternative identity categorisations into such situations.

In the course of outlining his notion of the membership categorisation device, Sacks draws attention to the fact that many of our ordinary activities are described in terms that can be seen to be closely linked to 'some particular or several particular categories of members where the categories are categories from membership categorisation devices' (Sacks, 1974: 222). The idea of the category-bound basis of activity descriptions is of considerable importance since it is one way in which we can arrive at judgements of identity through the inspection of activity. However, Sacks is also concerned to point out that not all activity descriptions can be treated as necessarily category bound. He provides neither a systematic account of what kinds of activities are in fact category bound in this way nor a solution to the problem of how we can decide in every case whether activities are or are not category bound. However, he does describe two procedures which can be used to determine whether or not a particular activity description is of this kind. The first of these is that activities are category bound whenever their use can function to denigrate or praise people who may

be seen to have undertaken them. What does he mean by this suggestion?

Some membership categories are 'positioned', that is to say one category within the collection of categories A, B and C is taken to be higher or lower with regard to some valued attribute than another. In the case of such categories, an activity can be said to be category-bound when:

> *a member of either A or B may be seen to be degrading himself and may be said to be 'acting like a C'. Alternatively if some candidate activity is proposedly bound to A, a member of C who does it is said to be acting like an A, where that assertion constitutes 'praising'.*
> (Sacks, 1974: 222)

A second way in which some activities can be seen to be category bound arise when we have difficulty in explaining why a person carried out some particular action (for example, an action seemingly inconsistent with a prior one). Sacks argues that if the action concerned is one which is category bound and you know that the person who carried it out is categorisable as a member of such a identity category, then an explanation is produceable. He points out several consequences of this possibility:

> *One of them is, for example, if a problematic occurrence has happened, and one knows a category that's bound to it ... then you can construct a search procedure for finding who, in fact, did it: look to the set of people who are so categorised. You could also, apparently, determine that any person who is proposed to have done it, did it or didn't. If he isn't a member of that category then he wouldn't have done it.*
> (Sacks, 1992a:179)

A third – and more fugitive – sign that an activity can be taken to be category bound, according to Sacks, is that a report or self report of such an activity may hint that the person undertaking it belongs to that particular membership category. That this latter inference is possible arises from another 'relevance rule', a rule that relates to membership categorisation devices: 'for an observer of a category-bound activity the category to which the activity is bound has a special relevance for formulating the identification of its doer' (Sacks, 1974: 225). This property is clearly related to something that Sacks discusses later in the same paper – the issue of social norms. Individuals use norms to determine an order in what they observe not merely to give orders for behaviour: 'viewers use norms to provide the relevant membership categories in terms of which they formulate identifications of the doers of those activities for which the norms are appropriate' (Sacks, 1974: 226).

Conclusion

Despite the richness of these observations (made possible of course by what Sacks refers to as the inference-rich feature of categorical identifications), Schegloff points out (Sacks, 1992a: xlii) that Sacks didn't pursue the concept of category-bound activities, on the grounds that the idea was 'too easily invoked' in accounts for action, while the invocation could not always be given clear analytical support 'other than the account of the data which motivated its introduction in the first place' (Sacks, 1992a: xlii). Although this reason may be relevant from Schegloff's (and Sacks') analytical standpoint, it has not led others to abandon the further examination of identity categories and their situated uses. Indeed, a judgement of the influence of Sacks' work should not be prejudiced by whatever significance is attached to his own decision about this element within it. His studies remain the first – and most productive – exemplification of the power of the ethnomethodological respecification programme, especially as it applies to the respecification of the concept of identity in the human sciences. Sacks' original work has been deployed and developed by a large number of writers, and I will begin the next chapter with a discussion of some of these.

Notes

1 Two journals have a particular interest in such matters and can be usefully consulted for a range of studies: *History of the Human Sciences* and *Journal for the History of Ideas*.

2 Another example can be found in Wooffitt's (1992: 102) descriptions of the methods used by speakers to diminish personal agency when claiming a factual status for certain kinds of accounts.

3 It is important to note that Watson's assertion about ordinary language expressions differs from assertions like those made by a number of authors discussed in Chapter 4. In this case, Watson is referring to verbal interaction as a jointly co-ordinated product of coparticipants, not to decontextualised instances of pronoun use or other such grammatical formulations (see also Watson, 1987).

4 There are a large number of collections of such conversation analysis (e.g. Boden and Zimmerman, 1991; Drew and Heritage, 1992) and an increasing number of textbooks that provide good introductions to this work (e.g. Heritage, 1984; Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998; Silverman, 1999; Ten Have, 1999).

5 Some commentators would be critical of the assumption of too close a relationship between the respecification programme of ethnomethodology and the empirical programme of conversation analysis. Examples of arguments stressing the differences between these orientations can be found, for example, in Bilmes (1986), Atkinson (1988), Lynch (1993), Lynch and Bogen (1994, 1996), Hak (1999) and Psathas (1995). I share the view of writers like Heritage (1984) and Watson (1992) who emphasise a continuity of interest between the two forms of study, but even those who indicate differences between the approaches should agree that they share sufficient genes to be treated as close relatives.

6 The term 'discourse analysis' has been used by a number of writers. Here I am concerned with a limited group of users, especially those working at or associated with Loughborough University in the UK (see Edwards 1997; Potter, 1996; Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

7 The most recent of these was a debate between Schegloff and Wetherell (Schegloff, 1997, 1998; Wetherell, 1998).

8 'By interpretative repertoire we mean broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions, commonplaces ... and figures of speech often clustered around metaphors or vivid images and often using distinct grammatical constructions and styles' (Potter *et al.*, 1990).

9 Even here, however, some of the concepts in discourse analysis treatments of interactional rhetoric take their shape from the work of Harvey Sacks. See for example work on 'stake' and entitlement (e.g. Potter, 1996), to be described in the next chapter.

Chapter 7

Making identity matter

> *Practical wisdom, then, uses rules only as summaries and guides; it must itself be flexible, ready for surprise, prepared to see, resourceful at improvisation ... it is, centrally, the ability to recognise, acknowledge, respond to, pick out certain salient features of a complex situation.*
> (Nussbaum, 1986: 305)

In the second part of the previous chapter I introduced Harvey Sacks' foundational studies of the contextually occasioned use of culturally available membership categories for the identification and description (including self description) of individuals or groups of persons. I suggested that such studies illuminated important features of identity as 'occasioned', particularly in the attention they give to how and what identity matters are made relevant by participants in and through their orientation to the assumptions of category membership. In this chapter, also devoted largely to an examination of empirical studies, I want to note some of the ways in which Sacks' work on categorising and identifying as *activities* has been taken up by subsequent authors. Only after I have done this will I introduce the last member of this second family of studies of identity, and in so doing raise some questions about the nature and claims of the conversation and discourse analysis accounts which form the major focus of this chapter.

Categorisation, entitlement and identity

Despite Schegloff's (Sacks, 1992a) misgivings, there has been considerable willingness to take up Sacks' suggestions for the study of the dynamics of the deployment of membership categories in social interaction. Eglin and Hester (1992), Watson (1997), Hester and Eglin (1997) and Silverman (1999) have all argued that the analysis of the nature and use of membership categories – where such categories can be shown to be procedurally and sequentially relevant to the course of interaction – remains a significant and expandable component of the wider respecification programme. Indeed, there seems to be an acceptance of the term 'membership categorisation analysis' as an organising device and methodological slogan to collect together a number of recent and current studies along these lines (e.g. Hester and Eglin, 1997; Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998).

One section of Silverman's (1998) study of HIV counselling uses Sacks' observations of the nature of category-bound activities – that particular activities are commonly associated with specific membership categories – to develop an analysis of the 'expressive caution' with which HIV counsellors and clients approach and deal with some of the potentially embarrassing (or 'delicate') issues that arise in the course of their sessions. This can be illustrated by reference to one of the examples Silverman examines, in which a counsellor is raising

questions about the sexual history of the client. (In Silverman's transcript reproduced below, 'C' refers to counsellor, and 'P' to the patient or client.)[1]

17	C:	*[So: the thing is you see*
18		*- wh- what about contacts before your present*
19		*boyfriend if I might ask about (tha:[:t).*
20	P:	*[Well I had (.)*
21		*since my: divorce in eighty-two (.) I've only had*
22		*two relationships.*
23	C:	*Right.*
24	P:	*And uh:m (0.2) one lasted for eight years and one*
25		*lasted for three year:s.*

(Silverman, 1998: 73)

Silverman notes that the speech perturbations that precede, and the request that follows, the use of the category 'contacts' by the counsellor to refer to other persons with whom the client might have shared sexual activity marks its potentially delicate character. The reason for its delicacy, he argues, lies in the fact that it is known to be a professional term hearable as 'bound to the category of "promiscuous person"' (Silverman, 1998: 73). It is also noticeable, however, that the client's response to the counsellor's question uses a different category term: 'relationship'. As Silverman notes, this makes possible an alternative portrayal of the significance of any sexual activity that might have taken place – in particular the term implies 'that the sexual activity is necessarily contexted in "commitments" and other non-sexual matters' (Silverman, 1998: 73). Furthermore, Silverman draws attention to the contribution to this alternative identity formulation made by the client's prior reference to her 'divorce', along with her subsequent temporal accounting of such relationships. These references invoke the existence of a prior monogamous stability and the legitimate singleton's engagement in a small number of new relationships over a fixed period of time.

Hester (1992) has written of the way that the intelligibility of descriptions of the deviant attributes of schoolchildren referred to a particular School Psychological Service in the UK rested on the situated deployment of a number of conventional features of membership categories as part of a co-constructed consultation involving a number of teachers and educational psychologists. He shows the way that membership categorisation work was relevant both for the accountable character of the talk of participants as professionally legitimate referral talk in and of this particular occasion, and also for the accomplishment of their talk as 'producing and recognising references to deviance' (Hester, 1992: 156). In a detailed analysis he describes how identifications of the various pupils who were the subjects of the talk of the professionals actually invoke one of two separate membership categories: 'referral' and 'pupil'. He also examines the different ways that individuals are characterised as deviant when one or another category membership is deployed as part of this particular episode of

practical reasoning about identity matters. Identifications of deviance are accomplished when orienting to the category 'referral' by finding such an ascription consistent with a set of negative predicates and problematic activities normally associated with this category by this set of users. On the other hand, when the other membership category 'pupil' is deployed, such references are accomplished through the use of a contrastive device: deviance is recognised and described by reference to the child's 'infraction of category-bound norms' of acceptable behaviour. In the course of this analysis, Hester is able to demonstrate the way in which identifications – in this case educationally and socially consequential ones – rest on practical ways of achieving referential recognition as an essential and localised mundane achievement of ordinary actors.

Both of these studies – Silverman's and Hester's – are able to demonstrate the significance of the attentiveness of participants to the choice and implications of particular identity ascriptions and avowals in interaction, as well as the consequences of their choices for the development of such interaction. Other conversation and discourse analysts have taken up these matters as part of their interest in the rhetorical and argumentative properties of instances of co-ordinated speaking and acting. One element in what Sacks had described as the 'inferential richness' of membership categories and their use relates to the fact that particular membership categories can be seen to 'entitle' persons thus categorised to a variety of claims concerning their experience, activity and treatment by others. This point can most easily be seen whenever such 'entitlements' concern claims to knowledge, for example where 'the entitlement obviates the need to ask how the person knows: instead, simply being a member of some category – doctor, hockey player, hospital worker – is treated as sufficient to account for or warrant their knowledge of a specific domain' (Potter, 1996: 133).

Several studies have explored general and specific features of the way in which such entitlements are used and treated in the course of social encounters. In an examination of the work of television programme makers, Potter and colleagues (Potter, Wetherell and Chitty, 1991; Potter, 1996) noted discussions about the appropriate category to be used for the introduction of a particular participant in a planned programme on cancer, the options being the category 'doctor' and their eventual choice, 'homeopathic physician and founder of New Approaches to Cancer' (see Potter, 1996: 138). What concerned the programme makers was the inferences that viewers might legitimately make with regard to the entitlement to knowledge of someone categorised with one or another of these alternatives. Their own view was that the latter categorisation would carry more weight on the grounds that 'doctor' might be used to describe 'any old GP' (whether they might have considered the effect of the modifier 'homeopathic' prior to 'physician' is of course open to question).

Participants' own orientations to the issue of entitlement – specifically that they are entitled to claim factual and objective properties for the accounts that they give to others – are examined in substantial parts of Wooffitt's (1992) study of accounts of 'paranormal' phenomena. He notes that a variety of details in many such accounts serve to stress the objectivity and disinterestedness of the speaker's initial observations of the anomalous phenomenon that is being

reported (e.g. an apparition, a precognition, spirit contact or spiritual experience) alongside self attributions of particular category membership. Such occasioned category attributions are varied: they may be achieved through references to the person's 'ordinariness', or to other more narrowly defined membership categories, as in the cases examined by Wooffitt in which the work identities of 'policeman' and 'cleaner' were used to account for their presence in particular places and also for their likely orientation to the anomalous events that they witnessed. Wooffitt shows the way in which the choice of such work identities can be seen to address potential scepticism amongst the recipients of accounts or witnesses to actions.

Other studies have chosen to focus more directly on the interactional forms taken by such sceptical approaches to identities and their attributes. In a discussion of 'description as attribution', Edwards and Potter (1992) remind us that descriptions offered of any matter by individuals – including descriptions of themselves and other people – are vulnerable to being attacked as being merely a 'claim, a speculation, or even a lie' (Edwards and Potter, 1992: 104) rather than a factual description as such. One of the ways in which such attacks can be mounted is by showing that the describer had an interest or 'stake' in having the content or form of the particular description accepted by others in the first place. Participants in interaction regularly show a lively interest in the extent to which what others say can be undermined or supported by features of their situation, their identity, or the conjunction of both. Edwards and Potter provide a wealth of examples from court proceedings, political interviews and public debates to illustrate these matters at work. Wetherell and Potter (1992) discussed these issues in relation to identity attributions in their study of racism in New Zealand; Edwards and Potter (1992) applied this concern to the analysis of news stories and television interviewing; and Potter (1996) extended the discussion to show the way in which participants may attempt to 'inoculate' themselves from such imputations of self interest in advance of their being made.

Using identity ascriptions

Paul Drew's (1978) analysis of a short section of the Scarman Tribunal hearings into Violence and Civil Disorder in Northern Ireland in 1969 is now something of a classic in a genre of studies of interaction in legal and related contexts. Drew is concerned to show the way in which the specific religious identity of one of those giving evidence at the tribunal is invoked without ever being explicitly described and, having been invoked in this way, is used as part of an accusation of impropriety. In doing so he provides a powerful demonstration of the relationship between issues of identity category membership and knowledge entitlement.

The 'accusation' in Drew's account occurs in the middle of a long stretch of cross-examination of a police witness in the tribunal. The events about which the witness is being questioned involved illegal – and violent – action being undertaken by people in the course of one particular night in Belfast. The accusation can be seen in the following lines of Drew's transcript (where 'C' is the Counsel, and 'W' is a police officer):

C: *Yes we are coming to that shortly. I want to ask you about the phraseology there, 'Ask people in Percy Street to go home as they can't stand there' Was that your message?*

W: *Yes that is my message*

C: *That was a rather polite way of addressing a mob who had burned and pillaged a Catholic area, was it not?*

(Drew, 1978: 2)

Drew comments that the expected hearing of this part of the cross-examination is that the action of the police officer in these circumstances can be made out to be defective or inadequate in some way – a shortcoming in relation to what the appropriate action of someone identified as a police officer might have been expected to be in such a situation. The accusation depends on the force of the contrast between two objects: the first is the report of what the officer said in a message sent to the Deputy Commissioner of Police; the second, a description of the events which the message was presumed to have reported. Drew's analysis is concerned to show the way in which this contrast is arrived at through a series of prior questions from counsel. In particular, how those questions involve either the counsel or the witness producing descriptions of named locations within Belfast, locations which 'can be attributed to some known identity in the normally organised religious geography of Belfast' (Drew, 1978: 4).

Drew begins a discussion of the way in which locations and identities are dealt with in the cross-examination by returning to Sacks' observations concerning how participants in interaction may come to provide one rather than another description or depiction of any person or object referred to on that specific occasion. Given that there is always more than one correct description that can be applied, selection must be based on issues that are independent of accuracy. Sacks' argument is that the notion of relevance is what matters, and I have outlined some of what he said about this in the previous chapter. The description selected has to be accountably relevant for the purposes to which it is proposedly put within the particular setting of its use. Its selection will have to be understood and examined as a 'member's methodic accomplishment'. In Drew's material the predominant descriptions of the people involved in the violent activities in question are produced through location formulations – both of where people are at any particular time, but more importantly as the names of places 'from which they came'. The 'named location of origin' of individuals and groups can of course be made a relevant feature of identity on a number of different kinds of occasions. Or to put it differently: it is often possible to find a way of describing what one or several people are doing by categorising them in this way. Drew points out how speakers in his setting rely on and reconstitute expected knowledge about the 'religious identity' of particular locations in Belfast. Most place names will have such recognisable religious identities attached to them in the commonsense geography of the area. What is more, knowledge of the geographical location of different religious groups is accompanied by an understanding of the significance of membership of such groups. Sacks' notion of category-bound activities is relevant here for it is in this way that identity membership may be used to infer the intention of group members when they are located in specific circumstances. Drew points

out that many of the descriptions of events assembled during the course of this particular examination invoke a contrast between the religious identity of individuals and groups and the areas in which they were seen to be – or towards which they were seen to be moving – on the night in question. He shows the way in which the detailed descriptions of the events and those who participated in them is used to 'warrant inferences about the identity of the "aggressors" and "victims": and it is, of course, in relation to these identities that we can begin to see judgements about the action of the police, and particularly the witness, being set up' (Drew, 1978: 14).

In a painstaking account of the cross-examination, Drew argues that the accusation rests on the assumption that the witness knew that his observations required a different message to be sent to the Deputy Commissioner than the one he sent. The accusation, then, is not that the police officer happened to mistakenly misread the events in question. He should – given what anyone can be expected to know as resident or worker in that particular city – have been able to draw 'obvious conclusions' about the crowd. That he seemed not to have done so – at least as far as his message suggests – is grounds for asserting him to be culpable either of a failure of observation or a failure of will. In fact Drew argues that eventually the accusation is seen to turn on the issue of the possible defectiveness of the action of the witness, which is in turn located in a version of his identity. That the witness himself is alive to this possibility is evidenced by the following remark later made by him in the course of the hearing:

> *A couple of questions before that you made a very strong suggestion that there had been a Protestant crowd at the bottom of Percy Street and that I was asking them very nicely to go home. It seemed to me that you were under the impression that I was biased with regard to religion. I, my lord, would resent that very much.*
> (Drew, 1978: 18)

Paul Drew's study describes one of a large number of ways in which identity as membership category can be made to matter in specific social settings. Here what is especially significant is the relationship between the identities of people and their claims to knowledge. Drew's and other similar work invites us to continue to ask questions about how issues of identity may be related to what individuals may be expected to know and believe, as well as act. Whether such questions are asked within the specific vocabulary of membership categorisation analysis or are framed by a concern with rhetoric and argumentation may not be especially significant. The important thing is the maintenance of a focus on how it is that participants manage the accountability of their descriptions and actions, an accountability in which issues of identity are ineradicable features.

The occasionality of identity matters

If we are to grasp the wide variety of ways that identity matters in and through the orientations of participants, we need to widen the scope of our inquiries from an emphasis on the deployment of stable identity categories, however rich our analysis of this deployment might be. There are other questions that relate to participants' orientations to identity issues, and I want to examine some of

these in the next two sections of this chapter. I begin by returning to some remarks by Sacks in which he suggests some novel ways of thinking about and researching this area.

In one of his lectures Sacks (1992b: 318) introduces the idea of the 'naturally evolved object' in relation to identity matters, in the course of an analysis of a sequence of conversation between Ethel and Ben (a middle-aged couple), Bill (their son) and Max (Ben's stepfather, Ethel's stepfather-in-law). Much of the conversation is concerned with a tinned food item – specifically 'Herring Snack Bits' – that is being shared amongst those people as part of their lunch. At several points in the conversation, both Ethel and Ben assert that Max should have some of this tinned herring. (I have edited Sacks' transcript to exclude all material excepting that which directly relates to his treatment of identity matters.)

Ben:	*Hey this is the best herring you ever tasted I'll tellyuh that right now.*
	(1.5)
Ethel:	*Bring some out//so thet m-Max c'd have some too.=*
Ben:	*Oh boy.*
Max:	*=I don'wan'ny*
	(0.5)
Ben:	*They don' have this et Mayfair but dis is //delicious*
.....	
Ethel:	*Ouu Max have a piece.*
Ben:	*This//is*
Ethel:	*Gesch//macht*
Ben:	*-the best you ever tasted*
.....	
Ethel:	*Max, one piece*
Max:	*I d'n want*
	(4.0)
Ben:	*Yer gonna be- You better eat sumpn becuz yer g'be hungry before we get there Max.*
Max:	*So.*
	(0.5)
Ben:	*C'mon now I don' wanche t'get sick.*
Max:	*Get there I'll have so//mething*
Ben:	*Huh?*
Max:	*When I get there I'll eat.*

Ben:	*Yeah butche better eat sumpn before. Y'wan'lay down'n take a nap?=*
Max:	*=No*
Ben:	*C'mon*
	(1.0)
Ben:	*Y'wan sit up'n take a nap? B'cuz//I'm g'n take one*
	(1.5)
Ben:	*Inna minute*
	(1.0)
Ben:	*Dets's good*
	(2.0)
Ben:	*Det is really good*
Ethel:	*Mm//m*
Ben:	*Honestly*
	(4.5)
Ben:	*C'mon*
	(1.0)
Max:	*((very soft)) (I dont want)*
Ben:	*Max please I don wanche t'get si:ck*
Max:	*I (wont) get sick*
.....	
Ethel:	*Max doesn't know what he's missin'*
Bill:	*He knows*
Ben:	*I don' wan' him tuh get sick I wannim tuh eat.*
Max:	*( )*

(Sacks, 1992b: 318–19)

Many things can be shown to be relevant to the coparticipants in the conversation from which these fragments are excerpted, but of particular interest for the subject of identity is what Sacks has to say about the repetitive assertions made by Ben and Ethel that Max should eat some of the herring. By providing a very detailed reading of each of the turns within the conversation, Sacks tracks for us the shifts in Ethel's and Ben's actions from Ethel's initial request that some of the herring be brought out for Max, through several offers to Max that he has at least a piece of the fish, then the issue of a warning and finally what Sacks describes as a 'quasi-threat' on the part of Ben that he wants Max to eat to avoid the possibility of his being sick. Sacks claims that these shifts in the character of Ethel's and Ben's actions are intimately connected to

changes in the identities of the coparticipants. He introduces this claim in a very careful way:

> *what I mean by changes in identity doesn't have to do with the changing from identities that they had at the beginning to identities that they didn't have at the beginning, but it's a changing of 'operative identities', where the identities they end up with are the identities they have in the world, but they weren't employing earlier on.*
> (Sacks, 1992b: 327)

Sacks also goes on to say that such changes of identity are reflexively related to the changes in the actions undertaken by Bill and Ethel: as each offer is rejected by Max, further offers (or the transformation of offers into other actions) have to be given a form that is related to these operative identity changes themselves. Each, then, is affecting the other through a series of reflexive iterations. Sacks begins by commenting that it is possible to imagine situations of copresence similar to that represented in the transcript in which food is being shared amongst the various parties and one of them commends what they have eaten and suggests that any one or several of the others should have some of whatever food this is. In this case, however, there are some significant features that depart from such a possibility. The commendation of the food is done by Ben, while Ethel suggests that Ben bring out the food so that Max can taste it. Ethel is Ben's wife, but she is not hosting the meal. She is, however, the only adult female in the room, and she is the stepdaughter-in-law of the widower Max. Sacks argues that it is these positions that Ethel occupies amongst the parties present that license both her instruction to Ben and its precise form – i.e. that Ben bring out the herring so that Max can have some.

Max, however, declines the first offer of the food. Why, asks Sacks, would a re-offer then be forthcoming, a re-offer that eventually leads to other actions? The relational identities of the participants are essential relevances for the unfolding sequences that follow: the fact that Max is widowed (and recently so) accountably provides for his stepson Ben and stepdaughter-in-law Ethel taking some responsibility for his wellbeing, and the refusal of an offer of food is an action that may be brought under the rule of this responsibility. While anyone may decline an offer, argues Sacks, Max's action in this specific context with these specific coparticipants makes potentially visible the relationship between him, Ben and Ethel, along with the stepchildren's responsibility of care. In a situation of this kind, a rejection of such an offer may be examined to see what to do, and another way may well be found to 'change the offer in some particular way' (Sacks, 1992b: 328). The series of subsequent offers and their rejections serve to make 'more alive' the nature of the relationship between Ben, Ethel and Max:

> *Their re-offers can be specifically turning him into a 'stubborn old man' that they are responsible for, i.e., that he doesn't take care of himself. In part then, the person he becomes in the sequence, the person they have got to take care of, is an identity that the sequence brings into focus.*
> (Sacks, 1992b: 330)

The possibility that this identity is one which may well be resisted by Max

is discussed by Sacks, and he suggests that such resistance can be seen in the series of refusals offered in the course of the sequence. He is pessimistic, however, in his claim that Max's identity as 'the old man, burden in the family' is an identity that will evolve – in his term as a 'naturally evolved object' – despite Max's attempts to resist it. What his description of this process so clearly shows is the way that this identity is accomplished through the actions that are exhibited in this sequence, and presumably in countless others like it:

> *We want to see how it is that the burden he ends up as being can be the product of some ways that he is pushed into doing things like being obstinate, stubborn, laconically reductive, by virtue of the way that things that are re-insisted for him extendedly are not ever re-insisted for anyone else.*
> (Sacks, 1992b: 330)

It is appropriate to acknowledge that in these fragments relevant identities are not always explicitly formulated – or named – directly. This is an important point, for in some senses it is this fact of unformulated identities that seems to push us back to the notion that identities are predominantly cognitive rather than interactional in character. However, it should be noted that formulations of names for events, objects or persons have specific kinds of consequences, and that is one reason why they are not always done, why indexicals can often be found in places where formulations would have been logically, if not, interactionally appropriate. The issue is that explicit formulations are interactionally consequential in ways that indexicals are not. Schegloff (1992a) makes the point that this is an important difference between the formulations of individuals *in situ* and those of professional analysts which are performed without such consequences. Of course the description of conduct with the use of category-bound activities (one of the activities reported in Chapter 6) may well be a way of formulating without a formulation.

Once again Sacks' startlingly original work has encouraged others to look – with a similar concern for detail – at the complex and variegated way in which identities are constituted in, and also help to constitute, everyday social actions. Such work enormously expands an understanding of identity based not on abstract theorising but on close study of action in practical settings. This work does not encourage us to think of identity simply through the use of commonsense or intuitive understandings in place of theoretically instructed examinations. Its approach is to consider the way that commonsense understanding of what identity is and how it matters informs discursive actions produced by people themselves. If we think of identity matters as a set of resources made relevant by and to speakers in their design of their own actions and their response to those of others, then we need to examine the occasions in which these resources can be seen to play a part in what both speakers and hearers accountably achieve, in the kinds of co-ordinated actions that are accomplished and oriented to in the course of co-constructed interaction. Two examples may illustrate the way in which some of these possibilities have been taken up. In the first case, we can see an instance of successful resistance to the ascription of undesired identities. In the second case, we can examine the active work done by one participant to bring into play a specific identity preferred

amongst several identities potentially relevant to a particular situation of interaction.

Negotiating identity ascriptions

In one of the chapters of their book *The Language of Youth Subcultures*, Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) provide an analysis of the way in which identities are intricately linked to specific features of the local context of talk. Their data derive from interviews conducted with members of a variety of subcultural groups including punks, skinheads, rockers and goths. The fairly standard opening utterance of the interview delivered by the interviewer was designed to elicit a response from the respondent in which a self identification was offered. Characteristic examples of such utterances include the following (where 'I' is the interviewer, and 'R' the respondent):

(6) 1 Non-Punk:M: T9SB [KHS]

1	*I:*	*'KAY can you te ((tape glitch)) thing about*
2		*yorself your style and that*
3		*(1.2)*
4	*R:*	*well, its jus the way (ah loo(k)) lots*
5		*of leather loads of chains and things*

(8) 2P:MF:T8SA [CM]

1	*I:*	*okay, hhhow would you describe yourselves*
2		*'n your style and that*
3		*(1)*
4	*R:*	*I coul answer that*
5		*(in a lot of ways)....*

(Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995: 82–3)

Widdicombe and Wooffitt confirm their interpretation of the first utterance's significance – that it was designed to elicit a self identification – by showing what happens in interviews in which second-turn responses constitute such an action. When one interviewee responds to the opening utterance with '... punk rockers', then the interviewer goes on to ask how long the speaker has been a punk. If the interviewer had been searching for some other kind of information, argue Widdicombe and Wooffitt, then she could be expected to have used the slot to provide a clarification or rephrasing of the original question, not continued with a further question which acknowledged the appropriateness of the first answer. In so far as respondents generally treated the first question as a request for an identification, they might well have done so because of those contextual features of the conversation that made it identifiable as 'an interview', since competent members of our society may well expect the first question in such a sequential context to be one designed to elicit a relevant identification of themselves as interviewees. However, Widdicombe and Wooffitt also point out

that the recognition on the part of respondents of the kind of action that might be appropriately forthcoming from them at any particular point in a conversation by no means guarantees their production of that action. In this specific context there were a number of interviewees who resisted identifying themselves at this point at the interview (and some resisted for some time after). Widdicombe and Wooffitt analyse these occasions of category ascription resistance in which respondents 'undermined the criterial relevance of their subcultural identity' (1995:107) and instead offered a non-categorical identity. Their account seeks to show that at least some such rejections are provided 'delicately' in so far as they use specific interactional resources to achieve the rejection.

Several procedures were used by respondents to resist category ascription. The first consisted of insertion sequences which occur immediately following the first utterance of the interviewer. These redirect the conversation by producing a different kind of action which in turn requires a relevant response from the interviewer. Insertion sequences that request clarification of the original question are described by Widdicombe and Wooffitt as 'delicate', in that they offer no direct challenge to the prior turn. Some attention is given to the organisation of these insertion sequences and the authors describe in detail the way in which the turns themselves do not always avoid altogether the provision of the self identification requested by the interviewer. One example illustrates very clearly that the respondent is able to use the clarification sequence to legitimate certain inferences about her identity via the design of the utterance. The sequence in question is shown below.

(5) 2G:F:T1SB [KHS]

1	*I:*	*right (.) SO as: a said I'm doing stuff*
2		*on style and appearance can you tell me*
3		*something about yourselves th (..) the way*
4		*you look*
5		*(1.6)*
6	*R1:*	*w-wu-wh't d'you mean li:ke*
		(0.3)
7	*R1:*	*what do you mean (.) about ourselves*
8		*'s a bit general huhhh*

(Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995: 99)

The respondent's use of the question 'what do you mean' indicates her disaffiliation from the prior turn, and Widdicombe and Wooffitt also point to the importance of the fact that her second turn within the clarification sequence omits a particular part of what the interviewer had said – she does not repeat the 'something'. It is this specific part of the first turn that marks it as being a question about identity, and in excluding it from her repeat, she is more easily able to 'perform an action other than the one made salient by the prior utterance' (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995: 100). Widdicombe and Wooffitt argue that she designs her utterance in such a way that she can be seen to address the

question 'as any normal person would', and in so doing makes it clear that the kind of identity ascription that is being sought is not relevant to her. This account, then, resonates with Sacks' remarks in one of his lectures that being ordinary is something that itself takes interactional work. A number of respondents are seen to do such work in the details of the insertion sequences that they instigate. Consistently they produce turns following the initial question that 'portray themselves as not-seeing-the-relevance-for-them of the category implicative reference to style' (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995: 103). The authors go on to comment on those responses that seem to pretend not to know the significance of what was being asked about. They argue that the respondents are 'resisting a way of being seen', and that this is particularly relevant to the context of the interview since they were selected on sight (and seeingly selected on sight) by the interviewer. In addition, that the fact that resistance to the ascription is offered in the very first turn at talk is indicative of the fact that it is a 'criterial identity' that is being oriented to by speakers. Even those people interviewed who insisted on their ordinariness in the way described were often willing to accept a subcultural identity designation at a later stage of the interview.

I believe that this kind of analysis is particularly useful in its treatment of identity issues. It manages to show some general features of the negotiation of identity in talk, but it also provides a detailed account of the way in which more than one version of anyone's identity can be ascribed, achieved and resisted in the course of interaction. In this instance – and in many others – their analysis of talk 'permits a more sophisticated and elegant appreciation of the dynamism of social identities' (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995: 108) than prior theoretical assertions have allowed.

In the next example that I want to present, Schenkein (1978) analyses the way in which individuals in specific interactional settings can attempt to provide and deal with particular identity ascriptions that they assume to be relevant to the course of their joint interaction. Here is an extract of the data from which Schenkein derives his remarks:

50	Alan:	*Mm hmm. It just tells you some of the*
51		*basic concepts. And, I give a memobook*
52		*out. And also let me put my magic card*
53		*innit*
54	Pete:	*Your magic card?*
55	Alan:	*My magic card, this makes the whole*
56		*thing a s- sort of kaleida-scopic*
57		*experiences – not really its just*
58		*y'know, uh two dimensional a(hh)c-*
59		*tually hehh hehh hehh hehh heh ih it*
60		*all depends in y'know, what you've*
61		*been doing right before you, look at*
62		*the card I guess if its two dimens-*
63		*sional*
64	Pete:	*Righ(h)t*
65		*(2.0)*
66	Alan:	*Uhh*
67	Pete:	*I gather you also wanna try t'sell me*
68		*some insurance*
69		*(2.0)*
70	Alan:	*Now- that doesn't sound like a bad*
71		*idea- no, ih- it would be nice. But*
72		*what I'd like to do*
73		*(3.0)*
74	Alan:	*Uhh, do you have any insurance*

(Schenkein, 1978: 70–1)

Even without knowing more about the interaction which preceded and followed this fragment, most competent readers would agree that the conversation could be glossed as one between 'a life insurance salesman' (Alan) and 'a prospective client' (Pete). The fact that we can so easily see it this way depends on the co-ordinating work that both parties undertake in the course of the interaction. Crucial to this is what Pete says in lines 67–8 in which he characterises what Alan is seeking to do as wanting to 'try t'sell me some insurance'. In providing this characterisation Pete ascribes to Alan the identity of 'salesman' as relevant to what is happening between them. Trying to sell things is a feature of the identity category salesman – and it is utterly familiar that this is just the kind of thing that salesmen do. But what is more interesting about this particular identity ascription is the precise place within the interaction at which it is offered. Prior to its utterance Alan has been describing some literature that he wants Pete to read, and in the course of this description he makes reference to his 'magic card' that he will provide along with the 'memobook'. The literature that Alan describes explains insurance to a potential buyer, and in offering such material he can be seen to provide resources for anyone to see that he is at Pete's home with the purpose – perhaps the sole purpose – of securing such a sale. But Schenkein is concerned to show us the significance of Alan's remarks about his 'magic card' and their relevance to the issue of identity. He asks us to notice that the (partial) account that he gives of what the 'magic card' is (lines 55–63) makes strong allusions to activities that involve perceptual alterations of some kind, and most would interpret this as a reference to drug use of one sort or another. These allusions therefore propose Alan's identity as other than that of a straightforward salesmen – a mildly deviant drug use identity is perhaps an alternative. But of course the possibility that a 'salesman' makes available to the client a less official, more personal version of himself is hardly surprising. Manuals of salesmanship, as well as the

personal experience of salesmen and women, suggest that some 'personalisation' of an otherwise abstract sales relationship is likely to lead to a more positive sales outcome. Establishing an identity that is more complex, more personal or more interesting to the client is simply one of those things that good salespeople have to do. And not only those who are hoping to sell honest goods. David Mamet has portrayed a version of such legal and illegal strategies and concerns in his plays and films, especially in *House of Games* (1994) and *Glengarry Glenross* (1996).

Pete's alternative formulation of Alan's identity in lines 67 and 68 serves to exclude Alan's allusions from further attention, although Alan's response allows him to be playful with this formulation. His humorous rejoinder that Pete has made a proposal that is new to him is made but then put aside as he returns to the business that he surely has at hand. However, later sections of the transcript continue to show Pete seeking to differentiate. A few lines on from those shown earlier we find the following:

89	*Alan:*	*Actually tuh go into it tonight, I*
90		*like to be able to s'down an' prepare*
91		*something specifically for a person I*
92		*talk to*

(Schenkein, 1978: 71)

Schenkein describes Alan's references here as a more 'personal' identification which contrasts nicely with Pete's earlier impersonal accounting of Alan's identity as salesman and as 'delicately designed' in its assertion that the kind of interaction he seeks is not a simple sales transaction. While he does not thereby deny the relevance of the proposed identity, he manages to suggest a sensitivity to personality and individuality within this specific context. It is, writes Schenkein 'an impersonal personalisation' which doesn't deny that the identity 'salesman' is relevant, but it does effect a small move by suggesting that 'agent' might be an acceptable alternative. Of course Schenkein is interested not only in the fact of identity negotiations between these two – or any – participants, he is also interested in the ways in which such negotiations utilise and instantiate recurrent interactional structures. He is particularly concerned to draw our attention to a recurrent device which Alan uses to accomplish the introduction of one or several 'unofficial' and allusive identities into the conversation, an example of which can be seen between lines 52 and 55 above. Schenkein describes a 'four-turn action sequence' which, he argues, is commonly seen in a wide range of conversational materials and is used for just the purpose that he has identified in his setting. The sequence is described as:

- Speaker A: Puzzle;
- Speaker B: Pass;
- Speaker A: Solution;
- Speaker B: Comment.

In this particular instantiation of such a sequence, the puzzles and the solutions are 'identity rich' – that is to say they carry information that is highly relevant to the issue of the identity of Speaker A, who here is Alan. Alan's initial use of the term 'magic card' introduces a rather exotic or bizarre expression which functions as the candidate puzzle if his recipient will treat it as such. Pete does this by offering a questioning repeat of the item in question, and this 'pass' on the puzzle permits Alan as puzzle-setter to offer a solution of the puzzle – a 'clarification' of the meaning of the term 'magic card' – which in turn engenders a comment from Pete at line 64.

Schenkein's observations draw our attention to a number of important matters regarding the deployment of identity in interaction, and how this deployment makes use of the basic machinery of talk He is concerned both with the fact that individuals seek to make use of one rather than another of the multiple identities available to them, and also with the ways in which any of these are brought into play. He observes that an examination of the interaction between Pete and Alan can show that way that 'each can surely turn the generation of unofficial identities by the other ... into an occasion for affiliation or disaffiliation, approval or disapproval, curiosity or incuriosity and so on' (Schenkein, 1978: 72), and how the generation of such identities is the result of reciprocal or co-ordinated work rather than just a matter of assertion. In showing us the nature and effects of this work – as carried out by Pete and Alan – he reminds us of the detailed ways in which identities are assembled and used in the course of interaction not as preformulated expressions of subjective realities but as occasioned features of interaction.

In this paper which deals with about a minute's worth of talk, Schenkein demonstrates that identity negotiation can be a finely tuned piece of interactional work (rather in the same way that Widdicombe and Wooffitt have shown the same thing with different data and by focusing on different negotiating devices). In addition, however, Schenkein also argues that these negotiations themselves are used as a method of producing other interactional effects, specifically the introduction and development of different action sequences. In this way, then, it is not just that identity is negotiated in interaction; identity in turn can function as a device for the negotiation of other pragmatic features of interaction.

Discourse identities

Some researchers in conversation analysis have found it useful to distinguish between on one hand, all of those matters that I have been discussing in this chapter thus far as 'normatively oriented-to situated identities' (Boden and Zimmerman, 1991: 13), and on the other hand 'discourse identities' – identities which are the positional correlates of particular discourse activities. This latter usage is concerned with those identity matters that arise in and through participants' 'relationship to the ongoing unfolding of interaction' (Wooffitt, 1998: 108). While such discourse identities may both draw on and implicate wider structural identity categories, they are primarily expressions of identity that belong to, and are relevant for, only the unfolding character of co-ordinated events and the forms of participation that constitute them. Zimmerman (1998: 90) describes them in the following way:

Participants assume discourse identities as they engage in the various sequentially organised activities: current speaker, listener, story teller, story recipient, questioner, answerer, repair initiator and so on. In initiating an action, one party assumes a particular identity and projects a reciprocal identity for co-participant(s).

Goffman's early work on 'participation frameworks' prefigures some of the current development of work along these lines, although his precise focus and methodology have not been closely followed. He suggested the idea of 'participation framework' to draw attention to the fact that individuals in interaction with others necessarily have some 'participation status' with regard to whatever is being said and done.[2] In several papers and books (especially Goffman, 1974 and 1981a) he described and discussed the ways in which individuals adopt and adapt the various positions that participation frameworks make allowable as they take stances towards themselves and others in the course of interaction. Concerned to argue for the insufficiency of the simple and traditional characterisation of participants in verbal interaction as either 'speakers' or 'hearers', Goffman introduced the notion of 'footing' as 'the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance' (Goffman, 1981a: 128). Typically, Goffman's treatment of these matters centred largely on the production of a typology of such footings ('principal', 'strategist', 'animator', 'figure' and 'audiences' in Goffman, 1974; 'animator', 'author' and 'principal' in Goffman, 1981a), delineating the 'specifications for appropriate conduct' for each, and on illustrating the possibilities and vulnerabilities of their uses. These illustrations are especially colourful in the written version of a paper that was first given as a lecture, and also in his account of the interactional consequences arising from individuals publicly attending to 'influencies' and other errors in their own speech (see Goffman, 1981a). However, as is usual in Goffman's work, it is not easy to discern the relationship between his elegant formulations of these matters and the operative relevancies that give shape to particular instances of orderly interaction between individuals who assume or revise such discourse identities.

Crucial to conversation analysis accounts of such discourse identities is the argument that they exist as features of the organisation of turns at talk within specific environments, and in this way 'the alignment of discourse identities figures in the maintenance of sequential ordering and the "architecture of intersubjectivity" it sustains' (Zimmerman, 1998: 92). In a series of related publications, Heritage and Greatbatch (Greatbatch, 1988, 1992; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991) have shown how the organisation of turns at speaking in television and news interviews 'establishes and maintains the relevance' of such local discourse identities of participants as those of interviewer and interviewee. They also demonstrate that the recognisability and stability of these recurrent public events rests on the collaborative work of participants, including the co-construction of these identities, in and through an orientation to the turn-taking system. In Hutchby's (1996) study of talk radio, the relevant discourse identities of 'host' and 'caller' are shown to relate closely to the distinctive asymmetries found amongst the distribution of activities that make up the orderliness of talk shows, in particular the fundamental feature 'that it is the caller's job to present an opinion and the host's job to react to what the caller says' (Hutchby, 1996: 110).

Some work has sought to bring together these kinds of observations of the constitution and operation of discourse identities with other interests in patterns of interaction between individuals in formal organisations, particularly those in which 'professional' identities are said to be involved, and where there are relationships between such professionals and their clients, patients or customers. Here attention has especially focused on how individuals are able to establish 'officially relevant identities' in and through their conversational action. Many such studies have thrown doubt on the accuracy of prior accounts of professional identities informed by theoretical assumptions concerning the nature of power, its relationship to identity and its realisation in specific circumstances (see, for example, Drew and Heritage, 1992; Boden and Zimmerman, 1991; Sarangi and Roberts, 1999).

Postanalytical ethnomethodology

The 'principle of relevance' (Wilson, 1991; Lynch and Bogen, 1996) that underpins the research practice of conversation analysis requires that analytical and theoretical interpretations of naturally occurring human action should not be substituted for the understandings of participants. Instead those understandings that are invoked and displayed within concrete occasions of co-ordinated action are to become the single topic of inquiry. In this chapter I have examined a series of studies that, informed by this principle, have accumulated descriptions of the ways in which identity is made to matter to and by participants in specific contexts. Methodologically, conversation analysis (and its close relative discourse analysis) has argued for the preservation of fine-grained detail of naturally occurring talk as the 'data' for its analysis, and it has established the expectation that transcripts of such talk are readily available within research reports. It has encouraged researchers to move away from the production of records of what subjects said assembled in accordance with literary conventions towards to the provision to readers of detailed transcriptions whose construction is governed by technically complex conventions. It argues that the provision of this material is essential for readers to be able to make a more informed judgement about the quality and validity of the inferences made by those who offer analyses of mundane social actions. These inferences themselves give rise to formal accounts of the methods which participants are said to use for the construction of orderly actions, especially talk-in-action where the 'descriptive adequacy of such an account would be tested against the naive adequacy of the members' practice' (Lynch and Bogen, 1994: 74.).

Lynch and Bogen (1994, 1996 and see also Lynch, 1993) have argued for an alternative strategy of analysis, related to that of conversation analysis by a shared commitment to Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, but which denies 'foundational status' to conversation and 'makes no effort to "ground" its research program by invoking a principled distinction between professional analysis and members' intuitions' (Lynch and Bogen, 1994: 65–6). They call this alternative 'postanalytical ethnomethodology'. Their argument with conversation analysis is not with the necessity for a focus on members' methods

– this after all is the initiating slogan of ethnomethodology – but with the former's development of specialised, second-order, methods for the observation and analysis of those members' methods, and, despite the rhetoric of such studies, the development of second-order concepts too. For Lynch and Bogen the detailed inspection of conversational transcripts directed by the specific technical relevances of conversation analysis will not necessarily enlarge our mundane capacity to recognise the density and complexity of ordinary social action. Indeed, they have argued that – despite its origins – the development of conversation analysis has shown an increased willingness to re-instate a principled distinction between professional and vernacular understandings of ordinary social action, and to privilege the former over the latter. They suggest that this can be seen in the way that writers like Schegloff have sought to distinguish between what an analyst can demonstrate to be technically describable as 'participants' orientations' within interaction on the one hand and what can be said and described by participants on the other. For Lynch and Bogen, the increasing emphasis on distinctions between 'technical analysis' and 'commonsense understandings' or between 'analytical understandings' and 'lay mastery' serve to establish within conversation analysis a version of exactly what such analysis had promised to respecify:

> *By distinguishing the analytic competence of members of the conversation analytic community from the vernacular competence of the ordinary conversationalists described, conversation analysts have segregated their technical reports from the communal practices they describe.*
> (Lynch and Bogen, 1994: 83)

Describing the 'neofoundationalist' character of conversation analysis as an ironic development for a group of researchers who are concerned to avoid the valorisation of professional human science understandings in place of vernacular understandings of meaning, social action and interaction, Lynch and Bogen argue that conversation analysis has shifted away from Sacks' original investigations of the grammar of social concepts as part of a possible 'natural science of human behaviour' in which any warrantable descriptions of actions, event or identities could be systematically examined, to a 'specialised sociolinguistic discipline that presumed an establish empirical grounding' (Lynch and Bogen, 1994: 76).[3] The nature of their dissatisfaction is expressed in the following paragraph:

> *What we find problematic is that the findings of conversation analysis tend to be presented as formal accounts of conversationalists' naively adequate methods for making ordinary interactional phenomena observable, reportable and reproducible. In our view, the naive adequacy of ordinary practices is not grounded in context-free descriptions of ordinary methods, any more than the stable reproducibility of scientific activities is grounded in context-free descriptions of scientific methods. If, as we argued, the descriptive adequacy of observational reports depends on their local and vernacular uses, it would be absurd to figure that one could write adequate accounts of method that do not trade upon an intuitive mastery of the 'thick' ensembles of equipment, skills, persuasive discourses, relational histories and informal understandings that comprise actual research situations.*
> (Lynch and Bogen, 1994: 90)

The shape of the alternative kinds of descriptions called for in their programme of postanalytical ethnomethodology can be discerned in the substantive chapters of Lynch and Bogen (1994), in which they report their study of the Iran–Contra hearings held before a Joint House–Senate Committee in the USA in 1987. The study is based largely on an examination of the video tapes of the testimony of a number of witnesses called before the committee, but particular attention is paid to the testimony of Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, who had been the staff member to the White House National Security Council in charge of the co-ordination of covert sales of US weapons to Iran. The video tapes were studied 'as a basis for addressing (and "respecifying") a series of general questions about lying and truth, testimony, interrogation, stories, memory and documentary records. All of these subjects pertained to the relationship between biography and history, a topic that makes up a (if not the) central problem of sociological theory' (Lynch and Bogen, 1996: 8). Lynch and Bogen's account of these matters is too detailed and extensive for me to cover in full, but two of their chapters (5 and 6) are especially relevant to my interests here.

In Chapter 5, Lynch and Bogen examine the organisation and implications of the telling of 'stories' in the course of witness testimonies and they demonstrate both the way in which such stories were used to display the special access of their teller to particular people or actions relevant to the unfolding events in question, and also the way in which they were systematically differentiated from the 'master narrative' of those events. A key issue in the production of these stories is that they are used by their tellers to claim particular entitlements for the veracity of their accounts. These claims derive from their tellers' presence at, or access to, the particular events that are described in the story. As the stories unfold, tellers locate themselves as characters within them and assign or avow particular attributes and identities to these characters. In one particular section Lynch and Bogen quote Oliver North's story about a series of separate conversations he had on one particular evening with Robert McFarlane, the US National Security Advisor and Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli Defence Minister. In the course of this story North identifies himself both as a significant actor through his participation in such conversations, but also, crucially, as a mediator with limited knowledge of the larger picture: 'It was in that period of time that I became aware of what was really trying to be moved' (North, quoted in Lynch and Bogen, 1996: 165).

In Chapter 6 of their book, Lynch and Bogen examine the management of 'memory' in the course of witness interrogations, framing this as an interest in memory-related assertions as an occasioned accomplishment of situated actors, rather than as 'simply the verbal end-products of chains of cognitive acquisition, storage and retrieval' (Lynch and Bogen, 1996: 15). In this treatment of the 'situated pragmatics' of recollection, they describe many instances of the committee's interrogations where witnesses – especially, but not exclusively, Oliver North – state that they cannot recall a specific event, action or date that is asserted to be germane to the inquiry. Lynch and Bogen consider both the

visibility of the potential use of such expressions as evasions, but also some of the situated resources used by participants in the inquiry to determine whether or not they constituted deliberate obstruction or 'genuine forgetting' in any particular instance of such recall failure. This concern with the 'plausibility' of the witnesses' failings is an important component in the image of a 'theatre of memory' which Lynch and Bogen deploy for the overall characterisation of the hearings as a whole.

In their discussion of 'stories', Lynch and Bogen address a series of issues:

- the relationship between 'recollections' and 'documented histories' of particular events;
- the nature of judgements of 'plausibility and credibility';
- the socially organised character of 'witnessing' as an activity and 'witness' as an identity.

In their treatment of memory, they have a similar interest in the operation of 'contestable public standards' for the assessment of cognitive and motivational issues. They are concerned that their inquiry remain free from a 'professionally fashioned nexus of definitions, propositions and a priori expectancies' (Lynch and Bogen, 1996: 273) as they focus on the natural accessibility of what participants did, and the resources they relied on in the course of the committee hearings. It is important to note that their descriptive analysis is not developed by reference to the typical conversational constituents and sequences that have been the object of conversation analysis treatments of such matters. Arguing that they were concerned 'to treat the hearings less as an occasion of "talk" than as a variegated production within which talk was situated' (Lynch and Bogen, 1996: 287), they characterise their descriptions as 'assailable, defeasible accounts, uncommitted to any single analytical model of conversational pragmatics or communicative ethics' (Lynch and Bogen, 1996: 287). It is interesting that the absence of such committments does nothing to weaken the contribution of this study to the effort to illuminate the practical significance of participants' actions and orientations in the setting studied.

Conclusion

The studies that I have been writing about in this and the preceding chapter have sought to maintain an attentiveness to those identity matters that can be shown to be oriented to by individuals in the course of their practical reasoning and practical action within specific social contexts. Those who have carried out this work have done so without predicating a new 'theory' of identity or providing an account of the 'predicament' or 'tribulations' of identity for individuals in modernity, postmodernity or any other theoretically constituted abstract designation of social context. Nor have their accounts of the mundane transactions in which identity has been shown to matter asserted the determining effect of external systems of discourse and language. So they have not ignored the fact that such transactions constitute what conscious agents do as part of their responsibility to themselves, others and the context itself conceived as the

ongoing structures of those transactions. It may seem paradoxical that one can have a successful account of how identity can be seen to matter which does not also propose a theory of subjectivity and its relationship to action and social structure, but the argument here is such theories and images are unnecessary to the task at hand. It is unclear how any of the various images that I have discussed earlier in this book would add anything to the descriptions of agency-in-action that have been supplied. They would be more likely to blur our view of such details by asking us to look at them through lenses ground by the application of abstract understanding and theoretical stipulation.

Despite the absence of stipulative theories of what identity is, the family of work which has produced the examples highlighted in this chapter seeks to show – in fine detail – how and why identity matters to real individuals in their joint actions. In the last few pages I have also discussed some of the internal differences that have arisen amongst members of this family, in order to show that there is more than one developing tradition of investigation that is worthy of consideration. Much of this work remains in its early stages and we are only just beginning to appreciate the complexity and power of many of those features of the close organisation of co-ordinated interaction which need to be taken into account to expand this understanding of identity matters. Nevertheless I hope I have managed to show that its development is something to which students of identity are advised to pay close and sustained attention.

Notes

1 The transcripts in this chapter use a limited number of the symbols (key below) common to conversation analysis research. The transcription system was developed by Gail Jefferson. Full details may be found in Atkinson and Heritage (1984: ix–xvi).

(.6) (3secs)	pauses showing timed gaps
(.)	untimed short pauses
.hh	speaker's breaths
( )	unclear speech
(( ))	non-verbal activity
=	contiguous utterances
wh-	cut-off word or sound
tha::t	stretched word or sound
[	start of overlapping talk
]	end of overlapping talk
W	emphasis on letter or word
underlining	emphasis

2 The concept of 'participation status' resonates with Goffman's much earlier reference to 'line' as 'a pattern of verbal and non-verbal acts by which [the person] expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself' (Goffman, 1967: 4).

3 Similar comments have been made by Coulter (e.g. 1983 and 1989) and by others (e.g. Sharrock and Button, 1991).

Chapter 8
Conclusion

> *Most of us who are interested in such things soon learn that if you want to discover how a man pronounces a word it is no use asking him. Many people will produce in reply the pronunciation which their snobbery or anti-snobbery makes them think the most desirable. Honest and self-critical people will often be reduced to saying 'Well, now you ask me, I don't really know'. Anyway, with the best will in the world it is extraordinarily difficult to sound a word – thus produced cold and without context for inspection – exactly as one would sound it in real conversation. The proper method is quite different. You must stealthily guide the talk into subjects which will force him to use the word you are chasing. You will then hear his real pronunciation; the one he uses when he is off his guard, the one he doesn't know he uses. It is with meanings something the same.*
> (Lewis, 1960: 17)

I began this book by considering what I think matters to us when we talk about identity. Following, and adding to, Kavolis (1980: 41), we can see that these identity matters have to do with the possibility and relevance of establishing, recognising and responding to:

- a certain *coherence* amongst the reported experiences and observed expressions either of oneself or another;
- the seeming *continuity* of an individual's biography as present in traces available to self and others;
- the proper *alignment* of an individual within a particular repertoire of social categories that together allow the representation of self and its relationship to others.[1]

These features are, in turn, instances of a larger set of concerns to which individuals can be held responsible when they co-ordinate their actions with those of others, and it is this important aspect of responsibility that locates identity along with other matters as comprising part of a moral, rather than purely expedient, order.

In the course of this book I have suggested some ways in which the human sciences in general and sociology in particular have responded to earlier accounts of the metaphysics of identity. Sometimes these metaphysical arguments have remained the unchallenged background to an understanding of the relationships between individuals and between individuals and forms of collective organisation. At other times they have been subject to direct attack or modification. In Chapter 3 I referred to Charles Taylor's account of long-term changes in conceptions of the self over several hundred years of European history. In his general comments on the significance of self and identity, Taylor (1989: 35) suggested that: 'One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be

described without reference to those who surround it'. He also claimed that it is the very fact that we ask certain questions of ourselves and others in the course of our individual and collective activities that constitute us as 'having' selves and identities in the first place. In his account of such matters these questions and ends are usually abstract and often ultimate: they are questions about the 'significance' of our actions, the 'meanings' of our lives, and our choice of values to which both of these are oriented. However, I think it is obvious that even those who seek the solution to such transcendental puzzles need to attend to the mundane transactions of our everyday lives as the places where real selves and their others act together in specific surrounding contexts.

The work I have presented in Chapters 6 and 7 has urged and exhibited such attention in a series of studies that have begun to describe the practical ways in which identity matters are made available to and by ordinary participants in local occasions. This approach, informed by Garfinkel's 'respecification programme', does not claim to add another voice to the conversation about philosophical or social universals. Instead it has asserted the necessity of setting to one side the whole history of studies that try to investigate identity as a definably specific property of persons, social structure, social interaction or even discourse which can be extracted from relevant orientations in specific practical occasions. Attempts to provide general and speculative theories which assert what identity is or is not, while allowing a casual treatment of the relationship of such theories to the understandings, actions and events which they claim to describe, illuminate or explain are regarded as unattractive. The alternative proposal – that we should look at identity matters as they arise and are addressed in the actions of real people in the local sites of co-ordinated actions (Smith, 1996) – is one which I have already suggested it would be profitable to adopt. The history and variety of philosophical speculations and human science studies of identity matters bear witness to the theoretical significance attributed to the idea of identity, but its mundane significance is measured not by its presence in these specialist discourses but in the ways that it is embedded in the ordinary activities and practical methods in which people accomplish joint actions. Identity may well be an inescapable feature of human existence, but we can understand why and how this is so much more successfully through the examination of local knowledge and practical action than we can by seeking to specify, modify or correct schematic theories of its essential features.

As detailed studies of such local knowledge and practical action accumulate and are brought up against the prior images of identity that I have discussed, it should become clear there are no necessary features of the way that identity matters that demand special theoretical attention. There is no requirement for identity to be best understood theoretically as a necessary feature of a universal unhistorical subject (however embattled), or as the internalised product of external social and historical determinations, or even as a simple (or complex) fiction. All these images are the result of 'a legacy of attempts by the human sciences to establish their legitimacy by defining a distinctive subject matter' (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995), and in place of these images I have urged consideration of new work which has taken a direct interest in the realisation and routine deployment of identity matters within the co-ordinated activities normally undertaken by people in the course of everyday life. This work has

sought to replace a treatment of identity as a decontextualised or precontextualised attribute with an understanding of identity matters as an assemblage of descriptive (including self-descriptive) and pragmatic interactional topics and resources. I believe the results of such studies encourage us to reject subjectivist, essentialist and structuralist versions of identity, and substitute for these an emphasis on the necessity for the detailed examination of relationships between individuals and their actions as both of these are constituted within recurrent and reflexive local contexts.

Many earlier sociological studies of interaction have already claimed to offer descriptions and explanations of the ways in which identity matters arise, as resources for, and as problems and correlates of, participants' concerns with the organisation and outcome of interactional issues. However, these accounts have usually been driven by the summarising and generalising strategies of conventional sociological methods and have therefore produced theoretical glosses on what are usually described as participants' meanings or interpretations. They are usually illustrated selectively by the provision of a variety of types of data, rather than being built from detailed descriptions of where and how such matters can be shown to be relevant and consequential in specific instances of co-constructed interaction. Katovich and Reese (1987), for example, provide an account of the situated identities of 'stranger', 'homecomer', 'regular' and 'temporary', all of which comprise a range of 'participative identities' that they argue will be found in a number of different social settings. Focusing on the neighbourhood bar as one such setting, Katovich and Reese (1987: 309) describe important differences between these typified identities:

- strangers as marginal individuals who are not integrated into the context;
- homecomers, whose previous identities are known but whose current identities are problematic;
- regulars as 'full-time community members' who 'transcend the limits of the clock and calendar when marking their involvement';
- temporaries, who may be frequently present in the bar but less integrated into its recurrent activities.

Their paper asserts the endogenous significance of such identities as the social accomplishments of coparticipants involving both joint action and shared definitions of the situation. But the plausibility of their descriptions of these matters simply relies on, rather than is subject to, analysis of a series of assumptions about the ways in which talk and actions are conventionally assembled and are visible in such settings.

Coulter (1989) has made similar points in a discussion of Lyman and Scott's (1970) treatment of the relationship between 'accounts' – defined by them as 'linguistic devices employed whenever an action is subjected to evaluative inquiry' (1970: 112) – and the identities of actors copresent on the occasion of account delivery and reception. Arguing that the avowal and ascription of identities are 'prerequisites to the presentation of accounts', and that participants have 'stakes' in both the presentation and reception of such accounts, they suggest that these

have to be understood as 'a manifestation of the underlying negotiation of identities' (Lyman and Scott, 1970: 136). Although the later part of their paper begins the examination of the temporal organisation of account presentation and identity negotiation, they do not themselves develop a detailed analysis of these matters. Instead they call for more detailed research on 'background expectancies' involved in the provision, reception and negotiation of accounts between particular 'categories of statuses'.[2] Indeed the use of the term 'negotiation' and its correlates is a widespread – though vague and slippery – way to indicate an interest in the indeterminacy of identity in shifting local contexts of its avowal and ascription.[3]

While we may be critical of the achievements of these kinds of sociological interpretations (along with many of those that I have discussed in earlier chapters), many of them do manage to touch on important aspects of identity, even if their transformation or reduction of these for the sake of theoretical propriety renders opaque the matters in question. Notions of the 'achievement' of identity are useful if we are prepared to examine the ways in which properties of achievement or achievability can be seen to matter to participants in specific settings. Notions of performance and effect are useful if attention is directed not to the abstractions of discourse, but to courses of action: identity performance is part of an ensemble of performances and relevances achieved in particular contexts. And we can find uses for the notion of ascription as long as we properly locate such ascriptions at the level of the local, and not in some putative generic mechanism of social structure. The point is not to outlaw or proscribe reference to such images for the analysis of identity matters, but rather to consider them as they arise and are deployed as the visible and revisable local accomplishments of socially situated persons. Such persons will of course draw on their own understandings of the relevance of self ascription or structural prescription in accounting for what they and others do, but they will have to make and contest such relevances within the occasions of their use. A focus on the order of interaction as the site for the local, responsive, formative and regulative constitution of identities will discourage analysts from producing their own stipulative definition of the necessary and sufficient features of action and experience that demarcate what they decide will count as identity issues. Rather it should be possible to show the ways that identity matters to those who co-construct whatever orderliness interaction exhibits. It is within this order that questions of the nature and relevance of both general understandings and specific instantiations of self and social identities can be seen to recur and be resolved.

Researchers in what I have referred to as the second family of studies of identity have shown a marked preference for detailed descriptive studies of the routine practices of everyday life in place of abstract generalisations that assert some underlying structural determinants of concrete social actions. I find this preference congenial. I think there is every reason for commending those like Lynch and Bogen (1996) who follow Wittgenstein in an 'antipathy to generalisation and a preference for description'. While this preference accords no 'particular epistemological privilege or status for description', it does, following Wittgenstein, argue for the value of descriptions of particular activities on the grounds that they 'cast into relief diverse, unexpected, yet intelligible

organisations of language use'.

Nussbaum's (1986 and 1990) observations on Aristotle remind us of the long tradition of commitment to such an interest in contextual particulars. Writing on ethical reasoning, Aristotle argued that it is 'practical rationality' that governs the process by which we choose between virtuous and vicious actions and which we use for designing and planning complex actions. This practical rationality needs to be distinguished from deductive scientific reasoning: the concern of the latter with universal necessity is replaced by practical attention to the 'ultimate particulars' of situated human conduct. Applying this type of rationality requires the use of local judgement in assessing facts and also in deciding how to respond to them. Practical rationality, then, is essentially concerned with the way in which concrete particulars are grasped by individuals through the use of experience guided by a knowledge of rules, generalities and general principles.

Nussbaum (1990: 69) commends this Aristotelian attentiveness to the 'priority of the particular' as necessary for our attempts both to understand the conditions of our lives and to determine what it is ethically right to do: 'Prior general formulations lack both the concreteness and the flexibility that is required. They do not contain the particularising details of the matter at hand, with which decision must grapple; and they are not responsive to what is there, as good decision must be'. Nussbaum argues here for analysis to be 'responsive to the concrete'. While theoretical and general rule systems may well be significant for determining issues of sense and propriety, 'it is all a question of what significance they are taken to have and how the agent's imagination uses them' (Nussbaum, 1990: 37) in concrete and particular circumstances.

These arguments for the 'priority of the particular' are especially relevant to this book's concern with identity. They provide a clear expression of why we have to focus on the kinds of 'resourcefulness' that characterise the way in which identity matters arise and are dealt with as they appear in the course of ongoing everyday social action. They direct our attention to identity matters as elements in that ready availability of tacit knowledge 'not available to its possessor in discursive or propositional form, but which is rather akin to "knowing how"' (Coulter, 1989: 21). It is on this knowledge that meaningful and orderly social life rests.

The studies to which I have referred in Chapters 6 and 7 have begun to provide detailed descriptions of the ways in which identity matters arise and are dealt with in and through the accountability of social interaction. Such descriptions continue to accumulate and they deserve close attention by all students of human action. It is important to realise, however, that these studies are not undertaken simply to produce better grounded second-order concepts of identity or richer analytical abstractions of identity matters. Nor are they concerned with the simple collection and display of 'commonsense' knowledge of identity matters as a distinct corpus of knowledge to be set against sociological or other human science knowledge. Instead they have a commitment to the *explication* of mundane understandings and of the actions within which such understandings are embedded. This commitment 'is not meant to result in a reiteration of those understandings for their own sake, but in a context which gives a *more perspicuous view* of their part in everyday activities and, also

cogently, in the work of sociological theorists themselves' (Sharrock and Button, 1991: 167). A frequent expression of the goal of such explications refers to Ryle's (1971) comments on the 'thick description' of actions as including references to attributes like motivation, purpose, context, intention, biography and history. But it is important to remember that all such attributes – including those that seem to refer to internal cognitive or mental states – are treated here as features of communicative and social activity, and therefore as matters which are available for inspection and explication in the course of everyday actions. Sharrock and Button (1991: 170) provide an admirable summary of this commitment which is worth quoting at length:

> *It is the 'thickness' of descriptions of social action which gives ethnomethodology its principal explicatory job, that of spelling out the extent to which even the most routine and otherwise unremarkable description of someone's action is permeated with social-organisational elements, or drawing out how far an attentiveness to the social character of conduct is built into even the most initial, pre-theoretical characterisations of it, how adequate recognition of ordinary actions, identification of them as the actions that they are, indispensably draws on an awareness of the social setting within which they are found and which they reciprocally comprise.*

It seems likely that my advocacy of these kinds of studies of identity will be unwelcome by those who continue to be concerned to uncover, undermine or strengthen the theoretical (whether metaphysical, social or discursive) and abstract understandings which comprise the foundations on which such co-ordinated actions are supposed to rest and without which they can be neither formed nor understood. Certainly when those with such concerns do undertake the detailed study of everyday actions, their gaze turns to the discovery of seemingly similar theoretical relevances amongst such actors. Often, such lay 'theories' – of identity, society or social life – will be described and discussed. But I am not sure what it means to identify such 'lay theories' in the first place, let alone what significance should be accorded to them either as candidate explanations of conduct or as distorted, or obscured, versions of more professional disciplinary achievements. I can only assert what others have already asserted: that any such 'foundations' to social life are best understood as some of what human actions in specific contexts predicate rather than as theoretical preconditions of their production. In his lectures on verbal and written communication, C.S. Lewis (1960) discussed the connotations of a mixed collection of English words including 'nature', 'sad', 'free', 'conscience', 'conscious', 'life', and 'world'. He argued that we should be sceptical of the production of stipulative or descriptive definitions of such words since 'unless we are writing a dictionary, or a text book of some technical subject, we define our words only because we are in some measure departing from their current sense' (Lewis, 1960: 18). The derivation of participants' 'theories' of identity from their explicit or implicit formulations confuses the idiom of their usage with that of the professional analyst.

If human science investigations are to be directed by an interest in what is important to real individuals as they live and experience their lives in common with others, these investigations cannot be based on theoretical assertions of

what is the core of such matters, whether such assertions are the product of researchers or subjects. It is situated use, not theoretical stipulation, that provides the understanding for which we search. When we examine such situated use we find that identity matters comprise a loose assemblage of concerns, questions and issues of interest. There is an long-standing, common and flexible representation of identity as a 'thread' which both runs through our individual lives, and is somehow attached to those of others, and this representation is often used to enliven, summarise or conclude accounts of the theoretically stipulated significance of identity.[4] Such uses borrow their force from our knowledge of the ancient account of the thread given by Ariadne to Theseus, by means of which he found his way back out of the Labyrinth. Of course there are questions concerning the unity, tenacity and directionality of such a thread, but still, the metaphor is undeniably appealing.

It is worth remembering, however, that another thread was also imagined in ancient accounts, and this one provides a different set of ways in which we can find a metaphor to capture and express how and why identity matters in a simple representation. This is Penelope's thread, the one that the wife of Odysseus daily took and wove together with others and then undid each night so that she could avoid the completion of a garment. Had that garment been finished, Penelope would have been forced into an unwanted marriage. And so, to prevent this happening, her thread was woven, separated and rewoven, night after day, time after time. This aesthetic representation of identity – as Penelope's thread rather than Ariandne's – focuses our attention on the revisable, multiple and contestable features of the ways in which identity matters are made 'visible, ascribable, rationally avowable, ratifiable, defeasible, inferrable – in other words "available"' (Coulter, 1989: 6) through and in the co-constructions of ordinary persons' identities and in the mutual orientations of actors to a range of identity matters.[5] Holzner and Robertson (1980: 28) provide an interesting – if necessarily incomplete – list of such orientations:

> *The individual actor identifies himself or herself in relation to others resulting in assessments of quality. He or she may also identify others to others in the role of arbiter, engage in identifying others for the purpose of constructing an intelligible map of his or her own location; identifies himself or herself in relation to others as in the forming of a stance towards the 'generalised other'; identifies the boundaries of collectivities; and identifies himself or herself as a member in relation to collectivities.*

If any proposed human science understanding of identity is seen to be responsive to what matters to individuals at all (and I cannot conceive of any useful human science understanding that could ignore this requirement), then it must be able to describe what and how identity matters to them in the local contexts of their everyday lives. Writing about a different but related issue, Smith (1996: 194) commented that those sociological approaches 'which give primacy to theory and whose phenomenal universe is constituted by abstractions' should be replaced by one which 'aims at knowing the social as people actually bring it into being. Its objects would not be meanings but the actual ongoing ways in which people's activities are co-ordinated'. I believe this to be true. If we cannot establish the connection between human science abstraction and the

mundane world which it seeks to interpret, then the function of such abstraction remains questionable.

MacIntyre (1973) extended Waismann's (1965) comments on the essentially 'open texture' of concepts (which means that it is impossible ever to supply a finite set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of a concept) to suggest the 'essential contestability' of (some) social concepts in which it is impossible to discern 'even provisional and temporary closure to debateability in certain areas of social inquiry' (MacIntyre, 1973: 2–3). Following MacIntyre we could say that the essential contestability of the concept of 'identity' arises from the fact that the social behaviours that it 'captures' are themselves already 'informed' by the concept in question. Further, since the uses of the concept of identity are conflicting and heterogeneous, we face endless dispute about its application and how it should be understood. While this may constitute an insoluble puzzle for some types of social theory (and therefore lead to calls for the abandonment of its use in theoretical discourse), a preferred alternative is the accumulation of studies of the ways in which such identity matters are implied, inferred and presupposed as part of the texture of everyday life. It is this alternative that I have sought to commend in this conclusion. The studies to which I have referred have begun to provide detailed descriptions of the ways in which identity matters arise and are dealt with in and through the accountability of social interaction. Such descriptions continue to accumulate and they deserve close attention by all students of human action. I hope I have managed to give some good reasons to encourage those who have read this book to explore these kinds of studies in further depth.

Notes

1 Larrain (1994: 143) describes a similar threesome as: 'permanence, coherence and recognition'.

2 Their description of the 'phasing' of accounts invokes a temporal or sequential organisation, but it is generalised and stipulative: 'One account generates the question giving rise to another; the new account requires re-negotiation of identities; the identities necessitate excuses or justifications, improvisation and altercasting; another account is given; another question arises, and so on' (Lyman and Scott, 1970: 139).

3 Such a view was taken by Strauss (1969). A more recent example asserts that: 'The way in which they [social actors] construct and negotiate identities needs to be examined in some depth before we can say much about the relation of language to identity' (Tannen, 1990: 86).

4 For example: identity is a 'necessary means of weaving our way through a hazard-strewn world and a complex web of social relations' (Weeks, 1987: 49).

5 I recognise that this image bears some superficial similarities to Deleuze's and Guattari's metaphor of 'transversality' (see Deleuze, 1972; Guattari, 1984), especially as advocated by Schrag (1997). Arguing for the need to prune 'the criteria of modernity's demands for universality, necessity and identity as necessary elements in the understanding of the self', Schrag (1997: 134) suggests the adoption of this metaphor to 'split the difference between the demands for the solidity of an impermeable unity by the moderns and the demands for the vacuity of a porous plurality by the postmoderns'. Instead, transversal unity comprises a network 'lying across and extending over surfaces, accelerating forces, fibres, vertebrae and moments of consciousness'(Schrag, 1997: 129). Both images emphasise the contingency of the situated accomplishment of identity, although the methodological idiom of each is clearly – and radically – different.

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